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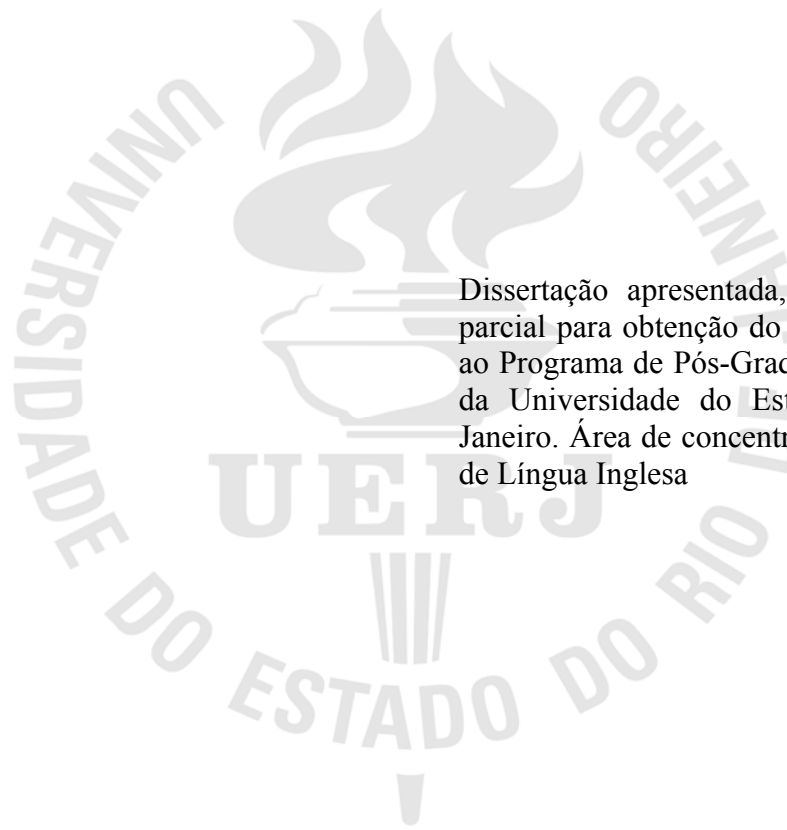
**Creating dangerously: literature as an instrument of resistance in the
works of Edwidge Danticat**

Rio de Janeiro

2013

Priscilla da Silva Figueiredo

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Dissertação apresentada, como requisito parcial para obtenção do título de Mestre, ao Programa de Pós-Graduação em Letras da Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro. Área de concentração: Literaturas de Língua Inglesa

Orientadora: Prof^a. Dra. Leila de Assumpção Harris

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2013

DEDICATÓRIA

For the brave and beautiful people of Haiti.

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The struggle against a single History for the crossfertilization of histories means repossessing both a true sense of one's time and identity: proposing in an unprecedented way a revaluation of power.

Édouard Glissant, The Caribbean Discourse.

RESUMO

FIGUEIREDO, Priscilla da Silva. *Creating dangerously: literature as an instrument of resistance in the works of Edwidge Danticat*. 2013. 103 f. Dissertação (Mestrado em Literaturas de Língua Inglesa) – Instituto de Letras, Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro, Rio de Janeiro, 2013.

O objetivo desta dissertação é discutir o lugar que o fazer literário ocupa no processo de resistência à poderes hegemônicos. Como fontes primárias centrais, foram escolhidos o romance histórico *The Farming of Bones* (1998) e a narrativa autobiográfica *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007), ambos escritos pela autora haitiana-americana Edwidge Danticat. Em *The Farming of Bones*, Danticat reconstrói ficcionalmente o trágico e obscuro episódio ocorrido em 1937 quando o então ditador da República Dominicana, Rafael Trujillo, ordenou o extermínio de todos os haitianos que residiam e trabalhavam em cidades dominicanas próximas à fronteira com o Haiti. O silêncio por parte dos governos de ambos os países em torno do massacre ainda perdura. A publicação do romance histórico de Danticat 61 anos após tal ato de terrorismo de Estado se torna, desta forma, exemplo de como o fazer literário e o fazer histórico podem fundir-se. Em *Brother, I'm Dying*, Danticat narra a história da vida e da morte de suas duas figuras paternas, seu pai Andre (Mira) Dantica e seu tio Joseph Dantica (que a criou dos 4 aos 12 anos, no Haiti). Joseph, sobrevivente de um câncer de laringe, foi pastor batista e fundador de uma igreja e uma escola no Haiti. Morreu dois dias depois de pedir asilo político nos EUA e ser detido na prisão Krome, em Miami. Mira, que migrara no início da ditadura de François Duvalier para os EUA, onde trabalhou como taxista, morreu vítima de fibrose pulmonar poucos meses depois de seu irmão mais velho. Edwidge Danticat recebeu a notícia de que o quadro de seu pai era irreversível no mesmo dia em que descobriu que está grávida de sua primeira filha. Com uma escrita que abrange tanto a narrativa de si quanto a narrativa do outro, além das esferas públicas e privadas, Danticat cria em *Brother, I'm Dying* um *locus* de fazer auto/biográfico que dialoga com questões de diáspora, identidade cultural e memória. Os ensaios publicados em *Create Dangerously* (2010) e as várias entrevistas concedidas por Danticat também reforçam meu argumento que Edwidge Danticat exerce seu papel de artista engajada através de seu fazer – principalmente, mas não exclusivamente – literário. Desta forma, a autora constrói uma possibilidade de resistência ao discurso hegemônico que opera tanto em seu país de origem quanto em seu país de residência.

Palavras-chave: Diáspora. Poder. Resistência. Fazer literário. Literatura caribenha.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to discuss the place Literature may occupy in the process of resistance to hegemonic power. The literary works chosen to illustrate my main argument were the historical novel *The Farming of Bones* (1998) and the autobiographical narrative *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007), both written by the Haitian-American woman author Edwidge Danticat. In *The Farming of Bones*, Danticat fictionalizes the tragic, and rather obscure, Parsley Massacre, which took place in the border side of the Dominican Republic in 1937. As both countries have remained silent about this act of State terrorism, the publication of Danticat's historical novel 61 years after the event is exemplary of how literary acts may fill the gap left by historiography. In *Brother, I'm Dying* Danticat narrates the story of the life and the death of her two father figures: her father Andre (Mira) Danticat and her uncle Joseph Dantica (who raised her for 8 years). Joseph, a throat cancer survivor and a pastor who founded both a church and a school in his neighborhood in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, dies while he was under the care of U.S. Customs and Border Protection, after requesting political asylum in the US. Her father Mira, who migrated in the first years of François Duvalier's regime to the US and worked there as a cab driver, dies a few months after his older brother. Danticat finds out that she is pregnant of her first daughter the same day that she hears that her father's pulmonary fibrosis is in a terminal stage. In *Brother, I'm Dying*, which encompasses the narrative of the self and the other and of public and private spheres, Danticat merges auto/biographical practices with questions related to diaspora, cultural identity, and the politics of memory. The essays in *Create Dangerously* (2010) as well as various interviews given by the author help reinforce my argument that Edwidge Danticat is an engaged artist who uses her art – mainly, but not exclusively – by means of her writings as an instrument of resistance to the hegemonic discourse present both in her place of origin and in her country of residence.

Keywords: Diaspora. Power. Resistance. Caribbean Literature. Cultural identity.

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INTRODUCTION

The responsibility of artists is to create as freely and as openly as possible. There should be no restrictions whatsoever on any artist or art. No prescriptions, orders, commands given to artists. They should engage us, make us think, entertain us in whatever way they see fit. There are however moments when art becomes part of something bigger, where a singular expression becomes part of the collective.

Edwidge Danticat¹

As I seat in my place for a nine-hour flight from Rio de Janeiro to Hartford (CT), the flight attendant offers me *The Wall Street Journal*. It is the weekend edition (July, 7 – 8, 2012)², and I am eager to read it for two reasons: because I am a book worm who reads almost everything that crosses my path and because reading some of the latest news seems a good idea. However, not even the prospect of a long flight in the uncomfortable economy class is enough to raise my interest in this particular edition of the newspaper. As I consider giving up on it, I lay my eyes on a column written by journalist Peggy Noonan in the occasion of Independence Day, celebrated only a few days before my trip took place. In order to honor this important U.S. holiday, Noonan dedicated her column to the theme of immigration, the same theme I have been studying for the last four years of my life; more specifically, I have been studying the literary representations produced by writers and artists that are either first or second generation diasporic subjects. The article, therefore, catches my attention immediately.

It takes me less than 30 seconds to realize that something is really wrong with what I am reading. Noonan, addressing the so-called “Gate Rule”³, which she has learnt from the former governor of Mississippi, Haley Barbour, claims that the fact that so many people are still trying to enter the U.S says something about the nation. She believes that “people don’t want to come to a place when they know they will be treated badly. They don’t want to call your home their home unless they know you’ll make room for them in more than economic ways”. Noonan also declares her desire to pay a tribute to the “American friendliness, openness, and lack of – what to call it? The old hatreds”. Then, she adds: “*They dissipate here*” (italics are mine). Finally, in order to support her opinion, she narrates three stories of successful immigration experiences: the story of the former Secretary of State Henri

¹ Interview to Nathalie Handal: http://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/danticat_1_15_11/ (last accessed in 03/15/13).

² The article may be found online in: <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304550004577506773186482182.html> (last accessed in 03/17/2013).

³ Noonan argues that, according to Haley Barbour, the Gate Rule is “the first thing you should think of when you think about immigration. People are either lined up at the gate trying to get out of a country, or lined up trying to get in”.

Kissinger, of her own grandmother, Mary Dorian, an Irish immigrant, and of film and stage director Mike Nichols.

Nonetheless, Noonan seems oblivious to a multitude of *Other* stories; stories of people who have not (and do not) encountered friendliness, openness, and lack of old hatreds in the “home of the brave and the land of the free”. The mere idea that someone could silent voices that have been speaking so loud in my ears for these last four years was simply outrageous and led me to change the focus of my M.A. thesis. Since my first year as a research grant holder UERJ, still as an undergraduate student, I have wanted to study and write about the role of memory and its expression in autobiographical narratives. In fact, the third chapter of this work is still dedicated to autobiographical narratives. However, after reading that newspaper article I became more aware of the fact that diasporic voices are still in need to be heard. Amongst the thousands of people that migrate to the U.S every year are those caught up between two worlds. People that, oftentimes, do not feel welcome or even accepted, in their new country, and that, differently from the ordinary migrant, cannot go back to their country of origin, be it because of financial or political reasons.

In *What is literature?* (1949), French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre responded to the critics that accused him of destroying literature because of his beliefs in engaged literature and engaged writing. Sartre, then, reflected upon relevant questions such as “what is writing”, “why does one write”, and “for whom” (1949, Foreword). The philosopher understood that, in contrast with artistic forms of expression such as music, painting, and poetry, prose writing is “employed in discourse [...]; words are first of all not objects but designation for objects” (SARTRE, 1949, p.20). Besides, Sartre considered speaking as action and argued that “by speaking, [one] reveal[s] the situation by [one’s] very intention of changing it” (1949, p.22). This assertion seems rather appropriate to the literature and the literary representations produced by several writers who belong to a diasporic background. By means of their words, they intend to unveil the situation experienced by many individuals who have their presence, more often than not, either erased or misrepresented in the dominant cultural production of a country. Those (diasporic) engaged writers have “given up the impossible dream of giving an impartial picture of Society and the human condition” (SARTRE, 1949, p.23). Although they do not use literature as an excuse to achieve their political purposes, as propaganda, they understand that when one is dealing with discourse, one cannot be impartial. Hence, they decide to become consciously engaged artists.

The artist I chose to illustrate the central idea of my thesis is the Haitian-American woman author Edwidge Danticat. Danticat was born in Port-au-Prince, capital of Haiti, in

1969. When she was 2 years-old, her father, André Danticat, like many other Haitians, immigrated to New York. Two years later her mother, Rose, joined him. Edwidge and her brother Bob stayed in Haiti living with their Uncle Joseph and Aunt Denise for a period of eight years until they were finally granted the visa which allowed them to join their family in the U.S. By this time, Danticat's parents had already had two other sons, Kelly and Karl.

Danticat has a BA in French Literature from Barnard College. Her first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994) was written as her MFA thesis at Brown University. Since the publishing of her first novel, Danticat has been acclaimed for her works and considered one of the major voices of the Haitian community. She has written works of fiction and non-fiction, edited books, and contributed to *The New Yorker*. Danticat has also produced movies and documentaries, and she has even worked as an actress. Regardless the media (book, press, or cinema) she uses, Danticat frequently merges aesthetics and political engagement; the issue of immigration and the treatment received by Haitians when they get to the U.S are two of her main topics. She has visited Haiti many times throughout the years and has been making the poorest country of the American continent and its people her constant protagonists. Danticat's works have been considered of great literary value by many critics and are constantly objects of research in Literary Studies. Additionally, she has received awards that are considered very important in the literary field, such as The National Book Critics Circle Award in 2008 for her auto/biographical account *Brother, I'm Dying* and the MacArthur Fellows Program Genius grant in 2009. This kind of involvement, both literary and political, makes Edwidge Danticat a truly engaged artist.

The present thesis will focus on two of Danticat's literary works: the historical novel *The Farming of Bones* (1998) and the autobiographical narrative *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007). Each work will illustrate how aesthetics and politics may coexist in a work of literature. The collection of essays *Create Dangerously, the immigrant artist at work* (2011)⁴, Edwidge Danticat's most recent book, will serve as the "backbone" of this thesis because in it Danticat shares personal politic views, revises already published works, and reflects on the role of the immigrant artist.

In "Haiti, Occupied Country"⁵, a speech delivered in 2011 at the National Library in Montevideo, Eduardo Galeano observes how since the beginning, Haiti has been deprived of its right as a free country on account of being a Black Republic. The Uruguayan intellectual

⁴ Danticat's most recent novel, *Claire of the Sea Light*, will be released in August 2013.

⁵ The transcription of the speech was published in the website <http://www.haiti-liberte.com/archives/volume5-12/Haiti.%20Occupied%20Country.asp>. Last accessed in 02/12/2013.

challenges anyone to open an encyclopedia and try to find Haiti listed as the first independent country in America and the first country in the world to abolish slavery; it will be useless because, according to him,

[t]he black slaves of Haiti defeated Napoleon Bonaparte's glorious army, and Europe never forgave the humiliation. For over a century and half, Haiti paid France a huge compensation for *being guilty of its freedom*, but not even that was enough. This black insolence still hurts the world's white masters. Of all that, *we know very little or nothing*. (italics are mine)

The world's "ignorance" about Haitian historical background weighs heavily upon this small but proud country. As Galeano accurately adds, Haiti has been an invisible nation for most of the time and it only receives international attention when tragedy hits it. In yet another text, "The White Curse"⁶ (2004), he lists the sequence of embargoes and occupations Haiti has been suffering since its independence and how they have caused the extreme misery the country cannot seem to get out of; among these embargos and occupations, Galeano mentions the "French Debt", which Haiti was forced to pay on the account of their independence: "The new country was born with a rope wrapped tightly around its neck: the equivalent of \$21.7 billion in today's dollars, or forty-four times Haiti's current yearly budget". Later on, there were the 19 years U.S occupation. "The first thing they did was occupy the customs house and duty collection facilities. The occupying army suspended the salary of the Haitian president until he agreed to sign off on the liquidation of the Bank of the Nation, which became a branch of City Bank of New York" (GALEANO, 2004). Also as a consequence of the U.S occupation, Galeano says, "[t]he president and other blacks were barred entry into the private hotels, restaurants, and clubs of the foreign occupying power. The occupiers didn't dare reestablish slavery, but they did impose forced labor for the building of public works. And they killed a lot of people". More recently, after the end of the Duvaliers' brutal regimes, U.S has once again interfered in the Haitian affairs and ousted the democratically elected President Jean Aristide twice. Finally, since 2004, the country is occupied by a UN force comprised by soldiers of different countries, including Brazil. However, Galeano understands that

the international experts are far more destructive than invading troops. Placed under strict orders from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, Haiti obeyed every instruction, without cheating. The government paid what it was told to even if it meant there would be neither bread nor salt. Its credit was frozen despite the fact that the state had been dismantled and the subsidies and tariffs that had protected national production had been eliminated. Rice farmers, once the majority,

⁶ Published in the website: http://www.thirdworldtraveler.com/Haiti/White_Curse.html. Last accessed in 02/12/2013.

soon became beggars or boat people. Many have ended in the depths of the Caribbean, and more are following them to the bottom, only these shipwreck victims aren't Cuban so their plight never makes the papers.

In both texts Galeano remarks that in spite of all the oppression and exploration the country has suffered, resistance seems characteristic of Haitians. Every occupation has left many dead bodies behind it because this is a people who, since the beginning, do not see themselves as slavers. If not every Haitian resists oppression, it is clear that many do, including the author whose works are hereby analyzed.

Many are the themes that surround Postmodern and Postcolonial literary works. And many are the possibilities to approach them. I am well aware that notions considered as paramount to Postmodern and Postcolonial studies will seem to have been overlooked in this thesis. The fact that they are not explicitly present does not mean that they are absent; my focus, however, is to investigate in what ways writers may use their work in order to resist power. In saying this, it is implicit the idea that literary writings may work and have worked in service of the hegemonic power, propagating fixed ideas of nationality, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc. Therefore, even if imperative contemporary discussions are apparently not observed in this thesis, it seems rather important to clarify that their importance is acknowledged and that their absence is only a matter of choice: some topics need to be excluded in order to include others.

The first chapter is devoted to set the theoretical foundations of the main argument of the present thesis, i.e., how literary works produced by contemporary immigrant authors deal with the relationship between discourse and power and between power and resistance. Foucault's dedication to the subject has deeply influenced innumerable scholars in contemporaneity, and it has, indeed, influenced me on the choice of the subject of this thesis. Nevertheless, the relationship between word and power is present in rather ancient texts such as the Bible and Plato's *Republic*. In order to support this statement, I chose the opening sentence in the *Gospel of John*, "In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God and the Word was God" (Jo 1: 1). Since in the Hebrew and Christian faiths God is the Supreme Entity, in this excerpt the Apostle equals the Word with God and, therefore, equals Word with Power. By the same token, in *Republic*, Plato recognizes that stories are determinant to the formation of children's characters and that certain stories were not to be told if "we mean them to honour the gods and their parents, and to value friendship with one another" (BOOK III, 2002, p.239). Thus said, Plato recognizes that, somehow, power and word are intrinsically connected. Both the Biblical narratives and Greek philosophical writing may be considered fundamental texts in the Western culture; therefore, in spite of the fact that

they are many times are regarded as outdated, it is impossible to ignore their influence even in contemporary Western culture.

After considering the Foucauldian concept of discourse and how discourse mediates reality, I pose some questions that seem quite relevant and that have guided me throughout the process of reading and writing for this work. I question the possibility of, first, a universal and ahistorical truth in society, second, an unbiased perception of important notions such as nationality and gender, and third, a literature which is free from ideology. Later, I attempt to show how Cultural Studies, Postmodernism, and Postcolonial Studies have dealt with the same questions and how literary works considered postmodern and postcolonial have contributed, by means of their narrative strategies and themes, to the decentering of what were once fixed concepts.

As an attempt to answer the questions previously posed, the chapter was divided in three main sections, each of them focusing on a significant theoretical topic. The first section discusses how the shift in the concept of identity that took place during the second half of the twentieth century arose interest on discourses produced by individuals considered *Others*. In the period called late-modernity, identity started being experienced as fragmented rather than fixed and whole. The notion of identification, implying a cultural process marked by *differánce* (HALL, 2003, p.3) was vital to ex-centric writers (including diasporic ones), who found by means of their literary representation a fertile ground where they could re-think, re-claim, and re-create their identities.

The second section reflects on how Postmodernism ruptured with the Modernist belief that the true modern artist was the one who isolated himself (because most often than not, the modern artist was a man) in order to create his work of art and how, in fact, “only the distance afforded by exile and autonomy maintained art’s critical and oppositional edge” (GRODEN & KREISWIRTH, 1993, p.585). The postmodernist artist, on the other hand, recognizes the illusionary aspect of the modernist isolation and admits the impossibility of a discourse, whichever its materiality, free from ideology. Under this notion that reality is mediated by discourse and that there is no discourse free from ideology, postmodernist artists may consciously engage themselves politically by means of their work and contest hegemonic discourses, historiography being one of them.

The third, and last, section ponders on how Postcolonial studies have become an important academic field because of its effort to dialogue with the processes of colonization and their effects over nations that have achieved their independence after the Second World War. In order to delimitate literary works that may be considered postcolonial, Ashcroft *et al*

propose that they should “emerge in their present form out of the experience of colonization and assert themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumption of the imperial centre” (2004, p.2). Thus, postcolonial works are potential sites of resistance from colonial force, which, even after the independence, influences both colonizer and colonized cultures. Moreover, in this section of the chapter, I approach the concept of diaspora and the intertwining of diaspora and concepts such as gender, home, and discourse.

In the second chapter of the thesis, entitled “The Importance of Telling a (Hi)story”, I intend to discuss how “New Historicism” challenged the enlightened opposition between history and fiction and proposed that historiography was another among many cultural phenomena under the influence of ideology. Once the illusion of a clear-cut opposition between historical and fictional narrative is overcome, the possibility of questioning and revising a historical event by means of a literary work is made possible.

The literary work chosen to illustrate how the fictional narrative may become a site of resistance against the hegemonic discourse of history was the historical novel *The Farming of Bones*. In it, Danticat retells the Parsley Massacre from the point of view of her narrator-protagonist Amabelle Desir. The Parsley Massacre took place in 1937 and killed thousands of Haitians living in the Dominican side of the Island of Hispaniola. In order to better analyze the novel and highlight my argument, this chapter is also divided in three sections. The first section briefly discusses the changes New Historicism and Postmodernism have brought to the previous notions of past, historiography, and literature (as mentioned previously). A caveat is important, though: the understanding brought by these two fields that history is one among many representations of the past does not imply that the past did not exist; rather, as Linda Hutcheon acknowledges, it is crucial to observe the systems which transformed past *facts* into past *events* (1998, p.74), i.e., what forces were operating when one narrative was privileged over the multiplicity of narratives found in a society and considered the truthful account of the past.

The second section of the chapter concisely discusses the historical novel as a genre. Although from the 19th century when the first historical novel *per se* (Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverly*) was published up to current times the genre has gone through some transformations; the possibility of questioning the historical discourse, thus threatening the hegemonic ideas of the past, remains the same. Indeed, Jerome Groot acknowledges that much of the criticism towards the genre was due to its capacity to persuade its reader to be “knowingly misinformed, misled and duped” (2010, p.6). This same characteristic has proven to be

attractive to postmodern and postcolonial writers who have made use of it in order to destabilize old modern certainties.

The third section is dedicated to analyze *The Farming of Bones*. The novel narrates a rather obscure historical fact that took place in 1937 in the Dominican side of the border. Consequently, a brief historical background of the Caribbean Islands and of the Island of Hispaniola, as well as of the Parsley Massacre, seemed necessary. Then, as the aim of this thesis is to reason and discuss how immigrant artists may make use of their craft in order to resist power and question fixed notions of nationality, gender, and race, for instance, I examine the strategies, images, and themes used by Danticat in the construction of her fictional narrative.

The third chapter focuses on the autobiographical narrative *Brother, I'm Dying*. Even though autobiographical accounts have been written for centuries, the genre of autobiography is recognized to be inaugurated in the 18th century with the publication of *Confession*, of the French philosopher Jean Jacques Rousseau. Consequently, in order to be considered an “authentic” autobiography, the narrative should follow some patterns which reduced the genre to texts written mainly by white, heterosexual male authors. Already in the twentieth century, Philippe Lejeune was one of the first scholars to make an effort to systematize the genre. Even though his famous text “The Autobiographical Pact” has suffered great transformation since its first publication, the idea of the genre as an *individualistic* narrative remains unchanged.

In *The Second Sex* (1949), Simone de Beauvoir makes one of her most famous assertions: “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (1953, p.273). For good or bad, the statement implies that a woman’s identity is, more often than not, defined not in isolation but, rather, in relation to the collectivity. Therefore, autobiographical accounts written by women authors (and by authors belonging to other minorities) distinguish themselves from the traditional concept of the literary genre. The notion that one *becomes* a woman is crucial to the argument that Danticat’s book *Brother, I'm Dying* may be considered an autobiographical narrative. Actually, I adopt the noun “auto/biography” or the adjective “autobiographical” when referring to this literary work because it does not fulfill the first requirement of a “pure” autobiography: Edwidge Danticat, the author, is not the center of the narrative. In spite of it, she acknowledges that her sense of identity depends on other people, meaning that she cannot be separated from the lives of her family and her countries.

Likewise, the chapter comments on important topics in the field of life writings such as the role and the politics of memory and how the writer of autobiography may fictionalize events. The fictionalization of memory is especially noted on writers who have been

dislocated from their places of origins by the processes of migration. Stuart Hall, however, reminds us that the past is not frozen, just waiting for us to access it and recuperate our identities. According to him, “it has to be [...] reinvented” (HALL, 1997, p.58).

Finally, I make use of the concept of *alterbiography*, developed by Jana Evans Braziel in reference to some novels written by the Antiguan-American author Jamaica Kincaid (*The Autobiography of my Mother*, *Mr. Potter*, and *My Brother*). Braziel defines alterbiography as an autobiographical account which is permeated by the notions of “alterity and difference” (2004, p.1) and argues that by means of her novels, Kincaid is writing her autobiography. Though *Brother, I’m Dying* is not a novel, it seemed to me that the concept of alterbiography is the one that better defined Danticat’s auto/biography.

Ultimately, the idea of the United the States (or any imperial power for that matter) as the Promised Land which welcomes and takes care of anyone who reaches its shores has proved to be an illusion. At least, it has proven to be biased because friendliness and openness are not available for everyone. It is sure not available for the Haitian immigrants, the “boat people”, who face all kinds of trouble in order to have a better life. Hence, more than ever, artistic voices, like the Haitian-American woman author Edwidge Danticat, are crucial if we are to see a more democratic world. Although one cannot escape power, one might, and should, resist it.

1 A SOLID FOUNDATION: THEORY MATTERS.

[D]iscourse is not simply that which manifests (or hides) desire

– it is also the object of desire; and since, as history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translates struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, discourse is the power which is to be seized.

Michel Foucault (*The Order of Discourse*)

In the face of both external and internal destruction, we are still trying to create dangerously [...], as though each piece of art were a stand-in for a life, a soul, a future.

Edwidge Danticat (*Create Dangerously*)

The first four verses of the *Gospel of Jesus Christ According John* reads: “In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created”. The Apostle chose the Greek term λόγος, translated in English as “word”, to describe Jesus Christ because he understood that that word and power were not to be separated. According to the *Strong Bible Concordance* the Greek term λόγος in this Gospel narrative “denotes the essential Word of God, Jesus Christ, the personal wisdom and power in union with God, his minister in creation and government of the universe, the cause of all the world's life both physical and ethical [...]”⁷. However, John was not the first Biblical author to relate word and power; since *Genesis*, on the account of Creation, this relationship is present. The narrative declares that in the beginning, when the Earth was formless and empty, and darkness covered the deep waters, God decided to create the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1: 1, 2). The world is, then, created by God through an act of speech.

The relationship between word and power is paramount to other texts besides the Biblical narratives. In Plato’s *The Republic*, which was probably written some five centuries before the Gospel text, and, which is considered the most important philosophical text of the

⁷ The *Strong Bible Concordance* (<http://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G3056&t=KJV>), accessed in 11/25/12).

Western world, the relationship between word and power is also present. In *The Republic* Plato exposes his political, philosophical, legal, and aesthetical ideas. In Book II, Socrates dialogues with his disciples about the role of the guardians, the rulers of the city. According to the philosopher, aside from the physical characteristics, the guardians should “unite in [themselves] philosophy and spirit and swiftness and strength” (PLATO, 2002, p.229). Gymnastic would, then, be for the body, while Music, which includes Literature, would be for the soul. Now, Socrates suggests that children listen to stories before they are old enough to learn Gymnastics. Nevertheless, the philosopher worries that children will listen to certain stories because he understands that “the beginning is the most important part of any work, especially in the case of a young and tender thing; for that is the time at which the character is being formed and the desired impression is more readily taken” (PLATO, 2002, p.230). Therefore, Socrates assumes that it would be imprudent to let children listen to any kind of tale because they could “receive into their minds ideas for the most part the very opposite of those which we should wish them to have when they are grown up” (PLATO, 2002, p.230-231). Even though Plato does not attribute to the word (the tales) the divine nature that the Bible does, he not only understands that they may influence the character of a child but also believes that some tales need to be banished: “some tales are to be told, and others are not to be told to our disciples from their youth upwards, if we mean them to honour the gods and their parents, and to value friendship with one another” (BOOK III, 2002, p.239).

In contemporaneity no other intellectual seems to have dedicated more time and effort to investigate the relations established between word and power than the French philosopher Michel Foucault. In “Michel Foucault’s Archeology of Knowledge” (2006), Darren Hynes, member of the Department of History of the Memorial University of Newfoundland, states that although Foucault’s work has been about the nature of power in society, “his more particular concern has been with power’s relationship to the discursive formation in society that makes knowledge possible” (2006, p.1). Hynes adds that, in *The Archeology of Knowledge*, power is not present in the orthodox form of institutions and leaders; rather, it is in discourse that power is, at the same time, “both manifest and hardest to identify” (2006, p.1). In “The Work of Representation” (1997), Stuart Hall affirms that, in Foucault’s works, the term discourse, which had been previously used as a linguistic concept meaning simply “the passage of connected writing or speech”, became both language and practice, something that “defines and produces the object of our knowledge” (2003, p.44).

In *The History of Sexuality* (1976), Foucault himself declares:

By power, I do not mean "Power" as a group of institutions and mechanisms that ensure the subservience of the citizens of a given state. By power, I do not mean, either, a mode of subjugation which, in contrast to violence, has the form of the rule. Finally, I do not have in mind a general system of domination exerted by one group over another, a system whose effects, through successive derivations, pervade the entire social body (1978, p.92).

Foucault believes that power must be regarded as “the multiplicity of *force relations* [...]” (1978, p.92, italics are mine). This notion seems to suggest at the same time fluidity and inescapability, a never ending struggle, and a succession of associations and disruptions. “Power is not something that is acquired, seized, or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away; *power is exercised from innumerable points*, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations” (FOUCAULT, 1978, p.94, italics are mine). These “relations of power”, as the philosopher calls them, have some characteristics: they are inherent to other forms of relationships (such as economic and sexual, for example), they trespass the entire social fabric, and they are “both intentional and nonsubjective” (FOUCAULT, 1978, p. 94, 95).

Then, Foucault states: “where there is power, there is resistance⁸” (1978, p.95). As a consequence of it, he acknowledges that “resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power” and that instead of one source of rebellion one should consider “a plurality of resistance”, each one of a different nature (FOUCAULT, 1978, p. 95, 96) which, as power relations, trespasses the entire social fabric; Foucault concludes: “[j]ust as the network of power relations ends by forming a dense web that passes through apparatuses and institutions, without being exactly localized in them, so too the swarm of points of resistance traverses social stratifications and individual unities”.

The notion that resistance exists inside power is particularly interesting because Edwidge Danticat and her writings, chosen to illustrate the main argument of this thesis, seem to embody this Foucauldian premise. Danticat was born in Haiti in 1969 and has been living in the U.S.A since she was 12 years old. She writes exclusively in English in spite of the fact that her native language is Haitian Creole and that she was taught how to read and write in French at her school in Haiti before migrating to the U.S. Her works, be they fictional or non-fictional, seem to express *en lettre* the experience of *hybridity*, which marks the conflicting situation of the diasporic person, that is, the one living “in the belly of the beast”. When asked in an interview the reason why she writes in English, Danticat responded

⁸ FOUCAULT, Michel. *The History of Sexuality, Volume I: An Introduction*, translated by Robert Hurley. New York: Pantheon Books, 1978, p. 95.

(...) I came to English at a time when I was not adept enough at French to write creatively in French and did not know how to write in Creole because it had not been taught to me in school, so *my writing in English was as much an act of personal translation as it was an act of creative collaboration with the new place I was in*. My writing in English is a consequence of my migration, in the same way that immigrant children speaking to each other in English is a consequence of their migration (my emphasis).⁹

Her answer may be read as an artistic manifesto; Danticat is, thus, a writer who is aware of the importance of using her art as an instrument to enrich the culture she became a part of the moment she migrated to the U.S, even if collaborating with this new place involves opposing the hegemonic power by means of her writings. Hence, it is possible to say that, in choosing to use the English language as an instrument of self-translation, Edwidge Danticat becomes an author who makes use of writing as resistance in the Foucauldian sense, that is, resistance which exists inside power.

Stuart Hall uses the term *translation*¹⁰ in order to describe the life of those who have gone through the processes of migration, exile, and diaspora. These people often seem to preserve a strong bond with the place they came from and their traditions, but, at the same time, they do not keep any illusion of a return to the past. In result, “they are obliged to come to terms with the new culture they inhabit, without simply assimilating to them and losing their identities completely” (HALL *et al*, 2007, p.629). Moreover, Hall states that migrant writers, who belong to more than one world at once, “must learn to inhabit at least two identities, to speak two cultural languages, to translate and negotiate between them” (HALL *et al*, 2007, p.629). In the interview above mentioned, when asked why Haiti is her main theme, although it is no longer her home, Danticat answers that even though she does not live in Haiti, she feels very connected to it: “It’s as much a part of me as the United States, as much home for me – if in a more spiritual way – as where I live now in Miami”.

Although Foucault was not the first one to establish the relationship between words and power, which he called *discourse*, it was through his works that this relationship became clear and led to further questioning. For instance, if discourse is power and if reality is mediated by words, is there something in society which may be considered universal, ahistorical? If, as Foucault has said, “discourse is the power to be seized” (YOUNG, 1981, p.52-53), is it possible to have a neutral perception of concepts such as gender, nationality,

⁹ Interview taken from the website: http://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm/author_number/1022/edwidge-danticat (last accessed in 12/29/2012).

¹⁰ HALL, Stuart. “The Question of Cultural Identity”. In: HALL, Stuart; HELD, David; HUBERT, Don & THOMPSON, Kenneth. *Modernity: An Introduction to Modern Societies*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007, p. 629.

and race? Moreover, is literature free from ideology? The purpose of this chapter is to ponder on how Post-Modernism, Post-Colonialism and Diaspora Studies dialogue and reason over questions like the ones posed, and how literary works considered post-modern and post-colonial have addressed a set of alternative narrative methods and themes, thus enabling the centering of the ex-centric.

1.1 “We Are Not Who We Used To Be”: From Identity to Identification.

In “The Question of Cultural Identity” (1992), Stuart Hall calls our attention to a crisis of identity that started taking place in the late-modernity. Identity, he argues, which had always been considered a fixed entity, started to be experienced as fragmented (HALL *et al*, 2007, p.596). Hall, however, asserts that “what has happened in the late-modernity to the conception of the modern subject is not simply its estrangement, but its dislocation” (2007, p.606). He adds that this dislocation happened by means of a “series of ruptures in the *discourses* of modern knowledge” (HALL *et al*, 2007, p.606, italics are mine). Those ruptures deeply affected “the cultural landscapes of class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, race, and nationality which give us firm locations as social individuals” (HALL, 2007, p. 596) and instigated us to rethink our identities.

Therefore, in “Who Needs Identity?” (2000), Hall proposes the use of the term *identification* instead of *identity*. Identification, according to Hall, implies a perpetual process which takes into consideration both what is present and what is absent:

Identification is, then, a process of articulation, a suturing, an over-determination not a subsumption. There is always 'too much' or 'too little' - an over-determination or a lack, but never a proper fit, a totality. Like all signifying practices, it is subject to the 'play', of *différance*. It obeys the logic of more-than-one. And since as a process it operates across difference, it entails discursive work, the binding and marking of symbolic boundaries, the production of 'frontier-effects'. It requires what is left outside, its constitutive outside, to consolidate the process (2003, p.3)¹¹.

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Homi Bhabha ponders on new signs of identity that are made possible by the ground provided by the in-between spaces. In the introduction of his

¹¹ HALL, Stuart. “Who Needs ‘Identity?’”. In: HALL, Stuart & DU GAY, Paul. *Questions of Cultural Identity*. London: Sage Publications, 2003, p. 1 – 17.

book, he indicates that “what is theoretically innovative, and politically crucial, is the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus on those moments or processes that are produced in the cultural differences” (1994, p.1).

Diasporic people are an example of those living “in between”. In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (1993), Stuart Hall describes two possible ways of reflecting on the diasporic cultural identity. The first one is understood as “a collective, shared history among individuals affiliated by race and ethnicity” (HALL, 2010, p.233). In this sense, cultural identity provides “stable, unchanging and continuous frame of references and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of [...] actual history” (HALL, 2010, p.234). The second way of reflecting on culture identity is through *difference*, though recognizing the points of similarity as well; regarding this second conceptualization of cultural identity, Hall states:

[it] is a matter of *becoming* as well as of *being*. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history, [gender], and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything historical, they undergo constant transformation (2010, p.236)

Once identity is not experienced¹² as a stable and unified entity anymore; rather, it is viewed as a *construct*, a process realized through and in discursive practices, we should bear in mind that concepts such as white/black, national/immigrant, man/woman, among others, are not natural, but cultural phenomena. This is specifically important for individuals who were considered by the hegemonic discourse as the *Other*, because it exposed the oppressiveness involved and made it possible to resist it and “produce” new identities.

One of the instruments used by many of the ex-centric peoples in order to re-claim and re-create their identities is literary representation. By means of their writings, migrant subjects have been able to get hold of their own identities and find their own voices, thus, producing an alternative to the hegemonic discourse. Migrant writers are among those who have been making use of literary representations as a possibility to recuperate their identities and resist oppression. In *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* (2010), Edwidge Danticat reflects:

There are many possible interpretations of what it means to create dangerously, and Albert Camus, like the poet Osip Mandelstam, suggests that it is creating as a revolt

¹² It is important to point out that although many theorists and intellectuals date the beginning of the late-modernity in the years following the end of World War II, it is more a structure of thought than a period of time, which means that I consider that some people and peoples might still experience their identities in a rather modern form.

against silence, creating when both the creation and the reception, the writing and the reading, are dangerous undertakings, disobedience to a directive (2011, p.11).

Although Danticat when pondering on “create dangerously” was directly referring to those who opposed the Duvalier regimes, to the persecution which fell upon anyone who would have disagreed with the violence and corruption ever present, and to the sites of resistance found in the arts, both in the production and in the reception – it is possible to understand that she is also referring to this opportunity that the immigrant artist has when it comes to breaking silence and (re)creating identities. Furthermore, she writes, “[t]he immigrant artist shares with all other artists the desire to interpret and possibly remake his or her own world” (DANTICAT, 2011, p. 18). By means of their works, the immigrant artists try to interpret and remake not only their world, but their own identities.

1.2 “We Don’t Need No Thought Control”: Postmodernism Political and Artistic Resistance.

In *Politics of Postmodernism* (1989), Linda Hutcheon warns that few are the terms which have been more overused in contemporaneity than postmodernism. This expression has been used in reference to a wide range of cultural and academic fields; consequently, the Canadian scholar assumes that any effort to explain it will necessarily deal with both what postmodernism is and what it is not (HUTCHEON, 1990, p. 1). Postmodernism cannot, for example, be used as a synonym for contemporary, or to label an international cultural phenomenon because it is predominantly European and American (NATOLI & HUTCHEON, 1993, p.244).

The *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* (1977) defines postmodernism as “a general (and sometimes controversial) term used to refer to changes, developments, and tendencies which have taken place (and are taking place) in literature, art, music, architecture, philosophy, etc. since the 1940s or 1950s” (1999, p.689). However, what are the changes that the prefix ‘post’ implies? Has postmodernism overcome every aspect of its predecessor? Does postmodernism completely oppose to all modernist structures or is it just a continuation of the more radical aspects of modernism? In “The Question of Postmodernism” (1981), Isab Hassan argues that,

[t]he word postmodernism is not only awkward and uncouth; it evokes what it wishes to surpass or suppress, modernism itself. The term thus contains its enemy within, as the terms romanticism and classicism, baroque and rococo, do not. Moreover, it denotes temporal linearity and connotes belatedness, even decadence, to which no postmodernist would admit. But what better name have we to give this curious age? (1981, p.31).

According to John McGowan, the central element to modernism was the privileged independence that art enjoyed. It was separated from the everyday worries of a bourgeois culture. The true modern artist, most often than not a man, isolated himself in order to create his work of art and “only the distance afforded by exile and autonomy maintained art’s critical and oppositional edge” (GRODEN & KREISWIRTH, 1993, p.585). The postmodernist artist, on the other hand, maintains that being autonomous and separated from the influence of capitalism is an illusion because the materiality of the art work – that in the case of literature is the language – is cultural, ideologically delimited. In *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Novel* (2002) critic Bran Nicol explains:

Postmodernism can be regarded as a mode of cultural awareness informed by the conviction that everything is, in fact, cultural; that is, nothing in life – nationalism, value systems, identity, history, even reality – is natural or given. Rather, everything is constructed, mediated, put there by someone for a particular reason (2002, p.2).

Furthermore, according to some critics, postmodernism cannot avoid but being political. In “Beginning to Theorize Postmodernism” (1993), Hutcheon declares: “what I want to call postmodernism is fundamentally contradictory, resolutely historical and inescapably political” (1993, p.244); postmodernist discourses, thus, may confront the fixed boundaries between genres, ethnicities, nationalities, art forms, etc. In addition, McGowan states,

[l]iterary criticism, as well as its new colleague literary theory, began to explore the complex relation between the artwork and its social contexts. Generally speaking, the formal analysis of the artwork in isolation yielded to an exploration of the social determinants of the work and to the ideological impact the work had on its audience (1993, p.585).

If postmodernism is not a total rupture with modernism, rather, it is a movement that “manages to *install and reinforce as much as undermine and subvert* the conventions and presuppositions it appears to challenge” (HUTCHEON, 1990, p. 1- 2, italics are mine), then, in order to approach postmodernist literature, it is worth mentioning some preoccupations of modernist literature. In “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (1903), sociologist Georg Simmel argues that “the deepest problems of modern life derived from the claim of the individual to

preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life” (BRIDGE & WATSON, 2010, p.103, italics are mine)¹³. In other words, not only modern life but also modernist literature in general attempted to reveal profound truths of experience and life and to find depth and interior meaning beneath the surface of objects and events.

Postmodernist literary authors, on the other hand, do not believe that one can reveal profound truth of experience because postmodernism postulate the notion that both history and literature are human construct. It does not mean, though, that they promote a complete deconstruction of the past to the point that it does not exist; rather it means that the only way to access this past is through its texts. Postmodernism also confronts the prerogative of historiography as being the truthful account of the facts. “In a very real sense, postmodernism reveals a desire to understand present culture as the product of previous representations. In this sense, the representation of history becomes the history of representations” (HUTCHEON, 1990, p. 58).

Though the works to be analyzed in this thesis may not be considered aesthetically postmodernist by many people since – contrary to the works of Angela Carter, for instance – they do not deal with the representations of the past by means of parody, or even irony, they may be considered postmodern from a political perspective. The first work to be analyzed in this thesis is the historical novel *The Farming of Bones* (2006), which fictionalizes the massacre of the Haitian people living in the Dominican Republic in the year of 1937, under the orders of Dominican Dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. Her writing a historical novel on this specific historical fact becomes postmodern because it challenges the official discourse of history (if ever there is one). In an interview conducted by Bonnie Lyon, when asked how much the massacre figures in Haitian consciousness, Danticat answers: “[t]he 1937 massacre is very much part of both Haitian and Dominican consciousness, but in Haiti it's not taught in school as history” whereas in the Dominican Republic, children only learn about the Haitian occupation of the country which took place in the 1800s (DANTICAT, 2003, p. 192). Moreover, in “Daughters of Memory”¹⁴, Danticat declares:

Grappling with memory is, I believe, one of many complicated Haitians obsessions. We have, it seems, a collective agreement to remember our triumphs and gloss over our failures. (...) In order to shield our shattered collective psyche from a long

¹³ SIMMEL, George. “The Metropolis and Mental Life”. In: BRIDGE, Gary & WATSON, Sophie (Ed.). *The Blackwell City Reader*. West Sussex: Blackwell Publishing Ltd., 2010, p.103-110.

¹⁴ DANTICAT, Edwidge. “Daughters of Memory”. In: DANTICAT, Edwidge. *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*. New York: Vintage Books, 2011, p. 59-71.

history of setbacks and disillusionment, our constant roller-coaster ride between savior and dictators, homespun oppression and foreign tyranny, we cultivate communal and historical amnesia (...) (2011, p.64).

Besides, her protagonist is a Haitian orphan living and working as a maid in the Dominican Republic. Thus, it is also possible to relate Danticat's choice to Linda Hutcheon's statement that "[d]ifference and ex-centricity replace homogeneity as the foci of postmodern social analysis" (2010, p.5).

Nicol acknowledges that "[f]or all its problems, 'postmodernism' [and postmodern works] has become more or less established in critical discourse as a term that refers to a shift on what it means to be a subject in late twentieth-century society [...] (NICOL, 2002, p.2). In this sense, *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007), the other book chosen to be analyzed in this thesis, may also be considered a postmodern work of literature as in it Danticat questions the control she, as an auto/biographer, has upon her own work. As we will discuss in chapter 3, in this autobiographical piece of writing, Danticat deals with the fragility of memory and of identity, as well as she questions the veracity of official documents. Finally, the author also assumes the role that has been traditionally male and revises it as she becomes the one to tell the (hi)story of her family, her *self*, and, in a way, her country.

1.3 "We Are One, But We Are Not The Same": Post-Colonial And Diasporic Literatures As Sites Of Resistance

1.3.1 Post/colonialism and Diaspora: some considerations.

Post-Colonial Theory is related to the effects of the processes of colonization in cultures and societies. Colonialism is not a new phenomenon in history, neither are the processes of de-colonization; in this thesis, though, it will be taken into consideration the political, linguistic, and cultural experiences resulting from colonialism and post-colonialism in countries that have achieved their independence after the end of the Second World War.

Even though Haiti, the place where Edwidge Danticat was born and main theme of her works, has not been a colony since its independence, which took place over two centuries ago, it is rather possible to affirm that the Haitian society is Postcolonial. In the next chapters we will discuss how the sequence of international invasions and dictatorships that the country has

faced since the 19th century has contributed to its present condition. Although Haiti was never a colony of the U.S.A., it has suffered the consequences of the U.S. Imperialism, as many other countries in the American continent have. In fact, it is even possible to question if the poorest country in the continent has been able to achieve a postcolonial status, once the economic and political dependence is still a mark in Haiti.

The use of the prefix “post” is rather a polemic choice; in *Post-Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (2000), Ashcroft *et al* recognize that the term post-colonial “continues to be a source of vigorous debate amongst critics” (2009, p.169). Using ‘post’ as simply meaning ‘after’ does not seem accurate once the process of colonization is too complex to be divided in clear-cut periods such as pre-colonization, colonization, and post-colonization. In *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literatures* (1989), Ashcroft *et al* propose that the prefix is better used in order to comprehend every culture affected by the imperial process, which started on the moment of colonization and endures to the present day. Post-colonial, hence, suggests an ongoing anxiety that permeates the process initiated by European imperial violence. Moreover, they believe that the term seems also suitable to denominate both the new cross-cultural criticism which has recently emerged and the discourse by means of which this criticism is constituted (ASHCROFT *et al*, 2004, p.2).

In “Histories, Empires and the Post-Colonial Moment” (1996), Catherine Hall reminds us that colonization is a two-way event, which means that both colonizer and colonized are connected through histories. Most often than not, however, after the process of decolonization starts, some of these histories are forgotten, she states, “in the desire to throw off the embarrassing reminders of the Empire” (HALL C., 1996, p.67) even though the evidences of colonization are present everywhere. In the case of Britain they are, for instance, in the name of streets, the sugar in the tea, the coffee they drink, among others. Hall believes that, instead of forgetting, it is necessary to start a work of remembering empires differently (1996, p.66). The suggestion of this thesis is that post-colonial writings and readings are efficient strategies used in order to avoid this erasure.

However, if we are to consider the multiplicity of colonial and post-colonial experiences, how to overcome the challenge of defining and categorizing a work of literature as postcolonial? Ashcroft *et al* respond that what postcolonial literatures have in common, apart from their regional specificities is that “they emerge in their present form out of the experience of colonization and assert themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumption of the imperial centre” (2004, p.2). In other words, postcolonial literature suggests a political position deeply

rooted in resistance. Thus, in the core of postcolonial writings is a desire to (re)view and (re)write the conventions delimited by the former colonizer, a desire to recuperate the silenced voices and to break free from the bars of exoticism.

Even though postcolonial literature is an umbrella term which may encompass authors and literary works with experiences of exile, migration, and diaspora, those processes are rather distinct. In “Diasporas” (1994), James Clifford delineates some differences between immigration and diaspora. According to him, diasporic populations and immigrants are not synonyms for, although immigrants may experience a degree of loss and nostalgia, they are on their way to a new home in a new place. The aim of the immigrant is to assimilate the culture of the host country, in other words, they long to fit in. Diasporic populations, on the other hand, maintain connections, be they ideological or practical, to a home which is located in a different place. Their sense of identity is rooted on shared and ongoing (hi)stories of displacement, suffering, adaptation, and resistance (CLIFFORD, 1997, p.250).

The term ‘diaspora’ comes from the Greek word *diaspeirein*, and means literally “to scatter through”. In the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (edition of 2003), the primary definition for the entry is “the movement of the Jewish people away from ancient Palestine, to settle in other countries”. Indeed, the Jewish diaspora has been considered a defining model (CLIFFORD, 1997, p.247). However, the term has been used by scholars in order to define the process of de-colonization and globalization that have been taking place in the world from the second half of the twentieth century on (BRAZIEL & MANNUR, 2003, p.4). Therefore, the scope has been reviewed and re-defined in order to include the experience of other peoples. Thus, the Jewish diaspora is better referred as a point of departure rather than a model (BRAH, 1996, p. 181). Moreover, in “Nation, Migration, Globalization: Points of Contention in Diaspora Studies”, critics Jana Braziel and Anita Mannur emphasize that the term may assume positive and negative aspects when dealing with the *new diasporas*, i.e., the ones which took place after World War II when countries like England and France started losing their last colonies. The critics acknowledge that on a historical level, diaspora (negatively) “denotes communities of people dislocated from their native homelands through [the processes of] migration, immigration, or exile as a consequence of colonial expansion (BRAZIEL & MANNUR, 2003, p. 4)”. At the same time, though, they recognize a more positive approach, since, etymologically, “the term suggests (...) fertility through dispersion, dissemination, and the scattering of seeds” (BRAZIEL & MANNUR, 2003, p. 4).

Likewise, *diasporas* seems a more accurate term than *diaspora* when referring to this contemporary phenomenon so to acknowledge plurality of the diasporic experiences and to

avoid the tendency to homogenize and essentialize other people's stories and histories. Besides, it is important to bear in mind that diasporic experiences do not "transcend differences of race, class, gender, and sexuality, (...) nor can diaspora stand alone as an epistemological or historical category of analysis, separate and distinct from these interrelated categories" (BRAZIEL & MANNUR, 2003, p. 5).

1.3.2 Home and Diaspora.

In *The Politics of Home* (1996), Rosemary George observes: "the word 'home' immediately connotes the private sphere of patriarchal hierarchy, gendered self-identity, shelter, comfort, nurture and protection" (1999, p.1). Diaspora and home are, at many times, considered as two opposite concepts; whereas home implies fixity and steadiness, diaspora suggests movement and dislocation. The concept of home, however, is quite relevant to the Diaspora Studies. Diasporic people occupy a rather complex position, i.e., they are not in their way to cultural assimilation and they cannot go back to their places of origin. Therefore, they face a constant struggle to belong. In an interview conducted by Dr. Opal Palmer Adisa, Edwidge Danticat, when asked what Haiti means to her, she declared:

Haiti is and will always be one of the two places, the United States being the other, that I call home. Haiti is where I was born and Haiti was my first home. I am like most Haitians living with my feet in both worlds. I go to Haiti as much as I can. I still have a lot of family there. I have always lived in Haitian communities in the United States, so while I have left Haiti, it's never left me (2009, p.345).

In addition, the notion of home is an ideological determinant of the subject; it is built around inclusions and exclusion, and has become a way of defining difference. Thus, home (which includes the concept of home-country and homeland) may not be regarded as a neutral place (GEORGE, 1996, p. 2-6). Consequently, the concept of diaspora offers "*a critique of discourses of fixed origins*, while taking account of a homing desire which is not the same thing as desire for a homeland" (BRAH, 1996, p.180, italics are mine), and "forces us to rethink the rubrics of nation, nationalism, while refiguring the relations of citizens and nation-states" (BRAZIEL & MANUR, 2003, p.7).

Furthermore, George indicates that "while the nation is the object and subject of nationalist narratives, literary narratives are more centrally concerned with the idea of home"

(1999, p.12). She implies that, in the context of migrant literature, home is to be seen as the private sphere, usually embedded in discourses on women (GEORGE, 1999, p.19). Again, diaspora and diasporic women narratives become potential sites of resistance and agency.

1.3.3 Women in Diaspora.

Clifford attests that there is a tendency in theoretical narratives of diasporas to address to travel and displacement in a rather unmarked way. He, however, believes that diasporic experiences are always gendered and indicates that focusing on women experiences might be relevant because they reveal some political aspects of diaspora. According to him, an important issue to be raised is whether diaspora reinforces or loosens gender subordination (CLIFFORD, 1997, p.258). Yet, it is not possible to provide a straightforward answer, because diaspora is not an uncomplicated phenomenon.

In *Cartographies of Diaspora: Contesting Identities* (1996), Avtar Brah remarks that globalization, which in fact initiated centuries ago, achieves new implications in a moment as ours, whose characteristics are: the increasing dominance of multinational capital; the flexible specialization of labor and products; and the revolutionizing impact of new technologies in production, distribution, and communication. According to her, women have a crucial role in this new international division of labor, and, therefore, it must not be a surprise that they encompass a growing parcel in migration movements (BRAH, 1996, p.179). In “Diasporas old and new: women in the transnational world”, Gayatri Spivak reminds that women, and other marginalized groups, have never achieved their status of complete subjects and agents in civil society. She argues that even in a period considered transnational, the limits and openings of a particular civil society are never transnational, and it requires a class-system, and concludes that many women still struggle for basic civil rights. In conclusion, though women encompass a great portion in migration, it does not mean that displacement is a synonym of achieving agency (SPIVAK, 1996, p.249-252).

Diaspora may be a site where women can see themselves released from gender subordinations to some extent. Say, a woman who leaves an orthodox Islamic country and goes to the U.S. may achieve a greater degree of agency than she would in her native country. Moreover, women who at their country of origin would suffer organ mutilation, or who would

not even been allowed to be born (their mothers subjected to forced abortion because of the sex of the fetus), may have new opportunities as a second generation diasporic subjects.

At the same time diaspora may perpetuate the gender subordination women faced in their place of origin or, even, create new ones. If the same woman from an orthodox Islamic country migrates to France, instead of going to the U.S., she may face state retaliation if she chooses to express her faith by means of wearing her hijab. Additionally, it is possible that diasporic women find in her new country reflections of patriarchy she faced on her former home.

Breath, Eyes, Memory (1994), Edwidge Danticat's first novel, illustrates how women may face and perpetuate acts of violence based on their gender rather accurately; the Caco family is composed of three generations of Haitian women: Ifé Caco, the grandmother; Martine Caco, the older daughter who is raped by a Tonton Macoute when a teenager; Atie Caco, the younger daughter, who only achieves literacy as an adult and loves another woman; and Sophie Caco, the narrator, who is the child resulting from Martine's rape. As the narrative begins, Sophie is living in Haiti with her grandmother and auntie while her mother is in New York. By the age of 12, she joins her estranged mother in the U.S. Migration, however, does not prevent Sophie from becoming a victim of a Haitian form of violence against women, the *testing*; in the words of Danticat, "[a]ll of these women share a trauma: all had mothers who regularly inserted the tips of their fingers into their daughters' vagina to check that they were still a virgin" (DANTICAT, 2011, p.32). With Martine only rape put an end to the testing while Sophie inflicts violence upon herself to stop it. Becoming a diasporic person did not save Sophie from being a victim of violence; however, it enabled her to find a way (through therapy) to recover from the trauma of being tested and to break the cycle of violence, both suffered and perpetuated by women.

1.3.4 The Language of Diaspora.

Diaspora signifies people being dislocated from their place of origin by means of the processes of migration. However, diaspora is also a discourse. It is a concept constructed inside language, surrounded by narratives of traumas, separation, dislocation, and, at the same time, of reinvention and new beginnings. James Clifford understands that the language of

diaspora, as he calls it, is invoked by displaced people who not only feel, “but *maintain, revive and invent*, a connection with a former home”. (1997, p.255, italics are mine).

In *At Home in Diaspora: Black International Writing* (2005), Wendy Walters claims that literature has become an important location where contemporary black writers may express concepts of race and identity. According to her, “ink and the varieties of narrative forms that have made up African American, Caribbean, and Black European literatures are important sites where contemporary writers continue Du Bois’s project of tracing ‘a race concept’ that may be called *diaspora*” (WALTERS, 2005, p.vii). Besides, Walters notices a movement in the history of African American literature that goes from writers demanding an American identity to a searching of diasporic connections to other black peoples. She adds: “very often this seeking occurs in the pages of their texts, as writers use their prose to *construct alternative homelands*” (WALTERS, 2005, p.vii, italics are mine). Although Walters refers specifically to black writers, it may be inferred that other diasporic writers make use of literature in order to construct alternative concepts not only of race and home but also of gender, sexuality, etc.

Moreover, Walters considers the relation between displacement, narrative, and critique. She suggests that the displacement diasporic writers go through creates a distance that allows them a privileged position, a place from where they may (re)view and (re)write their *homes*, “construct new homelands, and [...] envision new communities” (WALTERS, 2005, p.viii).

In “Writing Home: Gender, heritage and identity in Afro-Caribbean women’s writing in the US” (1994), Carole Boyce Davies also considers the notion of displacement and narrative:

Migration creates a 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 for this rewriting. Home can only have meaning once one experiences a level of displacement from it (2001, p.113).

Davies (2001, p.115) notes: “the creative writer, located centrally in these colonialist re-inscriptions, is nevertheless privileged”. She understands that in their case the writing of home is present in everyday situations such as letters, conversations, and family stories. “Thus”, she concludes, “the rewriting of home becomes a critical link in the articulations of identity. It is a play of resistance to domination which identifies where we come from, but

also locates home in its many transgressive and disjunctive experiences” (DAVIES, 2001, p.115).

If diaspora identity, as Walters and Davies suggest, is indeed performed in writing (that is, inside language) and if the articulation of this identity, more than a literary performance, is a political act (WALTERS, 2005, p. ix), then, it seems central that the concept of representation be addressed. According to Gayatri Spivak representation can be understood as *Vertretung* or as *Darstellung*. The former means literally treading in someone’s shoes, which is the case of the political representation performed by a congressional person. The latter means “placing there”. Therefore, representing is done in two ways: by proxy and portrait. Spivak adds that it is impossible to separate the two; hence, when you represent politically, you are representing in the portraying sense as well¹⁵:

Now, the thing to remember is that in the act of representing politically, you actually represent yourself and your constituency in the portrait sense, as well. You have to think of your constituency as working class, or the black minority, the rainbow coalition (...) and so on. That is representation in the sense of *Darstellung*. So that you do not ever “simply” *vertreten* anyone, in fact, not just politically in the sense of true parliamentary forms, but even in political practices outside parliament forms (1990, p.108).

In “Feminism in/and postcolonialism”, Deepika Bahri considers the importance of women’s studies and postcolonial studies. She remarks: “these fields have arisen in response to the absence or unavailability of the perspectives of women, racial minorities, and marginalized cultures or communities in historical accounts or literary annals” (BAHRI, 2008, p.204). Bahri adds that, to the hegemonic discourse, those Others have no voice or say in their portrayal; they are condemned to be spoken for by those who have the authority and control the means to speak. And being spoken for, Bahri concludes, may generate an essentially fictional account with no relevant reference or compatibility with reality (BAHRI, 2008, p.204-205). Literary works written by diasporic subjects become, consequently, imperative instruments of resistance as they provide an alternative to the dominant discourse.

It is important to mention that literary works written by ex-centric people may also become generalizations with no truthful representation of reality. Many diasporic authors share this concern and are careful enough to make sure that their works are not considered as representatives of their whole culture of origin, but as their particular view on a specific topic. On answering if she considers herself a role model, Edwidge Danticat explains:

¹⁵ SPIVAK, Gayatri Chakravorty. *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies and Dialogues*. Edited by Sarah Harasym. New York: Routledge, 1990, p. 108-109.

I come from a very rich, strong, proud, and varied culture. There are so many aspects to Haitian culture that one person could not ever ever represent them all, and humbly and respectfully I don't believe that this task is mine. I'm a weaver a tales. I tell stories. (...) What I do is neither sociology, nor anthropology, nor history. I think artists have to be allowed to be just that: people who create, who make things up. (...) I hope to speak for the individuals who might identify with the stories I tell. However, I think it would be disrespectful of me to reduce the expression of an entire culture to one voice, whether that voice be mine or any other individual's. (...) My greatest hope is that mine becomes one voice in a giant chorus that is trying to understand and express artistically what it's like to be a Haitian immigrant in the United States¹⁶.

Edwidge Danticat is an example of a conscious, politically involved, diasporic artist. She is aware of the limitations of her works; she knows that she cannot truly represent the subaltern she is trying to give voice to. Danticat also knows that in writing in English, she writes from the center to the margin, about the margin. May she still consider herself a marginal subject? Hers becomes, therefore, a multifaceted position; and she does not deny her hybridism, on the contrary, she celebrates it.

By means of her works, Danticat is able to resist the silence imposed on “the least of these”. Moreover, she contributes to the construction of both Haitian and American cultural identity. Above all, she makes *home in diaspora*. Both works analyzed in this thesis, *The Farming of Bones* and *Brother I'm Dying*, are examples of postmodern and postcolonial narratives. The next two chapters will focus on historical novel and autobiographical writing in order to assess the extent to which works of literature may offer an alternative discourse and resist hegemonic versions of truth.

¹⁶ Interview published on the website:

http://www.bookbrowse.com/author_interviews/full/index.cfm/author_number/1022/edwidge-danticat. (last accessed in 12/29/2012)

2 THE IMPORTANCE OF TELLING A (HI)STORY.

2.1 History as Meaning Making.

History is natural selection. Mutant versions of the past struggle for dominance; new species of facts arise, and old, saurian truths go to the wall, blindfolded and smoking last cigarettes. Only the mutations of the strong survive. The weak, the anonymous, the defeated, leave few marks.

(Salman Rushdie – *Shame*)

For even if history is most often recounted by victors, it's not always easy to tell who the rightful narrators should be, unless we keep redefining with each page what it means to conquer and to be conquered.

(Edwidge Danticat – “*Bicentennial*”)

It was only in the early nineteenth century that historians began to relate truth with fact and to consider fiction and truth as opposites. History began, in this way, to be seen as the representation of truth, whilst fictional accounts – especially novels – as the representation of the possible. These ideas, according to Hayden White, gave birth to the illusion of a historical discourse that would comprise only accurate accounts about “a realm of events which were (or had been) observable in principle, the arrangement of which in the order of their original occurrence would permit them to figure forth their true meaning or significance” (WHITE, 1978, p.123). What the historians of that time could not perceive – being as involved with that delusion as they were – is that “the facts do not speak for themselves, but that the historian speaks for them, speaks on their behalf” (WHITE, 1978, p.125). Consequently, he/she needs to take hold of the same narrative strategies of the novelist when producing historical writing. Thus, already in the twentieth century, this antagonism between historical and fictional discourses started being questioned – particularly by postmodern scholars. In *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989), Linda Hutcheon (2002, p.61) states: “[h]istoriography too is no longer considered the objective and disinterested recording of the past; it is more an attempt to comprehend and master it by means of some work (narrative/explanatory) model”. Although

Hutcheon (2002, p.61) adds that the historical discourse indeed grants a particular meaning of the past, her position surely sounds heretic to those who (still) believe in a possible unbiased historiography.

Moreover, the possibility to access the past is also questioned. Both White and Hutcheon emphasize the fact that the past is accessed only by means of its fragments – or traces – such as documents, testimony of witnesses, archival materials, etc. (WHITE, 1978, p.125 & HUTCHEON, 2002, p.55). Thereby, this impression of an organized past is granted only through historical narratives, i.e. through representation. Hutcheon considers this organization as an attempt of totalizing the past:

The function of the term totalizing, as I understand it, is to point to the *process* (hence the awkward ‘ing’ form) by which writers of history, fiction, or even theory render their materials coherent, continuous, unified – but always with an eye to the control and mastery of these material, even at the risk of doing violence to them. It is this link to power, as well as process, that the adjective ‘totalizing’ is meant to suggest, and it is such that the term has been used to characterize everything from liberal humanist ideals to the aims of historiography (2002, p.59).

Consequently, instead of creating an abysmal separation between historical and fictional narratives, postmodern critics regard both as discourses, in the Foucauldian sense of the term and believe that "the meaning and shape are not in the events, but in *the systems* which made those past 'events' into present historical 'fact'" (HUTCHEON, 1998, p.74). In this sense, they question the power which privileged one narrative instead of others.

2.2 Literature as a Representation of the Past: the Historical Novel – Past and Present

The historical novel is not something of the late hour. It probably came to existence together with the development of the novel, although it may not have been labeled “historical”¹⁷. Lately, however, the genre seems to be receiving great attention, be it among writers, readers, or publishing houses. In *History and the Contemporary Novel* (1989), David Cowart suggests that the claims of the historical novel lie on this urgent contemporary necessity to analyze the past in order to relate it – and maybe find an explanation – to an increasingly chaotic present. In order to do so, it is necessary to search for the insights that

¹⁷ According to Jerome Groot “the first commonly defined historical novel” is Sir Walter Scott’s *Waverly* from the 19th century (2010: 7). Nevertheless, Groot states that “the first historical fiction that might be considered a ‘novel’ is Marie-Madeleine Lafayette’s *The Princess of Cleves*” published in the 17th century (2010:12).

both art and history offer, and, oftentimes, one finds the past more easily accessible through historical fiction than through history (COWART, 1989, p.1).

The term *historical novel* is pretty much self-explanatory; the entry in the *Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Criticism* (1977) defines it as “a form of fictional narrative which reconstructs history and re-creates it imaginatively” (1999, p.383). Adopting a broader perspective, Cowart (1989, p.6), labels as historical novel “any novel in which a historical consciousness manifests itself strongly in either the character or the action”. In either case, the past may be considered its true protagonist.

Many are the possibilities in a historical novel. It may portray the lives of historical personages or mix historical and fictional characters. It may focus only on a single past event or on a large period of time. In any case, it is a competent tool when it comes to literarily represent the impact of past events upon people’s lives. Early opponents of the historical novel, however, understood that it could have some harmful effects. In *Historical Novel* (2010), Jerome de Groot (2010, p.6) maintains that “much criticism of the historical novel concerns its ability to change fact, and indeed those who attack the form are often concerned with its innate ability to encourage an audience into being knowingly misinformed, misled and duped”. In order to deal with this capacity of “deceiving” its readers, many authors included explanatory notes in which they described their own engagement with the historical period represented in the narrative, be it through schooling or through reading and researching (GROOT, 2010, p.7). It was – and still is – a strategy used to attest the accuracy of the writing¹⁸.

Nowadays, though, accuracy has become less important than plausibility. The historical novel becomes, therefore, a potential site to contest the traditional place that history has assigned for itself – i.e., the only truthful account of the past – and re-vise official discourses. Individuals that were, at many times, silenced by the hegemonic historiography find in this literary genre an opportunity to reclaim their existence and achieve agency. Due to those reasons, the historical novel has emerged as a highly cherished mode of narration for postmodern and postcolonial writers, who are, more often than not, interested in using their art not only aesthetically, but also politically.

¹⁸ David Cowart offers the example of Sir Walter Scott who provided extensive notes for his novel *Waverly*. The notes in this novel encompass “ballads and poetry (sometimes made up), political occurrences, biography, culture and customs, classical learning, sword making, accounts of actual events” (1989:7). Scott also cites numerous authorities in order to make his points sound.

2.3 *The Farming of Bones*: the Engaged Author as a Novelist.

The Farming of Bones (1998) is the second novel written by Edwidge Danticat. It narrates the story of Amabelle Désir, a Haitian maid who, like many others, agonized in the hands of the Dominican Guardia and civilians during days of manslaughter in 1937. In an interview conducted by Bonnie Lyons in 2003 and published in the literary journal *Contemporary Literature*, Danticat declares that the massacre is a part of both countries' consciousness; nevertheless, it is not taught in the Haitian schools as history, whereas in the Dominican Republic, children learn about the Haitian occupation of the country which started during the 1800s and celebrate their freedom from Haiti (DANTICAT, 2003, p.192). In "A Marred Testament: Cultural Trauma and Narrative in Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*" (2006), Amy Novak, when addressing the aftermath of the massacre, remarks that in both countries:

[a] narrative was created that supported political and cultural hegemony, rather than one that sought out the voice silenced. And with no one to listen, this act of working through even in Haiti is forestalled. The event slipped from history, unspoken by the governments on both sides of the Massacre River (NOVAK, 2006, p.97).

The imposed silence about this terrible past event haunts the present and future of Haiti, for "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it"¹⁹. In this way, *The Farming of Bones* becomes an important literary representation of the historical period and a valuable example of engaged writing in an attempt to work through the tragedy.

Although Edwidge Danticat lives in the U.S. and writes in English, she considers herself competent to write about Haiti. In an interview conducted by Ginetta E. B. Candelario when asked if writing from outside the island affects her view of the island, she answered: "It definitely affects it. [...] [B]ut we can't neglect that there is this whole generation of us who left Haiti young and are now living outside. Are we supposed to be silent because somebody thinks we're not authentic enough?" (DANTICAT, 2004, p.73).

Finally, it seems rather important to keep in mind the history Haiti, both as a country and as a part of the Caribbean islands. Consequently, before further discussion of the novel, we will provide a brief historical background of the region.

¹⁹ SANTAYANA, George. *Life of Reason: Reason in Common Sense*. London: Archibald Constable & CO. Ltd, 1906, p. 284.

2.3.1 The Caribbean: a brief historical background

The Caribbean is an archipelago composed by thousands of islands. Their sizes vary considerably; they range from inhabitable coral reefs to Cuba, which is one of the largest islands in the world. The region comprises an area of 1,063,000 square miles (considering the Caribbean sea, its islands, and the surrounding coasts); it has a land area of 92,541 square miles and a population of 39,169,962 (2009) distributed in 30 territories (13 sovereign states and 17 dependent territories)²⁰. There was the first place in the American Continent where Christopher Columbus set foot in. According to tradition, on October, 12, 1492, Columbus reached the Bahamas Islands, on San Salvador (now Watling's Island). Rumor has it that the Genovese navigator believed that only 2,500 miles separated Asia from Europe, and when he arrived in Bahamas, he thought he had achieved his goal. Even though he was not the first person to cross from the Old World to the New, Columbus became the first to make the American continent known to Europeans, who from that moment on started entering the region.

Besides being the first place in the American continent to be reached by Columbus, the Caribbean was the place in the New World that was ruled longer by the Europeans – among them are the French, Spanish, and English. From the 19th century on, the region was under the economic and political influence of the U.S as well. As late as the 1960s many islands were still politically and economically dependent on European states and to the U.S.A.

During this long process of colonization different peoples went to the Caribbean islands – willingly or by force – and made the region one of the most diverse in the world. Amerindians²¹, Africans, Europeans of different backgrounds, Chinese, and Indians are some of the peoples that form the Caribbean identity. The region is also regarded for its connection to slavery and the plantation system, especially that of sugar cane, which was responsible for the relative peace and prosperity enjoyed by the islands. Even though they are currently supplying only a small fraction of European sugar, in the 18th century, the Caribbean produced 80 to 90 percent of the sugar consumed by western Europeans²².

The region is divided into four major groups of islands: Greater Antilles (Cuba, Jamaica, Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, and Cayman Islands), Bahamas Group (The Bahamas, and

²⁰ Data taken from <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Caribbean> (accessed in 12/15/2012)

²¹ In the Caribbean, the Amerindian presence is not as effective as in it is in the rest of the American continent because “almost all the indigenous population was destroyed in the first wave of colonization” (HALL, C., 1996, p. 68).

²² ROGOZINSKY, Jan. *A Brief History of the Caribbean: From the Arawak and Carib to the Present*. New York: Plume, 2000, p. 107.

Turks & Caicos), Lesser Antilles (U.S. Virgin Islands and British Virgin Islands), and Curaçao Group (Aruba, Bonaire, and Curaçao).

2.3.2 The Settlement of the Island of Hispaniola: 16th and 17th centuries.

The island of Hispaniola was discovered by Columbus during the first of the four voyages the navigator made to the Caribbean. On December 6, 1492, he reached the northeastern part of the island, which he named *Isla Española*. On Christmas day of the same year, his ship was grounded on a sandbank and destroyed; when Columbus left Hispaniola and went back to Spain, he left behind 39 men at the first European settlement of *Navidad*, the same place where now is the city of Cap Haïtien²³.

When Columbus returned to the island, eleven months later, he found *Navidad*, which was in fact only a small fortress, destroyed and the men killed. He decided, then, to found a new town 120 kilometers east which he called *Isabella*. In spite of being more than just a fortress – it even had public buildings and a church – the town did not prosper because its surroundings were not fertile. After this failure, Columbus did not give up; instead he chose another place, now 200 kilometers south-east of Isabella. In the year of 1496, Columbus's brother, Bartolomé, started building Santo Domingo. In *A History of Latin America* (2010), Peter Bakewell states that in the area of the new town “the harbor was good, the nearby land rich, well watered by rain, and densely peopled. A promising gold-field had been found 50-65 kilometers inland, which was another reason for the founding” (2010, p.110). All these details motivated the survivors from the north coast to move there.

By the time of his third voyage, in the year 1498, Columbus found in Hispaniola a group of rebels formed by Spanish settlers led by Francisco Roldán. The group was opposed to Columbus's rule of mining gold only for personal gains and exploiting Taínos – indigenous people that lived in Hispaniola – for personal use rather than for the Crown. In *A Brief History of the Caribbean* (2008), D.H. Figueredo and Frank Argote-Freyre explain that, even though Columbus made some changes due to Roldán's complaints, “the accusations nevertheless reached the Spanish monarchs, who decided to send an official representative to investigate” (2008, p.17).

In August 1500, Francisco de Bobadilla, the first governor chosen by Queen Isabella, arrived in Hispaniola and found the island at war. It took Bobadilla two years to restore the

²³ Ibid 6, p. 26.

order to the island. He also increased the production of gold, which happened because he offered incentives to individual entrepreneurs. The miners worked under royal license and all gold (and minerals) were royal property.

Hispaniola was the first Caribbean island to be properly colonized, which happened between the years 1502 and 1509 under the rule of Brother Nicola de Ovando. There was a pattern to the colonization: swift progress through the territories; conversion of the indigenous people to the Catholic faith, as mandated by Queen Isabella; harsh elimination of native insurrectionists; and forced labor for the Taínos and Caribs. The aim of the labor was the procurement of gold and silver for the monarchs²⁴. However, the prosperity in the first years of the Spanish settlement in Hispaniola did not last long. Added to the fact that the gold extinguished in a short period of time, the labor force diminished considerably.

The harsh treatment given to the native peoples, who served as labor force, together with diseases to which they were not immune contributed to the decimation of the natives.

Between the years of 1530 and 1570 there was a brief sugar boom in the Caribbean islands and, along with it, the introduction of the black slavery in the area. In 1513, the Spanish government began to grant licenses to bring slaves directly from Africa. One of the arguments to the import of laborers (especially Africans) was given by Friar Bartolomé de La Casa. According to Figueredo & Argotte-Freyre, the friar “recommended the end of the *encomienda* system, the release of all Tainos from servitude, and the restoration of the lands to the Tainos” (2008, p.28). He also suggested that the import of slaves would prevent the extermination of the Arawaks, which included the Tainos.

During the 17th century the economic life in Hispaniola reached its lowest and the trade inside the island almost ended. The illegal trade, on the other hand, flourished. In the northwest of the island, many Spanish colonists made their living from selling hides, meat, and fat from their cattle to French and Dutch pirates. In an attempt to stop this, the governor of Santo Domingo demanded that the homes of the settlers be burned and that they be relocated to the capital. This dislocation – known as *devastaciones* – resulted in economic ruin for many families as their animals could not be removed and their slaves ran away. In the end, however, the evacuation program failed; the illegal trade continued and the empty land attracted foreigners. Among these foreigners, there were French groups that settled mainly on the north of the island.

²⁴ FIGUEREDO, D.H. & ARGOTE-FREYRE, Frank. *A Brief History of the Caribbean*. New York: Facts on File, 2008, p. 19-20.

Furthermore, the area suffered several buccaneer attacks. The word derived from the French (“boucanier”) and referred originally to cattle hunters who ran away from abusive masters and illegally camped in western Hispaniola where Haiti is now located. The buccaneers learned survivor skills from the aboriginal peoples and, after 1603 (with the beginning of the “devastations”) they took the sea and became pirates cruising from Caribbean havens²⁵.

In the seventeenth century, the presence of the French colonist began to outnumber the presence of the Spanish ones on the territory where Haiti is currently located. The productivity of the Spanish settler’s gold mines was declining and so was their interest in the area. In *The History of Haiti* (2008), Steeve Coupeau explains: “A burgeoning population of some 3,000 French buccaneers became very visible, attracting the attention of the French government. On August 31, 1640, the French buccaneers expelled their rivals Englishmen from La Tortue and disembarked on the northern section of the island of Hispaniola” (COUPEAU, 2008, p.17). The following years, the French presence continued to increase. “In 1697, King Louis XIV secured the Western part of Hispaniola legally through the treaty of Ryswick, which ended the war of the League of Augsburg. The treaty of Ryswick divided the island into to colonies, Saint Domingue and Santo Domingo” (COUPEAU, 2008, p. 17)

2.3.3 The Birth of a Nation and the Haitian and French Control over Hispaniola: 18th and 19th centuries.

In the 18th century, Hispaniola – and other Caribbean islands – saw sugarcane become the base of its economy. In fact, in the book *The Sugar Cane Industry: a Historical Geography from its Origins to 1914* (1989), J.H. Galloway affirms that during that century “sugar cane was the most important cash crop in tropical America, dominating the economy of several colonies and making an important contribution to the economic life of many more” (2005, p.84).

Saint-Domingue was the richest colony in the Caribbean at the time; it was responsible for almost 40 percent of the French foreign trade. The prosperity of the white planters, which at many times surpassed that of their European peers, nevertheless, was based on slave labor.

The practice of slavery had already been introduced in the island two centuries before on the occasion of the first sugar boom. In *A Brief History of the Caribbean: From the*

²⁵ Ibid 10, p. 86; Ibid 12, p. 34.

Arawak and Carib to the Present (2000), Jan Rogozinski says: “by the 1750s, almost nine out of 10 men and women were slaves on all the islands where sugar was grown. Never before in human history had so high a proportion of a population been slaves” (2000, p.125).

In Haiti, slavery was regulated by the 1685 *Code Noir*. According to the *Historical Dictionary of Haiti*, the code was an effort to reduce the brutality of slavery. Yet, slavery in this part of the Hispaniola Island was especially cruel since the Planter’s Policy version of slavery was practiced there. The policy affirmed that it was more profitable to the owner to explore a slave to death and buy a new one than to take care of him/her properly. As a result of this inhumane policy, the slaves living in Haiti never completely assimilated to the dominant culture rather, they reinforced their African roots, which may explain the peculiar characteristic of this country when compared to others in the Caribbean (HALL M., 2012, p.238).

The Haitian Revolution is considered a direct consequence of the extremely overbearing nature of the slavery in the country. Even though the revolution was relatively unexpected, seeds of rebellion had been spread. One of them had been organized by a run-away slave called Mackandal. In 1720, Mackandal enlisted more than 1,000 people in order to murder the whites through poisoning; his followers infiltrated plantations and convinced some slaves to join in his plot. Figueiredo & Argote-Freyre state: “Ultimately, the plot failed when Mackandal was betrayed, captured, and burned alive, but the spark lit by Mackandal’s rebellion was not extinguished. In 1791 the repressed hatred and anger of the slaves engulfed Saint-Domingue in flames” (2008, p.84).

Even though 1791 is regarded as the year when the Haitian Revolution started, it does not seem possible to make a precise statement about it. It is a well-known fact that the French Revolution had a great influence on its Caribbean counterpart; nevertheless, Rogozinski affirms that “[t]he revolution on Saint-Domingue began in 1788, when the king announced the forthcoming meeting of the Estates General” (2000, p.166). He considers the years 1788-1791 the first stage of the process, in which “whites fought whites, and whites also battled the colored freedmen. The black slaves looked on” (ROGOZINSKI, 2000, p.166). In 1790 a civil war was taking place with all parts wanting autonomy from France but, at the same time, maintaining the slavery and the race status.

By the year of 1791, the government had already collapsed and the slave owners – white or not – were divided into many sides. In short, the country was combusting. However, no one could expect that the slaves would join the revolution.

Suddenly, on the night of August 22, 1791, thousands of slaves near the city of Cap-Français rose up and took a terrible vengeance on their masters. Within 10 days, slaves had revolted throughout the entire North Province, leaving the whites in control only of Cap-Français and a few fortified camps in the western mountains. Within two months, rebel slaves killed 2,000 whites and destroyed 280 sugar plantations. Ash from the blazing cane fields rained down on the city of Cap-Français (ROGOZINSKI, 2000, p.167).

In spite of what the words of Rogozinski may suggest, the rebellious slaves did not achieve their intent easily. Figueredo & Argote-Freyre affirm that in a few days after the slaves' attack, the owners reorganized: "[t]aking advantage of the rebels' weariness and the fact that some slave units [had] disbanded, the whites began their attack, killing any black person they came across, rebel or not" (2008, p.87). In fact, it took 13 years and many leaders for Haiti's independence to be proclaimed.

One of those leaders – probably the most iconic one – was Toussaint Louverture. Louverture was born as a slave and was taught to read and write by his owner. Before the age of 20, he was a medical practitioner, and later supervised 40 acres of plantation and a dozen of slaves that belonged to his owner. On the occasion of the revolution, Louverture organized and trained an army of approximately 4,000 slaves and fought on the side of the Spanish against the French. When France abolished slavery, he traded sides. Under Louverture's leadership, the Haitians defeated the Spanish forces. Then, in 1797, the black leader expelled the British invaders. Four years later, Louverture's forces occupied the Spanish side of the island. (FIGUEREDO & ARGOTE-FREYRE, 2008, p.89).

In 1802, though, Napoléon ordered an invasion of the colony in order to remove Louverture from power and restore slavery. The Haitian hero indeed left his government and eventually died in France. Nevertheless, his second-in-command, Jean-Jacques Dessalines proceeded with the rebellion. In January 1804 Dessalines and his followers drafted Haiti's declaration of independence.

The occupation of the Spanish side of the island which started under Louverture's rule would last many years until it ended in 1844. Rogozinski states:

Santo Domingo provided an obvious target to the despots ruling Haiti during the first half of the 19th century. Toussaint Louverture and Dessalines seized the neighboring Spanish colony from 1801 to 1805. And it was occupied again from 1822 to 1844 by the armies of Jean-Pierre Boyer (ROGOZINSKI, 2000, p.221).

During his government, President Boyer tried to erase the Spanish culture and even prohibited communication between the Roman Catholic Church in Santo Domingo and Europe. Finally, in 1844, a group of Dominicans nationalists signed a document called

Manifestación de la Parte Este, claiming independence from Haiti. This was not accepted by the Haitian government. Over the next decade, the Haitians conducted military campaigns against the newly formed Dominican Republic. This history of aggression would be used to fan the flames of anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic in the 20th century (FIGUEIREDO & ALGOTE-FREYRE, 2008, p.115).

2.3.4 Haiti and the Dominican Republic: the 20th century and the Parsley Massacre.

In the 19th century Haiti occupied and dominated its neighbor; nevertheless, as the economy of the first black republic deteriorated, their relationship changed during the 20th century. With an economy booming (especially during the years of the *Trujillato*), the Dominican Republic saw thousands of Haitians moving there in order to find work, mainly as cane cutters.

Democracy, on the other hand, never blossomed in the island of Hispaniola. Several international occupations and brutal dictatorships (The Duvalier regimes in Haiti, and the *Trujillato* in the Dominican Republic) made both countries economic dependent on other nations, particularly on the imperial power of the U.S.A.

Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molinas was elected in 1930 as the president of the Dominican Republic. After a national disaster which nearly destroyed Santo Domingo shortly after his election, Trujillo showed his leadership capacities and started to build his Benefactor façade. The *Trujillato* lasted 31 years; sometimes he ruled as president, and sometimes he ruled from behind a civilian government. His government was characterized by economic progress and brutality (FIGUEREDO & ALGOTE-FREYRE, 2008, p.177).

The nationalist feeling and Dominican identity built during Trujillo's regime had Anti-Haitianism as its foundations. He emphasized that Catholicism and the (white) European background opposed Voodooism and the African heritage that predominated in Haiti. Indeed, Anti-Haitianism was a useful distraction to conceal the almost total disregard for civil rights in the Trujillo years and the enormous amassing of private wealth by the Trujillo family (FIGUEREDO & ARGOTE-FREYRE, 2008, p.177).

In 1937 the Dominican dictator, ordered the murder of every Haitian living in the border of the Eastern side of the island of Hispaniola in an attempt to whitening the country. The massacre lasted three days; the number of deaths is uncertain, ranging from 4,000 to

30,000²⁶. Although the Dominican Republic claimed its whiteness, Trujillo had to establish a shibboleth²⁷ in order to distinguish Haitians from Dominicans; anyone who could not pronounce the word *perejil* (parsley) with the proper Spanish accent – which was very difficult for the Créole speakers Haitians – was considered non-Dominican and thus condemned to death.

In *Literature of the Caribbean* (2008), Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert writing about *The Farming of Bones*, comments that

[t]he massacre, known in the Dominican Republic as El Corte (The Cut), was carried out by machetes and clubs so to cover the Dominican Army's role in the killing. (The intention was to leave the impression that Dominican peasants, responding to local tensions, had attacked the Haitians using machetes, whereas the army would have used bullets (PARAVISINI-GEBERT, 2008, p.89).

The international press did not pay much attention to the event as it was preoccupied with the rise of Nazism and Fascism in European countries. Eventually, because of international pressure Trujillo held mock trials for many officers and offered indemnity to those wounded in the attack and to the families of those killed. The amount, negotiated through the United States, started in \$750,000, but only \$525,000 was paid. Although very little in view of the genocide he ordered, the indemnity was the only sanction Trujillo faced for the massacre.

The lack of response from the Haitian government was shameful and still causes dismay. In 2008, the first issue of *Fowòm Ouvriye*, an internationalist newsletter based on the Marxist doctrine, reads:

The international outrage brought on by this massacre was soon abated by an agreement between both governments, on January 31, 1938, to settle “these few incidents on the border between some Haitians and Dominicans.” The Haitian government of Sténio Vincent capitulated completely and dropped all proceedings in international court (2008, p.1).

2.3.5 The Ex-Centric Speaks: Postmodern and Postcolonial Influences.

²⁶ COUPEAU, Steeve. *The History of Haiti*. Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008, p. 82 and Ibid 4, p. 177.

²⁷ According to the Merriam-Webster online dictionary, one of the definitions for the entry *shibboleth* is “a use of language regarded as distinctive of a particular group” (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/shibboleth>). Moreover, the Wikipedia defines it as “a word, sound, or custom that a person unfamiliar with its significance may not pronounce or perform correctly relative to those who are familiar with it. It is used to identify foreigners or those who do not belong to a particular class or group of people. It also refers to features of language, and particularly to a word or phrase whose pronunciation identifies a speaker as belonging to a particular group” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shibboleth>).

In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995), Michel-Rolph Trouillot acknowledges the participation of human beings in history as both actors and narrators. He emphasizes that this participation is made possible because in many languages, English included, “History” is an ambivalent word meaning “both the facts of the matter and a narrative of those facts, [...]. The first meaning places the emphasis on the sociohistorical process, the second on our knowledge of that process or on a story about the process” (TROUILLOT, 1995, p.2). In “The Quarrel with History”, published in his book *Caribbean Discourse* (1999), Édouard Glissant, discussing the issue of History as an instrument of “ordering”, states: “History [with a capital *H*] ends where the histories of those peoples once reputed to be without history come together. *History is a highly functional fantasy of the West*, originating at precisely the time when it alone ‘made’ the history of the World” (2011, p.64, italics are mine). Glissant’s revolutionary statement empowers the narratives of peoples who do not live under the discipline of History. He adds: “[a]s far as we are concerned, history as a consciousness at work and history as lived experience are therefore *not the business of historians exclusively*” (GLISSANT, 2011, p.65, italics are mine). Hence, even though Danticat’s novel may not be considered historiography, it plays an important role in breaking the silence about the events of 1937.

The Farming of Bones may be regarded as an example of postmodern and postcolonial historical fiction. In *Politics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon reminds readers that in postmodern social analysis the interest in homogeneity and centrality is replaced by the interest in ex-centricity and difference (2002, p.5). Ex-centricity is indeed a central theme in *The Farming of Bones* as Danticat’s narrator and protagonist, Amabelle Désir, is an ex-centric character in, at least three levels: gender, ethnicity, and national status.

To begin with, Amabelle is a woman living in the Dominican Republic during the early years of the Trujillato. As in many other countries worldwide, the patriarchal rubrics determined gender relations and roles in the DR. Although he entitled himself “Benefactor of Women’s Right”, Trujillo had a very well defined part for women in his government. He ascribed the importance of the female participation in the regime to the moral guardianship and social conservation of Dominican society²⁸, thus reinforcing their roles as carriers of traditional – and therefore patriarchal – values.

²⁸ MANLEY, Elizabeth S. *Poner un Grano de Arena: gender and women’s political participation under authoritarian rule in the Dominican Republic, 1928-1978*. 2008. 386 f. Dissertation (Doctor of Philosophy) – School of Liberal Arts, Tulane University, 2008.

Second, Amabelle is a black young woman living within a racist society. The Dominican Republic was not an exception in the Caribbean; rather, it was the rule when it came to racial politics. At the bottom of the social ladder were people of African heritage and at the top, the ones with European background. In *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in Dominican History* (2003), Richard Turits explains that even during the pre-Trujillo years, Dominican intellectuals “had sought to define the nation (*la raza*) in monoethnic and Eurocentric terms” (2003, p.145). Turits adds:

[a]s part of their struggle to resolve the tensions between local practices and urban and elite visions of the nation, in the early twentieth century, leading political figures and writers advanced policies for both “the Domination of the frontier” and European immigration. These policies came together – albeit paradoxically – in official schemes to establish agricultural “colonies”, or settlements, composed of Europeans immigrant in the frontier (2003, p.145).

The idea that progress would require “external – namely, European – forces, ideas and bodies” (TURITS, 2003, p.145) was not a novelty in Latin America; nevertheless, Trujillo was the only one to openly encourage the murder of thousands people living and working in the Dominican Republic on account of their race. The dictator’s own motives to order the massacre are still obscure; however, it is known that “long-standing anti-Haitian nationalist discourses among Dominican intellectuals and state officials created the possibility of legitimating the slaughter as the realization of a supposedly patriotic project to “Domicanize the frontier” (TURITS, 2003, p.146). In the novel, the character that best represents this discourse is Señor Pico Duarte, Valencia’s husband. An officer in the Dominican Army, Pico was often stationed near the border of the country. As the majority of the Dominicans, Pico was not white, “with his honey almond skin and charcoal eyes” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.35), but he displayed racist behavior toward Amabelle and other Haitians living in the neighborhood. In one instance, after Valencia – still suffering on the account of her son’s death – invites a group of cane cutters to have some coffee with her on the porch of Papi’s house, “[Pico] did not scold her, but once he discovered that she had used their imported orchid-patterned tea set, he took the set out to the yard and, launching them against the cement walls of the house latrines, he shattered the cups and saucers, one by one” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.116).

Third, it may be said that Amabelle is in a diasporic condition, even though she is “next door” to her “home”. In this case, the social and emotional displacement is more relevant than the geographic one. Although both countries share the same piece of land, the Dominican identity has been built under a non-Haitian ideology, thus, making it impossible

for Haitian people to acquire the status of Dominican citizen. This sense of antagonism makes the experience of Haitian people living in the Dominican Republic close to that of diaspora subjects living in the U.S.A., for example. The sentiment of being in exile and the taboo of returning to the place of origin which are experienced by diasporic peoples (CLIFFORD, 2005, p.246) are also addressed in the novel. Father Romain, one of the characters, is a young priest who came from the same village as Amabelle and was always making much of it. Even though he was very dedicated to his students, he missed his family back in Haiti. This sentiment of being at the same time here and there was not unique to Father Romain, and many people found solace in each other and in the stories they exchanged in the evenings together. As the narrator comments:

It was a way of being joined to your old life through the presence of another person. At times you could sit for a whole evening with such individuals, just listening to their existence unfold, from the house where they were born to the hill where they wanted to be buried. It was their way of returning home, with you as a witness or as someone to bring them back to the present, either with a yawn, a plea to be excused, or the skillful of themselves in each other's memory so that if you left first and went back to the common village, you could carry, if not a letter, a piece of treasured clothing, some message to their loved ones that their place was still among the living (1999, p.73).

Moreover, the character of Father Romain has an important role in the novel. Living in a society in which the Roman Catholic faith is dominant, in his sermons and in his daily living his was a voice of cultural and political awareness: “In his sermons to the Haitian congregants of the valley he often reminded everyone of common ties: language, foods, history, carnival, songs, tales, and prayers. His creed was one of memory, how remembering – though sometimes painful – can make you strong” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.73).

Amabelle's triple ex-centric condition causes her many suffering, yet it seems that in the novel it is exactly this marginal condition that allows her to become the perfect narrator. She observes: “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” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.35). The presence/invisibility makes Amabelle a witness, a victim, and an agent of the events taking place in the novel.

2.3.6 Before the Massacre: “Am I My Brother's Guardian?”

It is possible to recognize two distinct moments in *The Farming of Bones*: the weeks that precede the massacre and the period after it. In this way, the novel is constructed over two principles; dividedness and non-resolution. Although it is not possible to make a clear cut, the feeling of dividedness is the mark of the first part of the novel, which narrates the weeks before the event, and the non-resolution is the characteristic of the second part, since the event has gone unrecognized by the government of both countries.

The sense of dividedness in the novel is built since the beginning as there are two narrative lines, both of them first-person accounts; the first one uses a traditional mode of narration, starting some days before the massacre and ending years after it; and the other is fragmented, “a collection of bold print fragments of memories or dreams” (NOVAK, 2006, p.95) that irrupts from time to time.

Another element used by Danticat to represent this dividedness experienced by Haitians and Dominicans is through the images. In the narrative, before Trujillo’s butchery takes place, it seems that almost every character and situation has its counterpart. The couples Amabelle/Sebastien and Valencia/Pico are one example. The first couple is in an intimate relationship of love and understanding, of mutual admiration and support. In the opening chapter of the novel, when referring to her lover, Amabelle observes: “I’m 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” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.2).

The love and intimacy which are characteristics of their relationship are also built in language, by means of communication. The couple seems to find their existence not only through their bodies but also through the conversations they hold with one another: “in the awakened dark, Sebastien says, if we are not touching, then we must be talking. We must talk to remind each other that we are not yet in the slumbering dark, which is an endless death, like a darkened cave” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.13).

Valencia and Señor Pico – the Dominican counterpart of Amabelle and Sebastien – though recently married seem more like two strangers. When their son Rafael dies within the course of only days after being born, Amabelle observes:

[h]e did not know how to ease her pain, not very well in any case; he kept shifting as she tried to find a comfortable nook to claim for herself, her own place to sink into, within his arms. He was silent while she sobbed, not offering a word. Perhaps he was suppressing his own tears, but his silence seemed to me a sign of failure for this marriage, the abrupt union of two strangers, who even with time and two children –

one in this world and one in the other – had still not grown much closer (DANTICAT, 1999, p.98).

As her relationship with Sebastien is based on conversation, Amabelle takes the silence in Valencia's marriage to Pico as a sign of failure.

Another important image of dividedness in the island of Hispaniola and the Dominican Republic may be seen in the characters of Rafael and Rosalinda, son and daughter of Valencia and Pico. By the time the linear narrative starts, Valencia gives birth to her children, who are delivered by Amabelle. The first one to be born is the baby boy, who is named Rafael by his father, after the Dominican dictator. The boy “was coconut-cream colored, his cheeks and forehead the blush pink of water lilies” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.9), like his mother. The baby girl, named Rosalinda by Valencia, after her own mother, had a skin of a “deep bronze, between the colors of tan Brazil nut shells and black salsify” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.11). Besides representing the Dominican Republic and Haiti, respectively, the birth of the twins foreshadows the tragedy that is about to happen

[t]he first born wailed as I drew another infant from between Señora Valencia's thighs. A little girl gasped for breath, a thin brown vein, like layers of spiderwebs, covering her face. The umbilical cord had curled itself in a bloody wreath around her neck, encircling every inch between her chin and shoulders (DANTICAT, 1999, p.10).

Yet another event foreshadows the tragedy; when Amabelle tells Doctor Javier about the struggle Rosalinda had been through in the occasion of her birth, he suggests that it is “as if the other tried to strangle her” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.19). When he is rebuked by Amabelle, Javier insists: “[m]any of us start out as twins in the belly and do away with the other” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.19).

A third image symbolizing the dividedness, yet shared destiny, of the Dominican Republic and Haiti may be found in the novel through the deaths of Jöel and Raphael. Jöel is a young Haitian man who works as a cane cutter at Don Carlo's Mill, which is close to Valencia's land. One night, as Jöel is going back home from work, together with Sebastien and another young cane cutter called Yves, he is struck by Pico's car. Valencia's husband was speeding in order to meet their new-born children. When Jöel's father, Kongo, knows about his son's death, he takes the corpse and buries it in the ravine where Jöel had died (DANTICAT, 1999, p.108).

Rafael dies only a few days later; according to Doctor Javier accounts, “it seems he simply lost his breath” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.90). Whereas the Haitian young man does not

have a funeral – “no clothes, no coffin, nothing between him and the dry ground” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.108) – baby Rafi has a coffin colorfully painted by his mother and a parade of relatives and neighbors to bid him farewell.

Jöel’s death foreshadows the massacre that is about to take place in the country. He seems to represent, in the novel, thousands of people who only happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time. Rafi, on the other hand, is the one that looks fine but ends up dying; in Javier’s words: “I thought Rosalinda was the one in danger, but he was the one whose strength failed” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.90). The baby boy’s death might be pointing out to the bigger and whiter country of Hispaniola, the one that looks healthier, but in the end, just like its darker and smaller counterpart is also dying because, no matter how governments try, it may be impossible to separate the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

The use of the foreshadowing is, in fact, a very efficient narrative strategy employed by Edwidge Danticat in the novel as it helps to create the atmosphere of the weeks before the massacre. The birth of the twins – though not the only one – is probably the most important foreshadowing in the novel. Rafael and Rosalinda are brought to the world by Valencia and Amabelle who find themselves alone at home. The occasion of the birth is very symbolic. If the babies may represent the Dominican Republic and Haiti, Valencia may be seen as representing Hispaniola, the island, as she “can trace her family to the Conquistadores, the line of El Almirante, Cristobal Colón” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.18) – and, to some extent, the European colonizers – while Amabelle can be seen as representing Africa and its peoples²⁹. Although Valencia is the happy mother, she recognizes that it would be impossible to deliver the babies alone and boasts “Amabelle, I’m so happy today. You and me. Look at what we have done” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.12).

Moreover, it is on the occasion of the birth that the historical time is first mentioned in the novel, Amabelle reports that Don Ignacio has written in his notebook:

I looked over Papi’s shoulder as he wrote ceremoniously in his best script the time and the place of the births, noting that it was on the thirtieth of August, the year 1937, the ninety-third year of independence, in the seventh year of the Era of Generalissimo Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, Supreme Commander-in-Chief, President of the Republic (DANTICAT, 1999, p.17)

Parsley³⁰ is also a strong symbol in the novel because the test Haitians were submitted consisted in having to pronounce the word *perejil* (parsley, in Spanish) “correctly” which was

²⁹ Even though Hispaniola has not been constituted only by Spanish and African people, their presences were, without a shadow of doubt, highly relevant.

³⁰ American poet Rita Dove wrote a poem entitled “Parsley” (1983) which is highly political and addresses to the Parsley Massacre (annex 1).

impossible to the Creole/French speakers. Parsley is mentioned at important moments of the novel. The first time is when Doctor Javier and Amabelle are in the kitchen talking about the two babies: “Doctor Javier followed me to the pantry. As he passed through the doorway, a suspended bundle of dried parsley leaves brushed his scalp, leaving behind a few tiny stems in his hair” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.18). The incident could be considered irrelevant if the conversation between Amabelle and Javier had not ended up with the doctor advising the protagonist to leave the Dominican Republic and start a new life back in Haiti: “Let me also say this to you, Amabelle. You should leave here and become a midwife in Haiti” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.20)

The second time parsley is used as a foreshadowing strategy is in the morning after Jöel’s death when the narrator/protagonist goes to “the stream behind the neighboring sugar mill where the cane workers bathed at daybreak” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.59). In this passage, Kongo uses parsley to scrub his body. Amabelle explains:

We use the pési, perejil, parsley, the damp summer morning of it, the mingled sprigs, bristly and coarse, gentle and docile all at once, tasteless and bitter when chewed, a sweetened wind inside the mouth, the leaves a different taste than the stalk, all this we savored for our food, our tears, our baths, to cleanse our insides as well as our outsides of old aches and griefs, to shed a passing year’s dust as a new one dawned, to wash a new infant’s hair for the first time and – along with boiled orange leaves – a corpse’s remains one final time (DANTICAT, 1999, p.62)

Once the brutal event is also known as “The Parsley Massacre”, it is not by chance Danticat makes her protagonist reflect on the importance of the herb for both Haitians and Dominicans. As the author is preparing her reader to, at least aesthetically, share the experience many people have been through, she uses this foreshadowing element in order to create an *unheimlich* atmosphere in her novel, so when the time comes, we may “feel” the terror of having something so intimate turned into something deadly. Later on, after suffering in her body the effects of the massacre, Amabelle reflects about the use of parsley as a death sentence:

Was it because it was so used, so commonplace, so abundantly at hand that everyone who desired a spring could find one? We used parsley for our food, our teas, our baths, to cleanse our insides as well as our outsides. Perhaps the Generalissimo in some larger order was trying to do the same for his country (DANTICAT, 1999, p.203).

2.3.7 After the Massacre: “What’s In a Name?”

When violence irrupts in the novel, it is reflected in the narrative. Amabelle is still the protagonist and the focus of the narration, but the bold print occurrences almost disappear. This change may be pointing out to an important shift: in the first part of the novel, regardless of the awareness of her condition as a Haitian living in the Dominican Republic, Amabelle seems to be an insular character, more an observer, both to the events taking place in Valencia's house and to the ones happening to the Haitians. Her world – better represented in the bold print excerpts – comprises mainly memories of her parents and her relationship with Sebastien. One good example of this isolation occurs one night when she is on her way to meet Sebastian; a Haitian man tells her that after Joël's been killed, the laborers have organized a brigade to fight, if necessary. They understood that Joël's death confirmed that the rumors they had been hearing were true. Oblivious – or skeptical – to the talks, the narrator ponders: “(...) I couldn't understand why Unèl and the others would consider that death to be a herald of theirs and mine too. Had Señor Pico struck Joël with his automobile deliberately, to clear his side of the island of Haitians?” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.126).

The massacre changes everything, though. Barely surviving the border-crossing with Yves, Amabelle, the narrator, changes her tone. She goes from being an insular character, living mostly as an observer, to become someone eager to tell her story. And telling her story, now, is telling the story of her lover Sebastien and his sister Mimi whom she never hears of again, after missing them the night the massacre starts in the novel. It is telling the story of the people she met on her journey to Haiti; people like Odette and her husband Wilner, who, like her own parents, but in very different circumstances, die in the river Massacre. It is telling the story of the people she met in the place she was taken to recover from her injuries and of the people in the lines to meet the justice of peace. In short, telling her story after the manslaughter is telling the story of her people, her country, and her island. Hence, the novel assumes its position alongside the testimonial narratives and the historical narratives when it comes to narrate the [hi]story of the Parsley Massacre and its outcome.

Argentinian intellectual Beatriz Sarlo spent the year of 2003 as a member of the *Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin* (The Institute for Advanced Studies in Berlin). There, she read several autobiographies and testimonials and decided to critically analyze their theoretical, discursive and historical conditions. Sarlo's book *Tempo passado: Cultura da Memória e a Guinada subjetiva* (2005) is the result of this reflection. In the last chapter, Sarlo makes a rather relevant remark: “From a personal standpoint, I dare say that it was in literature (and its hostility in having limits of accurate truth forced upon it) that I have found not only the most

accurate images of horrors of a recent past, but also the very texture of its ideas and experiences³¹” (2007, p.17). Sarlo is not idealizing literature to the detriment of testimonial or historical narratives, though; she concludes: “Literature can’t, of course, put an end to problems, or even explain them, but [in the literary text] there is a narrator who thinks from ‘outside’ the experience, as if human beings could take hold of nightmares instead of just living them”³² (SARLO, 2007, p.119).

The Farming of Bones seems to confirm Sarlo’s statement. When Yves and Amabelle are found nearly dead and are taken to an improvised clinic on the Haitian side of the border, after surviving the terror, Amabelle listens to many stories. “As they ate, people gathered in a group to talk. Taking turns, they exchanged tales quickly, the haste in their voices sometimes blurring the words, for greater than their desire to be heard was their hunger to tell” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.209). The tales in the novel, though fictional – or maybe because of it – are rather forceful and realistic. Trujillo wanted the massacre to be taken as the work of Dominican citizens responding to the supposed threat of Haitians living in the country. The following excerpt echoes it:

“It was Monday, the last two days in September”, a man began, as though giving an account to a justice of peace. “I went to the fields in the early morning. When I came home at noontime, the Guardia was in my house. I’d heard talk, not to lag outside. But this was daytime. The soldiers came, picked out some chickens in my yard and told me I was a thief. I tell you many a man was taken falsely as a thief” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.209).

The hunger to tell does not stop in the clinic, but the victims find out that people become less and less interested in their stories. This loss of interest is presented in – at least – two moments in the novel; the first one comes from the Haitian government: Amabelle and Yves try to see the justice of peace who allegedly was there to “listen to those who survived the slaughter and write their stories down” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.231). Although they – along with a large group of people – go to the police station where the government official was posted, they do not see the man, and neither do many others. After sixteen days, the justice of peace goes away and never comes back: “The head sergeant came out instead [of the justice

³¹ In Portuguese: “Se tivesse de falar por mim, diria que encontrei na literatura (tão hostil a que se estabeleçam sobre ela limites de verdade) as imagens mais exatas do horror do passado recente e de sua textura de ideias e experiências” (SARLO, 2007, p. 117 – translated from the Spanish by Rosa Freire D’Aguilar)

³² In Portuguese: “A literatura, é claro, não dissolve todos os problemas colocados, nem pode explica-los, mas nela um narrador sempre pensa *de fora* da experiência, como se os humanos pudessem se apoderar do pesadelo, e não apenas sofrê-lo” (SARLO, 2007, p. 119). Translated to English by Prof. Dra. Leila Harris.

of peace] and announced that there would be no more testimonials taken. All the money had already been distributed” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.235).

The Catholic clergy also cease listening to the survivor’s stories. After Yves tells Amabelle that some priests are listening to and taking down testimonials of the slaughter at the cathedral, Amabelle decides to go there in an attempt to find out about Father Romain and Father Vargas. Although she gets the information she wanted, the protagonist is also told the priests are not taking down testimonials any longer. One of the clergymen tells her: “To all those who tell us of lost relations, we can offer nothing, save our prayers and perhaps a piece of bread. So we have stopped letting them tell us these terrible stories. It was taking our time, and there is so much other work to be done” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.254). The stories were indeed terrible, but they also needed to be told.

The Farming of Bones does not claim the status of a historical narrative or of a testimonial. It is rather an effort to realize in fiction something that was impossible in reality: to perpetuate the lives of thousands Sebastiens Onius – and Yves, Valencias, Mimis, etc. – by means of their stories. After all, as Amabelle affirms: “[m]en with names never truly die. It is only the nameless and faceless who vanish like smoke into the early air” (DANTICAT, 1999, p.282).

3 AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL PRACTICES AS RESISTANCE ACTS IN *BROTHER I'M DYING*.

No [wo]man is an island
John Donne

I am writing this only because they can't
Edwidge Danticat

Autobiography and autobiographical practices in general seem to be an omnipresent mode of narration in contemporary cosmopolitan societies. What once was considered to be the narrative that best represented the spirit of the enlightened man of the Western hemisphere, autobiography seems to have crossed boundaries of gender, ethnicity, and sexuality and is being written and published prolifically by authors from different backgrounds. On the other hand, some scholars and literary critics, among them Susan Friedman, reason that minoritarian groups have always made use of autobiographical practices, and on the occasion of canon formation were excluded because they did not fit the traditional conception of the genre (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p.72). The aim of this chapter is to analyze in what ways the traditional concept of autobiography and autobiographical narratives have been appropriated and contested by writers who do not fit the hegemonic category of individual, which is the case of Edwidge Danticat and her book *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007)³³, and how this “reconfiguring” of autobiography and autobiographical practices are related to concepts of cultural identity, memory, and *alterbiography*.

3.1 Autobiographical Practices: A Brief Discussion on the Use of the Term

At first glance, autobiography is a simple concept: the term comes from the Greek αὐτότος - autos - self + βίος - bios - life + γράφειν – graphein - to write and means, *verbatim*, the writing of someone's life by him/herself. Nevertheless, in *Autobiography* (2001), critic

³³ *Brother, I'm Dying* and *BID* will be used in reciprocity to refer to Danticat's book.

Linda Anderson states that “autobiography has [...] been recognized since the late eighteenth century as a literary genre and, as such, an important *testing ground for critical controversies* about a range of ideas including authorship, selfhood, representation and the division between fact and fiction” (2011, p.1, italics are mine).

In *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* (2001), Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson question the seeming simplicity of “the act of people representing what they know best, their own lives” (2010, p.1). Instead, they propose that this is a complex act because the autobiographical narrator is at the same time “the observing subject and the object of investigation, remembrance, and contemplation” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.1). They conclude that the best way to approach autobiography is considering it “a moving target, a set of shifting *self-referential practices* that, in engaging the past, reflect on identity in the present” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p. 1, italics are mine).

The term “practice” in Smith & Watson’s statement is vital to this chapter because it suggests that autobiography is more than the act of *literary writing* and that the term may comprehend other types of text such as works of visual art, interviews, and even photographs. In “Beyond the Frame: Writing a Life and Jamaica Kincaid’s Family Album”, Susheila Nasta discusses how Jamaica Kincaid has blurred the boundaries between autobiography, fiction, non-fiction, and memoir with her writing (NASTA, 2009, p.64). In order to better “locate Kincaid as a writer” (NASTA, 2009, p.68), Nasta relies on several interviews the author has given throughout her career and believes that they should be seen as “a form of life-writing in themselves” (2009, p.68). The same strategy seems to be useful in relation to Edwidge Danticat; therefore, although the primary text to be analyzed in this chapter is *Brother, I’m Dying*, interviews with the author were regarded as autobiographical practices and were relevant to the development of our argument.

In their above mentioned book, Smith & Watson establish a clear-cut use for the terms autobiography, autobiographical, and life writing/life narratives. They explain:

we have chosen to use the term *autobiography* only to refer to the traditional Western mode of retrospective life narrative. [...] We often use the adjective *autobiographical* to designate self-referential writing. And throughout we use the terms *life-writing* and *life narrative* as more inclusive of the heterogeneity of self-referential practices (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.4).

In this chapter the adjective *autobiographical* will prevail (even though *autobiography* and *auto/biography* will also be largely used) because we understand that it may comprehend different types of self (and other) referential narratives.

3.2 Autobiography and Identity

In a chapter entitled “Life Narrative in Historical Perspective”, critics Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson delineate “the production of *autobiographical subjects* over time” (2010, p.103, italics are mine). According to the scholars, their purpose is not to simply map the development in the notion of personhood; rather, their aims “in constructing this history are both to identify exemplary autobiographical texts and to explore *kinds of subjects* those narratives inscribe” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.103, italics are mine). They conclude: “Understanding how individual representations of subjectivity are ‘disciplined’ or formed enables readers to explore how the personal story of a remembered past is always in dialogue with emergent cultural formations” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.103).

Although Smith and Watson’s chapter offers a number of examples of life narratives prior to the 18th century, *autobiography* as a genre was only made possible because of the concept of identity developed within the consolidation of the Capitalist system and the bourgeois mode of living. In *El espacio biográfico – dilemas de la subjetividad contemporánea* (2002), Argentinian scholar Leonor Arfuch reminds us that the emergence of the ‘I’ to legitimate a biography is only a two century year-old fact (ARFUCH, 2010, p.35)³⁴. Nowadays, it is consensual that the seminal autobiographical work, the first where one may clearly verify “the specificity of the autobiographical literary genres”³⁵ (ARFUCH, 2010, p.35, 36), is *Confessions*, written by the French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, and first published in 1782. Nevertheless, although not considered to be an autobiography, because its focus is “less [in] the singularity of the earthly life and more [in] the pious virtue of the community” (ibid, p.41)³⁶, the texts which became *Confessions*, by Saint Augustine, supposedly written between the years of 397 and 398AD, influenced Rousseau and the work is granted a place of prominence in almost every discussion on the subject of autobiography³⁷.

3.2.1 Defining the Narrative Genre: Traditional Concepts

³⁴ The translations to English are mine. In Portuguese: “a aparição de um “eu” como garantia de uma biografia é um fato que remonta a pouco mais de dois séculos somente” (ARFUCH, 2010: 35).

³⁵ In Portuguese: “a especificidade dos gêneros literários autobiográficos” (ARFUCH, 2010: 35,36).

³⁶ In Portuguese: “menos a singularidade da vida terrena do que a virtude piedosa da comunidade”.

³⁷ In “The Other Voice: Autobiographies of Women Writers”, Mary G. Manson challenges the consensual position and states that “though it is not generally recognized, [...] Margery Kempe produced (ca. 1432) what is actually the first full autobiography in English by anyone, male or female (OLNEY: 1980, 209)”.

The first version of “The Autobiographical Pact” (1973) is an attempt of its author, Philippe Lejeune, to establish the boundaries separating autobiography as a narrative genre, the biography, and the novel. At the time, Lejeune defined autobiography as a “retrospective prose narrative written by a real person concerning *his* own existence, where the focus is *his* individual life, in particular the story of *his* personality” (1989, p.4, italics are mine). In an interview conducted by Jovita Maria Gerheim Noronha, professor at the Universidade Federal de Juiz de Fora, Lejeune explains:

In 1971 I wanted to provide an overview on French Autobiography, something that had never been done before. In order to accomplish the task, I needed a definition. I was bewildered when I understood that autobiographical and fictional *texts* could operate under the same rules. The difference between them was not at the textual level, but in the element that Gérard Genette called paratext, in the commitment in telling the truth about himself that the author makes to his reader (LEJEUNE, 2002, p.22)³⁸.

In the second version of his essay, “Autobiographical Pact (Bis)”, from 1986, Lejeune writes that a critical comeback to the definition owes more to an uneasiness he felt in relation to the approval his text received than to the objections, and that the definition he gave should be considered as a starting point to deconstruct analytically those factors that are embedded in the understanding of the genre (LEJEUNE, 1986, p.50). Nonetheless, his (now) classic definition still seems to be very influential in this field of study.

As a consequence of his definition, in the first version of his essay Lejeune proposes that a pact be established between writer and reader. In this *pact*, the two fundamental conditions for a narrative to be considered autobiographical are: the coincidence between the name of the author appearing on the cover of the book and the name of the main character/narrator, that is, “[i]n order for there to be autobiography (and personal literature in general), the *author*, the *narrator* and the *protagonist* must be identical” (LEJEUNE, 1989, p.5). The other condition involves the commitment with telling verifiable truthful *facts*. According to Lejeune (1989, p.22), “as opposed to all forms of fictions, biography and autobiography are *referential* texts: exactly like scientific or historical discourses, they claim to provide information about a reality exterior to the text, and so to submit to a test of verification”.

³⁸ NORONHA, Jovita Maria Gerheim. “Entrevista com Philippe Lejeune”. In: *Ipotesi: revista de estudos literários*, v. 6, n. 2, jul/dez 2002. Juiz de Fora: Editora UFJF, 2003, p. 21-30. In Portuguese: “Em 1971, eu quis fazer um quadro geral da autobiografia francesa, o que nunca havia sido feito. Para isso, precisava de uma definição. Fiquei espantado ao constatar que o *texto* autobiográfico e o texto ficcional podiam obedecer às mesmas leis. A diferença entre eles não estava no próprio texto, mas no que Gérard Gennet chamou de paratexto, no compromisso do autor com o leitor de dizer a verdade sobre si mesmo” (2002, p.22).

In the second version of his essay, Lejeune admits that his pact had a normative aspect and that this aspect probably resulted from the fact that he had previously presented the problem of the autobiographical identity in a clear-cut manner (LEJEUNE, 2009, p.55); still, he maintains that establishing identity and its marks is rather crucial to the work he was doing. However, the critic confesses that a contradiction resides between his statement “an identity is, or is not” (LEJEUNE, 2009, p.15), and the analysis that follows it (LEJEUNE, 2009, p.55). This contradiction may indicate the impossibility of a definite conception of identity, which could, in fact, point to the resistance his work found among later critics, especially those committed to the analysis of non-traditional autobiographical practices, which is the case of *Brother I'm Dying*.

Moreover, even in the first version of his pact, Lejeune does not hold unrealistic expectations towards autobiographical narratives. He recognizes the impossibility of a complete restoration of the past in them, and even an objective account of the truth, for that matter.

The ultimate expression of truth (if we reason in terms of resemblance) can no longer be the being-for-itself of the past (if indeed such a thing exists), but being-for-itself, manifested in the present of the enunciation. It also implies that in his relationship to the story (remote or quasi-contemporary) of the protagonist, the narrator is mistaken, lies, forgets, or distorts – and error, lie, lapse of memory, or distortion will, *if we distinguish them*, take on the value of aspects, among others, of an enunciation, which, itself, remains authentic (1989, p.25, italics are mine).

Even though Lejeune admits the impossibility of a complete return to the past, he conditions the authenticity of an autobiography to the possibility of recognition by the readers of the narrator’s “error, lie, lapse of memory, or distortion” (LEJEUNE, 1989, p.25). Additionally, he declares:

Indeed, I am pretty naïve. I believe it is possible that one commit oneself in telling the truth; I believe that the language may be transparent and I believe in the existence of a full subjectivity that expresses itself through this language; I believe that my proper name guarantees my autonomy and singularity [...]; I believe that when I say “I”, it is indeed I who does speak: I believe in the Holy Ghost of the first person (LEJEUNE, 2009, p.65).

Autobiography seems, in that way, to be the ultimate narrative act of this enlightened man, the individual in control of his own life, and capable of differentiating himself from the others. Since he holds all these characteristics, he is authorized to write about his

experiences³⁹. Indeed, the term *autobiography* first appeared in the English language in the review of Isaac D’Israeli *Miscellanies* by William Taylor of Norwich in the *Monthly Review*, in 1797 (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.2) and has been since used to refer to a “master narrative of Western rationality, progress, and superiority” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.194), which means that, traditionally, scholars have assumed that the autobiographer was “an autonomous and enlightened ‘individual’[the great man] who exercised free will and understood his relationship to the others and the world as one of separateness” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.199). Smith & Watson’s idea is reinforced by Linda Anderson’s statement:

[...] the genre of autobiography has been implicitly bound up with gender. Insofar, as autobiography has been seen as promoting a view of the subject as universal, it has also underpinned the centrality of masculine – and, we may add, Western and middle class – modes of subjectivity (2011, p.3).

Hence, the opening of Rousseau’s *Confessions*, traditionally considered the archetypal autobiography, illustrates this idea in a rather efficient way:

I have entered upon a performance which is without example, whose accomplishment will have no imitator. I mean to present my fellow-mortals with a man in all the integrity of nature; and this man shall be myself.
I know my heart, and have studied mankind; I am not made like any one I have been acquainted with, perhaps like no one in existence; if not better, I at least claim originality, and whether Nature did wisely in breaking the mould with which she formed me, can only be determined after having read this work (Book I).

This autobiographical “I” that is “not made like any one” and that is, therefore, unique, seems to be a precondition to a traditional perspective of the genre. In his essay “Conditions and Limits of Autobiography” (1956), French philosopher Georges Gusdorf alleges that the autobiographical genre is limited in time and space, i.e., “it has not always existed nor does it exist everywhere” (1980, p.30). Besides, he adds that “autobiography is not to be found outside our cultural area [...] It is obvious that autobiography is not possible in a cultural landscape where *consciousness of self does not, properly speaking, exist* [...] Autobiography becomes possible only *under certain metaphysical preconditions*” (GUSDORF, 1980, p.30, italics are mine). In other words, Gusdorf claims that autobiography as a narrative genre does

³⁹ In the third version of his pact, Lejeune admits that his early definition attended his project of constituting a *corpus* based on a Rousseauian model. In later research, the scholar has indeed included other “possible combinations” (2009, p.81) of autobiographical narratives in his *corpus*; nevertheless, concepts such as gender, ethnicity, and sexuality, to mention some, still seem to be ignored in his studies of autobiography.

not belong to cultures in which identity is not experienced inside the realm of the Enlightenment parameters. The philosopher concludes:

The man who takes the trouble to tell of himself knows that the present differs from the past and that it will not be repeated in the future; he becomes more aware of differences than of similarities; given the constant change, given the uncertainties of event and of men, he believes it is a useful and valuable thing to fix his own image so that he can be certain it will not disappear like all things in this world [...] Man knows himself as responsible agent: gatherer of men, of lands, of power, maker of kingdoms or of empires, inventor of laws or of wisdom, *he alone adds consciousness to nature*, leaving signs there of his presence (ROUSSEAU, 1980, p.30-31, italics are mine).

3.2.2 “Other” Definitions of Autobiography.

As it has already been shown in the previous section, while people have been writing about their lives forever, the term *autobiography* was first used in order to characterize life narratives in the post-enlightenment period. Therefore, the traditional perspective of autobiography demanded a specific view of the self, which Stuart Hall in his essay “The Question of Cultural Identity” (1992) called the “Enlightenment subject”; according to him,

the Enlightenment subject was based on a conception of human person as a fully centered, unified individual, endowed with the capacities of reason, consciousness, and action, whose ‘center’ consisted of an inner core which first emerged when the subject was born, and unfolded with it, while remaining essentially the same – continuous or ‘identical’ with the itself – throughout the individual’s existence” (HALL, 2007, p.597).

Furthermore, in the introduction of their book *De\colonization and the politics of discourse in women’s autobiography* (1998), Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson declare that concerning the traditional view of autobiographical writings “despite the myriad differences, of place, time, histories, economies, cultural identifications, all ‘I’s are *rational, agentive, unitary*. Thus, the ‘I’ becomes ‘Man’, putatively a marker of the universal human subject whose essence remains outside the vagaries of history” (SMITH & WATSON, 1998, p. xvii, italics are mine). Yet, people who do not fit the traditional “conditions and limits of autobiography”, namely, women and other minoritarian writers, have become very prolific when it comes to writing autobiographical narratives, which is the case of the Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat.

After the World War II, with the processes of immigration, globalization, and the advent of many social movements that took place in the Western world (one of the most important being Feminism), what came to knowledge was that this cultural realm that produces a “conscious awareness of the singularity of each individual life” (GUSDORF, 1980, p.29), thus engendering this completely autonomous individual, is an illusion. Hence, a new way of approaching the concept of identity has arisen since the late modernity; instead of being experienced as a fixed entity, separated from the others, the post-modern subject experiences identity as fragmented and provisional. In the words of Stuart Hall: “[t]he subject, previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented; composed not of a single, but several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities” (2007, p.598) . This “de-centering of the subject” (HALL, 2007, p.606) has put in question old certainties such as the traditional concept of the autobiographical subject.

In the introduction of *Women, Autobiography, Theory: A Reader* (1998), the editors Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson remark that the autobiographical writings produced by women had been ignored by the academia for many years, but from the last decades of the twentieth century on, as the prestige of Autobiography rose, women’s autobiographical narratives have achieved respectability – both in the academic field and outside it – and proved to be a “privileged site for thinking about issues of writing at the intersection of feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern critical theories” (SMITH & WATSON, 1998, p.5). According to the critics while feminism has deeply altered literary and social theory, “the texts and theory of women’s autobiography have been pivotal for revising our concepts of women’s life issues [...]” (SMITH & WATSON, 1998, p.5).

Moreover, Smith and Watson acknowledge that women’s autobiographical narratives quite differ from the traditional concept of autobiography; they affirm that both literary and critical writings concerning the lives of women often happen “in texts that place the emphasis on *collective processes* while *questioning the sovereignty and universality of the solitary self*. Autobiography has been employed by many women writers to *write themselves into history*” (1998, p.5, italics are mine). Hence, it is possible to conclude that resistance is at the core of women’s autobiographical practices.

In “Women’s Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice”, critic Susan Friedman establishes a counter-reading to some of the traditional scholars on the field of autobiography. One example is George Gusdorf’s concept of autobiography as a genre which is possible only in in specific cultural spaces. He asserts that autobiography is an impossibility in cultures where

the individual does not oppose himself to all others; [where] he does not feel himself to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much with others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community (...) [where] lives are so thoroughly entangled that each of them has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere. The important unit is thus never the isolated being (GUSDORF, 1980, p.29-30 apud FRIEDMAN, 1998, p.73).

Friedman proposes a slight, yet pivotal, alteration to Gusdorf's statement. She understands that

Autobiography *is possible* when the individual does not feel *herself* to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts its rhythms everywhere in the community (...) [where] lives are so thoroughly entangled that each of them has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere. The important unit is thus never the isolated being (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p.74, 75).

Still according to Friedman, who takes into consideration the works of critics such as feminist theorist Sheila Rowbotham (1989, p.22), a woman cannot experience identity as being a “unique entity because she is always aware of how she is being defined *as woman*, that is, a member of a group whose identity has been defined by the dominant male culture”. This mirrored identity reflects on women's autobiographical practices; in fact, quoting the existentialist philosopher Simone de Beauvoir “a woman is not born, but made” (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p.75), Friedman asserts that

in taking the power of words, of representation, into their own hands, women project onto history an identity that is not purely individualistic. Nor it is purely collective. Instead, this new identity merges the shared and the unique. In autobiography, specifically, the self created in a woman's text is often not a ‘teleological entity’, an ‘isolated being’ utterly separated from all others (...) Instead, the self constructed in women's autobiographical writing is often based in, but not limited to, a group of consciousness – an awareness of the meaning of the cultural category of WOMAN for the patterns of women's individual destiny (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p.76).

It is possible to say that the same process of identification experienced by women is shared by other marginalized groups, such as the diasporic individuals, whose identities seem to be predetermined by the dominant white male Eurocentric culture. In the case of diasporic communities, the markers of marginalization may be double, even triple, which is the case of Edwidge Danticat, who belongs to a group that has to deal not only with the gender issue, but also with those regarding nationality and ethnicity.

In “Cultural Identity and Diaspora” (1993), Hall reminds us that one should not think of identity as a consummated fact; “instead one should think of it as an ongoing

process, never fully completed, constituted within representation” (2003, p.234). In “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities” (1997), he expands this idea and observes: “Identity is not something which is formed outside and then we tell stories about it. It is which is narrated in one’s own self” (HALL, 1997, p.49). In affirming that identity should be seen as a narrative, Hall implies again that he understands identity rather as a process than as an essence; moreover, it is a process which happens within, and not outside, language.

As it has been said previously in the theoretical chapter, Hall emphasizes that “cultural identity” must be seen in, at least, two different ways; the first one in terms of “one, shared culture, a sort of collective ‘true self’” (2003, p.234), and the other one “unstable, metamorphic, and even contradictory”, based on *difference* (2003, p.233). Either way, it is hazardous, according to Hall, that an individual – particularly the individual who has lived through the colonial experience – would ever consider him/herself as the isolated being imagined by Gusdorf once the process of identification of the diasporic individual is always taken in comparison to the dominant culture, and their experiences are always influenced by *alterity* (HALL, 2003, p. 236).

Leonor Arfuch (2010, p.54,55), when discussing Lejeune’s pact, reminds us that “beyond entangling the reader in a net of ‘meticulous veracity’, [autobiography] allows the enunciator the retrospective confrontation between what they were and what they get to be, that is, the imaginative construction of the ‘self as an Other’”⁴⁰. Arfuch’s statement is rather in tune with the concept of cultural identity developed by Hall since she dislocates the core of the autobiographical practice from the idea of this fully centered person, completely aware of ‘himself’, whose narrative will “tell the story of his personality” (LEJEUNE, 1984, p.4), as if it were something outside him/herself, like an object at which he or she could just look, describe, and reinterpret as a process through which the writer can not only confront himself/herself, but also construct his/her own “self as an Other”. In conclusion, autobiography is made less of an act of retelling and more an act of reflecting and recreating oneself.

Brother, I’m Dying (2007) is exemplary of how this re-conception of identity and, therefore, of the person who would be entitled to be engaged in an autobiographical practice, has become possible in literature. First of all, it is not the story “of a personality” as Lejeune would expect it to be, at least not in a traditional way. Second, Danticat presents herself as someone who understands the provisional situation of identity and the need of constructing

⁴⁰ In Portuguese: “para além da captura do leitor em sua rede peculiar de veracidade, ela [a autobiografia] permite ao enunciatador a confrontação rememorativa entre o que era e o que chegou a ser, isto é, a construção imaginária de si mesmo como o outro”.

her *self* through the act of narration. Both in form and in content Danticat distances herself from the Rousseauian model and presents her readers with a written account of a self who is both individual and collective. As the narrator in *Brother, I'm Dying*, instead of being the person that “exercised free will and understood his relationship to the others and the world as one of separateness” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.199), she is someone who finds herself caught up between the individual and the collective existence. Danticat’s narrative is not focused exclusively on her life; it is more an *auto/biography*⁴¹.

BID starts with the autobiographical pronoun by excellence, the “I”. “I found out I was pregnant the same day my father’s rapid weight loss and chronic shortness of breath were positively diagnosed as end-stage pulmonary fibroses” (DANTICAT, 2007, p.3). Nonetheless, as it is also possible to undertake by the opening statement, this account covers the story of her family. Likewise, the author does not claim her narrative to be definitive, rather, she confesses that it is “an *attempt* at cohesiveness, and at re-creating a few wondrous and terrible months when their [her father Mira’s and her uncle Joe’s] lives and mine *intersected in startling ways*, forcing me to look forward and back at the same time” (DANTICAT, 2007, p.26, italics are mine). In an interview to Martha St Jean, for *The Huffington Post*, Danticat commented:

[*Brother, I'm Dying*] was a book I felt I had to write, for my uncle who died in immigration custody as well as for my father who died at around the same time and for the future generation, including my daughter, who was born in the midst of all that. It was indeed very therapeutic to write. I've said this *before I think of Brother, I'm Dying as not a me-moir, but a nou-moir, a we-moir; it's not just my story but all these stories intertwined*⁴² (italics are mine).

Danticat’s statement confirms the notion defended in this chapter that diasporic subjects (and other minoritarian subjects) experience their identities not in isolation but always in relation to others. She does not see herself as a completely independent being, with an existence that is detached from her family, community, and two countries; therefore, her autobiographical narrative is more of an auto/biography. Moreover, Danticat’s diasporic condition leads her to experience identity more as a process than a fact. In the above mentioned interview, when asked what she discovers anew about herself, her family, and Haiti every time she writes a book, Danticat’s answer reveals that she has an experience of

⁴¹ The use of the slash emphasizes the particularity of the narrative practice realized by Danticat in *Brother, I'm Dying*. According to Sidonie Smith & Julia Watson, the use of the term auto/biography “designates a mode of the autobiographical that inserts biography/ies within an autobiography” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.256).

⁴² In interview to Martha St Jean from Huffington Post online source: http://www.huffingtonpost.com/martha-st-jean/genius-a-talk-with-edwidg_b_295040.html (last accessed in 02/15/2013).

identity that is close to the notion of cultural identity developed by Stuart Hall, pervaded with a provisionary nature and with narrative: “With every story, every book, I think I not only discover myself anew, but also *recover lost fragments of myself*” (italics are mine). Hence, Danticat realizes that it is not possible for her to have any final words. *Brother, I’m Dying*, as the author states, is “an *attempt* at cohesiveness” (DANTICAT, 2008, p.26). In saying this, Danticat distances her text from Rousseau’s endeavor, which the philosopher considered unique, “a performance which is without example” (ROUSSEAU, Book I). Unlike this great enlightened man, Danticat does not claim to know her heart and she does not “mean to present [her] fellow-mortals with a [wo]man in all the integrity of nature” (ROUSSEAU, Book I). Rather, she presents herself as a person who is constructing her identity within her narratives. She is writing her self (and her family, countries, etc.) into existence.

3.2 Autobiography and Memory.

Memory is another crucial concept in the study of autobiography and autobiographical practices for, according to Smith & Watson, “the life narrator depends on access to memory to narrate the past in such a way as to situate that experiential history within the present”. They consider memory central to autobiographical acts and place it as “the source, authenticator, and destabilizer” of that narrative practice. Two questions, though, remain in the critics’ opinion: what memory is and how it works (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.22).

Memory may be defined as a way of accessing the past and bringing it to the present. However, this process is not as simple and passive as it seems, once there is no such thing as a warehouse where one can store memories and make use of a competent library classification system when a specific memory needs to be accessed. Rather, the act of remembering is an active one where new meanings of past events are produced. In this way, memory might as well be seen as a narrative, the narrated memory being “an interpretation of a past that can never be fully recovered” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.21).

The idea of memory as a reinterpretation of a past that cannot be fully recovered is very present in the lives of individuals that have experienced the process of diaspora. In “Diasporas”, James Clifford affirms that diaspora cultures mediate in “a lived tension, the experiences of separation and entanglement, of living here and *remembering/desiring* another place” (1997, p.255, italics are mine). Remembering is, therefore, in the center of the diasporic experience and, as members of a diasporic community, writers share the same urge

of remembering. In *Imaginary Homeland* British-Indian novelist Salman Rushdie expresses this urge and also the impossibility of recovering the past:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation (...) almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, *create fictions*, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands (...) (RUSHDIE, 1991, p.10, italics are mine).

Additionally, what Rushdie implies is that memory is, to some extent, a fiction, i.e., once a straightforward access of the past is impossible, one might need to fictionalize it. In her book *The Politics of Postmodernism*, when dealing with fiction and history, Linda Hutcheon reminds us that “we only have *representations* of the past from which to *construct* our narratives or explanations” (1990, p.58, italics are mine). In affirming that, the Canadian scholar denaturalizes the discourse of history and highlights the interference of human beings and their ideologies in historiography. The same can be said of the autobiographical practices; as it is only possible to access memory through language, which suggests that memory is a narrative, it is possible to conclude that memory is, in a way, a fiction. Likewise, Hall observes in his text “Old and New Identities, Old and New Ethnicities” that

[w]e bear the traces of a past, the connections of the past. [...] The past is not waiting for us back there to recoup our identities against. It is always retold, rediscovered, *reinvented*. It has to be narrativized. We go to our pasts through history, through memory, through desire, not as a literal fact (HALL, 1997, p.58, italics are mine).

This urge and impossibility of recovering a past that cannot be directly accessed and, therefore, is at many times fictionalized, is also very present in Edwidge Danticat’s life. In an interview to Sita Bridgemohan, editor of *The Trinidad Guardian Newspaper*⁴³, Danticat declares that, as a teenager, she wrote because she feared that she would “forget things”. The writer continues saying “I wanted to tell stories the way my grandmother told stories but I didn’t have that kind of confidence. I discovered that reading and that books were another way to tell a story”. Moreover, in another interview, when asked about the “clash” between people who left the country and those who stayed, Danticat answers:

⁴³ The interview may be found online: <http://legacy.guardian.co.tt/archives/2004-06-16/features3.html> (last accessed in 03/13/13).

Each one of us keeps processing the country even though we are far away from home. Every time I visit Haiti, I try to take care and not reduce my experiences to my expectations. I try not to idealize or romanticize it, but the truth is that I live in one Haiti, and it is a different country from the one I find when I get there. Thus, when people say that my writings represent Haiti, I warn them: *I write about my personal Haiti.*⁴⁴

Curiously, Danticat does not make a difference between remembering – or avoiding to forget – and telling stories. In her book *Brother, I'm Dying*, Edwidge Danticat, as the narrator, tells her reader that as a Haitian girl whose parents had immigrated to the U.S.A. she relied on a story told by her cousin Marie Micheline in order to remember her father, who had left Haiti when she was only 2 years old. Still, she admits having no memory of her “father’s departure, or of anything that preceded it” (DANTICAT, 2008, p.54).

In the paragraph that follows the account of one of her cousin’s (Marie Micheline) telling her the story, the narrator makes clear that, sometimes, her memories are impossible to be recovered. Thus, some of them may be fictionalized:

I’ve since discovered that children who spend their childhood without their parents loved to hear stories like this, *which they can embellish and expand as they wish.* This type of anecdotes momentarily put our minds at ease, assuring that we were indeed loved by the parents who left (DANTICAT, 2008, p. 54-55, italics are mine).

Another excerpt of *Brother, I'm Dying* in which Danticat openly admits that her memories do not belong exclusively to her, that they are impossible to be fully recovered, and that she relies on other people’s stories is found when she narrates one of her uncle’s visits to her parent’s apartment in Brooklyn. She describes how her uncle and her father used to spend some time together after their morning prayers and “to fill the silence, [her] father would attempt to start a conversation, recalling a person they’d [her father and her uncle] both known or some incident they’d shared” (DANTICAT, 2008, p.160). In one of those conversations, Mira asks his brother if Joseph remembers writing him a letter telling that “a boy had beaten Edwidge in school” (DANTICAT, 2008, p.160). Danticat, the narrator, comments: “*Remembering neither beating nor boy, I asked, ‘when was that?’*” (2008, p.160, italics are mine). After a short record of Mira’s and Joseph’s account on the incident, Danticat confesses: “*More, please, I wanted to say. Please tell me more. Both of you, together, tell me more. About you. About me. About all of us*” (DANTICAT, 2008, p.161). In admitting that many of the stories that are narrated in her book were told to her, Danticat understands that

⁴⁴ The interview may be found in: <http://www.estadao.com.br/noticias/impreso,luz-sobre-o-haiti,520513.0.htm> (last accessed in 03/13/13).

the access to this so called factual truth is impossible, and that, as a writer, she is well aware – and exposes – this process of fictionalizing memories and past events.

Besides, in her essay “Daughters of Memory”, still on this issue of remembering and forgetting, Danticat offers her readers a rather poetic portrait of the struggle faced by the diasporic writer:

There are many ways that our mind protects us from present and past horrors. One way is by allowing us to forget. *Forgetting is a constant fear in any writer's life. For the immigrant writer, far from home, memory becomes as even deeper abyss.* It is as if we had been forced to step under the notorious forgetting trees, the *sabliyes*, that our slave ancestors were told would remove their past from their heads and dull their desire to return home. We know we must pass under the tree, but we must hold our breath and cross our fingers and toes and hope that the forgetting will not penetrate too deeply into our brains (DANTICAT, 2010, p.65, italics are mine).

The previous excerpts from *BID* and “Daughters of Memory” articulate with another a critical characteristic of memory for a diasporic subject: memory is a collective entity. Affirming this, does not mean that for people who do not experience the process of diaspora, memory is an individual entity; however, when one lives in a diasporic community, remembering as a collective act is more easily detected due to the fact that they are people “whose sense of identity is centrally defined by *collective histories* of displacement and violent loss” (Clifford, 1998, p.250). Smith & Watson reminds us that memory “is a means of ‘passing on’; it has the potential for reshaping a future of and for other subjects. In sum, *acts of personal remembering are fundamentally social and collective*” (2010, p.26, italics are mine). In “Diaspora and Cultural Memory” (2008), Anh Hua observes that “to define a memory as cultural is, in effect, to enter into a debate about what that memory means. This process does not efface the individual, but rather involves *the interaction of individuals in the creation of meaning*” (2008, p.199, italics are mine). In *Brother, I'm Dying*, Danticat embodies this statement even before she begins her narrative, when she dedicates her book to “the next generation of ‘cats’”, this dedication may suggest that she is leaving her autobiographical practice as a legacy from the previous generations to the next ones. In 2010, *Brother, I'm Dying*⁴⁵ was translated to Portuguese as *Adeus, Haiti*; on the occasion of the translation and publishing of the book Danticat gave an interview to the newspaper *Estado de São Paulo*. In the interview, conducted by journalist Lúcia Guimarães, Danticat develops the notion of the role many diasporic writers feel they have toward future generations:

⁴⁵ *Brother, I'm Dying* is the only book written by Danticat translated to Portuguese.

You go away, leaving the physical past behind. Your connection with those who remained in the homeland keeps you linked to [your roots]. Yet when those people start dying, you feel as if your roots are being pulled beneath your feet. Thus, *I was able to create some roots for my daughters*. Nowadays, grandchildren do not speak the same language the grandparents did. We gain a lot and lose a lot when we migrate. (DANTICAT, 2010, italics are mine)⁴⁶

Besides being a narrative, a fictionalized account of a certain event, and a collective entity, memory is also political. Smith & Watson call attention to the fact that “there are struggles over who is authorized to remember and what they are authorized to remember, struggles over what is forgotten, both personally and collectively” (2010, p.24). Moreover, Anh Hua remarks that “[m]emory has become a faculty that is gendered, appropriated, *politicized*, nationalized, medicalized, and aestheticized” (2008, p.197, italics are mine). Hua concludes: “[b]ecause cultural memory is political, and because different stories and representations struggle for a place in history, *memory is crucial to understanding a culture* since it reveals collective desires, needs, self-definitions, and power struggles” (2008, p.199, italics are mine).

Thus, central to the autobiographical practices of diasporic women writers is the struggle to become one of these subjects that is authorized to tell their own (and their people) story. Oftentimes, the narrative of those diasporic women confronts the allegedly official truth and becomes essential to memory studies. “Memory studies can demonstrate how power works, but also give voice and agency to the subjugated” (HUA, 2008, p.199). Though previously mentioned, it seems rather relevant to repeat Foucault’s statement:

Discourse is not simply that which manifests (or hides) desires – it is also the object of desire; and since, as history constantly teaches us, discourse is not simply that which translate struggles or systems of domination, but is the thing for which and by which there is struggle, *discourse is the power which is to be seized* (1981, p.52-53, italics are mine)

One example of the use of memory as a political act in *Brother, I’m Dying* is in the chapter “Alien 27041999” in which Danticat narrates the incident about her uncle Joseph’s interview by Officer Reyes (according to documents from Bureau of Customs and Border Protection) and compares her uncle’s answers to the interview and Reyes’s account of it. Danticat shows incoherencies between the two versions and questions whether her uncle’s life could have been saved had the officer acted differently. The narrator also states that the only reason her uncle went to the U.S.A at that time was because he had to flee from Haiti after his

⁴⁶ HARRIS, Leila de A. “Looking for a Neutral Space: A ‘Poetics of Dislocation’ in the Diasporic Fiction of Edwidge Danticat”. In: Scripta Uniandrade, v. 10, n. 2, jul/dez 2012. Curitiba: UNIANDRADE, 2012, p. 174 – 191.

neighbors destroyed his church and threatened to kill him after police officers from CIMO (Unit for Intervention and Maintaining the Order, in French), a part of the MINUSTAH, a UN mission in Haiti, invaded his church, climbed to its roof and killed some rebels that belonged to his community.

Another example of how Danticat considers her autobiographical narrative a political act may be found in the first chapter of *Brother, I'm Dying*. At the end of the chapter, she explains:

I write these things now, some as I witnessed them and today remember them, others from official documents, as well as borrowed recollections of family members. But the gist of them was told to me over the years, in part by my uncle Joseph, in part by my father. Some were told offhand, quickly. Others in great detail. What I learned from my father and uncle, I learned out of sequence and in fragments. *This is an attempt at cohesiveness, and at re-creating* a few wondrous and terrible months when their lives and mine intersected in startling ways, forcing me to look forward and back at the same time. *I am writing this only because they can't* (2008: 25-26, italics are mine).

The aforementioned excerpt also refers to another important issue related to the “politics of remembering” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p. 24). Smith & Watson consider important that some questions be raised in order to fully understand “what acts of remembering are emphasized” (2010, p.245). They ask: “What means of accessing memory are incorporated in the text? What are the sources of remembering? Are they personal [...]? Are they public? [...]?” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p.245). Danticat made use of both personal and public sources of remembering on the occasion of constructing her auto/biographical writing; in the first chapter of *Brother, I'm Dying*; she lists some: her father and her uncle, official documents, and family members (DANTICAT, 2008, p.26). Some examples of the official documents Danticat used when she was writing her autobiographical narrative were reports from international NGOs and American Universities involved in Human Rights advocacy. In the section “Acknowledgements” she writes:

Thank you, Cherry Little, Mary Gundrum, Sharon Ginter and the entire staff at the Florida Immigrant Advocacy Center for the acquisition, through legal action, and extremely persistent Freedom of Information Act requests, of Krome, Jackson Memorial, Department of Homeland Security records and Office of the Inspector General reports *so extremely crucial to this narrative* (DANTICAT, 2007, p.271, italics are mine).

These examples indicate, once more, the collective (yet individual) and political (yet private) aspects of memory. Another important means of accessing memory inside her narrative comes from her uncle Joseph Dantica. In the occasion of the military coup which

ousted President Jean-Bertrand Aristide only seven months after he had been sworn, on September 30, 1991, her uncle “kept track of the cadavers in the small notepads he always carried in his jacket pocket” (DANTICAT, 2008, p.139). While Joseph himself did not take part of the demonstrations and other political activities that took place in his country, his notebooks became, in a way, a site of memory for people who otherwise would have been completely erased from history as though they had never existed.

Hence, memory is not purely accessing the past as a film that we may watch over and over again. Every time one accesses memory, one does so through narration, through a polyphonic, political, possibly fictionalized narrative. Saying this does not deauthorize memory as one of the foundation blocks of the auto/biography narrative genre; on the contrary, for writers who belong to a minority group, and especially for writers who have experienced the phenomenon of diaspora, memory can become a site they can re-visit and re-construct their past and their future, as well as question official narratives. Memory becomes, in this way, a place where the personal and the political, the private and the collective, co-exist.

The issue of memory as a narrative construction both highly political and fictionalized is at the core of the new manner of writing autobiographies. Particularly for writers who have experienced diasporas, this new approach to memory is crucial because it gives them the possibility of re-writing, and in a way, re-living the past – theirs and of their communities and families – through their narratives. As authors of their own stories, histories and lives, they achieve agency through their narrative acts, the same agency that sometimes is denied them by the dominant culture.

3.3 Auto/Alterbiography.

In “Kincaid’s Biographical Autograph in *Mr. Potter*” (2004), literary critic Jana Evans Braziel coins a term that seems rather appropriated to the narrative practice performed by Edwidge Danticat in *Brother, I’m Dying*. Analyzing some novels written by the Antiguan-American writer Jamaica Kincaid, Braziel proposes that the author is engaged in writing *alterbiographies*. The critic, thus, defines an alterbiography as “a textual rendering of autobiography through the inscriptions of alterity and difference” (BRAZIEL, 2004, p.1).

Braziel considers *Mr. Potter* an alterbiography because she understands that Kincaid has written a text that “decenters and deterritorializes the matrix of self-other-text” (2004, p.15):

[t]he novel is not just a biography of this man (that could not read or write), but also the autobiographical reflections of his daughter (the one who could read and write): Elaine Cynthia Potter. [...] The book is a painful account of loss and desire, and it memorializes the pain itself (BRAZIEL, 2004, p.128).

Moreover, Braziel emphasizes that autobiographical narratives are, in fact, a hybrid genre because they constantly encompass more than its writer’s life. The critic explains:

Autobiography, then, almost always exceeds the individual who writes it, exceeds the life and the subjective experiences of the writing subject; autobiography will also be about those who surround the writing subject and whose experiences are enmeshed with those of the writer. Autobiography is entangled with biography, the writing of other people’s lives. (BRAZIEL, 2004, p. 16).

Although *Mr. Potter* is a novel, the resemblance with *Brother, I’m Dying* and other literary works by Danticat is strong enough, thus allowing us to make use of the term and the concept of alterbiography as the one which will better defines Danticat’s experiments in auto/biography. In an essay called “Our Guernica⁴⁷” (2010), published in *Create Dangerously*, Danticat writes about the 7.0 earthquake which struck Haiti in 2010 and, once more, blurs the boundaries of public and private, self and other. The “protagonist” of her essay is her cousin Maxo, one of the many victims of the earthquake. The opening statement reads: “My cousin Maxo has died. The house that I called home during my visits to Haiti collapsed on top on him” (DANTICAT, 2011, p.153). Danticat, then, chronicles the story of her cousin’s life and death at the same time that she narrates how the news of the disaster hit her and those living in the U.S. She also includes her impressions during her first visit to the country after the earthquake. Besides, Maxo is Uncle Joseph’s son, and the essay might as well work as a sequel to *Brother, I’m Dying*. Thus, not only because of its theme, but also because of its narrative structure, “Our Guernica” may be considered an autobiographical narrative in the same sense of *Brother, I’m Dying*.

If we take into consideration the traditional aspects of the genre, *Brother I’m Dying* (and other autobiographical acts performed by Danticat) cannot be considered a proper autobiography. By the same token, it cannot be considered a biography either. Rather, it is an auto/biographical narrative in which Danticat reflects on her own life, on her two father

⁴⁷ An earlier and shorter version of this essay was published in *The New Yorker* under the title “A Little While”: http://www.newyorker.com/talk/comment/2010/02/01/100201taco_talk_danticat

figures', on her family's, and to some extent, on the [hi]story of her two countries. *Brother, I'm Dying* is representative of how "[a]utobiography is inherently entangled with biography, the writing of other people's lives. These biographical others may or may not include one's family [...]; however, even when absent, genealogy is still silent and invisibly present in the autobiographical text" (BRAZIEL, 2004, p.16). Danticat, contrary to Rousseau, does not (and cannot) see herself as someone who knows her "own heart", she is not the "great man". But her position – the position as the *Other* –, that may be seen as fragile may be, at the same time, the site from where she can reclaim her identity through narration and gain agency.

Moreover, Smith and Watson consider *Brother, I'm Dying* an example of narratives of grief, mourning, and reparation; according to the critics, the book is "a generation narrative explicitly linking political and personal stories [...] Connecting her extended family to centuries of national history, *Danticat foregrounds the intersection of personal, communal, national, and transnational histories of colonial violence and relocation*" (DANTICAT, 2010, p.139-140, italics are mine). Once more, Danticat's writings reveal an artist who is committed to combine in her works poetics and politics; in the same way, Smith and Watson claim that while pieces of review "praised the 'healing power' of [*Brother, I'm Dying*], Danticat is [...] critical of the casual violence that narrating the brothers' death reveals". [...] She "refuses the comfort that writing grief supposedly brings and underscores the vulnerability of refugees in the Americas" (DANTICAT, 2010, p.140).

Finally, the traditional concept of autobiography, i.e., the one based on a rigid concept of identity influenced by the Enlightenment that essentialized the autobiographical subject in the white, Eurocentric, male experience, has been contested by writers that do not fit into this model. One of the writers who have done this is Edwidge Danticat. In *Brother, I'm Dying*, Danticat contests the fundamental understanding that autobiography is the narrative of the author's life as "an individual that opposes himself to all others" (GUSDORF, 1998, p. 74) and as someone who "know[s] [his] heart, and have studied mankind" (ROUSSEAU, Book I). Quite the contrary, Danticat is aware of the provisional nature of her own identity – and consequently of her memories – and sees herself always in relation to other people. It is exactly in this *differánce* that the strength of her resistance lies.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Writing is a struggle against silence
Carlos Fuentes

4.1 Discourse is power and where there is power, there may be resistance.

The relationship between words and power is not a novelty as two of the most relevant texts in the Western world, the *Bible* and Plato's *The Republic*, suggest. In contemporaneity no other intellectual devoted more time and effort to the subject than French philosopher Michel Foucault; it is possible to affirm that all his work was dedicated to investigate the relations between discourse and power.

In *The Order of Discourse* (1970), Foucault states that “discourse is the power which to be seized” (1981, p.52); hence, “in every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed according to a certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality” (FOUCAULT, 1981, p.52). According to Foucault (1981, p. 52-54), the external “procedures of exclusion” in a Western, Eurocentric society include: prohibition, the opposition of reason and madness, and the opposition between true and false. Besides the external procedures, he points out, there are internal ones, “since discourses themselves exercise their own control” (FOUCAULT, 1981, p. 55). Foucault accounts for a third group of procedures which allow the control of discourse; according to him, this time it is not a matter of “mastering [discourses’] powers or averting the unpredictability of their appearance, but of *determining the condition* of their application, of *imposing a certain number of rules on the individuals* who hold them, and thus, of not *permitting everyone to have access* to them” (1981, p.61, italics are mine). Speech rituals, societies of discourse, doctrinal groups, and social appropriations (FOUCAULT, 1981, p. 64) are examples of this type of procedures. However, in spite of all procedures, in *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault acknowledges the possibility of resistance. In fact, the philosopher states: “where there is power, there is resistance” (FOUCAULT, 1981, p.95). However, he warns that resistance is never exterior to power and that one must consider the plurality of “source[s] of rebellion” (FOUCAULT, 1978, p.96).

This thesis discussed in what ways literature and literary writings may function as sites of resistance. The author chosen to support the argument was the Haitian-American woman author Edwidge Danticat. Danticat was chosen not only because her works are considered of great literary value and have been objects of study in academic circles but because they may be regarded as illustrations of the Foucauldian notion of resistance.

It is possible to say that the main theme of Danticat's works is Haiti, the country in which she was born. Haiti is the poorest country of the Western hemisphere, even though it was the second American colony to achieve its independence. The history of Haiti is tainted with international occupations, dictatorship, corruption, and natural disasters. Since independence, Haitian people have suffered (both inland and offshore) prejudice, violence, and disregard. Consequently, from a Foucauldian point of view, it is possible to conclude that Haitians are not part of the group of "speaking subjects" (FOUCAULT, 1981, p. 64).

Conversely, Edwidge Danticat has been living in the US for over 30 years, she writes in English, she has a BA from Barnard College and an MA from Brown University, and she was granted a number of awards for her literary works. Thus, it is possible to conclude that she belongs to a society of discourse in the Foucauldian sense. At the same time, though, she sees herself as a hybrid individual and an immigrant artist, entitled to collaborate with her two *homes*. As Danticat explains:

I find [being an immigrant writer] enriching because I am looking at two different cultures cross-eyed. I am looking at Haitian culture through American culture, American culture through Haitian culture. But also, I have a mixed gaze, and I am both an insider and outsider in both cultures, which might be an uncomfortable place personally.

Indeed, Danticat cannot be described as a subaltern subject (if we take into consideration Spivak's discussion on the matter in her essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?"). By the same token, she does not regard herself as representative of Haiti; she is one voice among many. Nevertheless, Danticat has been making use of her art as an instrument of resistance, and in her literary narratives aesthetics and politics coexist harmoniously.

4.2 The Farming of Bones: Resisting the discourse (and the silence) of History.

In the section "The Unknown, The Uncertain" of *Caribbean Discourse* Édouard Glissant discusses the issue of History and Literature as instruments of *ordering*. The

intellectual reminds his readers that the apparent simplicity and uniformity of peoples who were colonized by the West, especially in the case of the Caribbean, which is “a composite of people” (GLISSANT, 2011, p. 92), is rather an illusion caused by a single-minded understanding of time and linearity. According to Glissant, while History originated “at precisely the time when [*the West*] alone ‘made’ the history of the World”, Literature attained “a metaexistence, *the all-powerfulness of a sacred sign*, which [allowed] people with writing to think it justified to dominate and rule peoples with an oral civilization” (GLISSANT, 2011, p. 64, 76, italics are mine). Nevertheless, Glissant understands that this notion of History (with a capital H) has proved frail and that “technological hegemony” is the only reason why the Western culture might consider itself supreme in relation to other cultures (2011, p.76). The notion that History cannot and will not be organized had an influence upon Literature. Glissant adds:

In the face of a now shattered notion of History, the whole of which no one can claim to master nor even conceive, it was normal that the Western mind should advance a diversified Literature, *which is scattered in all directions* but whose meaning no one could claim to have mastered (GLISSANT, 2011, p. 77).

In *The Farming of Bones*, Danticat fictionally re-covers a rather obscure historical event that took place on the border towns of the Dominican Republic in 1937: The Parsley Massacre. As a part of his whitening policy, Rafael Trujillo ordered the murder of Haitians living in his country. The outcome of the massacre was outrageous; although thousands of Haitians were killed in less than a week, Trujillo’s only sanction was the US\$ 750,000 compensation he agreed to pay for the Haitian government (only US\$ 525,000 ended up being paid). The massacre is still overlooked by the government of both countries; the incident is not taught in History classes neither in Haiti nor in the Dominican Republic. However, the imposed silence over the manslaughter is not powerful enough to heal the wounds it caused; rather, it generates a state of permanent fear. In her essay “Looking for a Neutral Space: A ‘Poetics of Dislocation’ in the Diasporic Fiction of Edwidge Danticat” (2012), Leila Assumpção Harris writes: “In her novels, Danticat creates fictional narratives that *oftentimes run counter the official or ‘pedagogical’ narrative of Haiti as a nation*” (HARRIS, 2012, p.179, italics are mine). Here lies the importance of *The Farming of Bones*. By means of her writing Danticat resists the power of silence (or the silence of power) and creates a site (even though it is a fictional one) where healing may finally begin.

The Farming of Bones is not historiography; yet, as Glissant observes: “The past to which we are subjected, which has not yet emerged as history for us, is, however, obsessively

present. *The duty of the writer is to explore this obsession, to show its relevance in a continuous fashion to the immediate present*” (GLISSANT, 2011, p.63-64, italics are mine).

4.3 Brother, I'm Dying: Writing an Alterbiography.

Autobiography have been wrongly considered the literary genre that best represents the spirit of the enlightened "man". Although autobiographical writings are an ever present mode of life-writing, it was *Confessions*, written by Jean-Jacques Rousseau and published in the 18th century that, according to critic Leonor Arfuch, first assembled “the specificity of the autobiographical literary genres” (2010, p.35, 36).

According to critics Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, the writing of autobiographical narrative produces *autobiographical subjects*; the critics suggest that to understand “how individual representations of subjectivity are ‘disciplined’ or formed enables readers to explore how the *personal story of a remembered past is always in dialogue with emergent cultural formations*” (SMITH & WATSON, 2010, p. 103, italics are mine). In this way, a specific notion of subjectivity is associated to the traditional concept of autobiography, which has in Rosseau’s *Confessions* its model.

[...] the genre of autobiography has been implicitly bound up with gender. Insofar, as autobiography has been seen as promoting a view of the subject as universal, it has also underpinned the centrality of masculine – and, we may add, Western and middle class – modes of subjectivity (SMITH & WATSON, 2011, p. 3).

This idea of a [masculine] independent individual is, then, in the core of the traditional concept of autobiography. However, according to Stuart Hall, in the late modernity, “[t]he subject, previously experienced as having a unified and stable identity, is becoming fragmented; composed not of a single, but several, sometimes contradictory or unresolved, identities” (HALL, 2007, p. 598) . This “de-centering of the subject” (HALL, 2007, p. 606) put in question old certainties such as the traditional concept of the autobiographical subject.

Besides, it is not possible to ignore the fact that autobiographical practices are (and have always been) instrumental among individuals who do not fit the idea of the traditional perspective. Among those critics that contest that autobiographical practices should be limited to the Western Anglo-Saxon male experience is Susan Friedman. Thus, in her essay “Women’s Autobiographical Selves: Theory and Practice”, she proposes an alternative

reading, with a slight, yet relevant alteration to George Gusdorf's argument that autobiography was inexistent in cultures where the individual does not oppose himself to all others; "[where] he does not feel himself to exit outside of others, and still less against others; [...] [where] lives are so thoroughly entangled that each of them has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere. *The important unit is thus never the isolated being* (GUSDORF, 1980, p.29-30 apud FRIEDMAN, 1998, p.73). Friedman, on the other hand, states:

Autobiography *is possible* when the individual does not feel *herself* to exist outside of others, and still less against others, but very much *with* others in an interdependent existence that asserts it rhythms everywhere in the community (...) [where] lives are so thoroughly entangled that each of them has its center everywhere and its circumference nowhere. The important unit is thus never the isolated being (FRIEDMAN, 1998, p.74-75).

Indeed, Smith and Watson explain that after being ignored by the Academia for a long period of time, autobiographical practices performed by women are now being given a great importance and considered a "privileged site for thinking about issues of writing at the intersection of feminist, postcolonial, and postmodern critical theories" (SMITH & WATSON, 1998, p.5).

In *Brother, I'm Dying*, Danticat resists not only the idea of Man as the authorized autobiographer but also the limits of the literary genre itself. Though her auto/biographical narrative begins with the autobiographical pronoun *par excellence*, the focus of her work is not her life exclusively. The lives and deaths of her two father figures and, it is possible to say, the (hi)story of her family and of Haiti are also very present.

In this thesis, not only *Brother, I'm Dying* but also essays and interviews were considered as autobiographical practices. Danticat posits herself as an individual who experiences her identity in relation – rather than in opposition – to other people's identities. She also considers herself an immigrant writer. In her essay "Create Dangerously", Danticat reflects:

The nomad or immigrant who learns rightly must always ponder travel and movement, just as the grief-stricken must inevitably ponder death. As does the artist who comes from a culture that is as much about harnessing life – joyous, jubilant, resilient life – as it is about avoiding death. [...] The immigrant artist to borrow from Toni Morrison's Nobel lecture knows what it is 'to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear' our company [...] (DANTICAT, 2010, p.17).

In other words, Danticat believes that certainty and sameness are not part of her existence as a diasporic subject and writer. In fact, Danticat's autobiographical practices are close to the concept of *alterbiography*, coined by critic Jana Braziel. According to Braziel, an

alterbiography is “a textual reading of autobiography through the inscriptions of *alterity* and *difference*” (2004, p. 1, italics are mine). Besides, the critic recognizes that every autobiography “will also be about those who surround the writing subject and whose experiences are enmeshed with those of the writer” (BRAZIEL, 2004, p. 16). Even though Braziel coins this concept in an essay on some of Kincaid’s novels, it is possible to understand that it applies to Danticat’s autobiographical writings as well. Then, it is possible to conclude that Danticat uses her words in order to inscribe her existence (which is at the same time individual and collective) in a culture where she is not always welcome and to resist the hegemonic power that this culture attempts to impose on individuals considered by it as the *others*.

4.4 Rome wasn’t built in a day.

More than 60 years separate the first publishing of Sartre’s *What’s Literature?* and Danticat’s writings. Nevertheless, Sartre’s notion that prose (and, I may say, art in general and literature specifically) is more than describing things and events is still relevant and seems to relate to the works of Danticat as a writer and an artist. Sartre understands that behind the act of writing is the desire of disclosure and proposes that two questions must be made to the writer: “What aspect of the world do you want to disclose? What change do you want to bring into the world by this disclosure?” (SARTRE, 1949, p.23). In addition, Sartre states that “[t]he ‘engaged’ writer knows that words are action, that to reveal is to change, and that one can reveal only by planning to change” (1949, p.23). When asked if she thought that art had always to be involved in some kind of engagement, Danticat answered:

Of course not. As I said before, I think artists should be as free as they want to be. It is up to the artist to decide what he or she wants to do. *But we should not “penalize”, if you will, people with a certain political view.* In “Create Dangerously,” the Albert Camus essay that inspired the title of the book, Camus writes for the writers of his time something that is still true today. *“The writers of today know this. If they speak up, they are criticized and attacked. If they become modest and keep silent, they are vociferously blamed for their silence.”* (italics are mine).

In her essay “O poder da escrita” (2011), Sandra Almeida writes:

The discourses of contemporaneity are characterized by a transdisciplinary perspective, interrelating a number of fields of knowledge such as Sociology,

Anthropology, History, Geography, Social Communication, Cultural Studies, Literature, among others. At the center of all those disciplines is the liminal territory of the Literary Studies which has frequently offered ground for reflections in other fields of knowledge as a means of making concrete current theoretical discourses (ALMEIDA, 2011, p.298, translation and italics are mine)⁴⁸.

Almeida, referring to Gayatri Spivak (2003), calls her readers' attention to the importance of Literary Studies. Once literary writings are considered representations of everyday practices, literature is no longer limited to being an object of study; it becomes our teacher (SPIVAK 2003 apud ALMEIDA, 2011, p.298). Hence, literature may take us to "cultural performativities by means of narratives that will lead the reader to face the effort of understanding the other by means of imagination" (ALMEIDA, 2011, p.298, my translation)⁴⁹. This notion of the role of Literary Studies seems rather relevant when one considers engaged writing because it provides a potential site for the work to achieve its purpose, that is, to offer an alternative, to provoke a dialogue, to disclose a specific situation in order to change it (SARTRE, 1949, p. 23).

There is no escape from the power that lies within discourse. Sartre (1949, p.23) points out that the engaged writer "has given up the impossible dream of giving an impartial picture of Society and the human condition". Discourse delineates our view of the world and our view of us. Discourse may be the greatest power there is because we need to make use of it even when we want to resist it. Moreover, although most of us can speak, not everybody will be heard, for in order to be heard one must belong to a "society of discourse" (FOUCAULT, 1981, p. 64). Why, then, speak even when no one seems to listen? Nevertheless, as Stuart Hall remarks, there seems to be an urgent need to *narrativize* (HALL, 1997, p. 58), to take hold of one's own identity, past, present, and future, by means of discourse. Discourse is, indeed, akin to desire.

I have not approached Danticat's works as a naïve reader. I fully understand that she is an awarded writer with an MFA from an Ivy League University and, probably, those are reasons why she is heard. Yet, she has chosen to use her "right to speak" in favor of those who will not be heard. She decided to "disclose" events (past and present) and lives (her

⁴⁸ In Portuguese: "Os discursos da contemporaneidade estão hoje marcados pelo selo da perspectiva transdisciplinar, inter-relacionando vários campos disciplinares e áreas do conhecimento como a sociologia, a antropologia, a história, a geografia, a comunicação social, os estudos culturais, a literatura, entre outros. No centro de todas elas, situa-se o território liminar dos estudos literários, que tem frequentemente fornecido as bases para reflexões de outros campos disciplinares como forma de materializar os discursos teóricos do momento atual" (ALMEIDA, 2011, p. 298).

⁴⁹ In Portuguese: "performatividades culturais por meio de narrativas que colocam o leitor diante do esforço de compreensão do outro por meio da imaginação" (ALMEIDA, 2011, p. 298).

characters', her own and the ones of her family and country of origin) and, by means of her writings, struggle against silence, against erasure.

Danticat's works are highly aesthetical and highly political. In *The Farming of Bones* it is possible to read a historical novel set in 1937 which is, at the same time, looking to an obscure past whose reflections may be felt in the present. In the words of the author: "[the massacre] really isn't a memory; it's an event that has a continuing relationship. [It] is something that people always fear can happen again"⁵⁰. Thus, by means of her novel, Danticat is not only re-visiting a past that the governments and people involved preferred to leave out of historiography; she also is discussing how this silence is reverberating in the present of one of her homes.

In *Brother, I'm Dying*, Danticat resists the traditional idea of the autobiographer as the individual who experiences his existence independent from (and oftentimes in opposition to) other people. By means of her (awarded) autobiographical narrative, she questions not only this isolated existence but also the sovereignty of memory, once she recognizes that some of the events narrated in her book about her life were told to her by members of her family. Additionally, Danticat questions the authority of official documents when she narrates the death of her beloved uncle, who was in the care of US government.

Danticat ponders on her role as a writer and an artist who faces and resists in her article "Create Dangerously", she ends with the following statement:

One of the many ways a sculptor of ancient Egypt was described was as 'one who keeps things alive'. Before pictures were drawn and amulets were carved for ancient Egyptians tombs, wealthy men and women had their slaves buried with them to keep them company in the next life. The artists who came up with these other types of memorial art, the art that could replace the dead bodies, may also have wanted to save lives. *In the face of both external and internal destruction, we are still trying to create dangerously as they, as though each piece of art were a stand-in for a life, a soul, a future.* As the ancient Egyptian sculptors may have suspected, and as Marcel Numa and Louis Drouin⁵¹ surely must have believed, *we have no other choice* (DANTICAT, 2011, p.20, italics are mine).

In brief, resisting power may seem a useless task by those who prefer to accommodate themselves. This is not the case of Edwidge Danticat. Although it seems to be the road less taken, she has chosen to travel it in favor of Haiti, and in favor of the United States of America.

⁵⁰ Interview with Edwidge Danticat: http://www.progressive.org/mag_intvddanticat (last accessed in 03/10/2013).

⁵¹ The two young Haitian activists, Marcel Numa and Louis Drouin, were executed in November, 12, 1964 at the order of the Haitian dictator François "Papa Doc" Duvalier. For more information read Danticat's essay "Create Dangerously", published in the book of the same name. An excerpt of the essay may be found online at: <http://caribbeanreviewofbooks.com/crb-archive/23-september-2010/create-dangerously/> (last accessed in 03/18/2013).

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ANNEX A - Parsley

Parsley (1983)

Rita Dove

1. The Cane Fields

There is a parrot imitating spring
in the palace, its feathers parsley green.

Out of the swamp the cane appears
to haunt us, and we cut it down. El General

5 searches for a word; he is all the world
there is. Like a parrot imitating spring,
we lie down screaming as rain punches through
and we come up green. We cannot speak an R-
out of the swamp, the cane appears

10 and then the mountain we call in whispers Katalina.

The children gnaw their teeth to arrowheads.

There is a parrot imitating spring.

El General has found his word: perejil.

Who says it, lives. He laughs, teeth shining

15 out of the swamp. The cane appears
in our dreams, lashed by wind and streaming.

And we lie down. For every drop of blood

there is a parrot imitating spring.

Out of the swamp the cane appears

2. The Palace

20 The word the general's chosen is parsley.

It is fall, when thoughts turn

to love and death; the general thinks

of his mother, how she died in the fall
and he planted her walking cane at the grave
25 and it flowered, each spring stolidly forming
four-star blossoms. The general
pulls on his boots, he stomps to
her room in the palace, the one without
curtains, the one with a parrot
30 in a brass ring. As he paces he wonders
Who can I kill today. And for a moment
the little knot of screams
is still. The parrot, who has traveled
all the way from Australia in an ivory
35 cage, is, coy as a widow, practising
spring. Ever since the morning
his mother collapsed in the kitchen
while baking skull-shaped candies
for the Day of the Dead, the general
40 has hated sweets. He orders pastries
brought up for the bird; they arrive
dusted with sugar on a bed of lace.
The knot in his sore throat starts to twitch;
he sees his boots the first day in battle
45 splashed with mud and urine
as a soldier falls at his feet amazed-
how stupid he looked!-at the sound
of artillery I never thought it would sing
the soldier said, and died. Now

50 the general sees the fields of sugar
cane, lashed by rain and streaming.
He sees his mother's smile, the teeth
gnawed to arrowheads. He hears
the Haitians sing without R's

55 as they swing the great machetes:
Katalina, they sing, Katalina,
mi madre, mi amol en muelte. God knows
his mother was no stupid woman; she
could roll an R like a queen. Even

60 a parrot can roll an R! In the bare room
the bright feathers arch in a parody
of greenery, as the last pale crumbs
disappear under the blackened tongue. Someone
calls out his name in a voice

65 so like his mother's, a startled tear
splashes the tip of his right boot.
My mother, my love in death.
The general remembers the tiny green sprigs
men of his village wore in their capes

70 to honor the birth of a son. He will
order many, this time, to be killed
for a single, beautiful word.

Rita Dove is a Pulitzer Prize awarded American poet and author.

ANNEX B – Map of the Caribbean



Map of the Caribbean

ANNEX C – Map of the Island of Hispaniola – Colonial Times

Map of the Island of Hispaniola – Colonial times⁵²

⁵² Available at: <http://www.swaen.com/antique-map-of.php?id=2891>

ANNEX D – Map of the Island of Hispaniola

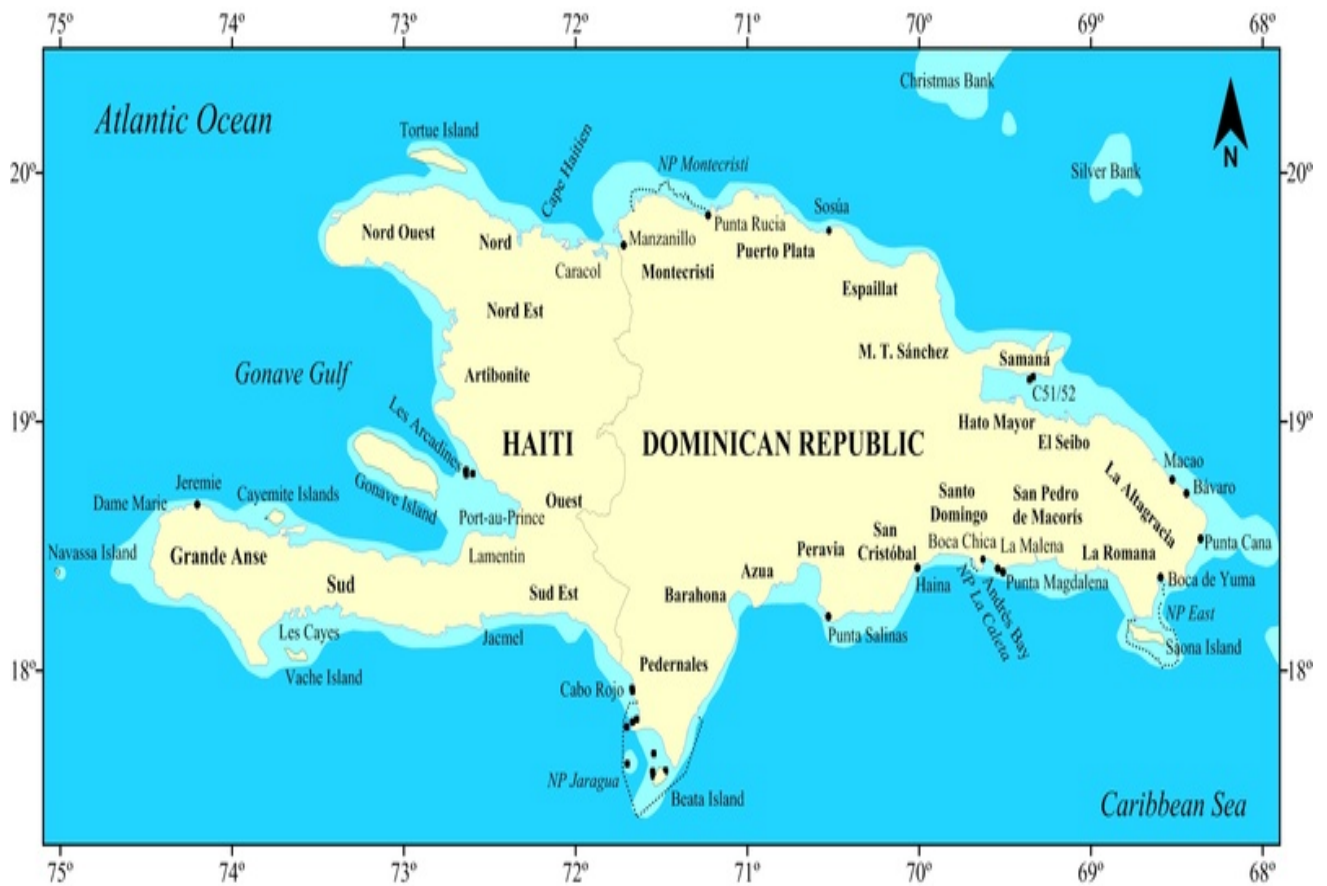
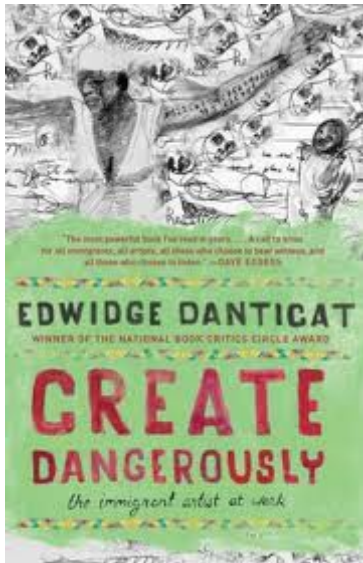


Figure 1. Map of Hispaniola Island showing sponges collection localities. The dotted line shows the boundary of the National Parks (NP). C51/52: Stations of the Research Vessel Caroline in Samana Bay.

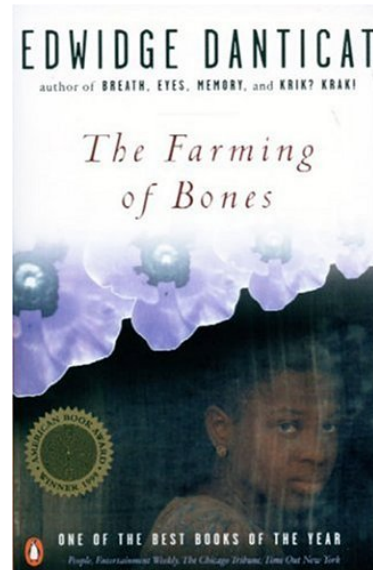
Map of Hispaniola⁵³

⁵³ Available at: <http://programacomar.com/Porifera.htm>

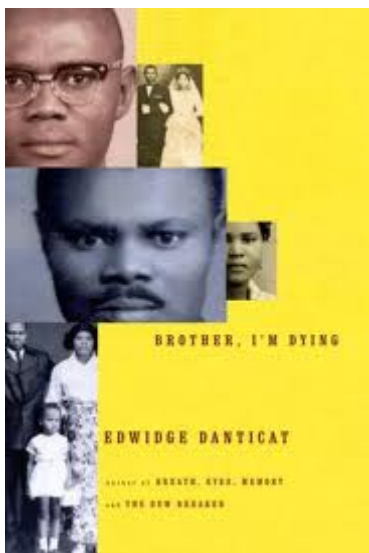
ANNEX E – Danticat’s Books



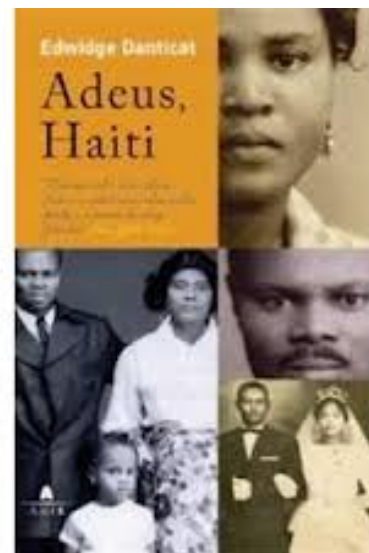
Create Dangerously (2010)



The Farming of Bones (1998)



Brother, I'm Dying (2007)



Adeus, Haiti (2010)

ANNEX F – The Artist

