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Literature D-Level Essay

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## **The Construction of Identity in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones***

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## Introduction

All I want to do is find a place to lay it down now and again, a safe nest where it will neither be scattered by the winds, nor remain forever buried beneath the sod (Danticat 266)

Edwidge Danticat's career defining novel *The Farming of Bones* (1998) has a lot to say on the subject of identity construction. It deals with the embodiment of pain and pleasure, past and present, and dream and reality of an individual who experiences the complexities of her social and national identity in a post-colonial society marked by unequal relations of social and economical power, social clashes, and experiences of otherness and inferiority. The novelist has soundly harmonized the female protagonist Ambelle's description of the events, and the way she tells Ambelle's story is heart-rending leaving the reader in sadness. Amabelle herself is a witness and at the same time a victim of the many brutal incidences. That is why her narrative intensifies the reader's feelings. Danticat's fictional representation of history in this novel gives a dramatic effect to the reader that is exceptional. *The Farming of Bones* is based on the events surrounding the brutal slaughtering and massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic during the rule of Rafael Trujillo in 1937. Both Haiti and the Dominican Republic share the same island – Hispaniola. The novel tells the story of how Haitians migrate to the Dominican Republic to escape poverty and to work as labourers in the sugarcane fields, an experience which constructs their social identity. They are alienated and devalued in their native society because of their poor economical condition. They do not have enough opportunity in Haiti to avail even the common means of life. That is

why they migrate to the Dominican Republic crossing the boundary that symbolically makes them nothing but 'other' and 'inferior'.

In this award-winning novel Danticat constructs women's social and national identity by valuing the memory of their experience and by giving them voice. The narrative of the novel presents an analytical reflection of Amabelle who experiences the attacks and devastating effects of massacre longing for her self and identity. At the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, Danticat invites her readers to explore the intersections of Amabelle's trauma, who undergoes a lot of toils and turmoil to construct her identity. Danticat states: "I tried to reduce the massacre to one person, through whose eyes we can experience it" (78). The post-colonial condition is depicted in this novel by the means of the examination of issues raised by the characters' crossing and re-crossing of national, geographical and linguistic borders and the forces that mould their personal, social and national identities.

This paper will discuss issues surrounding the dynamic connections between identity and boundary construction in post-colonial context. It will present an analysis of how the novelist problematizes and communicates her idea of social and national identity construction to her readers and how the readers can identify themselves with the struggles and challenges of the protagonist Amabelle who is trying to find her own identity.

The theoretical analysis of the novel will be conducted from a post-colonial perspective. In fact, Danticat builds her narrative on the basis of conflicts between two nations. At the same time she constructs her female protagonist Amabelle as a borderline therapist who endeavours to bridge the gap between two nations. She forgives her fellow human being but does not forget her past that has constructed her

social and national identity. Understanding Amabelle's experience of bridging mental boundaries will enable the reader to better understand those challenges of decolonization, exclusion, nationalism and identity which people from the Third World face a large. From this perspective, this essay will show how Danticat's novel contributes to an understanding of national identity beyond borders and makes the reader take the role of an individual who constructs her identity by uncovering moments of raw humanness. Until now, no literary scholar has examined the protagonist's therapeutic role in bridging this social and national gap. Instead critics have discussed other issues of the novel like crossing and re-crossing the border, love, dreams, etc. Although this scholarship has been very effective and rewarding, it lacks any focus on the complexity of the characters' identity construction. Therefore, this paper will reconsider Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* with a closer attention to the question of identity.

### **How Danticat Communicates Her Views on Post-Colonial Identity to Her Readers**

Danticat presents the nature of Amabelle's post-colonial identity by showing her diverse position as a settler, maid-servant, woman and beloved. Her complexities of identity construction and assertion call for theoretical and methodological approaches from a number of perspectives—social, national, economical, gender and linguistic—and this chapter is a brief overview of how the novel can be approached from all these perspectives. Focusing on the question of post-colonial identity, the novelist shows how her protagonist experiences brutality, otherness, ambivalence and hybridity. As Mikael Kurkiala states, "Identity is experienced, created and enacted in specific contexts" (41).

The question of identity involves a self-definition which takes into account the multifaceted nature of human existence. The nature of identity is variable and it changes by the passage of time, place and situation. She shows how location or displacement limits Amabelle's understanding of identity. Her painful description and her position as a traumatized survivor provide much of the novel's emotional power. Her experience epitomizes the homeless and stateless condition of many Haitians whom Sebastien describes as "an orphaned people" and "a group of vwayaje, wayfarers" (Danticat 56). Amabelle says, "To them we are always foreigners" (Danticat 69). Being the narrator of the novel, she plays the role of mouthpiece for the Haitians. Literally Amabelle is an orphan, marked by the loss of her family at a young age. She was born in Haiti and lost her family while they were crossing the massacre river, the boundary separating the two nations of Hispaniola. For most of her young life she has lived in the Dominican town of Alegria and has worked as a maid for a Dominican family. So, literally she is a Haitian who is an immigrant in the Dominican Republic.

Amabelle imagines herself as 'Other' as she does not belong anywhere in terms of her national identity. In times of trouble and upheaval there is a strong tendency for an individual to seek secured place where he/she can experience her root. Though she is by birth Haitian, she does not possess any official document to prove it. Amabelle states: "I wondered who had our house now and if I could still claim the land is my inheritance. I had no papers to show, but it was probably recorded some place that the land was once my father's and mother's and—even I hadn't been there for a long time—was still my birth right" (Danticat 184). Here we see the role of authority which constructs individuals' national identity. Though in the Dominican Republic, she sets a chain of relationships based on kin, service and spirituality, yet these construct her fake identity.

Here, she is nobody who loses her national identity just for the common means of life. In the midst of a war-ravaged situation, she experiences a crucial complexity about her identity and need to represent herself what is quite common in every post-colonial society.

Apart from Amabelle, the novelist also takes the initiative to recreate the collective identity of Haitians by remembering the past and in revising histories. She challenges the conventional construction of the colonial identity by engaging with the voices of oppressed people. She criticizes the ways in which collectivity was historically shaped along gender and race lines in Haiti during Trujillo's rule of the Dominican Republic. The novelist gives voice to women by choosing a female narrator and exposes patriarchal nationalism's dependence on traditional gender constructions. The protagonist tells the story of the massacre of Haitians during her last days in the Dominican Republic before the starting of upheaval, her separation from her lover Sebastien, her forced migration back to Haiti, her new life there and brief return to the Dominican side. Indeed, Danticat's method of narration engages her readers to follow the plot and understand the characters. Her characters' struggle with identities rooted in nation and history. That is why, in this novel history plays a vital role in constructing identity. A close reading of the text reveals to us that history is a tale authorized by those who are in power and for this reason its credibility is always question worthy. For example, we see that when war-ravaged Haitians are called by the government officials to relate their story, they are asked to show their 'proof' of sufferings. The irony is that victims must show the 'proof' of their tortures that indicates the loss of their family members or their own victimization. Although their mutilated bodies clearly show their sufferings, without proof their statement remains unacknowledged. Thus, their

experiences are invalidated unless related to someone in power, a “civilian face to concede that what they witnessed and lived through did truly happen” (Danticat 236). However, Danticat tries to demonstrate an already existing process by which identity is constructed by socio-political affiliation. She presents her novel as a vital alternative to history. Ink says, “The text is a recovery of lost history” (799). Thus, Danticat interweaves fiction and history in the creation of an imaginary space that promotes fluidity in the process of identity.

*The Farming of Bones* reveals that sustaining the liberty is more difficult and important than achieving it, because “someone can always come and snatch it away” (Danticat 212). Once Haitians had power and supremacy over other nations. As Danticat states “when Dessalines, Toussaint, Henry, when those men walked the earth, we were a strong nation” (Danticat 212). But they do not have that glory anymore. Thus the novel condenses a collective search of identity. It does not merely deal with what has been imposed on Haitians by cultural imperialism; it also shows what has been lost through a history of political struggle.

Danticat shows the importance of reminiscence in the construction of national identity. For example, during the war when Amabelle belongs to nothing, she remembers her past. She indulges her social identity in her dream. Once she belonged to a family and she used to lead a normal everyday life as she states: “I thought of past Saturdays spent sitting in the with Senora Valencia, but it was all the past. Now we have to try and find the future” (Danticat 184). Though she does not have such a position, she is still not hopeless. Danticat constructs Amabelle’s identity according to a forward-looking philosophy. Amabelle is very optimistic and she can be treated as a role model for those people who become hopeless and frustrated in the time of trouble and disaster.

In addition, we see that other Haitians also remember their previous glory and social status. Here we see that people can become conscious about their stature when they lose their important possession. This is what happens to the Haitians; they can realize their national glory and identity after losing it. They try to revive it through their reminiscence and forward-looking view. On their way to cross the border Amabelle and her friend Yves meet a group of people discussing among themselves: “They looked back and they reordered the moments—second vision, hindsight. What could have been done differently? Whatever became of our national creed, ‘L’union la force’? Where was our unity? Where was our strength? And how can we not hate ourselves for the people we left behind?” (Danticat 212-213). The novelist demonstrates the frustration of the Haitians who cannot understand what has become of their country, their people and their freedom. So, here we can come to know about the importance of becoming conscious about our collective ‘self’ that surely helps us to sustain our lives with due social status. Besides, Danticat also indicates that community can be created through shared suffering and that unity is yet to be established. Apart from this, she suggests the urgency to rethink the restrictive terms of national identity: “now we all had to try and find the future” (Danticat 184). That is why; it is evident that there is an inevitable importance of being united and optimistic in identity formation.

Danticat reveals the meaning of home through the result of displacement and colonialism and she renegotiates the idea of identity in this novel. The whole novel itself is like a documentary of a post-colonial context where people cross and re-cross the border because of poverty, war etc. Her readers can identify with her characters in understanding the consequence of homelessness, diaspora, hybridity and otherness. Amabelle’s lover Sebastien is like these displaced or migrated people who at a

particular level longs for his home. He says, “I am tired of the harvest and all the cane”, “Perhaps it’s time to see my mother” (Danticat147). Here we see the meaning of homeland. In the Dominican Republic, Sebastien is not only poor but also a man without his own identity and social position. Here, they have nothing to represent themselves. Sebastien belongs to a generation who migrated to the Dominican Republic in search of opportunity, to ensure a better life. As Carole Boyce Davies states: “He is a member of a number of overlapping communities which, with each departure, are instantly hurled into a movement of exile and return which is so fundamentally inscribed in “New World” post-/modern identities” (2). Their identity is constituted at the expense of a range of ‘others’. From this perspective he is the spokesman of every immigrant people who long to unite with their family. To Sebastien, his home is where he can mentally and spiritually adjust himself. Every migrated man can locate himself in the position of Sebastien. The reality is that people normally migrate to reshape their economical and social identity, but at the same time they have to forget their individuality and become ‘others’. Here we find the migratory meaning of placement and identity and this is how we see that renegotiation of identities is fundamental in a cross-cultural context and *The Farming of Bones* illustrates the dynamic connection between identity and boundary construction.

The novel shows us the influence of ancestral homeland is obvious in any identity construction. Being influenced by the poverty in their homeland, Haitians cross the boundary that takes away their national and social identity. This simple act makes us feel the cruel reality of the post-colonial world. However, sometimes boundaries can stand for something good as Robert Frost says in his “Mending Wall”, “good fences makes good neighbors” Here Frost uses ‘wall’ in a positive sense like respecting

privacy of others and maintaining individuality. But the concept of boundary is pervious, providing separation and connection, structural stability and change. It applies to walls, rooms and buildings, national borders etc. Through this type of boundary an individual can maintain privacy and identity. As we know identification normally involves defining oneself, commonly as one among a group or set with common characteristics, taste, style, preference etc. in contradiction with others who do not share these characteristics. Hence, literally we see that identity builds on boundary. However, all these definitions should be confined in abstractions. If the boundary is used in differentiating and manipulating any poor nation, then surely it will generate racism and hatred between two nations. In this novel we see this intertwined relation between boundary and identity formation uses border or boundary as a metaphor for categorization and maintaining the line among human being. Amabelle experiences such type of boundary which causes structure, mechanisms, understanding, all of which are central to her identity construction.

### **Identity Constructed Through Conflicts**

#### External Conflicts between Two Nations

*The Farming of Bones* heightens into its classical form by determining two distinct groups' immigrants and natives. The interest in identity grows largely from insecurities and tensions between Haitians and Dominicans associated with the displacement of boundaries in restless economic and geographical landscapes. As it has been stated earlier that *The Farming of Bones* recounts the massacre of Haitians under the period of Generalissimo Rafael. An ongoing economical and political crisis brought thousands of Haitian workers to the Dominican Republic. As Kongo, a Haitian cane worker says, "we would have been beggars if we did not come here" (Danticat 121). Some remained

for generations, marrying Dominican women and raising families. The political tensions of this period had their roots in centuries of conflicts between the two nations. They are confounded by the dissimilarity of the two cultures residing in close proximity to one another: the Dominicans a predominantly Spanish speaking, Catholic population, and the Haitians largely black and Creole speaking. Being poverty stricken they cross the border. It is also known by history that, in the nineteenth century, Haiti invaded the Spanish side of the Alegria Island twice, and the unpleasant experience of Haitian occupation has become fixed in the Dominican national memory. So when Haitian workers start migrating to the Dominican Republic, Trujillo takes it as an opportunity to take revenge. The Dominican ruler imagines Haitians as a threat to his economy and national sovereignty. He attacks the Haitians as if the people of the Dominican Republic have been threatened by Haitians. The Generalissimo treats them as: “the enemy of work and prosperity” (Danticat), which is based on nothing but mere prejudice. Dominicans think that their national identity and individuality are being hampered by Haitian immigrants and Haitians feel like: “They say some people don’t belong anywhere and that’s us” (Danticat 56). So Trujillo declares to terminate all Haitians on his land. Indeed, he constructs a Dominican national identity and individuality by applying the policy of exclusion. Richard F Patterson states, “Like Hitler, [he thought] he could purify his race” (225). It is known from history that Trujillo’s mother was Haitian. Therefore, his idea of purification makes little sense in light of the mixed racial composition of the Dominicans themselves. Yet he wanted to form a totalitarian state. To him, the fantasy of elimination is an important base in the establishment of his absolute control of the country. This idea of exclusion is a normal picture of every colonial society.

What Trujillo commits against the Haitians is savagery—a kind of violence against others without any sense of moral restraint. Verbally we can go through the same scene in Conrad's *The Heart of Darkness*, a prominent post-colonial novel. Like Conrad's Kurtz, Trujillo kills thousands of Haitians thinking of them as an obstacle against Dominican prosperity. This is behind all colonizers' thinking, that colonized people are incapable of civilization, so they should be restricted from the common means of life. Here we see the psychological view of identity construction. As I have mentioned earlier, the way Trujillo considers the Haitians is based solely on prejudice; it only exists in his mind. Still he considers the Haitians as inferior and constructs his superiority by killing them. Although this brutality causes hatred against him in common human minds, still he thinks himself as someone great. Apart from this, to many Dominicans he is a hero and a 'father of the nation', but to the Haitians he becomes a cruel and savage man. His activity is associated with the primitive and animal side of human nature. Through Danticat's portrayal of Rafael, we can think that there is no absolute meaning of identity, rather it is variable. So an individual may have dual identity in terms of the difference of society, perspective and situation. This is how Trujillo's identity is justified by the Dominicans and Haitians

Thus, the novelist criticizes the national identity that has stimulated the massacre which has continued to influence Haitian-Dominican relations adversely. By relating this history to the contemporary plight of migrant cane workers, she indeed revises the national identity and she endeavors to offer an alternative communal identity beyond national borders perpetuated by imperialism. It is notable that verbally the novelist seems to undermine the credibility and validity of history, yet she admits that her story is only one among many others that can be told, including those of Dominicans who

themselves lived through this struggle.

Apart from other aspects, language also plays a vital role in Danticat's novel when it comes to the construction of national identity. The idea of linguistic determinism is a crucial point in this novel. In greater extent, Haitians are "subject" to language. As Gaggi writes in his *From Text to Hypertext*:

The word "subject" ... evokes the idea of being "subject" to a larger force or forces: a king, a dictator, or a totalitarian state, perhaps. Of course, in the poststructuralist world the larger force to which one is subject is not an individual or human agency but language itself, which contains all of us in its prison house, makes subjects of us all, (xii).

Language becomes an issue of life and death for Haitians. Martin Munro states, "It was in language that slave was perhaps most successfully imprisoned by his master" (210). We can see the reflection of this idea when Haitians are being killed in the night "because they could not manage to trill their 'r' and utter a throaty 'j' to ask for parsley, to say perejill" (Danticat 114). The utterance of *pewejil* rather than *perejil* would reveal a kreyol accent and thus proves that individual as a Haitian national. Amabelle refuses to pronounce the word, as parsley is forced into her mouth, literally taking away her ability to speak. And yet she says she could have said the word "properly, calmly and slowly" (Danticat 193) as she had learnt it from Alegria. But, she does not bother about it. She realizes the absurdity of how mere pronunciation can divide an island into two opposing sides. In other words, she could have saved herself from violence, but instead she remains silent. So a state of voicelessness that the entire narration seeks to negotiate is that Haitians' inability to utter the word is a sign of exclusion and an excuse for violence. When Amabelle's companion Odette is subjected to the test, she shows pride

in her national identity and challenges Trujillo's linguistic cleansing:

With her parting breath, she mouthed in Kreyol "pesi", not calmly and slowly.....not questioning as if demanding of the face of Heaven the greater meaning of senseless acts, no effort to say "perejill" as if pleading for her life.....The Generalissimo's mind was surely as dark as death, but if he had heard Odette's "pesi" it might have startled him, not the tears and supplications he would have expected, no shriek from unbound fear, but a provocation, a challenge, a dare. (Danticat 203)

So, if the linguistic distinction relies on the idea of creolization and an establishment of monolingualism, Amabelle's silence and Odette's uncompromising "pesi" challenge the foundation of the linguistic identity bond that Trujillo imposes. In the novel those who like Pico and Trujillo hold the principles of linguistic identity fade away through the exact testimony of Amabelle. Her narrative tells of a dark-colored Dominican who can speak "only in Spanish" and who is wrongly identified by Rafael's men as Haitian because of her skin colour (Danticat 217). Therefore, the root of conflict is not only language; rather it is based on the arbitrary and superficial relation between those who belong and those who do not belong to artificial construction of language and race.

Indeed, Danticat performs the role of a critic of patriarchal nationalism exercised by Trujillo's dictatorship. Even in some extent, she technically displaces Trujillo also from the narrative center of the novel. Throughout the novel he is perceived from a distance like most marginalized people living in the Dominican Republic. It is like the source of the devil is far away from the scene. She does not allow him to appear on the scene. That is why at the very beginning of the massacre we find Amabelle in doubt about what is happening, even though she has heard "that

Generalissimo, along with a border commission had given order to kill all Haitians". (Danticat 114). When she is warned by a friend of Senor Valencia's family that she must flee immediately, her initial reaction is disbelief: "It couldn't be real. Rumors, I thought" (Danticat 140). Amabelle considers it as "all the talk" (Danticat 125) that rapidly increases from the network of situation through which the readers glimpse Rafael in much the same way as do Haitians: "many good men commit terrible acts these days" (Danticat 150). We readers can understand the historical context even though the comment is characteristically unclear. Trujillo is seen by the fictional characters through the medium of a large portrait painted by senor Valencia and displayed prominently in the parlor. This very painting is "a vast improvement on many of the Generalissimo's public photographs" and serves as a kind of insurance policy of Pico's family. It indicates their love for their land and it testifies their support for their regime. But, on the other hand, the "enormous presence" of such a man in the house creates fear in Amabelle. When Trujillo speaks on the radio, his voice sounds more ominous and it is Pico who insists on listening and says, "When the program is over I will have to leave for the border soon for that operation I spoke of earlier" (Danticat 99). When Amabelle flees to Haiti, after reaching the town of Dejabon, she learns that "Trujillo is inside the church" (Danticat 189) and she also comes to know from the local crowd that "the Dominican Republic's problems with Haitians would soon be solved" (Danticat 189). Within a few minutes Amabelle and her friend Yves are viciously attacked by the mob of some angry young men. This description reveals to us that Trujillo has executed the massacre behind the curtain, so to speak. Near the end of Amabelle's narrative, she reflects "The past is more flesh than air, our stories testimonials like the ones never heard by the justice of peace or the Generalissimo himself" (Danticat 281). Her experience of suffering is more physical than mental and

she has not been given proper justice. No power or authority has come to rescue them from this brutal incidence.

Whatever Trujillo has done and no matter for what purpose, in Danticat's narrative his identity is to be taken as a dictator and a psychopath who has turned his country into a wasteland of the spirit. His inability to control his bladder serves to reinforce the notion of a pervasive corruption that has emerged from the country itself. He has degraded the image of his land to the world and has achieved nothing but a bad impression worldwide. He was killed, but Danticat knows that to kill him is not enough; he has to be brought back to life, so that he can be unmasked and rewritten. Thus he is disempowered through the strength of her art.

Apart from this, through the narrative of Amabelle, Haitians' identity is also constructed. If the theme of *The Farming of Bones* resonates in today's Haiti, it is because it deals with militarism, racist violence and class divisions. Shame and guilt are the negative legacies of Haitian history. Haitian people do not take any initiative to resist this brutality which has been executed on them. Paradoxically it is the innocent, the weak, those who are the victims of violence, who feel shame and guilt most acutely. It is the shame of being powerless and being unable to act when events take over, and of surviving, and of not dying. Therefore, the massacre reveals both positive and negative identities of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. In one way, it has determined Dominicans' national identity since they have terminated all Haitians on their land and in another way it shows the weakness of the Haitians' power because they have not been able to protect themselves from oppressors.

### **Identity is Constructed through Internal Conflicts of the Characters**

In the novel, some characters' identities are constructed through internal conflict of what to do and what not to do. We find many characters; especially women, who face a crucial situation of having to choose between their moral duty and their responsibility to their fellow human beings. An interesting thing is that the individual fails to show his/her moral identity in a divergence of situation; especially women are weaker in terms of manifesting their moral duty when it becomes a threat to their personal life. It is a situation in which, according to Adorno, "the 'universal' fails to agree with or include individual and the claim of universality itself ignores the "rights" of the individual" (52). Indeed, this happens to Senora Valencia. She knows that her husband Pico is engaged with massacre, yet she treats him as a "good man" (Danticat 150). She does not have moral courage to go against her husband. She performs her duty by supporting her husband. She remains silent not only during the massacre i.e. she never goes against it but also implicitly joins the national project to terminate Haitians from the Dominican Republic. Her passivity becomes clear when she states that her husband "merely followed the order he was given" (Danticat 300). Valencia constructs her national identity by remaining silent and inactive during massacre though it indicates shortage of her conscience.

On the other hand, Man Rapadou- a female character of the novel- constructs her national identity placing her national loyalty over her wifely duty what is antithetical to Senora Valencia. "Greater than my love for this man was love for my country. I could not let him trade us all, sell us to the yankis" (Danticat 277). When Man Rapadou encounters a conflicting situation of choosing between her husband and her country, she prioritizes her land over her husband. To prevent him betraying his countrymen she kills

him by mixing poison with his favorite food. Though by doing this she loses her own identity as a “young happy woman whose husband was by her side, with joy in his eye and honor in his heart” her action exposes as a potential threat against imperialists (Danticat 277-78). She is a strong voice against colonialists who undermine the power of fellow human beings.

### **Rays of Hope to Bridge the Gaps**

Throughout the novel Danticat ultimately shows the idea of forming alliance between Haiti and the Dominican Republic based on common struggle and shared experiences undermining the disavowal of community beyond national borders. As Lynn Chun Ink states: “by exposing nationalism’s prohibition of collective alliances across national lines and thus questioning the division between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, *The Farming of Bones* endeavors to offer an alternative to a collective perpetuated by colonialism”(800). The author engages her characters in a process of constructing their identity in relation to their fellow human beings. She means the need for an increased accountability for the ways in which countries and individuals find possible points of contact. She presents Amabelle as a great example who shows the potential possibility of forming identity and community based on this idea. Though Amabelle’s constructedness of national identity is manifested through her experiences by which she comes to identify herself as Haitian, yet at a particular stage we find her torn between her Dominican family and Haitian heritage. When Sebastian asks Amabelle about her national identity, she answers him, “The Senora and her family are the closet to kin I have” (Danticat 110). This feeling of kinship comes not only from her membership within the family but also her loss of mother and motherland she shares with Valencia and Papi. Both Valencia and Amabelle have a traumatic experience of losing their

mothers. Amabelle has been in Duarte family since age eight. Despite of her status as a servant, she also identifies herself with Valencia who also has lost her mother at young age. This common feeling of loss is also another important reason that makes her close to Duarte family.

Another instance of striking possibility of community defined by shared struggle occurs in the interchange between Valencia and Kongo who is a Haitian cane worker whose son Joel is accidentally killed by Pico in a car accident. In spite of losing his son and Pico's unconcern over Joel's death, Kongo does not feel any anger or revengeful mentality against Pico. His tremendous sense of compassion and endurance is exposed during his meeting with Valencia who also recently has lost her son. Kongo can understand the feeling of a mother who loses her son. He expresses his heart felt sorrow as he says, "My heart is saddened for the death of your other child" (Danticat 116). Before that, at the very outset of their meeting, Kongo appears to be very cordial and he greets Valencia by kissing her fingers. Although no relationship develops through this encounter, yet it is a great initiative to collapse all the boundaries of race, color and nation with their mutual experience of loss. During their brief meeting all class, race and gender differences between them are temporarily taken away, and the novel shows the hint of a possibility of building a community based on shared experience.

After all, at the end of the novel the novelist leaves her reader with Amabelle at the river which can be metaphorically treated as a crossroads which separates Haiti and the Dominican Republic. To understand the humanist, or post-nationalist, theme of the novel it is very important to pay close attention to Amabelle's returning to the Dominican Republic and her visiting the *lieux de memoire* that have haunted her for so many years. When she enters the river, she finds herself accompanied by a "crazy man"

a “tall bowlegged old man with a tangled gray beard” whom the washing woman has nicknamed “Pwofese” (Danticat 285). Amabelle recognizes a kindred soul in him and speaks the final words of the novel: “He, like me, was looking for the dawn” (Danticat 310). Probably, she gets inspired by that man. As Heather Hewett states, “she understands him as a survivor who, like (her) continues to move forward in the aftermath of trauma” (140). She is like Tennyson’s poetic character Ulysses who always strives, who does not look backward, never yields, rather feels an optimistic sense of growth. Afterwards Amabelle says, “I looked to my dream for softness, for a gentle embrace, for relief from the fear of mudslides and blood bubbling out of the riverbed, where it is said the dead add their tears to the river flow” (Danticat 310). In the river she seeks out a place in which she is not required to pledge allegiance to any one nation. Amabelle’s standing at the crossroads (river) that symbolically stand for both danger and opportunity, because this is the place of her original loss where she has lost her parents. Yet, she finally looks to her dream and memories for “relief” instead of torment. In her moment of floating, we find her in such a place where she can be at peace. We can understand this scene as a moment when she embraces all the losses what have defined her identity and creates a new self out of loss. She gives birth to herself. She is described as: “cradled by the current, paddling like a new born in a wash basin” (Danticat 310). Having returned to Haiti after escaping from the Dominican Republic, she has existed in a “living death” (Danticat 283). She decides to go on living. Danticat Describes Amabelle as being in water “so shallow that [she] could lie on [her] back in it with [her] shoulders only half submerged, the current floating over [her] in a less than gentle caress, the pebbles in the riverbed scouring [her] back” (Danticat 310). It can be argued that in this situation her face should easily clear the surface of the water, but instead she finds closure to the horrors she suffered, accepting the deaths of

her loved ones. So the river stands for an archetype of collective memory that reconnects Amabelle with her past. Before entering the water she reflects on her body having raised and carried “into the river, into Sebastien’s cave, my father’s laughter, my mother’s eternity” (Danticat 310). Then she slips into the river, taking off her clothes, nakedness having been identified earlier in the novel with being “fully awake” (Danticat 2). By entering the water she accepts the past remembering who she is and where she comes from, as the past is painful, she remembers her dream that Sebastien once said that, “it takes patience.... to raise a setting sun”(Danticat 283). Now after twenty-four years of night she is patiently “looking for the dawn” (Danticat 283). At this moment of Amabelle’s heightened awareness, we can understand that though she is wounded yet she is whole and healed. Her condition is metaphorically a crossroads of past and future. In spite of having a lot of sufferings she waits to see the rays of the rising sun. She tries to move forward. Apparently it seems that she has forgiven what has been done to her, and now she wants to see a dawn and a new day.

To sum up, Danticat shows us an individual’s attempt to negotiate her complex identity through her social relations. Amabelle is an individual who does not represent her community as a whole, who tries to make an alliance with the Dominican Republic after massacre. Therefore she is an influential and interesting character. She is a great example of those people who can think beyond the restriction of social, racial and national boundaries. As Mally Charters states, Danticat’s “characters are not the representative of the community as a whole, as a writer, it’s the person who is different from everybody else who might be interesting to you” (43). Thus Amabelle is portrayed as an individual who pioneers to incorporate herself with other cultures and nationalities. As this essay has argued, *The Farming of Bones* can make its readers feel

and think beyond their own region race, culture and society. In this context, Ivanic Roz says, “writing is an act of identity in which people align themselves with socio-culturally shaped possibilities for self-hood, playing their part reproducing or challenging dominant practices and discourses, and the values, beliefs and intersects which they embody” (32). Therefore, through her transformative narrative Amabelle is a challenge for imperialists’ endeavors. She endures, forgives but keeps everything in her mind to shape her identity.

## Conclusion

Finally it can be said that *The Farming of Bones* brings to the forefront the importance of a possible alternative community founded on shared experience. Danticat tries to reconnect both countries into one homeland. Embracing her Haitian roots, Amabelle's final act of returning to the Dominican Republic suggests something like a renewal of her past relations and hope. Martin W. Todd interprets Amabelle's entering into the river as a kind of 'in betweenness' which means that she is neither Dominican nor fully Haitian (because of her long absence from her homeland) and finds her home between the two countries. But as this essay has argued, it can also be understood as an initiative of integration between the two nations. It can be interpreted as a wish to see both Haiti and the Dominican Republic as a borderless land. From this perspective, Danticat presents her protagonist in this novel as a therapist. She shows that in spite of being different in terms of race, colour and nationality, it is possible to maintain an alliance and build a community. In any extent, the consequence can be harsh if the borderer crossers or immigrants are perceived as 'other,' or worse, as the enemy. Such colonial attitudes call for the need of constructing an identity which is independent of imperial influences. Decolonization requires as Lynn Chun Ink states, "a new method of reading communal identity that in fact re-imagines geographic and psychic boundaries in a way that has yet to be explored" (805). This is what Amabelle does by removing all hatred and pains from her mind. It cannot be directly said that Danticat hopes to ventilate that globalization can contribute to softening and perforating boundaries. She rather encourages the readers to open their armour of rigidity to a more genuine engagement with others, with the remainder of the natural world. It offers no guide to global bliss. It simply provides a transnational perspective and practical application of present-day

living that can bring us one step closer to a global outlook with which we all can relate. Eric Clark and Bo Petersson state, “If the world is increasingly experienced as one place, perhaps we can all be defined into the community, and we may after all be on the way to a more harmonious world”(9). As this paper has argued, Amabelle’s narrative points the way towards forgiveness, towards a world which is free of hatred and colonial influences.

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