

Homeland as a Site of Trauma in Selected Short Stories by Edwidge Danticat

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ABSTRACT

This main objective of this article is to examine the representation of 'homeland' in three short stories by Caribbean-American writer Edwidge Danticat: "The Book of the Dead," "Night Talkers," and "The Gift." All three stories represent Haitian migrants in the multi-cultural setting of the United States. A central theme that connects these stories is that of trauma and its physical and psychological repercussions on both victims and perpetrators. In the majority of earlier Caribbean migration narratives, the return to homeland is utilized to allow characters either to "confront the traumatic experience of historical violence and to finally begin the process of healing from it," or to "[recover] an empowering cultural past" (Richardson 37, 41). However, Danticat problematizes her return narratives by presenting Haiti as a site of perpetual trauma rather than a site of healing. A close reading of Danticat's work shows unwillingness to heal from the wounds of the past. Drawing on the intersections between literary trauma theory and psychoanalysis this paper argues that, by establishing Haiti as a site of repetitive traumatic experiences, Danticat resists the perception of 'return' as a healing and empowering act.

Key Words: Edwidge Danticat, Homeland, Trauma, Return narratives, Perpetrator trauma

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Introduction

This article examines the representation of ‘homeland’ in three short stories by Caribbean-American writer Edwidge Danticat: “The Book of the Dead,” “Night Talkers,” and “The Gift.” All three stories represent Haitian migrants in the multi-cultural setting of the United States. A central theme that connects these stories is that of trauma and its physical and psychological repercussions on both victims and perpetrators. Rather than merely depicting “the return of the traumatic experience in the dream” (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 62); the selected short stories literally portray the infliction of another ‘wound’ that complicates the process of healing. According to Jill T. Richardson, the return to homeland in the majority of earlier Caribbean migration narratives is utilized to allow characters either to “confront the traumatic experience of historical violence and to finally begin the process of healing from it,” or to “[recover] an empowering cultural past” (37, 41). However, Danticat problematizes her return narratives by presenting Haiti as a site of perpetual trauma rather than as a site of healing. Drawing on the intersections between literary trauma theory and psychoanalysis, this article argues that, by establishing Haiti as a site of repetitive traumatic experiences, Danticat resists the perception of return as a healing and empowering act, hence

imagines a Haitian diaspora that is not centered around the notion of homeland.

Haitian emigration to the United States was accelerated by the “repression and violence of the dictatorship of François Duvalier (1957–71) and later his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier (1971–86), as well as the devastating political turmoil of the years immediately following” (Chen 221). During the reign of François Duvalier, heinous crimes were committed against his political opponents with the help of his personal secret police, the ‘*tonton macoutes*,’ (Glover 14) who terrorized Haitians through acts of random killing, lynching, rape, and kidnapping. In search of a better place, Haitians emigrated to the United States in great numbers. Danticat herself experienced the “pain of passage” when she and her brother followed their parents who left to the United States in 1981 for political and economic reasons (Danticat, “An Intimate Reader” 20). Danticat is one of the most popular Caribbean-American writers, writing prolifically and in different genres such as novels, short story cycles, and critical essays. Being primarily occupied with the troubled and violent history of Haiti, and given that common themes in her work include “loss, death, violence, justice, the irrepressible weight of history” (Danticat, in *BOMB* 107), Danticat has been described by many as melancholic. As such, Danticat’s work provides the best example

for examining the impact of historical trauma on individuals and communities.

As a term, *trauma* was first used by physicians and neurologists in the nineteenth century to refer to a physical injury and the resulting complications (Sütterlin 12). However, the term is “now primarily used to describe emotional wounds, traces left on the mind by catastrophic, painful events” (Davis and Meretoja 1). Evidently, what qualifies a particular event to be described as traumatic is the ensuing “feelings of intense fear, helplessness, or horror” (Wiechelt and Gryczynski 193). Although the effects of traumatic events manifest themselves mainly on individuals, i.e., survivors, witnesses, or even perpetrators, Jenny Edkins argues that trauma “always already involves the community or the cultural setting in which people are placed” (107). This is particularly true considering that the main concern of trauma studies is catastrophic events such as “the Holocaust and other genocides in Armenia, Cambodia, Bosnia or Rwanda, or the Vietnam War, or 9/11” (Davis and Meretoja 1); the list continues to include the atrocities committed by the Jews in Palestine, military wars, natural disasters, famines, and pandemics. The literary and cultural productions that address the psychological impacts of such traumatic events are the subject of literary trauma theory.

The healing power of narrative in traumatic situations was central to Freud and Breuer's 'talking cure' method "in which patient narratives help victims heal" (Pederson 97). Theoretically speaking, the link between trauma and literature was established in the 1990s with the works of Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub's *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (1992); Geoffrey Hartman's "On Traumatic Knowledge and Literary Studies" (1995); Kali Tal's *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literatures of Trauma* (1995), and Cathy Caruth's foundational text *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (1996). These critics focused on the psychological impact of historical traumas on individuals and communities; they investigated "how literature explores the interplay between the personal and the cultural in narrating particular experiences of trauma" (Davis and Meretoja 4). Their work also identifies repetition and return as a recurring narrative trope in narratives of trauma (Pederson 101). Instead of Freud's "dreams that [return] us to the site of a disaster (Caruth, *After the end* 23), Danticat physically returns her characters to the site of trauma, with a very similar effect to dreams or hallucinations that bring back traumatizing memories. In such a case, "victims do not merely relive or reexperience their traumas; they retell them, too" (Pederson 104), which further emphasizes the circular or repetitive nature of trauma.

Erin Mcglathlin explains that a psychiatric turn in trauma studies “emerged during the First World War, when military physicians and psychiatrists [. . .] observed among soldiers on both sides of the conflict a marked spike in mental disorders that they ascribed to ‘combat stress’ or ‘shell shock’” (103). In this context, a soldier who proudly kills to defend his country, is seen by a soldier on the other side as a perpetrator or a murderer. Thus, participants of any military war are intrinsically both victims and perpetrators; it simply depends on the perspective from which a person is seen. Nevertheless, Mcglathlin argues that contemporary trauma theory has been almost exclusively concerned with “the victim as the sole sufferer of the traumatic effects of violence, [while it] has had very little to say about either the phenomenon of perpetrator trauma or its representation in literature” (100). Indeed, the very notion of ‘perpetrator trauma’ is controversial as it poses the ethical dilemma of humanizing the perpetrator and even sympathizing with him. Ron Eyerman explains that “[w]hile a perpetrator is by definition guilty of acting in a harmful way toward his or her victim, one can speak of ‘perpetrator trauma’ when such an action injures the doer, as well as the victim, an injury that can be moral and psychological, if not physical” (169). Thus, trauma in the case of perpetrators is caused by the feeling of guilt, particularly after their “return to civilian life and another moral order” (Eyerman 168). In this case, the memories of the pain perpetrators were responsible for inflicting

on others are retained in the form of dreams, flashbacks, and other post-traumatic manifestations.

Indeed, Danticat's fiction provides a particularly good example for the investigation of perpetrator trauma. A close reading of her fiction reveals that her "description of the traumatic event and its impact on the human psyche" (Meacham 122) is not restricted to the victims who survived the atrocities of the François Duvalier regime; her fiction actually engages with what is usually neglected by studies of human-caused traumatic events: the dilemma of the perpetrator and the trauma of guilt. By so doing, Danticat seems to suggest that "the torturer is [also] a victim of Haiti's repressive regime" (Collins 12). To emphasize the persistence of trauma, Danticat uses the motif of return to take her characters, physically or psychologically, back to their homeland, hence repeating their traumatic experience.

According to Nathan Jung, "[r]eturn narratives describe a common story structure in diasporic literature wherein dispersed characters return to their homeland state. Such returns are often quest-like, and often proceed with an intention of reconciling disparities between hostland and homeland identities" (66). However, as the following discussion of the three short stories shows, Danticat establishes Haiti as a site of trauma rather than as a site of healing, which implies that "returning to the traumatic event in its past is undesirable" (Rajiva 21). A careful

examination of Danticat's stories shows that when characters/survivors return to Haiti seeking solace in the company of their families, they experience another traumatizing event that further dissociates them from their homeland.

“The Book of the Dead” and the Trauma of Return:

Danticat's short story cycle *The Dew Breaker*¹ (2004) is composed of nine fragmented yet interconnected stories that depict “the physical and psychological effects of state-sponsored torture in Haiti on survivors and perpetrators who now live in diasporic Haitian communities in the United States” (Rohrleitner 75). The stories are “linked by the theme of Duvalier's terror as perpetrated by the Dew Breaker” (Collins 9). The fragmented narrative structure of *The Dew Breaker* is intended by Danticat and other writers of trauma as an attempt to mimic the forms and symptoms of trauma; as Toni Pressley-Sanon explains, “if trauma can be put into a narrative form, it requires one that departs from a conventional linear sequence” (20). The first of the nine stories, “The Book of the Dead,” presents the titular character of *The Dew Breaker* yet in “a markedly different way—through a humanizing rather than a demonizing portrayal of a *tonton macoute* (Glover 14). The central character in the story, known colloquially as the dew breaker, killed and tortured hundreds of people in Haiti and

(1) ‘Dew Breakers’ are “the agents of state violence in Haiti, whose machetes disturb the dew during the killings they perpetrate during the early hours of the morning” (Jung 58).

now tries to remake his life in New York City with his wife and his daughter (Danticat, in *BOMB* 107). In this story, Danticat focuses on the psyche of the dew breaker whose return to Haiti is made impossible considering his past identity as a perpetrator. Even though the dew breakers' job was sanctioned by the state, they were later seen as "individual perpetrators who had committed horrible capital crimes and had to be treated as criminals" (Giesen 121). In this story Danticat brilliantly shows how the feelings of guilt and shame haunt the perpetrator as well as the feelings of terror and loss haunt the victim.

Born in the United States, the dew breaker's daughter, Ka, misses having shared memories of her parents' homeland, Haiti. Ka sees her father as a survivor of the brutal Duvalier regime and as such she is very proud of him; she is even proud of the physical manifestations of his supposedly traumatic experience in prison in Haiti. When her father disappears and the policeman asks for details, Ka proudly mentions "the blunt, ropelike scar that runs from [her] father's right cheek down to the corner of his mouth, the only visible reminder of the year he spent in prison in Haiti" (DB 5). For Ka, the scar on her father's face is a marker of struggle and persistence, "a testament to his prison sufferings" (Collins 10). To emphasize her pride, "Ka creates a concrete embodiment of this idealized past in the form of her wood-carved sculpture of her father [. . .] The sculpture connects Ka to an

imagined family past, one based on idealization of her father's victimization (via state-sanctioned torture) and survival (in diasporic exile)" (Glover 16). However, Ka's father himself seems to be ashamed of his scar as he "has never liked having his picture taken. [. . .] He didn't want any more pictures taken of him for the rest of his life, he said, he was feeling too ugly" (DB 5). Evidently, because it reminds him of one of his victims, the dew breaker is actually repelled by his scar. He destroys the sculpture that his daughter was going to sell to a popular Haitian-American Hollywood star because it idealizes his past identity by depicting him "as a virtuous victim" (Glover 16). For Ka's father, "the statue would make permanent a false narrative about his homeland identity" (Jung 58).

As Erin Mcglathlin explains, a perpetrator "suffers precisely on account of his infliction of violence" (101). Indeed, the dew breaker's feelings of guilt and shame are evident in his rejection of the false identity imposed on him by his daughter. In a desperate attempt to find cure in talking, the dew breaker confesses to his daughter that he

was the hunter, he was not the prey. [. . .] Ka, I was never in prison. [. . .] I was working in the prison. [. . .] It was one of the prisoners inside the prison who cut my face in this way. [. . .] This man who cut my face [. . .] I shot and killed him, like I killed many

people. [. . .] “And those nightmares you were always having, what were they?” “Of what I,” he says, “your father, did to others.” (DB 21-23)

As this quotation makes clear, the dew breaker seeks forgiveness, redemption, and acceptance by confessing his past criminal acts to his beloved daughter. What seems fairly undeniable here is the fact that Ka’s reaction to her father’s confessions underlines the problematic nature of perpetrator trauma. According to Mcglathlin, “perpetrators of extreme violence might experience psychic repercussions as a result of the commission of their crimes” (100), which explains the nightmares that haunt the dew breaker. Ironically, Ka does not believe that her father is a perpetrator specifically because he always complains about having nightmares. Ka’s shock and denial confirm the popular conviction that post-traumatic psychological manifestations, such as dreams and hallucinations, occur only to victims. As Cherie Meacham argues, “the manifestation of post-traumatic stress disorder plays an important role in preparing the reader to come to a final sense of justice with regard to the guard’s fate” (135); by referring to the nightmares that haunts the dew breaker, Danticat seems to imply that the perpetrator too is suffering. But Ka’s inability to process her father’s confession highlights the “ethical and affective challenge that the trauma of the perpetrator poses to contemporary trauma theory” (Mcglathlin 103). Although the

reader may sympathize with the dew breaker for his suffering that is manifest in his nightmares and in his evident sense of guilt, it still feels unethical to forgive him after confessing having killed many people.

In “The Book of the Dead” Danticat depicts Haiti from two conflicting perspectives; the first is Ka’s romanticized view of a homeland that she has no actual memories of but constantly misses. For this reason, “Ka registers a feeling of dislocation, of severed origins. She wishes to have Haiti in common with her parents, but her birth and upbringing in America make Haiti a lost, irretrievable homeland” (Glover 16). The second is the perpetrator’s view of a homeland he fears to return to. After her father’s confession, Ka suddenly recognizes why her parents never speak of returning to Haiti: “Is he going to explain why he and my mother have no close friends, why they’ve never had anyone over to the house, why they never speak of any relatives in Haiti or anywhere else, or have never returned there” (DB 21). Evidently, Ka’s parents see Haiti as the site of the traumatic memories of her father’s true identity as a torturer. Because Haiti for the dew breaker is the site of his past crimes, a return to homeland would inevitably entail feelings of guilt, shame, regret, and self-hatred. Living in permanent exile is the dew breaker’s only way to repress his memories of the horrible crimes he has committed, which implies that in the case of perpetrator trauma,

no catharsis is ever expected of returning to the homeland. By depicting Haiti as a site of unforgettable trauma, Danticat establishes exile as a place where forgetting and healing are possible.

Cutting the Last Link in “Night Talkers”:

In “Night Talkers,” the fifth of the nine intertwined stories in *The Dew Breaker*, Dany “had lost his parents to the dictatorship twenty-five years ago” (DB 88) and was raised by his aunt until he emigrated to the United States. While he is in New York, he constantly has nightmares about the day when his parents were killed in Haiti; in his dreams, “Dany relives the pain of loss as though it were constantly recurring in the present” (Meacham 135). According to Freud, the traumatic memories that manifest themselves in the form of dreams are in fact repetitions of the experiences that a traumatized person could not grasp at the time when it actually happened (Caruth, *After the End* 20). Although Dany was a little child when he witnessed the murder of his parents, he is still confused as to why his parents were targeted by Duvalier’s ‘dew breakers’. Dany’s preoccupation with the traumatic memory of his parents’ death leads him to believe that a barber from whom he rents a room in New York is actually the dew breaker who killed his parents years before. Dany thinks of killing the barber for revenge but then worries he might kill the wrong man. Seeking closure to the trauma of losing his family,

Dany decides to visit his aunt in Haiti to tell her about the barber and to “come to grips with the origins of [his] aftershocks” (Jung 67).

Aunt Estina is Dany’s only connection to his deceased parents and “reconnecting with [her] can only be accomplished by travelling back to Haiti, the site of his family origins as well as the violence that destroyed his family and forced him into exile” (Glover 25). Dany does not seem to remember anyone in his aunt’s village, Beau Jour, a name that suggests a “romanticized space of home that the migrant cherishes” (Glover 25). In his attempt to reconnect with his roots, Dany looks in Haiti for memories of his parents: “Had his father ever bathed in this stream? [. . .] He had so little information and so few memories to draw on that every once in a while he would substitute moments from his own life in trying to re-create theirs” (DB 99). Returning to a space that confirms the absence of his parents estranges Dany and reaffirms his sense of loss. In most cases, “talking about the trauma is often a terrifying experience and one that will be avoided unless a profoundly safe and supportive environment is provided” (Belicki and Cuddy 47). Even though Dany is back in Haiti mainly to talk about his parents, he resists sharing the traumatic memories of their murder with one of his aunt’s neighbors, which implies that his wound is not healed yet. Evidently, Aunt Estina is Dany’s only supportive environment

which is why he takes the arduous journey from New York to Haiti and through the mountains to reach her village to just talk with her.

Dany's conversations about his parents take the form of dreams since both he and his aunt are *palannits*; they both speak their "dreams aloud with words" (DB 98), which "reflect[s] again the intrusion of traumatic memories that break spontaneously and repeatedly into their sleeping consciousness" (Meacham 135). Wilson C. Chen attributes the phenomenon of sleep talking to the fact that memories of traumatic events are usually "Unable or not yet ready to be spoken in the clarity of daytime" (226). According to Cathy Caruth, dreams, hallucinations, flashbacks, or sleep talking – as in the case of Dany and his Aunt– are some of the manifestations of trauma where survivors "attempt to master what was never fully grasped in the first place. Not having truly known the threat of death in the past, the survivor is forced, continually, to confront it over and over again" (*Unclaimed Experience* 62). In their 'dream conversations' Dany and Aunt Estina recall the day of his parents' murder and contemplate the perplexing experience of their survival; how he and his aunt almost died in the attack. What haunts Dany, more than the details of the accident itself, is its incomprehensibility. This forces him to desperately search his parents' past to see if there is any reason, such as being involved in politics, that led to their murder. Although Aunt Estina does not

show any interest in talking about the barber/dew breaker while she is awake, in her dream she asks Dany for details about him and shows concern as to whether the barber and the dew breaker are really the same person.

Unfortunately, Dany's attempt to understand why his parents were killed fails because of the sudden death of Aunt Estina (DB 110). Although there is no violence whatsoever involved in Aunt Estina's death, "The death of a loved one is a trauma that each person must eventually endure" (Garfield 186). In this context, the traumatizing death of Dany's aunt disrupts the image of "the idealized rural space that the Haitian émigré hopes to find" (Dash qtd. in Glover 25), which again presents Haiti as a perpetual site of "death, catastrophe, and loss" (Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience* 93). While Dany returns to Haiti seeking some closure to and healing from his childhood trauma, he experiences another loss that severs the last connection to his homeland and forces him into permanent exile. With Estina's death, Danticat deprives Dany of the only support environment through which he could reconstruct his life and start anew.

Enduring Trauma in "The Gift":

In "The Gift," one of the eight stories in the recent short story cycle *Everything Inside* (2019), Danticat continues to demonstrate "the extensive and enduring nature of trauma" (Meacham 135). The central characters in the story are two

Haitian-American immigrants: Anika and Thomas who are involved in an extramarital affair. Thomas is a married, well-to-do Haitian who had moved to New York with his family when he was just a child. In an attempt to fix his relationship with his wife whom he cheats with Anika, Thomas takes a trip to Haiti with his family to rekindle their relationship amidst their relatives and loved ones. Unfortunately, an earthquake devastates Haiti and kills hundreds, including Thomas's wife and daughter. Anika tries to reach Thomas after the earthquake but he distances himself from everyone while he spends some time in a psychiatric hospital.

Evidently, Thomas had a romanticized view of Haiti as a place where he could enjoy a vacation with his family and forget about the stressful world of business back in the United States. But Danticat seems intent on disrupting the positive image of the homeland since she deprives Thomas of his wife, his daughter, and his leg. Again, Danticat eliminates the rosy picture of Haiti by turning it into a site of destruction, loss, and grief. The amputation of Thomas's leg at the knee joint makes his experience severely traumatizing because he would have to go through both physical and psychological rehabilitation. Patricia Garfield illustrates that studies of the process of grief designate three basic phases of mourning. The first phase, known as 'Numbness,' is "characterized by shock or denial of the death" (Garfield 187).

This is when Thomas disappears for months and avoids getting in touch with Anika and everyone else. Given the violence of natural disasters, the horrifying memories of the earthquake prolong phase one, particularly when compared to traumas caused by “deaths from natural or expected causes” (Garfield 204). Because of the violent deaths of Thomas’s wife and daughter, the amputation of his leg, in addition to his inevitable sense of survivor guilt and “a residue of unresolved terror” (Siegel 162), Thomas is admitted to a psychiatrist hospital so that he can “work through the pain of grief” (Garfield 187).

The second phase of grief is characterized by “emotional chaos [. . .] typically including anxiety, fear, grief, anger, fury, guilt, relief, and/or anguish. [. . .] restlessness and behavior that suggests searching for the deceased. In cases of violent death, hatred, horror, or revulsion may be experienced” (Garfield 187). In Thomas’s meeting with Anika, Danticat brilliantly describes this state of post-traumatic emotional chaos that Thomas is going through:

He was direct, even brutal sometimes, yet he could be gentle, too, she reminded herself. [. . .] He was fidgeting, rubbing his hands together. He seemed nervous, angry even. His sudden mood change scared her. Maybe his head wasn’t fully right yet.

Or he wasn't ready to tell her all those things. (EI
126)

Thomas's conversation with Anika shows his vacillation between two emotional states: his desire to appear normal, and his inability to repress the traumatic memories of his multiple losses. Although Thomas's physical trauma is to some extent cured by replacing his missing leg with an artificial one, the emotional wounds stemming from losing his loved ones are much deeper, hence more difficult to heal.

According to Anna Hunter, "the traumatic event is stored only in the subconscious memory of the sufferer and surfaces into the conscious mind in the form of unwelcome and uninvited intrusions such as flashbacks" (67). In his attempt to appear strong in front of Anika, Thomas stands up with her against the glass wall of the restaurant to enjoy the 4th of July fireworks. Instead of enjoying the celebration as he and Anika are used to, Thomas re-experiences the terror of the earthquake in the form of flashbacks: "'The ground is moving,' he shouted in her ear. His face was sweating, his breath racing. [. . .] 'I need to get out of here,' he mouthed. He might have been yelling, but the words were trapped in his mouth" (EI 134). The lights and sounds of the celebration terrify Thomas because they probably remind him of the chaos caused by the earthquake.

It should be noted that Danticat gives Thomas's return to Haiti an indelible marker, i.e., a prosthetic leg that would always remind him of his compound trauma. As a result, Thomas's psychological rehabilitation would be complicated because of the irreversible damage done to his body. The painful loss of his leg would cause his trauma to be "a long process of mourning and coming to terms with a changed future" (Barrette 178). As the narrator describes it, "The prosthetic looked nearly identical to his other leg, the dark surface skinlike" (EI 139). Yet when Thomas takes off the prosthetic leg, Anika "was afraid to touch the suture marks, which, because of the gaps of lighter skin peeking out between them, made the rest of the leg still look unhealed" (EI 140). Thomas's seemingly unhealed leg could be seen as a symbol of the deceptive image that he exhibits of himself as coherent and strong. Though appearing entirely normal to everyone, Thomas would always be haunted by the absences caused by his traumatic return to Haiti.

Conclusion

Evidently, the impossibility of "a happy ending of return, recovery, and healing" (Rajiva 71) is a common theme in all three stories. Going back to Garfield's argument about the process of bereavement, one can imagine that the third phase of grief, "Reorganization" (187), would be a possibility for both Dany and Thomas who, as survivors, can eventually "[treasure] memories of

the deceased but [. . .] emotionally reinvest in life” (Garfield 187). On the other hand, despite Danticat’s attempt to rehumanize the perpetrator in “The Book of the Dead,” “she does not redeem him nor conflate his suffering with that of the victims” (Meacham 137). This may denote that, in spite of sincere feelings of regret and contrition, the perpetrator’s trauma would remain unhealed. The dew breaker, Dany, and Thomas are all deprived of a supportive environment where they can share their pains and fears, which hinders the process of healing.

When the dew breaker seeks forgiveness by confessing his past crimes to his daughter, she abandons him and is shocked that her mother still loves him. By losing faith in her parents, Ka loses her only connection to homeland. The death of Dany’s aunt interrupts his healing process and prolongs his ‘numbness’ phase, which highlights the continuity of trauma and unwillingness to heal in Danticat’s fiction. In “The Gift,” when Thomas tries to reconnect with his wife by taking a trip together to Haiti, he loses her. The death of his wife and his only daughter burdens Thomas with feelings of loss, regret, guilt, and even shame for having cheated on his wife. Anika could never be a supportive environment for Thomas because he starts to despise their relationship after the death of his wife. Danticat gives both the dew breaker in “The Book of the Dead” and Thomas in “The Gift” permanent markers of their traumas; the former is haunted

by the scar on his face, the latter by his prosthetic leg. The scar and the prosthetic leg are both permanent physical reminders of their personal traumas as well as of Haiti as a dreadful place.

In an interview with Sandy Alexandre and Ravi Y. Howard, Danticat was asked about the place of Haiti in the memory of those who live in the diaspora; she said that many Haitian emigrants refuse to return to Haiti “because they would rather keep a good memory of it, the one they grew up with” (Danticat 168). Forgetting painful memories of the past helps those emigrants reconstruct their lives in the hostland. But Danticat does not seem to believe in healing, which explains why forgetting as a form of healing is not offered to her characters. In the short stories examined in this article, Danticat presents immigrants who are always haunted by their pasts as trauma “is perpetually re-experienced in a painful dissociated traumatic present” (Fierke 120). To highlight the painful life of Haitians both at home and in exile, the three stories literally involve the infliction of another ‘wound’ that creates an enduring connection between Haiti and feelings of loss and grief. The connection that Danticat creates between homeland and trauma stands in direct contrast to the view that return to the site of trauma, literally or metaphorically, has a cathartic and healing effect (Hirsch and Miller). Thus, for Danticat’s characters, a return to homeland would lead to neither healing nor catharsis. In painting such a

dreadful picture of Haiti, Danticat eliminates the possibility of return and imposes on her characters a diasporic identity that is not centered around homeland.

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ملخص

يهدف البحث إلى دراسة صورة الوطن في ثلاث قصص قصيرة للكاتبة الأمريكية من أصول كاريبية "إدويدج دانتيكا" وهي: "كتاب الأموات"، "متحدثي الليل"، و"الهدية". تعرض الكاتبة في القصص الثلاث شخصيات هاجرت من هايتي إلى الولايات المتحدة ويتضح من خلال تلك القصص موضوع واحد حرصت الكاتبة على تقديمه وهو؛ أثر الصدمة نفسياً وجسدياً على الشخصيات المهاجرة سواء كانت تلك الشخصيات ضحايا أم جناة. هذا على الرغم من أن أغلب قصص الهجرة في الأدب الكاريبي تصور العودة إلى الوطن على أنها فرصة لمواجهة ذكريات الماضي المؤلمة والتغلب عليها بل واتخاذها مصدرًا للقوة، إلا أن الكاتبة قدمت في تلك القصص صورة كئيبة للوطن تؤكد فيها أن هايتي ستظل دائماً موطناً للصدّامات.

الكلمات المفتاحية: إدويدج دانتيكا، الوطن، الصدمة، حكايات العودة للوطن، صدمة
مقترف الجريمة، التحليل النفسي