

Article

## Postcolonial Trauma Theory in the Contact Zone: The Strategic Representation of Grief in Edwidge Danticat's *Claire of the Sea Light*

Silvia Martínez-Falquina

Departamento de Filología Inglesa y Alemana, Facultad de Filosofía y Letras, University of Zaragoza, Calle Pedro Cerbuna 12, 50009 Zaragoza, Spain; E-Mail: smfalqui@unizar.es; Tel.: +34-976-76-15-15; Fax: +34-976-76-15-06

Academic Editor: Sonya Andermahr

Received: 4 September 2015 / Accepted: 13 November 2015 / Published: 20 November 2015

---

**Abstract:** This article starts by engaging in a dialogue with the most relevant postcolonial emendations to trauma theory, addressed to both its aporetic and its therapeutic trends, and it goes on to reflect on the state of the decolonizing trauma theory project, critically examining the motivations behind it as well as some of the problems it still encounters, like the risk of objectification and revictimization of postcolonial peoples, the blurring of their trauma particularities, and the appropriation of their experience. Then, it proposes an alternative understanding of postcolonial trauma theory as a contact zone where trauma criticism and the postcolony are interrelated and mutually transformed, and where unequal power relations are also attended to. Acknowledging the postcolony as a site of theory production rather than the object of external definition, it proceeds to analyze Edwidge Danticat's short story cycle *Claire of the Sea Light*: its strategic representation of grief—which she achieves through the short story cycle structure and overall in-betweenness and ambivalence in symbols and characterization—puts Haitians on the critical map of trauma, fighting invisibility and oblivion, but it simultaneously resists an appropriation of Haitian experience by rejecting any monolithic view on Haiti and refusing to fit into a predetermined template.

**Keywords:** trauma theory; postcolonial trauma theory; (neo)colonialism; contact zone; grief; Edwidge Danticat; Haitian American literature

---

## 1. Postcolonial Emendations to Trauma Theory

In her accurate overview of the relation of trauma theory and postcolonial studies in this volume, Irene Visser examines the current state of the project of decolonizing trauma theory [1]. As she acknowledges, it was Michael Rothberg who, in his contribution to the special issue of *Studies in the Novel* dedicated to that relation in 2008 [2], first discussed the need for a “decolonized” trauma theory, and this entailed a turning point in the development of trauma studies. In 2015, Visser appropriately refers to the project of decolonizing trauma theory as an ideal and she outlines some of the remaining objectives to reach it, arguing that “[a] response to trauma from a respectful cognition of culturally specific spiritual and religious perspectives, analogous to the recognition of historical, national, and ethnic diversification, is necessary for a postcolonial theory of trauma to be truly decolonized” ([1], p. 259). The project has, however, already borne some important fruits, mainly because the need to radically question and expand the trauma paradigm is now generally assumed by the critics, and a number of articles since 2008 have included a series of emendations, to use Visser’s term [3], to mainstream trauma theory. These emendations are a reaction to the inadequacy of trauma theory to properly account for postcolonial experiences and texts, for as Michela Borzaga puts it, although trauma may be a legitimate category in the field of psychiatry ([4], p. 74), it is problematic to work with Western psychiatric and cultural theories of traumas in a postcolonial situation ([4], p. 65), to such an extent that in its current mainstream use, “‘trauma’ becomes more of a barrier than a fruitful epistemological tool” ([4], p. 68).

The main target of criticism has been trauma theory’s lack of interest in the traumas experienced by members of non-Western cultures. As appropriately phrased by Stef Craps and agreed upon by many more critics, “if trauma theory is to adhere to its ethical aspirations”—it is worth recalling Cathy Caruth’s famous idea that “trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures” ([5], p. 11)—“the sufferings of those belonging to non-Western or minority cultures must be given due recognition” ([6], p. 13). There has also been a generalized call to interrogate and move beyond a fundamentally Eurocentric trauma paradigm. Pat Bracken, for example, denounces how PTSD has been brought to the developing world “without any great thought of the great cultural, social, and other difficulties there would be with that move” [7]. Trauma criticism’s lack of historical particularity and careful attention to context is contrasted to the postcolonial focus on historical, political and social factors, which explains the generalized claim to attend to specific postcolonial experiences, like the trauma of racist oppression, or the negative consequences of (neo)colonialism.

A further ramification of trauma theory’s Eurocentrism is its excessive focus on experimental (post)modernist textual strategies to represent the acting out of trauma, which has resulted in a prescriptive and narrow trauma paradigm that seeks to impose Western narrative criteria in order to assess the representational value of texts that deal with trauma. Critics like Craps have responded by deauthorizing a predetermined relation between aesthetic form and political or ethical effectiveness, and suggest instead that trauma theory should attend to “the specific social and historical contexts in which trauma narratives are produced and received, and be open and attentive to the diverse strategies of representation and resistance which these contexts invite or necessitate” ([6], p. 43). Critics of postcolonial texts are therefore encouraged to attend to indigenous cultural traditions, knowledge

systems and ways of perceiving the world, including the understanding of spirituality or the storytelling tradition.

The traditional event-based model of trauma ([2], p. 226)—or “accident model of trauma”, as Nancy van Styvendale calls it ([8], p. 207)—which cultural trauma theory continues to adhere to and “according to which trauma results from a single, extraordinary, catastrophic event” ([6], p. 31), has also proved inadequate to account for experiences of exclusion or marginalization. Merlinda Bobis, for example, talks about poverty as a violent phenomenon, “and yet”, she notes, “it is hard to say one is traumatized by this violence, because it seems the concept of trauma is something that happens suddenly, disrupting normal life” ([9], p. 62). It is a sad fact that poverty, like discrimination or natural calamities, is, for many peoples, simply normal life. Some of the critical challenges to trauma as a singular, recognizable and chronologically-bound incident are articulated by Michela Borzaga, who argues for an analysis of the conditions, rather than events, in which life—with its corresponding traumas—unfolds ([4], p. 68); Laura S. Brown, who works with Maria Root’s notion of insidious trauma to refer to “the traumatogenic effects of oppression that are not necessarily overtly violent or threatening to bodily well-being at the given moment but that do violence to the soul and spirit” ([10], p. 107); or Nancy van Styvendale, who uses the concept of trans/historicity to refer to “a traumatic event-which-is-not-one” and to gesture toward “a trauma that takes place and is repeated in multiple epochs and, in this sense, exceeds its historicity, conventionally understood as its singular location in the past” ([8], p. 204).

A further point of contention with traditional trauma theory is its focus on psychic trauma to the detriment of a proper attention to the material conditions—economic, sociological, political, *etc.*—which affect people and determine their reaction to traumatic experience. As Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allué contend, mainstream trauma theory’s “focus on an individual/psychological perspective may pose the danger of separating facts from their causes, thus blurring the importance of the historical and social context, which is particularly relevant in postcolonial trauma narratives” ([11], p. xi), and that is the reason why these authors argue for a fruitful dialogue between the psychological conception of trauma defined by Caruth and the sociological definition of cultural trauma articulated by prominent sociologists like Arthur G. Neal, Ron Eyerman or Jeffrey C. Alexander, to name but a few ([11], pp. xi–xii). This also reminds us of the fact that, in the postcolonial context, “[i]n addition to psychological work, social consensus and reparation are also necessary” ([11], p. xiii). Needless to say, the sufficiently proven statement that the personal is always political becomes even more evident when we are referring to accounts of the effects of colonialism or racism.

Also in relation to the psychic model of trauma is its questioning of the reliance on the Western conception of the self as a psychologically healthy and unified subject, in such a way that trauma is understood as a shattering experience that fragments a previously coherent sense of self. As Stef Craps contends, drawing on Claire Stocks, “for many disempowered groups [...] trauma is a constant presence, [...] meaning that there is no pre-traumatized state of being that can be restored in any straightforward manner” ([6], p. 33). The Western individualistic conceptualization of man and society is additionally challenged by the emphasis on the healing resources of family and community [4,7,12], which becomes perhaps the most outstanding vindication of postcolonial fiction. Irene Visser shows an additional reaction to the emphasis on Freudian melancholia and stasis when she argues that

[u]nlike what is currently the dominant idea in trauma theory, social fracture, alienation, and a weakening of social cohesion, are not the only, nor perhaps even primary characteristics of trauma. In fact, while trauma may cause divisiveness, it can also lead to a stronger sense of belonging and can in fact *create* community ([13], p. 109, original emphasis).

The fact that in the postcolonial world time is not necessarily understood as linear or based on cause-effect relations has also been emphasized to question the idea of traumatic atemporality, together with “the predominant model that suggests traumatic memory remains frozen and separated from ‘normal’ memories” ([14], p. 163). Since in many postcolonial cultures the past, present and future are not considered separate but part of “a unified tangle”, then “the repetition and re-living of traumatic experiences as well as the potential for overcoming trauma: *i.e.*, the process of working through it, are not separate and set at the two ends of the spectrum but coexist and struggle with one another in complex and unexpected ways” ([4], p. 78). One good way to account for this complexity would be to combine an approach to trauma as both concrete event and part of a trans/historical process, as van Styvendale does [8], but in any case, a more careful attention to the culturally specific way of understanding time—and space, for that matter—is still required in this respect.

The questioning of an excessive emphasis on the post-traumatic condition—with a focus on the shattering experience of trauma, the disorder and destitution resulting from it—is also present in some critiques of mainstream trauma theory, which underscore the possibility of healing that is obvious in postcolonial literatures and cultures [4,6,12]. As Melvin Konner states, “resilience and/or independent recovery are by far the most common responses to potentially traumatic experiences” but this is not often shown in studies of trauma ([12], p. 320). Agency, empowerment, affirmative politics, or “post-traumatic growth”, to use Borzaga’s term ([4], p. 74), are some of the ways of responding to trauma that can be observed in the postcolonial context.

All of the above emendations are mainly addressed to the deconstructionist approach to trauma, whose main representatives are Cathy Caruth and Geoffrey Hartman, and which remains the dominant model in mainstream trauma studies today. However, when it comes to the supposed inaccessibility of trauma, famously identified by Caruth, we find an alternative understanding of the function of narrative, resulting in an important point of contention that made Roger Luckhurst talk about the trauma theory contradiction ([15], p. 82). As Visser summarizes it, there are two opposed views of the trauma narrative, the former—with Caruth and Hartman as main representatives—considering it “aporetic, leading to increased indeterminacy and impossibility”, and the second—associated to the work of Judith Herman, who argues that narrative is a powerful and empowering therapeutic tool—seeing it as “therapeutic, enabling a ‘working through’ and eventual resolution of trauma” ([16], p. 274). As it has become clear in literary criticism, the second approach to trauma—which allows for a “historically and culturally specific approach to trauma narratives” that sets a necessary contrast to Caruth’s “homogenizing tendencies” ([16], p. 274)—is more appropriate to account for postcolonial texts, thus confirming Jenny Edkin’s perception that “there is an imperative to speak, and a determination to find ways of speaking that remain true to the trauma” ([17], p. 15). In fact, for many, if not all, postcolonial authors, speaking out about their traumatic experiences—which they do each time their texts explore the consequences of (neo)colonialism and/or discrimination—becomes

the best possible act of resistance to the silencing of their voices and the recovery of a self-defining subject position.

In spite of the affinity of the therapeutic view on trauma to postcolonial realities, some emendations to this trend have also been made, which, because they have had a more discrete presence in criticism, should be brought to the fore lest we encounter the problems of Herman's model of understanding trauma while trying to revise the Caruthian one. On the one hand, as Craps has warned, it is important for a text to unsettle "triumphalist accounts of the postcolonial that deny the continuing effects of racial and colonial trauma" ([6], p. 71), as well as to avoid "[p]utting pain at the heart of demands for political recognition", for this "severely limits the possibilities for political transformation" ([6], p. 126). It is undeniable that the traumatic condition in postcolonial contexts is ongoing and far from being solved, and a vision of trauma which celebrates healing through narrative runs the serious risk of denying the continuing impact of trauma. In this respect, Jo Collins wonders whether "an approach which sees literature as a vehicle for healing can fully recognize the political concerns of postcolonial writings" ([18], p. 6). Needless to say, the erasure of the political vindications present in a text becomes an ethical problem, for it entails the silencing of unequal power relations and of the call for political engagement to revert them, both of which are key motivations in much of postcolonial writing.

On the other hand, we need to be very attentive to the possibility of neo-colonial appropriation in this way of reading trauma. Stef Craps cautions that "the traumas of non-Western or minority populations need to be acknowledged for their own sake" ([6], p. 3), while Jo Collins also refers to a serious limitation of the therapeutic approach, namely the risk of appropriation of the trauma of others, what Spivak calls "epistemic violence" ([18], p. 8). The problem is not only that, in Craps's words, "rather than reflecting a postcolonial sensibility, well-meaning attempts to reach out to the racial, ethnic, or cultural other can effectively result in the appropriation or instrumentalization of his or her suffering in the service of articulating the trauma of the self" ([6], p. 3), but also that this may allow for an even more unethical opportunity to expiate colonial guilt: "Reading such novels through western paradigms of trauma may seem like an ethical act of recuperating memory, but may ultimately be a way of appeasing guilt about the West's imbrication in such trauma without impelling real intervention" ([18], p. 14).

All in all, two aspects should have been made clear in the account of the emendations to trauma theory above: firstly, that since neither the aporetic nor the therapeutic views of trauma is free of problems, it is not enough to simply adopt either variant of trauma theory and apply it to postcolonial texts and contexts. The fact that critics analyzing postcolonial texts engage in a critical relation to Western theoretical models before using them is probably the best thing that could have happened to trauma theory, for it has given it a great opportunity to transform itself and improve; and secondly, that the ideal of decolonizing trauma theory is certainly still not a reality, which is why, in what follows, I am offering some further critical reflection on the motivations behind it which are intended to contribute to this ongoing project.

## 2. The Decolonizing Ideal: Open Issues

As it has been mentioned above, Rothberg was the first to talk about the need to decolonize trauma theory while he acknowledged the *Studies in the Novel* contributors' "creation of an alternative canon

of trauma novels that should have significant pedagogical implications”, and their “insight that theory needs to globalize itself more thoroughly and responsibly” ([2], p. 226). His references to an “extended” model of trauma ([2], p. 229) and to “the project of decolonizing and globalizing trauma studies” ([2], p. 226) have been continued by various critics, among others Herrero and Baelo-Allué, who focus on “worlding” or “postcolonizing” trauma studies ([11], p. xvii); or Visser, who offers suggestions aimed at reaching the ideal of a “truly” or “fully” decolonized trauma theory ([1], pp. 259–60) and associates globalization and trauma theory thus:

the global impact of western cultural trauma theory may be understood under this same rubric of globalization, and it may also be understood as a movement from the west to the non-west: it is informed by western psychoanalytic theory and brought to bear on non-western literary studies ([3], p. 40).

This reference to a transition from the west to the non-west evidences the basic motivation of the decolonizing trauma project: that of expanding the paradigm, of incorporating other experiences and texts as objects of trauma theory analysis. However, such an expansive movement also points at a colonial power dynamic that should be critically attended to, namely that between a center of theoretical definition and its margins, which may end up being reinforced rather than questioned. The relational approach to postcolonial trauma theory that Visser conceptualizes in a different article—“a comparative and relational notion of trauma at the center of a tangled complexity of theories and concepts about trauma” ([19], p. 4)—further illustrates this dynamic: in spite of its “‘unsayable’ nature” ([19], p. 3), trauma is at the center of definition of that “‘intricate knot” ([19], p. 3). Notwithstanding the usefulness of this idea—which allows Visser to offer the most insightful analysis of Toni Morrison’s novel *Home* that I have encountered so far—it should be noted that it also contains the potential risk of sustaining trauma in the central position that was originally questioned as a new type of cultural imperialism ([4], p. 69) and a new master narrative ([20], p. 229). If decolonizing is the ideal—with all the self-reflective questioning that this should always involve—then we should at least reconsider whether sustaining the centrality of trauma is desirable or convenient, and whether the relation of trauma and postcolonial theory is equally beneficial for all of the parts involved.

It is obvious that trauma theory has benefitted and will keep benefitting from its expansion, but whether the opposite influence is also true still needs to be more thoroughly discussed, mainly because most of the critics who argue for a postcolonial trauma theory take it for granted that its expansion to the postcolony is a positive, even ethical move, without entering into much more debating. As argued above, the interaction with postcolonial theory has offered trauma studies a great opportunity to face many of its inconsistencies and improve itself in the process. In Irene Visser’s words,

[p]ostcolonial literary texts often engage with trauma in ways not envisioned in the currently dominant trauma theory, or in ways that reverse trauma theory’s assumptions, for instance by depicting victims’ resilience, resistance, and eventual triumph over trauma, or a community’s increased cohesion and enhanced sense of identity after a traumatic event ([13], p. 127).

A number of authors also underscore the positive contribution of trauma theory for the understanding of previously ignored issues, like Herrero and Baelo-Allué, who point at trauma theory’s usefulness “in analyzing and understanding colonial traumas such as forced migration, sexual,

racial and political violence, dispossession, segregation, genocide, and the intergenerational transmission of trauma, to mention but some” ([11], p. xvii); or Craps, who illustrates the contribution that a decolonized trauma theory can make to our understanding of “postcolonial literature that bears witness to the suffering engendered by racial or colonial oppression” ([6], p. 5), and remarks how it can act “as a catalyst for meaningful change”, enabling us to “expose situations of injustice and abuse, and open up ways to imagine a different global future” ([6], p. 8).

Clearly, the fact that previously silenced or forgotten traumas are given further visibility on a global scale is very positive indeed, and the possibility of using linguistic and diagnostic categories that are sanctioned by the dominant culture surely allows many people to “hold out the hope of having [their] pain recognized, legitimated, and compensated for” ([8], p. 205). Nonetheless, there must be a reason why some writers and critics in the postcolony are resisting the trauma terminology; Merlinda Bobis reflects on the way that the Western word “trauma” is perceived as being part of an industry whose terminology simply does not suit Filipinos ([9], pp. 61–62), which could explain why many indigenous people resist becoming the object of Western definition once and again. On the other hand, as van Styvendale observes, the paucity of research on the particular case of Native American trauma “reveals a necessary political resistance to the potential revictimization of Native peoples through the nomenclature of trauma—or, in other words, to the reification of Native victimhood and the pathologizing of Native communities through the imposition of yet another Euroamerican framework designed to ‘figure out’ and ‘fix’ Native peoples” ([8], p. 206). For this critic, the danger of institutionalizing the fact of trauma in Native communities—which can be extrapolated to other marginalized communities in the world—is “the danger of revictimization”, and while she has to admit to have “no easy safeguard to protect against this danger”, she shows her conviction that it is necessary to proceed, “aware of the possible pitfalls, to recognize post-contact Native experience as traumatic” ([8], p. 206).

The dangers of objectification and revictimization are only a part of a series of pitfalls encountered by the expansion of trauma theory for the postcolony. Another not less relevant one is the risk of homogeneization, or the silencing of different ways of perceiving, responding to and representing trauma that may ultimately reinforce (neo)colonial relations. In the application of trauma theory to a diversity of postcolonial experiences there is an obvious risk of uniformizing, of using trauma studies as an umbrella term that will erase differences and particularities. The attempt on the part of trauma studies to export its model to the postcolony threatens to absorb particular experiences into a global theoretical frame and to erase differences that should be made visible and vindicated. Visser’s list of questions in her article on globalization and trauma point at what are still very open issues, when she wonders

whether the ever-growing influence of trauma theory in literary and cultural studies in academia worldwide is to be seen as a beneficial development for the critical development with postcolonial non-western literatures. What promises does cultural trauma theory hold out for a global understanding of trauma, and how adequate are they to the agenda of postcolonial literary criticism? May a critical approach that draws on trauma theory in its engagement with non-western, local literatures be seen as contributing to the beneficial or perhaps rather to the more questionable effects of colonization? ([3], p. 41).

As Merlinda Bobis pondered, “[t]he collectivization of loss can lead to further loss of justice in specific lives” ([9], p. 78), and we should not minimize the consequences of this for many people. But again, as in van Styvendale’s case above [8], critics usually acknowledge this risk but decide that the advantages make up for the pitfalls, as shown by Herrero and Baelo-Allué’s reflection that “[a]lthough literary criticism may run the risk of homogenizing trauma, especially when applying trauma theory to a postcolonial context, it is undeniable that it can shed light on the interpretation of postcolonial traumatic fiction” ([11], p. xv). Even if the necessity to attend to culturally specific features of trauma is generally agreed upon—Borzaga for example talks about the need to unmask the points of difference, discontinuities and ruptures ([4], p. 70)—there is also a counter-call for the need “to generalize and build theoretical models” ([2], p. 232) in order to avoid what is perceived as “the tendency toward hyper-particularism” ([2], p. 228). This points at the difficult balance between over-homogeneization and hyper-particularization that will also have to be negotiated in the process of decolonizing trauma studies. In any case, clearly more work still needs to be done especially in the direction of specificity, both in the analysis of the literary representation of trauma and by paying more attention to theories about and especially originating in those contexts.

All in all, it seems obvious that there are two relevant issues that remain open and which a “decolonized” trauma theory should not fail to address. Firstly, the very motivation behind it ought to be critically questioned, for one of the problems we face is that we may be talking about mainly Western needs here. I agree with Kansteiner and Weilnböck when they state that “there is no such thing as neutral by-standing—politically, personally, or scientifically—and this insight should be reflected in our scholarly work” ([20], p. 238), so it is worth asking a series of questions: What is the purpose of aiming at a “truly” or “fully” decolonized trauma theory?; is it equally desirable for all of the agents involved in it? Secondly, and relatedly, we need to seriously face the delicate issue of appropriation, which evidences itself each time the center is interested in the margins for some reason. Lately, trauma criticism seems to have discovered postcolonial texts as an occasion to reinforce some of its tenets, but it remains to be seen whether the actual bases of colonial/theoretical power will really be shattered, that is, whether this power can actually be decolonized, or ultimately reinforced, therefore involving an unwanted recolonization, in the process. Needless to say, we should always critically examine the interests behind the wish for expansion, of the yearning for connection to others, for in them we may find a hidden wish to expiate for colonial guilt by focusing on the colonized victim’s role. Although perfectly satisfactory answers may never be found to these open issues, it is an ethical obligation to keep addressing them for the project of decolonizing trauma theory to remain truly postcolonial.

### **3. Postcolonial Trauma Theory in the Contact Zone**

Having argued that the motivations behind the project of decolonizing trauma theory should be revised while it is still in the making, I contend that, in order to raise awareness of the power relations involved in postcolonial trauma theory, it is worth recovering the critical concept of transculturation. Coined by Fernando Ortiz in the 1940s, Mary Louise Pratt famously defined it in 1992 as the term that could be used to describe “how subordinated or marginal groups select and invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture” ([21], p. 6). As she also emphasized,

[w]hile subjugated peoples cannot readily control what emanates from the dominant culture, they do determine to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for. Transculturation is a phenomenon of the contact zone. [...] While the imperial metropolis tends to understand itself as determining the periphery (in the emanating glow of the civilizing mission or the cash flow of development, for example), it habitually blinds itself to the ways in which the periphery determines the metropolis ([21], p. 6).

Because transculturation, itself a reaction to the traditional view that minority groups should be acculturated, focuses on mutual interaction between different groups or cultures, it becomes useful in order to underline both the way the center influences the margins, and the way the margins influence the center too. Thus, it resists the idea of a unidirectional flow of influence from the center to the margin, emphasizing the fact that marginalized cultures are not passive recipients of what comes from the mainstream but usually voice non-conformist responses to the center of representation, a good medicine against the risks of epistemic violence. Applying this to the relation of trauma and postcolonial studies, we are compelled to examine both what the postcolony can and does offer trauma theory, and what trauma theory can and does offer the postcolony, as well as the ways in which both are mutually transformed and interrelated.

The very debate on the articulation of postcolonial trauma theory may be seen as functioning under the dynamics of transculturation, a dialogic process where each participant depends on and is transformed by the other, establishing a reciprocity that questions the idea of cultural purity and which, very importantly, never loses sight of unequal power relations. In other words, postcolonial trauma theory is in itself the result of a new contact zone, a “space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict” ([21], p. 6). In order to make even more emphasis on the unequal relations of power usually involved in contact zones, Pratt adds that these are spaces “where disparate cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in highly asymmetrical relations of domination and subordination—like colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out across the globe today” ([21], p. 4). A look at postcolonial trauma theory as a critical contact zone evidences the fact that the relations of power between trauma theory and other critical frameworks still has to be properly acknowledged, and a careful observation of inequality will have to counter the sometimes excessive optimism of theories of hybridity or relationality. This is the only way that the risk of erasure of theories and experiences coming from the margins can be resisted and unequal relations of power can be acknowledged, challenged, and whenever possible, reverted.

Replacing the focus on the expansion, globalization or opening of trauma theory with an attention to postcolonial trauma theory as a phenomenon of a critical contact zone additionally gives us a more adequate insight into different ways of representing and dealing with traumatic experiences. Instead of interpreting them as devalued copies of Euro-American understandings or of measuring them from a predetermined template, this view lays emphasis on the singularity that they usually vindicate, and which is more often than not threatened. Correspondingly, due attention needs to be paid to postcolonial criticism’s merit in anticipating some of the conclusions that mainstream trauma theory is only recently beginning to see, and, in general, more work needs to be done to recognize the influences

of other paradigms on the trauma one. In addition, a stronger emphasis should be laid on the authors and critics outside mainstream trauma theory who have dealt with past and more recent traumas in their many forms. Stef Craps argues that Frantz Fanon already anticipated “the criticisms of the individualizing, pathologizing, and depoliticizing tendencies of the dominant trauma model” ([6], p. 28), whereas Borzaga vindicates trauma theory from the postcolony—most notably authors like Frantz Fanon, Achille Mbembe or Ashis Nandy—and criticizes the censoring mechanisms in trauma discourse, “its resistance to more creative modes and less orthodox ways of approaching this topic, its intolerance towards those scholars who write about the wound of colonialism without using the specific lexicon of trauma” as aspects that require urgent investigation ([4], p. 80). For decades now, postcolonial critics have been talking about the traumatic effects of colonialism and the literary responses to them—healing and not—without using Caruth or Herman as a framework, and it might even be argued that all postcolonial theory—which deals with colonial relations, racism, or gender violence, to name but a few of their main concerns—is always related to trauma in some way or another, without necessarily naming it so or understanding it on the same terms as mainstream trauma theory does. In fact, a good exercise in critical ethics would be to recognize that each time that references are made to something new in trauma studies—like the new opening of the paradigm, the new attention to marginal texts, or the need to look at new elements like ritual and spirituality—we may actually be referring to something new to trauma studies only, and this is a problematic rhetoric of discovery that we should obviously try to avoid.

Part of the effort to decolonize knowledge should be directed at recognizing the postcolony as a site of theory production rather than merely as an area to be studied. In this respect, I am interested in the way that fictional texts can illuminate theory too, instead of trying to make a specific text fit into some kind of predetermined template. Apart from the aforementioned risks of appropriation and re-victimization, the frequent negative reaction of marginalized groups to trauma theory—and Western theory in general for that matter—may be explained by the fact that they have their own ways of representing and dealing with various forms of traumatic processes—violence, grief, pain, suffering, dispossession, loss...—but they still have to vindicate them in order to counterbalance the invisibility and silence imposed on them. One way to do this is through literary creation, a discourse which is different from but closely related to that of theory; fiction often responds to critical expectations, but literature can also illuminate criticism, question it, call for its revision, transform it. To illustrate this, in the next section, I offer an analysis of Haitian American writer Edwidge Danticat’s recently published *Claire of the Sea Light* [22], looking at how the text rejects appropriation of Haitian American experience in the terms of either the aporetic or the therapeutic trends of trauma theory. As I will try to prove, by offering a strategic representation of grief, the text resists fitting into any kind of template and demands a careful reading in its own terms, all of which compels us to further reflect on the process of decolonizing trauma theory.

#### **4. Edwidge Danticat’s *Claire of the Sea Light* and the Strategic Representation of Grief**

Haitian-American writer Edwidge Danticat’s short story cycle *Claire of the Sea Light* is full of parents losing their children, and children missing their dead or absent parents; of death, rape and murder; of poverty, loneliness and grief. Previous texts by Danticat have often been analysed as trauma

fiction, an approach that interprets her as a witness to the traumas suffered by her people—both Haitians and Haitian-Americans—and at the same time recognizes her merit in articulating narratives of memorialisation, resilience and hope [23]. One of the issues related to this frequent approach to Danticat is the fact that she is generally viewed by critics as the voice of Haiti, and her work as representing the entire culture, something that the author herself is very aware of and has commented on: “It is a burden that most writers who are from smaller groups face. There is a tendency to see our work as sociology or anthropology, an ‘insight’ into a complex culture. Readers have to remember that we’re writing fiction, telling stories” ([24], p. 190). The burden Danticat acknowledges is also made manifest in criticism on the part of Haitians, who have not always reacted encouragingly to her works, especially when these do not project a positive image of Haiti and Haitians [25]. The only possible answer to the kind of accusations she occasionally faces—“That is not us. The things she writes, they are not us”, or “You are a parasite and you exploit your culture for money and what passes for fame” ([26], pp. 32–33)—is to vindicate, once and again, her status as nothing more and nothing less than a storyteller, a fiction writer.

External views have a lot to do with the way Danticat sees herself as a Haitian American and as an immigrant artist, one who is full of self-doubt ([26], p. 19) as she struggles to keep “the dangerous balance between silence and art” ([26], p. 10). In both national and artistic affiliation, the author identifies as a “diaspora”, a Creole word whose multilayered meaning she has often struggled to explain [26], and which defines her as a member of an ambivalent in-between space:

My country, I felt, both as an immigrant and as an artist, was something that was then [in the 1990s] being called the tenth department. Haiti then had nine geographic departments and the tenth was the floating homeland, the ideological one, which joined all Haitians living outside of Haiti, in the *dyaspora* ([26], p. 49).

Such an affiliation emphasizes the complexities of belonging and not belonging, it proves the need to de-essentialize identity—both Haitian and Haitian American, in this case—and reminds us that being a person of the in-between, an inhabitant of a contact zone, is not always an easy thing. As a writer, the way for Danticat to respond to the risk of appropriating the experience of an “other”—Haitians who may feel they are not faithfully or properly represented in her fiction, fundamentally—is to assume that just as identity should never be claimed to be pure, through language, she is allowed to construct a reality that is not exactly Haitian but hybrid and métisse, a product of the contact zone, through what she calls “my self-created folkore, my fake-lore” ([26], p. 68).

Since, as argued by some of the trauma critics mentioned above, there are different, cultural-specific ways of representing trauma other than through the use of experimental (post)modernist textual strategies, and since there is ample agreement that the understanding of trauma should be expanded from the early narrow model of event trauma to incorporate examples of insidious or transhistorical trauma, the way a text like *Claire of the Sea Light* represents trauma deserves careful critical attention. In my analysis, I am taking one specific aspect of trauma which has not often been the focus of criticism, namely the grief caused by the losses derived from colonization, racism or gender violence. I am offering a look at the strategic representation of grief as a means to, on the one hand, denounce the continuing effects of colonial trauma on contemporary Haitians and, on the other, to vindicate agency, empowerment and resilience for colonized peoples in a way that complicates the risk of appropriation

and exotization. I start from the assumption that, in Leeat Granek's words, "[t]he expression of grief is always mediated by one's social context and is always political" ([27], p. 61), and that, as Erika Lawson puts it, "grief is an epistemological site for interrogating the detrimental impacts of racial/social inequalities" ([28], p. 2104). The representation of grief is particularly relevant when we are dealing with a community where it has often been disenfranchised like the Haitian, with the Code Noir of 1685 that made it illegal for the slaves to practice their African religions openly and forced them to convert to Christianity ([29], p. 475). To a large degree, the issue here is to disrupt, through literary texts, the division of the world population into grievable and un-grievable lives that Judith Butler famously noted [30], by vindicating everyone's right to count as a subject. Moreover, quoting Granek again, "the recognition of everyone's grief and loss is the only solid foundation from which social change can begin" ([27], p. 67), which makes the representation of grief politically charged too.

*Claire of the Sea Light* exemplifies the relevance of analysing the representation of specific aspects of grief in the contact zone from a diaspora liminal perspective. The text is constructed as a string of stories of grief, most of which can be traced back to the inheritance and persistence of colonialism in Haiti. In spite of its having been the first country to overthrow slavery as early as the 1790s, and establishing the first black republic in the world in 1804, as Andrew Flood argues Haitians have not been able to defeat the colonial system which has continued to punish them to this day, and which has resulted in centuries of invasion, the robbery of Haiti's natural resources, and the impoverishment of its people [31]. Reactions after the 2010 earthquake confirm established representations of Haiti as a dangerous place incapable of running its own affairs and requiring foreign intervention, which throughout its history justified the interference of Spain, Britain, France or the USA. In fact, the internationally accepted idea of Haiti today, Flood goes on to argue, is a nation "riddled with (poor, black) terror gangs waiting to pounce on naïve (white) visitors" that goes back to the anti-slavery insurrection. But the truth is that Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas, most of its population lives in abject poverty, and the Western response to this situation is to encourage the fear of the poor [31], a view that, far from being helpful, manages to sustain the interests of neo-colonialism.

Danticat's poor are not fearful. However, part of the author's strategy in this particular work, aimed at contradicting images like those mentioned above, is not to point an accusing finger at the forces responsible for Haiti's suffering, at least not directly [32]. Instead, she manages to involve the reader in the working out of the political implications of the personal, presenting as many points of view as possible and providing a panorama of contemporary Haitian society that is quite different from the dominant views on the country. All throughout the text, she remains faithful to her position as a diaspora, a Haitian American in-between two worlds who is very aware of the risks of appropriating the experience of others, and will accordingly resist representing any final truth, resorting to the representation of liminal and complex meanings instead. For that purpose, she constructs a hybrid text that incorporates symbols and stories that originate in the Haitian tradition—like the view of the sea, Haitian beliefs and other cultural references—and also the western tradition—including references to *The Waste Land*, La Fontaine or the Brothers Grimm. The narrative is set in and around the fictional town of Ville Rose, considered by its inhabitants "a small and unlucky town" ([22], p. 14), where events like the public school collapsing and "killing 112 of the 216 pupils enrolled there" ([22], p. 15), are by no means uncommon. Ville Rose "was home to about eleven thousand people, five percent of them wealthy or comfortable. The rest were poor, some dirt-poor" ([22], p. 5). The difficulty to make

progress can be blamed on “the town, its lack of opportunities, its rigid social hierarchies” ([22], p. 186), and the social determinism implied here points at global, powerful and unknown forces that the individual cannot really fight on his/her own.

The play between the personal and the political, the individual and the collective in *Claire of the Sea Light* is brilliantly articulated through literary form. The short story cycle—which, as opposed to either the novel or the short story, allows for its parts to be read independently, for each story stands on its own with some sense of closure, or sequentially, in such a way that meanings are added to the whole and the connection of the separate parts is emphasized—combines two apparently opposed but ultimately complementary forces: a centrifugal impulse towards isolation, loneliness, the individual and the focus on open wounds; and a centripetal movement towards healing, connection, the community and its chorus of voices. The former impulse is concerned with the denouncing of traumas and requires a more clearly political reading and involvement in the text, one that recognizes the agency behind these traumatic experiences and acknowledges its victims, while the latter entails a vindication of the colonized people’s affirmation and self-empowerment in spite of their condition, it is centered on recognizing post-traumatic growth and resilience, and it contributes to the reversal of the negative images of Haitians that sustain neo-colonial interests today [33].

Although the short story cycle generic form is not necessarily connected to any specific identity [33], its cyclic structure, which emphasizes circularity and the aforementioned closure and openness recurrent impulses, does prove particularly useful to articulate the diaspora condition in all its ambivalence. Interestingly, it can also be related to the cyclic, repetitive and circular—rather than linear and progressive—movement of water backwards and forwards which Kamau Braithwaite conceptualized as “tidalectics”, often associated to Danticat’s texts [34,35]. Tidalectics is a poetics of the sea “which is the ripple and the two tide movement”, and that involves “the rejection of the notion of dialectic, which is three—the resolution in the third” ([36], p. 145). It embodies “the Haitian *Weltanschauung* of life’s dualities” by “[r]efusing closure in determining paradigms and resisting spatial confinement” ([34], p. 86). Through the short story cycle structure and sea symbolism, *Claire of the Sea Light* responds to the two problems faced by Caribbean writers who put their island onto fiction: on the one hand, they have to tell the horrors and violations, past and present, suffered on that land; and on the other, they have to restore a balanced relationship to the landscape that differs from and resists colonial and neocolonial representations. This explains why the discourse on tropical islands is generally ambivalent, for it has to incorporate the idea of earthly Paradise and that of an alien and hostile land ([35], p. 1). Needless to say, this dilemma is made even more complicated by the drastic change of the landscape of Haiti after the 2010 earthquake, for *Claire of the Sea Light* is set right before that moment that changed everything.

In the most common reading of the text, the sequential one that focuses on the whole and looks for connection and some resolution through an accumulation of meaning, we start the book with fisherman Nozias trying to give away his daughter Claire to fabric vendor Gaëlle, a member of the local accommodated class. Rather than a full member of a new family, this would make Claire a *restavek*—from the French “rester avec”—and possibly one of the abused domestic servants that abound in Haiti as a result of this extended system derived from extreme poverty. In spite of the pain this decision brings him, Nozias, who lost his wife to childbirth, is so poor that he is incapable of providing Claire—whose life is dramatically marked by the absence of her mother—with a decent life,

and he sees this as the only way for the girl to have a future while he goes away “[p]ou chèche lavi, to look for a better life” ([22], p. 8). This is the only chance that, should he die at sea, she would not be left “completely parentless and end up in a brothel or on the streets” ([22], p. 17). Gaëlle Lavaud is also damaged herself: the day that she gave birth to her daughter Rose her husband was murdered, which made her think “that everyone should die” ([22], p. 144). This is why she accepts the offer of some friends to seek another type of justice and have Bernard Dorien, the suspected intellectual author of the crime, killed. But Gaëlle’s own violent act does not bring her the relief she had expected; in fact, seven years later her daughter dies in a car accident—and the young man responsible for it ends up psychologically wounded too ([22], p. 156)—which, due to her guilty conscience, she interprets as “some terrible cosmic design engulfing everyone involved” ([22], p. 146). Gaëlle becomes, as defined by herself, “a shell, a zombie” ([22], p. 148). Her losses “had not made her stronger; they had made her weak. They had given others control and power over her” ([22], p. 159). She also suffers from survivor’s guilt, as shown when she says, “Too many people die here, and why do the rest of us get to live?” ([22], p. 162). In an attempt to break with the chain of painful events that keep haunting her, Gaëlle decides to take Claire on the anniversary of her own daughter’s death, but Claire will not accept this externally decided destiny willingly.

Bernard Dorien was not really guilty of Gaëlle’s husband’s murder. He was just a resigned inhabitant of Cité Pendue, which some people called “the region’s first circle of hell” ([22], p. 63) because of all the violence and corruption that grow there, like the tumor of gangs, that “new urgent and deadly plague” ([22], p. 62). Bernard’s death makes his parents disappear and never again be heard of, but we do hear about the impact, even 10 years later, of his absence on his special friend Max Ardin, Jr., secretly in love with Bernard and incapable of openly admitting his homosexuality. After ten years in Miami—he is one of the diasporas who encounter “the difficulties of starting a new life in another land”, whose humiliation is imprinted on their skin, showing in their eyes whenever they come back to visit ([22], p. 160)—Max, Jr. returns home and meets the son he fathered when he raped his house servant Flore Voltaire just to prove to his own father and to himself that he could be with a woman. Flore goes to Louise George’s radio show *Di Mwen, Tell Me*, to talk about “one moment that changed [her] life. A moment that made everything that had come before it seem meaningless” ([22], p. 172), partly out of revenge, partly for fear that Max and his powerful father might take her son from her. Although the little boy’s pain is not addressed directly, we do see a drawing he makes of his unknown father, with a blank O for a face that perfectly illustrates the hole left on the child by his father’s absence, and which reminds us of the *vevés*, or Haitian ceremonial drawings based on outlined emblems that are meant to call forth the spirits ([26], p. 129). In the words of Max’s friend Jessamine, who is described as “[t]oo damaged herself to be judgmental” ([22], p. 91), the worst possible case of unrequited love is “feeling abandoned by a parent” ([22], p. 99), a statement that rings true for several characters in this narrative.

A look at this entanglement of traumatic stories in a sequential reading of the text uncovers the complex relations of victims and perpetrators and of all the people affected by each event, and Danticat takes great pains to provide all the points of view of the people involved, incorporating, for instance, the rapist and his guilt; the raped woman and her burden; the son’s loss; even the rapist’s father considering the “horrible act” his son committed and feeling unable to forgive himself in turn ([22], p. 184). The author’s attention to different characters’ participation in the various acts of violence

disrupts easy polarizations of victims and perpetrators, as it points at the complicated issue of complicity, one of the areas that still require more theoretical attention in postcolonial trauma studies ([1], pp. 258–59; [2], pp. 231–32). Additionally, she attends to the encounters, often tense but sometimes productive, of members of the higher and lower social classes: class divisions and differences of power are obvious in the separation between the schoolmaster Max, Sr., or Gaëlle, the fabric vendor, and the larger group of fishermen and the rest of poor villagers. However, in a sequential reading, the ending provides a hopeful resolution to the text, with Claire returning home after having escaped when she was about to be given away, and Max, Jr. being returned from the sea and welcome by the community, the poor and the rich attending to him together. In this reading, time becomes cyclic too, for although several cycle stories go back in time, the final one takes place on the night of the same day the narrative started. The elemental symbolism can also be read as reinforcing such resolution: the terrifying freak wave which, personified and monsterized as “a giant-blue-green tongue” ([22], p. 3), swallows a poor fisherman and his boat at the beginning of the text becomes the friendly hand of a spiritual presence—perhaps Claire’s own mother—which rises from the sea and touches her shoulder ([22], p. 235), then a mother who bears a grown man back into the world of the living: “In the middle of the lamp circle, half of which was now in the water, she saw someone pull a man in a red shirt out of the sea. Like a dying fish, the man’s body jerked about” ([22], p. 236). The images of a wasteland in the summer when all the frogs had disappeared, and the “cosmic design” of death it accompanied in “Starfish” ([22], pp. 123–43) are now replaced by images of reconciliation, community, and home. The text’s very last words seem to suggest that amends can be made, one’s fate can be accepted and grief may be overcome:

She had to go back and see her father and Madame Gaëlle, whose own sorrows could have nearly drowned them. She had to go down to the water to see them take turns breathing into this man, breathing him back to life. Before becoming Madame Gaëlle’s daughter, she had to go home, just one last time ([22], p. 238).

Together with these implications, clearly privileged in a sequential reading, the author also strives to represent how the community is not monolithic or even consistent in its grief. In fact, the recognition of everyone’s grief in the story responds to the author’s wish to provide a diversity of perspectives on Haiti; as she has said on interview, “I want a multiplicity of stories to be told about Haiti; I think it is one of those places that is often portrayed in a very singular way and I certainly wouldn’t want to participate in that. [...] Haiti is not a monolithic community” [37]. She does so by individualizing the experiences of the poor like Claire, Nozias, or Caleb; homosexuals like Max, Jr. and Bernard; lonely people like Gaëlle; the violated, like Flore; or diasporas like Jessamine and others who live in the US and come back to visit. These characters are all members of the same community but in an independent reading of the cycle parts, the stories of grief of each individual character are brought to the fore, images of isolation and openendedness abound, the search for connection is often frustrated and healing does not seem to be so easy to achieve.

All the separate stories share a Haitian setting of liminality, for both Ville Rose and Cité Pendue, the village and the beach are contact zones full of conflict and tension, but each cycle story also has a title and some degree of structure, narrator, character, symbolism and theme. In the first cycle story, entitled “Claire of the Sea Light”, Nozias is trying to give Claire away, and when Gaëlle finally agrees

to take her, Claire escapes. The story is structured around images of life and death: it is Claire's birthday, which is also the day in which her mother, and years later, Gaëlle's daughter, died. Claire and Nozias' visits to the cemetery to visit the girl's dead mother are repeated year after year on this day in a tidalectic kind of flow: the same dress worn, the same ritual performed—and, to Claire's dismay, the same stories not told. Ironically, the town mayor is also the owner of the funeral home, the same person taking care of the villagers in life and of their bodies in death, the difference thus being deliberately blurred. Gaëlle decides to take Claire to replace death with a new life, for she says, "I need another way to remember this day" ([22], p. 32). In the final scene, Nozias and Gaëlle are in his cabin, waiting for the girl to appear, and for a brief moment they seem to approximate like the waves touching the beach where the cabin is located. If only they did, then Claire would not have to be given as a *restavek*; if only the two would come together, then a family would be created out of their grieving, isolating selves. But the high tide is always followed by a low tide, and vice versa, and the story flows again and closes on distance and silence: "[Gaëlle's] eyes were like two vacant pits, and in them he recognized a void that [Nozias] could easily identify but could never soothe, not even in himself. She was there but not really. At one moment, her mouth opened and closed but nothing came out" ([22], p. 40). Both Gaëlle and Nozias lack the language to put their memories into words, and finally he leaves.

"The Frogs" starts with a plague of exploding frogs full of biblical resonances and ends with the modern plague of gangs. In-between, images of the broken cycle of natural events abound: the terrible heat, wasteland imagery, a pregnant woman eating a dead frog and nibbling at new fabric, rivers swelling and swallowing houses "in response to the lack of trees, the land erosion, the dying topsoil" ([22], p. 52). In "Ghosts", Cité Pendue is a hellish place full of violence and loss, the poor have nowhere to hang on to, the differences between the gangs and the police are blurred, for they share the same methods, and the protagonist, Bernard Dorien, dreams of transcending boundaries through the radio station waves by bringing in the side of the gang members, the "chimè, chimeras, phantoms, or ghosts" ([22], p. 68). "Home", focused on Max, Jr. and his reflection on abandonment, guilt and homosexuality, is structured around racial, gender and class boundaries that are blurred in grief, shared by all: victim and executioners are equaled in death ([22], p. 89), whereas the schoolmaster and the mayor-undertaker, live "the same life", follow "the same emotional path" ([22], p. 87). Ville Rose is connected to Little Haiti, in Miami, by the dyasporas' movements to and from home, accompanied with their exile dislocation. Max, Jr.'s coming to terms with a ten-year-old crime, and the son that came out of it, is illustrated by his metaphorical road to hell, from Ville Rose to Cité Pendue, where the beauty of the landscape becomes "mountains of trash, tires, and thousands of plastic juice bottles and foam food containers" ([22], p. 112), and the sea turns from green-blue to brown to ashen black ([22], p. 107). However, after all, the story ends on a fragile image of home and return.

"Starfish" is structured around this animal's symbolic death and regeneration, a piece of the self breaking and then becoming something new. But the image becomes an external patriarchal imposition on Louise George, an isolated and lonely woman who is misunderstood by the community because of a strange feminine ailment and who is betrayed and humiliated by her powerful lover. In "Anniversary", a grieving woman reflects on the circle of violence she contributed to when she tried to take revenge on her husband's violent death. Gaëlle Lavaud's grief makes her lonely, but it also ties her to this town, where her ghosts are, and although in her mourning she searches for guidance—symbolized in

the broken lighthouse she plans to fix—and for male companionship, mainly through the temporary union that sex involves. The story closes on distance: “He walked out. He left anyway” ([22], p. 165). “Di Mwen, Tell Me” is a short story cycle in itself: the first part centers on a poor woman’s rape during a hailstorm, with “the echoes of swelling waves meeting in the seashore” ([22], p. 169), which contribute to characterize home as an uncertain and unsafe place: just like the ocean cannot be stopped, the ceiling does not provide isolation from the rain, the door does not provide protection from her rapist. Flore takes refuge in beauty, a symbol of resilience, and becomes empowered, if only temporarily, when she tells her story through the radio waves and her voice is heard all over the city and the surrounding towns. In the second part the rapist’s father offers a reflection on guilt and forgiveness, with a series of references to the generational gap that separates parents and children. The third section recreates the final scene of Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, with the rapist, Max, Jr., recounting all the flowers, insects and birds he can think of, in connection to his memories, as he slips into the water. In the last part, a connection between this young man and Nozias, who is looking for his daughter on the beach, is established and the communication with the ocean sounds and spirits brings Nozias to his own grief at having lost his wife and feeling compelled to give his daughter away. The last cycle story, “Claire de Lune”, is focused on the young girl’s coming to terms with her own grief at having lost her mother through a transcultural inheritance of stories, some originally from the Haitian tradition, some those of western origin she learned at school. Marked by her mother’s absence, the story—and the full text—ends with a promise of community and rebirth.

As the short story cycle reading shows, while *Claire of the Sea Light* ends in an optimistic note with renewed relations in this Haitian community, the gaps and wounds that are also part of this community should not be obscured. It is true that, at the end of the full text, Claire is coming back home, but that home is undefined, the ending left open, and in any case, home is far from an ideal of comfort and security, for she is either going back to her destitute father or to a surrogate mother, and both are homes where grief seems to have settled. It is obvious that there are strong relations between the different stories and characters, but there are also silences, gaps, and frustrated attempts at connecting, at finding meaning in one’s mourning, and a clear emphasis on separation and grief. In accordance to its short story cycle generic structure, we could argue that a sequential reading of the text, with its accumulation of meanings, guides us towards a view of community and a possible healing in the end. However, each independent story focuses on pain. Strategically, then, the emphasis on the trauma articulated in each particular story makes the wounds more visible and it helps avoid a totalizing, redemptive kind of narrative, which might become a form of traumatic denial and obscure the colonial responsibility behind it.

Together with the short story cycle structure and its tidalectic rhythm, which emphasize the tension between openness and closure, approach and distance that are typical of the definition of diaspora identity, the politics of the contact zone is represented through female characterization and natural symbolism. The text is particularly concerned with uncovering the violence exerted on the bodies of women, who are doubly affected by the colonial inheritance, and it does so by emphasizing their liminal status. The rape of the maid shows how helpless poor women can be: Flore does not even consider filing a complaint against her rapist, for she knows that police officials are easily bought by powerful men and that justice is not usually obtained by a person in her situation ([22], pp. 174–75).

She therefore raises her son in constant fear that the wealthy and influential Ardins may steal him from her. In the end, her fear makes her another exile, another unhappy victim of the diaspora.

Another illustrative example of trauma in relation to the female body is that of Louise George, the hostess of the radio program *Di Mwen*, who suffers from a strange ailment—she has been coughing up blood during her periods since the age of thirteen—that many doctors and tests cannot explain. Marginalized because of the strangeness of her female body, Louise is a mystery to most people in town, where “all things unexplained were attributed to the spirit world” ([22], p. 123), and there are rumors about her being a cat eater, or an alcoholic ([22], p. 126). An isolated and liminal character, she not only finds it impossible to fit in the community, but she has also internalized the external definitions of her own self: “she was floating through her life, looking for some notion of who she was, and in those scowls and rumors she often caught a glimpse, even if a distorted one, of what that might be” ([22], p. 127). Her lover Max Ardin, Sr. tries hard to “describe [the taste of blood] to her in great detail as though his tongue were not inside *her* mouth” ([22], p. 136, original emphasis). In fact, he is trying to define her just like everybody else, only more closely, while she remains silent in her suffering:

It is salty [...]. It is sweet. He was convinced that the taste was based on her moods, and she would let him go on and on about it, expressing the same thoughts with different words. And she would daydream of other things as he spoke and she would daydream of how free she would feel without this affliction and she would marvel at how some things could destroy a person’s life, like being housebound for a few days when you were bleeding out of your mouth and you had trouble remembering when you had not. And all of a sudden, the past was your haven and the time you felt freest was when you least understood your body, [...] when you were a little girl ([22], p. 136).

When Max, who eventually stops being attracted to her strangeness—“the intrigue of her biblical affliction waning as she moved deeper into middle age” ([22], p. 136)—not only leaves her but publicly humiliates her, Louise’s “dreadful feeling of loneliness” returns ([22], p. 143).

While their stories denounce the woman’s subordinated role in a hierarchical and patriarchal society, Flore and Louise are also presented as producers of a view on grief, rather than mere objects of analysis or definition. In spite of her victim role as a raped woman who can obtain no justice, Flore speaks out, using the resources she has at hand—including those provided by Louise’s radio show—and then goes away to avoid having her boy taken from her by the Ardins. Undoubtedly, Flore is a victim of a social dynamic that leaves a humble woman disempowered, but she is also represented as a symbol of resistance who does not exactly conform to social class expectations. Louise, in turn, although largely defined by others, becomes a committed storyteller, reading stories to the children at school and especially through her successful radio program, which also manages to give a voice to the previously unheard part of the population: the poor, the excluded, the disempowered. In spite of her isolation, Louise has found a way to express herself and also a chance to take revenge on Max, Sr. by bringing Flore to her show to denounce his son. Moreover, Louise looks for connection with other people like little Claire, an outcast like herself but probably one who might be able to understand her own traumas, suggesting a female community in solidarity:

The girl was so quiet that Louise worried that there might be some other frightful things about Claire that would link them. Had she, also like Louise, been born with absolutely nothing, from people who had absolutely nothing? Was she the surviving twin who had lost a sibling at her birth? Had she been born with a sixth finger on each hand, which had been forced to atrophy by having strings tied tightly around them? Did she have a spider-shaped birthmark on her belly? ([22], p. 127).

Both Flore's denounce and Louise's corporal response to the traumatic experiences she has internalized can be related to the manner in which nature responds to its own violation, also resisting being a passive recipient of external definition and control. The chain of useless violence described in the text does not escape nature, and in *Cité Pendue*, for example, Bernard's parents sell pigeons not for racing, to train as carriers or as pets for their small children as they used to do in the past, but for a violent ritual previous to the local young men's first sexual encounter:

They'd slit a squab's throat, then let it bleed into a mixture of Carnation condensed milk and a carbonated malt beverage called Malta. Sometimes their fathers would come with them and, after their sons had held their noses and forced down the drink, the fathers would laugh and say, as the pigeon's headless body gyrated on the ground, "I pity that girl", ([22], p. 65).

As the context changes, their main customers become gang members who come for the drink before going on a political demonstration encouraged by ambitious business owners as well as local politicians, who give them guns and use them whenever a crisis is needed ([22], p. 65). This ritual is one of the most obvious examples of violence—which is here associated to power and masculinity—in this contact zone.

Nature responds loudly to this and other examples of violation and corruption. Because of the overexploitation of the land and the excessive cutting of trees—which poor peasants cannot really afford to abandon, for economic forces beyond them do not allow them to find another way to make a living—devastating floods are more and more common, destroying houses and displacing people. The sea, acting as a character in itself, is not giving enough to fishermen like Nozias, either, burying them deeper and deeper in their poverty. In fact, the sea can simply make people disappear, as it did when a freak wave measuring between ten and twelve feet high—"a wall of water [that rose] from the depths of the ocean, a giant blue-green tongue, trying, it seemed, to lick a pink sky" ([22], p. 3)—sunk a fishing boat and swallowed poor fisherman Caleb, never to surrender him again.

All throughout the telling of their stories, the characters' bonds with the natural world are emphasized, especially through ritual and storytelling. The sea is the ultimate protagonist in this respect, and the ambivalence in its symbolism can be illustrated thus:

People like to say of the sea that *lanmè pas kenbe kras*, the sea does not hide dirt. It does not keep secrets. The sea was both hostile and docile, the ultimate trickster. It was as large as it was small, as long as you could claim a portion of it for yourself. You could scatter both ashes and flowers in it. You could take as much as you wanted from it. But it too could take back ([22], p. 199).

The sea brings death, as it is clear at the very beginning when fisherman Caleb disappears ([22], p. 3), but it can also bring new life, as seen in Nozia's wife Claire's moonlit swim when she is pregnant of Claire and chooses her name ([22], pp. 32–35). The sea offers the possibility of rebirth to Max, Jr., when he surrenders to it but the sea brings him back to life, hopefully renewed after having faced his secrets and fears ([22], pp. 197–99, 236–38). The sea's ambivalence is especially obvious in the case of little Claire. To her, the sea is a way to imagine being in her mother's body for the short time that he knew her, before she was born ([22], p. 215). But she is also afraid of the sea and its deadly threat, afraid that it will take her father, and because, when she imagines that the sea would disappear, she knows she would miss it too much, she sings a sad fisherman's song about loss as a ritual to prevent bad things from happening ([22], pp. 219–21). In the dialectic between grief and healing—the two opposite reactions to the Haitian landscape faced by writers like Danticat—the poetics of the sea incorporates the two but does not allow for a resolution in a third element. The two tide movement resists closure and confinement, and as Danticat has consistently articulated elsewhere in her fiction, the sea can bring people closer—like Haitians and Haitian Americans, who are located on two opposite shores of the same ocean—but it is often an insurmountable border; it involves the hope of communication and a new life for those who try to flee the island, but it is also a massive grave full of the dead bodies of those who did not succeed at escaping.

The view of nature and its ambivalence symbolizes the latent forces in this society, and it becomes a warning about its power. Like nature, these people cannot be expected to just be quiet and submissive. Like the frogs who disappeared for no explainable reason and died out mysteriously, the people are also threatened. But like the sea, they cannot be tamed; they are unpredictable, changing, alive. This is part of Danticat's strategic representation of grief, and it is additionally supported by a series of traditional elements which are articulated in the narrative. Most instances of Haitian wisdom, myth and lore in the text are related to the natural and the supernatural realms, and they are kept alive through stories. There is one story to explain drizzle, or ghost rain, which is also a story of violence and pain: "The devil was beating his wife and marrying his daughter. [...] The drizzle was both the wife's and daughter's tears" ([22], p. 58). When Claire is born and her mother dies, she is immediately incorporated in a storytelling tradition by just pronouncing one word to greet her, *revenan*:

To most people, Claire Limyè Lanmè was a revenan, a child who had entered the world just as her mother was leaving it. And if these types of children are not closely watched, they can easily follow their mothers into the other world. The only way to save them is to immediately sever them from the place where they were born, even for a short while. Otherwise they will spend too much time chasing a shadow they can never reach ([22], p. 16).

As these examples make clear, many of the Haitian beliefs present in the text have to do with death, too common in this community. People are very aware that "the dead were never to have shoes. Shoes could weigh a person down in the afterlife" ([22], p. 206), and some are afraid that their dead might be "snatched from the cemetery and turned into zombies" ([22], p. 207). In addition, expectedly, there are a series of rituals related to the sea: The fishermen throw rock salt in the fire to make sparks, hoping to draw the lost fisherman's spirit out of the sea ([22], p. 28); "Some of the fishermen's wives would throw a pinch of crushed salt in the air for good luck, before their men left for the sea. (Some would

also refuse to eat, or wash, or comb their hair until their men came back.)” ([22], p. 212). Danticat also incorporates a mythical figure with western and Haitian resonances, Lasirèn, the

long-haired, long-bodied brown goddess of the sea. With an angelic face like a bronzed Lady of Charity, Lasirèn was, it was believed, the last thing most fishermen saw before they died at sea, her arms the first thing they slipped into, even before their bodies hit the water. Like most fishermen he knew, Nozias, in his boat, next to his trap, net, hook, line, and tin can full of bait, kept a burlap sack in which he had a mirror, a comb, and conch shell, an amulet to attract Lasirèn’s protection ([22], p. 34).

Another way in which the presence of Haitian stories and beliefs becomes a strategic response to (neo)colonialism is by contributing to the redefinition of community, and this is where Claire of the Sea Light’s role becomes central in the narrative. Claire has always been searching for connection. Hungry for stories, especially those that could fill in the gaps left by her dead mother’s absence, she has often resorted to traditional song to express her fears and yearnings, and when she escapes from home after having learned that her father is finally giving her away, she makes herself part of ritual by incorporating her experience into a song:

Yo t ap chèche li...  
 They were looking for her  
 Like a pebble in a bowl of rice  
 They were looking for her  
 But no, no, no, she didn’t want to be found ([22], p. 233).

While running to the top of Mòn Inital, from where she can see the village and the beach, Claire incorporates herself in the storytelling tradition of the community: she becomes complicit with the maroons who, as told in “Madame Louise’s stories”, had escaped slavery and hidden in this mountain ([22], pp. 126, 234). Like the maroons, whose presence is latent all throughout the text, Claire decides, she will survive by hiding in the mountain; she will come and visit her father during the night, and be an accompanying spirit, “the girl at the foot of the sky” ([22], p. 234). The phenomenon of maroonage, or the communities of fugitive slaves who often fled into the mountains and lived in small bands while eluding capture, was “crucial for the fight of Haiti’s independence” [38]. As Ricky K. Green states, the Maroon communities “develop the potential for sovereignty” ([39], p. 27), as in the case of the Haitian revolution and the nation of Haiti, and “they stand as the first communities to institutionalize Black identity beyond the level of family” ([39], p. 27). Characterized by pluralism, they were organized around the experience of resistance, their strongest common bonds being self-determination and the importance of African spirituality ([39], p. 28). The reference, therefore, is by no means coincidental, for it points, once again, at the latency of rebellion in the text.

The presence of the maroons, however, and in accordance to the way Danticat represents the complexity of identity, is vindicative and oppositional but not simply so. Although she wishes she could “go away without really leaving, without losing everything, without dying” ([22], p. 235), up in the mountain Claire goes through a process of reconnection, then comes back home. When she looks back at the village from the lighthouse, she sees her neighbors: “These familiar people and the fires that made them visible to her, these points of light, now seemed like beacons calling her home” ([22],

p. 232). She feels a spiritual presence—perhaps her own mother—coming from the sea, just as the sea pulls Max Jr., almost drowned, onto the beach. This is not the disappeared man the villagers were expecting the sea to return, but the view of her father, her adoptive mother-to-be, and the rest of the people in a circle, trying to breathe the man back to life, makes Claire reconsider her place in this community and come back. This final scene nicely stages the way that Danticat presents the town as the hero of her narrative, in her vindication of a communal system that she believes has sustained the country and which characterizes “a way of life that is sometimes not heard or talked about when people talk about Haiti” [37].

All in all, the fact that Claire finds inspiration in the oppositional, resisting identity of the maroons but finally chooses community—as shown in a sequential reading of text—demands a reflection on identity as a dynamic and complex combination of difference and relation which was also reflected in the analysis of the short story cycle structure. The maroon reference could be associated to what Édouard Glissant characterizes as the atavistic identity or a community of filiation, which is stable, oppositional, based on fixed places of origin and necessary for decolonial resistance; but it would live together with and be undermined by Glissant’s idea of Relation, which rejects dialectical positions and searches for sites of connectivity through the dismantling of barriers of difference, and which is best exemplified by créolization [40]. In Glissant’s words, “[w]e are not prompted solely by the defining of our identities but by their relation to everything possible as well—the mutual mutations generated by this interplay of relations” ([41], p. 89). Accordingly, identity cannot be seen as simply oppositional or purely relational, in an either/or way, for both impulses—identification and inter-subjectivity—are entangled in a complex relationship, and the recognition of this dynamic strategically contributes to resisting the view of Haiti as monolithic.

## 5. Conclusions

For Danticat—and this can of course be extrapolated to many other postcolonial authors—writing is an act of resistance that challenges the supposed unspeakability of trauma as well as extended stereotypical images of Haitians and their history, emphasizing that, as she states, “It is not our way to let our grief silence us” ([42], p. 188). On the contrary, grief may be precisely the impulse that makes her speak, and its representation strategically denounces the effects of the traumas of Haitians as it vindicates the particular ways in which a victimized but resilient community confronts them. In *Claire of the Sea Light*, Danticat denounces the poverty and the terrible conditions that much of the Haitian population has to live with, as well as the wounds inflicted on the body, focusing especially on women, who are doubly marginalized in this strict patriarchal context, but also referring to homosexuals, “dyasporas”, the poor. Neither the community nor its transcultural experiences of grief are monolithic but complex, changing, and depicted without falling into the spectacular or over-sentimental. In fact, although we know that poverty and the class division that characterize Haiti are largely the result of colonial and neocolonial exploitation of the island, the ultimate causes of peoples’ traumas are left off scene in this text, which resists a polarized conception of victims and perpetrators. As we get a good view on grief in this community, we are also witness to inequality at its roots, with a part of society being privileged and therefore at least partly responsible for the sustaining of injustice and the poverty of the majority. However, while she denounces the persistence of class

boundaries, Danticat also opens a window to solidarity, for at times, the rich and the poor do come together in their grief. Talking about her motivation when writing the text on a 2013 interview, Danticat explained that she placed the story in 2009, right before the 2010 earthquake, to “stick to something that was” [37], and as readers we are allowed to hope that the solidarity that makes a community has survived the earthquake, but we are also reminded that the situation of confrontation and inequality has worsened significantly after the tragedy [43].

In any case, divided and together, the Haitians in this short story cycle are certainly victims, but also agents who strive to define and speak for themselves, rather than have somebody else do the speaking and defining for them. They constantly affirm their own ways of representing and dealing with their grief, an act that becomes political insofar as it challenges a very long history of disenfranchised grief associated to colonization. Focusing our attention on such a strategic representation of grief allows us to appreciate how the text resists an appropriation of Haitian traumatic experience, for it cannot be easily framed in either the aporetic or the therapeutic trend of trauma theory. In contrast to the Caruthian model, trauma here is obviously not unspeakable but spoken, represented, symbolized, sung, played upon, struggled with, denounced. It is not merely psychic, either, for the individual recovery of characters is not privileged over social and political aims. Besides, the isolating or shattering effects of trauma described in the text are largely countered by the healing resources of the community, which is reinforced in renewed structures of solidarity. However, it should also be noted that in spite of this positive reading, healing is not always simple or even that clear: poverty, dislocation and discrimination persist, and the ending of the text is left quite open in this respect, which complicates our attempt to apply a therapeutic kind of reading too. As we see, the text’s strategic ambivalence and its rejection of any single story or monolithic understanding show a resistance to erasure by denouncing grief, which is very real and urgent, but also a resistance to revictimization in a conventional trauma narrative. All in all, the difficulty to classify the characters and their stories as simply victims or perpetrators, heroes or failures, individualistic or communal; the ambivalence in symbol; or the play between opposition and relationality in the understanding of individual and communal identity all point at the attempt to escape easy classifications and the derived risk of critical appropriation. Needless to say, while we are in the process of reflecting on the articulation of a postcolonial trauma theory, we should not only try to expand the mainstream trauma paradigm to find texts that fit in it, but be particularly open to appreciate the texts that resist it.

Interestingly, a text like *Claire of the Sea Light* demands an interpretation in its own terms, and it resists critical appropriation by refusing to submit to any kind of monolithic story of Haitians, which is something that any theoretical background that we may want to apply to the text should consider along with the generalizations that necessarily have to be made while analysing. Although, by vindicating Haitian lives as grievable, Danticat is also putting them on the critical map of trauma, engaging in a dialogue with contemporary theories, and this will counter those lives’ invisibility and silencing. We could say that just as Claire goes back to the community after symbolically associating herself to the maroons, moving in-between affiliative identity and relation, postcolonial texts like *Claire of the Sea Light* are also constructed on the tension between difference from and relation to contemporary literature and criticism in a global scale. As long as we never lose sight of unequal power relations, the interplay between affiliation and relation may thus contribute to illuminate the debates on the relationship between trauma theory and the postcolony in the development of a postcolonial trauma

body of theories. All of these elements should be seen as participants in a contact zone where trauma and postcolonial theories, contexts and texts interact with local symbols and traditions, like the Haitian and Caribbean ones in this case.

The most positive impact of the emendations to the trauma critical paradigm detailed at the beginning of this article is without a doubt that trauma theory has been postcolonialized—challenged, debated, revised from a postcolonial way of looking at the world—which has made it better, and the most promising aspect of postcolonial trauma theory may be precisely that it is still in the process of being articulated. The pitfalls of applying a theoretical framework like trauma theory to postcolonial contexts, texts and experiences may never be completely overcome, and the relation between trauma theory and the postcolony will probably continue to be more tense and contentious than balanced or harmonious. Even if reaching a “truly” or “fully” decolonized trauma theory may not even be possible, postcolonial trauma theory seen as process, rather than conclusion—with all the constant self-questioning that this entails—will allow for the exploration of new encounters, new contact zones, places of dialogue, opposition, contradiction, and this will undoubtedly make it a fruitful epistemological tool.

### Acknowledgements

The research carried out for the writing of this article is part of a project financed by the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness (MINECO) (code FFI2012-32719) and the University of Zaragoza (JIUZ-2014-HUM-02). The author is also thankful for the support of the Government of Aragón and the European Social Fund (ESF) (code H05).

### Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

### References and Notes

1. Irene Visser. “Decolonizing Trauma Theory: Retrospect and Prospects.” *Humanities* 4 (2015): 250–65.
2. Michael Rothberg. “Decolonizing Trauma Studies: A Response.” *Studies in the Novel* 40 (2008): 224–34.
3. Irene Visser. “Trauma Theory: Global Aspirations and Local Emendations.” In *The Local and Global in Postcolonial Literature*. Edited by Punyashree Panda. New Delhi: Authorspress, 2014, pp. 40–57.
4. Michela Borzaga. “Trauma in the Postcolony: Towards a New Theoretical Approach.” In *Trauma, Memory and Narrative in the Contemporary South African Novel*. Edited by Edwald Mengel and Michela Borzaga. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2012, pp. 65–91.
5. Cathy Caruth. “Trauma and Experience: Introduction.” In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Edited by Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, pp. 3–12.
6. Stef Craps. *Postcolonial Witnessing: Trauma Out of Bounds*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

7. David van Nuys. "Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder: An Interview with Pat Bracken." *Community Counseling Services Inc.*, 1 January 2010. Available online: [http://www.communitycounselingservices.org/poc/view\\_doc.php?type=doc&id=33858](http://www.communitycounselingservices.org/poc/view_doc.php?type=doc&id=33858) (accessed on 1 July 2015).
8. Nancy van Styvendale. "The Trans/historicity of Trauma in Jeannette Armstrong's *Slash* and Sherman Alexie's *Indian Killer*." *Studies in the Novel* 40 (2008): 203–23.
9. Merlinda Bobis. "Passion to *Pasyon*: Playing Militarism." In *The Splintered Glass: Facets of Trauma in the Post-Colony and Beyond*. Edited by Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allué. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011, pp. ix–xxvi.
10. Laura S. Brown. "Not Outside the Range: One Feminist Perspective on Psychic Trauma." In *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Edited by Cathy Caruth. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, pp. 100–12.
11. Dolores Herrero, and Sonia Baelo-Allué. "Introduction." In *The Splintered Glass: Facets of Trauma in the Post-Colony and Beyond*. Edited by Dolores Herrero and Sonia Baelo-Allué. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011, pp. ix–xxvi.
12. Melvin Konner. "Trauma, Adaptation, and Resilience: A Cross-Cultural and Evolutionary Perspective." In *Understanding Trauma: Integrating Biological, Clinical and Cultural Perspectives*. Edited by Laurence J. Kirmayer, Robert Lemelson and Mark Barad. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 300–38.
13. Irene Visser. "Trauma and Power in Postcolonial Literary Studies." In *Contemporary Approaches in Literary Trauma Theory*. Edited by Michelle Balaev. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014, pp. 106–30.
14. Michelle Balaev. *The Nature of Trauma in American Novels*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012.
15. Roger Luckhurst. *The Trauma Question*. London: Routledge, 2008.
16. Irene Visser. "Trauma Theory and Postcolonial Literary Studies." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47 (2011): 270–82.
17. Jenny Edkins. *Trauma and the Memory of Politics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
18. Jo Collins. "The Ethics and Aesthetics of Representing Trauma: The Textual Politics of Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*." *Journal of Postcolonial Writing* 47 (2011): 5–17.
19. Irene Visser. "Entanglements of Trauma: Relationality and Toni Morrison's *Home*." *Postcolonial Text* 9 (2014): 1–21.
20. Wulf Kansteiner, and Harald Weilnböck. "Against the Concept of Cultural Trauma (or How I Learned to Love the Suffering of Others without the Help of Psychotherapy)." In *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies*. Edited by Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning. Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2010, pp. 229–40.
21. Mary Louise Pratt. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. London: Routledge, 1992.
22. Edwidge Danticat. *Claire of the Sea Light*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2013. Some of the ideas on my analysis of this text were part of a paper presented at the 38th AEDEAN Conference, Universidad de Alcalá de Henares, Alcalá de Henares, Spain, 12–14 November 2014.
23. For an overview of the authors who have analysed Danticat's texts as trauma fiction, see Silvia Martínez-Falquina. "Postcolonial Trauma Theory and the Short Story Cycle: Edwidge Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*." *ES: Revista de Filología Inglesa* 35 (2014): 171–92. This article and a

previous one entitled “Memory, Diaspora and the Female Body in Little Haiti: Edwidge Danticat’s ‘Reading Lessons’.” *Revista de Estudios Norteamericanos* 17 (2013): 93–111, also offer a critical engagement with trauma theory through the analysis of other works by Edwidge Danticat.

24. Bonnie Lyons. “An Interview with Edwidge Danticat.” *Contemporary Literature* 44 (2003): 183–98.
25. The most obvious case in point is the controversy over the issue of virginity “testing” that she represented in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*. London: Abacus, 1994, and which she has commented on extensively. See for example “I am Not a Journalist” (*Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*. New York: Vintage: 2011, pp. 41–58), or her interview with Bonnie Lyons [24].
26. Edwidge Danticat. *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work*. New York: Vintage, 2011.
27. Leeat Granek. “Mourning Sickness: The Politicizations of Grief.” *Review of General Psychology* 18 (2014): 61–68.
28. Erika Lawson. “Disenfranchised Grief and Social Inequality: Bereaved African Canadians and Oppositional Narratives about the Violent Death of Friends and Family Members.” *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 37 (2014): 2092–109.
29. Leslie G. Desmangles. “The Maroon Republics and Religious Diversity in Colonial Haiti.” *Anthropos* 85 (1990): 475–82.
30. Judith Butler. *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* London: Verso, 2009.
31. Andrew Flood. “Haiti: A History of Intervention, Occupation, and Resistance.” 2010. Available online: <http://anarchism.pageabode.com/sites/anarchism.pageabode.com/files/HaitiHistory.pdf> (accessed on 1 July 2015). Flood offers a succinct account of the foreign intervention of Haiti throughout its history, which he sees as escalating after the 2010 earthquake. In his words, “[i]n the modern world, imperialism almost always wears a humanitarian mask”, and the terrible consequences of the earthquake are part of the crises that, as studied by Naomi Klein in *The Shock Doctrine* (2008), capitalism often uses to impose restructuring on people that would otherwise resist. As a result, in recent years the people of Haiti have suffered greatly under occupation-imposed restructuring programs.
32. She does adopt a more directly combative stance in lectures and interviews, and in other works such as her memoir *Brother, I’m Dying*. New York: Vintage, 2008, about Danticat’s father and uncle’s lives and deaths, including her uncle’s persecution in Haiti and his detention and tragic death in Krome detention center.
33. For a full definition of the short story cycle, a peculiar case of the simultaneity of closure and openness, both formally and in terms of meaning, and an analysis of its relevance to interpret the representation of trauma, see [23].
34. Brinda Mehta. “Diasporic Trauma, Memory, and Migration in Edwidge Danticat’s *The Dew Breaker*.” In *Notions of Identity, Diaspora, and Gender in Caribbean Woman’s Writing*. New York: Palgrave, 2009, pp. 63–88.
35. Elvira Pulitano. “Landscape, Memory and Survival in the Fiction of Edwidge Danticat.” *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* 6 (2008): Article 5.
36. Paul Naylor. *Poetic Investigations: Singing the Holes in History*. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1999.

37. Edwidge Danticat. “Edwidge Danticat Reaches Back and Forward in her New Novel. An Interview with Jeffrey Brown.” *PBS Newshour*, 17 September 2013. Available online: <http://video.pbs.org/video/2365081056/> (accessed on 1 July 2015).
38. Kona Shen. “History of Haiti: 1492–1805.” Available online: <http://library.brown.edu/haitihistory/index.html> (accessed on 1 July 2015). In “Recovering the Fugitive History of *Marronage* in Saint Domingue, 1770–1791.” *The Journal of Caribbean History* 46 (2012): 121–53, Jason Daniels tries to dismantle this generalized view by studying the decline of maroonage in the eve of the revolution, whereas Richard D.E. Burton offers an interesting deconstruction of the maroon myth in *Le Roman marron: études sur la littérature martiniquaise contemporaine*. Paris: L’Harmattan, 1997. In spite of these and other revisions of the maroon relevance, its romantic impact in the articulation of Haitian national identity is undeniable, as illustrated by the “Le Negre Marron” sculpture in front of the National Palace in Haiti’s capital Port-au-Prince, which still stands while the Palace was destroyed by the earthquake. When interviewed, Danticat has openly stated “I’m maroonage”, and this “situates her writing in the long history of black resistance and survival” Isabela Penier. “Engendering the National History of Haiti in Edwidge Danticat’s *Krik? Krak!*” *Anglica: An International Journal of English Studies* 19 (2011): 123–31.
39. Ricky K. Green. *Voices in Black Political Thought*. New York: Peter Lang, 2005.
40. The echoes of Édouard Glissant in Danticat’s fiction have been accounted for by Elvira Pulitano [35], and Carole Sweeney. “The Unmaking of the World: Haiti, History, and Writing in Edouard Glissant and Edwidge Danticat.” *Atlantic Studies* 4 (2007): 51–66.
41. Édouard Glissant. *Poetics of Relation*. Translated by Betsy Wing. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1997.
42. Renee H. Shea. “A Family Story: Danticat Talks about her Newest and Most Personal Work.” In *Edwidge Danticat: A Reader’s Guide*. Edited by Martin Munro. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2010, pp. 187–93.
43. Sam Jones. “Aid, Cholera and Protest: Life in Haiti Five Years after the Earthquake.” *The Guardian*, 12 January 2015. Available online: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jan/12/haiti-earthquake-five-years-on-village-solidarite> (accessed on 1 July 2015).