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Insularity, translation, and genre: the case of two Caribbean writers, Hazel Robinson and Edwidge Danticat

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Thesis abstract:

The Caribbean is the meeting point of many cultures (European, African, American) and has been through a complex historical process, marked by the consequences of the colonization process. Natural disasters, like hurricanes and earthquakes, political instability and exploitative practices also have deeply affected the region. These events give the literature and culture of this area unique characteristics and complexity.

In my thesis, I study two Caribbean authors whose works show the complexity of this region from a cross-cultural and crosslinguistic perspective. The first writer is Hazel Robinson, born in 1935 in San Andrés, Colombia. The archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia had a historical process different from the rest of the country, which led to an oftentimes tense relationship with the Colombian government, oscillating between indifference and efforts to assimilate the islands. In her novels and articles Robinson portrays the history of San Andrés and Providencia, promoting and defending their literature, language, and culture.

The other writer studied in this thesis is Edwidge Danticat (Port-au-Prince, 1969). Although Danticat has lived in the United States since she was twelve, Haiti remains the main setting in her texts. In her narrative she often explores the country's traumatic history and her own complicated relationship with it as a diasporic writer. My study focuses on three of her works: one novel, one collection of short stories, and an essay, which gives my research a broader perspective of some of the themes present in her narrative.

In conclusion, I study the works of these two Caribbean authors in the framework of a comparative study based on ecocriticism and gender studies. My objective is to see how these authors are challenging the notions of nationality and identity and creating a new way to read the history of their countries and of the Caribbean, from the perspective of women protagonists, traditionally marginalized in their countries' historiography.

Contents:

Introduction:

1) Defining the Caribbean

The Caribbean may seem easy to define, at least geographically, as the territory composed by the group of islands that share the interior sea framed by the American coastline to the north, west, and south, and the Atlantic Ocean to the east. However, some historians have challenged these rigid borders, as some apply the term 'Caribbean' only to the Antilles (or island territories), while others regard the continental portion of the region (the Caribbean coast of Colombia and Venezuela, for example) as included therein, owing to their cultural and economic influence, and their shared history as colonies of European nations. Others, such as Antonio Benítez Rojo (1997) in *The Repeating Island*, even consider the south of the United States and the north-east of Brazil as culturally part of the Caribbean, due to their historical ties and socio-economic similarities in their development. These regions, for example, have in common with the insular Caribbean the institution of slavery and the economic model of the plantation, as the basis of their economy. The plantation system and chattel slavery had enduring consequences on the region's contemporary society, as Herbert S. Klein (1986) points out *African slavery in the Latin America and the Caribbean*, his study of the phenomenon in the region.

According to Klein, the institution of slavery resulted in a rigid social structure in the American colonies, where society was divided along rigid racial lines. In these colonies, a small group of white Europeans controlled a large population of enslaved people (some black and some mixed race, often descendants of enslaved women and white settlers) forced to work in the large plantations that sustained the colonies' economy. In between these two groups there were some free people of colour and poor white Europeans, who did not own any land or slaves. This system not only had a deep effect on the social composition of the islands, but it also changed their

environment, through the clearance of the land for significant expansion of monoculture crops (mainly sugar and cotton plantations) and the introduction of European plants and animals that often pushed local flora and fauna to the brink of extinction (this aspect will be studied in more detail in following sections).

The institution of slavery also influenced the economic and political relationships of different European nations (mainly England, France, and Spain) between the sixteenth and nineteenth century, that often went to war to control these territories and the trade routes between America, Africa, and Europe. This created a compartmentalization of the region that continues to this day, as the islands tend to gravitate to those with shared language and history to create socio-economic and political alliances, as the French Departements D'Outre Mer, the West Indies and British Overseas territories and the CELAC for the former Spanish colonies in the region. The result of these internal division in the Caribbean is that often there are stronger ties between the islands and their former colonial metropoles, than with their neighbours.

On the other hand, many critics have pointed out that the rigid topographical definition of the Caribbean mentioned before does not reflect its complex history nor its internal divisions. Anton Allahar (2005), for example, states that "The Caribbean can be many things for many people" (125) and that it "can also be seen to have a marvellous elasticity that defies the imposition of clear geographic boundaries, has no distinct religious tradition, no agreed-upon set of political values, and no single cultural orientation" (125). Thomas D. Boswell (2003) echoes this idea in *Understanding the Contemporary Caribbean* when he points out the difficulties of placing the Caribbean in a clear geographical frame as "Hundreds of other islands are technically located in the Caribbean but are possessions of Central and South American countries; most geographers consider them part of Latin America instead of the Caribbean" (21). Boswell's statement also

shows the rift between the Spanish-speaking islands that technically belong to Latin America, both historically and culturally, and the English- and French-speaking nations of the region. Contrary to the Spanish colonies, these territories underwent a different colonial process, as many of these territories had a later independence process and many of them continue to have a close relationship with the colonial metropoles and even depend on them politically and economically (as can be seen in the French DOM or Departments d'Outre-Mer mentioned before, Martinique and Guadeloupe, among other territories). Consequently, the Caribbean lacks unifying elements, the geographical rift reflecting the cultural and linguistic divisions inherited by their relationship with the former colonial powers. However, although colonialism and slavery had traumatic consequences for both the people and the landscape of the region, these institutions also serve as the basis of Caribbean identity. For example, in the book *Éloge de la créolité* (1989), co-authored by Jean Bernabé, Raphael Confiant, and Patrick Chamoiseau, these writers analyse how slavery and the plantation serve as the base of the creolization process that in turn led to a particular identity in the Caribbean. To have a better understanding of these ideas, we have to briefly examine some of the theories that have shaped Caribbean philosophy.

2) *Négritude* or *créolité*?

In this section I am going to briefly examine some of the most important theoretical approaches to the issue of Caribbean identity and how they are going to be used in this study, as the Caribbean has been frequently examined from the perspective of postcolonial studies. The term 'post-colonial' is now commonly used to refer to the period after colonialism while 'Postcolonial', is seen as more critical, as it interrogates the wider political, social and cultural realities in the formerly colonised regions of Latin America and the Caribbean. Applying the first term to the

Caribbean is inaccurate, as many islands of the Caribbean are not in a postcolonial situation. Most French-speaking territories remain French departments and territories, for example.

In any case, there are some important postcolonial thinkers in the region, but they often wrote and published their pivotal works outside of the region, contributing to this idea of the Caribbean seen from outside. It should be noted that postcolonial theory still offers valued tools to study the region and the works of both Danticat and Robinson, especially texts about post-colonial women writers like Carine M. Mardorossian's 2005 study, *Reclaiming difference*, Shalini Puri's studies and Gina Wisker's. We will see this gender aspect in more detail later in this introduction, for the moment I will focus on some of the approaches that have been proposed to have a better understanding of how Caribbean identity has evolved through the years. As we will see, studying texts produced in the region (or by diasporic Caribbean writers) allows us to understand the complex history of the region, and issues like the traumatic legacy of colonialism and slavery, the often complicated relationship between human beings and nature, and the problem of identity tied, as mentioned previously, to exile and cross-border movements. All these topics frequently appear in the work of the two writers studied here: Hazel Robinson Abrahams (Colombia) and Edwidge Danticat (Haiti-United States).

The first movement that we must examine is *Négritude. Négritude* was a cultural and literary movement, born in the 1930s by Aimé Césaire (1913-2008), Léon-Gontran Damas (1912-1978) and Léopold Sédar Senghor (1906-12001). Glissant was born in Martinique, Damas in French Guiana, and Senghor in Senegal. Therefore, they had first hand experience of being born under the French colonial system and its consequences in their homelands. *Négritude* was a counter-cultural movement born from the Pan African movement that emerged at the beginning of the twentieth century, exploring African identity, like the Harlem renaissance. These writers,

therefore, have to be considered within the context of a global network of influences and of ideas that emerged during the 1920s and 1930s and travelled between different backgrounds. According to Irele Abiola (1965), "*Négritude* is this at the same time a literary and an ideological movement" (500). In other words, "a psychological response to the social and cultural conditions of the 'colonial situation', and secondly as a fervent quest for a new and original orientation" (499). As Abiola explains, this movement was born of the "political and cultural uprooting of black people in general by colonial conquest" (499-500). The movement was also deeply shaped by a sense of alienation, born from the condition of exile that these writers experimented: "For the French-speaking Negro writer, this situation is signified by his physical exile in Europe" (500). The *négritude* movement, although critical of the French colonial system, was born in France, where these writers lived in those years. For the Caribbean writers in the movement, the feeling of alienation mentioned before is heightened, as Abiola explains: "because of the total orientation of their society towards western values, symbolized by whiteness, was more a source of shame and frustration than for the for the Africans" (503). Finally, despite its importance and influence for different Caribbean writers, *Négritude* was not a purely Caribbean movement and despite its importance *Négritude* was later criticized by various writers, for its narrow approach to Black culture while also recognizing its value for the development of a local identity. This movement interrogated the imposition of European cultural values and traditions on colonised people and drew attention to the effect of self-estrangement that colonialism has had on Africans and African-Caribbeans.

Originally, the *négritude* thinkers were more interested in the issue of black identity in a postcolonial context in general, not specifically in the Caribbean setting. According to Abiola, Senghor wanted to define the idea of a "Negro soul" and this is the reason he turned to Africa's

past. As Abiola explains, for Senghor "the African's distinctive qualities [were defined] mainly by opposition to the western, often by setting a positive value on what the west derided in the African" (518). It offered a very personal interpretation of African culture and identity, based largely on the theme of subversion and revolt, as Abiola states "the theme of revolt in the literature of *négritude* represents a reinforcement of the antagonism created by the colonial situation, between the white master and the black subordinate" (508). Senghor ideas cannot be fully applied to the Caribbean as its identity is not a result only of African culture, but it also has European and indigenous elements. However, the movement had a historical debt with the Haitian revolution and its emergence in the twentieth century is directly linked to this historical event. For example, Munro (2004) calls this upheaval the "big bang" that led to the birth of Négritude more than a century later. The Haitian revolution was the first successful slave revolt and Haiti became the first black republic in the world. However, not all of the *négritude* thinkers related to the Haiti and the Haitian revolution in the same way. For example, Munro states that while Senghor mentions Haiti in some of his poems, showing it as the "symbolic heart of the colonized, pan-African world a nation that, despite, or indeed because of its historical daring, is still 'crucified'" (3), in general he remains centered around the African struggle and the colonial systems there. Meanwhile, for Césaire and Damas Haiti remains the prime example of revolt and struggle against colonial rule. Césaire's study of the revolution focused specially on the intellectual advancement of Black people, and how they had recovered their history and their culture. Additionally, Césaire called for a political, linguistic, racial and cultural renewal with regard to the relationship between black and white people as well as for black people's re-assertion of their race and colour that, from his point of view, the Haitian revolution had fully embodied. However, in Haiti their attitude towards *Négritude* and its African legacy was ambivalent. As Munro (2004) explains, while Haitians prided

themselves on being the first Black nation in the world, in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century "Haitian elite attitudes towards Africa were at best ambivalent, and at worst echoed European racist prejudices" (5). This would change with the *Indigénisme* movement that would give importance to the Haitian past and recover its indigenous roots. Later, some aspect of *négritude* would be integrated into Haitian *Noirisme* by the Duvalier regime, as we will see in more detail in the first chapter. To conclude, it is important to mention that despite its importance, *négritude* is not widely studied either in Anglophone or Hispanophone studies. However, as some of the issues discussed by the *négritude* writers (such as questions around black people's ethnic and cultural identity in the context of colonialism) were central to Caribbean writing across the linguistic divide, it is important to take into account in this study.

Creolité can be seen as the intellectual heir of *négritude.* As mentioned before, it was born in the 1980s with the book *Éloge de la créolité.* In this text the authors propose a Caribbean identity as its own entity, which is no longer European nor African, while recognising these elements in their cultural heritage. As Murdoch explains, the discourse of *créolité* sought to contest the "long-standing binary perspective that saw the Caribbean as part of an either/or, Africa/Europe continuum whose singularity still lay in the concept of separation" (184). Similarly, the creolists go beyond the geographical definition of 'Caribeanness', instead proposing *Creoleness* or Creolization, an identity born of the coming together of the different cultures present in the region (African, American, and European). Furthermore, this notion of *créolité* transcends the concepts of nationality and cultural identity, a problematic notion in the Caribbean context, due to its tradition of exile and migration.

Another important aspect of creolization is its on-going aspect, as the *créolistes* argue that these diverse cultures did not merge, but instead remain independent from one another. Glissant's

(2008) notion of *identité rizhome,* by opposition to an *identité racine* (root), reflects this idea of mobility and fluidity. Glissant adopts Deleuze and Gauttari's (1987) concept of "rhizome" (a plant system with many roots instead of one) to underline the diversity of the region and its fluidity. However, for Glissant this diversity presents itself under the image of a mosaic, composed of different cultural elements that remain distinct from one another rather than interacting with each other as would be implicit in a process of merging or mixing. Glissant also emphasizes the impact on Caribbean society of the violent experience of plantation economy, with the trauma of enslavement of African people and the annihilation of the indigenous Arawaks and Caribs by the European colonizers. This traumatic experience had a deep impact on the Caribbean people's sense of identity, their connection with their past, and their sense of history. They had to create their own cultural traditions and artistic expressions, sometimes in open confrontation and sometimes in dialogue with the European history and culture imposed during the colonial regime.

On the other hand, some recent articles have criticized the creolist approach: for example, H. Adlai Murdoch (2001) states in his analysis of the movement that one main critique has been the absence of female writers in the canon proposed by the creolists. Similarly, this approach focuses on the French Caribbean and especially the influence of writers like Edouard Glissant, excluding other Caribbean territories, thereby contributing to the linguistic compartmentalization of the region. Furthermore, *creoleness* seems to be restricted to the realm of literature and the arts but their exploration of cultural diversity as a basis for the constructive cross-cultural encounters has become an important concept for the re-appraisal of Caribbean history. Despite these issues, the creolist theories still have value for this analysis, as the creolists were the first to define Caribbean identity as its own entity, as they stated that they are no longer European nor African but have their own independent and clearly differentiated identity. Both *antillanité* (a more recent

term) and créolité have emphasized the fertility of cultural diversity and focused on hybridity and creolisation.

Finally, it should be noted that even though the creolization movement was primarily developed in the Francophone Caribbean, this idea of a Caribbean or Antillean culture can also be found in other studies of the region, such as Benítez Rojo's work, as stated previously. Since the 1980s this common identity has been expanded by new elements, such as the prevalence of natural disasters in the region and the relationship between human beings and the environment, as we will see in the following section.

3) Nature and identity

The elasticity and complexity of the area, accordingly, has led many Caribbean writers to use natural elements to try to define the exact meaning of "Caribbeanness" and to find through them a common identity. For example, Glissant, mentioned previously, proposes the image of the archipelago and the rhizome in his essays, while Kamau Brathwaite in essays such as *Caribbean man in space and time* (originally published in 1975) offers the term "tidalectics" and states that "the unity is submarine", while Benítez Rojo suggests the idea of "the repeating island" in his analysis of the region. Although the terms differ, these images have in common their use of the sea that gives the region its name to illustrate the cultural unity of the territory and of its inhabitants, despite their different languages and colonial legacies. The sea underlines the fluidity of Caribbean identity, while also hinting at their shared past, as these writers also study their shared history to find common traits that unify the region despite its complicated geography and the cultural and linguistic barriers mentioned previously. This study of the past plays a crucial role in Caribbean identity, because as Glissant (1992) posits in the essay *History-histories-stories*, the Caribbean exists in a never-ending and catastrophic present, caused by its disconnection from the past as

creolization created a cultural amnesia across the region, erasing the indigenous and African legacies, their languages, culture, and traditions, in favour of the European legacy. In this context of generalized amnesia, the writer plays an essential role, as "the writer must contribute to re-constituting its tormented chronology: that is, to reveal the creative energy of a dialectic re-established between nature and culture in the Caribbean" (65).

The idea of a never-ending and catastrophic present also influenced Martin Munro's *Tropical Apocalypse: Haiti and the Caribbean End Times* (2015). Here Munro uses disaster studies to explore why the literature of the area often represents the Caribbean as a place prone to catastrophes. As Munro explains in the introduction, "disaster studies" refers to an interdisciplinary field, embracing both the political and cultural effects of disasters. According to Munro, these types of events are so widespread in the Caribbean that they create, in a sense, their own normalcy, while also creating their own conception of time, as the Caribbean lives in a time without end and without a past, a paradoxical "endless end time" (18). Munro also divides catastrophic events into two categories: human and natural. The first category includes slavery, wars, violent revolutions, political and economic instability, etc. The second one relates to earthquakes, volcanoes, hurricanes, among other natural phenomena. Additionally, human conditions often aggravate the consequences and frequency of natural disasters, through overcrowded cities, over exploitation of the land and the sea, etc. The apocalyptic cycle, therefore, creates a complex relationship between human beings and nature, as Munro points out: "Disasters also cast into sharp relief humans' relationship with nature, particularly if one holds that human subjectivity is formed in and through nature" (29). All these catastrophic elements can be seen in what Munro calls Haiti's "culture of disaster" (29) and its complex history, but the fraught

connection between human beings and the environment, shaped by the legacies of plantations, slavery, and colonial exploitation, persist through the Caribbean.

This apocalyptic culture, on the other hand, connects with the region's contradictory image in the popular imagination. According to Allahar (2005), the Caribbean has always offered many contrasting facets, often represented in art and literature as both wonderful and fearsome. For example, although in the chronicles of European travellers the Caribbean often appears as the place of legends such as El Dorado and other Edenic images, those literary texts also associated the place with monstrous creatures such as the cannibals, who gave the area its name. In modern times, this dichotomy can be seen in the contrast between touristic pamphlets presenting the Caribbean as an untouched paradise and the region's proclivity to natural disasters (mainly hurricanes and earthquakes) often aggravated by economic crises and political instability. These contrasting images have been appropriated and criticized by many Caribbean writers, as we will see in the third chapter.

The image of the island often serves as another key natural element and an important theme in Caribbean literature, as the region is made up of more than one hundred islands, encompassing several nations and sovereign states. Literary texts often emphasize the islands' duality, depicting these spaces as combinations of dystopic and utopic images, both menacing and protecting. According to François Barrié (2011), in *Métaphores de l'île et ses topoi littéraires,* islands have always represented "an isolated microcosm, a closed world which is sometimes attractive and voluntary, (islands of light, blessings), sometimes repulsive and constrained (islands of mist, disastrous)" (1)[1]. Barrié explains that this dual image of the island creates complex dualities centre/periphery, inside/outside, freedom/confinement, dystopias/utopias. These dualities, amply

[1] My translation. Original quote: "un microcosme isolé, monde clos qui est tantôt attractif et volontaire, (îles de lumière, bienheureuses), tantôt répulsif et contraint. (îles de brume, funestes)".

explored in European art and literature at the height of colonial expansion between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, resulted in a boom of literary islands and castaway narratives, such as Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. As Rebecca Weaver-Hightower (2006) explains in *Empire Islands*, castaway stories served to popularize the image of exotic lands inhabited by non-threatening indigenous people, welcoming the beneficial influence of the civilizing (white and male) European. These ideas permeate the history of the two territories I study here: Haiti and San Andrés.

4) Comparative analysis:

As mentioned before, the study of the Caribbean tends to focus on the specific linguistic areas (Hispanic, French, and English). However, this compartmentalisation of Caribbean studies following linguistic divisions led to the absence of any sustained studies that acknowledges cultural and literary dialogues within the Caribbean. Furthermore, the terms, Spanish-, English-, and French speaking also have a problematic legacy. These expressions gloss over differences between the various former, Spanish, English and French-speaking colonies, while also continuing to posit the former colonial metropolises as the centre and the main identity for these territories. As this study will show, the relationship between, language, identity and power remains a constant theme in Caribbean writers' works.

This analysis studies two very different territories (Haiti and San Andrés) and, despite their similarities (as island territories colonized by European nations), they present specific historical processes and issues that will be considered in my textual analysis. This comparative approach brings together one writer from a Francophone country (Haiti) and one from a Hispanic background but with English-speaking influence (San Andrés). This focus, however, reproduces the compartmentalization of the region inherited from the colonial regimes, creating a false

division of the region, emphasizing differences, and ignoring the shared history and cultural influences of the Caribbean. A comparative analysis is necessary to have a better understanding of the region and to explore the issue of Caribbean identity and how the writers of this area have defined themselves as Caribbean people. While the structure of this thesis seems to continue to compartmentalize these writers, with ~~c~~hapters two and three focusing on Danticat and the following two studying Robinson, it is necessary to have a deeper understanding of their works and approaches to Caribbean identity. As we will see, while coming from different countries, Danticat and Robinson share topics and aesthetic approaches. In this sense, the first chapter compares the two writers and their backgrounds to underline their similarities and common themes.

Additionally, the Hispanic and Francophone Caribbean are rarely studied together in English academic texts, due to the linguistic barrier between them and the lack of available translations in English. The different languages of the Caribbean exacerbate the problems of undertaking a comparative study and accessing texts from different linguistic areas, as translation efforts focus on the more successful and best-known writers. While Edwidge Danticat writes in English and her books have been successful in English-speaking countries (mainly the United States), the other writer examined here, Hazel Robinson Abrahams, is not very well known. Robinson's first novel was reissued in 2010 in a bilingual edition, but the rest of her work has not been translated and remains difficult to access, even in Colombia. Because of this, there is a lack of critical studies about her work outside the Hispanic sphere.[2] On the other hand, while Danticat's

[2] Only two articles about Robinson can be found in the MLA International bibliography:
(i)Valle Idárraga, M. M. del. (2011). Escenario edénico y naturaleza prístina en *Sail Ahoy!!! ¡Vela a la vista!* y *The Spirit of Persistence*, de Hazel Robinson Abrahams: Dos formas de recuperar una isla colonizada. *Estudios de Literatura Colombiana,* 28, 17–38.

texts are more accessible to an Anglophone audience, as stated before, her texts remain largely inaccessible for the people in her homeland, as Haiti's official languages are Creole and French. Additionally, Haiti has one of the lowest literacy rates in the continent. This causes a sense of alienation and even guilt in the writers who produce their work outside of the country. Many of these writers sometimes feel they are exploiting their country's past for their own benefit, as we will see in the third chapter, where I analyse in more detail the Haitian diaspora and Danticat's own experience as a diasporic writer. Finally, in terms of Francophone studies, Haiti is in a very peculiar situation.

Contrary to other French-speaking territories in the Caribbean, like Martinique and Guadeloupe who remain part of France, Haiti's early independence led to a distinct literary, cultural, and political development. To this day Haiti continues in a complicated relationship with its former colonial metropole and its past. It has maintained an administrative and educational system based on French republican ideals and French continues to be one of its official languages (the other been French creole), while also seeking to create their own distinctive identity. Since their independence, in the early nineteenth century, Haiti has reaffirmed their African legacy.

5) Gender focus

Finally, it should also be noted that women writers in the Caribbean are still marginalized and forgotten, both in terms of production (sales and translations) and in academic studies of the region. Due to this marginalization, texts produced by Caribbean women were largely created in response to the male-centric literary canon, as Evelyn O'Callaghan (2004) states in her study of

(ii) Rosas Consuegra, Adriana. (2019). Resistencia e identidad en la isla de Providencia a través de la literatura y el cine. *Anuari de Filologia: Literatures Contemporànies*, 9. 63-73.

West Indian women writers: “White men did not write them into the official discourse of colonial rule, because they had no official part in the project; and they could not or did not write about themselves until centuries later (the 1990s)” (1). O’Callaghan goes on to state that although there are some early nineteenth century texts written by Caribbean women (such as Mary Prince and Mary Seacole’s accounts), in the first half of the twentieth century literary accounts by women remain scarce, as “the context of a history of colonial deprivation [which] decreed very limited access to women generally, and non-white women in particular to education and even to basic literacy” (1-2). Additionally, the few women who were able to write had little opportunity to publish their texts, as colonial authorities controlled the newspapers and printing presses and they “catered to the ‘English’ tastes cultivated by the plantocracy” (2). Although O’Callaghan’s study focuses mainly on the West Indies and on nineteenth century women writers, these ideas still apply to the writers analysed here, as we will see in more detail in the following chapters.

Other important studies about the similarities between these women writers have pointed out that they often share an interest in storytelling and oral literature. For example, Gina Wisker (2006) points out how the women she studies “explore motherlands, mother tongues, oral storytelling and poetry, nation language […] women’s experiences and the importance of telling tales of individuals lives” (93). As we will see, both Robinson and Danticat rescued the oral aspect of Caribbean literature, showing that nursery rhymes, bedtime stories, and even gossip play an important role in the literature of both San Andrés and Haiti. These narrative practices, often exclusively feminine, offer an alternative history of their homelands, that escapes censorship and other silencing practices. Both Danticat and Robinson place at the centre of their stories unique female narrators that have a deep interest in (re)writing both the history of their countries and their own personal stories. I will investigate the extent to which contemporary women’s writing reveals

issues that seem to move beyond linguistic and colonial boundaries between different Caribbean societies and how they use these narratives to create a new identity and a new sense of belonging.

In conclusion, my thesis examines literary texts against the background of the Caribbean complex history. My thesis also shows that Caribbean cultural identities need to be explored not only in relation to the former European colonising powers and their cultures, but also in their interaction with each other in order to fully conceptualise their complexity. As my study will show, these territories have always had cultural and economic bounds. It considers different theoretical approaches and uses them to examine the works of two writers that seem to have little in common, because an area as diverse and complex as the Caribbean calls for a study that takes into account different theoretical and literary traditions and hence reflects more of its stylistic and thematic complexity. However, as the first chapter will show, Haiti and San Andrés have many cultural similarities that Robinson and Danticat's books explore in detail.

Chapter 1: A historical approach to Haiti and San Andrés.

Having established the theoretical frame of this study and its limitation, it is important now to establish the background of the writers that I study in the following chapters. In this chapter first I study the history of the two territories explored in this study. This historical approach allows us to have a better understanding of the writers' background and to underline the similarities between Haiti and San Andrés past. In particular, this chapter will study how different forms of colonization shaped these islands' societies. They have in common slavery and how the experience of uprooting has influenced the relation of its inhabitants to the place, their history as well as their identity. This chapter explores how the slave trade and the colonial need for cheap labour created the linguistic, ethnic and cultural diversity that characterises these territories (and the Caribbean in general). Then I will establish the specific context for the two writers I study, to have a better understanding of their thematic interests. This analysis will allow me to trace a cultural and literary bridge between the two authors and to show how both of them place historical events at the centre of their books and how they both question the notion of identity imposed on them and on their territories.

1) Saint Domingue, the riches colony in the Americas

Hispaniola, the largest island in the Caribbean after Cuba, hosts the Spanish Dominican Republic on the eastern side and French Haiti on the western side. Columbus and his crew encountered it on their first voyage, in 1492, which makes it one of the first American territories to have been seen by Europeans. Shortly thereafter they renamed the island as Hispaniola (as Ayiti was its indigenous name) and established the first colony in the Americas on the northern coast of the island, La Isabela, named after the Spanish queen. The rapid colonization of the island reflected what would be the Spanish strategy in their American colonies in the following centuries: establishing settlements, converting the native population to Catholicism and then enslaving them

to work on the mines and in agriculture. This led to the decimation of the native population due to sickness, starvation, and exhaustion. For example, according to Arthur and Dash's in *A Haiti Anthology* (1999), "within a stunningly short period of time the vast majority of Tainos in Hispaniola had perished" (17). The Spanish settlers had to replace them with enslaved Africans, which arrived in the island as soon as 1501. At first, these enslaved people worked in the island's mines, but as the mineral supplies quickly dwindled, the settlers started using them in agriculture (coffee, tobacco, and sugar cane crops, mainly). However, as Arthur and Dash also state, "The Spanish were increasingly shifting their attention to the gold and silver-rich colonies of Mexico and Peru" (17) and as the colonizing efforts shifted from the Caribbean islands to the mainland, the Spanish settlers eventually lost interest in the island of La Hispaniola. By the mid-seventeenth century, most of the original Spanish settlers had abandoned the island and moved to other colonies in mainland America, but they were soon replaced by French buccaneers and English pirates, who used the island to carry out attacks against the ships traversing the region and against Spanish ports. By 1665, the French had colonized the abandoned western part of the island, which led to conflict with the Spanish Crown, that still valued the strategic location of La Hispaniola for their trade routes between Europe and their American colonies. After almost a decade of war, the two European countries finally signed a treaty (known as the Peace of Ryswick) and Spain formally surrendered the western part of the island to France in 1697. Since then, the island has been divided into two nations, one Spanish-speaking and one French-speaking.

While the Spanish side of the island deteriorated due to the authorities' lack of interest in sustaining the colony, the French side prospered and soon Saint-Domingue (as the French renamed the colony), turned into one of the richest European colonies: the 'Pearl of the Antilles'. The colony exported different goods to Europe, but the main source of wealth came from the large

cane plantations, cultivated by the Africans brought to the island by the European settlers. After Brazil, Saint Domingue became the major importer of slaves to the Americas and by 1745 around a quarter of a million slaves lived in the colony. However, this number does not reflect the total number of slaves brought to the island, as they survived on average only seven years following their arrival on the island and "only the very fittest could survive the punishing plantation life for long" (Arthur and Dash, 18). Because of the strenuous manual labour in the cane plantations, many slaves revolted against their masters, openly or through "Marronage", which consisted of "protest through the active or passive withdrawal of labour" (Arthur and Dash, 19). Before the successful slave revolt that led to Haitian independence there were some early slave uprisings in Saint Domingue, but as Arthur and Dash point out, "these were localised, isolated and quickly suppressed" (19).

Slavery also shaped Saint-Domingue's societal configuration, as Arthur and Dash point out that "Colonial society was obsessed with race, sexual liaisons and the most subtle gradations of colour which emerged from them" (19). Saint Domingue's society, therefore, was divided into four distinct main classes following strict racial lines: first, the 'grands blancs', the rich and powerful (white) Europeans who owned three quarters of the island's large plantations and, therefore, the enslaved people who sustained those plantations. However, despite their economic and political power, many of them were absentee owners and left administrators in charge of their plantations, while they spent most of their time in France. Second, the 'petits blancs', the poor Europeans who had neither land nor slaves, and worked as artisans, soldiers, plantation administrators, etc. Third, the 'gens de couleur' or 'métis', the descendants of Europeans and slaves, often 'affranchis' (emancipated) by their European fathers. They were almost as numerous as the colony's white population and some of them owned the remaining plantations, but they had

no social status and were still discriminated against, both socially and legally. For example, they could not enter the same professions as the 'petit blancs'. Finally, at the bottom of the social ladder there were the slaves: although numerically dominant, they were exploited by all and had neither legal rights nor social status. Despite these racial and social differences, the French colonial system privileged assimilation. Its central administration, education and political system laid the basis for a gallicisation of the French Caribbean colonies since the seventeenth century.

Therefore, despite the colony's prosperity, the island was deeply divided and, as Jean-Germain Gros (2000) points out in his study of Haitian history, "Saint Domingue existed more in name than as a unified political entity" (212). He adds that the tensions between the different social classes were used to prevent unity and dissent against the colonial rule, as "Antebellum Haitian political struggles also pitted blacks of various origins against mulattos, freed blacks against black slaves, blacks against whites, mulattos against whites, and whites against whites (petits blancs against grands blancs)" (212). In 1789 the French revolution exacerbated the conflict between the colony's different social classes, especially around the complicated issue of slavery. Following the humanistic principles of the French Revolution, the local administration had tried to implement some reforms on the island and grant the enslaved people some rights, which had been opposed by the planters. Additionally, in September 1789 the *gens de couleur* filed a petition presented to the French National Assembly, asking for equal rights, but the local Assembly rejected it, escalating the tensions between the colony's classes, which eventually exploded in a first unsuccessful revolt in October 1790. But the animosity remained high between the enslaved people, the *gens de couleur,* and the *grands blancs.* A few months later another slave rebellion erupted in Saint-Domingue and this uprising then turned into a thirteen-year revolution that finally led to the end of colonial rule in Saint Domingue and the creation of independent Haiti.

As Gros posits, the main actors in Haitian independence were the enslaved people and the *gens de couleur*, as "the visceral hostility of white Saint Domingo to the political enfranchisement of the mulattos and mulattos' desire to lead a postcolonial order without the whites led to a temporary alliance between half-castes and blacks" (213). However, some *grands blancs* also played a key role in the revolution, seeing it as an opportunity to enrich themselves and be free of French control (especially concerning trade with other countries and lowering taxes).

All these circumstances led to a long and complicated independence process in Haiti. After the initial slave uprising, more than a decade of war followed. Meanwhile, the political panorama had changed in France, with Napoleon Bonaparte now in power. On July 1803 slavery was reinstated in the colony of Guadeloupe and that same year Napoleon also sent troops to end the rebellion and regain control of the wealthy colony. However, after some initial successes, the French troops fell sick from tropical diseases such as yellow fever and lost control of the colony. Finally, they surrendered, and the new country came into being in 1804, becoming the first independent nation in the Caribbean and the first black republic in the world with former slave and revolutionary leader Jean-Jacques Dessalines declaring himself emperor.

However, Haitian independence created a new series of issues, both internal and external, as "The colonial powers, whose empires continue to depend on slavery, were openly hostile to the world's first black republic" (Arthur and Dash, 45). They feared that the success of Haiti's slave rebellion would inspire similar uprisings in their respective colonies, so after their independence from France an embargo on Haitian arms and goods was put in place by Europe and the United States. France also demanded payment from the new country for the sugar plantations lost in the war, which put Haiti into extreme debt. Many historians consider this the beginning of the 'Haitian

curse' (as Munro calls the country's apparently never-ending state of catastrophe) and the source of the country's many issues, both past and present.

The economic crisis brought by the embargo and the contradictory opinions of the revolutionary leaders about the country's future brought infighting between the different factions shortly after independence. Additionally, as stated previously, the slave rebellion exacerbated the racial and social divide of the country that continues to this day, as "many rich Haitians still live in mortal fear that the poor black majority will re-enact the uprising of 1791" (Arthur and Dash, 19). Before independence, one of the main sources of the conflict between the island's social classes related to the ownership of the land and how it should be exploited. This issue continued to be a source of tensions between the different factions after the war, as the European settlers left the island, and their properties were confiscated. Following the departure of most of the French creoles, the *gens de couleur* took their place as the new elite within Haitian society. Rural labourers resisted their landowners' plans to rebuild sugar plantations, preferring instead to work the land independently. Therefore, as Arthur and Dash explain: "during the early decades of independence, the interplay between these racially and ideologically divided groups determined the economic, social, and political foundations of modern-day Haiti" (45).

After the assassination of Dessalines, in 1806, the tensions over the ownership of the agricultural land and the division between these two factions reached a new hight. According to Gros, the southern part of the island declared its independence and Haiti "split into a mulatto-dominated republic in the west and south and a black-dominated kingdom in the north", with Henri Christophe (one of Dessalines' successors) proclaiming himself king of the northern part. After Christophe's death in 1820, Jean Pierre Boyer (another of Dessalines' successors) reunited the island in 1822 by occupying their Spanish-speaking neighbour (Santo Domingo) and declaring

their independence from Spain. As Gros posits, Boyer played a key role in the reunification of the island in the troubled post-independence period. However, he also exacerbated the racial tensions in Haiti by excluding black people from power, a problem that still has not been solved to this day as "The old color cleavage continued well into the twentieth century, leading ultimately to the *noiriste* Duvalier dynasty" (Gros 213).

Boyer also had a great influence in the conflict between Haiti and its neighbour, as he decided to invade the Dominican Republic to unify the island. Boyer abolished slavery there and helped the former colony in their independentist cause, as the Dominican Republic had declared its independence from Spain in 1821, after years of decline and neglect by the colonial power. Some Dominican politicians and military officers thought that the annexation of their country by Haiti in 1822 and putting their country under Haitian protection would solve the former colony's socio-economic issues. However, as the Haitians monopolized government power and confiscated Dominican properties, the tensions between the countries escalated. By the 1830s a resistance movement had emerged on the Dominican side. Eventually, they won their independence from Haiti in 1844, after a long war and heavy losses for the Haitian army.

While the Haitian side of the island was facing both political and economic instability, the newly independent Dominican Republic started to prosper and grow, soon becoming the largest economy in the Caribbean and Central America. The second half of the nineteenth century also corresponded to the birth of anti-Haitian sentiment, a sentiment that would govern the policies adopted by the Dominican government against its neighbour in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The most infamous example of this anti-Haitian sentiment can be dated to 1937, with the so called 'Parsley Massacre', under Trujillo's dictatorship, a period examined in more detail in the following chapter.

2) Haiti, twentieth century and twentieth-first century

While the newly independent Dominican Republic prospered, Haiti continued to experience political and economic turmoil. Between 1911 and 1915, seven presidents were assassinated or overthrown in Haiti. The beginning of the First World War also led to fears of German influence in the Caribbean. This situation led to the United States occupying Haiti between 1915 and 1934. In 1915, the U.S. Government forced the election of a new pro-American President, Philippe Sudré Dartiguenave. The election of a President that did not represent the choice of the Haitian populace increased unrest in Haiti, debilitating state institutions and aggravating the economic crisis. To solve this crisis the U.S. government took control of the country's banks and used *corvée* (forced labour) to bolster Haiti's infrastructure, constructing roads and buildings. The occupation also allowed the government to buy vast tracts of Haitian land (which had been forbidden after Independence). Racial discrimination was also common during this period and, although a select group achieved economic prosperity, most Haitians remained in poverty. Culturally, the American Occupation led to the birth of the Indigeniste movement. As Munro (2004) explains, after Independence "the island's intellectuals often aligned themselves culturally and socially with the former colonial power" (5). In other words, although they had gained political independence from France, the Haitian writers and intellectuals still followed French literary models. This changed with the American occupation, as "Haitian culture increasingly identified itself with the colonized peoples of Africa" (6), eventually leading to the Indigénisme movement that, as mentioned before, wanted to recover the indigenous elements of Haiti's past and its indigenous roots. As stated before, despite the country's early independence, its cultural identity was still largely based on Western (French) cultural models. Followers of Indigénisme, on the other hand, opposed this orientation towards western literary models and

cultural influence. They wrote about historical figures like Toussaint L'Ouverture and painted the Haitian landscape. Indigénisme focused on Haitian's continuous struggle against foreign domination and especially the American influence in Haitian culture brought by the occupation.

In 1929, a series of strikes and uprisings led the United States to begin withdrawal from Haiti, formally leaving in 1934. However, its economic and political influence would continue throughout the twentieth century. These circumstances paved the way for the Duvalier family's control over the country in the second half of the twentieth century. In 1957 François Duvalier (known as Papa Doc) assumed power and soon established a dictatorship that lasted until his death, in 1971. His son Jean Claude (or Baby Doc) succeeded him and declared himself president for life, but in 1986 had to flee the country, due to mounting social instability, economic crises, and pressure exerted by the United States. During their time in power an estimated 300,000-400,000 Haitians had to flee the country and during Papa Doc's regime, the more brutal of the two, around 30,000 to 50,000 people were assassinated or executed. However, there are no official numbers, as the regime did not formally record who was sent to prison, for example. Additionally, inside the prisons the prisoners were starved to death or suffered other forms of torture, therefore the total number may be even higher.[3]

The main force behind Papa Doc's abuses was the **'**Milice de Voluntaires de la Sécurité", commonly known as *Tonton Macoutes*. Duvalier created this paramilitary group in 1961, to replace the Haitian Army. According to Suzy Castor (1986), the Tonton Macoutes owed personal obedience to François Duvalier and "this national force reached up to 40,000 men, while the army only had 7,500 troops" (57). During Papa Doc's regime, as Castor explains: "State terrorism,

[3] A detailed list of the massacres carried out during the Duvaliers' regime can be found in https://www.sciencespo.fr/mass-violence-war-massacre-resistance/en/document/massacres-perpetrated-20th-century-haiti.html

internalized fear, corruption, ideological manipulation, corruption and depoliticization became powerful instruments of the regime. Having a monopoly on violence, Duvalier crushed all expressions of struggle against him" (57). For example, the regime targeted groups like the *Jeune Hati* a youth political movement who led a failed coup against Papa Doc in 1964. Danticat mentions this episode in *Create Dangerously* and I will study it in more detail in chapter 3. During this time period, the United States supported the regime, despite its violence, as part of the Contention policy the U.S. government adopted after the Cuban Revolution. This policy sought to prevent another communist regime rising in the Caribbean. This support would dwindle throughout the twentieth century, but the U.S. political and economic support allowed the Duvaliers to stay in power almost thirty years. Castor, for example, states that between 1973 and 1978 "the [Duvalier] government received more of 2,000 million dollars in monetary and food aid, from the United States, Federal Republic of Germany, Taiwan, France, and Israel" (57). Castor adds that the "Duvalier government received all the political support, police, military and economic aid of six American administrations. The constant violations of human rights, the implementation of the presidency for life and hereditary regime did not alter American-Haitian relations" (59).

Another crucial element in the Duvaliers' dictatorship (especially in Papa Doc's regime) was the appropriation of *Noirisme. Noirisme* was close to the *négritude* movement mentioned in the introduction, as it revindicated the black elements present in Haitian culture. The *Tonton Macoute*, for example, were originally a figure from Haitian folklore and many of them practised Vodou. Papa Doc used this idea of Haiti as a Black country to persecute mixed-race people, who he considered political opponents and therefore dangerous for his regime. According to Castor, the collapse of the Duvalier regime started with Baby Doc's marriage to Michelle Benett. The Benetts were a powerful mulatto family and, as Castor states, this marriage symbolized "the collapse of

Noirisme, the backbone of the ideology of Duvalierism, with that triumphant entry and almost hegemonic of the mulattoes in power" (58).

Finally, in 1986 Baby Doc left the country and sought refuge in France. After a short transitional government under a civil-military junta, Jean-Bertrand Aristide won the 1991 elections. However, Haiti's return to democratic stability did not last. Aristide was ousted barely seven months later and replaced by Raoul Cedras. Cedras was in power only three years, as U.S. pressure and threat of force (Operation Uphold Democracy) put an end to his regime in 1994. Aristide returned to Haiti and was president again from 1994 to 1996 and from 2001 to 2004. He was finally ousted in the 2004 coup d'état after right-wing ex-army paramilitary units invaded the country from across the Dominican border. Additionally, as Castor points out, Haiti "leaves the Duvalier era as the poorest country in Latin America with a polarization of the wealth among a few rich versus the vast majority lacking the conditions elemental for a decent life" (58).

To this day Haiti continues to struggle to return to a democratic regime and social stability. The last years of the twentieth century were marked by a cycle of fraudulent elections and coups. This unfortunate situation was compounded by a long history of natural disasters (the most recent example being the earthquake of 2010, with an estimated death toll of 100,000 to 160,000 people) that had severe consequences, in terms of human lives, environmental destruction, and socio-economic issues on the island.

3) Old Providence, a puritan colony in the Caribbean:

The archipelago of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina is the smallest and, at same time, most densely populated department in Colombia. San Andrés, the main island, is located approximately 110 miles east of the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua and 300 miles west-northwest of the Colombian mainland. Since the arrival of the Europeans, these islands have been a meeting

point for the various cultures that have shaped the region and can be seen as a microcosm of Caribbean history, with their traumatic legacies of colonialism and slavery. However, the period of colonization also created a rich culture, born of the coming together of European and African elements. According to Alberto Saldarriaga Roa (2020):

> the history of the islands of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina is rooted in the complex historical formation of the Caribbean, a meeting place for diverse ethnic groups and nationalities, bearers of their customs, their language, their religion, and their conception of the world (para. 1).

Before the arrival of the Europeans, the islands were never permanently settled, as the Miskito Indians sailed from what is now Nicaragua on fishing expeditions to the archipelago and established temporary bases but never fully inhabited it. The historical chronicles offer different versions about the discovery of the islands. For example, Peter J. Wilson (1973) claims that Columbus reached the islands on his fourth voyage. However, Parsons (1964) says that there is no evidence that Columbus reached the islands. Wilson also states that the Spanish built fortifications on the islands in the late sixteenth century. While the Spanish did arrive at the beginning of the sixteenth century and placed the territory under the control of the Spanish Crown, due to its strategic position in the Caribbean, their stay on the islands did not last, as the archipelago lacked gold or other resources that interested them. Despite the Spanish claims over the islands, According to J.C. Robinson (1996), a native historian, the first settlement was the Sea Flower Puritan colony established in 1631. This colony had around five hundred settlers, among whom there were only fifty women. Karen Ordahl Kupperman (1995) also stated that this colony was similar to those established in the United States in that same period, as "Providence Island, just off

the coast of Nicaragua, was settled at the same time as Massachusetts Bay by the same kind of substantial puritans" (ix). The Puritans also settled in other territories of the Caribbean and the Central American coast, and this is why there still are Caribbean communities of English-based creole languages in Nicaragua and Panama. Aside from the Puritan settlers, the first slaves arrived in the islands between 1629 and 1633. This enslaved communities created their own culture, by interacting with the English population.

These first settlements served initially as commercial and military bases, as the Puritans wanted to use Providence to launch the colonization of Central America and diminish Spanish influence in the area. While they failed in this aspect, the specific conditions of the Providence Company laid the foundation for the occupation of Jamaica in 1665. The economic exploitation of the island also started during the Puritan settlements, with tobacco and cotton crops, grown by the enslaved Africans brought to the islands by the European colonizers. However, these crops were soon abandoned for a more profitable source of income: piracy. Providencia was a perfect base for English buccaneers due to its geographical location and protection by the reefs.

The pirating activities of the Puritan settlers of the archipelago led to conflict between Spain and England during the seventeenth century, as the English pirates and privateers used the islands to strike out against the main ports of the region. During that turbulent time, the islands changed hands several times, as neither country was able to maintain their control over the archipelago for too long. In 1635 the Spanish Crown started a series of expeditions with troops sailing from Cartagena and Panama to retake control of the islands. Eventually, the Spanish crown was able to retake Providencia and controlled it until 1670,[4] when an English fleet seized

[4] Some sources, like Pomare (2021) state that the island was taken in 1666 by Edward Mansfield and that Morgan was under Mansfield's orders, but other sources (Parsons, Wilson, Saldarriaga, among others) state that Morgan was the expedition's leader and that it took place in 1670.

Providencia and captured the Spanish settlers. They were taken to Panama, while they left one hundred men and the slaves that had belonged to the Spanish on the island. The privateer Henry Morgan took the islands and then used the archipelago as a base to carry out attacks against Panama and the Colombian coast. To this day, Henry Morgan continues to be an almost mythological figure in San Andrés. Meanwhile, the governor of Panama organized an expedition to retake the island and after a simultaneous attack on the island's forts, the English pirates surrendered, and Providencia was once again under Spanish rule in 1672. This tension, between the Catholic and the Protestant religions, the Spanish and British empires, and between Spanish and Anglo-Saxon cultures, would be central to the history of the archipelago in the following centuries.

Finally, in 1786, the two countries signed a treaty putting an end to the conflict, placing the territory formally under the control of the Spanish crown and demanding the departure of English settlers who lived on the islands with their families. However, most of the settlers requested permission to stay in exchange for recognizing the authority of the king of Spain as well as of the regional and local authorities. Spain had placed the islands under the authority of the captaincy of Guatemala, due to its proximity to the islands. However, as Juan Carlos Eastman Arango (1992) explains in his historical study of the island, Guatemala's control over this territory was only in name. Although Guatemala was closer to the archipelago, the contact between the two territories was scant, as the islands had strong and constant legal and economic ties with Nueva Granada (and continuous trade with Cartagena), which they had maintained even during the conflict between England and Spain. In consequence, the viceroyalty of Nueva Granada formally integrated the islands into its administration in 1803. In any case, Spain's control over the archipelago did not last long, as Nueva Granada declared its independence from Spain in 1810.

The inhabitants of San Andrés and Providencia eventually decided to support the independentist cause and in 1822 the islands adhered to the new constitution and became part of the new 'Gran Colombia', rejecting Spanish authority. The islands played a crucial role during the war, as their strategic position in the Caribbean was used by the independentist troops to move weapons and men across the region. However, even during the conflict the attitude of the continent towards the islands was complicated. In a 2021 the local historian Martin Alonso Pomare affirms that: "Bolívar said to Aury that the Nueva Granada's (modern day Colombia) cause had reached a state in which he no longer needed the support of privateers that only degraded his flag before the rest of the world" (40). This attitude of the continental government led the inhabitants of the islands to remain loyal to the Anglo-Saxon culture and the protestant religion (Pomare, 41). Throughout the nineteenth century the attitude of the Colombian government towards the archipelago oscillated between relative neglect and sporadic efforts to integrate the islands, for example by sending civilian officials to help in the evangelization of the islanders and reinforce the Colombian state's presence in the archipelago.

These efforts accelerated by the end of the nineteenth century, when the Colombian government tried to include the islands in their national building project. After independence from Spain, Colombia remained deeply divided, both politically and socially, which resulted in a series of civil wars throughout the century. In the 1880s the 'Conservador' party proposed a political and cultural movement to finally unite the country, known as *La Regeneración*. With this project, the government proposed a national building project based on the Catholic religion and the Spanish language as unifying elements. This project, however, failed to consider the situation of minority cultures in Colombia, such as indigenous people and, of course, the people of San Andrés and Providencia, who had a different cultural identity from the mainland, as already mentioned. The

Colombian government tried forcibly to annex an English-speaking, mostly black and protestant territory, to the Spanish and Catholic mainland, threatening the islanders' newfound identity, which resulted in tensions and conflict between the national government and the archipelago. Their education and evangelization campaigns endangered the islanders' cultural identity, forbidding the use of English and imposing Spanish on the archipelago. It also forced the conversion of the islanders to Catholicism. I examine this episode of San Andres's history in more detail in the final chapter.

4) San Andrés and Colombia in the twentieth century:

Due to the tensions between the islanders and the mainland in the late nineteenth century, the Colombian government decide to create the "Intendencia Nacional de San Andrés y Providencia" in 1912. A 'Intendencia' (Intendency) was new type of territorial administration put into place by the Colombian government at the beginning of the twentieth century. Other departments of Colombia that were Intendencias throughout the twentieth century were: Arauca, Casanare, and Putumayo. All these territories were remote and isolated and were going through different political and economic issues. The government's goal through the Intendencies was to ensure better policies and the presence of the state in those remote territories. However, in the archipelago's case the Intendency also served to strengthen the government's presence in the area, as the Panama crisis at the beginning of the twentieth century had threatened Colombia's control over their Caribbean territories. I study this episode in more detail in the final chapter. In any case, the islands were facing different economic, social, and political issues at the beginning of the twentieth century and the Intendencia did not solve any of these problems but instead created a new series of challenges for the islanders.

Eventually, the government declared San Andrés 'Puerto Libre' (free port or a place exempt from taxes) in 1953. This initiative sought to solve the economic crisis in the archipelago by creating new job opportunities and promoting trade by removing taxes. However, for many islanders this initiative represented another example of the exploitation of their territory by outsiders, as the Free Port led to massive immigration from mainland Colombia to San Andrés, displacing the local population from their territory and overpopulation became a source of criminality and of socio-economic, political, and ecological problems (Livingston Forbes, 2019). For example, Pomare (2021) states that "Initially it was believed that the Free Port was of great benefit to the natives, but, unfortunately, it turned out to be quite the opposite" (81) and "In one way or another, it has brought ruin to the island and its occupants" (81). According to Pomare, the Colombian Government's intervention in the islands has led "islanders to abandon their traditions, language, and religion and replace them with a presumably Colombian identity" (81).

On the other hand, the Free Port also led to the loss of native territory for the islanders, as "The government recklessly began to take land to build roads and hotels everywhere (such as the Abacoa and the Isleño) without feasibility studies or guarantees of economic recovery" (83) and he adds that "A large part of the land that the government occupied was not paid for not at all" (83). The main source of income for the islands became tourism and trade but the islanders did not benefit from it because, as Pomare explains, they did not own these businesses and were often discriminated in favour of the people from the mainland (because they could not speak Spanish). This led to the creation of different social and political movements on the islands. For example, Pomare states that:

> There has been a constant interest from some older and younger people for a better life that they assume they will never have in Colombia. This desire became evident in the

1960s, when a group of people of Providencia asked the United States government and the United Nations to listen to their request to separate from Colombia (143)

The economic and social issues of the archipelago continue to this day, even though the Constitution of 1991 gave San Andrés the status of department, which granted the islanders more administrative autonomy from the central government. The Constitution also gave the native islanders or *raizales* more rights and put forward measures to protect their ethnic and cultural legacy, such as recognizing the use of *Creole* and English as official languages in the islands. However, as Pomare states, these measures only exist on paper. For example, Law 47 of 1993 protects bilingualism on the archipelago, but as Pomare explains, "The strategy of unilateral Colombianization has already damaged the very being of the people in such a way that there is very little or nothing that can be done to recover what has almost disappeared with the wave of colonialism" (109). Creole has been replaced by Spanish both at home and in public spaces. Meanwhile, the standard English that until the 1950s was spoken by most islanders, requires a level of education not available to most *raizales* today.

The loss of identity and native territories was reinforced with the 2012 International Court of Justice ruling. In 2012, the International Court ruled in favour of Nicaragua, in a dispute about Colombia's sovereignty over the archipelago and the surrounding sea. According to Pomare, this was the result of a long dispute between the two nations and both Colombia and Nicaragua "systematically failed to consult the Raizal people of the archipelago" (209) over the years. The final ruling in favour of Nicaragua limited Colombia's access to the sea, which deeply affected the people of San Andrés, as many of them still rely in fishing as their main source of income. Despite this ruling, the dispute between Nicaragua and Colombia for the control of the archipelago and the

surrounding sea persists to this day which (according to Pomare) hinders the islanders access to their ancestral territories and fishing areas.

In any case, for many *raizales,* the attitude of Colombia towards this ruling shows the government's lack of interest in their status and situation, as no native leaders were present at the ruling, and some complained that the islanders' interests were not considered. This ruling led to some *raizal* political parties (like Sons of the Soil or SOS) to claim more independence and autonomy from the mainland, proposing the Puerto Rican model within the United States as a solution. This would give the islanders more autonomy, but they would still be Colombian citizens. However, this solution is not very popular in the islands, as many islanders prefer to be under the jurisdiction of the Colombian government. Furthermore, most of the population are not *raizales* but *pañas* (mainland Colombians) or *half and half* (the descendants of *raizale*s and *pañas),* whose standing would not be clear if the islands changed status.

5) Two writers, two territories

Edwidge Danticat was born in 1969, during Papa Doc's dictatorship. As for many other Haitians, her life was marked by the regime's repression and violence. Her family emigrated to the United States when she was twelve years old and has lived there since. Her first novel *Breath, eyes, memory* was published in 1994 to great success. Chapter 2 studies Danticat's second novel, *The Farming of Bones* (1998). This historical novel portrays one of the most violent episodes of Haitian history: the so-called Parsley massacre of 1937, carried out during Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship. The novel focuses on a young Haitian woman living in the Dominican Republic, who gets caught up in the violence and must flee to Haiti with other survivors. In this chapter I also examine the collection of short stories *Krik? Krak!* (1996). I choose this collection over other of

Danticat's texts, like *The Dew Breaker* (2004) because both *The Farming of Bones* and *Krik? Krak!* use mothers-daughters' relationships to explore the issues of identity and belonging.

Krik? Krak! also serves as an introduction to the topic of the Caribbean diaspora, a topic that reappears in the third chapter, where I analyse the collection of essays *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* (2010). This collection of essays portrays Danticat's own experience as a writer born in Haiti but living and writing in another country (the United States) and how the traumatic history of Haiti has marked its writers and artists. Danticat's texts often deal with topics like national identity, mother-daughter relationships and how to rewrite Haitian history from the perspective of those forgotten or marginalized by official accounts. Her texts are also deeply influenced by her experience as a diasporic writer, someone who (according to Danticat) does not fully belong to the United States nor Haiti, as we will see in the third chapter. Haitian migration is a central theme in several of her works, like the autobiographical book *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007), the short story collection *Everything Inside* (2019), and several articles and essays.

On the other hand, Hazel Robinson Abrahams was born in San Andrés in 1935 and stands out as one of the most renowned writers of San Andrés and Providencia, especially for (re)writing the islands' forgotten past. Her literary career started in 1959 with journalistic articles (*Meridiano 81°* 1959-1960) about the day-to-day life and the history of the islands of San Andrés and Providencia, published weekly in *El Espectador*, one of Bogotá's most important newspapers. The name of the articles already hints at the relationship between the mainland and the archipelago, as "Meridiano 81" refers to the meridian separating the maritime territories of Nicaragua and Colombia in the Caribbean Sea and among them, of course, the islands of San Andrés and Providencia. This line played a key role in the 2012 dispute between the two nations, mentioned previously. After these early articles, Hazel Robinson did not write for forty years, until her first

novel, *No give up Maan! No te rindas!* was published in 2002. Chapter 4 examines this historical novel in detail and how Robinson uses the love story between an islander and a European woman, to retell the forgotten history of the archipelago. The novel takes place in the nineteenth century just after slavery was abolished in Colombia (1852). The expression that gives this novel its title (*No give up Maan*) reflects the use of Creole among the islanders, especially among the African slaves, and hints at the enslaved people's resilience, as Ariel Castillo Mier points out in the prologue of the novel's 2010 edition:

> (It shows) the slaves' victory after a silent struggle using their rites, language, chanting and prayers, and the brilliant defence of a vision of a world ruled by the rhythm traced back to Africa, the cultural values of the black world clearly evident in their life, in relation to nature, music, communication (236).

The other books studied here are Robinson's novels *Sail Ahoy!!! ¡Vela a la vista!* (2004) and *El príncipe de St. Katherine* (2009). Like the first novel, these novels combine historical events and fiction to (re)write the history of the archipelago, a history often forgotten in mainland Colombia and even on the islands themselves. Additionally, as Ana Mercedes Patiño (2014) points out in her study of Robinson's works, all these books retell the history of the islands from the perspective of women, both as protagonists and narrators. In her novels, Robinson also proposes love stories that challenge the traditional Latin-American foundational novels of the nineteenth century (as we will discuss in chapter 4) by portraying mixed-race couples and a national identity no longer tied to the unifying elements proposed by the Colombian government in the nineteenth century (one territory, one language, and one religion). Instead, identity in Robinson's texts is rooted in the history of the islands and especially in the influence of other cultures. In these novels

the islands offer an opportunity for the travellers to start a new life and help to build islander society, a multi-racial and multi-lingual society.

The books also have a historiographic objective, as the history of the islands has been forgotten and almost erased, especially in Colombian archives. This situation is the result of the complicated history of the island mentioned previously. The colonial archives about the archipelago are scattered and difficult to access. More recent documents were lost when San Andrés' archive located in the 'Palacio Intendencial' (the local seat of government) was destroyed by fire in 1965. As Monica del Valle (2019) explains in her analysis of this episode, this fire took place in a moment when the San Andrés status as a Free Port was already a source of controversies and tensions between the islanders and the Colombian government. Many newspaper articles published shortly before the fire denounced that the Free Port had not solved the economic issues of the archipelago and had opened the door for smugglers. Meanwhile, Del Valle states that local newspapers, like the *San Andrés Bilingüe* (a local publication in English and Spanish that circulated at the time) criticized the government's lack of response to the fire.

Del Valle also examines the deep symbolical meaning of the fire, explaining that the archive's building represented the Colombian government presence in the island. According to Del Valle, this power was "ambivalent, loaded with interest and opposing passions" (176). The aftermath of the fire also showed the Colombian state attitude toward the islanders. As Del Valle explains, the local firefighter station was not properly equipped to put out the fire. As this station depended on the Colombian government, it also showed their lack of interest towards the archipelago. The following investigation of the fire's causes was also criticized by the islanders, as the two investigators sent from the continent by the Colombian government accused someone from the island without sufficient evidence. The investigation was then closed without any

satisfactory results for the islanders. This fire remains an important part of the islands' collective memory as "The origin of the fire in the Intendencies' house, the causes and the causes are silenced by the mutual consent of the local population, who treats it as an open secret" (Del Valle 193). The fire had severe consequences for San Andrés and its inhabitants. On the one hand, it led to the loss of the archipelago's historical documents and the titles of many properties were also lost in the conflagration.[5] As Del Valle states, "The loss of deeds and legal documents [proving the ownership of the land] specially affected the common people" (190) as they were then unable to prove the ownership of their lands. The fire, therefore, meant the loss of native territory for the local community.

Robinson wants to fill the gaps in the history of the archipelago through fiction. Some details in these novels may not be historical (the emancipation of the enslaved people in San Andres happened earlier than stated in Robinson's texts for example) but they reflect important episodes in the history of the islands and its society. After the original historical trilogy, the author has continued to publish books that explore the history of the archipelago, such as *Si je Puis (If I can)*, published in 2019, *Copra* (2020), and her most recent work, *Da So e go (Así pasó/That's how happened)* just published in 2024. All of these new books continue to explore the complicated relationship between San Andrés and Colombia and how the islanders have tried to build their own identity. In parallel to these texts, other authors have also interested themselves in the islands' past but also in their future. Christina Bendek's *Los cristales de la sal* (*The salt crystals,* published in 2019) shows how the overexploitation of San Andrés' resources in recent decades had led to a societal and cultural crisis in the island. Bendek's book is also from the perspective of a *raizal*

[5] https://thearchipielagopress.co/sin-memoria-ni-ruido-se-cumplieron-50-anos-del-incendio-del-palacio-intendencial-de-san-andres/

woman that has lived many years outside the island and therefore shares a sense of alienation also present in Robinson's books, as we will see in chapters 4 and 5. While all of these texts have important topics, they were too recent to be fully analyzed in this study. However, they helped to establish a literary background useful for understanding San Andrés' culture and history.

6) Diasporic literature or the Caribbean beyond geographical borders:

Although the last section emphasized the history and cultural characteristics of both Haiti and San Andrés, my analysis also explores the topic of diasporic literature. The third chapter explores this issue in more detail, but some elements must be considered in this analysis of the writers and their countries of origin. For example, the concept of diasporic literature, as the topic of exile and migration are recurring themes affecting both Danticat and Robinson, and the wider society across the region. Such texts produced in diasporic contexts (especially the context of the Haitian diaspora) illustrate the complexity of Caribbean identity and how it is not limited to the geographical borders of the region, as established in the introduction.

Due to the unique circumstances of the region, many Caribbean writers had to migrate to other countries, either because of political persecution or looking for better opportunities. These constant migrations led to the creation of diasporic literature, which challenges the conventions of what really is Caribbean literature and if this literature can be defined only by its geographical origin. The texts produced by these authors often explore issues such as national identity, language, and memory. Danticat migrated to the United States when she was twelve and her books often explore these issues. Similarly, Robinson's texts are influenced by her experience as a diasporic writer, as she lived many years outside the archipelago, in the Colombian mainland and in the United States. The situation of these diasporic writers often leads to conflict with their places of origin. The physical distance creates a sense of alienation, and such writers are often accused of

being impostors or criticized for their portrayal of their culture. For example, Danticat's first novel, *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), was heavily criticised by the U.S. Haitian community due to its representation of the Haitian characters. As mentioned before, the third chapter explores in more detail the diasporic writers' dilemma and their place in Caribbean literature.

On the other hand, the Caribbean, as a region, has been shaped by migration and movement, from the transatlantic voyages of the colonial period to the modern phenomena of migration and exile. Haiti's economic and political instability during the early twentieth century led many of its inhabitants to travel to other countries in search of work and better living conditions. According to the United Nations Population Division's estimates, by mid-2020, the largest Haitian migrant population in the world (around 680, 000 people) lives in the United States and around two million people live outside the island (of a total of Haiti's 11 million inhabitants). In the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, Haitians migrated to the neighbouring country, the Dominican Republic, where they worked as domestic workers and sugar cane collectors, as we will see in the second chapter, analysing Danticat's novel *The Farming of Bones* (33). In the second half of the twentieth century, the violence of the Duvaliers' dictatorships and the socio-economic deterioration of the island led many Haitians (including Danticat and her family) to leave their country, either for the Dominican Republic or the United States. Even after Baby Doc left Haiti in 1986, the resulting political instability caused another wave of migration to the United States in the early 1990s, as we will explore in the study of other texts, such as the collection of short stories *Krik?Krak!* (33) and in the essays included in *Create Dangerously*.

In San Andrés's case, travel and migration also had a deep influence in the societal configuration of the archipelago. Although the islands were seen as "isolated" from the Colombian mainland, due to their unique situation during the colonial era, as discussed before, throughout the

nineteenth century San Andrés and Providencia maintained a continuous trade with other islands of the region and with the Central American coast. The final chapter, for example, explores the close relationship between the archipelago and Panamá. Today, the islanders often migrate to the Colombian mainland or to other countries for job and education opportunities, due to the overpopulation of the islands and the lack of local resources. To this day the islands still rely on the mainland for food and other resources.

Conclusion:

Having established the similarities (and differences) between the authors and their territories, we can see some common themes and issues that are going to guide this study. On the one hand, both Danticat and Robinson explore the topic of identity and belonging, often through the lens of the diasporic or displaced writer/narrator. On the other hand, their works show the consequences of colonialism and neocolonialism in their territories, how exploitative practices affected both the nature and the inhabitants of these islands, leading to the loss of territory, native culture, and socio-political instability. Both San Andrés and Haiti experienced colonial systems that imposed a doctrine of assimilation or acculturation. This policy in the neglect of local Caribbean cultural traditions and, ironically, a lack of acceptance of people from the Caribbean in other countries (United States and Colombia for these writers). Finally, in both writers' texts nature plays a central role. It can be healing or destructive, the reminder of a lost (and often idealized) past or the promise of a better future for the characters in these books. This aspect of the duality of nature can be seen in Danticat's novel *The Farming of Bones,* as the next chapter is going to explore.

Chapter 2: Memory, identity, and nature in Danticat's fiction

Introduction:

In this section, I study Danticat's 1998 novel *The Farming of Bones* and some of her short stories included in the collection *Krik? Krak!* (1996). In *The Farming of Bones*, Danticat's second novel, the author uses the framework of a historical novel to portray the so-called Parsley Massacre, one of the most infamous examples of anti-Haitian sentiment in the Dominican Republic. In 1937, Rafael Trujillo, then president of the Dominican Republic, ordered the persecution and murder of Haitian labourers living in the country. The short story collection *Krik? Krak!* also explores the tense relationship between the Haitian people and their past, in this case the violent and traumatic influence of Papa Doc and Baby Doc dictatorships (1957-1986). I will first study how these texts present the tense relationship between Haiti and its neighbour, the Dominican Republic, and how the author uses this relationship to create a sense of identity and belonging. These countries share a complicated and interwoven history and the conflicts between them result in traumatic and violent experiences for many characters in Danticat's works. In the following section, I examine how, in both the novel and the short stories, Danticat explores the connection between these traumatic experiences and identity, both at individual and national levels. In the novel, these stories serve as testimonies by voices often forgotten or erased in traditional historiography. Then, I investigate how the characters in these texts use storytelling, rituals, and ceremonies as healing strategies, to reconcile themselves with the violent past and deal with their trauma. The final section of this chapter explores how natural elements play a central role in this healing process and how nature serves both as a source of identity and as a source of violence and trauma for the characters in Danticat's texts.

1. Duality, the "Other", and national identity:

The Farming of Bones offers an account of the violent events of 1937, through the story of Amabelle, a Haitian domestic servant living in the Dominican Republic. When violence escalates against the Haitian community, she must run away and try to go back to Haiti. However, just before crossing the border, Dominican soldiers capture and violently beat her. This event leaves Amabelle with deep psychological and physical wounds, as we will see later in this chapter. Throughout the novel the tensions between the Dominican and the Haitians escalate, showing that the events of 1937 are not isolated but the result of a violent and complicated history between the two neighbouring countries. The strained relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti plays a central role in the plot from the very beginning, symbolized in the image of twins. The novel starts with Sra Valencia (the Dominican woman Amabelle works for) giving birth to twins: a boy and a girl. As Juliana de Nooy (2005) explains in her study of the figure of twins in contemporary culture, in literary texts twins are often used "to represent divided nations" (114).

In the novel, the twins hint at the complicated relationship between the two countries that share the island, which started during the war for Haitian independence. The Haitian revolutionary leaders invaded the neighbouring country in 1801, considering the unification of the two nations a necessary step in consolidating their independence from France but failed to maintain control over the country. In the following years, Haiti invaded Santo Domingo (the colonial name of the Dominican Republic) two more times. Finally, in 1822, they succeeded in taking control, and this final invasion led to a twenty-two-year occupation, which not only resulted in the socio-economic degradation of Santo Domingo, but also resulted in a lot of resentment by the Dominicans against the Haitians. The tensions between the two nations culminated with a war (1844-1856) that finally led to the Dominican Republic's independence in 1856. However, as the Dominican historian

Pedro San Miguel explains in his study of Hispaniola, the anti-Haitian sentiment born of this event shaped the relationship between the two countries in the nineteenth and twentieth century.

According to San Miguel, the anti-Haitian sentiment born during the occupation was also largely based on a rejection of African-Haitian elements, which led to an historiographic effort to rewrite the history of the island from the perspective of *Criollismo.* As San Miguel explains, Dominican historians (or *criollos letrados*) proposed *criollismo,* an ideology that valued the influence of Spanish traditions and culture over indigenous or African elements, as the basis for Dominican national identity. In *criollismo,* Santo Domingo represented the true heir of Spanish values and culture and "Consequently, other ethnocultural elements—particularly Afro-Dominican elements— are played down, marginalized, or totally ignored" (10). For the promotors of *criollismo,* the Haitian revolution had only brought instability and violence to the island and as black upheaval against European control, it "was an offense against the dominant notions of relations between the 'races'—notions based on the premise of a 'natural order' in which whites commanded and blacks obeyed" (22). Therefore, for these Dominican historians of the nineteenth century, Europe still represented order and civilization while "Haiti's Afro-Antillean population was a perennial threat to the racial and ethnic composition of the Dominican Republic" (24).

In the twentieth century, the racism present in *criollismo* evolved in "colourism" or discrimination based on skin shade, as Malinda Marie Williams (2011) states in her study of this phenomenon. Williams explains that colourism can operate both interracially and intrarracially: the first refers to discrimination based on skin shade between members of a racial group by members of another racial group, while the other refers to discrimination within a racial group, when people create distinctions based on the skin shade between individuals of their own race, often rejecting those with darker skin. The novel presents mostly the first type of colourism, as

Dominicans and Haitians are not necessarily from different races, but the Haitians usually have darker skin, which is associated with African ancestry and thus rejected. At the same time, Haitians use their skin shade to differentiate themselves from the Dominicans and create a sense of community. However, sometimes the difference between Dominicans and Haitians blurs, as Amabelle points out when she meets some other refugees on her way to Haiti and she describes two of the women: “Those two seemed like they might be Dominicanas—or a mix of Haitian and Dominican—in some cases it was hard to tell” (171).

These ideas about skin colour and identity are reflected in the description of the twins as the boy, Rafael, has a “cherimoya milk color” (11). As for her daughter, Rosalinda, Valencia says to Amabelle: “My daughter is a chameleon. She’s taken your color from the mere sight of your face” (11) and she also says: “My poor love, what if she’s mistaken for one of your people?”. Valencia, therefore, associates her children’s skin colour with nationality, stating that darker skin corresponds to Haitians (or Amabelle’s people). Later, Doctor Javier repeats this idea when he describes Rosalinda as having “a little charcoal behind the ears” (17). This description is violently rejected by Valencia’s father, Don Ignacio, who says that Rosalinda’s colour “must be from her father’s family” (17) and that his wife “was of pure Spanish blood. She can trace her family to the Conquistadores” (18). In this way, Don Ignacio denies even the possibility of African or Amerindian heritage in his grandchildren, only accepting European ancestry in his family. Valencia, on the other hand, accepts the possibility of indigenous blood but not of African ancestry, calling her children “my Spanish prince and my Indian princess" (29). She also compares Rosalinda to Anacaona, a Taíno princess who played a fundamental role in the Dominican national myth. According to Williams, colonial Latin American and Caribbean societies preferred to see themselves as the descendants only of the indigenous people and the European colonizers, seeking

to erase any trace of their African legacy. As stated before, this idea influenced Dominican *criollismo* and anti-Haitianism which, eventually, led to the events of 1937.

However, even though the characters in the novel reject the possibility of African ancestry, the twins themselves are a link to this legacy, through the figure of the *marasa* or sacred twins. In Haitian Voodoo, *Marasa* refers to a mythological pair of twins, who are said to be connected to the gods, to be between the living and the dead. According to Marylin Houlberg, in Haiti *marasa* are part of the so-called "sacred children", which include twins, babies with birth defects and "those born with the umbilical cord around their neck" (276) and "those born in the caul" (276). In the novel, Rosalinda is born both with a caul and the umbilical cord around her neck, considered a sign of misfortune, as Valencia says: "It's a curse, isn't it? […] A caul, and the umbilical cord too" (11). In the context of the novel the curse symbolized by the twins' birth can be related to the fratricidal violence to come, which means that the birth of the twins creates a bridge between the traumatic past (the war between Haitians and Dominicans) and the violence to come (the Parsley Massacre). As Toni Pressley-Sanon (2013) explains in her study of Haitian twins, "The *marasa*, as it was formed in the New World, arose from trauma and catastrophe, referred to as the *maafa*, or disaster, by several scholars" (121). The figure of the *marasa* twins, therefore, was tied to the traumatic experience of slavery and continued to be associated with violence and disasters.

The novel underlines this violent connotation of the twin's figure, through Rosalinda, who almost died during the birth as she was born with the umbilical cord around her neck. As the doctor points out, "It's as if the other one tried to strangle her" (19). However, despite her apparent fragility, Rosalinda survives, while her brother dies suddenly shortly after. The death of Rafael can be seen as an omen of the violence to come, while also showing another important aspect of the *Marasa* myth: the confrontation of masculine versus feminine characteristics. *Marasa* twins are

usually formed by a boy and a girl, to show how masculine and feminine attributes complement each other. As the twins' story shows us, in the end, the masculine characteristics of the Dominican Republic (violence) end up losing to the feminine ones of Haiti (resilience). However, the narrative also points out that the baby boy's death "would no doubt follow his sister all of his life" (119). Similarly, the trauma of the massacre would haunt the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic for years to come, as we will see later in this chapter.

The novel's couples also show the contrast between traditional masculine and feminine characteristics. Amabelle, for example, often describes her lover Sebastian, a cane worker who goes missing on the first night of violence, as strong and protective. On the other hand, Amabelle has nurturing qualities, as she feeds him and makes clothes for him. These traits are underlined when she assists Valencia during the birth of the twins. Amabelle learned about midwifery from her parents, Haitian herb healers who challenged traditional gender roles, as they worked side by side, with her father frequently assisting his wife at births. Meanwhile, the other central couple in the novel, Valencia and her husband Sr Pico, clearly embody traditional gender roles and represent the ideal Dominican family of the time. During the first half of the novel, Valencia's role revolves around her pregnancy and motherhood, while her husband, a military man, represents the Dominican nationalistic ideals of the time, including the rejection of Haitian characteristics. For example, it is clearly implied that he dislikes his daughter because of Rosalinda's dark skin and her resemblance to the Haitians, as mentioned above. He shows even more coldness toward his daughter after Rafael's sudden death as seen when Valencia's cousin visits them: "Lidia stepped forward and held Rosalinda out to be embraced by her father. Señor Pico avoided the child and instead brushed his lips against the side of Lidia's face before springing out the door" (137). Sr Pico's rejects his own daughter despite their resemblance, as he has darker skin himself. The novel,

for example, describes Sr Pico as having "honey-almond skin and charcoal eyes" (35) and that "he was the one that baby Rosalinda resembled most" (35). His internalized racism plays an important part in the novel, as Sr Pico oversees the "New border operation" (the code name used by the Dominican army for the slaughter of the Haitians).

Even before the slaughter happens, rumours and smaller acts of violence show the reader the prejudices against Haitians, with Sr Pico often instigating many of these incidents directly or indirectly. For example, at the beginning of the novel he causes the death of Joel, a cane field worker, pushing him into a ravine with his car when he is rushing home as Valencia gives birth to the twins. According to Don Ignacio, Sr Pico does not even care: "My son-in-law did not want to stay and search [for the bracero]" (44) and he never faces consequences for this incident. Throughout the text, Sr Pico's interactions with Amabelle show his dislike and even hatred of Haitians. For example, he does not like her touching the children, as seen in the episode after Rosalinda's baptism. As Amabelle reaches to kiss the little girl, "Señor Pico yanked his wife's arm and pulled her away, almost making the señora drop the child" (119). Another incident showing his violent tendencies occurs when he makes Valencia practise with a rifle. This incident not only foreshadows the violence to come, but it also traces a parallel between the persecuted Haitians and animals, as Amabelle says:

> I remembered how, for lack of a boy child, in spite of his saddening memories of the war, Papi used to take the señora hunting with real rifles when she was only a girl. With Papi the hunt was for birds. With her husband, what would her mark be? (136).

Shortly after this incident Amabelle decides to run away, worried that something bad is about to happen. Her fears are confirmed that same night when Amabelle sees a confrontation between Dominican soldiers and some Haitians cane cutters. Amabelle uses the confusion to

escape but before she has time to see how the soldiers, under Pico's orders, arrest the cane cutters and when some of them resist, Sr Pico orders the trucks to run them over, in an incident that parallels the death of Joel, earlier in the novel. The soldiers also seize and violently beat those who try to escape: "The soldiers were using whips, tree branches, and sticks, flogging the fleeing people" (157). However, as Amabelle remarks, they do not use their weapons: "The soldiers seemed to have orders not to use their rifles, otherwise, they could have fired at those who fled" (156). It is implied that the reason behind this was to avoid accusations against the army about their participation in the slaughter.

The novel, however, shows that even though Sr Pico gives the orders, Rafael Trujillo and the Dominican army played a key role in the 1937 massacre. During Trujillo's thirty years (1930-1961) as president of the Dominican Republic, he tried to reshape the country's history and how Dominicans viewed themselves, through a nationalistic and racist discourse. For example, San Miguel states that during his regime Trujillo rewrote the country's history to consolidate his power over the Dominicans and, eventually, for them "The tyrant, hyperbolized, was seen as the very embodiment of the nation" (3). The association between Trujillo and Dominican identity is one of the novel's main themes. As mentioned previously, Sr Pico names his son Rafael, after Trujillo, and he is not the only one, as Amabelle describes a baptism ceremony where some boys are "being rebaptized so the Generalissimo could now become their official, albeit absent, godfather" (118) and one of the older boys is even renamed Rafael in Trujillo's honour. The novel also points out that the twins were born "on the thirtieth of August, the year 1937, the ninety-third year of independence, in the seventh year of the Era of Generalissimo Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, Supreme Commander-in chief, President of the Republic" (17). The dictator, therefore, exerts pervasive control over people's lives, his influence extending even to calendars and to the passage

of time. This cult of personality even leaves its imprint on the country's landscape, such as when 'Pico Duarte', "the tallest mountain on the island" (35) was renamed 'Pico Trujillo' in his honour, as Amabelle explains. Other examples of Trujillo's influence over Dominican lives can be found in the portrait painted by Valencia herself in a place of honour in the living room. According to Amabelle, this portrait "was a vast improvement on many of the Generalissimo's public photographs" (43). In it the "Generalissimo" appears as a "giant" dressed in military regalia and surrounded by symbols of the nation (flag, coat of arms, shield). As Kelli Johnson explains, these demonstrations are also tied to Trujiilo's initiative to become the symbol of the Dominican Republic, as "Those commemorations were the space Trujillo claimed for himself in which to construct the national identity of the Dominican Republic, his own attempt to shape the country's collective memory and identity" (76). Despite Trujillo's importance in the plot, however, he never appears directly, which gives him an almost mythical dimension: he is everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

While Trujillo and Sr Pico embody the anti-Haitian sentiment openly, the novel also shows that even in the absence of evident hate, the strong social barriers between Haitians and Dominicans persist. Valencia and Amabelle's relationship demonstrate this, because even though they were raised together, almost as sisters, Amabelle also states that they were never equals: "I had called her Señorita as she grew from a child into a young woman. When she married the year before, I called her Señora. She on the other hand had always called me Amabelle" (63). This social difference between the two women appears clearly during the birth, as Amabelle does not want to leave Valencia alone because "Anything could happen in my absence, the worst of it being if a lady of her stature had to push that child out alone, like a field hand suddenly feeling her labor pains beneath a tent of cane" (7). Amabelle clearly admires and respects Valencia, but this respect

is not reciprocated, as she is exploited by Valencia's family. For example, although Amabelle carries out most of the domestic labour in the house, she is not paid and, as Amabelle herself states, the only 'thing' that truly belongs to her is Sebastian, since everything else she inherited from Valencia's family. These social differences are even more noticeable in the relationship with the other servants, like Juana and her husband. Although they have worked for Don Ignacio even before Valencia's birth, they always maintain their distance, not even daring to touch the children, for example. Also, when Juana stays to take care of Valencia after the birth of the twins, she sleeps on the floor, even though there is another bed in the room.

On the other side, the Haitians responded to this hatred with distrust and suspicion, as we see in the episode of the tea set. After the death of her new-born son, Rafael, Valencia invites the cane workers to drink coffee in her house, but during the visit the workers remain uncomfortable and suspicious:

> Maybe they were all going to be poisoned. Many had heard rumors of groups of Haitians being killed in the night because they could not manage to trill their "r" and utter a throaty "j" to ask for parsley, to say perejil. (114)

Beside foretelling the central role that parsley will have in the massacre, this passage also shows the mutual distrust between Dominicans and Haitians. As mentioned previously, in the Dominican Republic the "historiographic effort" was focused on emphasizing the Spanish heritage and eradicating the elements associated with Haiti and African heritage. Haiti, on the other hand, constructed its identity around the slave revolutions that led to independence, rejecting their colonial heritage, and embracing the African legacy instead. As Johnson explains: "Haitians progressively dismantled or destroyed the social, political, and economic structures established by the colonial invaders, structures that had created and maintained the plantation system" (4). In *The*

Farming of Bones, for example, the victims turn to Toussaint Louverture and other figures of Haitian independence after the massacre, trying to make sense of what they have endured: "A woman was singing, calling on the old dead fathers of our independence. Papa Dessalines, where have you left us? Papa Toussaint, what have you left us to? Papa Henry, have you forsaken us?" (212).

Despite this common past and some shared beliefs, however, the novel does not portray the Haitians as a homogenous group, in an economic or social sense. While most of them work in the cane fields or as house servants and are at the bottom of the Dominican society, some of them have become rich. The novel, for example, mentions Don Gilbert and Doña Sabine, who live in a mansion, separated from the road by a tall wall and even protected by Dominican guards. In between the field workers and Don Gilbert and his wife, are "people whose families had been in Alegría for generations" (68). These people constitute the 'non-vwayaje' Haitians, the inbetweeners, "who were better off than the cane cutters but not as wealthy as Don Gilbert and Doña Sabine and their friends, the rich Haitians" (68). However, even though some of them were born in the Dominican Republic or had married Dominicans, they still do not have access to birth certificates or official papers and continue to be rejected and, as one of them says, "to them we are always foreigners" (68). Additionally, language and race still create a division between the two groups, with the black Creole-speaking Haitians on one side and the whiter Spanish speaking Dominicans on the other. However, the novel also highlights how the distinction between the two often blurs, as the 'non-vwayaje' Haitians speak "a mix of Alegrian creole and Spanish […] caught as they were on the narrow ridge between two nearly native tongues" (69). Although the linguistic difference between the Spanish-speaking Dominicans and the Creole-speaking Haitians appears as the main cause of the conflict, the novel also shows that the difference between the two is not

always clear and that not all Dominicans reject the Haitians. For example, Doctor Javier speaks Creole and wears a carving of cane leaves, "a charm, like the amulets the cane cutters here in Alegría wore around their necks to protect them from evil spells" (16), as Amabelle describes it. Because of his sympathy towards the Haitians, Doctor Javier also becomes a victim of the slaughter.

To summarize, *The Farming of Bones* explores how the events of 1937, promoted by the dictator Rafael Trujillo, arose from national myth born of anti-Haitian ideas. This myth sought to erase any trace of African ancestry in Dominican society, through the persecution, expulsion and even murder of the Haitians living and working in the Dominican Republic. However, as the novel shows through the image of the *Marassa* or sacred twins, Dominicans and Haitians have a lot in common, especially the shared trauma they inherited from the colonial experience. Therefore, although the author is writing about a traumatic and violent episode, the novel calls for a "transnational reconciliation" as Myriam J. A. Chancy (2001) points out in her interview with the author: instead of criticizing the Dominicans, Danticat is calling into question the idea of "nation" and "nationality" and "demands a breaking down of national borders and boundaries to actualize a cross-national healing" (144). It should also be noted that, according to Danticat, the violence and discrimination against Haitians by Dominicans is an ongoing issue, a "living memory" (3) that continues to this day. To better understand this idea, we will now focus on the issues of trauma and memory in the novel, and how they are linked to identity.

2. Trauma, memory, and identity:

As established previously, the characters in *The Farming of Bones* go through different traumatic experiences. The slaughter of the Haitian cane workers gives its title to the novel, and it is the main source of trauma for many characters, both Haitian and Dominican. However, this

massacre is not the only violent or traumatic incident. Other instances of trauma have an important role, as Amabelle sees her parents drowning, Valencia loses her new-born son, Sebastian is still haunted by the death of his father, etc. The field of trauma studies developed in the 1990s with pioneer texts such as Dori Laub's and Shoshana Felman *Testimony-Crisis of Witnessing in Literature Psychoanalysis and History* and Cathy Caruth's *Unclaimed experience*. Laub places narrativization at the centre of his study, as the violent experience of trauma needs to be witnessed, remembered, and retold to lose its power over the survivor. Both Laub and Caruth also explore the representation of traumatic experiences and the connection between trauma and language, and how memory creates a sense of belonging and identity. This section examines how the novel represents trauma and how violent experiences shape the identity of the characters.

Trauma can refer both to a physical or mental experience. In Danticat's case, the book places this physical aspect of the traumatic experience, the traces violence leaves on bodies, at the centre of the novel. For example, through the detailed description of Amabelle's body after the events, when she compares her body to a "map of scars and bruises, a marred testament" (226) and also with the bodies of the survivors she encounters in the clinic after crossing the border also show the violence they experienced, as she sees "a line of people with burns that had destroyed most of their skin" (206) and "a young woman with three rings of rope burns in her neck" (210). Amabelle herself will carry the physical traces of the violence for the rest of her life and years after the events she still has "an aching arm that prevented me from sewing, when the joint of my knee would throb, and the ringing in my ears would chime without stop" (269). The survivors' scars and bruises also create a sense of community and bonding, differentiating them from those who did not encounter the violence, as Amabelle indicates when she returns to Haiti: "They recognized us without knowing us. We were those people, the nearly dead, the ones who had escaped from

the other side of the river" (220). Additionally, when Amabelle returns to Alegría, she knows that Valencia's new maid is also a survivor of the massacre because she has "a deeply furrowed field" (292) of rope burns around her neck. The physical scars, therefore, implicitly bonds Amabelle to other survivors while also being a constant reminder for the victims of the traumatic events they endured. We will later see that the scars of that night are not the only ones that branded the cane cutter works, creating a divide between them and the Dominicans.

As for the psychological effects of post-traumatic experience, the novel also details the mental scars carried out by the survivors. In the novel, Amabelle suffers constant nightmares from the moment she returns to Haiti and before the events of 1937 she also had night terrors where she constantly relives her parents' deaths (that she also witnesses when she was a child). This echoes Dominic La Capra's (2003) description of the impact trauma has in survivors:

> Victims of trauma tend to relieve occurrences or at least intrude on their present existence, for example in nightmares or in flashbacks or in words that are compulsively repeated and that doesn't seem to have their ordinary meaning because they are talking on different connotations from another belief . . . I also believe that people who have been severely traumatized, it may be impossible to fully transcend acting out the past (143)

In other words, nightmares, flashbacks, and vivid hallucinations prevent the victim to move on from the traumatic experience. Caruth, similarly, mentions that the "repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (181) are common among the survivors of violent events.

However, it should be noted that Caruth's and Laub's trauma theories and how they apply in different scenarios have been re-examined by recent studies. Irene Visser (2015), for example, points out that Laub's trauma theory, applied in a post-colonial context, has "many controversies, contradictions, and limitations" (251) and tends to have an "Eurocentric, event-based conception

of trauma" (252), as the theory often relates trauma to a single violent event (in Laub's case the Holocaust) and therefore, cannot be applied to all scenarios. In the Caribbean, as Visser points out, the experience stems not from a unique violent event but instead from "the sustained and long processes of the trauma of colonialism" and the "cumulative hurt of long years of repression […] with its repeated and cumulative stressor events" (252). Visser, therefore, seems to propose to study trauma in a postcolonial context not as single event but instead as a series of traumatic experiences and the impact of intergenerational trauma. In this way, Visser theory seems to relate to the chaos or disaster theory mentioned in the introduction (17) and how the Caribbean existing in this never-ending cycle of catastrophe and violence prevents its inhabitants to move away or heal from traumatic experiences. In Danticat's book, the trauma experienced by Haitians in 1937, under Trujillo's regime, finds its roots into the colonial past and how the legacy of slavery and exploitation that the island has suffered through the centuries created a division between Haiti and Dominican Republic.

This legacy has left marks in the survivors' bodies, as established before, but the physical trauma also serves as an alternative discursive strategy for the survivors. In April Shemak's analysis of the novel she points out that: "One alternative that the novel offers to oral testifying are survivors' bodies, which become visual and palpable testaments to their oppression under the Trujillo regime" (88). In this way, the bodies of the survivors with their scars and chronic pains and aches also serve as monuments, filling the gaps in official accounts or memorials. These alternative discursive strategies play a crucial role in preserving the memory of the event, as the novel shows that both countries tried to erase the memory of the slaughter. For example, as Amy Novak states (2006) no official Haitian sources for the events of 1937 exists. Meanwhile, on the Dominican side, the state used propaganda to hide the real cause of the event and the Dominican

government showed a clear intention to hide the extent of the slaughter: "The narration of this trauma in official histories of the Dominican Republic did not include a confrontation with or working through of the past, but instead entailed a justification of the event in order to consolidate Trujillo's faction authority" (96). In the novel, this can be seen in Father Romain's case, a Haitian priest who lived in Alegría before the events, who was captured and tortured by Dominican soldiers to the point that, "Though still young, he had the look of those who no longer recognized anything" (259). After being released from prison, he also repeats obsessively a nationalistic speech he was forced to learn, stating that "Our motherland is Spain, theirs is darkest Africa, you understand?" (260). This phrase shows the anti-Haitian sentiment and propaganda used by the Dominican state to justify the slaughter.

This lack of acknowledgment by the authorities, in turn, does not allow the trauma to heal and causes the survivors to remain trapped in their memories and relive them constantly. For example, Amabelle recounts the events obsessively, even years after the events: "Each time I closed my eyes I saw the river and imagined Sebastien and Mimi drowning the way my mother and father and Odette had" (227). When she returns to the border, she relives the events of 1937 and faints after having a panic attack: "As I approached the grounds where the dead and wounded had lain, I thought of Odette and my stomach churned […] and finally I fell, making of the earth a warm bed" (257). Yves, another survivor who was with Amabelle during the massacre, never healed from the trauma of his near-death experience and even years later remains deeply affected by the events:

> (he) detested the smell of sugarcane (except the way it disappeared in rum) and loathed the taste of parsley; he could not swim in rivers; the sound of Spanish being

> spoken—even by Haitians—made his eyes widen, his breath quicken, his face clouded with terror, his lips unable to part from the other and speak (273).

In these passages we can see that the trauma still has a physical effect on the survivor's bodies, years after the initial wounds had healed. The repetition of the traumatic event also ties to the lack of official mourning of the dead, as the Dominican soldiers burned the bodies and dismembered them so the river would carry them away. Other Haitians are made to jump from a cliff, as Tibon, another survivor, tells Amabelle: "[the soldiers] make us stand in lines of six on the edge of the cliff […] They have six jump over the cliff, then another six, then another six, then another six" (173). These practices show the desire to erase the identity of the victims even after their deaths and to cover any physical evidence of the massacre. For many years Amabelle does not know whether Sebastian is dead or alive and, therefore, cannot move on from the traumatic experience.

Today Haitian migrants continue to work in the Dominican *bateyes* (sugar mills) in terrible conditions and are often persecuted and discriminated by the Dominican authorities. As Andrea Nuñez (2016) explains, the discourse against the Haitian migrants continues, as "the Dominican media and politicians portray Haitians as a threat to national identity and unity" (212). For example, Haitian children born in the Dominican Republic "are generally forced to start work at an early age, prevented from registering for school, and prevented from claiming citizenship even when they are entitled to do so" (Nuñez, 212). Due to this traumatic and violent history, Danticat's novel proposes to foster the healing process with alternative coping mechanisms: storytelling, acts of commemoration and a sense of community, as we will see in the following section.

3. Testimonio, storytelling and a new kind of historical novel

While *The Farming of Bones* explores in detail the trauma endured by the Haitians in 1937 and its physical and mental effects on the survivors, it also offers the characters (especially Amabelle) the tools for healing, giving special attention to the idea of a listener or audience who can share the traumatic experience. This follows Laub's premise about how the traumatic experience must be shared with an appropriate listener, someone prepared for the difficult experience of hearing the traumatic event and who is also knowledgeable about the victim's experience. The listener then becomes a participant and a "co-owner" of the traumatic experience, as "he comes to partially experience trauma in himself" (57) but "he nonetheless does not become the victim" (58). While it may seem problematic to assert that the listener experiences the traumatic event at the same level of the victim, this a similar idea of the survivor-by-proxy discussed by Caruth in her interview with Robert Jay Lifton. According to Lifton (who worked traumatic experiences like Hiroshima, Vietnam and the Holocaust) states that: "you're not doing what they did, you're not exposed to what they're exposed to, but you must take your mind through, take your feelings through what they went through, and allow that in" (173). In other words, the listener is not appropriating the traumatic experience, but allowing the survivor to share their pain and eventually heal. As Laub states, "The act of telling might itself become severely traumatizing, if the price of speaking is re-living" (67). Laub also points out that "if one talks about the trauma without being truly heard or truly listened to, the telling might itself be lived as a return of the trauma—a re-experiencing of the event itself" (67). In *The Farming of Bones,* we have different examples of an inadequate listener or audience, as the authorities refuse even to acknowledge the full import of the events, as stated in the previous section. However, at the beginning some efforts were carried out to listen to the survivors, as the novel shows.

First, the novel states that the Haitian government initially appointed an official to listen to the victims, but this was mediated by an economic reward and once funds were exhausted, they stopped listening to the survivors. Therefore, many of them did not have the opportunity to speak. They must also recount their experience in the presence of the guards, giving the impression that the survivors are censored, as the woman who tells her experience about giving testimony is constantly "watching the soldiers for approval" (233). These guards also wear "the same khaki uniforms as the Dominican soldiers" (234), which makes the survivors constantly relive their trauma, as the massacre was mostly carried out by the Dominican army. The Haitian government is then replaced by the Church, but this effort is also short lived, because, as a priest, Father Emil, explains to Amabelle" "we have stopped letting them tell us these terrible stories. It was taking all our time, and there is so much other work to be done" (254). Due to the official indifference, the novel proposes *testimonio*, storytelling, and ceremonial acts, as another way of commemorating the events of 1937.

According to John Beverley's definition (1989), testimonio is "a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is, printed as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first-person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events he or she recounts" (12). Beverley explains that, traditionally, *testimonio* is used for a Latin-American corpus of texts produced during the '70s and '80s, in response to a specific social and political context (the fall of dictatorships and State violence). Following this definition, Danticat's novel is not a traditional *testimonio* because, although Danticat conducted thorough research for this book, Amabelle herself was not a real, historical person[6]. Rather, in the book Amabelle embodies all of the Haitian

[6] It should be noted, however, that there is some contradiction in the sources: Cherie Meacham mentions in her article that Danticat stated that Amabelle is loosely based on a real victim, but this statement could not be corroborated with other sources.

victims of the violence and persecution. In this way, Danticat uses another of the *testimonio*'s tools: give voice to a marginalized witness or narrator (due to their race, gender, social position, etc.) so they can act as a spokesperson for a silenced group (in this case, the Haitian workers massacred in the Dominican Republic) to denounce the crime and to instigate social changes. Narrating the events also serves a similar function to the testimony therapy proposed by Van Dick et Al (2003). In this article, the authors state that: "Traumatized victims of war or political violence give testimony of their experiences in different situations and for different reasons" (361). They analyse how testimony therapy, a term first used by Chilean psychologists Cienfuegos and Monell in the context of the Chilean dictatorship. They collected interviews "as a way of documenting the oppression, but they also discovered that giving testimony in this way seemed to help these former prisoners" (361). Since then, testimony therapy has been adapted to different contexts, including refugees and survivors of all kinds of traumatic events. However, in the cases analysed by Van Dick et al those testimonies are accompanied by a qualified therapist, which is not the case for the survivors in Danticat's novel.

Shemak's analysis of the novel places *The Farming of Bones* in a tradition of literary texts that use testimonial narrative to allow marginalized voices to tell another version of historical events. In Shemak's words: "Recently there has been a trend in Caribbean fictions to represent subaltern voices by mimicking *testimonio*, a genre that arose out of Caribbean and Central American social and political movements as a way to foreground the voices of the oppressed" (83). Following this idea, *The Farming of Bones* also resembles the 'New Historical novel', proposed by Seymour Menton. Although Menton's analysis focuses on the Boom novelists of the '60s and '70s, it can be argued that in her novel Danticat uses one of the most salient aspects established by Menton: fiction as a medium for rewriting history. In her study of *The Farming of Bones,* Jennifer

Harford Vargas expands this idea about the use of fiction by comparing Danticat's procedure with what Gabriel García Márquez did in *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, for the massacre of the United Fruit Company workers. According to Harford Vargas, both novels are "using the medium of fiction and the novelization of memory to testify against state violence" (1162). Additionally:

> Danticat's novel, in contrast, carves out a place for imaginative modes and stylistic mixture in the testimonial project, offering a more intimate and creative representation of oppression than appears in traditional testimony and asserting the validity of metaphor when recounting trauma at a personal and collective level (1166).

Munro (2015b) echoes this idea in his study of Haitian novels and art as coping mechanisms for the country's apocalyptic history. Although Munro's analysis refers specifically to the Duvalier regime, the idea of using narration to move beyond the trauma can also be applied here. As Munro explains, the censorship imposed by the dictatorship led to a lack of an official discourse about the horrors of Duvalierism. Many Haitian writers try to fill the gap in their country's history by exploring this period in their texts, by preserving the memory of the victims and dealing with the traumatic experiences many Haitians endured during the regime. Many of these books discuss the themes of healing and reconciliation and "such works of fiction may be compared to the *testimonio* or the *crónica,* genres developed throughout Latin America since the nineteenth century as means of bearing witness to contemporary social events" (65). However, Munro also points out that these texts have a limited effect, as "in the case of Haitian fictional writing on the Duvalier period, there is often a temporal distance that renders the testimonial aspects more as acts of memory than direct engagements with contemporary political reality" (65). This is also the case with *The Farming of Bones*, as the temporal gap between the events in the novel and its publication (almost sixty years) means that its impact on contemporary Haiti is

probably reduced. The access to this text also limits its impact, as it was published in English and even if it was translated, the number of Haitians having access to books remains limited[7]. However, while Danticat's intention seems to be more about preserving the memory of the victims than to provoke social change, the act of preserving the memory of this victims is still a political act and by extension a social act.

Therefore, Danticat uses the framework of a traditional *testimonio* while at the same time using the aesthetic and stylistic freedom of the novel to rewrite history, from the perspective of Amabelle and the victims of the slaughter. For example, the novel alternates between two clearly differentiated types of chapters: realistic and experimental. The second type even has a different style and typography (bold font). While the realistic type deals with day-to-day life, the other describes memories, dreams, and nightmares. In the first chapter, for example, Amabelle describes her nightmares and states: "It's either be in a nightmare or be nowhere at all. Or otherwise simply float inside these remembrances, grieving for who I was, and even more for what I've become" (2). These dream sequences show how Amabelle deals with trauma and loss, both the personal (the death of her parents) and the collective and historical trauma of racial discrimination she encounters in the Dominican Republic as a Haitian worker. In her dreams, for example, Amabelle often sees what she calls "the sugar woman" (132), a woman with chains, a metallic collar, and a muzzle, symbols of slavery. Amabelle's voice also changes through the novel, going from being more descriptive and not very analytical to slowly starting to comment on the racial and social differences between her countrymen and the Dominicans. During the second part of the book, that starts with the disappearance of Sebastian and other cane workers, the dream-like chapters vanish.

[7] At 49% Haiti's literacy rate is the lowest in the Western Hemisphere, according to https://www.literacyworldwide.org/blog/literacy-now/2019/04/03/access-to-literacy-an-inalienable-right-to-quality-education

This may signify that Amabelle no longer has time for dreams or sensuality, as she is now concerned with survival and practical things. The change also signals that the subjective personal point of view has turned into a collective one, as Amabelle cedes her narrative role to other characters, such as the survivors she meets in the border clinic, after the massacre. The non-realistic chapters return at the end of the novel, when Amabelle goes back to Alegría and deals with the painful memories and the effects of the slaughter, showing that she has finally healed from her trauma and accepted Sebastian's death.

Finally, *The Farming of Bones* is not only about what happened in 1937 but about a broader problem: the way in which deep and continuous trauma affects a community's sense of identity. As mentioned previously, traditional trauma theory proposes narrativization as part of the healing process, but in the novel the characters also use storytelling as a self-affirmation strategy. Visser, for example, points to the importance of retelling and oral tradition in the Caribbean context because "Narrativization of trauma allows insight into specifics of the colonial past as a pathway to integration of the traumatic memory" (258). The novel emphasizes the value of narrativization, showing how telling and sharing stories create a connection with the past and a sense of community between the survivors of violent events. According to Visser, in post-colonial literature there are many examples showing that "trauma itself instigates a strong need for narrative in order to come to terms with the aftermath of colonial wounding" (257). This need for a narrative means that the listener can be anyone, as the importance is in the narrativization process and not in the audience, in contrast with traditional trauma theory, that places the audience at the centre of the healing process, as mentioned before. This process also combines the use of different narrative strategies because "Narrativization is empowering to individuals and their communities, and is in fact crucial to cultural survival" (257). Sharing their stories, therefore, creates an identity and a sense of

community, because "[trauma] is not only understood as acute, individual, and event-based, but also as collective and chronic; trauma can weaken individuals and communities, but it can also lead to a stronger sense of identity and a renewed social cohesion" (263). We can see the importance of this narrativization in the episode of the clinic mentioned previously. After escaping the massacre, the surviving Haitians gathered in a clinic are eager to tell their stories: "As they ate, people gathered in a group to talk. Taking turns, they exchanged tales quickly, the haste in their voices sometimes blurring the words, for greater than their desire to be heard was the hunger to tell" (209). The survivors also subconsciously establish a "right" and wrong way to tell. For example, a man who takes too long to tell his story is criticized: "The group grew impatient with that one. He took too long to arrive at the center of his tale" (211). In the aftermath of the slaughter Amabelle cannot share her story, as she had her jaw broken and is unable to speak and, therefore, many years must pass before she can truly "heal" by telling her own story. Visser also mentions other strategies and other ways of expressing the trauma, as the importance of "social activism, recuperation, and psychic resilience" (257).

The novel often connects these strategies and the narrative process to religious practices or rituals, that go against the "secular ideology of postmodern Western culture" (Visser, 261). Through the novel several passages show the importance of ritual and religion (voodoo) in Danticat. For example, we have mentioned the connection between Sra Valencia's twins and the Haitian *marasa*. Similarly, *The Farming of Bones* starts with a dedication by Amabelle to the Haitian Loa (the saints of the Haitian Voodoo) "Metres Dlo, mother of rivers". Later, after the slaughter, Amabelle's mother appears to her in a dream as this Loa: "I see my mother rising, like the mother spirit of the rivers, above the current that drowned her" (207). These rituals and religious practices are also linked to orality and storytelling. The novel traces a parallel between

the “oral history” of the survivors and the “official history” of the Haitian government and other institutions, giving priority to the former. As Chancy also explains, Danticat follows Haitian tradition, where the oral stories, familiar lineages, and religious practices serve as substitutes for institutions and official history: “For a great number of Haitians and Cubans, for example, the rituals of Vodoo and Santería secure the preservation of memory and consequently of unscripted history” (Chancy, 134). Danticat clearly uses oral tradition for preserving the memory of the survivors, as we saw previously in the use of *testimonio,* but the book also shows the limits of this type of history.

The first limitation can be seen when the victims tell their stories to the government’s officials. A woman recounts her experience to Amabelle and how the survivors and the families of the victims are asked to provide evidence of their experience: “Then he lets you talk and lets you cry and he asks you if you have any papers to show that all these people died” (234). The woman also states that they often encounter bureaucratic indifference: “He [the officer] writes your name in the book and he says he will take your story to President Stenio Vincent so you can get your money” (234). Even when their stories are believed, the survivors often discover that the “official” version of the events does not correspond to theirs: “You tell the story, and then it's retold as they wish, written in words you do not understand, in a language that is theirs, and not yours" (246). As Johnson explains, “These Haitian survivors understand the traditions of history: if an event is written, documented, contained in a book, it is real” (10). The survivors need their experience to be validated by the government or some authority to be real. The State, therefore, has the power to transform individual memory and experiences into collective and official History. Trouillot (1995) states a similar idea in his study of Haitian history: “history is to a collectivity as

remembrance is to an individual, the more or less conscious retrieval of past experiences stored in memory" (14).

The Farming of Bones shows the lasting consequences of a traumatic experience, both for an individual and for a community. In the novel the survivors carry physical and mental scars of the violence and, unable to escape from the trauma, they live in a never ending and painful present. Similarly, the survivor's families can never fully grieve their dead and cannot move forward, as seen with *man* Denise, Sebastian's mother, who Amabelle meets after returning to Haiti. She refuses to believe in the death of her children (Sebastian and his sister Mimi) and even after hearing from a witness that they were murdered in Santiago, she still hopes that one day they will come back. In order to escape the cycle of violence and finally heal, Amabelle and other survivors turn to oral history and other non-traditional strategies, in an act of resistance against the erasure of their experience due to the indifference of the Haitian state and in order to heal following their traumatic experiences. Nature also serves as a healing mechanism, as we will now see.

4. Nature, landscape, and identity

In *The Farming of Bones,* the Massacre River, that marks the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, also plays a central role in their violent shared history and the tensions between the two countries. Notably, its name is not related to the 1937 slaughter but to an earlier violent incident mentioned in the novel: in 1728, thirty French buccaneers were murdered by Spanish colonials. The name Massacre, thus, refers to the island's violent past and to the hostilities that have always existed between the two nations. However, the Massacre River does not belong to either Haiti or the Dominican Republic but instead works as a "third country", a place of transit that many Haitians cross to work in the Dominican Republic, for example. Amabelle herself might be seen as belonging to this third country, neither Haitian nor Dominican. As mentioned already,

Amabelle, like many Haitians, was never fully accepted in the Dominican Republic. Even in her childhood she moved between the two countries with her parents, who worked in towns on both sides of the border. To this day many Haitians and Dominicans live and work in both countries and travel between them frequently. The mobility of these communities shows what Fred Reno (2020) calls "river identities" (38) in his study of borders in the Caribbean. Reno studies the case of the communities on the border between Guiana and Suriname and how "River identities rule out border politics and support the notion that borderisation arises from over dramatised social interactions" (38). In other words, although the Dominican government (represented by Trujillo) tried to reinforce a xenophobic discourse by killing and persecuting the Haitians and showing them as dangerous 'other', the Massacre River (and the people living on its banks) shows that the border between the two countries has always been porous and the differences between the two countries artificially reinforced.

Similarly, in the novel the river symbolises a place not only of collective but also of individual trauma, as the book opens with Amabelle having a nightmare about her parents, who drowned in this same river, as mentioned before. At the end of the novel, Dominican soldiers use the river as a mass grave, into which they throw the bodies of the Haitians murdered on its banks, trying to get back to Haiti. In this way, the Massacre functions as a *lieu de mémoire* for Amabelle and the survivors of the massacre. The term "Lieu de mémoire", is used by Pierre Nora (1989) to refer to how memory attaches itself to sites, which he calls "lieux de memoire", in contrast to history, which attaches itself to events (Nora, 22). Nora also mentions that for a natural space like the river to be used as *lieu de memoire* there must be a desire to turn it into a place to remember the past. In *The Farming of Bones*, this happens at the end of the novel, when Amabelle transforms the river into a monument, giving it symbolic meaning. After traveling back to Alegría and

speaking to Sra Valencia, she goes back to the Massacre and remembers the different traumatic events she has witnessed throughout her life and that are connected to that river, from the death of her parents who drowned in the massacre to the slaughter of 1937 in the banks of the same river.

This desire to remember the past contrasts with the indifference that both governments displayed to both the events and their survivors, despite the profound impact the events of 1937 had on the relationship between the two countries and the heavy cost in human lives. As Danticat herself explained in an interview to *Publishers Weekly* in 1998, about her visit to the border and the Massacre River:

> It was really strange to stand there- it was low tide and people were bathing and washing their clothes in the water. There are no markers. I felt like I was standing on top of a huge mass grave, and just couldn't see the bodies. That's the first time I remember thinking 'Nature has no memory', a line that later made its way into the book and that's why we have to have memory.

At the end of the book Amabelle emphasises this idea of nature's lack of memory when she says that "There were no graves, no markers"" (270) for the victims of the slaughter, whose bodies were thrown into the river and their stories forgotten. In this sense, the consideration for the symbolism behind the construction of monuments needs to be discussed. As Jenny Edkins posits, "monuments *do not need to visited,* how indeed they *do not need to be built*" (134). In other words, while monuments do not need to be visited to exist, they do need to be planned and there must be a desire to commemorate and remember. This step is necessary to move from the induvial subjective memory to the collective objective history, mentioned before. In Danticat's case, this lack of official monuments and accounts means that the survivors have no place to mourn and remember, which, in turn, prevents them from healing from the trauma and violence they experienced. Danticat's quote shows not only the main objective of the novel (remembering the

massacre and its victims), but it also indicates one of its central themes: the relationship between human beings and nature and how nature often connects to traumatic memories. Due to the lack of man-made monuments, the river itself must serve as one. It can be debated if nature, by its apolitical character can serve as a vector to preserve's the memory of traumatic events. As mentioned before, the Massacre river is an in-between space, it does not belong to either country.

The problem, however, according to the novel is that nature itself often causes pain and suffering. The novel's title, for example, alludes to this violence found in nature: "the farming of bones" refers to cane cutting, a task carried out primarily by Haitian migrant workers in the Dominican Republic. Due to the complicated economic situation in the early twentieth century, thousands of Haitians left their country and often ended working in the sugar mills in other Caribbean nations, as Arthur and Dash state: "Between 1915 and 1929, over half a million Haitians, out of a total of approximately two million, travelled to those countries [Cuba and Dominican Republic] to work as cane cutters" *(*177). Those cane cutters started as sessional workers but by 1937 many of them had already settled in the Dominican Republic and even today, despite the violence they endured and the tensions between the two countries, many Haitians continue working as cane cutters in the neighbouring country.

In several of Danticat's works, sugar cane fields feature as places of individual and collective trauma, associated with the traumatic legacy of slavery and colonialism, but also with modern-day exploitation, discrimination, and violence. In the novel, for example, cane cutting separated the Dominicans who owned the land from the Haitians who worked in the fields, creating a racial and economic divide between the two. Additionally, cane cutting has a deep impact on the physical and mental well-being of the labourers, which echoes through Amabelle's description of

the cane workers: “The oldest cane-cutting women were now too sick, too weak, or too crippled to either cook or clean the big house, work the harvest in the cane fields, or return to their old homes in Haiti” (61). Years of working in the cane fields also had a deep impact on Sebastian’s body, as Amabelle describes how “the cane stalks have ripped apart most of the skin of his shiny black face, leaving him with crisscrossed trails of furrowed scars” (1) and that his hands “have lost their lifelines to the machetes that cut the cane” (1). Another labourer, Kongo, has a “map of scars” (62) on his back from working in the fields. These quotes trace a parallel between Sebastian’s and other cane labourer’s scars and the scars of slavery, as Heather Hewett (2006) explains in her article about disability and trauma in *The farming of Bones*. According to Hewett, “the scarred back became one of the most potent and recognizable corporeal signifiers of the violence within the institution of slavery” (125). Both Kongo and Sebastian have had their bodies altered by their work in the sugar cane fields. In the case of - Sebastian even his lifelines (and therefore his future) have been erased by the machetes they use in the fields. On the other hand, these quotes also foreshadow the violence to come, as the Dominican soldiers often used machetes to attack the Haitians on the night of the slaughter, the same tools the Haitians labourers used to cut the cane. Despite the over-exploitation, humiliation, and the violence they often encountered, these cane cutters played a vital role in the Dominican economy, as Amabelle points out in the novel: “They were giving labor to the land. The Dominicans needed the sugar from the cane for their cafecitos and dulce de leche. They needed money from the cane” (140). However, despite their important role in Dominican economy and society, the cane workers are rejected by the Dominicans and do not fully belong to either of the two countries. Sebastian, for example, states that the labourers are excluded and seen as outsiders by both Haitians and Dominicans:

> ‘Sometimes the people in the fields, when they are tired and angry, they say we are orphaned people’ he said. ‘They say we are the burnt crud at the bottom of the pot. They say some people don’t belong anywhere and that’s us. I say we are a group of vwayaje, wayfarers’ (56).

Amabelle also says that these workers are the “most unprotected of our kind” (71), often victims of violence and at the bottom of the social ladder. Their status as outsiders made them vulnerable to Trujillo’s racist ideas.

The novel similarly uses another natural element, parsley, to express these racist ideas and the persecution against the Haitian workers. In the Dominican Republic the episode of 1937 is known as the parsley massacre because the Dominican soldiers used parsley as a *shibboleth*, a way to differentiate between Dominicans and Haitians. According to some sources, the Dominican troops went around asking people to pronounce *perejil*, since Haitian Kreyol/Creole speakers find it difficult to pronounce the trilled ‘r’ in the Spanish word for *perejil* and instead pronounce it Creole (pe’sil) or a bastardized Spanish (pewehi). In the novel, Valencia explains that when a young Trujillo worked as a field guard, he noticed that the Haitian workers he supervised had trouble pronouncing certain words. As Valencia says to Amabelle: “Your people did not trill their *r* the way we do, or pronounce the jota” (34). Apart from being used for purposes of violence and discrimination, parsley plays a crucial role in the Haitian community, as Amabelle explains:

> We used pesi, perejil, parsley, the damp summer morningness of it, the mingled sprigs, bristly and coarse, gentle and docile all at once, tasteless and bitter when chewed, a sweetened wind inside the mouth, that leaves a different taste than the stalk, all this we

> savored for our food, our teas, our baths, to cleanse our insides as well as our outsides of old aches and griefs. (62)

After the slaughter, Amabelle repeats this phrase as a question:

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

Through the novel other natural elements also convey belonging and identity. Amabelle says that the "non-vwayaje Haitians" (70) belong in Alegría as much as "the tamarind trees, the birds of paradise, and the sugarcane" (70). These quotations show the duality of nature: on the one hand, as a source of trauma and violence, and on the other a source of community and bonding.

As stated previously, due to the institutional indifference regarding the massacre, Amabelle turns to natural elements for healing and dealing with the traumatic memories. In this sense, the novel also often underlines the connection between Amabelle and natural elements and how Amabelle often seeks protection in nature. For example, one of the dream-like chapters describes a cave where Amabelle and Sebastian often met. The description of this space stresses the effects nature has on Amabelle:

> You who know the cave's secret, for a time, you are also held captive in this prism, this curiosity of nature that makes you want to celebrate yourself in ways that you hope the cave will show you […] in ways that you hope your body knows better than yourself (100).

On the other hand, Valencia, points out Amabelle's connection to water: "When we were children, you were always drawn to water, Amabelle, streams, lakes, rivers, waterfalls in all their

power; do you remember?" (302). At the end of the novel Amabelle goes back to the river and submerges herself in the stream, in a purifying ritual that allows her to let go of the dead (Sebastian and her parents). Amabelle describes the river as a liminal space, not only between Haiti and the Dominican Republic but also between the land of the dead and the land of the living, and between the past and the present: "I looked to my dreams for softness, for a gentler embrace, for relief from the fear of mudslides and blood bubbling out of the riverbed, where it is said the dead add their tears to the river flow" (310). This ritual allows Amabelle finally to let go of the violent past and make a new start, as she describes herself "paddling like a new-born in a washbasin" (310). Another body of water that serves as a place of communion and friendship for the Haitians workers is the river where they bathe before their day of work. The river also serves as a place of mourning, as the Haitian workers meet there to carry out a wake and mourn Kongo's son (the *bracero* killed by Sr Pico).

These rituals emphasize the connection between natural elements and identity building, while at the same time showing that natural elements like the river and the cane fields create divisions between the Haitian community and the Dominicans. However, the novel also shows the artificiality of these differences. The Massacre river is a permeable border, as mentioned before, as the Haitian labourers could travel between the two countries and some of them had even settled on the Dominican side of the island without any incidents and some of them had married Dominicans, creating mixed families. *The Farming of Bones*, nonetheless, also shows the internal divisions within the Haitian people. Despite their shared trauma and the persecution they endured at the hands of the Dominicans, the social division persists within the Haitian community, as Danticat shows in her other works and especially in the short story collection *Krik? Krak!* as we will now see.

5. Storytelling and narrative strategies in *Krik? Krak!*

After her successful first novel, *Eyes, Breath, Memory* (1994) Danticat published the collection of short stories *Krik? Krak!* (1996). This book, based on traditional storytelling, explores Haitian history and, especially, the violence of the Duvalier regime and its effects on Haitian people. This section analyses the short stories "Nineteen thirty-seven", "Between the pool and the Gardenias", "The Missing Peace", "Children of the Sea" and the epilogue, "Women like Us", to see how Danticat portrays the themes of storytelling, *herstory* and exile in these stories. While these topics are present throughout the collection, the detailed analysis of these five short stories will allow to examine these topics more thoroughly.

Storytelling plays a central role in many of Danticat's books, often used as a coping mechanism when faced with traumatic or violent events. The title of this collection of short stories, *Krik? Krak!*, refers to a traditional Haitian storytelling technique, central to their culture. The use of storytelling creates a bond not only between the characters in the short story, but also with the readers, as Rocio Davis points out in the analysis of *Krik? Krak!*. According to Davis, the author "invites the reader not merely to read the book but to participate in a traditional Haitian storytelling ritual" (67) and to be part of the stories told in these pages. This idea of "ritual" or tradition, a central aspect of the book, appears in several of the short stories. For example, in "Children of the sea*"* the characters use storytelling both to preserve memories and pass the time in the slowly sinking boat. This short story, narrated through the letters of a man and a woman, portrays the recent history of Haiti, the political unrest and violence that led many people to exile at the end of the twentieth century[8]. The man, on a boat bound for the United States with other refugees, flees

[8] While some studies point out that the story takes place during the Duvaliers' regime, others state that it takes place in the 90s, shortly after Aristide was ousted for the first time. The short story is purposely vague, to show

political persecution, while the woman, who stayed in Haiti, witnesses different forms of violence and unrest. These two narrators never have an opportunity to read the other's letters, as the man's boat sinks and all the people on board die, but writing their letters help them to process the trauma they have witnessed and experienced. The short story combines different narrative levels: the letters they write to each other and the stories the people on the boat share with each other. As the man explains, "We spent most of yesterday telling stories. Someone says, Krik? You answer, Krak! And they say, I have many stories I could tell you, and then they go on and tell these stories to you, but mostly to themselves" (14). The people on the boat use storytelling and other narrative forms like songs and poems to pass the time and to distract themselves from seasickness, as the narrator points out: "Some of the women sing and tell stories to each other to appease the vomiting" (9). This quote also implies that while all of them participate in the narrative game, the women are those who control it. Meanwhile, the male narrator controls the written narrative, as when the boat starts to sink, he writes down the stories of the people around him and turns the notebook in his will (and the will of the other people in the boat, as he is the only one able to write). Even if he eventually throws the notebook into the sea, writing about them constitutes a form of resistance, a way to preserve their stories through the trauma of exile, violence, and political persecution they endured.

In the study of *The Farming of Bones* I examined the connection between nature and traumatic memory, and how sugar cane fields represent the traumatic legacy of slavery and a constant reminder of the exploitation of Haitians by the Dominicans through the twentieth century. In *Krik? Krak!* the memory of slavery and the violent events carried out during the Duvaliers'

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that the Haitians' situation did not improve, a reflection of the never-ending continuous present mentioned in the Introduction.

regimes transform Haiti into a "blood-wrenched land" (27) and a place of never-ending violence, as described by the male narrator of "Children of the sea". The violence and the traumatic experiences endured by the characters in these short stories have turned Haiti into a place of pain and death and a prison, from which the only possible escape is death. Both *The Farming of Bones* and the short story "Nineteen thirty-seven" show that the Haitians had nowhere to go during the violence of the Parsley Massacre, as going back to Haiti only meant replacing one violence by another. This situation did not improve in the second half of the twentieth century, under the Duvaliers' regimes. Many of the stories in *Krik? Krak!* describe how some of the characters were often forced to choose between exile or a violent death in Haiti, with water often serving as an allegory of death.

In *The Farming of Bones,* as stated before, water was both a source of life and death for the characters (especially Amabelle) and often appears tied to rituals of healing and purification. In *Krik? Krak!*, aquatic images also have this double connotation. As Elvira Pulitano (2008) explains in her study of Danticat's use of landscape, "the Caribbean Sea itself, now routing the modern voyage of Haitian refugees to the United States, that forcefully reinscribes the history of the middle passage" (10). In Danticat's texts, the Atlantic Ocean serves as a painful reminder of the traumatic uprooting of slavery and the Massacre River of the Dominican persecution, while the Caribbean serves as a modern place of memory, now tied to the traumatic experience of forced migration. However, as Pulitano states, "In this landscape of rough sea waves, frail sailboats, and ongoing political violence perpetrated upon the Haitian population, sites of memory are built to counteract sites of dispersal" (12). In other words, the places associated with violent experiences (slavery, persecution, and exile) also serve as places of memory for the survivors and a connection with their country and their community.

Danticat shows this idea in “Children of the sea”, as, at first, water has both positive and negative associations. For example, the female narrator’s mother compares love to aquatic images: “all anyone can hope for is just a tiny bit of love, maman says, like a drop in a cup if you can get it, or a waterfall, a flood” (13). Then the man repeats this idea, comparing his love for her to the sea: “Maybe the sea is endless. Like my love for you” (15), a phrase then repeated by her at the end of the short story, creating a dialogue between the two despite the distance and his death at sea. However, as the boat starts to sink, he describes the cruelty of this “endless sea” as “The sea [...] is like the sharks that live there. It has no mercy.” (26). However, despite this merciless side of the sea, the male narrator also associates it with heaven and freedom, especially compared to the country he had left behind. He says that the sea serves as the home for “the children of the deep blue sea, those who have escaped the chains of slavery to form a world beneath the heavens and the blood-wrenched land where you live” (27). The narrator continues: “I feel like we are sailing for Africa. Maybe we will go to Guinin, to live with the spirits, to be with everyone who has come and has died before us” (14). These quotes show the connection between the sea and the trauma of slavery, but, at the same time, they demonstrate that even when associated with death, the association is not completely negative. In Haitian culture death is not something to be feared but instead welcomed, as it provides freedom to go back to the lost homeland. These quotes also illustrate how the past traumas of the colonial era led to a sense of community and bonding, not only between Haitians but also with a larger Caribbean community, as the narrator in “Children of the sea” points out when he mentions that Haitians are discriminated against in the Bahamas: “To them we are not human. Even though their music sounds like ours. Their people looks like ours. Even though we had the same African fathers who probably crossed these same seas together” (14).

However, in the short story we can see how despite the shared trauma of political persecution, the people on the boat still distrust each other and often refer to their social differences. For example, the narrator points out that one of them "speaks in a singsong that reminds me of the villagers in the north" (5). He also says that when the boat starts to sink people "get into arguments […] fighting about being superior" (21). The male and female narrators' letters also indicate their social and cultural differences. In her letters the woman uses more expressions in Creole like "Haiti est comme tu l'as laissé" (4) and her passages also lack punctuation and capital letters. The man, on the other hand, uses allegories and poetic images. He also mentions having passed the university exams and not being very religious, compared to her, who (as the male narrator states) believes in *wanga* magic (vodoo) and the other people in the boat whom he calls "Protestants", who "see themselves as Job or the Children of Israel" (6). These differences do not last, however, because when the boat starts to sink he throws his money into the sea, as an offering for "Agwé, the spirit of the water" (20), indicating that he does believe in the Loas like her. In other short stories, such as *Between the pool and the gardenias*, religion also marks social distinction, as "Monsieur and Madame", say of the narrator (a woman working for them) that "She's probably one of those stupid people who think that they have a spell to make themselves invisible […] It's that voodoo nonsense that's holding us Haitians back" (95).

Social differences also appear tied to race, as in "Children of the sea" skin colour also serves to create social barriers among the Haitian society. For example, the narrator describes himself after several days at sea as an African and writes to her that "I am even darker than your father" (11). As the female narrator's father, a gardener, comes from a small town in the Haitian countryside called Ville Rose, this quotation demonstrates how skin colour is used to differentiate between social classes in Haiti, the darker skin colour associated with peasantry and poverty. In

the boat, however, these social differences disappear, and the male narrator soon becomes another of the "children of the sea", as he points out at the end of the story, when he has accepted his death: "I know that my memory of you will live even there as I too become a child of the sea" (28).

Another short story that shows the internal divisions in Haiti is "Nineteen thirty-seven". This short story, like *The Farming of Bones*, portrays the Parsley Massacre but does not focus on the slaughter itself. Instead, the short story describes the life of the survivors and their descendants in Haiti. In this story, Josephine, born the night of the slaughter, visits her mother in prison. Josephine's mother escaped the Dominican soldiers by crossing the river but had to leave her own mother behind and witnessed her murder, as Josephine explains: "From the Haitian side of the river, she could still see the soldiers chopping *her* mother's body and throwing it into the river along with many others" (40). Josephine's mother thought they were safe but was then wrongly accused of killing her friend's baby, condemned as a witch, and sentenced to life in prison. There she is beaten, humiliated and finally starves herself to death. Josephine says that her mother's case is not an isolated event: all the women imprisoned are accused of witchcraft and that "A loved one, a friend, or a neighbor had accused them of causing the death of a child. A few other people agreeing with these stories was all that it was needed to have them arrested" (38). This quotation shows the danger of gossip or, as Ana Rodríguez Navas (2018) calls it, "*télédiol"* (12). In her study of gossip in the Caribbean, Rodríguez Navas explains that this term is formed by combining the word "télé- with the Creole word for 'mouth' to signify the oral grapevine, or *téléphone arabe*; and *chwichwi*, which refers more specifically to rumor" (12). Additionally, Rodríguez Navas points out that gossip has many uses in the Haitian community, on the one hand, used as a subversive narrative strategy: "*télédiol*, is […] the legacy of the national government's efforts to control and censor more formal discourse" (22). On the other hand, Danticat's short story shows

the danger of gossip, how it serves as a tool to control the population, because Josephine's mother ended up in prison only because of a rumour.

Despite all this violence, the short story focuses on the importance of community to survive traumatic experiences, because, as Josephine explains, before her mother was sent to prison, "every year on the first of November", they met with other survivors in the river to share their stories. This short story, therefore, also serves as a *testimonio,* not only of the Haitians killed in 1937 but also of those who were persecuted by their own people after their return to Haiti. It shows how the women who survived the events formed a community to facilitate healing from the trauma, as we will see in the following section.

6. *Herstories* under the Duvaliers

While *The Farming of Bones* shows the trauma caused by the Parsley massacre, *Krik?Krak!*, on the other hand, shows the complexity of Haiti's recent history and especially the impact of the regimes of Papa Doc Duvalier (1957-1971) and his son, Baby Doc (1971-1986). While other books written by Danticat, such as *The Dew Breaker*, portray the Duvalier's regime in more detail and its consequences both for the victims and the perpetrators, this collection centres on the victims' perspective, the consequences of political persecution, violence and injustices visited on the Haitian people by their own governments. These short stories show the consequences of the Duvaliers' regimes and how their use of terror and repression created a schism in the social and political fabric of the country. Munro underlines the impact these regimes had on Haiti and how "The terror he [Papa Doc] wreaked touched all sectors of society, as no one, regardless of their color, gender, social class, or age was completely safe from the threat of violent retribution" (37). The nine stories included in this collection portray a wide range of characters from different

backgrounds and social groups united by the common trauma of political violence and persecution resulting from the Duvaliers' regimes.

As mentioned before, this trauma has several facets in Haiti, that impact various aspects of the characters' lives. In *Krik? Krak!,* for example, among the different kinds of painful experiences the characters go through, a recurrent theme is gender-based violence. In *The Farming of Bones,* although Amabelle lives and witnesses all kinds of terrible events, she does not encounter any instances of sexual trauma. By contrast, in most of the stories in *Krik? Krak!* the Tonton Macoutes carried out sexual abuses and other types of gender violence against the female protagonists. As stated in chapter one, Papa Doc Duvalier created the Tonton Macoutes in 1961 and used them as paramilitary police, to instil fear and persecute political dissidents. Their name and appearance were inspired by Vodou (their name refers to a type of Haitian 'bogey man', Tonton Macout) and in many of Danticat's stories their descriptions emphasise their monstrous or inhuman nature. Although they do no longer exist officially, their legacy of paramilitary violence deeply impacted Haitian society and culture, as Danticat's writings show. In "Children of the sea" both the male and female narrators describe the control the 'Macoutes' have over the Haitian population through violence and fear. The male narrator had to escape Haiti after they captured and possibly killed his friends, as the woman says: "all the other youth federation members have disappeared. no one has heard from them. I think they might be in prison. maybe they are all dead" (4-5). Additionally, the woman says that, even after their deaths, the Tonton Macoutes continue to humiliate and torture the grieving families. For example, Madam Roger, a neighbour of the female narrator and the mother of one of the youth federation members, is only able to recover her son's head from the morgue. When she brings it home they mock her: "the macoutes by the house were laughing at her, they asked her if it was her dinner" (7). Among the people in the boat the narrator writes the

story of Celianne, a pregnant fifteen-year-old girl. The narrator later learns that she was raped by soldiers. She gives birth to a stillborn girl and, when the boat starts to sink, she jumps into the sea with her: "And just as the baby's head sank, so did hers. They went together like two bottles beneath a waterfall" (26). In other stories, like *The missing peace*, Lamort, the protagonist of this short story, falls in love with a young Tonton Macoute and this relationship humanises him to some degree, showing that not all Macoutes acted as the supernatural entities of Haitian folklore. However, the short story also shows the control over the population the other soldiers carried out, with curfews, arbitrary detentions, and other forms of violence. The short story also revolves around another character (Emilie) looking for her missing mother, probably murdered by those same soldiers.

Another aspect of gender-based trauma in these short stories can be found in the way they depict motherhood. As stated in the epilogue *Women like us, Krik? Krak!* traces a connection between different generations of women (the narrator describes them as an "army of women" (222) watching over her). Some of the stories underline this intergenerational connection, such as *Between the pool and the gardenias,* where the narrator mentions some of the women in other stories: "my great grandmother Eveline who was killed by Dominican soldiers at the Massacre River. My grandmother Défilé who died with a bald head in a prison, because God had given her wings" (94). This reference to the short story "Nineteen thirty-seven", treated previously, underlines how this book uses mother-daughter relationships to portray Haitian history.

The mother-daughter bond plays a key role in "Nineteen thirty-seven" and in other stories like "The missing peace" and "Between the pool and the gardenias". In these stories the author explores the traumatic side of motherhood. In the first the main character, Lamort, received her name (literally translated as "death") because her mother died in childbirth. The other character in

this short story, the American Emilie, travelled to Haiti looking for her mother, a journalist from Port-au-Prince who went missing the night of the coup. In this short story we can see how the relationships with their mothers (or lack thereof) define both Lamort and Emilie, as Emilie states that "They say a girl becomes a woman when she loses her mother" (116). In "Between the Pool and the Gardenias", we have the other side of this absence, with Marie, a Haitian servant who finds a baby abandoned in the street. Marie, who has suffered numerous miscarriages and still-births, sees this as a "gift" or "miracle", and takes the baby home. However, the reader soon understands that the baby is dead and witnesses as Marie goes through different stages of grief.

In these two short stories the broken relationships between mothers and daughters are a source of trauma because, as Jana Evans Braziel (2004) explains in the article "Défilée's diasporic daughters", through their relationship with their mothers the characters create links with the past and, therefore, construct their identity. This article also explains that the history of Haiti has always been associated with feminine figures, such as Défilée and Rose: "Sor Rose, according to *Ayiti´*s folklore, was the *négresse*, or black African slave woman, who was raped by her French master and gave birth to the *Repiblik dAyiti (République d´Haiti,* or Haitian Republic)" (79). Défilée, on the other hand, was an important figure in Haitian independence. Danticat uses these names in the book, Défilé being the name of both the grandmother and one of the ancestors of the protagonist of "Nineteenth Thirty-Seven", the one who received the figure of the Madonna that plays a central role in the story: "I held out the small statue that had been owned by my family ever since it was given to my great-great-great-grandmother Défilé by a French man who had kept her as a slave" (34). Meanwhile, Marie chooses the name of Rose for the dead baby girl she finds in "Between the Pool and the Gardenias" and many of the short stories take place in Ville Rose, a small town

in the Haitian countryside. This town appears in other of Danticat's works such as the novel *Claire of the Sea Light.*

By presenting Haiti's history through the perspective of these women, both historical and fictional, Danticat not only gives voice to the victims but also writes *herstory*. In her article about *herstory,* Leidy Navarro-Antolinez explains that in the 1960s a movement arose, seeking to tell history from another perspective, from the everyday, the family, and the domestic. While this movement laid the groundwork for stories with a feminine perspective, it is not yet *herstory* or gender history. In this first wave, according to Antolinez, the woman continued to serve as an object of study, but not yet a historiographic subject. She also states that, although the concept of *herstory* emerged in the sixties, it was consolidated in the post-structuralism of the eighties and it "started from two premises: on the one hand, reintegrating women into history and, on the other, restoring to women their history" (10). The sources of this new story from the perspective of women consisted of "narratives, biographies, stories and methods such as demographic analysis" and also "sources that had not been used before: private sources (such as family correspondence), literary sources, iconography, photography, newspapers, archives and collections about women" (11). The use of "herstory" in Danticat's book contrasts with what Glissant in *Discours Antillai*s calls "nonhistory" or the history that has not been told, due to the disruption of historical consciousness caused by slavery, that led to "the erasure of the collective memory" (62) of the people forcibly brought to the Americas. The women in Danticat's stories challenge this non-story and the disappearance of the collective memory by means of an oral literature, transmitted from mothers to daughters. By narrating their lives, these women also tell the history of their country. As the epilogue explains, Haitian women are not only "kitchen poets", but they also serve as the guardians of memory, identity, and history, and their stories deserve to be told.

Conclusion:

Both *The Farming of Bones* and *Krik? Krak!* place trauma at the centre of their narratives. The novel and the short stories explore the legacy of Haiti's apocalyptic history, the result of the traumatic experience of slavery, colonialism, and modern exploitation. These give voice to the victims, people who have been marginalized and left outside traditional historiography, either because of their nationality, race, or gender. The Haitian state and other official institutions constantly downplayed or openly ignored the stories and experiences of these victims (and even in some cases were the source of their trauma), preventing them from processing this trauma. Due to this indifference, the victims had to create their own healing mechanisms. They use storytelling and nature to recover from violent experiences and create a community of survivors. Danticat's books use nature, and especially the land and the sea, as a monument to a traumatic past and a symbolic new beginning, a source of both life and death for the people of Haiti. This symbolism becomes even stronger for the people of the Haitian Diaspora, as the land reminds them of the violence they endured but also, and above all, represents a beloved homeland to which they are connected through their memories, their stories, and their families. The following chapter investigates in greater detail the theme of the Haitian diaspora and how exile creates a special connection with landscape and nature.

Chapter 3: Travel writing in a diasporic framework.

Introduction

Travel writing, one of the oldest literary genres, encompasses different textual devices, such as travelogues, letters, autobiographies, journals, etc. The Europeans' arrival in America in 1492 expanded and gave new purpose to travel accounts, as Robert Clarke states in the introduction to *Postcolonial travel writing*: "travel oral writing has been deeply implicated in naturalizing and celebrating the ethos of European hegemony over the last 500 years" (1). As Clarke explains, the European exploration and colonization of America, Africa, and Asia, produced many travel accounts detailing the new territories they encountered, their inhabitants and the unknown flora and fauna (2018, 2). In this context of discovery and conquest, travel writing served to catalogue, dominate, and eventually exploit the new-found territories, creating a power dynamic between the European chroniclers and the people they encountered. For example, from the sixteenth century, the European travellers wrote detailed descriptions of the American continent, which often mixed facts and myths. One of the most recurrent myths is the idea of America as an Edenic or paradisiac place, as we explore in this chapter.

In the twentieth century, the decolonization processes shifted this power dynamic and those who had been previously dehumanized and the object of analysis in early European accounts started to write and produce travel narratives. Therefore, travel writing moved from the "centre" to the "periphery" of the former colonial empires, from Europe to America, Asia, and Africa. The type of journeys detailed on those accounts went through a similar shift, as the scientific expeditions and the rise of tourism in the nineteenth and early twentieth century were replaced by the forced migration and political exile that many of these postcolonial writers experienced in the second half of the twentieth century. Therefore, the authors of these accounts often explore the

history and culture of their home countries through the lens of exile and diaspora. They also often use travel as a literary motif, to study issues such as identity and belonging, and the power dynamics that exist in a postcolonial context.

In this chapter I study these themes in Danticat's work, giving particular attention to some of the essays included in *Create dangerously, the immigrant artist at work* and to some of the short stories in *Krik? Krak!*, especially "Children of the sea" and "Caroline's wedding" which show different migrant experiences. First, I examine how Danticat appropriates the images present in the early travel accounts, especially the notion of paradise. Then I focus on the motif of travel in postcolonial context and Danticat's own experience as a diasporic artist, her search for identity as a writer belonging to the Haitian diaspora in the United States. Finally, this chapter studies the liminal spaces inhabited by the characters in these texts and by the author herself.

1. Paradise myths, exoticism, and early images of the Americas

According to Sarah Casteel (2007), from the fifteenth century the European explorers associated America with an exotic and mysterious place, both alluring and dangerous. They thoroughly described the continent in letters and journals, frequently mixing facts and fiction, and these early travel accounts defined the relationship between Europe and America from the sixteenth to the nineteenth centuries, establishing the foundations for the colonization of the continent. As Bernard Cohen (1992) explains in his article about the early exploration of the continent, Columbus first arrived at the island of Guanani (modern day Bahamas) and promptly renamed it El Salvador. In this same voyage he landed on the island of Ayiti, where, after changing its name to Hispaniola, he established a small settlement, officially launching the European colonization of the Americas. On the other hand, renaming the new territories served as an early invention of America. As Casteel explains, this process of renaming the territory implied a first

attempt at a "domestication" of "foreign surroundings" (10). By renaming the islands he encountered in his voyage, Columbus incorporated unknown nature, people, and territories he encountered, into the accepted cosmography of this period.

As Edmundo O'Gorman explains in *The Invention of America*, Columbus thought that he had arrived at Cipango (Japan) and in his following travels he would continue to believe he had found a new route to the Indies (Asia) and not an unknown land mass. Columbus' texts, therefore, focused on creating parallels between what he saw, and the ideas found in texts from Antiquity, religious books, and the accounts of previous explorers, more than on describing an unknown territory. Columbus' accounts sought to make the new landmass fit into a fixed image of the world, that did not allow the existence of another continent apart from those that had been established from Antiquity: Asia, Africa, and Europe. O'Gorman continues his analysis explaining how European travellers in the following century slowly started to accept the idea of a new landmass that had not been mentioned by ancient writers and, consequently, their accounts became more descriptive and started to emphasize the "newness" of the territories they encountered. Their role as the "discoverers" of this new land reinforced the Europeans sense of superiority and once they accepted their place in this new vision of the world, they promptly began to domesticate and colonize the American continent.

This domestication process, as Casteel explains in her analysis, led to the invention of the so-called colonial pastoral, a type of literary text where the new territories were often idealized and associated with paradisiacal places "drawn from classical antiquity" (10), such as Arcadia. Richard Grove (1996) also studies this idea, pointing out that the discovery of these new territories was associated from the beginning with Edenic images: "During the fifteenth century the task of locating Eden and re-evaluating nature had already begun to be served by the appropriation of the

newly discovered and colonised tropical islands as paradises" (5). As Grove explains, these unexplored spaces "gave an opportunity to locate Gardens of Eden, Arcadias Elysian Fields and Golden Ages in a geographical reality" (32). All these ideas turned the American territories into an idealized place, full of abundance and wealth, to be "discovered", conquered, and exploited. The idealization of the continent eventually led to the creation of myths such as El Dorado, a legendary city made of gold and immense wealth. Many expeditions of Spanish explorers searched the whole continent for this place for nearly two centuries. Although they never found it, this legend fuelled the exploration of the American territories and, with it, the first travel accounts of the region, that often depicted the American continent more as an idea or fantasy than as a real place.

The eighteenth and nineteenth century brought a second wave of travel writing, reshaping the image of the continent again. At the beginning of the nineteenth century, the American continent continued to be mostly unknown and mysterious for many Europeans and various naturalist expeditions were sent to explore, collect, and classify plants and animals. Mary Louise Pratt (1992) analyses these texts in *Imperial Eyes*, demonstrating how travel accounts helped to develop natural history and other disciplines such as anthropology, while at the same time serving the imperial project. According to Pratt, the naturalist expeditions produced a large body of texts that had a specific purpose: to allow the European explorers to dominate and, eventually, to exploit both the natural resources and the people encountered in the unknown territories. As Pratt explains, one of the most important figures in this wave of naturalist expeditions in the late eighteenth century was Alexander von Humboldt (12).

Humboldt travelled across America between 1799 and 1804 and described his journey in detail in several volumes, where he analysed the continent's geography and landscape. These

descriptions changed the way the Europeans saw America as, in Pratt's words, "Spanish America, in Northern Europe, was a virtual carte blanche which Humboldt seemed determined to fill completely with his writings, drawings, and maps" (119). Pratt also points out that Humboldt wrote these texts in response to the so-called *querelle d'Amériques,* a term applied to "the long and arrogant dispute among European intellectuals over the relative size, value, and variety of American flora and fauna" (120). As Pratt explains, America's image as a new and younger continent led to the common belief among naturalists of its nature as less developed and even primitive. Humboldt, on the other hand, "reinvented South America first and foremost as nature" (120), emphasizing traits such as "dramatic", "extraordinary" and even "overwhelming". Additionally, Humboldt represented American nature as "powered by life forces many of which are invisible to the human eye; a nature that dwarfs humans, commands their being, arouses their passions, defies their powers of perception" (120). In this way, Humboldt differs from the traditional European explorers' efforts in favour of imperialist expansion and exploitation of America's natural resources, showing instead that American environment is a force that escapes human control and cannot be domesticated or controlled. This notion may have influenced later forms of literature in the continent, such as magic realism's description of overflowing flora and fauna.

Humboldt's descriptions of America as a primitive landscape relates to Edenic images studied before. As Casteel states, the European settlers saw the continent as deprived of human civilization, culture, or history. Casteel continues explaining that these ideas served to justify the conquest of the continent as "pastoral representations of New World landscapes not only inscribed colonial control but also facilitated settler cultures' creation of a sense of place" (10). Additionally, the primitive imagery influenced how the Europeans settlers saw the American indigenous

inhabitants. As Pratt explains, the classification efforts applied by the European naturalists to the fauna and flora also led to an "attempt to 'naturalize' the myth of European superiority" (32). They separated human beings into different types and gave them varying levels of civilization depending on their geographical place. In America, and the Caribbean in particular, these classifications often also included "wild men" and monsters. The word "Caribbean", for example, comes from the word "cannibal", a myth from medieval bestiaries, that refers to man-eating monsters that was later associated with one of the indigenous tribes inhabiting the region: the Caribs.

Nature, therefore, while abundant and rich, also contained dangerous elements and the American tropics became associated with a world of unknown illnesses, natural disasters, and unpredictable weather. Nancy Stepan (2002), for example, studied in detail how the tropics were associated with diseases such as elephantiasis. This reflects the accepted idea at the time that established the northern hemisphere as the only part of the world conducive to human habitation, while the tropics were dangerous places, harbouring diseases and resistant to human civilization. This cosmology placed Europe at the centre of the world, the place of civilization and order, in contrast with other territories, uncivilized, primitive, and dangerous. In the following centuries Europeans will continue to define themselves through their relationship with the "other" and the opposition of civilization (white, Catholic) versus barbarism (non-white, pagan). A large part of this relationship was based on converting and educating the indigenous population and the Spanish crown sent priests as early as 1523 to advance the colonization of the continent. These ideas remained prevalent in the following centuries, and the natural expeditions of the eighteenth century tended to reinforce the image of the tropics (and its inhabitants) as uncivilized spaces.

In conclusion, for many years America was less a real, geographical place than an invention of the European travellers, the product of the combination of various myths that often depicted the

new continent as an untouched paradise, a place both alluring and dangerous. These myths drove the conquest and exploitation of the American territories and conditioned European perception of the natural settings and the people who inhabited them. The exploration of the American continent produced a varied and extensive bibliography, made of travel accounts, scientific texts, letters, and maps. These texts were used to reinforce ideas about European superiority and justify the colonization of the continent. Now we turn to how modern writers appropriate and subvert these ideas in their texts and travel accounts.

2. Travel writing in a post-colonial context.

As we will see in this section, the decolonization processes of the twentieth century shifted the power dynamics present in the travel accounts analysed previously. Postcolonial writers challenged the idealized vision of the American continent present in the travel literature produced previously and gave voice to the people often excluded from the traditional accounts, offering new perspectives of their countries' history.

As Angelica Nixon (2015) explains in her book *Resisting Paradise,* the idealized image of the American continent and the Caribbean was tied to the colonial project as *"*Discourses of paradise are inherently racialized, gendered, and sexualized because of and through the histories of slavery and colonialism" (3). Nixon argues that the Edenic images used by early European travellers survive to this day, especially in the tourism industry that often depicts the Caribbean islands as paradisiac places of pristine natural beauty while at the same time presenting its inhabitants as mere decor. Nixon posits that these paradisiac depictions of the region often gloss over the economic issues, the exploitation of its inhabitants and the environmental impact caused by tourism in those territories. Consequently, postcolonial writers such as Danticat often criticize and examine this association between Caribbean islands and paradisiac places in their work.

For example, Danticat points out in her essay *The Immigrant Artist at Work*, that "Our paintings show glorious Edenlike African jungles but never the Middle Passage" (63). In other words, the use of paradisiac images in Haitian art often results from the desire to erase part of the country's violent past and, especially, any reference to slavery and colonization. However, as LeGrace Benson (2011) explains in an article examining the artistic movement that developed in Haiti from the 1950's, these painters often used their art in subversive ways. For example, this movement resulted from people migrating from the *andeyo* (countryside) to the cities, especially the capital, Port-au-Prince. While at first it may seem that this art turned the Haitian landscape into an object to be sold and consumed by tourists, Benson argues that "Although commodified, the images bore the marks of memory and the desire for the distant home" (62). Benson also mentions the influence of the United States' occupation (1915-1934) on these artists and especially on Jean Price-Mars, called the 'father of Négritude'.

As stated in the introduction, Négritude and Indigénism were artistic and intellectual movements based on recovering Haiti's history outside the European heritage (i.e., the indigenous and African culture), giving special value to elements such as the Kreyol language and Vodou religion, among others. Price Mars, according to Benson, "had initiated a riposte from the urban, intellectual elites to the nineteen years of indignity suffered under the 1915-1934 United States occupation" (64). Painting the Haitian landscape, therefore, served as a form of resistance, of recovering Haiti's history and culture prior to U.S. occupation and European colonization through art. However, as David Nicholls (1986) explains in his study of Duvalerism in Haiti, Papa Doc Duvalier also used Négritude as part of his political discourse, turning elements that had been used to resist foreign influences in the past into tools of oppression and persecution. Papa Doc often

used folkloric elements to control Haitian people, as happened with the Tonton Macoutes, mentioned in the first chapter.

Going back to the place of landscape in Haitian art, Danticat also states that the richness of nature portrayed in these paintings ignores the consequences of plantation economy and colonial exploitation, such as the trauma of slavery and the exploitation of nature, and the landscape changed in the pursuit of economic gains. Danticat, on the other hand, often uses natural elements in her books to explore Haiti's violent and complicated history, as stated in the analysis of *Krik? Krak!* and the *Farming of Bones.* As mentioned previously, her texts draw a parallel between natural elements (such as the Caribbean Sea and the Massacre River, for example) with historical traumas, from the "Middle Passage" (slavery) to modern forms of racial discrimination and oppression. In this way, Danticat uses the exploitation of nature (cane cutting for example) to denounce the mistreatment of Haitians and fill gaps in the country's historiography (like the silence around the 1937 slaughter). This subversion extends to the point of view in her travel accounts. As Nixon explains, traditional travel accounts were mostly produced by white European men. Danticat and other postcolonial writers, on the other hand, "challenge dominant social constructions and representations by reworking the travel genre and placing themselves and their characters into a white, male-dominated space" (6).

Danticat, as a Haitian-American woman describing Haiti, rewrites Eurocentric travel accounts' conventions. For example, the travel accounts written in previous centuries dehumanized the inhabitants of the Caribbean and the Americas, turning them into objects of analysis and often described them in an extremely negative way, as primitive and not completely human. Danticat's texts, as mentioned in the previous chapter, tell the history of Haiti from their point of view, giving them a voice that often offers a different perspective from the official accounts and showing them

as key players in the history of Haiti. The protagonists of Danticat's short stories and novels often link travel and survival, as they escape violence, persecution, economic instability and even death, either from the Dominican Republic to Haiti or from Haiti to the United States. This type of journey results in complex power dynamics and tensions with the host country they encounter (Dominican Republic or the United States), while also creating a new and complex relationship with their homeland (Haiti). In *Asylum speakers* April Shemak (2011) states that migration and diaspora have shaped the Caribbean due to the region's "dire circumstances including civil war, natural disaster, genocide, or failing economies, which forced people to flee their homelands" (4).

According to Shemak, these Caribbean refugees and exiled people produce a new kind of travel literature, often influenced by the conventions of testimonial narrative, studied in the previous chapter (50). Similarly, to these testimonies, the accounts produced by the Caribbean exiles aim to convince an audience. As Shemak explains, *how* the *testimonio* is told is more important that *what* it tells. As seen previously, in the analysis of *The Farming of Bones*, there is a "correct way" to tell a story. In the case of the refugees' accounts studied by Shemak, the Caribbean migrants usually address American authorities (immigration officers, lawyers, etc.) because they play a key role in allowing them to enter another country. The testimonies, therefore, must persuade an audience that the trauma and persecution they experienced is real. Additionally, as we saw before, the main problem of *testimonio* resides in how it often relies for its transmission on a translator or another type of intermediary. In the case of the Haitian boat people studied by Shemak, for example, their oral accounts in Kreyol are often written down, translated, and published in English, as they present these testimonies to American immigration authorities, for example.

On the other hand, Shemak also analyses the origins of the term "refugee" and how it links with politics and modernity. According to the United Nations definition a refugee is

> (a person) owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country.

Contrary to the refugee, therefore, "migrant" refers to people who move out of their country voluntarily, looking for a better life, work, or education opportunities, etc. In the case of "exile" and "émigré", they are similar, but while the first one is often imposed, the second term refers to a form of "self-exile". Therefore, the circumstances in which they leave their homeland distinguishes those who move to other countries, be it voluntarily or forced by economic crises and/or political instability. However, as Shemak explains, this convention "was conceived in Eurocentric terms, aimed at aiding displaced Europeans, but not concerned with the non-Western world" (6) and cannot be applied to Caribbean migrants.

In the essay entitled "I am not a journalist", for example, Danticat shows the complexity of the term 'diaspora' when she lists the different categories that exist in the Haitian diaspora: "exiles, émigrés, refugees, migrants, nomads, immigrants, naturalized citizens, half-generation, first-generation, American, Haitian, Haitian American, men, women, and children who were living in the United States and elsewhere" (51). Although some of these terms may seem similar, the difference seems to reside in the motive behind their traveling and if they had a choice or not, as mentioned before. The Haitian diaspora encompasses a large group of people as, according to United Nations Population Division's estimates, by mid-2020, the largest Haitian migrant population in the world (around 680, 000 people) lived in the United States and around two million

people lived outside the island (of a total of Haiti's 11 million inhabitants). Haiti's economic and political instability during the early twentieth century led many of its inhabitants to travel to other countries in search of work and better living conditions, especially to their neighbour, the Dominican Republic, where they worked as domestic workers and sugar cane collectors, as mentioned in the analysis of *The Farming of Bones.* In the second half of the twentieth century, the violence of the Duvaliers' dictatorships and the socio-economic deterioration of the island led many Haitians to leave their country. Even after Baby Doc left Haiti in 1986, the resulting political instability caused another wave of migration in the early 1990s to the United States, as we saw in the analysis of "Children of the sea".

In *Krik? Krak!* Danticat shows these different types of migrants, from the "boat people" fleeing political persecution and violence, to the "naturalized citizens" who obtained citizenship in other countries and even those born in the United States and belonging to their own category: the second-generation Haitians. However, despite their differences, these categories often overlap and coexist, and, in some cases, people may experience more than one in their lifetime. For example, a political refugee may return to Haiti when the regime that led to their exile changes, but then migrate again because they do not find a job in their own country becoming an economic migrant. In any case, the existence of these different categories show that many Haitians have experienced migration and diaspora, both directly (by traveling abroad themselves and settling in another country) or indirectly (through their families and friends living in the United States and other countries). As stated before, one fifth of the Haitian population live outside their homeland and these people have become a source of income for many Haitians households, through remittances (transfer of money and goods). For example, in 2001, the Inter-American

Development Bank (IDB) estimated that 24.2 percent of Haiti's GDP came from remittances, although the exact amount is hard to establish, as they are often done through unofficial channels.

Additionally, Haiti has another category of migrants: those moving to other places on the island itself, especially from the impoverished countryside to the cities. The ecological and social deterioration of the Haitian landscape has led many peasants to move to the cities, leading to the overpopulation of the urban centres. For example, in the essay *I am not a journalist*, mentioned before, Danticat describes Jean Dominique's situation, a Haitian journalist who lived many years in exile: "Migration in general was something he understood well, whether from the countryside—what many in Haiti called the *peyi andeyò*, the outside country—to the Haitian capital, or from Haitian borders to other shores" (51). This situation is portrayed in many of Danticat's stories, where the author shows that, despite their different situations, these internal and external migrants often face similar challenges, including discrimination, persecution, and identity crises. The internal migrants appear in some of Danticat's stories like "A wall of fire rising" and "Night women", where the Haitians who migrate to the cities often find themselves living in overcrowded and impoverished neighbourhoods and having to resort to prostitution and other exploitative practices to survive.

Furthermore, the situation of this migrants does not improve when they go back to Haiti. As Danticat portrays in the short story "Nineteen thirty-seven", they continue to be mistreated and persecuted, may be even more than in other countries. As mentioned before, this short story portrays the events of the Parsley Massacre, however it does not focus on the Domincan's role in the event, but rather on how the Haitian state perpetuated the trauma. The story shows that the Haitian state continued to persecute the victims and their families, even sending some of them to jail where they endured all kind of tortures and mistreatments. In the analysis of *The Farming of*

Bones we saw how the Haitian government did not act as a proper audience for the survivors, as its efforts to compensate the victims were short-lived and only focused on paying the victims. Additionally, the officers appointed for the hearings did not listen to the survivors or their relatives and even doubted their accounts. Here, the Haitian state continues to be depicted in a negative light, as it acts violently and unfairly towards the imprisoned women. For example, Josephine says that her mother and all the women in the prison were sentenced without trials, often for life, after being accused of witchcraft: "A loved one, a friend, or a neighbor had accused them of causing the death of a child. A few other people agreeing with these stories was all that was needed to have her arrested. And sometimes even killed" (38). In prison, the prison guards continuously humiliate these women, beating and mistreating them. Josephine also describes the prisoners as "bone-thin women with shorn heads" (35), who only have some bread and water to eat. She describes how the guards shave the prisoners' heads "to make them look like crows, like men" (39). This dehumanization of the prisoners will continue even after their death, as Josephine says that after her mother's death, "her remains were to be burnt in the prison yard, to prevent her spirit from wandering into any young innocent bodies" (36), showing that the Haitian government acted like its Dominican counterpart when they burned the bodies of the 1937 slaughter's victims, preventing their families from mourning them.

As Nixon states, in a postcolonial context, writers such as Danticat and Jamaica Kinkaid use travel writing tropes to question power dynamics and, in this way, "[they] expose the continuity between colonial and neo-colonial exploitation of the Caribbean by critiquing travel and tourism" (33). Nixon explains that the tourism industry appropriated the image of the paradisiac Caribbean and uses it to continue with exploitative practices. According to Nixon, "Kincaid and Danticat challenge exploitative consumption and tourism in their literary works by exposing and utilizing

the power that lies in the production of history" (33). As mentioned before, Danticat often explores episodes of Haitian history from a different perspective, not from that of the exploiter but from that of the people exploited. Additionally, her texts show that, in the twentieth century, the old forms of colonial exploitation were replaced by other power dynamics. Haitians are still exploited for agricultural labour in the Dominican Republic, as we saw in *The Farming of Bones*, and those who migrate to the United States, as the short stories included in *Krik? Krak!* show, often face discrimination and persecution.

In conclusion, we can see that Danticat uses travel writing in these texts to present Haitian history from a different perspective. Contrary to the idealized image of the Caribbean present in the texts written by European travellers in previous centuries, Danticat's texts denounce the violent history of Haiti and show how the exploitation of the country and its inhabitants did not stop with their independence from France but continued through new exploitative practices in the twentieth and twenty-first century, especially regarding women[9]. While *The Farming of Bones* and the short stories present the perspective of narrators who are marginalized or discriminated against, the essay *The immigrant artist at work* expresses Danticat's own point of view. In this book Danticat writes about Haiti from a place of privilege and success, as we will see in the following sections, analysing how the travel motif serves to explore issues around national identity and displacement. Before studying these topics, however, it is important to define in more detail the concept of diaspora, especially in the Haitian context and in Danticat's case in particular.

3. Diaspora, refugees, and exile

[9] This process is analyzed by Dorit Naaman (2000), who states that the newly independent nations assert patriarchal power to suppress and control women. In Danticat's case, they are often presented as victims of sexual violence, discrimination, and persecution.

As stated in previous sections, movement and migration define the Caribbean space. Since colonial times, it served as the place of exchange between Africa, America, and Europe. In modern times, it continues to be a site of travel and migration, ranging from the Haitian refugees studied in "Children of the sea*"*, to the modern touristic cruises that continue to reinforce the idea of the Caribbean as an Edenic place to be consumed and exploited. Danticat explores these different types of migration and the power dynamics they create in her texts, as we will see in this section. First, some definitions about diaspora, migration and exile must be considered in this analysis.

As Bénedict Boisseron (2014) states, the term diaspora (or in Haitian Creole *Dyaspora*) "is a condition created by the other's gaze, and more particularly the gaze of the community back home" (10). Boisseron also states that the Caribbean diaspora has a unique configuration, as "The traditional sense of diaspora is connected to minority, two concepts that presuppose the idea of people from a common background sticking together in a situation of geographical and cultural estrangement" (3) but the Caribbean diasporic communities lack cohesion and often create a diaspora inside the diaspora. This lack of unity inside the diaspora has its origins in the transatlantic slave trade and the forced displacement of African people brought to the American continent. Since then, as Boisseron states, the Caribbean went through different waves of migration and "As diasporic phenomena become increasingly scattered, the idea of unity in spite of, and certainly because of primal uprootedness turns out to be obsolete" (2). While Boisseron also states that diasporic communities "attest to the viability of a Caribbean world outside of the archipelago" (1), the Caribbean communities abroad reflect the fragmentation of the region. The Caribbean refugees living in the United States and in other countries continue to be divided, due to their nationality, language, etc. This can be seen in Danticat's story "Caroline's wedding", where a Haitian mother

is ashamed of her daughter marrying a Bahamian man. We will later study this short story in more detail.

Similarly, Boisseron points out that the Caribbean diaspora also erases the traditional binary perspective between "the land of asylum on the one hand and the home left behind on the other" (2), as "In diasporic cultures, the fantasy and impossibility of return traditionally keep the community together through an ever-postponed materialization of the return" (10). In other words, diaspora traditionally implies a desire to return to the homeland, a desire that is often impossible due to different circumstances. However, as Boisseron explains, these modern Caribbean refugees return and travel back more easily now between their homeland (Haiti) and their countries of adoption (the United States) and "As return gets technically easier, dispersion subsequently becomes more mobile, transient, and less permanent" (10). This ease, on the other hand, "erases the line between the home state and the adopted land, thus turning immigration into a border diaspora, a kind of diaspora of which to-and-fro mobility weakens the inclination toward settlement" (10). In the case of the Haitian diaspora, however, this mobility is only possible for some privileged people, who have the economic means and the legal status to travel back home. For many Haitians, as we saw in the short story "Children of the sea", migrating to the United States is a one-way trip and one that many Haitians do not survive. The survivors, meanwhile, create strong communities like the neighbourhood of Little Haiti in Miami[10]. As Boisseron states:

> Though arguably diffractive, the Caribbean diaspora has also been engaged, paradoxically enough, in a slow process of territorialization over the course of the twentieth

[10] Danticat explored the connection between the Haitian people and this neighbourhood in a 2019 article for the *Miami Herald* https://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/community/miami-dade/downtown-miami/article235553577.html

century, which has grounded once dispersed peoples into rooted communities in spite of the lingering effect of colonization (3).

Danticat also shows the cohesion of the Haitian community in the short story “Caroline’s wedding”, mentioned previously. This story explores the identity crisis many Haitian immigrants experience when they leave their country and emigrate to the United States. The short story shows how two sisters, Caroline and Grace, struggle with their identity while at the same time trying to be part of a new society in a cross-generational and cross-cultural context. The three protagonists of the short story, a Haitian mother, Hermine, and her two daughters, Caroline (born in the United States) and Grace (born in Haiti), have different ways of relating to their Haitian heritage. For example, Hermine frequently cooks Haitian dishes, uses *Kreyol* expressions, and tries to educate her daughters following the traditions of her country. Meanwhile, Grace, who migrated to the United States with her mother when she was very young, while still feeling a strong connection to Haiti, often feels oppressed by the culture she has inherited. She feels neither completely Haitian nor completely American and Americanized her Haitian name “Gracina " to “Grace”, to try to fit more easily into American society. Additionally, both sisters teach English in a high school to Haitian students, showing they are as fluent as a native speaker in the language of their host country. Grace also goes with her mother to a mass in Saint Agnes church, a popular place for the Haitian community, for a group of “boat people” who died trying to reach America. The short story shows that religious practices, therefore, help maintain family bonds and create a sense of community in the Haitian diaspora, emphasized by the fact that the mass takes place in *Kreyol*. During his sermon the priest also mentions the condition of the Haitian community in the United States:

> We have come here this far from the shackles of the old Africans […] At the mercy of the winds, at the mercy of the sea, to the quarters of the New World, we came. Transients. Nomads. I bid you welcome. (167)

This quotation shows not only the unity within the Haitian community but also their connection to the African-American diaspora, through their shared experience of slavery and exploitation. Grace also states that "[the priest] recited a list of a hundred twenty-nine names, Haitian refugees who had drowned at sea that week" (167). The use of "that week" emphasises that the Haitian community often has this kind of mass, as every week many Haitian refugees drown on their way to the United States. In this case, the mass specifically honours one of the refugees, an unnamed woman who died at sea. The priest describes her as:

> A young woman who was pregnant when she took a boat from Haiti and then later gave birth to her child on that boat. A few hours after the child was born, its precious life went out, like a candle in a storm, and the mother with her infant in her arms dived into the sea (167).

This description shows similarities with Celine's story, the fifteen-year-old who had been raped by Tonton Macoutes from the short story "Children of the sea", a connection that also seems implied by the name of the church: St Agnes, the patron saint of rape victims. The connection between these two stories shows the links within the Haitian diaspora, implying, as Grace states in the story, that "all Haitians know each other" (167). She also states about the people who drowned that "it seemed as though many of those listed might have been people that I had known at some point in my life" (167).

On the other hand, Caroline shows a different facet of the Haitian diaspora. Unlike her Haitian-born sister, Caroline was born in the United States and her mother and sister often describe

her as “very American”. Caroline has never been to Haiti, and follows American beauty standards, as Grace’s description of her sister underlines: “(Caroline) brushed aside a strand of her hair, chemically straightened and streaked bright copper from a peroxide experiment” (160). Caroline also does not take part in many of the cultural and religious traditions followed by her mother and sister, such as going to church, and this often causes conflict between Caroline and her mother. As mentioned before, the main source of tensions between the two of them resides in Caroline’s decision to marry a non-Haitian, embarrassing her mother, as Grace states: “We invited none of Ma’s friends from Saint Agnes because she told me that she would be ashamed to have them ask her the name of her daughter’s fiancé and have her tongue trip” (160). Caroline also displays some resistance to her mother’s traditional ideas, for example by sneaking out of the house to spend the night with her fiancé and insisting on a small civil ceremony for the wedding instead of a religious ceremony, as her mother would prefer. In this sense, the short story seems to fall into a common trope of migration narrative, as Carine M. Mardorossian (2002) states in her analysis of exile literature in the United States. According to Mardorossian, in the novels written by migrant writers there is often an association of “The Caribbean with repressive sexual mores and North America with a liberating narrative” (22), especially for female protagonists. The United States liberal views on sexuality allows these protagonists to escape patriarchal values and rigid social structures still prevalent in their native culture. However, as Mardorossian underlines, this association may lead to an unjustified idealization of American society. As the short story shows, although Caroline has more freedom in the United States regarding her relationship with her fiancé, Hermine was arrested and spent three days in an immigration jail when she was pregnant with Caroline, showing that migrants are still persecuted and discriminated against.

Additionally, the short story also shows that despite her Americanised ways, Caroline still maintains some strong links with Haiti, through the stories and games she shares with her sister. As Alexandria Ayala (2014) explains in her article on Danticat's short stories, the characters often use orality to create identity and belonging. In this short story we have two examples of orality connecting the characters to Haiti. First, Grace and Caroline play a game based on free associations and, as Grace describes it, "Sometimes we would play half the night, coming up with endless possibilities for questions and answers, only repeating the key word in every sentence" (161). The description of this game shows that it follows the same structure of orality and storytelling used in the *Krik? Krak!* narrative analysed in the previous chapter (64). The short story also points out that originally only women played this game, as mothers taught their daughters how to play it. The short story describes a secret female society that existed in the Haitian town of Ville Rose, connecting "Caroline's wedding" to other stories in the *Krik?Krak!* collection, underlining the cohesive structure of these short stories, as mentioned in the analysis of the epilogue "Women like us" (73). Therefore, through this narrative game, Caroline and Grace take part in a Haitian tradition that connects them with several generations of Haitian women. The other example of orality in the short story comes from the use of proverbs as a teaching and bonding strategy between parents and their children. As Grace points out, her father used to talk in proverbs and "Beneath the surface of Papa's old proverbs was always some warning" (162).

In conclusion, through Grace and Caroline's situation, Danticat shows the contradictions and complexity of the Haitian diaspora. Grace, born in Haiti and raised in the United States, does not know exactly where she belongs: she does not feel either completely Haitian nor completely American and obtaining citizenship, although important, exacerbates this feeling of alienation. Meanwhile, we do not have a lot of insight about Caroline's true feelings about her situation as an

American-Haitian, as Grace is the narrator of this story, but, as stated previously, she often rebels against her mother's wishes and rules while also maintaining some Haitian traditions. The sisters' situation reflects Danticat's status as a diasporic writer, as we are going to see in the following section.

4. The diasporic or exiled writer

Having analysed how the characters in Danticat's stories reflect the complexity of the Haitian diaspora and the power dynamics that shaped the Caribbean, I will now focus on the author herself and how she portrays the topic of exile in her texts and how her own experience shaped the way Danticat sees exile and Haitian culture.

As stated previously, the Haitian diaspora has different facets and not all Haitians live in the same conditions in the United States, often creating strong bonds with other Haitians while struggling to integrate themselves in the new country. Danticat, who emigrated to the United States when she was twelve, can be seen as one of the privileged ones, as the essay *I am not a journalist* shows. In this essay, the author travels back to Haiti for the funeral of the murdered journalist Jean Dominique. While Jean Dominique had been exiled from Haiti on several occasions due to his political activities, Danticat, as an American citizen free to travel between the United States and Haiti, often returns to visit her family in Haiti, as she states in this essay. Her situation is similar to other modern diasporic and exiled writers, as Boisseron states, (as quoted on page 101). This ease, on the other hand, "erases the line between the home state and the adopted land, thus turning immigration into a border diaspora, a kind of diaspora of which to-and-fro mobility weakens the inclination toward settlement" (10). The constant movement, therefore, also erases their sense of identity, as they are not fully American nor Caribbean and often do not settle permanently in one place. This sense of alienation is often exacerbated by the rejection they often face in their home

countries. As Boisseron posits, these writers are often accused of being sell-outs, of betraying their countries: “the expatriate, this decentered figure living outside of the native Caribbean is not necessarily a welcome figure in the Caribbean” (5). Danticat often mentions in her essay the sense of guilt she feels as a diasporic writer, living and writing in the United States, far away from the violence and the economic and political turmoil of her home country. On the other hand, her status also gives her new opportunities as Boisseron states: “America offers a tabula rasa for Caribbean writers who are no longer interested in shaping their voice according to the African or European presence, whether to embrace or reject those presences” (Boisseron, 21). America also often offers them an opportunity to heal from traumatic experiences, like discrimination, poverty, and political persecution. However, they are also often victims of persecution and discrimination by the American state, as Danticat showed in “Caroline’s wedding” and in “Children of the sea”.

The Duvaliers’ regime had a deep influence on both Danticat’s life and on Haitian society in general and the collection of essays *Create dangerously* shows especially how it affected Haitians artists. The first essay, which gives the collection its title, describes the execution of Marcel Numa and Louis Drouin. Numa and Drouin had left Haiti in the 1950s but returned in 1964, as part of the guerrilla group “Jeune Haiti”. This group launched a plot to overthrow Papa Doc Duvalier but failed and most of its members died in combat. The only survivors were Numa and Drouin, who were captured and executed under Duvalier’s orders. Danticat regards this execution as her “foundation myth”, as it inspired her to become a writer. As Danticat explains, their fate embodies the conflict between freedom and authority, as “the execution of Marcel Numa and Louis Drouin involves a disobeyed directive from a higher authority and a brutal punishment as a result” (5). The tense relationship between artistic freedom and authority, present in many of Danticat’s texts, led many Haitian artists and writers to go into exile under the Duvaliers’ regime. The

collection of essays, therefore, portrays the experience of many Haitian writers and artists who had to leave Haiti, for fear of persecution and violence. In this collection of essays, Danticat explores issues such as identity, memory, and storytelling. But before studying these topics in more detail, we must define "exile" and how it works in a postcolonial context.

As mentioned before, the Caribbean region (and Haiti in particular) has been deeply marked by migration and travel. However, exile and migration, while sharing the notion of displacement, are different, in the sense that exile has a political connotation. As Elizabeth J. West (2004) points out in the introduction to *Caribbean women in exile*, exile, traditionally, refers to "a condition often associated with a form of punishment for crimes and political offense in ancient civilizations or, in more recent historical periods, periods of banishment for civil and political offenders to remote areas within a national realm" (i). In Danticat's essays, the journalist Jean Dominique serves as an example of this connection between exile and political punishment. As stated in the previous section, Jean Dominique is the focus of the essay *I am not a journalist*. The chapter begins with his assassination in 2000, outside the radio station Radio Haiti-Inter. As Danticat explains, Jean Dominique's story, like Numa and Drouin's, illustrates the dangers of being outspoken in Haiti and of criticizing the government, as he had to go into exile numerous times: "Jean had survived several arrests and their resulting exiles, and had lived to return to Haiti to open and reopen his radio station" (42). The essay also points out that Jean Dominique died in a moment of relative political stability, after having survived the Duvaliers' regimes, political persecution, and death threats. However, it should be noted that others have criticized the association between Haitian literature and exile. For example, Nadeve Ménard examines in an article "the myth of the exiled writer" and states that: "The fact that exile is central to the most cited critical works on modern Haitian literature strikes me as a problem, one connected to broader

issues such as the continued silencing of Haitian voices and the refusal to see the Haitian space as anything other than oppressive or empty" (54). She also points out that many Haitian writers "explicitly resist being labeled as either trapped within Haiti or exiled from it" (55). Ménard even states that Danticat herself does not identify as an exiled writer. In the strict sense of the word, it is true that Danticat is not a writer in exile, as exile implies a political condition, but she is a diasporic writer and her experience shaped many of her texts.

In any case, the complicated and fragile situation of the journalist and writer in Haiti creates a difficult situation with their environment. The Haitian writer, under the constant threat of death and violence, can never feel fully at home. Also, the violence of the present adds to the trauma of the past, as Yanick Lahens (1992) states in her article about exile and belonging. According to Lahens, in a postcolonial context exile does not only apply to a physical state, of being in another country. For example, Lahens points out that "Colonial zeal and its national prolongation have thus made the writer a foreigner in his own country and perhaps simply foreign, the very prototype of the modern nomad" (738). Therefore, even before leaving their home country, the postcolonial writer suffers a form of internal exile and never fully belongs to their home country's society. Lahens goes on to explain that this feeling of alienation stems from the imposition of colonial culture, and especially a foreign language (French in Haiti's case) because these foreign expressions "are foreign to the writer's body, to his passions, left to wane in his mother tongue" (737). The use of a foreign language means that "The new literature he writes in this language is not enriched by the Creole tradition or orality" (737). In Danticat's case, she writes and publishes her texts in English, which doubles her sense of alienation. Another factor that contributes to the feeling of alienation comes from Danticat's role as intermediary or translator, as she writes the

stories of the Haitian immigrants (both fictional and real) in her books to a foreign and English-speaking public.

Danticat herself, as stated previously, went through the experience of migration and *diaspora* with her family when she was twelve. However, she did not get to the United States on a boat but by plane and her family was not fleeing political persecution. Danticat acknowledges this privilege and in the essay collection, *I'm not a journalist,* the author mentions the guilt that diasporic writers often feel about their position, and "about my own physical distance from a country I had left at the age of twelve during a military dictatorship that had forced thousands to choose between exile and death" (50). She also mentions that this situation creates a sense of alienation, about "being called a parasitic *dyaspora,* a foreign being but still not a *blan*" (50). According to Michel Laguerre (1998), the diasporic citizen always struggles with a sense of alienation, "Because diaspora entails a double allegiance, a diaspora's vision of society—or its role in society—may differ from that of the country of residence and from that of the homeland" (9). Furthermore, "The diasporic subject's personal agenda in terms of commitments to both the homeland and the country of residence unavoidably conflicts with the demands and expectations of the country of residence or those of the homeland, or both" (9) as diaspora implies difference from both the homeland and the nation of residence" (9). In other words, the diasporic person feels that they never fully belong to either country and remains trapped between different cultures, identities, and languages.

This sense of being between two places appears frequently in Danticat's texts, as mentioned in the study of *The Farming of Bones* in the previous chapter. In the novel, Amabelle, as many other Haitians who lived in the Dominican Republic, did not really belong to either country or community and identifies herself as a "wayfarer" or in-betweener. The description of

the immigrant artist in the essays shows that Danticat shares Amabelle's loss of identity, the feeling of not belonging anywhere: "When I say 'my country' to some Haitians, they think I mean the United States. When I say, 'my country' to some Americans, they think of Haiti." (49). This quotation echoes what Mardorossian points out in her article, how postcolonial exiled writers serve as "mediators between two cultures" (16), a romanticized here (where they live and write) and an alienating there (their home country). While the notion of the home country being alienating seems contradictory, it is a common feeling, especially in the cases of writers forced into exile, who often face the "dyaspora dilemma", as Danticat calls it. We will see this conflict in more detail in another section. In any case, Mardorossian prefers the term "migrant literature" to "exile literature", as "The shift from exile to migrant challenges this binary logic by emphasizing movement, rootlessness, and the mixing of cultures, races, and languages" (16). Migrant literature, therefore, mixes the author's various languages and cultural traditions and serves as a bridge between different countries and societies.

In conclusion, the term exile can be both applied to a person and a situation. On the one hand, it refers to a political status, the fact of being removed from one's home country, often as the result of violence and persecution. On the other hand, it refers to a sense of alienation and estrangement, from events in one's own country. This creates a sense of alienation and even guilt in the diasporic writer, who tries to create a bridge between their home culture and the new spaces they inhabit, as we will see in the following section.

5. Liminal and border spaces

Having established how Danticat uses the figure of exile to explore issues of identity and alienation in her works, we can now study the spaces where this diaspora exists, such as the Caribbean Sea and the Massacre River, the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. As

we will see, these "border spaces" represent the in-between state of the migrant/exiled/diasporic writer, while also creating complex power dynamics, resulting from the interplay of race, language, and culture that often happens in these spaces.

In her article "Arts of the contact zone", Mary Louise Pratt (1991) defines border or contact zones as "spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (34). Haiti, as we have seen in this analysis, still feels the aftermath of colonialism acutely, with systemic social, political, and economic instability. Additionally, the old colonial centre (France) has been replaced by other seats of power, first by their richer neighbour, the Dominican Republic, and later by the United States. Danticat has shown in many of her short stories and novels the long and complicated relationship between Haiti and the other countries and how the power dynamics between these countries have caused political, racial, and economic issues.

As Leon Pamphile (2015) explains, the United States and Haiti share "the distinction of being the first two independent republics in the Western Hemisphere" (XVI), as the first became independent in 1776 and the second in 1804, as mentioned above. However, today the situation of these two countries is very different, as "the United States has become the world's sole superpower, while Haiti is known as the poorest nation of the Western Hemisphere, ranking last in health, education, and welfare" (XVI). The tensions between the two nations started soon after Haiti became independent, an event that the United States only recognized in 1862, almost sixty years after it happened. According to Pamphile, during the Haitian independence war, the United States initially supported France's interests and "when Haiti became a nation America lodged an economic embargo against her to keep her isolated from the rest of the world" (XVI). Many

historians cite this embargo as one of the sources of Haiti's difficult economic situation and political turmoil throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. Then, in 1915, after years of political instability and violence, the United States used the Monroe Doctrine to justify its occupation of Haiti and reinforce its presence in the country. The U.S. government then assumed direct control of the banks and of Haiti's national treasury, while also seizing control of education, health care, and commerce.

While the U.S. occupation led to some progress and modernization, this was done through the exploitation of the Haitians, including forced labour in public projects. The occupation also caused racial tensions between the Haitians and the Americans. The occupation officially ended in 1934 but, as Pamphile states, the United States still controlled the country "through the election of compliant Haitian presidents" (XVI) throughout the twentieth century. To this day the consequences of the occupation and influence of the United States can still be seen in Haiti, both politically and economically. In other words, the U.S. government often had a contradictory attitude towards Haiti, as Pamphile explains that "although theoretically a great defender of democracy, the United States has hindered the flourishing of democracy in Haiti for its own convenience." (XVIII). This ambiguous attitude can later be seen with the U.S. support to the Duvaliers' long regime (1957-1986) and the abuses committed during this era by the Haitian government. Despite their initial support for the regime, when Baby Doc was forced to leave the country in 1986, the United States promoted Haiti's return to democracy. However, the country still suffered political instability and economic issues and in 1994 the United States intervened again, to reinstate the Haitian president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who had been exiled after a military coup in September 1991. This intervention, however, did not solve Haiti's issues (in the economic, political, and environmental field) and the country still depends heavily on U.S. aid, as

seen especially after the crisis caused by the devastating 2010 earthquake. Due to these issues, many Haitians still try to immigrate to other countries, mostly the United States, in search of better opportunities and to escape violence and persecution, as portrayed in the short story "Children of the sea*",* analysed previously.

In *The Immigrant artist at work,* Danticat studies another of the consequences of this complex power dynamic between the United States and Haiti, in what she calls the "*Dyaspora* dilemma" (48). This Creole word with a "multi-layered meaning" (48), as described by Danticat, refers both to persons and the situation of living outside one's country. First, it refers to the real country of the immigrants, as the author explains:

> My country, I felt, both as an immigrant and as an artist, was something that was then 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.* (49)

As noted already, the vicious persecution of political opponents during the Duvaliers' regime resulted in the creation of this diasporic (or in-between) space in the second half of the twentieth century. However, the Creole word *dyaspora* not only describes the migratory space or the condition but the people who had to leave Haiti. The term *dyaspora*, as Danticat states, is used by other Haitians to refer to people who never fully belong to either country, as is the case of the author herself. On the other hand, while Danticat sees living in the United States as a "privilege", she also criticizes some aspects of American society and especially of American policies toward Haiti and its inhabitants in her books. For example, in her memoir *Brother, I'm dying* (2007) Danticat denounces her uncle's treatment in a U.S. detention centre, where despite being sick, he was detained, mistreated, and eventually died. The essay, therefore, criticizes the treatment of

Haitians in the American immigration system, a situation similarly depicted in "Caroline's wedding". In this short story, Grace describes the process of obtaining citizenship as a "battle" and the system as an "enemy rightfully conquered". The short story also shows the violence and control that the U.S. immigration authorities exert over the Haitian bodies, with Hermine's arrest, mentioned previously (97). The short story describes how, upon her arrest, a "prison doctor had given her a shot of a drug to keep her calm overnight" (162) despite the fact that she was pregnant. The family believes that this injection led to Caroline's lacking a forearm at birth.

In the essay *The other side of the water,* Danticat shows that this control affects the Haitians residing in the United States not only before they are born, but also after their death. In this text, the author draws a parallel between her immigrant experience and that of Marius, her cousin, who died in Miami in 1997. While Danticat left Haiti to reunite with her parents in New York when she was twelve years old, Marius stayed in Haiti ten more years and then emigrated to the United States as one of the 'boat people' who appear in Danticat's short stories: "A decade after I'd moved to the United States, I heard that Marius had taken a boat to Miami" (88). The essay's title associates death and the experience of migrating to the other country, as the author explains that "In Haiti the same expression, *lòt bò dlo*, the other side of the water, can be used to denote the eternal afterlife as well as an émigré's eventual destination" (93). On the other hand, Danticat points out that Marius' cause of death remains a mystery, but most people think that he died of *Move maladi ya* (90), a Creole expression meaning "the bad disease", a euphemism for AIDS. In the late 1980s, AIDS was often associated with the Haitian migrants arriving in the United States, which exacerbated the marginalization and persecution of Haitians. Even after his death, Marius continues to be objectified by the American authorities, and seen as dangerous and undesirable. The author explains that the American authorities refuse to surrender his body to the family, in

part because "There are some special procedures involved with these types of corpses" (90) but also because "Marius had come to Miami by boat and had never received asylum or legalized his status some other way, he was undocumented" (91). To these objections, Danticat states that "Were we still aliens in death, I asked, our corpses unwanted visitors still?" (91). In the end, she uses her privilege as *dyaspora* to bring Marius's body back to Haiti to be buried there, which in turn allows the author to reconcile with her privileged position.

Finally, the use of language itself plays an important role in the author's diasporic condition, as Danticat writes and publishes her books in English instead of her mother tongue (Haitian Creole and French)[11] and this, in turn, contributes to the feeling of alienation and loss of identity that many diasporic artists experience, as examined previously. As we have seen, language and identity are deeply intertwined in the Caribbean and especially in Haiti. For example, the relationship between language and identity plays a central role in another liminal space already considered: the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. As we saw in the previous chapter, language was used to differentiate between the Spanish-speaking Dominicans and the Creole-speaking Haitians, leading to violence and persecution of the latter. This issue of language and identity, therefore, relates to both the community and the individual. A person's capacity to use one language or another allows them to present themselves in a certain manner and to justify their belonging to one country or another. For example, in the essay *The other side of the water*, examined previously, Danticat mentions how Delens, her cousin's roommate, first asks her "'Would you mind speaking English? I grew up here. It's hard for me to speak Creole'" (71) but then switches to using Creole expressions when he and the author establish a relationship. In this

[11] N'Zengou-Tayo, M.-J. and Wilson, E.'s (2000) article analyse in more detail the challenges of translating Danticat's works to standard French and Danticat's own relationship with Haitian creole.

way, Delens sometimes claims an American identity and sometimes claims a Haitian identity, using Creole to refer to difficult topics, like Marcus' sickness (*move maladi ya* or bad disease, as stated before). On the other hand, Danticat herself also switches between languages, using Creole to create a bond with her cousin's roommate, but then using English to speak to the American authorities and recover her cousin's body.

The use of language also relates to what Pratt (1991) refers to as literary texts from the contact zones. As stated previously, Pratt studies the case of one of the first texts produced in the Americas, the chronicles of Guamán Poma de Ayala, a sixteenth century Quechuan nobleman who wrote an "autoethnographic text" where he gives a "revisionist account of the Spanish conquest" (35) of Peru, from a native perspective, denouncing the abuses by the Spanish soldiers against the native population. According to Pratt, Guamán Poma rewrites the history of the Spanish conquest of Peru in the sixteenth century, by "using the conqueror's language to construct a parodic, oppositional representation of the conqueror's own speech" (35). Pratt's analysis of Guamán Poma's accounts can also be applied to Danticat's revision of her country's history, by using the narrative devices of the colonial power (travel accounts) and the language of the neo-imperial metropole (English), for a non-Haitian and non-Creole speaking public. The most significant contact zone of all, however, is the Caribbean Sea. In the previous section we saw how Danticat uses the sea as a symbol of the traumatic past, especially of colonial exploitation and slavery (67), and how the sea engages with the creolization process, the coming together of different cultures. This condition of the Caribbean Sea as a "contact zone" has deeply influenced Haitian identity, and Caribbean identity in general. The sea initially had ties with chattel slavery and colonial rule, but in modern times the sea's fluidity also contributes to the "*dyaspora* dilemma" or the sense of non-belonging many Haitians living in other countries feel. The sea goes beyond state borders and

national identity, as April Shemak explains: “The Caribbean has been transnational since the beginnings of colonialism and today allows multiple forms of citizenship and sovereignty, which include postcolonial nation-states, commonwealths, territories, and departments that are not independent entities” (15). Therefore, the Caribbean has always been a place of exchange, multiplicity, and mobility, both of people and goods.

Shemak then expands this idea explaining that as “The emphasis on the aquatic environment of the Caribbean also allows for a configuration of identity that is regional rather than national” (22), showing that instead of dividing or fracturing, the sea contributes to a sense of identity and belonging no longer tied to national identity. Benítez Rojo (1997) echoes the fluidity of Caribbean identity in *The Repeating Island,* with the idea of the region as a “meta-archipelago” that goes beyond national borders and that serves as a connection between North America and South America (4). Another element that Shemak also analyses in this exchange are the boats that traverse the region. As she explains, ships “are often evoked as appealing metaphors because they exist beyond the borders of the nation” (22), an idea that Paul Gilroy also explores in his study of the black Atlantic, where he describes ships as “mobile elements that stood for the shifting spaces in between the fixed places that they connected” (16). Similarly, Gilroy states that ships “need to be thought of as cultural and political units rather than abstract embodiments of the triangular trade” (17). In the case of the Caribbean, therefore, they represent the evolving power dynamics that influence this space, from the boats that brought the enslaved Africans to the American colonies and took away the natural resources and commodities produced there, to the refugee vessels of “Children of the Sea”, symbols of both death and freedom for the people in them. Finally, Angelica Nixon points to another type of boat as a symbol of postcolonial exploitation:

the Caribbean cruise ships that sell the passengers the idea of these islands as untouched paradises, bringing us back to the early images of the Americas studied in the first section of this chapter.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, travel literature created a complex image of the Americas and the Caribbean, seen as both alluring and dangerous. Travel accounts were also used to help in the colonization process, turning nature and the people who inhabited these spaces into merchandise, ready to be exploited by the European explorers. Danticat, in common with many other postcolonial writers, subverts the typical Eurocentric literary tradition of travel accounts that presented the American continent more as a myth than a real place. Additionally, she uses the traditionally idealized nature of the Caribbean to explore different issues about Haitian history and culture. On the other hand, these accounts no longer come from a privileged perspective, as the protagonists of her stories are migrants and refugees rather than tourists or naturalists at the service of the colonial power. Similarly, her travel accounts are influenced by her own experience as a diasporic writer. Danticat, therefore, rewrites travel tropes while at the same time remaining conscious of the limits and benefits of her situation, as an "exiled artist" who does not really belong to either culture or country. Finally, in the same way that nature can be a source of life and death for the people of Haiti, travelling, in Danticat's texts, has an ambivalent meaning. While the journey fleeing political persecution and economic uncertainty is perilous, the boats leaving Haiti for the United States are a source of hope for the characters in Danticat's short stories and essays, a bridge between a violent and traumatic past and a (hopefully) better future.

Chapter 4: San Andrés in the nineteenth century, the birth of raizal culture

Introduction:

As mentioned in the first chapter, the nineteenth century played a crucial role in the relationship between San Andrés and the Colombian mainland which has persisted to this day. After changing hands repeatedly between England and Spain throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the archipelago became part of the Spanish colonies in 1641, when the Spanish officer Francisco Díaz de Pimienta captured the English colony of Providencia. Then, in 1783, Spain and England signed a treaty ratifying Spain's authority over the archipelago and other disputed territories, like the Miskito coast in today's Nicaragua. However, during that time Spain did not make any effort properly to colonize or populate the archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia. Instead, they allowed the original English settlers to remain on the islands, in exchange for their support to the Spanish crown, their conversion to Catholicism and their adoption of the Spanish language. To help in the evangelization of the islanders and reinforce their authority over the islands, the Spanish crown sent Thomas O'Neill to be the islands' governor, in 1789. However, as Maria Margarita Ruiz and Carol O'Flin de Chaves (1992) explain in their history of San Andrés, O'Neill failed to convert the islanders to Catholicism, as "the protestant faith has continued to be the most permanent and predominant religious practice among the people of the archipelago" (55). The inhabitants of the archipelago also continued to speak English, as they maintained continuous trade with other English-speaking territories, like Jamaica. After the independence war with Spain, the tensions between the archipelago and the mainland continued to escalate in the nineteenth century, in part due to the islanders perceived neglect from the Colombian government, but also around issues like slavery. As the island had been under English influence for most of its history, the islanders reflected the ideas present in the English-speaking

colonies. For example, the idea that educated and assimilated people black people could gain a certain extent of autonomy from the colonisers. As this chapter will show, some of the planters in the novel seem to have a more tolerant attitude towards the enslaved people and their cultural practices.

Hazel Robinson portrays this critical period of the archipelago's history in her first novel: *No Give Up Maan!* (2004). The novel takes places in the island of Henrietta, a fictionalized version of San Andrés, in the mid-nineteenth century. The island's economy depends mostly on the cotton plantations, owned by five English planters, and tended by black slaves brought from Jamaica. The arrival of Elizabeth, a young English woman, brings deep changes to the island's society. As we will see in this chapter, the issue of slavery and the planters' resistance to recognize the emancipation of the enslaved people created strong social and racial divisions among its inhabitants. Through the relationship of Elizabeth and George, the son of an enslaved woman and a white man, Robinson explores issues such as identity, power dynamics, and gender roles. At the same time, the novel uses elements of the historical novel and of the traditional foundational novels of the nineteenth century to propose a new perspective for studying the history of both Colombia and San Andrés. However, as we will see, the book does not idealize the island's past, which becomes apparent especially through the depiction of the colonial society's treatment of slaves and the lack of opportunities for women. Finally, the novel's perspective is often framed in a colonial point of view, as the island is described from the point of view of an outsider, as we will see.

First, therefore, I establish the precise nature of *raizal* identity and how the historical context of the novel (the nineteenth century) and the archipelago's relationship with mainland Colombia shaped this identity. Then I analyse the impact slavery had on the islands' society, how it created racial and linguistic barriers between its inhabitants, and how Robinson's use of English,

Creole, and Spanish reveals the power dynamics both between the different characters in the novel and between the archipelago, other Caribbean nations and Colombia. Finally, I investigate how the novel uses natural elements to portray the deep social changes that occurred in San Andrés in the mid-nineteenth century and how these natural elements relate to the islanders' search for identity and sense of belonging.

1. Nineteenth century: the birth of *raizal* identity.

Many historians, such as Wilson (1995) and Loraine Vollmer (1997), see the late eighteenth century as the starting point of the archipelago's true history and the consolidation of islander identity. As mentioned in the first chapter, the archipelago changed hands numerous times in the sixteenth, seventeenth and eighteenth century. This instability led to the islands remaining uninhabited for long periods of time which in turn prevented its inhabitants for forming their own culture. However, some elements remained constant through time, like the English language, the Protestant religion, and the influence of African culture, as we will see in this chapter. The archipelago's situation changed during the independence war with Spain and the archipelago's eventual integration within Colombian territory. During the nineteenth century, as noted above, the relative neglect of the newly independent Colombian nation allowed the islanders to consolidate their own identity: the *raizal* identity. As Dilia Robinson Saavedra (2002) explains in her study of the islands' history, the term *raizal* comes from "raiz" (root) and was first used in the political manifestos of groups such as Sons of the Soil Movement (S.O.S) that emerged in the late 1970s. The term *raizal* has since then been used to refer to the ethnic community that lives in the islands of San Andrés and Providencia, the descendants of the original English settlers and the slaves they brought with them. Since the 1970s, the S.O.S movement has played an important role in recovering the forgotten history of the archipelago, consolidating islander identity, and

defending the rights of the *raizales* both in front of the local government and in the international field.

For example, the group took part in the assemblies that drafted the constitution of 1991, which stated that Colombia was an ethnically diverse state and set protections for the languages and traditions of ethnic minorities, among them the *raizales* or native inhabitants of the San Andrés and Providencia archipelago. Later, in 2012, the group participated in the dispute between Colombia and Nicaragua discussed in the first chapter.[12] The term *raizal*, therefore, emerged long after the nineteenth century, the historical setting of Robinson's novel. However, the groups that started to use this term often refer to the nineteenth century as the moment when true *raizal* identity emerged and consolidated, protected from foreign influences and especially the influence of Colombian culture. These political groups regard the Baptist religion and both the English and Creole languages as the basis for the *raizal* identity, in contrast with the Catholic and Spanish speaking mainland. Finally, as the term 'root' implies, *raizales* also have a deep connection with the territory they inhabit, as we will see later.

As the *raizales* descend from the English settlers and the slaves they brought with them in the seventeenth century, they have a different culture, language, and religion from the people of the mainland, descendants of the indigenous people that inhabited the continent, the Spanish colonizers and, eventually, the African slaves brought to the Spanish colonies. As established in the first chapter, the archipelago became a Spanish colony in the seventeenth century, but Spain had little influence in San Andrés and Providencia during that time and the islands remained culturally and linguistically English colonies, as Loraine Vollmer (1997) explains: "It should be

[12] Although the *raizal* community's interests were key in this dispute, their leaders claim that the Colombian government did not listen to their arguments and did not consider their interests, as the ruling led to the loss of native territory in favour of Nicaragua (Chacón, 2020 and Pomare, 2021).

noted that towards the end of the [nineteenth] century 95% of the island population were Baptists, and more than 90% of these were able to read and write in English" (56). In consequence, the archipelago's inhabitants had (and still have) more ties with other English-speaking islands of the Caribbean, especially Jamaica, than with Colombia, a relationship that appears clearly in many of Robinson's novels. For example, in *No Give up Maan!* the reverend Birmington explains to Elizabeth that "You're on an island belonging to New Granada, but personally, I believe they've forgotten about it" (302) and he also adds of the islands collectively: "Perhaps because of the distance, or the fact that they haven't been inhabited for any length of time, the government all but abandoned them" (344).

On the other hand, Robinson has stated in interviews that she does not agree with the use of the term *raizal*, as Valeria Morales Traslaviña (2019) points out in her thesis about the author. According to Morales, Robinson dislikes the term because today it has assumed an almost exclusive political connotation, and she thinks it does not reflect the true situation of the islands' inhabitants. As stated before, the term *raizal* first appears tied to different political movements at the end of the twentieth century and has been used since then to defend the rights of the people living in San Andrés and Providencia, the descendants of the English settlers and the enslaved people who lived on the archipelago, in contrast with the *pañas* or outsiders, who arrived in the twentieth century. In the novel, the term is only used in the introduction by Ariel Castillo, not in the text proper as its usage in the novel would be anachronical.

Similarly, the *raizal* movement tends to idealize the island past, showing the islands before the intervention of the Colombian government as an untouched paradise and islander society as free of conflict and problems. This can be seen in studies like Pomare's book, mentioned before (33). Although this book is very valuable because it offers us a study of the islands from a local

perspective (absent in most texts about the archipelago), Pomare tends to idealize the past. For example, he mentions that before Colombia's intervention, "people lived happy, relaxed and in harmony with nature" (213) and that "living in the islands was like living in Paradise" (225). Robinson's novel, on the other hand, shows that the island's nature, although paradisiac in some respects, is often violent and unpredictable, as we will see later. The novel also shows that islander society as deeply divided between the enslaved Africans who had no rights and were constantly exploited and the European planters, who owned the land and who opposed the emancipation of the enslaved Africans promoted by the Colombian government in the nineteenth century. The text often criticizes other aspects central to *raizal* discourse, such as religion, used by the planters to control the slaves and justify their situation.

In conclusion, Robinson's novel portrays a crucial moment in the history of the archipelago. The particular situation of the islands in the nineteenth century, especially regarding the neglect of the Colombian mainland towards the territory, allowed the emergence of a unique cultural identity. This identity, based on the blend of the English and African heritages, was, therefore, deeply influenced by the institution of slavery, as we will see in the following section.

2. Slavery and islander society

From the beginning of the colonization of the Americas, the territory known today as Colombia played an important role in the slave trade. The Colombian city of Cartagena de Indias (founded in 1533) was, along with Veracruz, the main slave port in the Spanish American colonies until 1615. According to Klein (1986), between the sixteenth and seventeenth century around 196,000 slaves arrived at the port of Cartagena to be sold and sent to the Caribbean plantations and other Spanish colonies in the continent. As mentioned above, the institution of the plantation and the slaves needed to maintain it were central to the social and racial configuration of the

Caribbean (Benítez Rojo, 1996). However, compared to other colonies, such as Brazil or Saint Domingue, the number of plantations relying on slave labour in Nueva Granada (Colombia's name before the nineteenth century) was relatively low. Most of the slaves that entered through Cartagena did not stay in the territory, but instead went to other Spanish colonies of the region and especially to the Caribbean plantations. Additionally, as Alberto Abello and Ernesto Bassi (2006) explain in their book examining Caribbean plantations, unlike other American colonies, Nueva Granada relied on smaller agricultural units known as "haciendas". These haciendas required fewer labourers than traditional plantations and, therefore, most of the slaves that remained in the country worked instead in the silver and gold mines or were used for domestic labour. However, it is important to note that Abello and Bassi only study the continental portion of the Colombian Caribbean. Their analysis does not include San Andrés and Providencia, which followed the agricultural model found in most of the British Caribbean, with large plantations relying on slave labour to sustain them.

The main crops in Providencia, as stated before (24), were cotton and tobacco[13]. To work on these plantations the original British settlers brought their slaves with them to work on the island, mostly from Jamaica and other islands of the area. To sustain the plantations, they continued to import slaves to the archipelago during the late eighteenth century, which led to a high number of slaves and soon they became the majority in the archipelago. However, the exact number of enslaved people in the archipelago is hard to establish with certainty, as it varies depending on the sources.

[13] Although it is difficult to have exact figures of the archipelago's production during the colonial era, Adolfo Meisel Roca estimates that in 1802 the islands exported around 400,000 kilos of cotton annually (Meisel 2009).

For example, according to Vollmer (1997), at the beginning of the nineteenth century, of the 1200 people living in San Andrés, 800 were slaves. Gilma Mora de Tovar (1994), on the other hand, states that the total number of slaves in San Andrés and Providencia in 1849 was 183 (88 men and 95 women). Similarly, in Robinson's novel the island of Henrietta (San Andrés) has five plantations, with "more than two hundred slaves" (416). Forty-nine of these slaves are in Bennet's plantation, the biggest on the island, and Hoag has more or less the same number. Meanwhile, the white population consists of only five planters (three of them married) and Reverend Birmington, in charge of the only church on the island. At the beginning of the novel, all of the planters grow cotton and trade it with other Caribbean territories (mainly Jamaica) and the United States. This shows that the island's economy functioned independently from the mainland, as the islanders did not rely on Colombia for their subsistence and had created a plantation-based economy, with a small white population who owned the land and a large black population, working on the plantations and who had no economic or legal rights. In the novel the islanders rely not only on farming but on the shipwrecks that happened on occasion, to obtain the things that they were unable to make (such as clothes and furniture).

The islands' situation changed in the mid-nineteenth century, following a complex emancipation process that plays an important role in Robinson's novel. Although the enslaved people in the Spanish colonies were not officially emancipated until 1852, the first initiative to free the slaves happened during the Independence wars. Both the loyalist and patriotic armies used enslaved soldiers and, in 1816, the revolutionary leader Simón Bolívar offered freedom to the enslaved people who joined his army against the Spanish troops, a controversial idea that displeased the slave owners in his ranks. Bolivar's initiative was influenced by the slave revolt that led to the independence of Haiti in 1804 and was also aimed at having more men for the

independentist cause. The news about the emancipation of slaves reached the archipelago and, as Isabel Clemente (1991) points out, the Haitian revolution even inspired a couple of slave revolts in Providencia at the end of the eighteenth century. However, Robinson's novel shows little open conflict between the slaves and the planters, as we will see later. After independence, the government decreed 'freedom of wombs' in the new country (Gran Colombia), meaning that the children of slaves born as of July 21, 1821, were now free. The law also stated that the slave owners had to educate, feed, and give work to these children. However, the slave trade was only forbidden in 1823 and it only forbade new slaves entering the territory, meaning that internal trade continued. Also, these reforms could not be implemented easily throughout the Colombian territory, as some planters refused to comply with the emancipation process and found ways to keep the former slaves working for minimal pay. Eventually, the conflict between the Colombian government policies and the slave owners led to a civil war in 1851, with the 'conservador' party supporting the slave owners and the anti-emancipation movement. After four months of war, the liberal army won and all the slaves in the Colombian territory were finally freed in 1852.

The novel takes place shortly after these events, when the Colombian government sent officers to announce the emancipation of the island's slaves. As noted previously, although the islands had been under the control of the Colombian government since 1822, this control was only in name. In the novel, some of the measures taken in the mainland to emancipate the slaves had not been yet adopted on the island. However, it should be noted that, in reality, the emancipation of the slaves in the archipelago started in 1834, almost two decades before the Colombian government's intervention. The first person to grant freedom to the enslaved people in the archipelago was the reverend Philip Beckman (or Beekam, depending on the sources) Livingston. Livingston, who seems to serve as the inspiration for Reverend Birmington in the novel, was an

important figure in the archipelago's history. He was born in 1814, raised in Jamaica and educated in the United States. He returned to San Andrés in 1834, where he freed the enslaved people who worked on his family's plantations. He also founded the first Baptist church on the island of San Andrés (in 1845) and, as Robinson explains in a 1959 newspaper article about the Livingston family, three generations of his family played an important role in the island's society and its religious life[14], as they were all influential Christian pastors and participated in politics.

Nonetheless, despite the positive influence the Livingston family had in real life, in the novel religion has a more ambiguous role, as Robinson shows that it plays an important part in the subjugation of the enslaved people. For example, the Reverend himself explains to Elizabeth that when he arrived on the island, the planters wanted someone to help them control the enslaved population: "By asking for a teacher in religion, what they really wanted was to restrain the slaves through Christian doctrine" (345). Therefore, the novel often shows the contradictions of Christian religion towards the island's enslaved people through the Reverend's behaviour. For example, Chapman accuses the Reverend of hypocrisy after they find the shipwreck, claiming that if those who died had been slaves, the Reverend would not have said a prayer for them. The novel also indicates repeatedly that Reverend Birmington despises the slaves, often referring to them as savages and heathens, as he does on the night of a slaves' party: "those savages give in to their primitive instincts and their diabolic customs" (351). However, the novel also points out that the slaves are the only ones who go to mass, as the Reverend says to Elizabeth before the Christmas mass: "I must warn you that the two of us will be the only whites present" (362). Elizabeth even comments on how strange she finds the slaves' devotion, feeling confused by "the sight of the

[14] *The three Livingstons*, published originally in *El Espectador*, July 1959.

defenceless slaves struggling in vain to read the verses of the hymn they couldn't understand" (365).

In any case, the issue of emancipation in the novel reflects the conflict between the planters and the Colombian government, as most of the planters in the novel are against emancipation and the intervention of the Colombian government in the island's affairs, as shown by the tension between two planters: Bennet and Hoag. Richard Bennet and Harold Hoag represent two types of enslavers: one shows compassion towards the slaves[15], while the other has violent tendencies towards the enslaved workers. Bennet, for example, refuses to sell his slaves and as he tells Hoag: "When the time comes that I don't need them, I'll give them their freedom, and if I still have any land, I'll share it amongst them" (262-263). Hoag, on the other hand, violently rejects Bennet's plans to emancipate his slaves and eventually give them his land, threatening Bennet with expelling him from the island: "I swear that I alone will prevent you from doing this, in the only way you and your fifty slaves will understand" (263). This quote also shows that Hoag refuses to see George as a free man, as he often refers to him as "number fifty", refusing even to acknowledge his name. The slaves in Hoag's plantation even call him "*massa* pig" behind his back and references to him throughout the novel often underline his violent character.

Bennet and Hoag, therefore, have completely different attitudes towards their slaves. For example, while Bennet tries to understand their language, Hoag compares them to "savages" and animals, and forbids them to speak their language (as he cannot understand it). Part of Hoag's resistance to freeing his slaves relates to the fact that he still considers himself as a British subject more than a Colombian citizen, as Bennet points out in one of their discussions: "You seem to

[15] However, Bennet compassion is also limited, as he only plans on freeing the enslaved people after his death. He only states that he is going to give them their freedom to enrage Hoag.

forget you're not on the soil of an English territory, but the territory of New Grenada" (262). This seems to allude to the efforts by the Colombian government to free the slaves in its territory that we mentioned before and shows that, despite the lack of communication between the island and the mainland, the islanders knew about the situation in Colombia. However, this issue not only affected Colombia, as Elizabeth mentions in the novel that, at the time, only a few countries still resisted emancipation: "I understand that Brazil, the Dutch Indies, and Henrietta are the only places where trading human beings like cattle still exist" (373). However, it is important to note that although these statements seem to imply that the people of Nueva Granada were more open to the emancipation of the slaves and to their integration into the society, this was not the case as the issue of slavery was still controversial in the Colombian mainland, as stated previously.

Finally, although the novel sometimes shows the enslaved people in a positive way (through, for example, the description of their language, culture, etc.) it is also true that only some of the slaves have a name and all of them are secondary characters, mostly reduced to stereotypes, nicknames, or to their relationship with Elizabeth and George. For example, we have Hatse, the enslaved woman who was in a relationship with George for fifteen years until Elizabeth's arrival. When George sees Hatse dancing at a slaves' party, he feels alienated from her: "All of a sudden, she seemed like a stranger to him. He realized he felt nothing for her at all, and a sense of great shame came over him" (359). It is unclear if the shame that George feels is because of his behaviour towards Hatse after Elizabeth's arrival or because of Hatse herself, as the way she dances is part of a slave dance and her dancing is described as "sensual and seductive" (359) and "stamping her feet to the rhythm of the drums and clapping, her arms raised above her head" (359). If George feels shame for the way Hatse dances, it may show that George's gaze has been influenced by the

idea that the slaves' dance is uncivilized and even morally corrupt, as Reverend Birmington states several times.

Another important character is *Tante* Friday, who takes care of Elizabeth when she is recovering from the shipwreck. This character represents the enslaved people's ancestral knowledge, as she uses the island's plants to treat different illnesses. Her knowledge and expertise, however, are seen with suspicion by the Reverend, who refers to them as "mysterious habits" (290) and "savage practices", similar to the drum ceremony and the slaves' party mentioned before. However, the Reverend cannot forbid *Tante* Friday from using them, as they do not have anyone else on the island who knows how to treat injuries or illnesses, and her treatments are often effective.

In conclusion, we can see that the novel uses the issue of slavery and emancipation to show the tensions between the island's inhabitants, while at the same time underlining the differences between the island and the mainland. Slavery formed the basis of San Andrés' social, racial, and economic structure in the colonial era and, in time, the influence of African languages, traditions, and knowledge would be an essential part of *raizal* identity. Now we are going to examine how emancipating the slaves created a new social order on the island. This new social order relates to Elizabeth's arrival at the beginning of the novel, as she challenges social conventions and subverts the dynamics between planters and slaves, especially through her relationship with George and her interest in the enslaved people's culture.

3. An unconventional foundational novel

In this section I analyse how the novel challenges the racial and social model proposed by the Colombian national project of the nineteenth century, often present in the novels written at the

time. Under this model, Colombian society was represented as racially "mixed", as María Teresa Garzón Martínez (2015) explains in her article studying *mestizaje* or miscegenation in Colombia. However, as Garzón Martínez explains, although mixed race was desired in theory, mixed bodies were despised, as there were "good mixes" and "bad mixes". While the white Hispanic heritage was associated with progress and civilization, the black and indigenous heritage was seen as primitive or savage. Nineteenth century novels in Colombia often explored the consequences of mixing the two types of heritages and how erasing indigenous and African elements was necessary to build a modern nation. In Robinson's novel, George and Elizabeth's relationship represent this new social order, no longer divided between European nor African cultures, but instead mixed. Robinson uses the model of a foundational novel to propose a new ideal of nation that challenges the model proposed by the Colombian government, but also criticizes some of the elements that shape *raizal* identity, such as religion and its focus on racial elements, as we will see in this section.

First, therefore, is the use of the foundational novel model, as Ariel Castillo points out in the introduction to the novel. Foundational novels, as defined in Doris Sommer's (1991) study of Latin American literature in the nineteenth century, were very popular in Colombia and the newly independent countries of the continent. According to Sommer (1991), after their independence from Spain, these countries were looking for unification and consolidation, and literature played an important role in this project, through foundational fiction. As Sommer explains, this kind of novel often uses love stories as political allegories and proposed new social models for the recently formed nations. For Sommer, the Colombian founding novel is Jorge Isaacs' *María* (1867) but, according to Raymond Leslie Williams (1991), the Colombian foundational novel emerged earlier, between 1844 and 1858, a moment of great political turmoil for the country. The novels written during that period often reflected this political and ideological conflict, frequently proposing

contradictory models for the Colombian nation. Williams focuses on two examples: *Ingermina* (1844) and *Manuela* (1856), two novels that use love stories as allegories for an ideal society. However, *Ingermina* does this not by portraying nineteenth century Colombia but instead exploring the country's history, as it portrays the foundation of the city of Cartagena. It also has indigenous characters, an unusual aspect for the novels of the time. *Manuela*, on the other hand, shows the Colombian society of the mid-nineteenth century and its complicated relationship with the colonial past. This novel, according to Williams, often highlights differences between the Colombia that exists on paper (laws and books) and the real one, as the plot is based on a relationship between an intellectual from Bogotá (Demóstenes) and a young peasant woman (Manuela).

Meanwhile, Sommer's analysis places *María* as the foundational novel in Colombia, while also acknowledging that this novel has some unconventional traits, compared to other Latin American foundational narratives. For example, as Sommer point outs, the lovers in this novel represent the masculine and feminine ideals of the time, as in many other foundational narratives, with María representing the Christian values of marriage, femininity, and family. However, they do not embody the racial ideal of the time, as they have Jewish ancestry. As Sommer states: "racial distinction haunts the book in the fissured identity of originally Jewish María, a figure for the incestuous self-destructive aristocracy *and* for the racially unassimilable blacks" (23, emphasis in the original). However, despite these incongruities, *María* still represents the racial and social ideal of Colombian rural high society, where black people and poor people barely exist. This aspect of the novel resulted from Isaac's role in Colombia's national project and his political ideals, an essential aspect of foundational novels. As Sommer explains, the emancipation of the slaves affected Isaac's family and he fought in the conservative government's armies in the civil war of

1854. *María,* therefore, more than proposing an ideal future, remains replete with nostalgia for a lost past, as the new social order threatens Efraín's economic and class privileges (and therefore Isaac's). According to Sommer's analysis, María's death at the end of the novel coincides with the loss of the family's *hacienda,* symbolizing, therefore, the death of this white and rich social class and how they no longer can exist in the new republican society. Robinson, on the other hand, goes against this ideal, especially through her portrayal of the central characters in her novel: George (the son of a slave and a white man) and Elizabeth (an English woman).

In Robinson's novel, George and Elizabeth, as other couples in foundational narratives, are apparently idealized. Elizabeth, as the only survivor of a shipwreck, has an almost supernatural aspect, emphasized by the nickname of "angel child" given to her by the slaves. The novel also points out that they "were obsessed by the woman George had found, and made up all kind of stories and myths about her" (308). Her physical descriptions also underline her beauty and kindness towards the slaves. George's descriptions, on the other hand, tend to underline traditionally masculine characteristics, like his strength and courage. Elizabeth, for example, describes him as "a gentleman, sure of his decisions, strong, sincere, honourable, and good-looking too" (384). However, because this description refers to the son of an enslaved woman, as previously mentioned, it contradicts nineteenth-century gender and racial stereotypes. At the time, enslaved people were often shown as uncivilized and barely human, which may be the reason why George makes great effort to dress elegantly, as Bennet points out: "We both get our clothes from New Orleans, but you always get finer cloth and a better cut" (285).

Elizabeth, on the other hand, also goes against the feminine model of previous foundational novels. Contrary to Isaac's protagonist, María, Elizabeth has more agency and more independence, as the shipwreck made her the richest woman on the island, and she does not depend economically

on any man. At the end of the novel, Elizabeth even goes against social conventions by proposing marriage to George and even giving him her last name, as he does not have one, as she says to the Reverend: "if you think it disturbs me that my children won't have a surname, you're mistaken. They can have my father's. So can George, if he wishes" (403). The Reverend and the plantation owners (except Bennet) oppose their relationship and see their marriage as sinful and unnatural. They even refuse to see it as true love, as the Reverend tells George: "What she's looking for in you is the excitement of something that's forbidden in our civilization. Her immature mind is confused by the lure of erotic sex, which is sinful and prohibited" (403).

However, interracial couples were not rare in Colombian foundational narratives. The novels published in the nineteenth century often portray couples from different ethnic and cultural backgrounds as the basis for an ideal nation. For example, the novel *Ingermina,* mentioned previously, portrays the relationship between a Spanish man and an indigenous princess, as an allegory for the foundation of Cartagena and, thus, of the Colombian nation. As Sommer (1991) explains, in these foundational novels the local, indigenous women often serve as an allegory for the American continent and they "can offer the legitimate ground for society only if they seem unmarked and nonhistorical, as America appeared to the settlers who called her a wilderness" (56). In the novel this civilizing practice through mixed relationships can be seen in how the European settlers treat the enslaved woman in their plantations. For example, the planters Chapman and Golden have many *ñandu* children. We read that "Whilst one of them, in the western part of the island, was domineered by his wife's jealousy, the other, in the east, planted cotton and *ñandu* sons at an almost equal rate" (266). The novel also states that this practice is tolerated as it gives the planters more workers (slaves) for their plantations.

The main difference between Elizabeth and George's relationship and those nineteenth century foundational narratives is that in those novels the European culture ends up dominating the African and indigenous one. Garzón Martínez, for example, emphasizes. that these foundational romances had a civilizing objective, as she explains in her study of *No Give Up Maan!* and nineteenth century Colombian *mestizaje.* According to Garzón Martínez, *mestizaje* "constitutes an elite vision where mixedness is desired as a trope of the nation, but repudiated as a mixing of the bodies, which turns out to be a whitening strategy in the long run" (32). In other words, the national building project in Colombia and other Latin American countries encouraged mixed relationships, as long as they served a civilizing purpose, by erasing the African and indigenous cultural elements in favour of the European (white) ones.

It is notable that Elizabeth and George also subvert this model not only by reversing the traditional gender relationship (with a European woman and a local, mixed-race man) but also because their relationship replaces violence with love and acceptance. Instead of a whitening or civilizing project, like the one present in previous novels, Elizabeth learns from the enslaved people she encounters and adopts their language and traditions. Similarly, the African culture, language and practices are often shown as equal to the European ones. For example, George often defends the language and culture of the slaves, as we see in his conversation with Elizabeth after Christmas mass. Much to Elizabeth's surprise, George plays the organ and sings during the mass, which leads to a discussion about what constitutes "good" music, implying that the music played by the slaves is not good or even real music. For example, Elizabeth states that good music is the one that was "inspired by the great composers, of course. Works that stand the test of time" (366). As the enslaved people do not have great composers, it cannot be good. George, on the other hand, defends the enslaved people's music saying that "It's an expression of a culture that's being put to

the test of time, distance, prohibitions and impositions" (367). George's statement reflects the island's history and how the people from San Andrés and Providencia appropriated and transformed European traditions by combining them with African cultural expressions, as Ruiz and O'Flin de Chaves (1992) explain in their study of the archipelago's traditions:

> The European music, such as the waltz, the slow waltz, the *shotisse* and the quadrille, which had been imposed in the olden days by the slave masters, was a serious, very rigid type of music which the slave transformed with rhythms springing from his African roots (67).

Additionally, by defending the slaves' music and dance, George shows that, despite the European education he received (books, music, clothes, etc.) he has not rejected his African roots. As he states: "I have adopted some of the customs of white people, and some of those of the blacks" (356). Therefore, contrary to other foundational narratives that "civilize" the character outside of European culture, George does not become more European through his relationship with Elizabeth. In the novel, George even states that he was initially against the idea of starting a relationship with her as he sees mixed relationships as "the cowardly extinction of a whole culture, of our past" (396). He only accepts Elizabeth's love when he sees that she is receptive to African traditions, as she learns the language of the enslaved people and the history of the island.

In conclusion, *No Give up Mann!* challenges the model established in the foundational novels of the nineteenth century through a modern lens. Here the foundational love story occurs between the son of a slave and an English woman, subverting traditional race, social, and gender roles. Elizabeth and George represent the mix of cultures and races that would be the basis for *raizal* identity. Through this modern foundational novel, the author also challenges the Colombian

national building project of the nineteenth century, especially with the use of language, as we will see in the following section.

4. Language and identity

This section focuses on the relationship between language and identity proposed by *No Give up Maan!*. In the analysis of Danticat's *The Farming of Bones,* we studied how the use of language created a racial and social division between the Dominicans and the Haitians and how, therefore, language often creates a sense of belonging and national identity. Similarly, in the case of San Andrés, the linguistic barrier between its inhabitants and the Spanish speaking mainland became the basis of *raizal* identity, as it created a sense of community with other English-speaking islands of the Caribbean (like Jamaica), while also unifying the islanders. Robinson's novel, however, also shows that islander society had strong social and racial distinctions between the planters and the slaves, a distinction often reinforced by the use of different languages, as I explain in this section.

First, therefore, we must go back to the relationship between Elizabeth and George, as they not only represent a mixed society in terms of race and culture but also in terms of language. As stated in the first section of this chapter, slavery, and the mix it produced of English and African culture became the basis of *raizal* identity. Similarly, language plays a central role in the construction of this identity because, as stated before, the people who lived in San Andrés in the nineteenth century spoke English and *Creole,* which differentiated them from the Spanish-speaking mainland. The national building project mentioned above sought to unify the Colombian territory through one religion (Catholicism) and one language (Spanish).

It is also notable that, the use of different languages in Robinson's novel also challenges the Colombianization project. This Colombian "foundational novel" uses different languages, as the edition used in this study has the original text written by Robinson in Spanish followed by an English translation. This bilingual edition came out in 2010 (200 years after the territory later known as Colombia declared its independence from Spain) as part of a project to recover literature by black Colombian writers. Ariel Castillo points out in the introduction to Robinson's novel to justify her inclusion in the project that:

> I didn't think twice about putting forward the name of this author, whose first novel, with its issues and insights, was one of the most appropriate for the collection, as it narrates the history of the island from the beginning of the insular society (226).

The use of multiple languages in this edition, therefore, has two purposes: on the one hand, it offers another perspective of Colombian history from a region that has been ignored or neglected by traditional historiography and whose literature has not been included in the national canon. In addition, it underlines the complex process behind this "islander society", a society based on diversity and the coming together of different cultures and their languages. Additionally, both editions include the use of *Creole* expressions such as the "No give up Maan!", that gives the novel its title, an expression used in the islands to convey resistance and resilience. In the novel the enslaved people commonly use it to exhort each other to resist, so creating their own strong sense of community. This use of *creole* is common in Robinson's works, as all of them have bilingual titles (*Sail Ahoy! ¡Vela a la vista¡, Si je puis, If I can,* etc.).

However, the novels also underline that the different languages create social and racial divisions on the islands, as Sommer (2019) explains in her analysis of the novel: "Multilingualism is a synecdoche for racial, class and religious diversity, a technical part for the complex whole of

structural social difference" (84). In the book, the planters speak English, but the slaves speak their own language (*Creole*) and when the Colombian representatives arrive at the end of the novel they can only speak Spanish, adding another language barrier. Therefore, the different languages used by the islander society represent the creolization process at the base of *raizal* culture. However, the novel emphasizes that while the slaves play an active role in the creation of this society, as most of them can speak both languages fluently, the planters cannot understand *Creole*. In the novel, therefore, the enslaved Africans use *Creole* as a form of passive resistance, a way to defy the European culture imposed by the planters, while also maintaining their connection to their African heritage.

Reverend Birmington explains this idea to Elizabeth, stating that the slaves "made up this language which is a mixture of different African dialects and badly pronounced English words. There are slaves from more than twenty different tribes, and each has contributed to this dialect that, over the years, has become firmly rooted here" (311). The Reverend's statement not only shows the prejudices against *Creole* being mostly "badly pronounced English", but also underlines what Sommer (2019) posits in her analysis of the novel about language and cultural resistances. According to Sommer, by using Creole the enslaved Africans brought to the island "managed to bind together descendants of twenty African nations, while it kept white people at loose ends" (87) and that "Conquered peoples speak in more tongues than the masters can police" (87).

Therefore, in Robinson's novel some of the planters feel threatened by the enslaved people's use of Creole languages and because of that they seek to forbid the use of these languages. For example, when Hoag hears the slaves singing, we read that "Hoag listened to the chanting without understanding it, which made him even angrier" (257). According to the Reverend, the only one who can understand both the planters and the slaves is George, who often serves as an

interpreter between the two groups. However, another passage from the book indicates that, although the planters do not understand Creole, the slaves understand and are able to speak "proper" English, as "When she [Elizabeth] didn't understand them, they would speak to her in formal English, using the same inflections and tone of voice as their masters" (385). This quotation clearly shows that enslaved people deliberately chose to speak in *Creole* among themselves and why, when George translates for the planters, it alienates him from the African group. His bilingualism, in their eyes, reinforces his condition as a *ñandu*, neither a white man or a slave, as "*ñanduboy* was a man without a tribe; he was neither black nor white" (288). For the slaves who choose to speak *Creole* as an act of resistance, George's role as a translator constitutes an act of treason.

In this sense, the novel traces a parallel between George and Elizabeth's outsider status in the island's society. As stated before, Elizabeth lost her entire family in the shipwreck that brought her to the island and, therefore, she has no "tribe" nor a clear social status among the islanders. She has then two options to be reassimilated into proper society: marrying one of the island's planters or leaving the island. However, she rejects both ideas and chooses to stay on the island with George. Despite her condition as an outsider, Elizabeth still has power, not only because of her position as a rich and independent woman, but also because of her knowledge of both English and Spanish, as the book's conclusion underlines. At the end of the novel, she serves as an interpreter between the English planters and the Colombian officers who arrived at the island to carry out the emancipation of the slaves. In this way, Elizabeth serves as a bridge between the mainlander and islander culture and between the island's past and the present, as we saw with her subversion of the established social rules. Elizabeth's arrival on the island, therefore, symbolizes the union of Spanish and English culture that will be central for *raizal* identity in the future. She

also has a central role in writing the history of the island, as we will consider in further detail in the following section.

While the different languages may be a source of division among the islanders, orality brings them together. While traditional foundational novels often presented the European *cultura letrada* (written culture) under a positive light, Robinson's text underlines the importance of orality for the enslaved people of the island. For example, the novel shows the different ways the enslaved islanders had to communicate news across the island, as they could not read or write. For example, after the shipwreck Richard Bennet asks one of the slaves, *Tante* Toa, to communicate some news to the people helping to clear the shipwreck: "*Tante* Toa began chanting the message. Her voice, trained by years of practice, rang out strongly and clearly, and the message was repeated at once throughout the island" (257). Another important form of communication among the islanders are the conch shells that are used to signal different events. For example, when George sees an approaching sailboat: "[he] blew a long deafening note, followed by a short lively one" (320). The conch shells are also used to mark the passage of time and signal the end of the working day: "[Ben] blew a long lazy note on the shell—the signal that the workday for *massa* Bennet's slaves was over" (309). These quotations show that they even had specific sounds depending on the context, using combinations of long notes and short ones. Additionally, even though the islanders (free and enslaved) are all able to understand the conch shell notes, communicating through them is not available for all, as Elizabeth cannot blow the conch shell. In other words, using the shells to communicate requires expertise and knowledge, and must be learned as any other language.

In conclusion, we can see that the relationship between language and identity plays a central role in the novel. Language serves both to reinforce the social order (as it separates the enslaved people from the planters) but also as a subversive tool, allowing the enslaved people to

create a sense of community, by staying connected to their past and to their cultures. Both Elizabeth and George, who understand two languages, represent the ideal future of the island, where the different languages and legacies coexist. Their relationship symbolizes the union of English, Spanish, and African heritage and, thus, the base of *raizal* identity, as mentioned before. Now that we have studied these characters in detail, it is important to see the final element central to this identity: the island itself.

5. Nature and belonging

The novel explores the issue of identity and belonging through the appropriation (domestication of nature). This can be seen especially through the character of Elizabeth, who, as a foreigner, tries to find her place in the island and islander society. Similarly, the novel uses the island and other natural elements to show the changes that Elizabeth brought to the community and how the island itself changed her. Finally, natural elements also serve to question the relationship between land and identity, as we will see in this section.

At the beginning of *No Give Up Maan!* a hurricane destroys the cotton crops which had been the main source of income for the planters until then. The storm triggers profound changes in the island's economy and society, signalling, therefore, the end of the plantation system relying on slave labour and the colonial regime that existed since the seventeenth century. At the same time, the hurricane shows the different (and often contradictory) points of view about the islands and its inhabitants' future. For example, Bennet sees the destruction of his crops as an opportunity to change from cotton to coconuts. Another planter, Chapman, agrees with Bennet's idea of planting coconuts, stating that "coconut palms and macadamia trees are the best for this land" (268). He adds that the hurricane blew out the "fertile topsoil" and that they are "only a couple of feet away from pure coral rock now" (268). These quotes reflect the islands' reality in the

nineteenth century, as the colonial exploitation of their natural resources in previous centuries had led to erosion and other environmental issues, such as the loss of native forests. For example, Ruiz and O'Flin de Chaves (1992) indicate that the colony of Providencia relied on the extraction and export of precious woods, as "[the settlers] obtained cedars from the place known as Cedar Valley in Providence and these and all the other types of wood were sold to the shipyards of Europe" (54). While the novel takes place in San Andrés and not Providencia, San Andrés' situation was very similar to Providencia and even worse, as its lands had always suffered from erosion. To this day, land erosion and deforestation continue to be an important issue in the archipelago.

Another planter, Hoag, sees the destruction of the cotton crops as a disaster and disagrees with Bennet's suggestion, stating that he cannot wait seven years for the coconut harvest. Also, Hoag sees Bennet's project as a ploy to emancipate the slaves, who would not have to work until the coconut crops are ready. Additionally, the novel shows that the planters and the enslaved people have different perceptions of natural elements and the island's landscape. While the planters only see nature in terms of crops and economic opportunity (as the disagreements between the planters discussed earlier demonstrate), the slaves both fear and admire the force of nature, as seen in their reaction to the storm: "For the first time since their arrival, they were able to witness Mother Nature's skilfulness at producing and coordinating so many feats at the same time, at such a staggering rhythm, and they were mesmerized" (246). In other words, by uprooting the cotton plants, the hurricane also frees them of their bondage and changes their connection to the island, as they can now, as free people, own it.

Another consequence of the storm is the shipwreck that brings Elizabeth to the island. Her arrival brings deep changes to the island's society, mainly through her relationship with George but also in other aspects: Elizabeth is the first person to trace a geography and an historical archive

of the island. As discussed in the third chapter, maps and travel accounts played a crucial role in the colonization of the continent, as they allowed the Europeans to familiarize themselves with an unknown territory and appropriate its resources. In this novel, Elizabeth shows great interest in the island and its inhabitants. First, she learns the history of the island through the Reverend and then she "spent her time working on a map of the island she and George had begun together" (383). Before her arrival the novel points out that they did not need any maps, as they relied on memory. Additionally, the novel also points out that there are many paths that only the enslaved people know and use: "within a few minutes they reached the slope and a path that was used only by *Tante* and himself" (357). These paths allow them to travel from plantation to plantation and to secretly travel through the island.

By tracing this map, Elizabeth and George appropriate the landscape and give it a special meaning that goes beyond geographical markers. According to Johannie Lucía James Cruz and Soler Caicedo (2018), landscape goes beyond the geographical territory, as human beings associate different values with the land, among them an emotional value, tied to memories about specific places (similar to the *lieux de mémoire* discussed in chapter 2). Elizabeth and George's map underlines this emotional value of the island's territory, as they relied on the islanders to draw these maps and "took into account the legends and stories of the old people, and places were named in honour of them and times gone by" (383).

Therefore, Elizabeth's arrival also symbolizes the beginning of the island's history, no longer from the perspective of the planters but from the point of view of the enslaved people. However, as this perspective continues to be mediated through Elizabeth, a European woman representing the colonial gaze, the novel seems to imply that the enslaved islanders still lack complete control over their history. Nonetheless, they still have some influence, as the island's

map she draws with George show how the enslaved people appropriated the landscape, giving it names related to their cosmology, memories, and traditions. Through Elizabeth, therefore, the novel recovers the African perspective in the history of San Andrés, a perspective often erased from the official history of the archipelago, as Hazel Robinson states (quoted in Garzón Martínez 2015): "Not even the blackest person in San Andrés talked about Africa, as they also considered themselves descendants of white English people" (33). This forgotten connection between the islanders and their African legacy can also be seen through the character of *Tante* Friday and her healing practice. *Tante* Friday appropriates the island's nature, as she builds a mental list of the island's plants and learns how to use them, similarly to the European natural accounts studied in chapter 2. However, *Tante* Friday works from an African perspective, as her healing practice is connected to African traditions as mentioned earlier. Similarly, the novel always associates the island with the enslaved people, and in particular with George, as Elizabeth states: "George is the island and the island is George" (374). This description echoes James Cruz and Soler Caicedo's claim that islander societies create a special bond with the territory they inhabit:

> The awareness of inhabiting a finite territory on the island, as well as the way of accessing its possession, makes its inhabitants participate in a strong sense of identity linked to the land and based on this, define their participation and their social existence in the group (377).

On the other hand, the novel underlines that George and Elizabeth's interracial relationship and eventual marriage would not have been possible outside the island. As stated previously, in the nineteenth century a relationship between a white woman and a *ñandú* (or any black man) was considered antinatural, unlawful, and even sinful. Meanwhile, the relationships between black enslaved women and white men were tolerated, as George himself is the result of such a

relationship and the novel mentions that one of the planters "planted cotton and *ñandu* sons at an almost equal rate" (266). Also, at the time women of Elizabeth's social class had little autonomy and rights, having to submit to their fathers and husbands' wishes. For example, they could not work or own property. However, after losing her family in the shipwreck and inheriting all the cargo of said ship, Elizabeth became the richest person on the island and does not depend on anyone, which makes her relationship with George possible. Additionally, Henrietta/San André's isolation also protects them from the social and legal consequences they probably would face in the mainland or in other countries, as Birmington reminds Elizabeth: "And what will happen if you're forced to leave the island? […] Your love will be able to withstand all the shame and mocking you'll have to put up with from white people?" (402). The island, therefore, serves as a *locus amoenus*¸ a paradise and a promise of a new beginning for both George and Elizabeth. Additionally, other natural elements often facilitate their relationship, like the Free Man's Cave where George and Elizabeth spend their first night together. In this natural place, George has built a space where he can act as a free man, a place that really belongs to him.

This connection between land ownership and freedom results from the paradoxical relationship between the enslaved people and the island's territory. The novel shows that while the enslaved people had a deep connection with the land, they could not legally own it, as the planters had divided the island among them. For example, George explains that, although he is legally a free man and is paid for his work, he must live with the Reverend in the mission's house, as "Without the authorization of the owners of these lands, without a piece of ground to cultivate, I'm forced to remain under the protection of the Mission" (390). Only when the representatives of the Colombian government arrive at the end of the novel the now emancipated people can own land, as the Colombian representative, Dr Venecia announces: "I declare you free also. Each head

of family will receive a portion of land sufficient for cultivation" (417). Therefore, the land also has a connotation of freedom in the novel, the promise of a new social order where it no longer belongs only to the planters. Once the newly emancipated slaves can own the land and not only work it for other people their relationship with the island can also be fully restored.

Conclusion:

Hazel Robinson's *No Give Up Maan*! apparently follows the conventions of a foundational novel, as a love story serves to represent the birth of a nation. However, the novel also subverts many of the tropes found in traditional foundational narratives. First, because although it takes place in the nineteenth century, it was written two hundred years after most foundational narratives were published. Additionally, Robinson presents the birth of San Andrés' society through the love story of a *ñandu* man and a white woman, who have different languages, races, and cultures. Through George and Elizabeth's relationship, the author questions the core elements of *raizal* identity (language, race, land) while at the same time challenging the typical Colombian perspective on national history and identity. This conflict between the mainland and the archipelago would be exacerbated during the twentieth century, as we will see in the next chapter.

Chapter 5: San Andrés – Colombia in the 20th century: Escalating Cultural Tensions

Introduction:

In the previous chapter, we saw how the Colombian government tried to integrate the archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia in the context of the nineteenth-century national building project. The government's efforts to impose the mainland's language, religion, and culture in the archipelago intensified in the early twentieth century, which often caused tensions with the islanders. The conflict between the mainland and San Andrés can be seen in two other novels by Hazel Robinson: *Sail Ahoy!* (2004) and *The Prince of St Katherine* (2009). These texts present the deep changes that the Colombian government's presence brought to the archipelago in the late nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. Similarly to *No Give Up Maan!*, the author uses love stories as allegories of the island's social and political transformations. For example, the first narrates the arrival of the nun María José in San Andrés and her love story with Henley Alva Brittany, a sailor from Providencia whom she meets on her trip to the island. María José and Henley quickly fall in love, and she decides to marry him and stay in the archipelago. The second novel focuses on one of the characters that María José met in Providencia: the mysterious doctor Henry Timgen and his arrival on the islands. His story is narrated through the perspective of Miss Mary, a midwife who had a complicated and longstanding relationship with the doctor since he arrived at Providencia.

In many ways, these two novels continue the ideas of the previous book, as they present unconventional love stories that question the idea of national identity. These stories are also told from the perspective of women who challenged social conventions, who were travellers, historians, and writers. Through their relationships with these men, the women narrators in Robinson's books explore issues of identity and belonging, their personal stories paralleling the history of the

archipelago, its often-tense relationship with the mainland and the societal changes the islands underwent in the first half of the twentieth century. However, these texts go into more detail than *No Give Up Maan!* in some of these aspects. Identity, for example, plays a central role in these novels, as the archipelago's inhabitants, no longer isolated from the mainland, started to question their new place in the Colombian nation. Also, the arrival of people from Colombia caused new problems for the islander community.

It is also important to mention a change of scenery, as the two novels take place mostly in Providencia, an island similar to San Andrés concerning its relationship with the Colombian mainland but also, in other respects, quite different, especially in its social composition. At 758 km off the Colombian coast, and 93 km from San Andrés, Providencia was even more isolated than San Andrés. This isolation helped to protect the island's culture and language from foreign influence during most of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but was also a source of problems. In addition, Providencia's mountainous topography meant that it did not have large agricultural units and therefore it had fewer slaves and a more closely integrated social system compared to San Andrés. However, its nature also suffered the consequences of colonial rule, as the island's main resource was timber that was exported to Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which led to the disappearance of the native forests. The overexploitation of the archipelago's natural resources also symbolizes the consequences of the Colombian national project, as we will see in this chapter.

Finally, I analyse these two texts together because, as Patiño (2014) explains in her essay on Hazel Robinson's novels, *The Prince of St. Katherine* can be read as part of *Sail Ahoy!*. The former allows us to explore the stories of some of the characters present in the later novel and, although independent, is better understood when studied alongside the themes and ideas developed

in *Sail Ahoy!*. Also, both novels take place in the first half of the twentieth century, a time of conflict and uncertainty in the archipelago, resulting from their often-complicated relationship with the Colombian mainland's policies and other historical events taking place at the time. Therefore, both novels have the same central issues, such as identity and belonging. However, there are some discrepancies between the two texts, as I will point out in my study.

1. "Colombianization", a threat to *raizal* identity?

In the previous chapter, we saw that for most of the nineteenth century the interaction between the Colombian mainland and the islands remained very limited, as the archipelago's distance from the mainland kept them isolated and the Colombian government had little interest in the islands. However, most islanders saw this relative neglect by the Colombian state as positive, as it allowed them to develop their own culture, language, and religion, often influenced by other Caribbean nations and to trade with these nations. For example, they maintained strong cultural, economic, and familiar links with Jamaica, and with Central America and the United States. However, the attitude of the Colombian government towards the archipelago changed by the end of the nineteenth century, due to different political and economic circumstances. This new attitude towards the archipelago can be seen in the so-called "Colombianization project" that the mainland government implemented at the end of the nineteenth century to integrate the archipelago into the nation, as we will study in this section.

The first element that changed the attitude of the Colombian state towards the archipelago was the Panama crisis, as Sharika Crawford (2012) explains in her article studying this episode of the islands' history. According to Crawford, Panama and the islands had a similar relationship with the Colombian government during the nineteenth century, as they were both territories on the periphery of the nation and communication between them and the central government was often

difficult. Because of this and due to their geographical proximity (these territories are around one hundred and sixty kilometres away from each other), Panama and San Andrés maintained close commercial and cultural relations during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and relied on each other more than on the Colombian mainland. Similarly, the islanders often established personal and familiar relations with Panama, as the novels mention the strong *raizal* community living and working in Colón, in the Panamanian coast. Due to the lack of higher education institutions in the archipelago, the islanders also often sent their children to be educated in Colón and other cities of Panama in the early twentieth century. However, despite their similar situation and the cultural and commercial bonds with the archipelago, the novel also shows that the islanders often faced discrimination in Panama and remained excluded from certain social circles. For example, María José's description of Henley, whose family originally comes from Providencia but has lived and worked in the Canal for many years, emphasizes that he belongs to "that exclusive group of the Canal […] with all the privileges of the Americans, or rather of the whites" (169), implying that while white islanders could find a place among the Panamanian elite, black islanders received different treatment. Meanwhile, the Panamanians themselves faced discrimination by the Americans living and working in Panama. In her article, for example. Crawford points out the use of racist caricatures in American newspapers during the Canal negotiations, depicting both the archipelago and Panama as "insouciant, money-grubbing 'darkies', seeking to benefit from the $10 million deal between the United States and Panama" (23). The discrimination the islanders encountered in Panama is mentioned throughout *Sail Ahoy!*. For example, Henley mentions that "in Colon and Panama the islanders lived enthralled by the canal commissaries, where they were treated inhumanly, both at work and in the most elemental aspect: their food provisions" (261).

According to Crawford, it is very likely that the islanders knew about these depictions and the fear of racism or mistreatment by the United States may be the reason why they preferred to stay under the Colombian government's jurisdiction when Panama declared its independence from the mainland. Panama's independence, as Crawford explains, stemmed from their difficult relationship with the Colombian central government throughout the nineteenth century, as the people of Panama lacked autonomy to make decisions and they had to pay heavy taxes, while having their trade restricted. As trade was the main source of income for Panama, these circumstances caused resentment among the Panamanian elite.

This resentment was also tied to Panama's critical situation after gaining its independence from Spain. Panama became part of the 'Gran Colombia' territory, a state that encompassed modern day Panama, Colombia, Venezuela, Ecuador, and even parts of Brazil and Peru. This state, governed from Bogota, only lasted ten years but in that decade, Panama went from being one of the main trade centres in the Americas, to a forgotten territory of the Colombian nation, due to the political and economic crises that affected the country, as mentioned in the previous chapter . By the end of the nineteenth century, Panama's commercial elites wanted to recover the importance of the territory as a centre for trade and traffic between the Caribbean and the Pacific, and between North and South America. The project of an interoceanic canal was central to this objective and there had been plans to build one since the 1870s, but it was a complicated and long project: as Crawford states the canal was "the culmination of seven decades of geopolitical struggle and domestic maneuvering" (15). Crawford adds that the canal was the result of American imperialist expansion and their commercial and economic interests in the Caribbean and in Central America. The U.S. government initially tried to negotiate the construction of the interoceanic canal with Colombia, but in 1903 the Colombian government rejected a treaty with them because "Colombian

political leadership thought the canal terms too favorable to the United States" (Crawford, 20). The failure of these negotiations, in turn, led to resentment by the Panamanian elite, who ended negotiating directly with the United States and in the same year separated from Colombia, a decision that was costly for Panama, both economically and politically. According to Crawford, some scholars "have argued that Panamanian secession remains a symbol of Colombia's fragmented nationality" (16) and the loss of the isthmus represents the failure of the nineteenth century Colombian national project. Because of this, "A close examination of Colombian responses to Panamanian independence reveals how territorial loss provoked national reforms and motivated political leaders to strengthen national unity" (16) throughout the Colombian territory. In other words, the Panama crisis caused the Colombian government to rethink their rapport with border territories such as the archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia and urgently to adopt new policies to integrate these until then forgotten territories into the nation.

As mentioned above, the islands and Panama were in a similar situation for most of the nineteenth century. All the issues that led to the separation of Panama were exacerbated in the archipelago; the islands were a territory distant from the Colombian mainland not only geographically but also culturally. The novels of Hazel Robinson depicting this period show that the attitude of most of the islanders towards the Colombian mainland ranged from indifference to open hostility. As mentioned in the analysis of *No give up Maan!* , the Colombian government maintained a minimal presence in the archipelago for most of the nineteenth century and, in turn, the islanders did not see themselves as Colombians. The rapport between the Colombian state and the islands started to change with the Constitution of 1886, which made the islands part of the department of Bolívar and put them under the administrative control of its capital, Cartagena. Consequently, the government sent public servants (police officers, judges, teachers) from

Cartagena to the archipelago to reinforce their presence in the archipelago and carry out the construction of schools and infrastructure. For example, the Casa de la Intendencia (the seat of government that burned in the 1960s, as studied in the first chapter) was built in 1913. However, the islanders often criticized the delays in the construction of essential services, like hospitals and roads[16].

The presence of these civil servants from the mainland was often a source of tension with the islanders, who did not feel represented by them. By the end of the nineteenth century, the natives were claiming more autonomy and denounced the abuses of the government's officers, accusing them of corruption and incompetence. Some of them even started to think about declaring themselves independent from the mainland, as Crawford explains: "From the 1870s to the early 1900s, islanders occasionally challenged state authority and ruminated over plans to join another country, the United States" (21). As mentioned before, the idea of gaining independence from Colombia under the protection of the United States was popular among some social circles within the archipelago, especially after the United States approached the islanders with this proposal shortly after the construction of the Canal in Panama, as the archipelago was in a strategic position in the new trade route created by the Canal. However, as stated above, the fear of racial abuse or discrimination by the Americans caused the islanders finally to reject this idea and remain as a Colombian territory. Meanwhile, the United States used a political crisis in Nicaragua in 1912 to carry out a military intervention and claim some keys that belonged to the archipelago, to reinforce their presence in the region. This event alarmed the Colombian government and brought about another change in their attitude towards the islands, through the Law 56 of 1912.

[16] For example, the first hospital in San Andrés was not built until 1940, but was never used due to a lack of supplies and personnel (Gómez González, J y Villavicencio Sacoto, F. (2010)).

As mentioned in the first chapter, the Colombian government tried to give the islanders more autonomy from the central government by turning the archipelago into a Intendency. As the islands were no longer under the administrative control of the department of Bolívar, the islanders finally could elect their own native leaders and they now answered directly to the central government. However, this autonomy only existed on paper as, after declaring the Intendencia, the Colombian state reinforced its presence in the archipelago. Pomare (2021), for example, even states that this decision "constituted an act of ethnic cleansing and displacement of indigenous populations contrary to human rights" (208), by allowing the massive entry of continentals to the islands and opening the door to Colombianization.

Shortly after declaring the Intendency, the Colombian government launched 'colonization campaign' that would start a period known as 'Colombianization' (1912-1953). This campaign was based on two principles: education and Catholic religion. The Constitution of 1886 had declared Spanish as the official language of the nation and Catholicism its official religion. The government sent civil servants and religious orders to the islands, to educate the islanders in Colombian history, teach them Spanish and convert them to Catholicism. The most important of these religious orders, the Capuchins, arrived in the archipelago in 1927 and promptly monopolized the islands' education system. María José, *Sail Ahoy!*'s protagonist, as a nun sent to San Andrés to help in the evangelization of the islanders, represents these efforts by the Colombian government. The novel also mentions that the Colombian government sends school supplies to the nuns to support their educational projects on the islands. However, the novel also shows the negative issues that beset this project, as it points out that "Bogota's government sends a lot of school supplies, but the Mother superior does not give them to the schools" (117), which shows that what the government proposed on paper was not always fulfilled, either because of corruption

or incompetence. Also, the educational efforts had not been very successful because the nuns cannot communicate with the islanders, as the former cannot speak English and the latter continue to speak mostly English and Creole, despite the nun's efforts to forbid the use of these languages. The islanders also refuse to convert to Catholicism, especially those living in Providencia. Later we will see in more detail the results of the conflict between the two languages in the island's social configuration, how it creates complex power dynamics and how it ties to identity.

For now, it is important to point out that Robinson's other novel, *The Prince of St. Katherine*, even shows the abuses of the 'Colombianization' project, with the story of a young girl (Miss Mary) abused by a teacher sent by the government from the mainland and then forced to marry a "Panya" or *paña* (as the islanders call the people from the mainland) at only thirteen. We will also study this aspect in the section analysing the relationships portrayed in these novels. Aside from Mary's story, other elements in the novel show the negative influence of the mainland's intervention on the archipelago and how it created a difficult situation for the islanders, who disliked the policies imposed by the mainland but also depended on them. For example, this reliance on the mainland can be seen in the only two shops in San Andrés, one of which is even called "Bogotá" and the novel also points out that it is "a place completely different from the shops of the towns of the Colombian continent" (119), as the products it offers are limited. The islanders also depended on the mainland to be able to find jobs, as Timgen states in *The Prince*: "the government has become the employer: it gives them work in the new construction of schools, in the construction of roads, it offers scholarships to study outside the island" (27). However, these opportunities were limited to the islanders who converted to Catholicism. Because of this, some islanders did not want to depend on the mainland and preferred to work as sailors or in the Panama Canal and some of them, like Henley, did both. Additionally, the novel points out that when the

islanders get sick, they go to hospitals in Colon or Panama City and they send their children to be educated in Panama and the United States, not on the Colombian mainland. These elements show that the islanders still did not feel completely Colombian and prefer to rely on other countries, as Henley points out: "he acknowledged that he knew very little about Colombia, and explained that the people of Providencia turn for work, study, or health to the United States or Panama" (112).

In conclusion, the novel shows the growing tensions between the islanders and the Colombian state at the beginning of the twentieth century. The loss of Panama and the U.S. interests in the Caribbean changed the attitude of the Colombian government towards the archipelago, making them reinforce their presence on the island. This initiative, called "Colombianization", had a great impact on the social structure and cultural identity of the islands. In the novels, we can see these changes through two couples: Henley and María José, and Miss Mary and doctor Timgen. Their relationships represent the cultural and societal changes that the archipelago was going through in the first half of the twentieth century, as we will see in the following section.

2. Race and islander society in the early twentieth century

In the previous chapter, we saw how Hazel Robinson uses the model of foundational novels to propose a new society through an idealized couple (George and Elizabeth). This apparently ideal society arises from an "hybridization" process, the encounter of European and African elements that involves mutual understanding and acceptance rather than the civilizing influence of one side on the other. The novels we analyse in this chapter also revolve around love stories, but the couples they portray are no longer used to represent a national ideal. Instead, the couples in these books show the tensions brought by the "Colombianization" project and how the society of the islands was rapidly changing. Before studying these love stories in more detail, I analyse here some

contextual elements important to our understanding of how Colombian people (and the people of San Andrés) viewed mixed relationships at the time.

As stated in the previous chapter, *No give up Maan!*, like other foundational novels, proposes "mestizaje" or racial mixing as desirable, at least in theory, when the relationship is between a white man and an indigenous, black, or mixed race woman. In practice, however, society often repudiates the mixed couple and does not see their union as legitimate. In Elizabeth and George's relationship this is exacerbated because they do not follow the civilizing project (i.e., the whitening of the black or indigenous population) at the base of Colombia's nineteenth century's national building project. Instead, as mentioned before, Elizabeth is influenced by George and ends up adopting the islanders' culture as her own. Similarly to the nineteenth century civilizing project, in the twentieth century the Colombianization initiative, promoted by the government in the archipelago, resulted from this desire to civilize and integrate the islanders to the rest of the territory and continued to promote *mestizaje* as a civilizing strategy. The archipelago was outside the ideal image of the nation, not only because of its religion and culture but also because of racial elements. As we saw before, the San Andrés population was mostly black or mixed, due to the large number of slaves imported before the nineteenth century and its relative isolation throughout three centuries. Meanwhile, the inhabitants of the archipelago saw Colombian state intervention as a threat to their cultural identity and that is why they resented and distrusted the *pañas* or outsiders. However, many of them were from mixed origins and the novel shows that by this time mixed relationship are becoming more common in the island. We can see these contradictory ideas in the novel with Rosalía, Henley's mother, who at the beginning has trouble accepting his relationship with and eventual marriage to María José, because she comes from the mainland: "she could not accept what was happening between her son and sister María José. She kept telling

herself that her ancestors were all from the island and that until now no one in her family had been with a *panya"* (168). However, by the end of the novel, her attitude towards María José changes, and she accepts her as a "daughter", in part due to the birth of her grandchildren.

Rosalía's attitude shows the paradox at the base of *raizal* identity, born from the mix of different cultures, but also fearing the loss of this identity due to foreign influences. As Sally Ann García explains in her thesis, The *'Half & Half or Fifty-Fifties' de San Andrés, Los actores invisibles de la Raizalidad*, the people with mixed heritage (called *Half and Half* or Fifty-*Fifty*) often face rejection and discrimination. In her thesis, the author explains that San Andrés' society (and, more precisely, the *raizales*) resulted from the cultural and racial mixes, initially of the mix of the British settlers and the African slaves they brought with them, as we saw before, but the Colombianization process created a new hybrid society, between the mainland Colombians and the islanders. We can see this in the families of Miss Mary and Henley, who consider themselves "Raizales", although Miss Mary's mother married someone from Nicaragua, and Henley's family is also a mix of Nicaraguan, American, and islander.

While these mixed families were common, the novel also indicates that most islanders preferred to intermarry and avoid relationships with foreigners, as doctor Timgen says to Mary about the protestant legacy: "the only thing they left their descendants, apart from language, was inbreeding" (195). As García explains, the islanders participated in the whitening strategy mentioned before by only approving or tolerating mixed marriages as long as they served to "improve the race" by erasing those African elements. Similarly, in *Sail Ahoy* María José mentions that in Providencia the descendants of the black slaves were "confined" in one neighbourhood called Bottom House and that "due to the custom inherited from the puritans to marry within the same families, they had managed to maintain a colour, although not completely white because

without knowing how—or without recognizing it—black blood had slipped in and fortunately the mixture began" (102). Henley's description corresponds with these ideas of avoiding interracial marriage: he has grey eyes and white skin that he inherited from Scottish ancestors. Additionally, Henley's family only accept his marriage to the *panya* María José because she is white and educated. As stated in the previous section, the islanders often tried to erase their connection with African culture and history, privileging the white legacy inherited from the English settlers, their music, their language, and their religious practices. These racist ideas only worsened with the arrival of the Colombian officers as Tina, a young girl working in the convent, explains to María José that she often faces discrimination during Catholic church services, where young children are dressed in costumes: "I'll never be an angel. They [the nuns] only choose white girls" (43). Furthermore, these novels often underline how most islanders associated "blackness" and black ancestry with a lack of education or culture, as we will see in more detail when we study the theme of language in the books.

However, some elements of African ancestry still persist in islander society, such as the use of Creole language and storytelling, as we will see later, and also the sailing tradition. Due to the islands' condition and having to travel constantly between San Andrés and Providencia, sailing became part of many islanders' sense of identity. For example, Rosalía calls her grandchildren "sailors", implying that she sees them as islanders (like their father, Henley) and not as *pañas* (like María José, their mother). This reference to sailing also appears in the *Prince*, as Miss Mary mentions that because of her job she travels constantly between San Andrés and Providencia, and that "most men in my family are sailors and I have in my favour that I do not get seasick, and I am not afraid of the sea" (16). The connection between sailing and African ancestry appears in Kevin Dawson's (2021) study of what he calls "maritime maroons". The article explains that in the

Caribbean context many enslaved Africans escaped bondage by navigating or swimming from island to island. According to Dawson: "Many Africans arrived in the Americas able to read water's subtleties, while many country-born captives acquired this knowledge" (440). They used this knowledge to "create a *sea of islands* and encompassing continents that provided possibilities far beyond the dry places of subjugation" (436, emphasis in the original), associating, therefore, aquatic environments with freedom.

This familiarity with the sea and other water paths led the African enslaved people, in turn, gradually to appropriate these spaces, "As Europeans colonized the land, they treated waterscapes as roads, but not places of belonging, enabling captives to physically and intellectually appropriate rivers, lakes, and seas" (Dawson, 429). Eventually, water became associated with sacred and liminal spaces, an element that also appears in *The Farming of Bones* as we saw before (page 64) because "[By] Layering African cultural, spiritual, and political meanings onto waters that retained Amerindian valuations, captives recreated and reimagined African traditions" (429). Sailing was also a revered tradition, as the canoes were carved from sacred trees (431) and "Water was a cultural and spiritual space populated by deities and spirits, with members of many societies believing the realm of the dead lay at the bottom of or across the ocean or large waterway" (432). This belief in the sea as a passageway to the underworld appears several times in Danticat's texts (especially in *Children of the Sea*¸ as mentioned before). In Robinson's novels, this connection may not be as explicit, but evidently the islanders feel very connected to the sea and the *pañas* or foreigners who feel this connection end up staying in the islands. For example, María José crossed the Atlantic four times, and, unlike the other nuns, she does not get seasick. While the two other nuns spend the whole journey being sick below deck, María José shows interest in the sailors'

maneuvers in the ship and eventually she becomes very close to them, and especially with Henley, as mentioned earlier.

In Robinson's novels mixed relationships are accepted (or at least tolerated) when they enhance the whitening or civilizing strategy, promoted not only by the Colombian government, but also by the islanders themselves. (note p. 141 above: George shows that, despite the European education he received (books, music, clothes, etc.) he has not rejected his African roots. As he states: "I have adopted some of the customs of white people, and some of those of the blacks" (356). Therefore, contrary to other foundational narratives that "civilize" the character outside of European culture, George does not become more European through his relationship with Elizabeth.) However, the arrival of mainland Colombians also had a deep impact on the islands' society, as we will see now through the two main relationships in these books, Henley and María José, and Mary and Timgen.

3. Love stories

Similarly to *No Give Up Maan!*, these two novels use love stories as allegories of societal transformation on the archipelago. However, the couples in these two novels openly challenge the idealized couples of the foundational novels studied in the previous chapter, as we will see in this section.

First, it is important to mention that the protagonists of these three novels, Elizabeth, María José, and Miss Mary, respectively, share many characteristics, such as their beauty and intelligence. The first two arrive on the islands as "outsiders", but immediately are set apart from other "foreigners", as they sympathize with the islanders and quickly adapt to their way of life. For example, María José immediately gets close to the islanders in her trip to the archipelago, but

she also shows interest in its history. After a short stay in San Andrés, she travels to Providencia where she has access to the islands' archives (kept by a priest, Father David) and continues to study the colonization of the islands and the arrival of Europeans, among other episodes of the archipelago's past. She evens contributes to expanding that archive, by writing the story of the doctor's arrival on the island and his mysterious past. This interest in the islands eventually leads to her marriage with Henley and, by the end of the novel, she has abandoned the convent to stay in Providencia with him. In this way, the islands offer both Elizabeth and María José the possibility of a new beginning, a place where they can reject social conventions and where they find happiness. However, Doctor Henry Timgen and Miss Mary, the protagonists of the third novel, do not have such a happy ending.

If María José and Henley represent the tensions between the mainland and the continent, Miss Mary, the protagonist of *The Prince of St. Katherine*, represents the abuse and dangers brought by the Colombianization process. The title of this novel refers to Henry Timgen, an Austrian doctor who arrived at the archipelago under mysterious circumstances. The novel takes place in the span of a few weeks in 1902, when Miss Mary travels from the main island of San Andrés to Providencia, as a midwife. Contrary to the situation in the other two novels, Miss Mary and Timgen's love story does not have a happy ending, because when they met, she is already married and the age gap between the two (Mary is thirty-five and Timgen is sixty-five) makes the relationship even more difficult. Similarly, Miss Mary is quite different from Elizabeth and María José, the other two protagonists of Robinson's novels. While the other two novels have narrators who come from elsewhere (England and Colombia, respectively), Miss Mary, born and raised on the archipelago, presents a native perspective. Additionally, while Elizabeth and María José had received an exceptional education (being able to play musical instruments, speak several

languages, etc.), Miss Mary is described as ignorant or uneducated, as "she did not know anything about the books and mispronounced English words" (189). However, her "ignorance" or lack of education results from a situation beyond her control: being forced to abandon her studies, after the teacher and director of her school abused her when she was only twelve. As Timgen points out, Miss Mary has another type of intelligence and knowledge and "her role as a midwife made her untouchable, respected, and admired" (190). The novel indicates that three midwives take care of the pregnant women of the island, because the doctor refuses to take part in childbirth or visit the patients. Miss Mary, therefore, plays an essential role for the island's society, but her knowledge does not come from studying or from the doctor (we read that she learned very little from him), but through experience and the advice of the other midwives. The novel underlines the importance of this practical knowledge in islander society, as the traditional education system had various blind spots, as we will see.

It was through her job as a midwife that Mary met the doctor, fifteen years prior to the novel's opening, and during that time they have become close. Miss Mary explains that the basis of her relationship with Timgen is her curiosity and her desire to learn, for as she says: "Doctor Timgen did not try to teach her anything that she did not ask for. He did not treat her as teacher and student; she treated him as a doctor, and he treated her as she was almost his equal" (190). The doctor, therefore, instructs her in various subjects, such as literature, music, and, especially on the history of the islands. This last reference shows that the islanders were not taught their own history and that a foreigner, who has lived in Providencia for twenty-three years, knows more about the history of the archipelago than a native. Miss Mary points out that her schoolbooks came from England (and were, therefore, in English) and did not contain any information about the archipelago's history. Miss Mary also states that they sang "God save the King" in school until

they were ordered to sing the Colombian hymn instead. All these elements show how little presence the Colombian state had on the islands and how the education the islanders received did not correspond with their reality, their culture, or their history.

Going back to Miss Mary and how these novels show mixed relationships, we can see that in general, they are portrayed in a positive way, but they can also be abusive. As mentioned before, the abuse Miss Mary suffered at the hands of the teacher represents the abuses of the "Colombianization" process inflicted on the islanders by the Colombian state. Pedro (her *panya* husband) also represents another aspect of the Colombian state presence in the islands, as he is a policeman. In the novel, Miss Mary often states that she respects him but does not love him. Also, their age difference (more than twenty years) and the fact that they got married to protect Mary's reputation after what happened with the teacher, make their marriage seem almost abusive -. For example, there is a description of their wedding, when she was only fourteen. Miss Mary describes her confusion because she did not understand Latin and what was expected of her during the ceremony. She also points out that they have little in common as Pedro (despite having lived in San Andres for twenty years) refuses to learn the language and shows no interest in the culture of the islands, to the point that Miss Mary often describes him as "uneducated". This lack of interest contrasts with Timgen's attitude, as he has studied the history of the island and learned Creole to communicate more easily with Miss Mary. It is also important to point out that the relationships in these novels are "mixed", no longer in terms of race (or at least not *only* in terms of race) but in terms of *raizales* and *panyas* (or foreigners in general) and these relationships can be happy or unhappy. For example, Miss Mary's mother married twice, her first husband being described as a white man who was "her equal" (34) and the second a "Nicaraguan *mestizo" (*34). However, this second marriage only lasted eight years and, according to Mary, was not a happy one.

As mentioned before, Miss Mary's relationship with the doctor appears under a more positive light, but this relationship fails when Mary decides to stay with her husband and rejects Timgen's suggestion that she remain in Providencia with him. Also, the novel points out that Miss Mary's sister disapproves of their relationship not only because Timgen is thirty years older than her but because he has two daughters with two different women in Providencia and has rejected Father John's advice to marry one of them. In other words, although their relationship has some positive elements, it exists outside of social conventions and because of this transgression it fails. Both of Miss Mary's relationships, therefore, failed, not because they are "mixed" but because they are not relationships between equals (contrary to Elizabeth and George, or María José and Henley). At the end of the novel, Timgen dies shortly after Miss Mary goes back to San Andrés, putting an end to their love story.

In conclusion, in these two novels we have different types of relationships between islanders and *panyas* or foreigners, showing that the archipelago was no longer isolated, but part of a large pan-Caribbean community, with familiar and commercial ties connecting it to different countries. Additionally, the Colombianization campaign was changing the social order and challenging the sense of belonging and identity of the islanders. Although some of these mixed relationships are shown as positive, there are often tensions and conflict. In the novel language often conveys the power dynamics between the couples, sometimes bringing them together and sometimes accentuating their different backgrounds, ideals, and beliefs, as we will see in the following section.

4. Language and orality:

In the analysis of *No Give up Maan!,* we saw that bilingualism was presented as an essential element of the ideal islander society as portrayed by the author (page 136). Both George and

Elizabeth speak several languages, allowing them to communicate with different sectors of the island's community and to serve as spokespersons of the community when the Colombian officers arrive on the island. However, we also pointed out that language created power dynamics on the island, causing divisions and tensions between the planters and the enslaved Africans. These tensions did not end with the emancipation of the enslaved people, as at the beginning of the twentieth-century, language use became even more controversial in the archipelago, due to the Colombian government's new policies. The aim of the Constitution of 1886 to make Spanish the only language of the republic and the efforts of the Colombianization project to impose it in the archipelago created conflict between the islanders and the Colombian mainland, as we will see in this section. Another important aspect of these tensions was the conflict between written mainland culture and oral islander culture. Orality, as we will see, refers to a group of cultural practices, which includes language, but also storytelling and even gossip.

In *Sail Ahoy*, as mentioned before, María José arrived on the islands with other nuns in the context of the "Colombianization" campaign, to help in the education and evangelization of the islanders. A central aspect of this education was to teach the islanders to speak Spanish, as Tina, a young girl working for the nuns explains to María José: "You cannot speak [English] here, it is forbidden" (36). However, despite this prohibition, most islanders still do not know Spanish and insist on using English names not only for people but also for places and for the boats, including *The Endurance*, the "goleta" (schooner) in which María José and the nuns travel to the island. The use of English also ties to religious practices, as the islanders sing English hymns and still use English to communicate with each other. Because of this María José must often serve as a translator and her knowledge of different languages is the main reason she was sent to the islands. For example, Father David, a priest living in Providencia, states that María José is "a nun with a

degree in History, she speaks Spanish, English, German, and French" (122), while none of the nuns at the convent in Providencia know English and are, therefore, unable to talk to the islanders. In this sense, María José plays a similar role to Elizabeth's in *No Give up, Maan!*, as she serves as an interpreter or mediator between the Spanish-speaking *panyas* and the English- (and Creole-) speaking islanders and also oversees Spanish and English lessons in Providencia's school.

However, despite the islanders' initial resistance to learn and use Spanish, by the mid-twentieth century Spanish had already replaced Creole and English as the main language in San Andrés, as Parsons (1964) points out in his study of the islands: "the Hispanicization of everything on the island is advancing by leaps and bounds" (111) because "Without the command of Spanish today, as all young people know, the opportunities for economic progress are scarce" (111). Parsons explains that by the mid-twentieth century, Colombian authorities realized that the insistence on speaking Spanish and converting to Catholicism for certain jobs (especially government work, like civil servants, police officer, judges, etc.) along with the promotion of scholarships in the mainland, was a more effective strategy than openly forbidding the use of Creole and English on the islands, as they had done in the past. These policies resulted in many islanders converting to Catholicism and becoming what the islanders called "job Catholics". This practice was especially common among the younger population, as Mary mentions in *The Prince*: "The young will embrace Catholicism to have scholarships and jobs and the old ones will continue in the two other churches" (18), implying that the older islanders still refused to convert to Catholicism and continued to go to the Protestant churches.

On the other hand, the islanders associate the use of English with both social position and race, as Henley explains to María José in the ship that brings her and the two other nuns to San Andrés :

> the captain and Mrs. Ercilia [his wife] grew up and were educated in Providencia, where they received an education in an English they inherited from the puritans. Black Tom, the cook, spoke the dialect that the black people had created to communicate with each other. And the four sailors and Otto had a mix of the English left by the Puritans and the black people's dialect (28).

Parsons echoes these ideas in his description of the archipelago's Creole as "A degenerate Elizabethan English, with Scottish accents and full of many expressive idioms that make it colourful" (109). He also points out that the "patois" (or Creole) "is the most common form of expression among people of little education or low social position" (109), showing the prejudices against Creole, considered a "sub-language" that was used only by uneducated or poor people. The quotation from the text also shows the difference between Providencia and San Andrés: as Providencia had less slavery, its language was not as heavily influenced by African dialects as the one spoken in San Andrés and was, therefore, considered "purer". However, Pomare states that while slavery did not always exist on the islands (due to the conflicts mentioned before that led the islands to be uninhabited for long periods of time), it had a strong influence on the archipelago's language and culture. As Pomare explains, for Providencia, "the records show that by 1666 a certain Captain Hatsell was in charge of the island with 35 free men and 50 slaves, the latter undoubtedly Black" (197). He also says that earlier studies tended to underestimate the real number of slaves, as

> Population estimates drawn from historical documents do not consider the Maroon marginal settlements that are constantly mentioned in historical accounts of different periods, there can be no doubt that the descendants of African slaves have constituted the

bulk of the population and a permanent presence on the island since the seventeenth century (197).

In any case, Parsons' ideas around language also reveal the racial prejudices harboured by many islanders, as the people of Providencia consider themselves as less "mixed" and more purely European (i.e., whiter) than the people of San Andrés.

The use of language in these novels shows the power dynamics, not only between the archipelago and the mainland but also between the different couples portrayed in these novels. For example, María José and Henley communicate in English, not in Spanish, and María Jose's knowledge of English is what brings them together. For example, they confess their love to each other through English love songs, as the novel points out: "Among other songs, Henley sang *Blues Skies* and *I'm confessing that I love you,* and she followed with *They say it's wonderful,* and accompanied him playing on several occasions while he sang, *I love you, I can't begin to tell you* and *Don't blame me*" (26-27, emphasis in original). In this way, the novel shows the influence of English culture and music on the islanders, but also underlines that María José and Henley have a lot in common, such as their love for music and a common language. It is also interesting to point out that when Timgen meets María José, in *Sail Ahoy!*, he refuses to speak German to her, preferring to answer in English. This has to do with Timgen's desire to hide his past, because, as he points out "For him, there was no life before 1902" (142), the year he arrived in the archipelago. *The Prince* also mentions that Timgen quickly learned to speak Creole to communicate with Miss Mary and other islanders. In this way, we can see how language both brings people together and creates social and racial differences among the islanders, becoming a crucial aspect of their identity. On the other hand, language also creates a sense of belonging, as in the case of Timgen

and María José who can integrate themselves in islander society due to their knowledge of different languages and their willingness to learn the history of the islands.

Similarly, gossip also shows the connection between language and power, especially in *The Prince of St Katherine.* As Eduardo Silva-Peña (2018) explains in the article where he analyses the political uses of this practice, in Caribbean literature the use of gossip (or *sheshand* as it is called in Creole) often appears as a common narrative strategy. According to Silva-Peña, Caribbean writers such as Glissant have underlined how gossip plays a key role in Caribbean identity, as it originated in the plantations and in the context of chattel slavery, institutions that were central to the creolization process and, thus, in creating a Caribbean identity. Gossip, in this context, refers to any form of communication outside the official speech imposed by the European settlers, and therefore to any language used by the slaves to communicate with each other, transmit information, tell stories, etc. As we saw in the previous chapter (page 135), the slaves created their own language, a mixture of African languages and English, to be able to communicate with each other without being understood by the planters and to transmit information from one plantation to the other. According to Juliana Botero (2007), San Andrés, at the beginning of the twentieth century, remained a mostly oral society as *Creole* is a dynamic language, tied to narrative strategies that go beyond written speech:

> Creole speakers mix and accompany the linguistic turns, the various intonations, the rhythm, the musicalization, the silences, the variations, the laughter, the confusions and repetitions typical of any oral expression, with a language in which it involves the whole body, which also speaks, counts, sings and dances (279-280).

As a result of the Baptist church educational campaigns in the nineteenth century, the archipelago had a high literacy rate, but for the islanders “gossip, the opinion of neighbours, and

daily chat were of the utmost importance to maintain this network of both information and knowledge" (286). For example, in *Sail Ahoy* when the schooners arrive in Panama, the islanders living there gather on the pier to "receive news of the islands and to ask for parcels to be delivered" (88) and the same thing happens when they return to the islands. Similarly, in *The Prince*, Miss Mary describes how, when she arrives on Providencia, she sees the canoes that "received passengers, parcels, or simply news and gossip from San Andrés, Colón, and Cartagena. It was the way to know how they were, how they lived, how they worked, who was sick and who had died outside the islands" (17). In this way, the boats create a communication channel between the islands and the outside world, while at the same time showing the presence of the islands' diasporic communities both in Colombia and in other countries, especially Panama.

In both *Sail Ahoy* and *The Prince*, gossip and Creole continue to be used as a form of resistance, no longer to the colonial planters but to the representatives of the Colombianization effort like the nuns, in charge of the evangelization and education of the islanders. Silva-Peña explains that by using gossip, the islanders resist the imposition of a national narrative and a Colombian-centric history, as gossip "is not part of the elites, nor of those who construct the truth of historical facts" (12) and "In this way, the authority of the official versions and their writing is displaced, promoting a space for new praxis and social representations" (12). Botero echoes this idea, pointing out that in the islands the spoken word is more powerful than the written one, as "The spoken word is very powerful, it has the ability to count and sing, to order the world by naming it, just as it is an instrument that causes divisions, death and witchcraft" (286). However, while Creole and gossip serve to resist foreign influence and create an alternative speech, it also reinforces social and racial hierarchies among the islanders, as mentioned before. These hierarchies, according to Silva-Peña, play an important role in the societal configuration of the

islands, as their reputation and social standing come from both avoiding becoming a source of gossip and speaking "properly".

On the other hand, gossip also reinforces gender roles, as this type of narrative is often seen as exclusively feminine. For example, Silva-Peña studies the figure of the "*raizal* matron", who is an "heir to the legacy of African reputation and transmitter of the knowledge that comes with the native language of Creole" (5). These women also serve as intermediaries and translators between the islanders and foreigners. That this figure of the *raizal* matron as an intermediary between *Raizal* culture and foreigners can be seen in Miss Mary's relationship with the doctor. As a midwife Mary works in a traditionally feminine profession, which gives her social status among her peers and gains her the respect of Doctor Timgen. Gossip played an important role in Miss Mary's life, as what happened with the schoolteacher first and then her relationship with Timgen became objects of discussion and speculation in islander society. Silvia-Peña adds that *Sheshand* often connects to traditional feminine spaces, such as kitchens and other domestic spaces. We can see this in the novel, as Providencia's description emphasizes that it is an "island of women", as most of the island's men had to leave their families behind, to work as sailors or in other countries, such as Panama. As a midwife Miss Mary moves in these feminine spaces constantly, but, at the same time, she often breaks with this tradition of domesticity, as she has to leave her own family behind to take care of Providencia's women.

In conclusion, we can see that these novels use language to explore the power struggles between the archipelago and the mainland. This was a result of the government initiative to integrate a Protestant and English-speaking territory within their Catholic and Spanish-speaking national imaginary. On the other hand, language is used to create social hierarchies and gender roles in the archipelago. Finally, language is also used to express identity and belonging, as both

María José and Timgen use English to express their new identities and where they belong. Another element used to explore this issue of identity is the natural environment, as we will now see.

5. Travel writing and natural environment:

In the previous chapter we saw how *No Give up Maan!* traces a parallel between George (and the enslaved islanders in general) and the island and how this geographical space plays a key role in the construction of *raizal* identity. In these two novels nature, often seen through a nostalgic lens, also ties with identity and belonging, and influences the narrators' accounts. The three female narrators of these novels produce unique travel texts combining social commentary with personal introspection, comparing the changes in their own lives with the changes occurring in the islands due to external influences, such as the Colombianization projects. In these texts, travel often serves as an allegory of freedom, as we will now see.

In her thesis, *Trazos de nación: mujeres viajeras y discurso nacional en Latinoamérica* Vanessa Miseres (2010) explains that the nineteenth century represents a "turning moment" for women travel writers. As stated in the chapter about Danticat and the Haitian diaspora (page 92), before the nineteenth century, travel accounts presented people (and especially native or indigenous women) as "objects" to write about but not as subjects in the travel narrative. To show this change in travel narrative, Miseres focuses her analysis on four women writers of the nineteenth century (Flora Tristán, Juana Manuela Gorriti, Eduarda Mansilla and Clorinda Matto de Turner) who produced travel accounts at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, a period of great changes for the Latin American nations. Therefore, these women travellers use the travel motif to "re-think" the concept of nation and ideas like "unity" and homogeneity, while at the same time questioning their role in the newly independent nations. However, as Miseres explains in her analysis, these women can also be Europeans exploring

"exotic places", while others come from the *Creole*[17] upper class. Nonetheless, as the *Creole* upper class often received a European education, European ideas and a Eurocentric point of view still permeate these travel accounts.

In Robinson's case, María José's descriptions often emphasize her privileged situation, as she went to school in Vienna and lived in the United States. Father David for example, points out that the other nuns "had never left Colombia" (131) and were very ignorant about the outside world. Because of her education, María José often portrays Providencia as similar to the places she encountered in Europe, while at the same time underlining the difference between San Andrés and Providencia. For example, her first description of the island states:

> She thought that she will see another island carpeted with coconut palms, but rather found herself in a small town in a European country: the houses, although similar to those of the other island, had in their construction and their location a very European feeling, different from San Andrés. (127)

However, this privileged position does not prevent María José from adapting to islander society. While at the beginning she is shocked by the "primitive" conditions of the boat, for example, she quickly adapts and even enjoys traveling in these conditions, talking, and singing with the crew.

However, while Elizabeth and María José seem to follow the model of the nineteenth century or early twentieth century women travellers, educated in European ideals and with a cosmopolitan point of view, Miss Mary goes against this model. As mentioned before, her

[17] Creole in this context refers to people from European descent born in the Americas, but not necessarily people of mixed race.

condition as a midwife gives her social status among the islanders, but she is neither rich nor educated. Additionally, for the *raizales*, travelling was not unusual nor tied to a privileged social position. In fact, traveling plays a crucial part in their identity, as the *raizal* community never remained confined to the borders of San Andrés nor Providencia. Even in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century, people from the *raizal* community (and even the women) travelled constantly between the two islands, to other parts of the Caribbean, and to Panama, Nicaragua, and the United States. Miss Mary has a sister who lives in Panama, and she has visited her more than once. She also travels at least once a year between the two islands.

The idealization of the American continent in the European imagination, discussed in more detail in the third chapter, continues to be central to the travel literature of the nineteenth century. For example, Miseres points out that travel accounts in the continent: "(are a) literature that imagines the continent as a utopic space, far from the centres of Western civilization, ideal for men's exercise of full freedom" (26). The idea of the continent as utopic and outside Western civilization can be seen in Elizabeth's character. As discussed in the previous chapter, her shipwreck on the islands allows her to defy social conventions and to be uninhibited with George. María José and Timgen also find in the archipelago new opportunities and new identities. The three novels, therefore, use the figure of travel to explore the theme of identity and belonging, and to offer the different characters the possibility of escaping social norms to start a new life. Timgen, for example, refuses to talk about his life before arriving on the islands and even states that the island offers him anonymity and the promise of a new life: "Sometimes I feel that you emerged from the earth's womb so that people like me could find a place to start a new life" (34).

As mentioned in the analysis of *No Give up Maan!*, in Robinson's texts natural elements often serve as allegories for the societal changes happening on the islands. For example, the

hurricane at the beginning of the novel represents the change from the plantation and colonial system to a free and independent society in the mid-nineteenth century. Due to the storm, the crops in San Andrés change from the vast cotton plantations that required the extensive labour of enslaved people to coconut trees, which do not require as much attention. In another study about the history of the islands, James Cruz (2017) points out that coconuts quickly became the archipelago's main export: "in 1883, the islands exported 4 million coconuts, and by 1900 the annual production was of 16 million coconuts, the highest production in the history of the coconut's economic cycle" (32). Both *Sail Ahoy!* and *The Prince of St. Katherine* show the importance of coconuts in islander society and, as María José points out, by the beginning of the twentieth century San Andrés was "carpeted" with coconut palms. Despite the vital role coconut played in the archipelago's economy, some people saw this reliance on a single crop as problematic. Adolfo Meisel (2009), for example, points out that this dependence on a monoculture became a source of "economic instability" (16) for the islands through the first half of the twentieth century. Similarly, James Cruz (2017) details the negative effects of the overcrowded coconut crops in San Andrés:

> This fact not only brought with it an oversaturated visual island landscape of coconut palms, but also increased the vulnerability of the economy, which was now not only highly sensitive to the international market fluctuations, but also to phytopathological problems in the crop, due to the overcrowded coconut palms (40).

All of these elements led to the coconut crisis in the 1930s and the collapse of the islands' economy, an event foretold by Timgen in *The Prince*. When the novel takes place, a plague affecting the palm trees has already put into question the islanders' reliance on coconuts and Timgen knows that it will eventually have negative consequences, both for the land and for the

islanders, as he says to Mary: “what will happen to those who cannot work with the government and cannot sell their coconuts?” (27). Additionally, since most of the land is used exclusively for the coconut palms, the islanders had to rely for food on imports mainly from the United States. As James Cruz states, the American ships “came from Boston and New York, with cured meat, flour, rice, fabrics, and then went back with coconuts or ‘copra’ (dried coconut), tortoiseshell, sarsaparilla, cocoa, rubber, fustic (Maclura tinctoria or yellow stick), mahogany, hides, cotton, cedar, and other fine woods” (30). Robinson’s novels also show that due to the lack of opportunities in the archipelago (as the coconuts required less labour than other crops) most islanders had to work as sailors or look for jobs in other countries, such as Panama and Nicaragua.

The effects of the coconut crisis and the end of prosperity that it brought, aggravated by the effects of the Great Depression and the Second World War on the archipelago, creates a sense of longing in Robinson’s narrative, as Mónica del Valle (2011) points out in her analysis of the novel. According to del Valle, Robinson’s descriptions of the archipelago hint at an idealization of the past or “better times”. This idealization can be seen especially in the descriptions comparing Providencia and San Andrés. As noted above), *No Give Up Maan!* takes place on San Andrés, while the two other novels are mostly about Providencia, the second most important island on the archipelago. Robinson’s novel *Sail Ahoy!* often compares Providencia to a “jewel” (127) that has been protected “for centuries” from foreign influence, implying, therefore, that San Andres has been “corrupted” by these external influences. In this way, Robinson contrasts the situation of San Andrés and Providencia and the impact the contact with the outside world has had on the islands and their inhabitants. San Andrés and Providencia had a very different colonial experience and, although today San Andrés serves as the capital of the department, being the centre of tourism, the seat of government and monopolizing most of the archipelago’s trade, Providencia was the first

island to be inhabited and remained the more important of the two between the sixteenth and nineteenth century. Its volcanic nature and the fact that it is surrounded by reefs makes it a natural fortress, something extremely useful for the different European settlers who disputed control of the archipelago in the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Since the arrival of Europeans in the early seventeenth century, Providencia has been continuously inhabited, while San Andrés, harder to defend from pirates and other attackers, was abandoned on several occasions over the centuries.

Additionally, Providencia is further away from the mainland[18] and has mountainous terrain. The isolation of Providencia and its topography meant that its natural environment has been better preserved, as it lacked extensive plantations and did not take part in the coconut boom mentioned earlier. As James Cruz (2017) explains, in the second half of the nineteenth century, San Andrés' native forests were cleared to plant coconut palms, without any form of planning or control. During the coconut boom at least two thirds of the island's surface were used for the production of coconuts and between fifty thousand and seventy thousand trees were planted in total. This overcrowding of plants led to plagues and the proliferation of rats on the island and changed the landscape of the island permanently. The coconut palms also had a negative impact on soil quality, as the islanders "did not use fertilizers, even though coconut palms demand potassium and the island's soil is poor in nitrogen. This further impoverished the soil and rapidly aged the coconut palms" (44).

However, Providencia's nature may not be as pristine as it appears in most of Robinson's descriptions. As the first island in the archipelago to be colonized, Providencia's natural environment had already been affected by the introduction of European crops, farm and domestic

[18] Providencia is 418 kilometres from Nicaragua and 1246 from the Colombian coast, while San Andres is 318 and 1203, respectively.

animals brought to the island by the English settlers as early as the sixteenth century. This agricultural production continued through its history, as James Cruz explains in her analysis. According to James Cruz, while San Andrés went through the coconut boom, Providencia and Santa Catalina's fertile soil was still used for the agricultural production of fruits, timber (especially fine woods like cedar) and cotton. Additionally, despite the proximity of San Andrés and Providencia, these crops could not be used to solve San Andrés's food dependency, as James Cruz explains: "Deficiencies in communication between San Andrés and Providencia prevented taking advantage of the potential agricultural production of the latter in the provision of food for the growing economy of San Andres" (69). Most of Providencia's agricultural production was, therefore, exported to other countries. This statement contradicts Pomare's who states that ""Since the late 1870s, the islanders were never short of food" (226) and "the islands were self-sufficient in food and fruit, and had even reached export capacity" (227) before the Colombianization process and the population boom in the mid twentieth century.

The difference between San Andrés and Providencia increased during the forties and fifties, as the Second World War had a deep impact on the archipelago. Due to their strategic position in the Caribbean, the islands played an important role in the conflict. For example, German U-boats attacked and sank four schooners or "goletas" close to the archipelago during the war, an episode mentioned by Robinson in her 1959 article *La goleta 'Persistence'*[19]. Additionally, shortly after the war, in 1953, San Andrés was declared a Free Port by then President Rojas Pinilla. As stated in the first chapter, this measure was aimed to help the archipelago recover from the 1930s economic crisis, by ending customs and promoting trade, but in the end this initiative brought a

[19] *El Espectador Dominical*, August 23th, 1959. Consulted in https://www.revistaaleph.com.co/index.php/component/k2/item/779-meridiano-81-columnas-el-espectador-por-hazel-robinson

new set of issues. For example, the Free Port attracted a large number of migrants from the mainland and between 1951 and 1964 the population of San Andrés rose from 3,705 to 14, 413 people. Overpopulation continues to be San Andrés' main issue, with a density of 2,206 inhabitants per square kilometre, making it the most densely populated island in the Caribbean. This, combined with the overexploitation of land and natural resources, pollution of the sea and lack of fresh water in the island, has exacerbated the tensions between the mainlanders and the *raizal* society established during the Colombianization project which was implemented in the archipelago at the beginning of the twentieth century. The negative consequences of the Free Port, however, only affected San Andrés, as Providencia was not included in the initiative and, therefore, was not affected by the wave of migration it brought. Nonetheless, Providencia has faced other issues, due to its isolated nature. For example, in 2021 the hurricane Iota destroyed most of the island's infrastructure, including the only hospital, and its recovery was hampered by the difficulties of shipping building materials from the mainland and transporting them through the island.

In conclusion, we can see in these novels that the nineteenth century Eurocentric perspective of the islands, depicted in the previous novel, has now been replaced by what we can call a "Colombia-centric" perspective. However, while the actors have changed, the power dynamic associated with the dichotomy between 'civilized' Colombia and 'uncivilized' islands remains. This point of view of the islands as uncivilized dominates the relationship between the archipelago and mainland Colombia in the twentieth and twenty-first century, as European colonialism that shaped islander culture in previous centuries has been replaced here by a neo-colonial project, promoted by the Colombian government to incorporate the archipelago into mainland culture. This perspective, however, is not completely negative, as María José and Elizabeth embrace the archipelago's culture in preference to the apparently civilized one.

Nonetheless, their descriptions still exoticize the islands and emphasize the "otherness" of San Andrés. Additionally, although these novels denounce the abuses and problems brought by the "Colombianization" process (such as the loss of their native culture, language, and religion), the voice of the natives continues to be missing, as it was in the previous novel with Hatse's point of view being absent from the story. Although the events in the second novel (*The Prince)* are apparently narrated by a native narrator (Miss Mary), the novel focuses more on Timgen's story and the mystery of his arrival on the islands. Like other outsiders such as María José and Father David, doctor Timgen shows great interest in the archipelago, as he studies and records the history of the islands. However, this history seems aimed at outsiders, not at the islanders, as the only person he shares it with is Miss Mary. To this day many islanders still ignore their own history and the archipelago's past, as the schools only teach Colombian history, a gap that Robinson's historical novels try to fill from the perspective of these traveling women.

Conclusion:

While it may seem that splitting this study in two sections is at odds with the objective of conducting a pan-Caribbean approach of these two writers (instead of limiting to one linguistic zone), a detailed study of their works was necessary to have a better understanding of these authors, their backgrounds and the common themes that run through their work.

The two writers examined here, the Haitian American writer Edwidge Danticat and the Colombian author Hazel Robinson, belong to different generations and come from different cultural backgrounds. The first was born in Haiti but lives and publishes her books in the United States, which has made her well-known in English-speaking circles. Robinson, on the other hand, remains largely unknown, even in Colombia, where the study of Caribbean literature mostly focuses on the authors from the Colombian mainland. Even though English is one of San Andrés' official languages, she writes in Spanish and most of her works have not been translated into English.

Similarly, as this study has established, while San Andrés and Haiti went through different historical processes, they have a similar relationship to colonial and neo-colonial powers. While Haiti was the first independent nation in the Caribbean, today it depends heavily on the United States for economic aid, due to numerous socio-economic and political crises throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. San Andrés, on the other hand, may have been part of Colombia since 1820, but culturally and ethnically it remains very different from the mainland. While the archipelago relies on the mainland economically, the relationship between the two territories has always been a source of conflict. These processes are explored by both Danticat and Hazel Robinson in their works.

In their texts, they show how the traumatic experiences of chattel slavery and colonial exploitation have had a profound impact on these islands, creating societies marked by the creolization process analysed by many Caribbean writers. Creolization, or the coming together of different cultures, races, and languages, is not always a harmonious experience, as it often entails the subjugation or exploitation of a culture for the profit of another. Thus, Caribbean society remains divided along race and colour lines with issues like colourism and racism still creating tensions and conflicts, as seen in Haiti's and San Andrés' societies.

The colonial experience also led to a fraught relationship with the environment, often seen purely in economic terms (as something to be exploited). The Europeans cleared the land and introduced foreign animals into the Caribbean islands, causing irreversible damage to their environment. The environmental destruction is often aggravated by human-made disasters (like overpopulation). Nowadays, the colonial abuses of previous centuries have been replaced by other exploitative practices, such as tourism. Similarly, the colonial experience created a "cultural amnesia" (Glissant) or a widespread ignorance of the past, especially of non-European history.

As Danticat and Robinson establish in their texts, the inhabitants of both Haiti and San Andrés have forgotten many episodes of their past, which leads to a never-ending cycle of destruction and catastrophe (Munro) and to being trapped in unresolved and continuous trauma. Both writers share an interest in the forgotten history of their places of origin and their books aim to mitigate this cultural amnesia. In their books they want to retell the past through the perspective of marginal characters, especially women. The protagonists of their books witness historical events and go through traumatic experiences that change their perspective of the world. This gendered perspective also fills another gap in Caribbean literature, as the region's discourses and literary tropes have been male focused for most of the twentieth century. Danticat and Robinson challenge

or distance themselves from the accepted historiography and ideas of national identity proposed by male writers like Glissant, proposing instead a pan-Caribbean and cross-national identity.

Similarly, both authors emphasise the importance of communities recovering from trauma and creating a sense of self. However, Robinson's books focus mostly on romantic relationships as allegories for San Andrés history, and the island's relationship through the years with different colonial powers (England first then Colombia). Danticat, on the other hand, centres more on familial relationships, especially the connection between mothers and daughters. She shows how these women serve as *poto mitan* (pillars) of Haitian society. They keep alive the history of their country and their own stories through storytelling and other cross-generational narrative strategies.

Despite the importance of communal ties in both Danticat and Robinson, the characters in their books also reflect an intense sense of alienation. This alienation not only relates to the past, but also to physical alienation, including a metaphorical or real distance from places of origin. Danticat, for example, often explores the theme of the Haitian diaspora and how it creates a divided self, which does not fully belong anywhere. For Robinson, this sense of alienation comes from the archipelago's complex relationship with the Colombian mainland and from being trapped between two traditions, languages, and religions. This is why the protagonists in her novels are often foreigners instead of islanders.

Both authors also have in common their use of natural elements as allegories of the islands' traumatic past (sugar cane as a reminder of slavery, for example) and violent modern events (like the racial persecution of the Parsley Massacre). However, natural elements also relate to identity and belonging, which means they serve as tools for healing and reconciling with this past. This dual aspect of natural elements is especially prominent in the case of the Caribbean Sea, a place of death (the Middle passage) and of hope for a new beginning (often through exile and migration).

Traditionally, Caribbean studies have been conducted from a historical and cultural perspective, with a tendency to divide the region into isolated linguistic zones. While this approach remains important, a comparative study allows a better understanding of the region's dynamics, especially through taking into account shared history and the common propensity for catastrophic events, both natural and man-made. As already noted, natural disasters are often aggravated by human-made issues, like overpopulation and overexploitation of natural resources, often resulting from the complex history of the region and the legacy of colonial regimes and plantation-based economy. To have a better understanding of the Caribbean, future studies should focus more on Green Humanities and ecocritical perspectives, as the Caribbean is especially vulnerable to climate change and other natural disasters, as the Haitian earthquake of 2010 and the Iota hurricane of 2021 demonstrated. In the region, economic poverty and environmental vulnerability are often connected and force people to migrate.

This study has focused on a limited corpus and only on two authors. Both Haiti and San Andres have many other authors who deserve to be studied, but the present analysis has been constrained by a lack of sources (especially for San Andrés) and available translations. Future studies could develop and enrich the comparative approach pioneered here.

Appendix: Interview with Hazel Robinson.

In February 2020, I met with Hazel Robinson Abrahams in San Andres, in the Banco de la República library. While it was not a formal interview, it offered some insight on her writing process and on the history of the archipelago. According to Robinson, she started to write after reading a newspaper article in *El Espectador* about the islands, in 1959. By then the islands had been brought to the forefront of Colombian government policies. San Andrés had become a "Puerto Libre" in 1953 and quickly became an important trade centre and touristic destination. However, the communication between the archipelago and the mainland remained difficult. In 1959, the airport was still under construction and the islanders still relied on boats and hydroplanes to communicate with the Colombian mainland and other Caribbean territories. According to Robinson, only a couple of newspapers from the mainland arrived at the island each week and were shared by all the islanders. She also mentioned that usually the newspapers were one or two weeks old, but they were the only way of knowing about events in Colombia. In the case of the article mentioned above, she found the information about the archipelago (written by a journalist from the mainland) inaccurate and even wrong. Robinson wrote a letter to the newspaper director, Gabriel Cano. Cano, in turn, invited her to write for *El Espectador*. Robinson accepted the invitation, although she had no writing experience before that and faced technical difficulties (the hydroplanes were not always reliable and sometimes she was not even able to find paper to write the articles). These articles were published between 1959 and 1960 under the title *Meridiano 81*. Robinson explained to me that, from the beginning, she wanted to write about the islands' history and culture. I asked where she found the information about San Andrés's past, as there are very few pre-twentieth-century texts about the archipelago. According to Robinson, she had to rely on

anecdotes, oral history, and popular knowledge, as the few texts about the islands were not available on San Andrés. The importance of oral history is constant in her texts.

After these articles, Robinson did not publish any other text until her first novel, *No Give Up Maan*, in 2002. When asked why she stopped writing for so long, she explained that she had got married and then she left the islands, to live in the United States. When she came back to San Andrés in the 90s, she found that the island had changed a lot. The "Puerto Libre", as discussed before, had brought great changes to the archipelago. Robinson wanted to portray the islands' forgotten past and she started to write *No Give Up Maan!*. Her experience of living outside the islands also influenced a sense of nostalgia for the islander culture, then in danger of disappearing due to foreign influence. This is why most of Robinson's texts only portray the islands in the nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries. However, Robinson also criticizes some aspects of islander culture, especially religion. Protestant religion plays an important role in *raizal* culture, but Robinson shows in her texts that, in the past, religion was often used to control the enslaved people.

Glossary:

Ayiti: indigenous name of the island now shared by Haiti and Dominican Republic.

Creole/criollo: Descendants of Europeans born in the Americas.

Creole (language): a language born from mixing different languages. It has its own grammar, vocabulary, and it is learned as a native language by children.

Hispaniola: name given to the island of Ayiti by the Spanish settlers.

Houngan: vodou priest

Gran Colombia (1819-1831): a state that encompassed much of the north of the South American continent. It included present day Colombia, Panama, Ecuador, Venezuela and other territories.

Kreyol: language spoken in Haiti, combining French, African languages, and local idioms.

Loa/lwa: Vodou spirit

Marron: runaway slave. Also called *cimarrones* in the Spanish colonies.

Nueva Granada or New Grenada: name of the Colombian territory before its independence from Spain in 1810.

Paña: name given to the people from the Colombian mainland (or any foreigner) by the *raizales.*

Providencia: island of the San Andrés and Providencia archipelago. Historically called Old Providencia, it was first a Puritan colony. Situated at 94 kilometres of San Andrés and at 775 kilometres of the Colombian mainland.

Raizal: native from the archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia. The descendants of the Puritans settlers and enslaved Africans, mostly speak an English type of Creole rather than the Spanish used in mainland Colombia.

San Andrés: main island in the archipelago of San Andrés and Providencia.

Santo Domingo: name of the Spanish colony on the Eastern side of La Hispaniola (1535-1865, later known as Dominican Republic).

Saint Domingue: name of the French colony on the Western side of La Hispaniola (1697-1804, later known as Haiti).

Vodou: spiritual system mixing Catholicism and African beliefs, mostly practised in Haiti.

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