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Gendered Struggle for the Freedom From Violence Using Frantz Fanon's Theory in Three Postcolonial Novels: Albert Wendt's Pouliuli, Tsitsi Dangarembga's Nervous Conditions, and Edwidge Danticat's Breath, Eyes, Memory

Robin M. Respaut
Colby College

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∞ A Gendered Struggle For The Freedom From Violence
Using Frantz Fanon's Theory in Three Postcolonial
Novels: Albert Wendt's *Pouliuli*, Tsitsi Dangarembga's
Nervous Conditions, and Edwidge Danticat's
Breath, Eyes, Memory ∞

An English Honors Thesis by Robin Respaut
Advised by Jennifer Thorn, Fall '06–Jan '07

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Introduction

While studying abroad in New Zealand last year, I became intrigued by Albert Wendt's novel *Pouliuli*, because it was my first literary view into Pacific Island culture. My interest in the novel was part of my awakening to the particular damage done by the west in Oceania. By attending classes on the anthropology and sociology of postcolonial Pacific societies, I discovered how the west had acted in the region to encourage progressive technology in ways that handled native traditional culture with unconscious disrespect. I was stunned to learn that Oceania is the most aided region in the world today, surpassing even Africa, a situation which has left the area chronically dependent on external help. As a result, Pacific people today find their land inhabited with western NGO's, anthropological study groups, and foreign commerce. This infiltration rarely incorporates native populations' perspectives, intensifying the high poverty rates and the lack of skills and education in the region. As a result, western influence in the Pacific, in my impression, seemed misguided and destructive. Reading *Pouliuli* then confirmed this first impression of Oceania's relation to the west: I sympathized with the protagonist, Faleasa, when he rejected Christianity and attempted to purify himself from the western virus that has tainted his community. Yet, in doing this, Faleasa destroys his relationship with his family and enters into a sterile world of isolation. I, therefore, began this thesis with a pessimistic opinion that Oceania could not progress without a restriction of the west. Over the course of my writing, my disgust with western greed and arrogance has intensified, but I am, however, more reserved in my sense on how to fully respond to postcolonialism.

My project then turned to Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions* and Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, two novels that present "west versus native" dilemmas like those found in *Pouliuli* but are not as pessimistic in their overall evaluation of postcolonial society. I found revelatory their shared emphasis on the ways that gender shapes postcolonial trauma and recovery, something Wendt refrained to acknowledge altogether. Published twenty years after Wendt, Dangarembga and Danticat's novels seemingly replace Wendt's dichotomy of "good native tradition versus bad western progress" with the complexity of "good and bad native tradition" versus "good and bad western progress." Here, good tradition works to enrich the native people's cultural heritage, while bad tradition perpetuates colonial victimization and trauma within a community. I found that both novels scrutinized the ways tradition poses as familial duty and love, and this is revealed through the novels' heroines: in *Nervous Conditions*, Tambu, a young girl limited by her poor, rural, Zimbabwean family, idealizes the intellectualism of her uncle's mission school until her hybridized cousin and fellow schoolmate, Nyasha, shows Tambu the gendered restrictions that also exist within this colonial institution; and in *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Sophie, an inquisitive and sympathetic young girl who is sexually violated by her well-intentioned mother via a practiced Haitian tradition, travels between her home in the United States and her native country of Haiti to confront the personal and political traumas felt by four generations of women in her family. Both novels emphasize tolerance as crucial to understanding and confronting the damage done to a community by colonial violence, and both stress that, in dealing with this trauma, the compassion and understanding of women is essential to the healing process of the nation.

Throughout this project, I relied most centrally on the writings of Frantz Fanon, a renowned Martinique-born French postcolonial theorist in the twentieth century who wrote extensively on the psychological trauma of colonized natives after decolonization. In *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon describes three phases that the native intellectual upholds while trying to regain autonomy in postcolonial society: the first phase involves assimilation into colonial powers under the expectation that the colonial institution, no longer occupied by colonizer forces, will work to give the colonized man authority; the second phase is occupied by the native intellectual who, after returning home from studies abroad, finds himself distanced from his cultural heritage and, in an attempt to counter this alienation, works to remember his origin; the final stage encompasses the whole community as the native, frustrated by the traditional and colonial institutions that block progress in society, works to revolutionize the people and restore cultural legitimacy. I found this three-phase model quite useful as I studied these novels, in addition to Fanon's distinction between "custom" and "culture." Fanon declares custom, because of its natural inflexibility to evolve overtime, too rigid and restrictive to sustain in postcolonial society. Culture, on the other hand, Fanon defines through counter-reaction to oppressor forces, maintaining a partial dependence on the colonial institution. While many of Fanon's concepts seemed very much confirmed by the novels I examine, such as his proclamations on "custom," other elements, such as his construction of "culture," were very much contradicted. Still, Fanon's work was wonderfully inspiring as I analyzed the psychological effects of postcolonialism in these novels.

In my examination of the texts and with Fanon's influence, I have ultimately found that a flexible blend of traditional heritage and western progress seems to respond

best to postcolonial trauma. It has become painfully clear to me that the psychological damage indigenous communities endure during colonialism is often perpetuated in postcolonialism by the native population against themselves. This “native on native” destruction can become gendered as colonized men aim to displace their own anxiety of legitimacy on other “inferior” groups. Women, unfortunately, feel the worst of this displaced angst as they are continually discredited and subjugated by men and even other women. Significantly, as all three of my novels reveal poignantly, it is the recognition of women in their own right and as they affect men that is required to heal the cultural maiming done by colonialism. But, in the desperate pursuit of “authentic” “autonomy” in postcolonial society, it is these very women who are violated and silenced which, ultimately, damages their communities even further.

Chapter 1

Insanity and Darkness: Escapism and the Ideal in Albert Wendt's *Pouliuli*

Albert Wendt is one of the most prominent and influential postcolonial writers in the Pacific today. His writing centers primarily in Samoa where he was born in 1939, and in 1952, he won one of nine government scholarships to New Zealand's New Plymouth Boys' High School. He writes in many genres: novels, short stories, poetry, play scripts, and essays. His significance to modern Pacific writing has been intensified by his influential work as a teacher of creative writing, and in his creative writing, his influence seems true to his emphasis on Oceania's complexity. Here, he offers both Oceania and the international community alike a multidimensional view of Pacific history and culture, urging Oceania specifically to acknowledge, in order to counteract, the stereotypes imposed on it by the west as an alluring and mysterious western paradise tainted by an uneducated and poverty-stricken native population. Thus in the real world and in the world of his writing, Wendt rejects any rigidly romanticized views of tradition that might retard the Pacific as it moves into its necessary hybridized future.

I was first drawn to *Pouliuli* for its strange narrative; the writing style intertwines the whimsical quality of folklore with the bullet-point tone of a news report. I was greatly intrigued by the novel's opening description of its protagonist, Faleasa, vomiting maniacally before his fale, or family dwelling. Published in 1974, *Pouliuli* is Wendt's fifth major work and most critically-acclaimed. Often compared in tragic irony with Shakespeare's *King Lear*, Wendt's novella follows the willing surrender of authority by Faleasa, the leader of his aiga, or clan, through revelation, isolation, and desolation. The

plot reveals the Samoan community of Malealua struggling to negotiate the conflicting worlds of authentic tradition and western changes brought by the Second World War. Faleasa vomits because he is overwhelmed by a sharp realization that westernization has tainted his community. As he works, through the novel, to free himself from this newly-discovered contempt for his community, Faleasa seeks reconciliation with pouliuli, Samoan for darkness. This embrace of pouliuli evokes the Samoan myth of Pili, where a troubled king and father, unappreciated by his people and especially his daughter, leaps into the mouth of Darkness in order to reject his selfish and ungrateful community. Wendt's reinterpretation of this motif balances praise of Faleasa's brave renunciation of his corrupted community with criticism of the aiga leader as blind and vain. In this project, I explore Wendt's portrait of psychological damage done by colonialism, specifically its redefinition of freedom. Faleasa, seeking emancipation, sabotages his sons and beats his wife. In the end, the novel forces a painful consciousness of the inextricability of progress and corruption upon its readers.

The Flight to Freedom

Seeking to acknowledge Samoa's past and the traditional myths that revisit in modern society, Wendt emphasizes the importance of recognizing how the past shapes identities today. The pandemonium of the opening scene is followed with a series of flashbacks to Faleasa's childhood which reveal his father's destructive rearing: "Faleasa couldn't stop the memories from flooding into his heart in an endless stream of accusing pain, and the more his pain deepened the more he was forced to confront his past" (115). Faleasa's unwilling journey into his past works both to individualize the protagonist and

to critique a Samoan culture that is detrimentally alienated from its roots. At this early point, Faleasa cannot relate his own suffering to any larger system, but instead, he sees only his own “arrogant, autocratic, bigoted” father, “a bully and tyrant who enjoyed other people’s fear of him” (115). During a childhood when Faleasa “suppressed his guilty wish for his father to die,” the boy remains lost in the degrading belittlement imposed by his father’s utter disrespect (108).

Faleasa sees that his father narcissistically sought to replicate himself in his own son, and Wendt shows that this abuse caused Faleasa’s own denial of self. Still, an even more painful recognition for Faleasa is the realization that he “enjoyed his enslavement to his father” (115):

To his demanding father...the son had been merely an extension of himself, further proof of his virility, to be shaped in his own image in order to continue his brand of leadership – and his name of course. His son’s individuality was ignored, and at times when he had tried feebly to assert it his father had treated this slight assertiveness as a disease which must be cured even if it meant using violent intimidation. (115)

His father asserts this sadism in a “cocoon of cold aloofness,” demanding “full control over everything, especially over yourself,” for “without control you will never be a true leader” (116). Hence Faleasa learns to devalue himself, and he drifts into painful isolation.

As the flashbacks continue, we see that it is not until the arrival of the old man in the village that Faleasa discovers anyone who offers him intimacy and respect. The old man radiates a “contagious feeling of generous goodwill,” which Faleasa greatly prefers

to his father's fearsome ruthlessness: "unlike his real father, the old man allowed him to behave like a child, encouraged him to cry openly when he felt like it, and talked to him when he wanted to talk" (100). Faleasa revels in the old man's treatment of him as a nervous and curious child. He dreams that the old man's love might free him from the cold confines of his father: "the old man picking him up gently and – laughing until the whole earth and sky and sea were alive with his joy – releasing him up into air as soft as feathers, where he floated, wheeled, swam, and turned cartwheels in limitless, endless freedom" (100). The old man's reliable gentleness frees Faleasa from both his father's constriction and the desolation of his own loneliness.

The old man also teaches Faleasa larger lessons, helping him understand the dangerous correlation between Samoa's depleted alofa, or communal compassion, and colonialism's Christianization. He makes this point through symbolic, pebble circles that he secretly constructs before all the main buildings and homes in the village. The circles represent the Samoan conception of va, or communal wholeness based on alofa. Alofa represents the center of the circle, but not in any particular physical form. Instead, the center of alofa resides in pouliuli. European missionaries saw pouliuli as a dark pagan root to be eradicated. Denying pouliuli, Faleasa's Christian father also rejects the community center of alofa. Hence, when the old man constructs his final pebble circle in front of the Faleasa's fale, the center pebble is also omitted, suggesting the impossibility of a community that endorses the leadership of Faleasa's father.

The absence of the core pebble, along with the departure of the old man, greatly upsets the young Faleasa who is unwilling to admit his love, or renewed alofa, sparked by the old man. In the face of this loss, the boy retreats back to his father's doctrine and

reprimands himself for missing the old man, echoing his father's advice not to rely on anyone: "The shivering came from the pit of his belly and out to all the cells of his body as silence and the eerie light enveloped him, and he nearly ran back into the fale. He didn't need anyone" (109). Significantly, the angst provoked by the old man's departure originates in the center of Faleasa's body and spreads outward in a pattern similar to the circular network of va. His pain reveals the success of the old man's introduction of Samoan ideals to Faleasa.

Faleasa's apprenticeship to the old man allows readers to revisit the breakdown in which the novel begins, for Faleasa's madness resembles the old man's erratic behavior. The old man, as a moral touchstone, exposed Faleasa to the function of mental insanity as a purifying agent: "the people came to believe that God was working through [the old man's] madness to cure the incurable and to reward those people who were kind to the unfortunate" (111). The system of utilizing madness for clarity and restoration is congruent with Faleasa's pursuit of "madness [as an] escape from his suffering": "in our insane world in which terror and violence feed on the heart's sinews, what we call insanity or, rather, those we brand as insane are really the only sane creatures among us" (111, 17). While the old man's madness works to awaken and heal a village that is unaware of its fleeting alofa, Faleasa uses the guise of madness to manipulate and eliminate western corruption within his community.

Both men aim to return to pouliuli; yet while Faleasa dreams of a pouliuli preserved from before westernization, the old man seeks pouliuli in writing. He emphasizes the importance of writing to "store, describe, imprison, exorcise, and identify memories in written form" so that people are able to "escape from the ravenous,

rapacious, fearless appetite of memory” (104). Here again, even as the old man recognizes “collective memory” as necessary in the formation of identity and culture, it is only the “magic” of the word that can shine “humane light” into Samoa’s “brutal nightmare swamp” of collective thought (104). The old man’s acceptance of Samoa’s intersection with the west is lost on Faleasa, who simply wants to escape to the solitude of pouliuli that existed before he “divorced himself from the darkness” (112).

Though Faleasa’s oversimplification of pouliuli allows him to find comfort in “madness,” he is unable to revive alofa within himself and his community. Faleasa forgets that “whenever [the old man] helped others he succeeded, but whenever he tried to do something for himself he failed and the state of his mind deteriorated further” (111). In missing this final lesson from the old man, Faleasa does not realize that divorce from the community and denial of love for his people means he is doomed to fail. This damning mistake in his logic is evident in the behavior of those around him and the resulting “forced quality of it all”: they “were serving him, not out of any love for him, but because they were afraid” (93). By the end of the novel, Faleasa discovers the selfishness in his own seclusion: “‘Vanity, all is vanity’ you hear the old man reciting from the Bible. Your bid for freedom in these last years of your life is vanity too, you now tell yourself. Where then is the escape, the meaning to your life?” (113). Faleasa’s revelation shows that his isolated retreat into pouliuli is just as vain as his family’s cruelty and insincerity. Instead of aiding his people, following the old man truly, Faleasa runs from their side and achieves nothing.

The Tactic of Muted Rebellion

Faleasa is joined in his quest for freedom and redemption by Lemigao, a childhood friend born crippled and fatherless, who is now ostracized throughout their community for his misfortune. The two boys share a devotion to “the darkness” that “throbbed in their eyes and confined them more tightly in the greater darkness of their individual selves” (17). Lemigao, however, seeks pouliuli with a greater skepticism, as stigma forbids him to enter the community that Faleasa can access freely. In turn, his placement on the social margins means that Lemigao need not abide by the social conventions of their community. As he aids Faleasa in the pursuit of pouliuli, Lemigao reveals his own quiet struggle against corruption: a muted effort against the rigid stereotypes that dictate his own rejection from society.

Lemigao’s marginalization means that he is less influenced by destructive westernization; as a result, he lived a much more carefree childhood than the nervous Faleasa. This is especially evident after Faleasa and Lemigao lie, under an oath of God’s name, to Faleasa’s father about stealing a communal pig. Lemigao is ecstatic about their exhilarating ruse, crying out ““God is a God of love!”” while Faleasa “kept on running as fast as he could, as if he was trying to break free of an invisible and terrifying parasite that had wrapped itself round him” (27). After his father’s Christian preaching of a ruthless God, Faleasa is terrified to sin, but Lemigao, who never personally accepted the Christian doctrine, claims that God can only encourage goodness. In doing this, he distinguishes his separation from the community that he resides within, but he also avoids the penetrating “parasite” of Christianity.

Lemigao's defies not only western influence: he also challenges the traditional stereotypes that work against him within the Samoan culture. Assumed "too ugly to win any women," Lemigao forces "everyone...to reassess their standards of male attractiveness to women" after he impregnates a few of the most sought after girls in the village (75, 76). Lemigao's successful disruption of the communal standard is a silent challenge to Samoan norms. But Lemigao's ability to rupture convention only further alienates him from alofa: "His lone battle for survival in a hostile Malealua had turned him into a completely selfish being" (77). In Lemigao's search for solitude and self-preservation, he, too, is seduced by self-seeking and vanity.

Lemigao's vanity is not fully realized until he imposes his own rigid, idealistic expectations upon his only son, Mose. "With his parents' total devotion," Mose is molded into a "model son" "who excelled in everything" (81). He is recognized by the community as "fearless, obedient, and conscientious" and unlike his father before him, he is lauded for his "unquestioning loyalty and devotion" to the aiga (81-2). But Mose, too, is severely isolated from companionship within the community, and the seclusion is only further exacerbated as he becomes "entirely self-sufficient, needing only his father's companionship" (82). The dependency is mutual as the boy constitutes Lemigao's "whole meaning" and the threat of losing Mose manifests as "an almost overwhelming fear that the physical universe had been sucked away into a terrible void and he was utterly alone" (83, 82). While Faleasa embraces the void left in pouliuli after the displacement of alofa, Lemigao fills the absence with a consuming reverence for his son.

Mose's function as the replacement of alofa in the heart of pouliuli eventually destroys the boy when he is removed from the companionship of his father and sent on a

prestigious academic government scholarship to New Zealand. The illness that consumes him mystifies both western and traditional doctors, for it is “as if he had fallen into a deep sleep out of which he refused to be wakened” (84). Mose’s ailment eerily parallels Faleasa’s childhood infirmity after he lied to his father about stealing the pig: “He grew steadily thinner and withdrew into a silence from which he refused to emerge. But at night he talked in his sleep about God and his parents having forsaken him” (27). Moses, too, appears to want freedom “from the curse of his parents” as the illness manifests in “more of the mind than of the body,” (86). Continually forced to fill the void in his father’s life, Mose is never successfully able to integrate into society. Ultimately, Lemigao deprives his son of community in order to satiate his own feelings of deprivation. But when Mose dies, Lemigao realizes that he sacrificed his son for his own vanity, and it resulted in nothing.

Perpetual Violence and the Gendered Effect

The most explicit examples of violence, specifically physical brutality, in Wendt’s novel, occur against women who assume the blame for their victimization. Often these fights are instigated by utterly arbitrary factors, such as when Mose dies and Lemigao beats his wife “with his fists”: “He wasn’t angry; he was simply committing an act he had to commit. She knew this and accepted it as a punishment she deserved. She didn’t utter a sound as the exploding pain shocked her into a numb darkness” (86). Domestic violence is never challenged in Wendt’s novel as the husband’s right to beat his wife is universally assumed: “Her long hair was wrapped firmly around Moaula’s left hand while his right fist pounded at her mercilessly and he kept shouting at her that she was his wife

to do whatever he liked with...She sobbed and shrieked and asked for forgiveness” (93). These uncontested assumptions work to naturalize physical violence in their Samoan society as the female is often discredited, disrespected, and blamed for male dissatisfaction.

Significantly, in a society struggling to renew alofa and universal communality, it is the females in Malealua that demonstrate nurturing affection, especially in the wake of male aggression:

Finally he kicked upwards with his right foot into her abundant stomach and sent her sprawling out on to the paepae. Felefele and the other women converged on her, lifted her up, and carried her into the next fale, with Moaula shouting that if they ever mistreated his father again he would murder them all. His son still loved him, Faleasa thought. (93)

While Faleasa encourages his son’s brutality against his wife, Felefele and the other village women work to revive the broken women. Coupled with the cruelty, Faleasa makes the rancorous claim that Felefele shows an “intolerable” look of “deadly indifference in [her] eyes when [she] looked at him – it was as though he was a mindless, emotionless creature, who from a sense of duty they had to keep alive” (92). After Faleasa refers to his family as “his worthless kin” and threatens “to kill them,” he then expects his family to exhibit genuine compassion and acceptance for him (6).

The women in Malealua, however, do work to aid widening rifts within the family, such as when Felefele attempts to salvage the broken relationship between her two sons. In his aim to eliminate corruption, Faleasa sabotages his oldest son’s authority within the community so he may promote his second oldest son as the next leader to

follow Faleasa. In his exploitation, Faleasa manipulates friction between the boys and aggressively works to exacerbate their growing animosity. Yet, while Faleasa acts as the aggravate their relationship, his wife desperately attempts to conserve some of the respect between her sons: “They communicated when they had to through Felefele who, by then painfully aware of the widening rift between her sons but unable to heal it, was in a ‘frantic nervous condition’ (Faleasa’s description)” (32). In this perspective, Faleasa’s vanity is now instigating further corruption and acrimony within the family, while Felefele’s love for her boys attempts to preserve the thinning alofa left in their relationship.

Faleasa’s bigotry against women traces back to his childhood when, after discovering the self-empowering advantages of bullying his peers, Faleasa decides that his father’s lessons of arrogance, autocracy, and tyranny were self-benefiting and worthwhile. He reflects that “life was immeasurably easier if one became a castrated pet” to his father (115). In this sense, Faleasa’s father exacerbates familial victimization through the degradation of his son’s masculinity. But Faleasa fails to realize that the women in the village are repetitively subject to more extreme, callous hostility from the men in the village. Instead, he only credits the perpetrator of this violence to his father: “he wept, knowing that he too had been born out of violence: his father, he was sure now, had destroyed his mother. ‘Only the powerful have the right to survive’ – his father’s voice rang in his head” (122). Faleasa begins to recognize that the damage of his childhood victimization has extended into his adult life.

Faleasa also realizes that his father encouraged and expected him to maintain this violence in his own relationship with Felefele, and she, in turn, found reward in this type

of bleak accreditation: “While he was using her he realized that she was enjoying it all – the humiliation, the pain and the bleeding, his stabbing flesh...He had enjoyed violating her; she had enjoyed being violated” (122). Faleasa pursues his father’s orders by enacting the principle that “[r]eal power is when you can dominate and use others,” and in doing so, he completes a vicious circle of male domination – both being dominated and then becoming the dominator (122). Still, in discovering his own role in the vicious cycle, Faleasa feels remorse only for his own experiences.

Ultimately, Faleasa fails to fully recognize that the persistence of this aggression throughout the community represents the “symptoms of the sickness in the nation’s soul, a tragic mimicry, an absence of faith in things Samoan” in that “sickness has invaded that centre and is infecting it cell by cell” (131). The novel ends encouraging readers to review the critical effects of both westernization and tradition in postcolonial Samoa, but Wendt fails to clearly define the greater gender subordination that reverberates through the society. Men radiate their aggression onto their children, who grow up to continue the cycle, and against women, who assume that it is their nature to become the subjects. Ultimately, Wendt only hints at the possibility of crediting the female with the ability to nurture and revive the alofa that is necessary to renew his broken Samoan society.

Chapter 2

Gendered Tradition and Progress in Tsitsi Dangarembga's *Nervous Conditions*

Tsitsi Dangarembga, a contemporary female Zimbabwean writer and filmmaker, is widely acclaimed for bringing the female perspective to the foreground of postcolonial dialogue. Born in 1959 in colonial Zimbabwe, then called Rhodesia, she was educated in England from ages two through six and then finished her elementary schooling at a mission in Zimbabwe. Dangarembga continued to travel between the two countries, studying medicine at Cambridge University and psychology at the University of Zimbabwe. Always returning to her home country, Dangarembga worked on a number of projects pertaining to the great limitations placed on Zimbabwean women by traditional gender roles. While identifying the restrictive gender bias perpetuated by traditional custom, Dangarembga continuously reminds her readers of the risks in denying and dismissing one's cultural heritage. It is, therefore, only with a balance of appreciation for cultural tradition and western progress that Dangarembga finds a successful direction to work towards.

Nervous Conditions was the first novel to be published by a female Zimbabwean writer. Published in England in 1988 as a female coming-of-age story of two young cousins in postcolonial Zimbabwe, the book immediately achieved world-wide acclaim. The story is narrated by Tambu, a curious and introspective girl who is offered an education at her uncle's mission school after her older brother dies. At the mission, Tambu lives with her English-educated cousin, Nyasha, who is struggling to assimilate into a traditional Shona culture that she has never known. Together, the two girls face

gender-biased obstacles that have resonated in their family and society since colonialism. The girls struggle hardest with the traditional African injunction of silence and acquiescence placed on females. Forced to deny their resentment, Tambu and Nyasha internalize their frustration resulting in eating disorders and episodes of paralysis. Dangarembga's reference to Frantz Fanon's statement, "The condition of the native is a *nervous condition*" in her title draws attention to Fanon's assertion in the 1963 edition of *The Wretched of the Earth* that "[w]hen the native is confronted with the colonial order of things, he finds he is in a state of permanent tension. The settler's world is a hostile world, which spurns the native, but at the same time it is a world of which he is envious" (Fanon 52). While Wendt succeeds in demonstrating how this juxtaposition of tension and envy is dominant in Faleasa's postcolonial psyche, it is Dangarembga who considers the effect of this exploitation and the resulting victimization on women. With a modern feminist perspective that was absent in Albert Wendt's era of postcolonial writing, Dangarembga emphasizes the necessity of appreciating women's autonomy in order to heal the violence in postcolonial Zimbabwe.

The Ambition to Progress

The model of progress implied by *Pouliuli* fails because Faleasa seeks a purity of the past that can never be recreated. While readers are shown the impossibility of complete regression, also emphasized is the equally unproductive acceptance of western influence. *Nervous Conditions* presents a similar situation, but instead of aiming for absolute assimilation or eradication, the protagonists succeed in achieving a balance. Together, Tambu and Nyasha work effectively to challenge the obstacles imposed by

traditional Shona society and western institutions. By looking first at Tambu's journey, then at Nyasha's, we can see how each girl comes from drastically different childhoods, but it is not until they are supporting each other that either can fully confront their own limiters. Here, through Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, we compare the experiences of Tambu, her cousin, Nyasha, and Nyasha's father, Babamukuru with three extreme responses to colonization in the novel: the assimilating native, who condones colonial methods of power in order to assume his own authority; the disturbed native, who attempts to remember his roots after some distance from the culture; and the fighting native, who works as a leader of the people in order to awaken them from lethargy. In understanding their responses, Tambu shows us the novel's deepest commitment to the "four women I have loved": her mother, an exhausted and overworked woman carrying out the traditional female role in Shona culture, never fully respected by her culture and terrified by the English allure that draws her children away from her; Tambu's aunt, Lucia, a woman raised to follow the same traditional role as her sister, who escapes to find her own salvation through work and education; Maiguru, Nyasha's English-educated mother, who still, despite her graduate degree, faces the discrimination, disrespect, and bias of Zimbabwe society; and Nyasha, who struggles to connect with her African heritage after her rearing in England, unwilling to silently acquiesce to the gender bias that belittles her gender and limits her progress. Together, the women offer each other support and sympathy that is otherwise absent from the paternal society, for without one another, the "cornerstone of [their] security begins to crumble" (Dangarembga 199).

Tambu grew up on the family homestead, impoverished, uneducated, and eager to be free from her father's misogynistic assessment of his daughter's worth by her ability to

cook, clean, and grow vegetables. When her brother tells her that she will “go nowhere” because she is “a girl,” her “concern for [her] brother died an unobtrusive death” (Dangarembga 21). Tambu resides “in peaceful detachment” from her family as she plans her escape by selling crops in order to earn an education (Dangarembga 34). When Tambu is offered the opportunity at her wealthy and well-regarded uncle Babamukuru’s mission, she vows to “be like Babamukuru: straight as an arrow, as steely and true” (Dangarembga 88). Ironically, Tambu wants to be like her uncle when he was an underprivileged student in a mission, for she believes the only way a poor, African girl can succeed at the mission school is with his strict personal doctrine to “endure and obey” (Dangarembga 19).

Although initially excited by her uncle’s great success and prosperity, Tambu, over time, discovers the rigidity that overrides Babamukuru’s concern for Zimbabwean cultural heritage. His prejudice is made especially evident in his desire to give Tambu’s mother and father a Christian wedding, arguing that their traditional Shona wedding had left them merely living together, raising bastardly children in sin. Tambu struggles to accept such rigid distinctions of good and evil directed at her family and herself:

I objected so strongly to the idea of a marriage, the idea of my parents no longer living in sin. When I put it like that, I knew there was definitely something wrong with me because I had grown to understand, very categorically, that sin was something to be avoided...because it was deadly. I could see it. It was definitely black...[a]nd now Babamukuru was saying that this was where my parents were, which meant myself and my sisters too. (Dangarembga 150-1)

By enforcing a Christian wedding, Babamukuru symbolically colonizes Tambu's parents, invalidates their previous Shona matrimony, and demands only the Christian bond as legitimate (Hill).

Tambu cannot vocalize her concern over the wedding, because obedient silence is so ingrained in her social behavior: "There was definitely something wrong with me, otherwise I would have had something to say for myself" (Dangarembga 164). Instead of vocalizing her distress, Tambu internalizes her anxiety, feeling "a horrible crawling over my skin, my chest contracted to a breathless tension and even my bowels threatened to let me know their opinion" (Dangarembga 149). She becomes "anxious and sleepless without knowing exactly why" and feels "something unnatural" slicing her with "guilt, so many razor-sharp edges of it" (Dangarembga 150, 165). Tambu is overcome with painful guilt after she realizes she no longer respects her uncle as the patriarchal head of the family. As her role model, Tambu had followed Babamukuru, expecting to be relieved of the burden of her family through educational success. Similar to Faleasa who expresses the symptoms of Fanon's nervous conditions as feigned madness, Tambu experiences her guilt as physical pain.

Struggling to contain a psyche that is dividing against itself, Tambu undergoes physical paralysis on the day of the wedding: "She tried hard to coax me out of bed, but I was slipping further and further away from her, until in the end I appeared to have slipped out of my body and was standing somewhere near the foot of the bed" (Dangarembga 166). For the first time, Tambu is not concerned with Babamukuru, who is enraged by her rebellious behavior: "my uncle raged, his voice rising on each syllable and breaking on the top note. 'I do everything I can for you, but you disobey me. You are

not a good girl” (Dangarembga 167). Instead of listening to her uncle, Tambu is preoccupied with an inner dialogue of turmoil that is “splitting” her mind “into two disconnected entities that had long, frightening arguments with each other, very vocally, there in my head, about what ought to be done, the one half maniacally insisting on going, the other half maniacally refusing to consider it” (Dangarembga 167). Violently torn between the dominance of the old colonial regime and the authenticity of her parent’s traditionalism, Tambu realizes that the two institutions cannot exist as absolutely distinct. She attributes this consciousness to her “newly acquired identity” (Dangarembga 169).

In contradiction, Fanon writes, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, that identity is dependent upon oppressing forces: “you do not show proof of your nation from its culture but that you substantiate its existence in the fight which people wage against the forces of occupation” (Dangarembga 223). Essentially, Fanon declares that culture can only be derived through violence against the dominating system. In the postcolonial situation, this argument is very dangerous as suppressor forces are imbedded within the native people, especially for women, who quickly find hostility when challenging masculine authority. On the other hand, Dangarembga’s novel does support Fanon’s ideology on the harmful rigidity of cultural custom. Fanon explains that custom, unlike culture, is oversimplified: “custom is always the deterioration of culture. The desire to attach oneself to tradition or bring abandoned traditions to life again does not only mean going against the current of history but also opposing one’s own people” (Fanon 224). This rigidity of custom, in part, is why Faleasa failed, in *Pouliuli*, to revert back to his traditional roots. As with Samoa, colonialism in Zimbabwe adopted the traditional Shona

projection of the female as inferior, so in this combination of colonial and traditional forces, the oppression of females in Zimbabwe became inherently custom in the culture.

Intolerance for Westernization

Significantly, it is Babamukuru's daughter, Nyasha, who, after spending her childhood exposed to English standards of gender equality, objects most strongly to Zimbabwe's assumed inferiority of women. Considered an estranged cultural "hybrid" of English and African values, fashions, and social manifestos, Nyasha's western influence alienates her from the community. Her cousin, Tambu, explains that Nyasha's presence makes those around her nervous as she ignores conventional lines of social behavior: "Most of me sought order. Most of me was concrete and categorical. These parts disapproved of Nyasha very strongly and were wary of her" (Dangarembga 75). For Tambu, who aims to obey Babamukuru's discipline, Nyasha offers only "alternatives and possibilities that if considered too deeply would wreak havoc with the neat plan" (Dangarembga 76). Hence, Nyasha is deemed too dangerous for those in her community who strictly want to succeed through undisputed compliance and conformity.

After experiencing different gender roles in England, Nyasha refuses to belittle herself and abide to the Shona behavioral expectations that girls be timid and agreeable next to their male counterparts: "[the other students think] that I think I am superior to them because I do not feel that I am inferior to men (if you can call the boys in my class men)" (Dangarembga 196). But Nyasha's widened consciousness also forces her to socially withdraw as she finds herself incompatible with Zimbabwe culture: "each time she came I could see that she had grown a little duller and dimmer, the expression in her

eyes a little more complex, as though she were directing more and more of her energy inwards to commune with herself about issues that she alone had seen” (Dangarembga 51-2). Nyasha’s wariness of social disparities and biases, in addition to the apprehension other children feel about her, isolate Nyasha from her Shona community. Stuck with a consciousness that no one else shares, Nyasha’s differences are emphasized in her reclusion.

In the struggle to access her Zimbabwean community, Nyasha exemplifies Fanon’s second phase of the native intellectual: since “the native is not a part of his people,” the native becomes “disturbed” and “decides to remember what he is” (Fanon 222). Nyasha finds personal comfort in her history books, and she quickly expands her learning to the world’s great atrocities in order to seek out resolutions: “She read about Arabs on the east coast and the British on the west; about Nazis and Japanese and Hiroshima and Nagasaki. She had nightmares about these things, the atrocities; but she carried on reading all the same, because, she said, you had to know the facts if you were ever going to find the solutions” (Dangarembga 93). Like Faleasa, Nyasha yearns for an outlet from the seclusion of her postcolonial community, and she achieves this by broadening her studies to other national cultures.

But Nyasha’s great curiosity gets her into trouble when she begins to challenge her father’s authority and break the silence that is expected from girls in Zimbabwean society. Constantly trying to squelch his daughter’s verbal defiance each night at the dinner table, Babamukuru often couples his demand for Nyasha’s compliance with her consumption of the evening’s meal: “‘What did you say?’ cried Babamukuru, his voice cracking in disbelief. ‘Didn’t you hear me tell you I don’t want to hear you answer back?’

Didn't you hear me tell you that just now? Now sit down and eat that food. All of it. I want to see you eat all of it.'" (Dangarembga 83-4). Babamukuru's requirement of his daughter's silence inhibits her from vocally refuting his orders. The addition of commanding her to consume the food aligns the digestion of her meal with the ingestion of his rigid authority.

Like Faleasa in *Pouliuli*, Nyasha equates the food at her father's dinner table with the colonial disease, she vomits because of an urgent desire to reject the colonial doctrine and regain control of her body. To counteract her father's expectations, Nyasha, over time, adopts an anorexic "diet" to help "discipline [her] body and occupy [her] mind" (Dangarembga 197). Nyasha's behavior coincides with Fanon's argument that the native, after being forced to deny his own identity in order to abide to the colonial regime, becomes "dominated by exceptional sensitivity and susceptibility" followed by "withdrawal, which is due in the first instance to a begging of the question in his internal behavior mechanism and his own character, brings out, above all, a reflex and contradiction which is muscular" (Fanon 220). While Nyasha vomits to ease the tension caused by her father's model of power, she ignores the harmful physical repercussions done against her own body as a result of the purging: "it was serious. Nyasha was losing weight steadily, constantly, rapidly. It dropped off her body almost hourly and what was left of her was grotesquely unhealthy from the vital juices she flushed down the toilet" (Dangarembga 199). Eventually, Nyasha is betrayed by her failing body, which requires her to find an alternative way to resist her father's domination and to respect her body's need for nourishment.

No longer capable of displacing the tension through vomiting, Nyasha unleashes her pent-up anxiety one night by breaking the silence and denouncing the system that has limited her: “Nyasha was beside herself with fury. She rampaged, shredding her history book between her teeth (‘Their history. Fucking liars. Their bloody lies.’), breaking mirrors, her clay pots, anything she could lay her hands on and jabbing the fragments viciously into her flesh” (Dangarembga 201). The use of her teeth to destroy her history book alludes to the consumption and ingestion of historical lies and deception. Additionally, Nyasha attacks “mirrors” to destroy her image, “clay pots” that mark her heritage in Zimbabwe, her highly provocative western clothes, and her own skin, which although inherently black, could be seen as a white mask because of her western rearing in England (Hill). In the end, she vocalizes her desolation by stating, “‘Look what they’ve done to us,’ she said softly. ‘I’m not one of them but I’m not one of you.’” (Dangarembga 201). Nyasha resides in a liminal position from her hybridization of different cultures, because she never fully belongs to any one.

As the only character in the novel to concretely reference historical contexts, including the inquiry as to why Zimbabwean “freedom fighters were referred to as terrorists,” Nyasha embodies the anguish of Fanon’s decolonized man (Dangarembga 155): “In the colonial context the settler only ends his work of breaking in the native when the latter admits loudly and intelligibly the supremacy of the white man’s values. In the period of decolonization, the colonized masses mock at these very values, insult them, and vomit them up” (Fanon 43). Not unlike Faleasa, Nyasha displays the symptoms described by Fanon quite literally, specifically when she objects to the hegemony in the postcolonial system: “She began to rock, her body quivering tensely. ‘I won’t grovel. Oh

no, I won't. I'm not a good girl. I'm evil. I'm not a good girl.'" (Dangarembga 200). In this context, "good" assumes conforming for the colonial system, but Nyasha cannot relax when she condones this hegemony: "When the native is confronted with the colonial order of things, he finds he is in a state of permanent tension" (Fanon 52). Nyasha, through physical and mental stress, exhibits the strain placed on the individual when confronted by colonialism.

Nyasha's refusal to surrender to the forces that work to confine her indicates the third phase of Fanon's native intellectual, known as the "fighting phase" where "the native, after having tried to lose himself in the people and with the people, will on the contrary shake the people...an awakener of the people...a revolutionary figure" (Fanon 222-3). After her fury, Nyasha acknowledges the larger systems affecting their community by sympathizing with her parents for their own victimization: "It's not their fault. They did it to them too. You know they did,' she whispered. 'To both of them, but especially to him. They put him through it all. But it's not his fault, he's good.'" (Dangarembga 200). Nyasha, now vocalizing the institutions that have worked to keep her silent, claims that "[t]here's a whole lot more...I've tried to keep it in but it's powerful. It ought to be. There's nearly a century of it,...but I'm afraid,' she told me apologetically. 'It upsets people'" (Dangarembga 201). Nyasha recognizes that this greater understanding of colonial influence in Zimbabwe is too overwhelming for her to share with many other people, since other Africans have not read the great amount of world history to which she can compare.

In contrast, Fanon describes the native intellectual who returns from abroad as being more out of touch from reality than the rest of the native community:

The native intellectual who comes back to his people by way of cultural achievements behaves in fact like a foreigner. Sometimes he has no hesitation in using a dialect in order to show his will to be as near as possible to the people; but the ideas that he expresses and the preoccupations he is taken up will have no common yardstick to measure the real situation which the men and the women of the country know.

(Fanon 223)

Fanon criticizes the returning native for not comprehending the extent of the cultural hybridization in postcolonial society. Yet, in Dangarembga's novel, it is the hybridized Nyasha who recognizes many of the different forces coming into play within her Zimbabwean community. Much like after the old man left, the young Faleasa felt a new but cleansing angst, the result of Nyasha growing consciousness is her nervous condition.

The Perpetuation of Colonial Authority

Nyasha's father, Babamukuru, although the perpetrator of his daughter's pain, cannot be entirely demonized as his aim was always to raise his family from poverty through economic progress and education. At a young age, he was forced to adopt responsibility of his "destitute" family after his father died pursuing adventures of "riches and luxury" in the mines (Dangarembga 18). Babamukuru's mother, "being sagacious and having foresight," invested her last resources to send her eldest son to a white mission for an education (Dangarembga 19). To help pay tuition, Babamukuru worked the "farm by day" and by "night he was educated in their wizardry" (Dangarembga 19). Instilled with the motivation to help aid his mother and siblings, he excelled in his studies

and was considered an ideal student at the mission. Babamukuru adopted a strict personal doctrine to “endure and obey,” believing obedience was the only way to resist the poverty that was consuming his family (Dangarembga 19).

Babamukuru finds great reward in his assimilation into the mission, for over time, he earns a small salary “to reduce a little the meagerness of his family’s existence” (Dangarembga 19). With an income, Babamukuru proves to be a savior in the family by renewing “a modicum of dignity” to the family homestead, but, in the process, Babamukuru willingly adopts the mission’s lingering sentiments of colonialism. Unconscious of his embracement of colonial philosophy, Babamukuru agrees to migrate to England with his wife, Maiguru, on a scholarship for higher education: “so anxious were [the missionaries] that this intelligent, disciplined young couple be trained to become useful to their people” (Dangarembga 14). Skilled in missionary dialogue and discipline, Babamukuru is qualified to continue the colonial operation through his own mission in Zimbabwe. It is this unprecedented achievement in accessing white privilege and wealth that earns Babamukuru great reverence in the community: “Babamukuru was good. We all agreed on this. More significantly still, Babamukuru was right” (Dangarembga 87). The veneration Babamukuru enjoys entitles him to the highest authority within the family and encourages him to dictate the colonial doctrine by which he abides to personally. In Babamukuru’s accomplishment, he begins to signify Fanon’s first phases of the native intellectual, for “he has assimilated the culture of the occupying power”; he is inspired by “the mother country” despite an underlining understanding that the assimilation is “unqualified” (Fanon 222). Babamukuru, in a “rigid, imposing perfectionist, steely” character, renews the colonial order in the essence of Fanon’s

ideology of *Black Skin, White Masks*: he works to carry out white ambitions as a black man.

In Babamukuru's alignment with the mission's colonial institution, he interprets his daughter's rebellious behavior as defiant disrespect for his own authority. By attempting to remove herself from the very colonial conventions that her father promotes, Nyasha essentially demeans his ability to control her. Babamukuru, in turn, is enraged by his daughter's unconventional behavior: "'children must be obedient. If they are not, then they must be taught. So that they develop good habits. You know this is very important, especially in the case of girls. My wife here would not have disobeyed me'" (Dangarembga 171). Traditionally, the "most important" duty for both women and children in Shona culture was "never to offend the other members" of the family unit (Gelfand 9). Hence, Nyasha is essentially disrespecting both traditional custom and colonial expectation through her noncompliance. By dismissing the two sources as irrelevant, Nyasha undermines Babamukuru's strength and power.

In the heat of an argument, however, Babamukuru desperately tries to regain authority over his daughter by punishing her femaleness: "'How can you go about disgracing me? Me! Like that! No, you cannot do it. I am respected at this mission. I cannot have a daughter who behaves like a whore.'" (Dangarembga 114). Babamukuru's objectification of his daughter's femininity is a colonial tactic of belittlement used by the colonizers against the colonized. When the argument intensifies, a physical fight breaks out between them, revealing the great violence that Fanon argues has pent up since colonialism: "The colonized man will first manifest this aggressiveness which has been deposited in his bones against his own people" (Fanon 52). Fanon's statement shines true

as Nyasha and Babamukuru unleash their anger against each other through physical violence: “‘She has dared...to raise her fist against me...to challenge me. Me! Her father. I am telling you,’ and he began to struggle again, ‘today she will not live. We cannot have two men in this house.’” (Dangarembga 115). This scene is reminiscent of Faleasa and his own belligerent father, yet, in this case, the father’s objection is gendered. Since the challenge of authority in postcolonial Zimbabwe is considered so far removed from the feminine realm, Babamukuru can not categorize Nyasha’s defiance as anything other than masculine.

Significantly, Fanon claims that colonialism demands the assimilation of the native man without the incorporation of his needs or interests. Assimilation, however, insists on the black man’s mimicry [sic], which he considers alienating and degrading. Yet, for the black woman, Fanon assumes that mimicry is natural and instinctive (Fuss). Nyasha refutes Fanon’s assumption as she reveals her disgust for society’s demand of female assimilation without tolerance. But the victimization she suffers from her father is tied to his own deep-seated pain from oppression as a colonized man: “The masculine gaze displaces the anxiety of lack onto women by objectifying their images, silencing their voices, rendering their sexuality spectacular—in sum, excluding them from occupying a place subject within scopis systems of signification” (Berger 79). In order for the native male to regain his own authority, he transcends his feelings of inadequacy to the female by insisting on an impossible standard of the male as ideal and the female as insufficient.

As in Wendt’s *Pouliuli*, the male leaders in Dangarembga’s postcolonial society suffer greatly from the gendered violence caused by colonialism. Like Faleasa and his

father before him, men such as Babamukuru try to transfer their pain and insignificance onto female counterparts. In both *Pouliuli* and *Nervous Conditions*, the result of this compensatory male subjugation of women is an unhealthy redefinition of the female as “really no more than reflections...women, as a certain kind of person, were only myths; frightening to acknowledge that generations of threat and assault and neglect had battered these myths into the extreme” (Dangarembga 138). Yet, in a more positive conclusion than what is offered in *Pouliuli*, Dangarembga suggests the ability of women to collectively heal their own pain from male victimization: ““It was better...when you were here because we could laugh about it, so it looked silly and funny and we could carry on that way. But now that you’re going, there won’t be anyone to laugh with. It won’t be funny any more. We’ll all take these things much too seriously”” (Dangarembga 190). Perhaps unintentionally, Wendt hints at the therapeutic power of feminine tolerance, but Dangarembga shows us directly the curative result of women’s compassion. Ultimately, Dangarembga advocates for the dignifying affects women can have on men in postcolonial society, insinuating women’s ability to heal an entire society suffering from the resonating violence of colonialism.

Chapter 3

Intertwinement of Love and Harm in Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*

Both *Pouliuli* and *Nervous Conditions* concern child trauma caused by familial adults who are, themselves, damaged by colonial violence: Faleasa, as an adult, reflects back on his childhood and the effects of his father's rearing; while Tambu, as a child, counters various forms of colonial forces as she prepares for her own adulthood. "Native on native" psychological damage is emphasized in both novels, along with the perpetuation of violence done against one's own people after the colonial west has seemingly receded from the foreground. Following the same pattern, the next novel I examine, Edwidge Danticat's *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, presents another struggling postcolonial society haunted by western colonialism and the ongoing damage passed from generation to generation in an especially dangerous entwinement with familial love.

Breath, Eyes, Memory leads us further down a trajectory implied by the other two novels: *Pouliuli* shows a gendered violence that is deeply uninterested both in the potentially healing role played by women and the damage done to women by men; *Nervous Conditions* suggests the crucial impotence of women's mutual support for the progress of women and of Zimbabwe. *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is even more centrally concerned with the national implications of the damage done to women and the intentions of those who hurt them. *Pouliuli*, written in the 1970s, is set in its contemporary era, and *Nervous Conditions*, written in the 1990s, is set in the 1970s, just as Zimbabwe approached its independence. *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, also written in the 1990s and set in the 1970s, describes a time in Haitian history when one third of the population fled the

chaos of the brutal Duvalier government. Independent since 1804, Haiti has evolved since colonialism, but the evidence of “native against native” violence signifies a nation still damaged in its postcolonial era.

Edwidge Danticat, a contemporary female Haitian-American author, is critically-acclaimed for her writing about modern Haitian experiences with the adaptation of traditional Haitian folklore (*Charters*). Born in 1969 in Haiti, her parents migrated to the United States during her early childhood. Danticat remained with her uncle in Haiti until age twelve when she and her brother followed their parents to New York. In an interview with *Publishers Weekly*, Danticat explains that her first stories were inspired by a profound sense of absence that she felt after her move abroad: “‘My primary feeling the whole first year was one of loss,’ she recalls. ‘Loss of my childhood, and of the people I’d left behind—and also of *being* lost’” (*Charters*). Danticat, inspired by these feelings from in her adolescence, utilizes such autobiographical experiences of migration, memory, and family loss in her writing. In this case, *Breath, Eyes, Memory*’s protagonist is raised by her aunt until age twelve when she is sent to live with her mother in New York. This multi-generational story of the Caco family women is narrated by Sophie Caco, who unveils the story of four generations of damaged, but tenacious, women as she, herself, grows from childhood into adolescence and motherhood. Sophie struggles the most with the relationship she has with her mother, Martine, a rape victim at age sixteen by a Tonton Macoute, a member of the private police force that kept the Duvaliers in power. Driven out of Haiti by haunting memories of her attack, Martine migrated to New York shortly after her daughter’s birth. Since Martine is unwilling to confront her own pain, Sophie takes on many of her mother’s memories and comes to

terms with the political motivations of the rape. Yet, this political victim is also a personal victimizer as Martine violates Sophie through the Haitian tradition of testing for virginal purity. In a present that is damaged by her mother's past shame, Sophie works to reconcile the pain that infiltrates her family, both in New York and back in Haiti, in order to break the cycle of violation that causes mothers to victimize their own daughters.

Much like the story's narrative, the title of *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is a fragmented and poetic play on essential human characteristics passed down through a family. By looking first at familial victimization, then at cultural violation, and finally at the confrontation of pain, we can appreciate the ways that Danticat's novel reveals the huge encompassment of national oppression and the collective compassion required in the healing process.

Masked Violence Under the Pretense of Compassion

Like Tambu, Sophie Caco is a hopeful and insightful young girl raised in Croix-des-Rosets, Haiti with her aunt, Tante Atie, and her grandmother. Sophie's mother, Martine, left for New York shortly after Sophie was born, so, as a child, one of Sophie's only exposures to her mother was a picture next to Tante Atie's bed: "She waved from inside the frame with a wide grin on her face and a large flower in her hair. She witnessed everything that went on in the bougainvillea, each step, each stumble, each hug and kiss...Her expression never changed. Her grin never went away" (Danticat 8). Sophie's still-framed impression of her mother changes when Sophie, at the age of twelve, is uprooted from her Haitian home and sent to live with Martine in New York. There, Sophie learns that her mother has worked two jobs to send money home to Haiti, which surprises Sophie who always imagined her mother as "Erzulie, the lavish Virgin Mother.

She was the healer of all women and the desire of all men. She had gorgeous dresses in satin, silk, and lace, necklaces, pendants, earrings, bracelets, anklets, and lots and lots of French perfume. She never had to work for anything because the rainbow and the stars did her work for her” (Danticat 59). Sophie quickly learns her mother’s life in New York is “no vacation,” and comes to respect Martine’s hard work and sacrifice for the betterment of her family in Haiti (Danticat 58).

Martine expects hard work from her daughter as well, for, in the United States, Sophie has the ““chance to become the kind of woman Atie and [her mother] always wanted to be. If you make something of yourself in life, we all succeed”” (Danticat 44). Martine pressures her daughter out of her drive to save the family from the “dirt under our fingernails,” for Sophie’s success, Martine explains, “can *raise our heads*” (Danticat 20, 44). Martine is enthralled by her daughter’s opportunity, in the United States, to achieve an education and a career. As a female, this would not be available to Sophie in Haiti, where a girl’s identity is often tied to her male relations.

Still, Martine considers the legitimacy of her daughter and maintains the old Haitian custom of preserving a girl’s dignity by virginal testing. Traditionally, conserving a daughter’s virginity is one of the highest priorities for a family: “If a child dies, you do not die. But if your child is disgraced, you are disgraced...If I give a soiled daughter to her husband, he can shame my family, speak evil of me, even bring her back to me” (Danticat 156). Therefore, despite the relationship’s reduction to the simple conservation of sex organs, mothers, across Haiti, continue to prioritize testing their daughter’s purity over all else.

When Martine starts testing Sophie, the mistrust and violation of the tests degrade their relationship and inhibits communication: “My mother rarely spoke to me since she began the tests...I wanted to tell her that I loved her, but the words would not roll off my tongue” (Danticat 86-7, 79). The tests are presented to Sophie under the pretext that they are necessary for her future, but this explanation only leaves Sophie with an overwhelming sense of “feeling alone and lost, like there was no longer any reason for me to live” (Danticat 87). Sophie’s self-worth is debased because her mother now identifies her as an untrustworthy virgin instead of her own daughter. Over time, Martine’s only expression of concern for her daughter is shown through the tests, which Sophie considers “humiliation,” and begins to “hate [her] body” as the cause and location of her sexual violation (Danticat 123). Martine, trapped in her own debilitating trauma, is blinded to her daughter’s pain.

Significantly, Martine enforces the very determinant of female identity from which, by leaving Haiti, she previously attempted to free her daughter. Martine is conscientious of Sophie’s potential stigma of bastardry, as Gwen Berger in the article “Who Is That Masked Woman?” reveals: “the colonized male” occupies the “‘universal’ subject,” while “women are considered as subjects almost exclusively in terms of their sexual relationships with men” (Berger 77). Here, the novel allows us to extend the gendered critique of Fanon offered in the first two chapters of this thesis. Berger explains Fanon failure to incorporate women’s contributions to society or even “to consider how his account of normative raced masculinity depends on the production or exclusion of femininities” (Berger 77). Berger criticizes the assumption that the female is unable to define herself independent of the male. In addition, Fanon completely occludes the ways

that women affect masculinity. The colonized male is faced with a colonial “racial mirror” that formulates “racial identity by forcing a ‘recognition’ of lack” (Berger 78). In a similar argument made in the *Nervous Conditions* chapter of this thesis, Berger explains that the acceptance of gender bias in postcolonial society allows the colonized man to displace “the anxiety of lack onto women by objectifying their images, silencing their voices, rendering their sexuality spectacular” (Berger 77). Both *Nervous Conditions* and *Breath, Eyes, Memory* accurately reveal this combined silencing, objectification, and sexualizing of women. The black, colonized female, therefore, is subject to “double oppression or exclusion” by the combination of her race and her gender. Since both of these traits are categorized by the body’s physical appearance, the resulting victimization, therefore, is “experienced profoundly in the body” (Berger 78).

In just these terms, Sophie reveals her anxiety through the hatred of her own body. But instead of feeling victimized from the colonial system, which Fanon claims violates the colonized native, or the colonized male, which Berger argues displaces angst onto the female, Sophie is hurt by her own mother. Removed from her home country and subjugated by the only person she loves in New York, Sophie learns to double in order to cope with the trauma of testing: “I would close my eyes and imagine all the pleasant things that I had known” (Danticat 155). While Martine tests Sophie, she distracts the girl stories with Haitian vaudou: ““The *Marassas* were two inseparable lovers. They were the same person, duplicated in two”” (Danticat 84). Martine aligns herself with Sophie as the two *Marassas* in order to signify their similarity and her unconditional love for her daughter: ““When you love someone, you want him to be closer to you than your *Marassas*. Closer than your shadow. You want him to be your soul...The love between a

mother and daughter is deeper than the sea” (Danticat 85). Martine’s emphasis on the sacred bond between a mother and daughter seems to contradict her simultaneous testing of Sophie. Her words describe the urgency of her desire for a trusting bond of loyalty, while her actions suggest an utter mistrust of Sophie. While testing Sophie, Martine ruins the very allegiance she hopes to realize with her daughter.

Doubling, however, is not limited to Sophie, for she sites this psychological distancing in Haiti’s cultural history and heritage: “There were many cases in our history where our ancestors had *doubled*. Following in the *vaudou* tradition, most of our presidents were actually one body split in two: part flesh and part shadow. That was the way they could murder and rape so many people and still go home to play with their children and make love to their wives” (Danticat 155-6). Sophie recognizes doubling as a tradition of the African *vaudou* religion. At the same time, she acknowledges the function of doubling in postcolonial Haiti to excuse mental disengagement during atrocious acts of violence. Doubling, therefore, is used by both the victim and the perpetrator as a coping method in the face of victimization and aggression.

For Sophie, doubling functions as a claim over her own body, such as when she mutilates herself with a pestle from her mother’s kitchen. Sophie associates the act with a Haitian folktale of a woman who could not stop bleeding from her unbroken skin. Unnerved and helpless, the woman consults Erzulie, who says that if “she wanted to stop bleeding, she would have to give up her right to be a human being. She could choose what to be, a plant or an animal, but she could no longer be a woman” (Danticat 87). Eventually, the woman declares that she would like to be a butterfly, and upon transformation, she is freed from her burden. As Danticat illustrates this tale, Sophie

inserts the pestle into her and rips apart her own flesh to transform herself into something unacceptable to her mother: “My body was quivering when my mother walked into my room to *test* me. My legs were limp when she drew them aside. I ached so hard I could hardly move. Finally I failed the test” (Danticat 88). Sophie assumes the role of her victimizer when she mutilates herself, but in doing so, she reclaims her body from the sexual violation of her mother.

Stuck By the Shameful Past

The violence against Martine emanated from Haiti’s political scheme of mass suppression and terror of an already yielding Haitian population. In *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Danticat works to expose the lasting effects of the notoriously corrupt and brutal Duvalier regime. Weakened by colonialism and the fight for Haitian independence, the destabilized postcolonial state suffered from shifting political power and external influence. From 1957 to 1986, however, the Duvalier regime reigned in Haiti, declaring power after victory in the nation’s first universal suffrage election. The Duvaliers declared themselves “presidents for life” in Haiti and reinforced power through military manipulation (“Haiti”). Crucial to their kleptocracy was a rural militia group called the Tonton Macoutes, who killed, beat, and raped throughout the nation in order to ensure people’s obedience through fear and terror. Renowned for their “level of state corruption and the degree to which state violence was institutionalized,” the Duvaliers focused on redefining gender barriers and obliterating the blossoming women’s movement of the time (Carolle). When Haitian women throughout the country joined

together to protest against the institution's injustice, Duvalier narrowed his focus on the female body as the site of national trauma and political violence (Francis 77).

In refocusing their efforts, the Duvalier regime altered gender identity in Haiti: where women previously stood as "passive political actors, devoted mothers, and political innocents," they became "enemy subject[s] to political repression" and those women "who were not loyal to the Duvalierist cause were defined primarily as subversive, patriotic, and 'unnatural'" (Carolle). To help carry out their ambitions, the state instigated "systematic repressive policies" and utilized "gender as a central element in asserting power and domination" (Carolle). To counter the regime's own gender-bias reputation, the state implemented "state feminism" in the form of a female commander-in-chief of the Tonton Macoutes, and this woman encouraged a string of new offenses in the form of "female against female" abuse (Carolle). By the mid-1980s, approximately 500,000 Haitian victims had migrated to North America in search of a safe haven that could not be found in Haiti; approximately 55% of these immigrants were female (Carolle).

Danticat's genius, in this novel, lies in her ability to historicize trauma in ways that allow those unaware of Haiti's history access to the fears and sympathies of the time. Through Martine, we understand the severe trauma of those victimized by the Duvalier regime. Raped in her adolescent by a Tonton Macoute in the cane fields where her family labored, Martine's crime remained unrecognized and unpunished. During the act, Martine was silenced by her persecutor as he "kept pounding her until she was too stunned to make a sound" (139). Afterwards, Martine was again silenced by her society, since publicly voicing the atrocity would have risked severe harm to herself and her

family. Impregnated and terrified that her faceless perpetrator would appear again, Martine migrated to the United States in an attempt to escape her trauma.

While Martine's migration to New York City distanced her from the cane fields and from the "ghosts there that I can't face" (Danticat 78), she is still haunted by those symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder such as "the will to forget or amnesia about the traumatic event, the attempt to dissociate that generally induced a sense of fragmentation, and, the 'unspeakableness' of the trauma itself" (Francis 80). In attempting to explain to her daughter where she came from, Martine claims that Sophie "was born out of the petals of roses, water from the stream, and a chunk of the sky" (Danticat 47). The whimsical nature of this description shows Martine's own delusion about her daughter's origin. When Martine is forced to reflect upon the reality of the attack, her voice is expunged from all emotion: "She did not sound hurt or angry, just like someone who was stating a fact. Like naming a color or calling a name. Something that already existed and could not be changed" (Danticat 61). During this brief recognition of the attack, Martine disconnects her emotions from her conscious memory in order to not fully acknowledge the rape.

In her dreams, however, Martine revisits the rape in a far more concentrated reality than what she permits herself to recognize or vocalize at a conscious level: "At night, she tore her sheets and bit off pieces of her own flesh when she had nightmares" (Danticat 139). Martine's unacknowledged memories become reality in her dreams as she physical relives the attack each night. Sophie recalls that on the first night in her mother's apartment, she awakes to her mother "screaming as though someone was trying to kill her" (Danticat 48). Ironically, in the moment when she relives the attack, Martine

regains her voice of protest. Each night, Sophie wakes her mother from her nightmares, where Martine identifies her daughter as her savior: ““Sophie, you’ve saved my life”” (Danticat 81). Yet, in “saving” her mother, Sophie assumes some of Martine’s experience: “Her nightmares had somehow become my own, so much so that I would wake up some mornings wondering if we hadn’t both spent the night dreaming about the same thing: a man with no face, pounding a life into a helpless young girl” (Danticat 193). In adopting some of her mother’s pain, Sophie also becomes a victim in the trauma of her own perpetrator, her mother.

Despite her mother’s violation of her body through testing, Sophie uses the solace of her mother’s fellow victimization when she doubles during intercourse with her husband: “He reached over and pulled my body towards his. I closed my eyes and thought of my *Marassa*, the doubling. I was lying there on that bed and my clothes were being pulled off my body, but really I was somewhere else” (Danticat 200). For Sophie, sexual intimacy with her husband is not its own act of intimacy, but, instead, it is reduced to the traumatic reminiscence of testing (Francis). Strangely, Sophie seeks comfort during the doubling with both her *Marassas* and her own perpetrator.

Sophie understands her need to double during sex as unhealthy and, like her mother, at first attributes a problem borne of her mother’s abuse to her own inherent inadequacy: “Even though it occurred weeks later, our wedding night was painful. It was like the tearing all over again; the ache and soreness had still not disappeared. Joseph asked me several times if I really wanted to go through with it. He probably would have understood if I had said no. However, I felt it was my duty as a wife. Something I owed him” (Danticat 130). Traditionally in Haiti, it is assumed that a wife must be able to

satisfy her husband sexually, hence, Sophie is tormented with an overpowering feeling of shame by her inability. It is, perhaps, a hopeful tribute to Sophie for finding a husband who is loving, patient, and considerate of her pain. Still, her sense of inadequacy contributes to a massive guilt complex and manifests as an eating disorder.

After doubling during intercourse with her husband, Sophie seeks solitude in the kitchen, where she “ate every scrap of the dinner leftovers, then went to the bathroom, locked the door, and purged all the food out of [her] body” (Danticat 200). She explains that she feels “fat and guilty after eating” (Danticat 122) and is “too ashamed of [her] body” (Danticat 129). Unlike Nyasha in *Nervous Conditions*, who did not want to digest the colonial mentality, therefore purged the ingested doctrine out of her, Sophie’s bulimia functions as the “outward expression of violent cultural inscriptions concealed in her body” (Francis 84). Yet, both girls use their bulimia to assert autonomy in an effort to control the uncontrollable. Encouraged by Duvalier’s reconstruction of the female body as “unnatural,” Sophie aims to deprive her body from nutrients because it is the site of political violence (Carolle). Although her voracious appetite after intercourse shows that Sophie desires both food and sex, her residing guilt and traumatic memories of sexual violation force her to purge the pleasure out of her body (Francis 84).

Embracing Violation and Progressive Healing

Significantly, it is the cooking of food that provokes Sophie to address her pain and acknowledge the cultural history that has interwoven through her family’s past. As an adult, Sophie avoids cooking traditional Haitian cuisine, because she finds the memories that the food extracts too pungent to be comfortable: “I usually ate random

concoctions: frozen dinners, samples from global cookbooks, food that was easy to put together and brought me no pain. No memories of a past that at times was cherished and at others despised” (Danticat 151). In order for both Sophie and her mother to progress, it is necessary that they confront the violence that is hidden within their communal love and cultural tradition. But, in their aversion of things that remind them of the pain, each unhealthily evade facing their victimization.

When Sophie cooks for her family in Haiti, however, she is forced to recognize the cultural functions and limitations of the female domestic servant. Recognizing women as she progresses through her Haitian recipe, Sophie acknowledges feminine immobility within traditional roles:

The fragrance of the spices guided my fingers the way no instructions or measurement could. *Haitian men, they insist that their women are virgins and have their ten fingers.* According to Tante Atie, each finger had a purpose. It was the way she had been taught to prepare herself to become a woman. Mothering. Boiling. Loving. Baking. Nursing. Frying. Healing. Washing. Ironing. Scrubbing. It wasn't her fault, she said. Her ten fingers had been named for her even before she was born. (Danticat 151)

Sophie is overwhelmed by the restriction of women's duties in Haiti, yet Sophie only has to endure the discomfort of constraint during visits and in memory. For her aunt, Tante Atie, the expected feminine role must be fulfilled everyday.

Tante Atie, although the oldest daughter and the one “whose Papa loved her best” in the family, is the most stuck in Haiti's gender limitations (Danticat 165). Never married, Tante Atie looks after her mother, because “[s]he feels she must...It's not love.

It is duty” (Danticat 168). Unlike her sister, Martine, Tante Atie is tormented by the good memories of the past as her nostalgia is for a time of freedom and innocence: ““We always dreamt of becoming important women...Imagine our surprise when we found out we had limits’” (Danticat 43). Unmarried, Tante Atie cannot be defined through a husband, but as a result, she is never identified within her community: “My life, it is nothing...The sky seems empty even when I am looking at the moon and stars” (Danticat 136). Even in the comfort of the heavens, Tante Atie finds no self-recognition or hope for her future.

Even though Tante Atie feels utterly incapable of progressing out of her present life, she does not reminisce for a husband to elevate her: ““They train you to find a husband,’ she said. ‘They poke at your panties in the middle of the night, to see if you are still whole. They listen when you pee, to find out if you’re peeing too loud...They make you burn your fingers learning to cook. Then still you have nothing’” (Danticat 136-7). Stuck within a paternal hierarchic society, Tante Atie feels so confined that her life constitutes meaninglessness. Her only solitude is seclusion itself, which, much to her mother’s horror, she seeks by venturing into the night: ““The way you go about free in the night, one would think you a devil.’ ‘The night is already in my face, it is. Why should I be afraid of it...The spirits of alone-ness, they call to me’” (Danticat 107-9). With little to empower her in conventional life, like Faleasa in *Pouliuli*, Tante Atie is attracted to the void of the black night, because it is in the nothingness of the blackness that Tante Atie finds the closest thing to peace of mind.

The ways in which Tante Atie diminishes through the years contrast sharply to Sophie’s progress in this same time and suggest the relevance to both women of Albert

Memmi's emphasis on the importance of history to individual and cultural healing. In *The Colonizer and The Colonized*, Memmi argues that the colonized native is removed from his past by colonialism's disruption of national history: "The history which is taught [to the colonized] is not his own" (Memmi 105). At the same time, the native is generally displaced from the construction of his own autonomy, so that "[p]lanning and building his future are forbidden. He must therefore limit himself to the present, and even that present is cut off and abstract" (Memmi 102). We see this incapability of planning for the future very potently in Tante Atie, who believes "[she] must graze where [she is] tied" (Danticat 136). With her own autonomy designated obsolete by state politics, Tante Atie is removed from her cultural heritage. Powerless to counter her barriers, Tante Atie slides into apathy and depression. Sophie, however, returns to Haiti to reconnect with the parts of Haitian tradition that empower her and to identify the damage tainting this postcolonial society.

What Sophie discovers in Haiti, in part, is the importance of oral folktales as the only cultural heritage that can preserve through the progression of literate powers. The natural malleability of folktales and the inability to concretely destroy orality enables these stories to sustain cultural evolution and colonial debilitation: "Creative narratology provides the means for a type of understanding that leads to other types of asymptotical awareness as one generation seeks to strengthen the next...The survival of words through translation into an acceptable postcolonial idiom insures the survival of the race" (Samway 81). When all other means of cultural heritage fails, the flexibility of the oral tale perseveres. Sophie's grandmother, after experiencing horrors of the Haitian state, shows a profound reverence for the power of the folktale: "The tale is not a tale unless I

tell. Let the words bring wings to our feet” (Danticat 123). Sophie’s grandmother illustrates the oral story’s ability to break the debilitating silence and legitimize authority in an oppressed culture. Like Tambu, Sophie evaluates tradition, and in folktale, she finds the beneficial side that she seeks, an enlightening and communal tradition.

In folklore’s unyielding malleability, however, it can also become a vehicle for oppressors to incite terror on people. Danticat, wary of the folktale’s limitations, provides an example by illustrating the “fairy tale” of the Tonton Macoute: “the *Tonton Macoute* was a bogeyman, a scarecrow with human flesh...In his knapsack, he always had scraps of naughty children, whom he dismembered to eat as snacks. *If you don’t respect your elders, then the Tonton Macoute will take you away*” (Danticat 138). The fable of the Tonton Macoute is a mythological bogeyman, initially described as a frightful incentive for children to behave properly. But Sophie, in her investigation into her culture’s damaged history, strips away the fairytale illusion and addresses the modern reality of the Tonton Macoute: “Outside the fairy tales, they roamed the streets in broad daylight, parading their Uzi machine guns. *Who invented the Macoutes? The devil didn’t do it and God didn’t do it*” (Danticat 138). Sophie’s inquiry into the Macoutes origin implies that they were produced by some other power than the devil or God: she implicates the Duvalier regime. In acknowledging their crime of murder and their manipulation of folklore, Sophie reclaims the fairy tale of the Tonton Macoute.

By vocalizing these questions and disrupting the illusion of her mother’s rapist, Sophie breaks the silence that oppresses women in Danticat’s novel. This moment resembles the frenzied night when Nyasha destroys her history book in *Nervous*

Conditions. Once the blocking forces are verbally acknowledged, Sophie can begin to accept the reality of her family's pain:

My father might have been a *Macoute*. He was a stranger who, when my mother was sixteen years old, grabbed her on her way back from school. He dragged her into the cane fields, and pinned her down on the ground. He had a black bandanna over his face so she never saw anything but his hair which was the color of eggplants. He kept pounding her until she was too stunned to make a sound. (Danticat 139)

In recognizing her own heritage, Sophie commits the initial steps of making peace with her past. This is important, because Sophie considers herself essentially tied to the past: "I was a living memory from [my mother's] past" (Danticat 56). By understanding her true origin and her family's damaged history, Sophie becomes better acquainted with her identity and her cultural heritage.

Since Martine is never able to directly confront the memory of her rape, however, she cannot ground the fairy tale in the reality of her own experience: "Your mother never gave him a face. That's why he's a shadow. That's why he can control her" (Danticat 209). As a result, her trauma remains in the unreal, and the brutality of the assault loses legitimacy (Francis 81). When Martine gets pregnant again later in life, the stress of her attack begins to overwhelm her: "I am very worried about her state of mind," [Sophie] said. "It was like two people. Someone who was trying to hold things together and someone who was falling apart...It's always been real to her...Twenty-five years of being raped every night. Could you live with that? This child, it makes the feelings stronger" (Danticat 218-9). When urged to find help in healing the pain,

Martine is terrified: “I am afraid it will become even more real if I see a psychiatrist and he starts telling me to face it. God help me, what if they want to hypnotize me and take me back to that day? I’ll kill myself” (Danticat 190). But Martine’s horrifying dreams do take her back to that day, and one night, after her unborn child speaks to her in the voice of her attacker, her fear overpowers her. Delusional, Martine leaves her bed and stumbles into the bathroom, where she stabs her stomach seventeen times and bleeds to death.

Sophie, however, understands that healing requires the confrontation of fear and violation and attends a women’s therapy group when she returns to New York. Although therapy groups are generally considered a western phenomenon, this group focuses on sexually abused women of diverse ethnicity, and together, they recite self-empowering serenity prayers: “*God grant us the courage to change those things we can, the serenity to accept the things we can’t, and the wisdom to know the difference...We are beautiful women with strong bodies...Since I have survived this, I can survive anything*” (Danticat 202). By voicing the recognition and accepting their bodies as beautiful and strong, the women break the silence that has bound them and rupture the violence that has resonated within the site of their bodies. Together, the women encourage and help each other heal and break free.

In the climatic act of empowerment and recognition, Sophie burns a piece of paper with her mother’s name on it as an acknowledgement of her mother as her sexual perpetrator:

I felt broken at the end of the meeting, but a little closer to being free. I didn’t feel guilty about burning my mother’s name anymore. I knew my

hurt and hers were links in a long chain and if she hurt me, it was because she was hurt, too. It was up to me to avoid my turn in the fire. It was up to me to make sure that my daughter never slept with ghosts, never lived with nightmares, and never had *her* name burnt in the flames. (Danticat 203)

Sophie identifies the lineage of sexual violence that has passed down through the women in her family, and she is cognizant of the harm that a mother can commit against her own daughter in the name of Haitian tradition: “There is always a place where nightmares are passed on through generations like heirlooms” (Danticat 234). Wary of her own ability to become a victimizer of her daughter, Sophie wants to heal before she too will pass on the trauma.

Later, Sophie returns to Haiti to bury her mother and again reconnects with the tradition that she values. Despite the painful customs ingrained throughout Haitian tradition, Sophie recognizes that the sacredness of the mother-daughter relationship is “essentially Haitian. Somehow, early on, our song makers and tale weavers had decided that we were all daughters of this land” (Danticat 230). After her mother’s burial, Sophie attacks the cane stalks and releases her aggression against the site that originally caused pain for three generations of women in her family. In the process, “Sophie attempts to reclaim her own body as she unleashes pent up terror and fear...a confrontation with cultural history and social practices that uses her body as the vehicle to rewrite dominant narratives” (Francis 87). Reclaiming her body and confronting the site of her mother’s attack helps Sophie heal from the trauma that was passed on to her through her own violation. By going to the original site where her family labored in poverty for so many

generations, Sophie aims to not only help herself but also help free her family from the bondage of their cultural oppression.

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