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# Family Stories: Narrating the Nation in Recent Postcolonial Novels

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# Family Stories: Narrating the Nation in Recent Postcolonial Novels

Erin Haddad-Null, PhD

University of Connecticut, 2013

## Abstract:

This study examines the depiction of family histories and stories of familial interactions and dynamics in eight recent postcolonial novels. I examine the depictions of family and nation in these novels and discuss the counter-histories that emerge as a means of questioning national narratives. This project contributes to discussions of the relationship between the nation and the novel and how postcolonial nationalism reshapes understandings of the construction of the nation-state in an increasingly transnational world.

In this study, I draw upon Anne McClintock's and Susan Strehle's examinations of how nationalism often separates the idea of family and home even while using these spheres as legitimating metaphors for national power. I examine how the novels' depictions undermine the division of nation and family and question the subordination of the supposedly private familial life to the public national sphere. I utilize trauma theory, specifically drawing upon the work of Dominick La Capra, to consider how the novels represent the impact of historical events that are traumatic and represent the effects of trauma by structuring its effects into the narrative. I draw upon the work of Chandra Mohanty to argue that these literary depictions prompt a reconsideration of familial relationships in order to rethink and revise nationalism and constructions national identity.

The four chapters of the study are organized regionally, with the first chapter focusing on two novels from Northern Ireland that examine how the sectarian violence that has historically marked the region necessitates an understanding of national identity linked to trauma. The second chapter examines how in the representation of trauma in the works of Amitav Ghosh and

Erin Haddad-Null—University of Connecticut, 2013

Arundhati Roy issues of gender and of utopian hopes for a new understanding of home emerge. The third chapter discusses the search for “reconstituted kinship” that underlies the narratives of Margaret Cezair-Thompson and Michele Cliff in their depictions of Jamaican history, while the fourth chapter examines the critiques of patriarchal nationalism and the need for reformulating familial relationships and arrangements in response in novels by Edwidge Danticat and Junot Diaz.

Family Stories: Narrating the Nation in Recent Postcolonial Novels

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APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Family Stories: Narrating the Nation in Recent Postcolonial Novels

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## Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Chapter One: Uncanny Homes and Haunted Histories	32
Chapter Two: Crossing Boundaries of History and Confronting Trauma in Arundhati Roy's <i>The God of Small Things</i> and Amitav Ghosh's <i>The Shadow Lines</i>	84
Chapter Three: Recreating Genealogy in Explorations of National History in Jamaican Literature	136
Chapter Four: Forging New Families: Resisting and Rewriting Patriarchal Nationalism in Edwidge Danticat's <i>The Farming of Bones</i> and Junot Díaz's <i>The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao</i>	170
Conclusion	221



## Introduction:

Scholars have long noted the relationship between the novel and the nation as the novel often represents the nation within literary form. Franco Moretti, in his *Atlas of the European Novel*, draws upon Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* and its illumination of the relation between the rise of a print-culture and the rise of the nation-state. Moretti expounds on the relation between literature and the modern nation-state, claiming "the nation-state...found the novel. And vice versa: the novel found the nation-state. And being the only symbolic form that could represent it, it became an essential component of our modern culture" (17). While some critics, such as Patrick Parrinder, have questioned Moretti's overarching claim regarding the novel being "the only form" capable of representing the nation, it does appear that the novel offers a particularly viable format for giving literary form to the nation. Responding to Moretti's assertion, Parrinder notes "such generalizations should be treated with caution. The notion of a symbolic form is, in this context, hopelessly vague—are not Shakespeare's history plays [...] a symbolic form of the nation-state?—while the concept of the nation-state itself is much debated and cannot be taken for granted. To put the two ideas together is as epigrammatic as it is ultimately mystifying" However, Parrinder does concede, "What can be said at this stage is that novels have been influential sources of ideas of nationhood and national belonging" (14). Thus, whether it remains the best form for adequately representing the nation, the novel does seem to offer a readily available venue for literarily recreating the nation. As Timothy Brennan notes "[i]t was the *novel* that historically accompanied the rise of nations [...] by mimicking the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jumble of languages and styles" (8). Brennan elucidates the appeal of the novel as a form for writers particularly interested in representing the nation, namely, postcolonial writers aiming to capture and explore the complex issues raised by

postcolonial nationalism. The novel's ability to encapsulate multiplicity within one single body often offers a site for investigating and questioning the construction of nationalism. I am interested in how contemporary postcolonial novels examine how nations either newly independent or undergoing struggles against imperial powers utilize the novel format to portray family sagas and narratives focusing on family history while representing the nation.

This study focuses on eight contemporary novels: *Reading in the Dark* (1996) by Seamus Deane, *One by One in Darkness* (1996) by Deirdre Madden, *The God of Small Things* (1997) by Arundhati Roy, *The Shadow Lines* (1988) by Amitav Ghosh, *The True History of Paradise* (1999) by Margaret Cezair-Thompson, *No Telephone to Heaven* (1996) by Michelle Cliff, *The Farming of Bones* (1998) by Edwidge Danticat, and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) by Junot Díaz. These narratives, with their use of family sagas and cross-generational stories, offer a means for examining the construction of the nation and nationalism. The family becomes the site where national history occurs within the texts. This occurs as the novels represent the intrusion of the political sphere into the familiar sphere and the home; in addition, the novels emphasize the family's power to shape understandings of history, especially national history and to convey a sense of national identity. National turmoil comes to be focalized through familial interactions and is often represented in the novels' focus on political events' effects upon the family.

The novels all depict trauma, to varying degrees, and in these depictions, the novels represent the relationship between history, nation, and family. National traumas, such as widespread violence spurred by political oppression, slavery, and/or diaspora affect families within the narratives. In addition, the novels represent traumas occurring through the instigation of social discrimination, for instance, attacks meant to intimidate those who seek to go against

the status quo. And, the novels represent traumas that occur within the home, such as through abuse. In depicting such instances of trauma, the novels explore the haunting power of trauma as they depict the way it affects those who experienced it as well as subsequent generations who continue to be affected by it. As the families within the narratives experience trauma and its consequences, they wrestle with understanding the history and political circumstances shaping their experiences. Particularly for those facing traumas experienced by previous generations that continue to affect them, they must grapple with historical understandings that often remain difficult to access in order to understand the trauma that continues to affect their present and their identity. In these representations of trauma that intersect with and occur within the family sphere, the novels portray the “unhomely” that Homi Bhabha discusses in order to represent haunting memories and experiences (141).

In depicting the relationship between the family and the nation, the narratives subvert the separation presumed to exist between the two. Bhabha draws upon the concept of the “unhomely” in world literature to explore the relationship between public and private appearing in portrayals of historical traumas within the home. He describes the “unhomely” in fiction as the means whereby “the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history’s most intricate invasions. In that displacement, the border between home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (141). The “divided” and “disorienting” experiences that occur when private home life and the public world of history and the nation serve as the subject matter for the narratives studied here. These fictional explorations of familial life and domestic space reveal the shaping effects of history upon home and family and vice versa as well as the upheavals that often attend the overlapping of the two spheres. As Bhabha continues to explain:

In the stirrings of the unhomely, another world becomes visible. It has less to do with forcible eviction and more to do with the uncanny literary and social effects of enforced social accommodation, or historical migrations and cultural relocations. The home does not remain the domain of domestic life, nor does the world simply become its social or historical counterpart. The unhomely is the shock of recognition of the world-in-the-home, the-home-in-the-world (141).

This offers a formulation for understanding a dynamic and interactive, if not necessarily equal and reciprocal relationship between the home and the public space. National history makes itself felt in the home, yet the domestic space does not remain merely acted-upon and shaped by the larger world; rather, it responds to the “intricate invasions” Bhabha mentions. Attending to such literary depictions of the unhomely allows for viewing the shaping effects of nationalism and national history while attending to the ways that the domestic sphere accommodates and /or opposes such effects.

The novels in this study address prevalent concerns within postcolonial literature, and they do so through exploring issues of nationalism, national identity, and national history as they appear within stories centered on family. In these narratives, family history often intertwines with national history to reveal national history’s effects upon its subjects. The family histories offer a means for representing access to counter-histories, those historical experiences often occluded or excised from official accounts of history. These counter-histories typically emerge from a need to understand the way particular forms of nationalism suppress or elide certain experiences. For instance, Trujillo’s nationalistic discourse seeks to exclude the African presence in Dominican history and society by focusing on Spanish heritage instead. The novels seek to critique such exclusions by depicting narratives that serve as counter-histories. These counter-

histories emerge in depictions of the familial, personal sphere which the novelists use to portray lived experience of history as well as bring to light individuals, groups, and/or experiences often left out of official history. Thus, Bhabha's account of the unhomely addresses the ways in which the overlappings and intrusions of public and national experience into the domestic, familial sphere can undermine the divide erected between the two. These familial sagas explore and represent the tenuous boundaries between national experience and family history in ways that "disorient," according to Bhabha's formulation. This disorientation allows for destabilizing commonly accepted visions and allowing the novels to represent access to counter-histories through memory, dreams, oral traditions, and other means outside the domain of official historiography.

The novels focus on the "unhomely" to explore the intertwining of national history and personal tragedy and explore how private and public traumas sometimes intersect and emerge out of the other. One such instance is in *The God of Small Things*, where Arundhati Roy highlights the divide between the nation and the family figuratively. The narrative voice comments on how nationalist discourse seeks to occlude traumas visited upon individuals who often do not have a readily available venue to articulate their experience within public discourse. Roy explains:

*personal* despair could never be enough. [...] something happened when personal turmoil dropped by at the wayside shrine of the vast, violent, circling, driving, ridiculous, insane, unfeasible, public turmoil of a nation. That Big God howled like a hot wind, and demanded obeisance. Then Small God (cozy and contained, private and limited) came away cauterized, laughing numbly at his own temerity. Inured by the confirmation of his own inconsequence, he became resilient and truly indifferent. Nothing mattered much.

Nothing much mattered. And the less it mattered, the less it mattered. It was never important enough. Because Worse Things had happened. In the country that she came from, poised forever between the terror of war and the horror of peace, Worse Things kept happening. (19)

Roy reveals the mutually informing relationship that the seemingly separate spheres of nationalism and family share. In this passage, national events usurp the private, personal experience, such as occurs within the realm of the family, defining them as subordinate to public, large-scale events. This passage also comments on how personal tragedy and loss is counted as “less” than public turmoil, and how “[i]t was never important enough” to warrant the same attention as struggles for national power. However, Roy’s novel reveals that “personal despair” figured as the “Small God” arises out of historical and national oppression. The narrative underscores that loss of autonomy over one’s life or recognition of one’s rights and dignity are innately bound up within public turmoil and the historical injustices that continue to make their legacy felt.

Frederic Jameson has famously argued that postcolonial literature represents the nation allegorically. He states, “All third-world texts are necessarily, I want to argue, allegorical, and in a very specific way; they are to be read as what I will call *national allegories*, even when, or perhaps I should say, particularly when their forms develop out of predominantly western machineries of representation, such as the novel” (69). While Jameson’s generalization points to how postcolonial narratives are typically more consciously concerned with representing the nation than first-world or western texts that often assume and portray a more individualized, personal experience that forgoes attention to the political realm, this assertion has raised a large

critical response, much of it skeptical about such an overarching claim<sup>1</sup>. While Jameson's argument provides a useful means for recognizing the context that informs allegorical moments in many third-world literary texts concerned with representing the national and political realm, in this study, the novels' concerns with exploring nationalism do not remain solely within the realm of the allegorical. Rather, these texts at times offer the family as a site of complex interactions between national discourse, history, and personal experience. Conceptions of nationalism are often formed and reformulated, questioned, resisted, and revised through the narratives' conceptual work in exploring how the family intertwines with the nation.

Scholars have noted the ways in which the image of the family is deployed by nationalist discourse. Franz Fanon comments on the psychological aspects of reading familial relationships into national power, noting that "For the individual the authority of the state is a reproduction of the authority of the family by which he was shaped in his childhood [...] He perceives the present in terms of the past" (143). This statement, meant to illuminate the psychology of individuals who see the authority of the state as reproducing similar power dynamics to ones they experienced previously within the realm of the home, provides a means for understanding literary portrayals that highlight national struggle and national division as it maps onto the struggles and divisions that occur within the familial realm. Thus, narratives often use familial power struggles or divisions to reveal the effect of similar political ones upon those experiencing national upheaval.

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<sup>1</sup> Imre Szeman's article "Who's Afraid of National Allegory? Jameson, Literary Criticism, and Globalization" provides an overview of the charges Jameson's critics have leveled at him, such as embedding Eurocentrism in his argument by generalizing and homogenizing the third-world in his formulation. Szeman, however, argues that this criticism often fails to note the attempt at metacommentary in Jameson's claim (805). He further argues that critics fail to take into account the more nuanced understanding of allegory that Jameson utilizes. For further information, refer to the rest of the article.

While novelists and writers may evince an interest in using the family as ground for exploring national power, nationalism itself often attempts to deploy images of the family for its own means. Anne McClintock discusses the ways in which nationalism at once divides the family from the nation and at the same time, imposes national power upon it. She asserts “The family as a metaphor offered a single genesis narrative for national history while, at the same time, the family as an institution became void of history and excluded from national power. The family became, at one and the same time, both the *organizing figure* for national history and its *antithesis*” (91). McClintock’s criticism, although regarding Boer nationalism in South Africa specifically, reveals how nationalist discourse more generally deploys the family as the metaphor for the nation. Her analysis offers a springboard for examining the uneasy relationship between the nation and family, whereby nationalist discourse draws upon the image of the family to instantiate its power, yet also attempts to keep the family separate from and subordinate to national power, thereby creating a situation where the family and nation exist both in tandem and in opposition to one another.

In a similar vein to McClintock’s theoretical concerns, Susan Strehle’s study of recent transnational fiction by women examines how imperial discourse figures the home as at once bound up with the creation and advancement of the nation even as the home is meant to remain a separate sphere. While settling home has often been figured in terms where home is separate from the public world, Strehle argues,

From a perspective conjoining feminist and postcolonial theory, home reveals its deeper affiliation with the public realm, as a patriarchal space where power relations vital to the nation and culture are negotiated. Home reflects and resembles the nation: not a retreat from the public and political, home expresses the same ideological pressures that contend



within the nation. Home is both target and mirror of the marketplace, as central and centering as any institution in the public realm. Indeed, home does the business of nation and carries its agendas forward in time, producing the subjects of nation and empire. (1)

Strehle's analysis of recent novels representing the intersection of home and nation reveals the ways in which the private, familial realm can be co-opted metaphorically in an effort to divide and subordinate these concerns to nationalist endeavors. Strehle's analysis of home offering a site of national power recalls Bhabha's statement regarding how "the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions" (141). By attending to the way the divide between public and private fails to uphold itself, one can see how the family offers a site where national history is enacted and national identity is formed. The novels in this study depict how national power exerts its control over the familial space, often utilizing power structures within the family to inculcate the power relations within the nation-state, as in Fanon's formulation whereby the state reproduces the power of the family. The novels depict the double-edged nature of family as both the "mirror" and "target" of nation that Strehle mentions.

However, the novels also depict how, for members of marginalized groups or those not officially recognized as part of the national "family," the familial space can also offer a site of opposition and resistance in the face of national oppression and violence, particularly in communities experiencing struggles against imperial domination or the erasure and suppression of national identity via the legacy of colonialism. In this regard, family offers a site for resistance and revision of national identity.

Alexandra Schultheis examines how, in postcolonial texts that depict the nation as a family, family at once serves as a means for support and sustenance, yet also erasure. In her study of postcolonial literature, she notes that for the characters "Family is at once a source of

identification as well as of marginalization, disappearance, or death” (2). Thus, while family offers a place of belonging, it also provides a site for colonialism’s destructive effects to be experienced. When the family is utilized within nationalist discourse to instantiate certain power relationships, it can cease to offer a sense of identity and rather serve as a site for inculcating exploitation. Schultheis asserts, “the patriarchal family – understood through gender-coded signifiers of power and value – has been and continues to be invoked in political, literary, and scientific realms to ‘explain’ global phenomena, therefore, it plays a key role in maintaining inequity” (3). Schultheis’s characterization of the patriarchal family reveals how it often serves as a means for justifying and naturalizing power imbalances and oppressions. However, fictional representations offer a means of investigating such constructions and creating new ones that might utilize the family’s ability to provide support and sustain its members. An understanding of family’s role to provide support even as it provides a site of erasure appears in Martin Mordecai’s analysis of the “reconstituted kinship” that functions as a feature of Jamaican literature and underscores the loss of family emerging from forced exile and migration (119). Yet, literary depictions focus on the recreation of familial bonds as a means of imaginatively creating national kinship. Although the loss of the family underscores losses constitutive in national identity and nation-formation, the attempt to understand these historical losses in an effort to recreate such familial bonds offers a mean for reimagining national identity.

Scholars who have been interested in reimagining home and family as sites of empowerment rather than oppression underscore the possibilities of forming communities through adapting familial forms and re-appropriating the domestic space. Chandra Mohanty examines the use of genealogies “as a crucial aspect of crafting critical multicultural feminist practice and the meanings I have come to give home, community, and identity” (135). In her

study, Mohanty explores the complex determinations of a postcolonial national identity and offers a genealogy that illuminates the repercussions of globalization and the disproportionate burden it brings to bear on already-marginalized groups within the nation. In this critique of globalization, she explains how she sees possibilities for re-appropriating home from its traditional alignment with stasis and removal from the world. Her experience of creating affiliations as an immigrant led her to rethink assumptions of home. She argues for viewing home thusly:

not as a comfortable, stable, inherited, and familiar space but instead an imaginative, politically charged space in which the familiarity and sense of affection and commitment lay in shared collective analysis of social injustice, as well as vision of radical transformation. Political solidarity and a sense of family could be melded together imaginatively to create a strategic space I could call home. (128)

Mohanty's vision of political solidarity and a *sense* of family (in contrast to officially recognized family) underscore the possibilities inherent in rethinking ideas of community and affiliation. Revising views of the family and seeing home as a site for building solidarity allows for a space of struggle against imperial domination, capitalist exploitation, and gender discrimination. Thus, the family and home could forgo repressive functions that perpetuate exclusionary notions of identity in favor of affirming a sense of community that resists exploitation and domination. The narratives in this study raise a similar imaginative project in exploring what political actions and identities familial experience engenders and how familial bonds might be recreated and utilized to build political solidarity in the face of marginalization and oppression.

The novels examined here engage in genealogical projects of the kind Mohanty advocates through portraying characters' investigating and wrestling with understanding of family history. In the novels, this exploration often stems from a desire to understand history via its effects upon families and view aspects of history that often remain occluded. In many instances, the novels depict characters and circumstances where genealogy has been lost or remains incomplete due to colonization, enslavement, and diaspora. Thus, the genealogies offer a means of recreating understandings of national history in ways that grapple with aspects of history not fully investigated or acknowledged within nationalist discourse.

The family histories depicted in these novels provide a means of exploring national history and accessing counter-histories. Since these explorations often arise in the face of colonial suppressions of indigenous or local history, as well as nationalisms that sometimes seek to impose exclusionary narratives, the novels wrestle with gaps in official accounts of history. The texts in this study portray the effect this imposed forgetfulness or occlusion of certain experiences has upon members of the nation by utilizing narratives to mediate against forgetting history. Ernest Renan claims, "Forgetting, I would even go so far as to say historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation, which is why progress in historical studies often constitutes a danger for [the principle of] nationality. Indeed, historical enquiry brings to light deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations, even of those whose consequences have been altogether beneficial" (2). This idea that nationalism relies upon forgetting the violence that underlies its formation highlights the process that often necessitates a need for national subjects to counter their loss of understanding and/or historical knowledge. If nationalism relies on "forgetting" or hopes to limit historical inquiry, experiences that fall outside of, or remain unrecorded within, official historiography challenge the "forgetting"

embedded in the creation of nationalistic discourse. The novels in this study aim to represent such experiences that reveal and challenge this process of eliding certain experiences or events within nationalist discourse. The narratives incorporate counter-histories that reveal such occluded experiences, and family histories in particular offer an important site for portraying counter-histories that challenge dominant or official historical narratives.

Through incorporating these counter-histories into the texts, the novels bring attention to traumas embedded within national history. The representation of trauma within the structure of the novels aims for an account of national history that incorporates the experiences and perspectives of those who have suffered from nationalist violence. In these counter-histories, the novelists undertake not simply recounting the traumas but representing the remembering of them and exploring how these remembrances affect historical understanding.

In creating counter-histories that explore the effects of trauma, these texts undertake what Dominick La Capra terms “writing trauma”. La Capra explains that there exists a difference between writing about trauma, which is more aligned with traditional historiography that records the happening of traumatic events or atrocities, and *writing trauma*, which, he claims, “involves processes of acting out, working over, and to some extent working through in analyzing and ‘giving voice’ to the past—processes of coming to terms with traumatic “experiences,” limit events, and their symptomatic effects that achieve articulation in different combinations and hybridized forms” (186). La Capra’s study suggests literature may be more adept at transmitting traumatic experiences and their aftereffects than historical writing that seeks to objectively record the traumatic events. The *writing trauma* described by La Capra occurs in all eight texts examined here, albeit to varying degrees. Despite differing emphases, all the novels bring their

concerns with historiography and historical understandings shaping individual and communal identity to center on understanding historical atrocities that have marked national communities.

The narratives “write trauma” and aim to embody its effects through stylistic features of the narrative so as to render the experience in a way that does not circumscribe or foreclose the trauma, but makes apparent its continuing effects. Thus, the novels not only recount the historical traumas that continue to affect the characters, but they “write trauma” by incorporating representations of its effects within the narratives. The texts thus represent traumatic effects by deploying fragmented portrayals of the past, emphasizing a sense of the repetition of the past, and underscoring its inability to be recovered fully due to absences and losses engendered by traumas. Several of the narratives rely on non-linear structures to emphasize the intertwining of past and present that often attends trauma. In “writing trauma” the texts do not segment off the trauma as a discrete historical event; rather, the aim is to explore trauma’s ability to haunt survivors who must grapple with its continuing influence in the present. To utilize La Capra’s term, the texts work towards “Empathic unsettlement” which “poses a barrier to closure in discourse and places in jeopardy harmonizing or spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme events from which we attempt to derive reassurance or a benefit (for example, unearned confidence about the ability of the human spirit to endure any adversity with dignity and nobility)” (41-2). This appears in the texts through their insistent focus on the continuing effects of trauma and the lack of closure, even as the narratives often move towards a processing or understanding of trauma within an historical context to reveal ways that such an understanding might motivate new concepts of identity or community.

In addition, trauma, perhaps by its very nature presents difficulties for being incorporated into historiography due to its aspects of often compelling silence or remaining inaccessible in the

minds of survivors who may repress knowledge of the events. Cathy Caruth asserts that the experience of forgetting is typically embedded in trauma, explaining “[t]he historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all” (17). Caruth’s study focuses on how literature, with its emphasis on what is and is not known, what is and is not expressed, possesses the ability to convey the experience of trauma with its inherent forgetting and repeated reemergence in the consciousness of survivors, long after the original event. The texts in this study focus on exploring historical losses and absences through the representation of familial experiences. In addition, the counter-histories emerge through the family histories and family experiences represented within the texts. Since the family is the site where historical traumas intrude and make their effects known, representing familial experiences offers a venue for exploring trauma. In addition, historical experiences lost or occluded due to trauma may remain accessible and knowable through family stories and familial experiences where the effects of trauma are experienced.

In exploring the links between trauma, memory, and the shaping of national history, family offers a key site for such narratives. As the narrator states in *The God of Small Things*, “This was the trouble with families. Like invidious doctors, they knew just where it hurt” (Roy 70). Roy’s line sums up how family, while offering a place of belonging and a way to mark one’s identity, also often functions as the site of trauma, whether the trauma is inflicted upon someone by another family member or caused by outside forces disturbing or destroying the family structure. Thus, the same formation that offers protection and belonging also contains the implicit threat of harm within it. By portraying the way oppressions are interwoven within the

intimacies of familial life, the authors draw attention to the varied, and at times contradictory, role of family.

If the family offers the site where trauma occurs, it also provides a means for grappling with the after-effects of trauma. The texts represent these after-effects via such stylistic features as the non-linear narratives of Roy and Ghosh, which circle around the moment when violence occurs, underscore the way trauma involves disjunction and repetition. The haunting memories of ghostly presences depicted by Deane, Danticat, and Cezair-Thompson reveal how historical violence and atrocity haunts survivors in the present. In addition to writing trauma, the family functions as a means for reproducing oppression, but also marking and symbolizing what is lost due to political violence and oppression. Danticat was inspired to write *The Farming of Bones* in part by an account she had heard of a maid who was slaughtered by her longtime-employer on the eve of the Parsley Massacre so the man, an officer in Trujillo's army, could demonstrate his loyalty to the regime. Danticat's text undertakes the recuperative work of exploring and imagining the experience of this particular victim of the massacre in an effort to examine how daily life was transformed by such violence. Thus, the narrative incorporates the kind of "unhomely" quality that Bhabha discusses as it examines the intrusion of violent political aims within the domestic sphere. Political divisions map onto and highlight marginalizations within the home. In addition, the loss of family becomes interwoven with political subordination and oppression.

Depictions of struggling to both overcome the horrors of the past and to remember it in order to make sense of it underscore the way trauma at once obscures and continually recalls the past. The "Empathic unsettlement" rendered by the narratives' ambiguous endings and fragmented representations of the past present the reader with a sense of the devastating and



continuing effects of trauma. However, the narratives also gesture toward utopian visions and moments of hope that point toward alternatives that subvert oppressive and harmful status quos. These utopian moments remain unrealizable within the reality of the narratives, and as such, they do not seek to simply replace a troubled world with an imaginary, idealized one. Rather, despite the unattainable nature of these utopian moments, they gesture toward a break in oppressive, totalizing systems. The utopian moments allow for depictions of critiques and protests against hegemonic orders that propagate violence and suffering and instill divisiveness.

The traumas represented within the narratives reveal their intertwining with national history. They pose questions regarding understandings of national identity and open up possibilities for reimagining nationalism. However, even as the novels contain and reconfigure national histories, they explore those histories with an awareness of global issues. The narratives also explore global understandings while simultaneously highlighting how views of the world are embedded within and arise from local or regional experiences.

### **Methodology:**

The dissertation is divided into four chapters, with each chapter focusing on a study of two novels from the same region. This organizational approach allows for a consideration of the historical contexts that inform the texts. Pairing novels from the same nation and/or region illuminates the ways in which the authors address concerns regarding national history and allows for exploring the convergences and divergences between writers from the same nation. In addition, studying these texts from varying countries and regions of the world allows for examining how world literature attends to the differing national and historical contexts. Studying these recent novels with their varying histories and contexts yields insight into how people

experiencing historical and national traumas have had to rethink and refigure identities and communities in order to sustain themselves.

The chapters in this study contain an overview of the national historical context that informs the novels to begin an examination of historiography within the narratives. In organizing the chapters around a specific national history and national context, I hope to bring specificity to the examination of each region. In comparing texts from different parts of the world, my aim is not to collapse or homogenize the differing histories and circumstances of the various regions under the umbrella of postcolonial literature; rather, the goal of this study is to illuminate something about the function of the nation-state as the dominant paradigm – how does that help or hinder liberation? In addition, how are understandings of history impacted by nationalism or understood through the framework of the nation? I believe the literary representations examined here explore how national identity is formed and inculcated within the site of the family. Exploring these formations that occur within the familial realm reflect how various types of national identity might be deployed or revised to help achieve national communities that are more inclusive and egalitarian. In this undertaking, the texts offer possibilities for new understandings of community and collective identity, understandings that rest on the need for confronting disjunctions within the nation and finding ways to forge ties within communities that do not rely on exploitative relationships.

In framing the discussion of the texts in this manner, the study underlines the functioning of historiography and memory within the narratives. The novels foreground the struggle for historical understanding against the backdrop of repression and loss of history, often drawn into focus through losses within the family. In turn, the familial narratives offer counter-histories that call into question the construction of dominant historiographies that often occlude oppressions

and fragmenting within the nation. In addition, the narratives draw attention to the way history and memory inform nationalism and how they play into trauma and understandings of history. These counter-histories typically highlight and foreground the absences of those lost to violent conquests, national struggle, and/or colonization. History and memory inform the narrative concerns and structuring of the plot as the narratives display the struggle for historical understanding in the face of loss of memory and trauma.

By focusing on counter-histories, the narratives draw attention to those whose voices are often absent. In other words, they draw attention to the victims of historical atrocities and reveal how their experiences and stories remain unrealized within the historical and national record. And the narratives foreground the struggle for historical understanding in the face of such loss. In showing the struggle for historical understanding, the narratives highlight how national histories are often not seamless narratives; rather, they continue to be fragmented and ruptured. Yet trying to understand history in the light of uncovering overlooked aspects remains important for understanding national formation and identity.

While this study takes part in the long-held premise that novels can reflect and examine the national context they emerge from, my examination of these texts also aims to consider the global issues raised within the novels. Examining the national history and issues of nationalism depicted by these works entails considering how such histories and questions of national identity intersect with current debates regarding globalization and the concomitant awareness of transnationalism in the field of English and literary studies. The debates concerning globalization often center on whether it acts as a force to unite and equalize people across the world or whether it serves to further entrench inequalities by making already and/or historically marginalized populations more vulnerable to neo-imperialist exploitation and western hegemony.

In *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*, Paul Jay uses an overview of these debates to assert that the new interest in transnationalism emerging from the issue of globalization in postcolonial studies belies the ways that literature has contained a transnational focus for much longer than typically supposed. He argues for “other approaches based on a global reframing of the origins, productions and concerns of what we have called ‘English’ literature, to look closely at how the production of English literature itself has increasingly become transnational, and how it has become engaged with a set of issues related to globalization” (5-6). This attention to a longer-standing and broader transnational focus than typically assumed allows for a better understanding of how current preoccupations with globalization intersect with issues of nationalism and postcolonial identity. Several of the novels in this study offer critical portrayals of globalization’s effects and those that do not specifically criticize globalization still criticize neo-imperialism. The novels in this study incorporate a transnational focus so as to place national history within a global context. I focus on this portrayal of transnationalism in the texts in order to explore how the treatment of nationalism in the novels raises a reconsideration of global identity.

Examining the global perspective in the novels allows for understanding the representation of traumas emerging from national, historical events entail understanding how such experiences link people across disparate histories, places, and identities. In this endeavor, the novels share a concern that somewhat aligns with Gayatri Spivak’s advocating for “planetary” in contrast to globalization<sup>2</sup>. Spivak asserts, “If we imagine ourselves as planetary

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<sup>2</sup> In her chapter on “Planetary” from *Death of a Discipline*, Spivak explains, “I propose the planet to overwrite the globe. Globalization is the imposition of the same system of exchange everywhere [...] The globe is on our computer. No one lives there. It allows us to think that we can aim to control it. The planet is in the species of alterity, belonging to another system; and yet we inhabit it, on loan. It is not really amenable to a neat contrast with

subjects rather than global agents, planetary creatures rather than global entities, alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away” (73). The narratives in this study evince a similar outlook when they portray characters imagining the world and their place within it as a means of grappling with and coming to terms with the regional history and/or national traumas that have affected them. As the narratives highlight the intertwining of national history within the larger world and negotiations between the familiar and the other, they aim for the “Empathic unsettlement” La Capra names. Thus, the images of the world and the planet, while emphasizing a global connection that might resonate with readers from around the world, are not meant to serve merely as a comforting homage to universalism. In bringing to bear Spivak’s idea of “planetarity” on readings of the texts, I attempt to locate ways in which the novels suggest depicting efforts to “work through” trauma might allow for different understandings of national identity. Re-conceptualizing national identity entails rethinking understandings of one’s relationship to the nation and national relationships to the world.

### **Chapter One: Uncanny Homes and Haunted Histories**

This chapter examines issues of nationalism in Northern Ireland focusing on Seamus Deane’s *Reading in the Dark* and Deirdre Madden’s *One by One in Darkness*. Both authors portray the political turmoil surrounding Northern Ireland regarding its contested status as part of Great Britain in order to explore how such a divisive history affects those in the region. In portraying the family history of those in the Catholic nationalist community, Deane and Madden

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the globe” (72). In advancing this concept of planetarity, Spivak calls for a rethinking of models of universality that do not rely on homogenization but rather recognize difference even within an image of universality.

represent the past's haunting power through the depictions of political violence, betrayal, and trauma that mark the families.

In representing the absent figures and silences that mark the family histories, the two novels portray how the history of the region continues to affect its inhabitants. In examining history's impact, Deane and Madden explore formations of national identity and how such identities develop in response to historical traumas. In their differing emphases, Deane and Madden both bring awareness to understanding family history against the backdrop of national history. The two narratives focus upon the intrusions of the political into the home, and how familial life and experiences shape political understanding and responses.

While both novels depict growing up in homes and families shaped by the aftermath of political violence and national struggle, they differ in their representation of responses to trauma. Deane's novel incorporates more of the elements of a detective story as the narrator seeks to uncover the truth of his family history, and thus the narrative focuses more on the tension between secrets and storytelling as a means to address the past. Madden's novel focuses on the reactions of family members to trauma in portraying the responses to the murder of a family member due to political violence. Their different emphases emerge from stories set in different time periods. *Reading in the Dark* takes place in the 1940s and 1950s, ending at the very beginning of the period of civil conflict in Northern Ireland known as "the Troubles". Thus, the recovery of family secrets and family history offered by the narrative segues into a depiction of the civil strife that has simmered below the surface and informed the context of the family history erupting into the social and national sphere. *One by One in Darkness*, on the other hand, incorporates a retrospective view of the "the Troubles" as the characters recall coming of age

during that time period and consider how it affected their view of home and family, as the political pressures shaped and intertwined with their childhood experiences.

While both Deane and Madden represent regional history through the family narratives in the text, the regional history and issues of nationalism give rise to representations of globality and attempts to see the regional history connected to the world. In Madden's novel, the ending conveys a sense of Spivak's understanding of "planetary" to provide an understanding of global views that characters arrive at after grappling with familial legacies of trauma and oppression whereas Deane's narrative gestures towards this idea but ultimately revolves around the tension between storytelling as a means to address the past and secrecy to protect one from the past in the face of grappling with violent oppression. In their representations of trauma and loss, the texts aim for "Empathic unsettlement" to connect the haunting and uncanny aspects of the narrative to issues of suffering and loss that emanate from, but resonate beyond, specific regional and national communities.

## **Chapter Two: Crossing Boundaries of History and Confronting Trauma**

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* both portray a post-colonial India to explore how familial conflicts and struggles mirror and encapsulate national history. In portraying the way inequalities and hierarchical relationships play out within the family sphere, the narratives critique the way state power is often enacted within the family in ways that constrain people's lives. However, both narratives draw attention to the ways in which the domestic space offers a site for undoing those hierarchical relationships and questioning existing inequalities.

The narratives examine issues of gender and how gender divisions within the nation and state come to be experienced and deployed within the familial sphere. In examining the common trope of women representing the nation and the home within nationalist discourse, the narratives explore the lived experience whereby women often are excluded, to varying degrees, from state power. Both narratives examine the often-tragic consequences that emerge when women are deprived of political power or agency and political oppressions are reproduced within the home. In addition, the symbolic burden placed on women to represent the nation, the community, and the family result in women being policed within the domestic sphere.

While both narratives focus on national relationships and identities inculcated in the home, especially regarding gender roles, Ghosh focuses on the experience of Partition and communalist violence arising in response to this historical event. Roy's novel examines inter-caste prejudice and oppression arising within a national community in order to explore how internal oppression and oppression and violence within the domestic sphere become intertwined with a colonial legacy of domination. In both instances, the novels examine the construction of borders and boundaries that give rise to the impulse to expel or eliminate those who threaten the idea of purity that such boundaries offer. Both novels portray love stories that cross boundaries in order to examine how such conflicts play out against a historical legacy of struggle for national independence.

In portraying love scenes that cross boundaries of national identity, community, and/or social boundaries, the narratives represent the acting out of trauma and loss as well as offering moments of utopian hope. In underscoring the ways that such encounters transgress boundaries, the novels both highlight the effects of boundaries and histories of oppression that engender the very illicit relationships they seek to control or contain; yet, in these encounters, the narratives



suggest that desire offers a venue for imagining alternative familial and social arrangements via utopian hopes that serve not to posit an idealized, alternative world as if it were readily attainable. Rather, they serve to critique the existing social order and remind readers of other social arrangements that may not include such oppression.

### **Chapter Three: Recreating Genealogy in Explorations of National History in Jamaican Literature**

Chapter Three explores the depiction of what Mordecai terms “reconstituted kinship” in *The True History of Paradise* by Margaret Cezair-Thompson and *No Telephone to Heaven* by Michelle Cliff. The two authors portray how in Jamaica historically familial ties have been severed due to slavery, colonization, and immigration. In the face of these historical upheavals, Jamaicans have had to confront these losses and attempt to recreate the family structures and relationships severed. The texts portray these attempts at “reconstituted kinship” resulting from investigations into genealogy that offer critiques of traditional understandings of genealogy and counter-genealogies. In formulating these critical counter-genealogies, the novels offer a counter-history intertwined with representations of Jamaican nationalism.

The two novels offer counter-histories that explore the protagonists developing and shifting conceptions of Jamaican nationalism; however, the two novels offer different trajectories for their respective protagonists that are reflected in the different journeys undertaken in each novel. Cliff’s protagonist, Clare Savage, after fleeing from Jamaica with her family as a young girl, lives abroad for several years before deciding to return home. Her return to Jamaica culminates in a decision to join a nationalist group of guerillas. Cezair-Thompson’s protagonist, Jean Landing, by contrast, ultimately decides to leave Jamaica and travel to the United States in

an attempt to escape the violence engulfing Jamaica. Thus, Cezair-Thompson's novel focuses more on the experience of emigration and attempting to understand the decision to leave one's homeland against a backdrop of history and nationalism emerging from the movement for independence. In contrast, Clare's decision to commit herself to national struggle after living in a sort of psychological exile from her homeland brings the narrative's focus to bear upon the experience of national struggle and commitment to a national community as a means of attempting to redress historical injustices. In examining these two varying journeys, I aim to explore how the narratives represent the struggle to understand and define national commitment in the face of violence and inequality.

In exploring the two narratives' varying depictions of exile and understandings of home, I aim to reveal how the texts suggest understandings of genealogy and family history can offer critical historical understandings that could potentially foster more egalitarian types of relationships within national communities. The characters' memories allow for the formulation of a counter-history that examines Jamaica's construction as a multicultural nation. In addition to persistent inequalities within the nation, the narratives represent the struggle for Jamaica to define itself autonomously in the face of pressure from US foreign policy that exacerbates violence within the country. Although the image of family is called upon to define the nation, persistent inequalities render the nation far from being a viable family.

#### **Chapter Four: Forging New Families: Resisting and Rewriting Patriarchal Nationalism**

In this chapter, I examine the critiques of patriarchal nationalism offered by Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Both authors depict the *trujillato*, the reign of the dictator Trujillo, in order to explore the destruction

wrought by his tyrannical rule. In addition, Díaz's acknowledgement note to Danticat at the end of the book suggests he is familiar with her work (338), and both authors explore similar historical ground. However, both texts go beyond simply depicting the historical period in order to question how family structures reinforce exploitative or repressive models of nationalism and how familial bonds can also undermine divisiveness and offer solidarity in the face of oppression.

Although both novels differ in terms of genre, familial life, and time period, both utilize their depiction of familial interactions and history to offer a critique of Trujillo's patriarchal nationalism as well as the legacy of colonialism and political interests of US neo-imperialism, both of which lent support to Trujillo's dictatorship. Danticat's novel is historical fiction and it recreates the trujillato of the 1930's from the vantage point of one of the regime's victims: a young Haitian woman who has grown up on the Dominican side of the island and works as a maid. Amabelle must flee the household where she has lived and served for most of her life to return to her homeland when violence against Haitians erupts. Danticat's text figures family as a marker or reminder of what is lost in nationalist violence. The family Amabelle remembers is mainly loving and nurturing and her early childhood and home life in a rural Haitian setting is recalled in fairly idyllic terms.

Díaz, by contrast, depicts a family struggling with diaspora after Trujillo's reign has ended and facing cultural conflicts in the US as members of a minority immigrant community. Meanwhile, they must deal with the effects the violent, abusive legacy of the trujillato continues to exert on the family. The dislocation experienced by the family is mirrored in Díaz's deployment of sci-fi/fantasy genres, which contrasts with Danticat's more straightforward historical fiction. Although Díaz grounds his writing in portraying the history of the Dominican

Republic, he infuses his story with sci-fi/fantasy references as well as supernatural elements in order to undermine Trujillo's grandiose self-mythologizing and replace that with an examination of the evils wrought by the dictator's rule.

In exploring the effects of Trujillo's rule from the vantage point of those who suffer under it, both writers incorporate historical references and representations of ancestral memory to draw attention to earlier historical atrocities that precede the dictator's rule. Both narratives depict reminders of slavery and the annihilation of the indigenous peoples of Hispaniola. These elements link the political oppression of the trujillato with the earlier conquest of the island and the legacy of colonization and slavery.

In recalling Haiti and the Dominican Republic's past atrocities and linking them to a U.S.-backed dictator, Danticat and Díaz reveal how neo-imperialism continues to beset the Caribbean and hamper its attempts to craft a more viable national political structure. However, the ability of those who to form familial bonds in the face of oppression and destruction offers a model for reconstructing social and cultural bonds and re-imagining national identity. I argue that the texts aim to represent the experience of migrants, immigrants, and those marginalized by the state forging familial bonds as a means of fostering community in the face of loss and trauma. In these representations, Danticat and Díaz write against historical and ongoing oppressions by subverting patriarchal nationalism's attempts to "purify" the nation with depictions of families and familial bonds that reject such models and methods of control.

## Chapter One: Uncanny Homes and Haunted Histories

Since the 1994 ceasefire in Northern Ireland, novelists have looked back at the time period that came to be known as “the Troubles” in an effort to narrate the experience of political upheaval and violence which marked the time period<sup>1</sup>. As Michael Parker asserts, “[t]races of the political translations and cultural reconfigurations taking place immediately before, during and after the 1994 ceasefires can be easily described in the fiction of the period” (176). He identifies Seamus Deane’s *Reading in the Dark* and Deirdre Madden’s *One by One in Darkness* as novels “which movingly survey a substantial stretch of Northern Irish history and diagnose how the province came to its current pass” (176). In looking back at history to make sense of the present, Deane and Madden explore how historical understandings are forged by various forces beyond strict historiography, such as folk tales, memory, and family lore. Family history and family lore contribute to historical understandings, thus the novels portray the family as a site where historical understanding is formed and also a site where history’s events and effects are experienced.

Using familial experiences and family history as a lens allows Deane and Madden to offer a more complex, historically situated representation of the conflict in Northern Ireland than is commonly portrayed. Critics have noted the problems that writers face in representing this conflict. In particular, “the most formidable problems are those of ‘familiarity’ and ‘repetitiveness,’ both of which relate to the challenge of reaching an audience and leading it beyond the gross simplifications and distortions served up by the sensationalist narratives of tabloids, films, and pulp fiction” (Harte and Parker 5). Deane and Madden delve deeper into the ‘familia[r]’ and ‘repetitiv[e]’ narratives of Northern Irish history by utilizing family stories to

depict identity formation, ostensibly of individual characters within the narrative, but in ways that illuminate the formation of collective, national identity. In other words, the development of the characters' historical understanding that emerges from the family histories in the novels illuminates how such understandings inform national identity. In addition, both narratives depict the past as haunting in order to defamiliarize history by emphasizing its uncanny qualities and making what is often assumed to be familiar unfamiliar.

In defamiliarizing the familiar, Deane and Madden engage in depicting what Bhabha terms the "unhomely" when there is an intrusion of the historical or political into the home, rendering the world of the home "uncanny" (141). Bhabha describes literature depicting familiar spaces made unfamiliar by the intertwining of the public and political with the domestic and familiar. In representing scenes of haunting and depictions of silence that make familiar homes appear strange and uncanny, the narratives deploy the "unhomely" quality Bhabha describes in portraying the way family life and political turmoil become constitutive of one another. The narratives' depictions of home life and family space transformed into strange and unfamiliar places reveal the haunting power of the past. In addition, the portrayals of family life and family history evoke issues of nationalism and national identity. Portrayals of nationalism and the development of national identity emerge from the narratives' portrayals of national and historical trauma. Exploring the effects of trauma reveals the power of the past to shape the present and impact understandings of national identity.

Robert F. Garratt in his study *Trauma and History in the Irish Novel: The Return of the Dead* notes the characteristics that novels engaging with historical trauma use to depict trauma, such as featuring characters who survive violence and traumatic experiences yet are haunted by the events later, and that "[e]ither as witnesses or participants in an act of violence, these

characters are portrayed as permanently attached to that moment, unable to let it go or to understand it with any certainty or without considerable suffering” (3). Garratt draws upon LaCapra’s idea of “writing trauma” to discuss recent Irish historical novels that function as “trauma novels.” He distinguishes “trauma novels” from “novels about trauma” which are those that center more upon trauma as an outside force affecting character and plot but relying upon more traditional novelistic elements rather than incorporating traumatic effects stylistically (6). In contrast, he describes “trauma novels” as:

employ[ing] a narrative strategy in which a reconstruction of events through memories, flashbacks, dreams, and haunting is as important as the events themselves. In a trauma novel, both subject and method become central: in addition to developing trauma as an element of the story and part of its dramatic action, it depicts the process by which a person encounters and comes to know a traumatic event or moment that has previously proved inaccessible. (6)

In this designation, Garratt illuminates the unknowable and unnarratable aspect of trauma that nevertheless gives rise to attempts to represent its effects in literary forms and structures. His designation of Deane’s novel, among others, as a “trauma novel” emphasizes the repetition of history, the preoccupation with memory, and the recurring depictions of haunting that serve as central and structuring elements of both Deane and Madden’s works.

Deane’s novel *Reading in the Dark* focuses on a young boy discovering familial secrets that involve searching out buried and suppressed history and in the process becoming more aware of how interpretation influences understanding, thus entailing the work of “reading in the dark” alluded to in the title. As the unnamed narrator/protagonist uncovers more of his family history, he discovers that his mother’s anguish and traumatized reliving of painful memories

relates to her involvement in a betrayal affecting those closest to her. She loved Tony McIlhenny, who eventually left her to marry her younger sister, Katie. While Katie was pregnant, the mother notified her father, an IRA man, that McIlhenny was a police informant. This led to McIlhenny fleeing the country to escape retribution. What the mother finds out in the course of the narrative, and what causes her anguished reliving of the past that makes such an impression upon the narrator, is that her father ordered the execution of her husband's brother, Eddie, not realizing at the time that McIlhenny was the real informer. The story of family secrets, hidden betrayals, and the ensuing agony they cause connects to and illuminates the historical context of the legacy of colonization that brings pressure to bear upon a minority community defined in opposition to the imperial power. Thus, in revealing how historical oppressions continue to be experienced in the sectarian divisions that foster both inter and intra-community tensions, the narrative serves as a "nationalized autobiography" (Longley, qtd. in Harte).

Likewise, Madden's novel utilizes family stories to provide a window into the lived political situation of Northern Ireland and the effects of political violence. The novel tells the story of a Catholic family in Northern Ireland with three daughters who grow up during the Troubles. Chronologically Madden's novel picks up where Deane's concludes by narrating the Troubles mainly retrospectively via the childhood memories of the sisters at the center of the narrative. While the focalization of the narrative occurs through all three daughters and the mother, briefly, the narrative is mainly focalized through Helen, the eldest daughter who works as a lawyer and is most deeply involved through her profession in questions of political justice. The multiple viewpoints and different storylines of the three girls allows the narrative to portray a variety of reactions and responses to loss, trauma, and political violence as the characters grapple with the death of Charlie, the father of the family, at the hands of Loyalist gunmen.



In portraying the effects of trauma, both Deane and Madden suggest that confronting historical atrocities of the past in the context of national struggle entails utilizing nationalism to develop a global perspective. This perspective aligns with what Spivak terms “planetarity<sup>3</sup>.” As the narratives evoke a perspective of planetarity emerging out of engagement with local histories and national struggles or conflicts, they underscore the need for seeing nationalism within the context of the world. In Madden’s novel, the main character Helen recalls her childhood imaginings of flying over the planet, seeing various homes and families until finally seeing her own. This image is marred as an adult because recalling this image insistently conjures up images of her father’s violent death. As Helen reflects on her imagining, though, the image depicted underscores a perspective of “planetarity” whereby a perspective of the world entails recognizing the uniqueness and difference within the world rather than an image of unified homogeneity offered by globalization. While *Reading in the Dark* does not emphasize global imaginings as deeply, the narrator still exhibits a key awareness of the need for viewing history in a global, rather than strictly local context. Attempting to understand his family history, which involves delving into local history, leads the narrator to eventually conclude that to truly understand history, he needs to see beyond the local issues to instead view history from a more global perspective. In concert with the narrator’s realization, though, is an emphasis in the novel of the importance of this global perspective emerging from an understanding of the local. In both instances, the novels emphasize the suffering engendered by particular political circumstances yet also connect these to world history. Simultaneously, the novels also advocate not rejecting

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<sup>3</sup> As discussed in the introduction, Spivak’s concept of “planetarity” offers a response to theoretical concepts of globalization that abstract the idea of the world into the image of the globe, emphasizing homogeneity. In contrast, planetarity offers a view of the world that allows for recognizing otherness without seeing such a state as threatening (Spivak 73).

local and national understandings for a homogenized, universalized view. Understandings of local and national events viewed through the context of world history allow the narratives to advance an implicit call for seeing in postcolonial struggles for independence a means for forging more just social and national arrangements.

In what follows, I examine the historical background interwoven in each novel as well as how the depictions of historiography within the novels aligns with trends of narrativizing history in Irish literature. This discussion of history serves to open a discussion of the haunting nature of the past and how this sense of haunting conveys traumas that reverberate within the family and connect to national history. In exploring these connections to national history, I discuss Linden Peach's deployment of Freud's term *Nachträglichkeit* (which, Peach explains "means the way in which what has given rise to the trauma that has affected the patient, even though s/he may have suppressed the memory, returns to them" (38)). In order to examine Peach's contention that it allows for understanding trauma on a national scale while allowing for a critical stance towards certainties often advocated within nationalistic discourse. I connect this to Luke Gibbons's critique of the "therapeutic approach" to history that can seek to conclude historical narratives even though those that contain trauma may not allow for such simple conclusions. Gibbons uses this critique to investigate the ways in which Irish have used understandings of their history in order to build solidarity with other anticolonial struggles. In taking up Gibbons's argument about the need for utilizing nationalism as a means to engage with other struggles for national independence and/or justice, I aim to explore how the literature discussed in this chapter depicts such a model of engagement emerging from anti-colonial politics and nationalism rooted in familial experience.

*Reading in the Dark* and *One by One in Darkness* contain portrayals of Northern Irish history that examine the experience of sectarian violence and ongoing historical oppression. Both texts incorporate portrayals of the time period known as the Troubles, in which “[v]iolence in Northern Ireland broke out in the late 1960s and continued for almost thirty-five years, casting its shadow over political, social and cultural opinion in Ireland” (Garratt 2). Although both authors represent the historical period from different angles—Deane’s novel ends with the beginning of the Troubles while Madden’s portrays characters looking back on their childhood during that historical period in order to understand its influence upon their lives—both represent the Troubles’ historical context and connection to issues of nationalism<sup>4</sup>.

The texts examine the time period retrospectively, as the novels were published when Northern Ireland had begun a peace process. As Liam Harte claims, by turning to this time period in the recent past, they thus participate in a tendency of literature of that era to “ope[n] up new artistic as well as political perspectives on the sectarian violence and religious bigotry which had plagued the province for a quarter of a century” (149). This outbreak of violence emerged from the aftermath of Northern Ireland being divided from Ireland when it gained its independence from England. This division of Ireland and Northern Ireland led to sectarian divisions between Loyalists, who were mainly Protestant and wanted Northern Ireland to remain a part of Great Britain, and republicans and nationalists, generally Catholic, who wanted Northern Ireland reunited with Ireland. The conflict over Northern Ireland’s political and national status led to periodic conflicts and eventually erupted in the time period that came to be known as “the Troubles” in the late 1960s. This emerged from increasing calls for civil rights for the Catholic minority that had experienced discrimination and not been fully included in

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<sup>4</sup> For a critical overview of the political situation in Northern Ireland and the period of violent fighting between Unionists and Nationalists known as “The Troubles”, see Michael Parker, *Northern Irish Literature, 1975-2006*.

Northern Irish society. A backlash against this movement emerging from fears that Catholic nationalists who wanted to join the Republic of Ireland would undermine the state of Northern Ireland led to sectarian violence that was to last for decades. As Marianne Elliot explains in her historical study, *The Catholics of Ulster*, “In 1969 all the undercurrents which had gone to create that fearful and suspicious part of Ulster mentality suddenly exploded” (417).

Deane and Madden convey the effects of the division between Northern Ireland and Ireland and bring a particular focus to the experience of the Catholic minority population in Northern Ireland. The authors focus on this experience through incorporating historical narratives that are often interwoven through family stories. As Garratt notes, “Deane’s narrator in *Reading in the Dark* grows up in a republican family in post World War II Derry listening to family stories and rumors of his grandfather’s and uncle’s involvement in the political troubles in 1922 Ulster, when Ireland was divided into two political entities: the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland” (98). He continues to explain the impact of this year for the narrator’s family and community in stating, “1922 was a particularly difficult time for Catholics in Northern Ireland, who were seen by the Protestant majority as threats and as troublemakers; this view often led to political and economic discrimination, isolation of the minority, and occasional outbreaks of violence between the two communities” (ibid). This experience of discrimination with resulting bouts of violence comes to affect the characters in the story, and representing these effects allows for the incorporation of historical understandings in the texts.

Issues of how to understand the past dominate the narratives as both portray characters continually overwhelmed by history. These portrayals of the past continually returning to affect understandings of the present resonate with Costanza del R  o’s argument that: “the frequent perception of Irish history as violent, conflicting, fragmented, chaotic, and discontinuous [...]

transform[s] Irish history, not into a classical narrative with a clear beginning, middle and ending providing a sense of closure, but into an experimental open-ended text that continuously demands revisitation and re-interpretation, since there would always lurk the uncertainty of possible misreadings and lack of understanding” (139). She asserts that this non-linear history becomes a “Gothic history” and continues to explain, “Seeing Irish history as a Gothic narrative brings to mind that a staple Gothic motif [...] is the dynamic established between the past and the present, whereby a despotic and tyrannic past visits and haunts the present” (ibid). Linden Peach likewise asserts the tendency for writers to depict Irish history in gothic terms. However, he emphasizes that literary portrayals do so not to necessarily show the past as dominating the present but rather emphasize that viewing history as haunted and haunting calls into question understandings of history as bounded and easily understood. He notes:

Even a cursory reading of Irish fiction in the 1980s and 1990s suggests that it is a ‘haunted’ literature. I don’t mean by this that it is preoccupied with ghosts and phantoms in their conventional sense [...] rather, that it is concerned with haunting, ghosts, and specters as manifestations of what, in the cultural critic Fredric Jameson’s words, ‘makes the present waver [...]’ In much Irish fiction, the points at which the text reveals itself as possibly more cryptic than we thought, mirror the way in which our epistemological understanding of nation, locale, history and human behaviour [sic] as knowable is disrupted. (41)

While the gothic histories portrayed in the texts do serve to represent the way the present is haunted by the past as del R o describes, they also portray haunting in order to question our ability to know the past. In depicting ghostly presences and haunting, the novels do, as Peach via Jameson contends, ‘mak[e] the present waver’ and thus permit a reading of how history remains

unfinished and unclosed. In depicting the present and past intertwining via hauntings, the novels provoke reevaluations of received understandings of history and nation.

The gothic elements of the text serve an important purpose in narratives concerned with history and historiography. As Flannery notes in regards to *Reading in the Dark*, “[t]he acute compression of the sectarian society compels this coincidence of the real and the phantasmal” (77). Thus, the ongoing colonial divisions within the region bring pressure to bear on the inhabitants and pivotal historical events or experiences are often represented as haunting elements. In colonial contexts where oppositional moments in history are typically suppressed, accessing such history entails developing historical understanding in a way that questions the formation of traditional history.

Thus, in both narratives, memory plays a crucial role in allowing for portrayals of the past, especially ones that counter official historical accounts or that give voice to less recognized historical experiences. Additionally, memory becomes the focal point for the narratives’ engagement with trauma, as memory has the power to trap characters into reliving traumas. As Parker notes, “One of the most terrible ironies in *Reading in the Dark* surrounds its concern with memory and history. Whereas for the author, the poet and novelist, memory functions as a potent cultural resource, for the narrator’s mother it is a curse since it brings constantly to mind past transgressions, humiliations and failures” (*Northern Irish Literature* 190). The narratives highlight this double-edged nature of memory—cultural resource and curse—in exploring the role memory plays in affecting historical understanding and offering a means for shaping new historical understandings. Both narratives portray families struggling to grapple with the impact of traumatic events arising from the historical sectarian divides and political turmoil of the region. The texts render how the haunting nature of the traumatic event causes characters to feel

as if they relive the pain of the past; however, the narratives also represent memory as safeguarding and providing access to historical understandings that are suppressed or otherwise excluded from dominant discourses. Although painful, unwanted memories torment certain characters, the representation of such memories within the narratives serves to highlight the necessity of grappling with the past in order to understand present-day conflicts.

Flannery, in his discussion of *Reading in the Dark*'s representation of political history, asserts, "Memory serves the present in the form of conciliatory narratives, and as a means of empowerment in the face of an obliterating colonial regime. Equally, the construction of an historical horizon is realised in the constitution of a narrative, a facility of interpretation that is a means of generating tradition" (74). Thus, memory offers a tool for reclaiming history, especially history that has been dominated by an imperial power. Both narratives explore the urge to revisit such a history and understand aspects of it that have remained occluded.

The two narratives offer counter-histories emerging in memory, local lore, and family stories. The family history thus opens up historical issues within the region. In *Reading in the Dark*, the family history intersects with the national history surrounding sectarian divisions within the community, the family's involvement with the I.R.A., and nationalist sentiments and ideas fomented and discussed within the home. In *One by One in Darkness*, the novel portrays the history of "The Troubles" via narrating the family members' various memories of experiencing this time period as well as the experience of growing up as part of the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland. In both novels, these national and political experiences are often filtered through the perspective of childhood, which inculcates the reader into a growing awareness of how such experiences shape lives as the characters themselves struggle to understand the shaping effects of history and their community. The attention to the local,

domestic, and familial within the “broader history” of a nation reveals how such experiences connect to historical ones. For instance, both novels describe characters’ childhood memories shaped by police searches of their homes for falsely-suspected IRA involvement. The narratives undermine the assumption that familial experience is private and separate from the realm of official history and/or national politics.

In utilizing familial histories and experiences to depict broader historical experiences, the authors depict coming-of-age experiences in order to represent developing awareness of regional history and the shaping effects on family and self. Deane’s novel is often described as a “Bildungsroman” in which the anonymous narrator’s maturity is bound up with his immersion in family history and growing awareness of how the family history provides insight into national history. As the narrator begins to piece together the complex family history, he discovers the secrets and betrayals intersect with local and national political developments. As he realizes this he begins to understand how the repetition of certain experiences and losses signal the cost of political oppression. Likewise, Madden’s novel frames the family’s loss as representing the suffering engendered by the political violence emerging out of historical patterns in the region. Historical traumas and losses are experienced across generations, rendering the history of the narratives “gothic” in del Rio’s terms. The haunting nature of the past and the narratives’ emphasis on absences and losses reveal the historical traumas present within the familial sphere.

Yet while the texts emphasize the experience of feeling trapped in the past that occurs with trauma, they also emphasize the power of interpretation. Within the coming-of-age narratives, the texts contain depictions of an evolving awareness of history as the characters must confront the political context shaping their reality and an increasing ability to come to terms with it and confront its effects. For instance, the protagonist in *Reading in the Dark* and Helen in *One*



by *One in Darkness* both become conscious of the ways in which the study of history selects certain events and aspects of history and can circumscribe understanding through historical discourse. As the two encounter versions of local and/or familial history in school lessons, they become aware of the distance between the two.

The haunting nature of the past may remain, however, the narratives underscore the possibilities for emerging from an engaged understanding of the haunting past to view historical and national traumas from a global perspective that no longer restricts portrayals of such history to divided and dichotomous understandings.

In this regard, the historical understandings offered by the texts underscore the desire to view the past as interpretable and historiography as open to new understandings. While del Río characterizes representations of Irish history as “gothic” with the past continually haunting the present, she also argues

history, tradition, and the past, when summoned and appropriated by a subject that recreates them imaginatively, narrativising them as open and fluid texts, as texts in constant progress and process, can become fundamental tools in forging a sense of identity that manages to evade the fixities and essentialist dichotomies imposed first by colonial resistance and then by a post-colonial ‘anomalous’ situation. (141)

Thus, the texts’ interest in revisiting and revising understandings of the past allows for possibilities in navigating understandings of national identity that allow for more flexible and nuanced depictions of nationalism.

Both texts depict nationalism by exploring familial interactions and histories that intersect with nationalism. At times the novels utilize the family as an allegorical representation of the nation, as the experiences of the family represent Northern Irish society; however, the

counter-histories offered by the texts go beyond circumscribed, allegorical accounts of the nation to explore the impact of national trauma on understandings of national identity. Such explorations lead the novels to examine regional conflicts within the context of world history. Both texts emphasize the need for revising understandings of nationalism to effect change from the past.

Peach, in his study of *Reading in the Dark*, examines the use of the Freudian concept of “Nachträglichkeit” for understanding trauma on a national scale. The novels’ portrayals of haunting correspond with Freud’s account of suppressed memories that return to haunt characters. Peach asserts that “one might see this as analogous of the way in which the nation is deprived of its conventional narratives and ideological defences” (39)<sup>5</sup>. In the novel’s utilization of this, Peach theorizes a recuperation of nationalism that has been afoot in literary studies. Peach argues that “Nachträglichkeit undermines the sense of certainty and stability that nationalism can provide” (39). Yet, this undermining does not necessarily render nationalism useless or outmoded, for Peach continues to explain,

it is important not to see this stability [provided by nationalism] as anti-modern. For some time ‘nationalism’ and ‘modernism’ in Ireland were perceived as mutually exclusive. But contemporary scholarship no longer conceives of nationalism as necessarily ‘atavistic, racist, nostalgic and militant’, recognizing that it can serve as ‘a strategy, in both culture and politics, of giving back to the individual subject or to a community, a sense of hope and coherence, in the face of the shattering, fragmenting experience of modernity’ (McCarthy, 2000: 17). (ibid)

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<sup>5</sup> For an elaboration on these ideas, refer to Linden Peach, “Chapter 3: Secret Hauntings” in *The Contemporary Irish Novel*.

For the characters in the novel, who have experienced or must witness and confront the experience of ‘shattering, fragmenting’ experiences of trauma wrought by political violence, wrestling with and revising understandings of nationalism offer a means to understand experiences that have shaped individuals and communities. While remaining aware of the repressive functions nationalism engages in, both narratives emphasize the potential for addressing the past and addressing trauma through understandings of national history and national identity that emerge in the wake of confronting *Nachträglichkeit*.

While both novels utilize nationalism to explore the history and events that have shaped communities and peoples, Deane and Madden remain attentive to issues within postcolonial nationalism. Therefore, while the novels address history from an anti-colonial perspective, they remain critical of postcolonial nationalism as well with a recognition that postcolonial nationalism can repeat and instantiate oppressive and exploitative behaviors and tactics within nationalist struggles. As Dermot Kelly asserts, “for Seamus Deane, as for James Joyce in Deane’s view, nationalism is a condition of oppression” (435). Liam Harte offers a similar claim, explaining how Deane’s anti-colonial stance leads to a critical take on postcolonial nationalism:

his critique of colonialism does not lead to an axiomatic celebration of the post-colonial nation as the proper outcome of the process of anti-colonial struggle. Rather it is underpinned by a view of postcolonial nationalism as repressive and monolithic, being ‘*mutatis mutandis*, a copy of that by which it felt itself to be oppressed’. This recognition of the ideological restrictions of colonialism *and* postcolonialism is the starting point for much of Deane’s critical writing and, I would argue, forms an important part of the ideological subtext of *Reading in the Dark*. (151)

If Deane explores the pitfalls of postcolonial nationalism, Madden remains attentive to noting the diversity within national communities, something often missed in both colonialist views and nationalist ideology as well. Michael Parker discusses the portrayal of pluralism within the Northern Irish Catholic community, which is often portrayed as monolithic. He notes the differing responses and individualized memories of the Quinn sisters in *One by One in Darkness*. He sees the varying reactions of the characters as countering the image of a unified, homogenous political community, asserting

Too often critiques [...] have overstated the homogeneity of the northern nationalist community, characterizing its members as uniformly 'atavistic', 'traditionalist' and 'reactionary' in their thinking. Certainly, the sense of siege within the northern nationalist enclaves following the founding of Northern Ireland in the 1920s and again in the late 1960s and early 1970s, when violence erupted again, did generate a high degree of inter- and intra-generational solidarity, but Madden is at pains to present diversity in the reactions to the political crisis. Increasingly the Quinns in *One by One* read the same text differently. (178)

Thus, according to Parker, both Deane and Madden evince an awareness of anti-colonial nationalism needing to avoid reproducing the same models of oppression or monolithic identity perpetuated by colonization in order for nationalism to provide a means for addressing historical wrongs. In their respective narratives' emphasis on "read[ing] the same text differently," both Deane and Madden underscore the varying possibilities for developing revised understandings of national identity and nationalism. In addition, acquiring the ability to read national narratives and develop one's own interpretation marks the character's development within the narrative as well

as emphasizing the necessity for coming to terms with issues of national identity rather than adopting limited and limiting characterizations of nationalism.

Luke Gibbons discusses how attending to national history can aid in better understanding other situations of oppression. In his article “The Global Cure? History, Therapy, and the Celtic Tiger”, he questions the language of therapy surrounding discussions of the Celtic Tiger and its effects upon cultural understandings of the Irish past. He argues that the therapy model, applied to understanding history and traumas of the past, has led to a debate between revisionism and post-revisionism, in which advocates of revisionism tend to seek to dismantle nationalist historiographies preoccupation with past wrongs, whereas post-revisionism “persist[ed] in attributing to powerful global forces—British colonialism, imperialism, the capitalist world system” culpability for past and persistent wrongs (90-1). Such debates reveal the reason for a desire to see Ireland in a post-national and more global era, which results in the search for what Gibbons calls the “global cure” which is “not so much an abolition of the past but its integration into wider, ‘normalising’ narratives of the kind found in advanced European or Anglo-American societies” (91). However, such debates can lead to a false expectation of healing to occur by ‘sealing off’ history<sup>6</sup>. Gibbons explains, “Perhaps the difficulty here lay in the therapeutic approach to history in the first place, which seeks to effect a premature closure to political crises [...] that admit of no such easy resolutions” (99). Gibbons argues instead for a ‘rooted cosmopolitanism’ that allows one to engage with a national or specific identity and past in order to make connections between that history and other histories in other locations.

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<sup>6</sup> For a further explanation on how the Celtic Tiger (the boom economy that Ireland experienced in the 1990’s) led to cultural debates about Ireland’s changing identity and re-evaluation of the past, see Luke Gibbons, “The Global Cure? History, Therapy and the Celtic Tiger” in *Reinventing Ireland* (89-94).

In discussing examples of Irish nationalists who were inspired to work for humanitarian causes and/or rights of indigenous people because of their own experience with colonialism in Ireland, Gibbons notes how a view of Ireland's historical experience as a colonized nation led to sympathy with other nations experiencing colonial domination and exploitation. Gibbons explains that such examples serve not as general characterizations of Irish nationalism, but rather to highlight the possibilities for nationalism allowing for a global view and international engagement. As he explains, the examples of Irish nationalists who found solidarity with third-world struggles for freedom from colonial domination "contest the common assumption that preoccupation with one's culture and with the past, particularly an oppressive past, militates against international solidarity and an embrace of cultural diversity in a modern social polity" (102). Gibbons's argument frames an understanding of how nationalism may be used to engage with others across the globe.

An awareness of past oppressions and sufferings may be more critical to a post-independent nationalism than ever. As Gibbons explains:

while critics denigrate the establishment of historical affinities between Irish society and developing nations, the reality of globalization is that Ireland is coming into far greater contact with outlying regions of the world economy—and, as immigration shows, with the casualties as well as the beneficiaries of the new world order. The capacity of a society to retrieve the memory of its own unacknowledged others—those who paid the price in different ways for its own rise to prosperity—is a measure of its ability to establish global solidarities with 'the other' without, both at home and abroad. (100)

Thus, Gibbons's awareness of recognizing 'the other' within one's national community and history in order to engender international solidarity resonates with Spivak's idea of "planetarity"

which she sees as offering an understanding of the world where “alterity remains underived from us; it is not our dialectical negation, it contains us as much as it flings us away” (73). The texts emphasize the possibility for such occurrences of engagement through offering portrayals of national struggle and national politics within the context of global and humanitarian issues. The “unhomeliness” that characterizes much of the narratives’ portrayals of homes and familial spaces affected by political turmoil leads to re-evaluations of home, family, and nation. In these questionings and revisions, the texts offer reflections upon global views as a means for engaging with world issues from a non-imperialist and anti-colonial standpoint. Such reflections emphasize that national engagement and nationalism can emerge from solidarity and a desire for justice formulated by familial ties.

### **Reading in the Dark**

Seamus Deane’s semi-autobiographical novel, *Reading in the Dark*, contains a family narrative within the context of Northern Ireland’s troubled political landscape. The novel incorporates features from various genres, such as gothic elements, a detective story, and a *Bildungsroman*. The various elements combine to offer an account of the narrator’s evolving understanding of his family history and the history of the region with which it intersects. In addition, the boy gains an awareness of how the national and regional history surrounding him connects to world history. Such evolving understandings in turn shape the depictions of nationalism as replicating past oppressions yet still potentially offering a venue towards working for a more just social order. The protagonist’s evolving understanding represents an awareness emerging from an engagement with familial and in turn, national history.

In this section, I examine how the depictions of the “unhomeliness” of the family

home and the haunting nature of the familial past and secrets serve to portray a critique of imperialist nationalism. In addition, the novel offers a critical view of anti-colonial nationalism in underscoring how it often continues, rather than curtails, abuses wrought by colonialism. The novel's critiques underscore the need for imagining a postcolonial nationalism that does not replicate the power structures of colonial rule, but rather seeks to liberate inhabitants of the regions from such domination.

The family history and familial interactions reveal the effects of colonial rule on the Catholic population of Northern Ireland as well as the effects of resisting that rule and engaging in anti-colonial national struggle. As the narrator seeks to uncover his family's secrets, he begins to understand his mother's trauma and the repetition of past events that continues to permeate and haunt the family. In portraying atrocities emerging from the struggle for political control over the region, Deane suggests that national trauma must be worked through even as the narrator ambiguously longs to seal away the family history he desperately seeks to uncover and understand.

The narrative emphasizes the "unhomeliness" of the narrator's home from the very beginning, as the first chapter describes a haunting presence on the stairs that causes the mother to warn the boy away from climbing the stairs to be near her. While the narrative incorporates supernatural elements, such as this depiction of the haunting figure within the home, the realism of the narrative underscores that the literary depictions of ghostly presences represent the haunting guilt and suffering of the past. As Peach notes in comparing Deane's novel to Toni Morrison's *Beloved*, both are "sophisticated ghost stories" in which "[b]oth novels turn on a significant absence, or absent presence" (46). These absent presences continually return to haunt the narrative, serving as reminders of terrible secrets from the past.



The various uncanny, ghostly experiences recounted in the novel's opening chapters reveal a world and a home already becoming strange and eerie to the narrator. He recounts how watching a magic show where the magician disappears at the end with no final reappearance leads him to wonder what happened to the magician. He is not reassured by the explanation that the man has simply disappeared down a trap-door and instead wonders at the audience's laughing and clapping (6). This uneasiness in the face of disappearances foreshadows the several troubling ones he later encounters. His younger sister Una dies, yet the boy encounters her ghost in the cemetery. Additionally, the boy overhears rumors and stories about his father's brother, his Uncle Eddie, who supposedly ran off to Chicago. These uncanny and troubling absences emphasize the troubled surrounding social world the boy begins to encounter.

The sharply divided and divisive make-up of Derry reveals how the vexed political situation continually impacts the home, making it strange and exemplifying Bhabha's account regarding "the intimate recesses of the domestic space become sites for history's most intricate invasions" (141). The narrator provides accounts of political skirmishes, such as the shoot-out at the Distillery that his Uncle Eddie had taken part in, and he recounts the IRA shooting in "protest at the founding of the new state." He describes the ruins of the distillery as "a burnt space in the heart of the neighborhood" (34). Additionally, when the police attempt to disperse a St. Patrick's Day riot, the boy recalls how those pursued poured oil on the streets so that the police cars skidded out of control while pursuing the protesters and "[t]he whole street seemed to be bent sideways, tilted by the blazing hoardings into the old Gaelic football ground" (35). Thus, the public spaces within the boy's neighborhood, sites that are so familiar to him, simultaneously appear as surreal and strange through the eruption of political turmoil. Yet, the strange and eerie sights of the "burnt space" and the street appearing "bent sideways" also embody geographical

touchstones that call up familiar lore and stories by which the boy knows his identity and understands his surroundings.

Similar invasions occur within the home, intertwining it with the political world. One incursion occurs when the police raid the house after the narrator unwittingly lets slip that his father has a gun in the house. As the police tear up the floors and smash items in search of the weapon, the narrator describes how “[o]bjects seemed to be floating, free of gravity, all over the room” (29-30). The familiar sight of the home suddenly seems strange and unnatural due to the upheaval of the raid. The boy experiences panic long after the raid and subsequent interrogation, as he has nightmares about being questioned regarding the gun and notes, “If a light flickered from the street beyond, the image of a police car would reappear and my hair would feel starched and my hands sweaty. The police smell took the oxygen out of the air and left me sitting there, with my chest heaving” (30). Thus, the anxiety produced by the police raid continues to affect the young boy and his account underscores the vulnerability experienced by those subject to such raids.

Such intrusions that make the home unhomely do not occur only in the present time of the narrative, which is the 1950’s; rather, local legend and folklore emphasizes how familial spaces have been continually invaded by the haunting of history. The narrator’s Aunt Katie relates a story of a young woman named Brigid, sent to care for two orphaned children while their guardian is away. The story of the possessed, haunted, and haunting children serves as a folkloric reminder of the famine. Although the famine only comes into play tangentially (the children’s parents died during the famine, although not due to hunger or poverty but rather illness), the ghostly presences evoke the destruction of the mass deaths and the haunting it continues to wreak a generation later. The story emphasizes how the orphaned children are

eventually consumed and possessed by haunting presences of the past. This ghostly story provides a counter-history of the famine; rather than directly narrating experiences of that historical event, it obliquely addresses the famine and represents the suffering and loss continuing to endure from that historical period. In addition, the ghost story provides an explanatory connection to current local events as Katie, relating how the young woman caring for the children went mad after her supernatural encounter, asserts that “the blight’s on that family to this very day” (73). Her reference to one of Brigid’s descendants, Larry McLaughlin, who is rumored to be haunted and the narrator later discovers this haunting is linked to McLaughlin’s role in executing his Uncle Eddie, is meant to provide the narrator with a sense of how haunting continue to occur across generations.

The various ghost stories and folkloric tales of haunting convey the haunting nature of the past and offer an instance of what Peach defines as representations of *Nachträglichkeit* in regards to what has given rise to trauma returning even though memory of it has been repressed. As such tales of haunting and possession are linked with national traumas; in these instances, the Famine and then intra-community betrayal and killing, thus illustrating Peach’s contention that *Nachträglichkeit* functions in similar ways for the nation when “it is deprived of its conventional narratives and defences” (39). Thus, these representations of haunting emphasize the sense of being trapped in a past that eludes conventional understanding. The portrayal of such haunting and traumatized repetitions provides a counter-history of secrets and silences built around past traumas. The narrative presents these stories of haunting not only as folk tales that reveal some unacknowledged aspect of the past, but also as analogous to the haunting secrets increasingly consuming the narrator’s family.

In addition to the ghost story related by his Aunt Katie, the young boy's father tells him about "the Field of the Disappeared" which, the father explains, is where "the souls of all those from the area who had disappeared or had never had a Christian burial [...] collected [...] to cry like birds and look down on the fields where they had been born" (54). While initially scoffing at the tale as nonsense, the boy comes to realize that his father's telling of the tale was meant to be a cover allowing the father to relate his feelings about the circumstances surrounding his brother Eddie's disappearance, a secret he feels is shameful and jeopardizes the family's reputation in the community. Belatedly realizing the father's emotions and the weight of experience wrapped into the account of the mysterious field, the boy tries to run to his father to make amends. However, the boy cannot reach his father, explaining, "I ran to catch up with him but, as in a dream, he seemed never to get nearer and I gave up" (55). From hearing his father's story, the narrator's own experience becomes marked as strange and dreamlike, as if he in turn is being haunted by his father's sense of the family's past as haunted. The sense of haunting, conveyed across generations, represents the legacy of traumatic history and loss that continues to make itself felt long after the initial experience.

The narrator's keen attention to what is absent yet still seems present highlights the narrative's depiction of the past remaining unresolved and thus continuing to overwhelm the present. The narrator describes instances where something buried continues to make its presence felt, such as when the community must fight a plague of rats and they corner them within trenches for extermination. Although the rats' burial beneath the ground signifies an end to the rat problem, the young boy asserts, "I imagined the living rats that remained, breathing their vengeance in a dull, miasmatic unison deep underground" (80). A similar "burial" occurs when the boy and his father feud and the boy destroys rosebushes his father has planted, prompting his

father to cover the ground where the rosebushes stood in an attempt to put to rest the conflict. The narrator describes the effect of seeing the concrete covering the roses, explaining, “When I kicked a football there, I could see it bounce sometimes where the rose petals had fallen and I would briefly see them again, staining the ground. Walking on that concreted patch where the bushes had been was like walking on hot ground below which voices and roses were burning, burning” (111). The boy’s recall of the roses from seeing the concrete suggests that the burial has not worked to close off and end the incident from which it arose; rather, the attempt to put the roses, and the incident itself, underground perpetuates its presence, as the “burning” the boy imagines symbolizes tormented recollections of the past.

The suffering the family, and the mother particularly, experiences is compounded by the need to keep past events secret. Despite this, the narrator grows increasingly aware of the way the past continues to torment his family in the present. The death of the narrator’s grandfather marks his exposure to family secrets that spur the boy to investigate his family’s history to uncover the truth regarding their tormented past. His grandfather confesses his guilt at mistakenly ordering the execution of the boy’s Uncle Eddie, believing him to be an informer. However, the grandfather found out too late that the real informer was his son-in-law, Tony McIlhenny who was married to the narrator’s Aunt Katie. Upon hearing his grandfather’s deathbed confession, the boy reflects sadly that he must return “home, home, where I could never talk to my father or my mother properly again” (132). The boy’s inability to speak openly with his parents because of the information he has learned is due to the conflicted loyalties engendered by his grandfather’s actions. The narrator’s paternal uncle was murdered by his maternal grandfather, yet the boy’s father remains unaware and continues to feel ashamed that

his brother was an informer. The boy cannot correct the mistaken belief that causes his father such pain because doing so would betray his mother.

Deane portrays how the necessity for silence about the past leads to shame, which compounds the suffering. The boy's mother becomes increasingly consumed by guilt and haunted by the betrayals in her past. After the grandfather's death, the mother and the narrator are complicit in sharing the guilty secrets of the past, yet the mother pushes her son away from her because of the shame she feels, which his knowledge reminds her of. The mother lapses into long silences, entering a near-catatonic state, from which she will emerge to make oblique statements, such as "burning [...] burning" (144). Her expressions of suffering and pain conjure up the struggle she experiences due to the burden of her past betrayals. In the images of burning accompanying depictions of traumatized states, the narrative attempts to render the ongoing suffering caused by the entrapment of the present in the past. The mother's cries of burning resonate with religious images of hell and eternal suffering, although the narrative deploys this symbolism to reveal the ways in which political trauma marks and transforms the familial realm. Previously, the narrator links the phrase "burning" to the roses buried underneath the ground after he and his father fight, spurred by the anger and shame due to believing Eddie was an informer. The phrase continues to resonate with the motif of suppressed conflicts and haunting reminders of the past that seems to be buried but returns. Thus, the mother's cries indicate her tormented mental and emotional state while invoking the idea of unresolved conflicts and unhealed wounds.

The young narrator becomes increasingly consumed by a desire to know the truth of his Uncle Eddie's death and his mother's role in it, for he intuits that she is holding back information. His mother becomes vexed with the narrator's relentless pursuit for finding out

what happened, asking him, “Can’t you just let the past be the past?” However, the narrator asserts, “it wasn’t the past and she knew it” (42). The narrator’s assertion highlights the intertwining of the past and present, as the secrets of the past continue to affect the family and community. However, seeking to know the truth of the past does not provide closure. Although the narrator cannot remain in ignorance of the past once exposed to his family’s secrets, his quest for finding out the truth does not provide the relief he seeks. Daniel W. Ross explains “the seeker’s attempt to undo a trauma of shame only brings more shame on the family—while causing the seeker himself to be cast out as an exile” (35). The boy’s relentless desire to find out the truth of his family’s history ends up alienating him from his family.

As mentioned in the introduction, Strehle’s study examines how home functions as both the “mirror” and “target” of the nation. In her discussion, Strehle draws upon Qadri Ismail’s assertion that nationalism depends upon a ‘gap between the promises made by nations and homes [...] and their imperfect delivery’ (7). This gap emerges from nationalism appearing to promise a sense of relief from nostalgia engendered by alienation from the national community. However, nationalism relies upon a sense of nostalgia for the home to legitimate itself as the protector and guardian of the home. Yet, Strehle notes that “women, commonly held to be the keepers of the home, cannot find home in home either, nor can people whose ethnicity or poverty renders them ‘foreign’ within their culture” (7). The inability to find “home in home” concerns the narrator’s mother, as home and family become, for her, reminders of her betrayals and losses. Strehle’s supposition applies to the narrator as well, for even though he is not a woman, his status as a colonial subject makes him increasingly feel ‘foreign’ within his own culture. His increasing understanding of how national history intertwines with his family history makes that family history appear strange. He remains caught between two nationalisms, as colonialism renders his

homeland “foreign” and his entanglements with the police lead members of his own community to suspect him of being an informer or betrayer, and they begin to view him with hostility, making the places once familiar to him unwelcoming. Such experiences reveal the intertwining of nation and family, as national history infuses and affects familial interactions and family history haunts several of the characters, including the narrator.

As history continues to invade the family home, the boy must reconsider what he understands of his family history and re-conceive its meaning in regard to his increasing understanding of the national politics embedded within it. Early on in the narrative, a priest at the school tells the narrator and his classmates a story about a man involved in a revenge killing against a policeman who surprisingly escapes conviction despite the pervasive prejudice against his Catholic background. The boy recognizes the man in the priest’s story as his grandfather, recalling how he heard the story as a child while eavesdropping on the adults. The boy initially derides the story as “folklore,” yet the priest’s telling of the story reframes it as almost fable-like, with a moral call for seeking forgiveness and justice rather than revenge. Despite the boy’s scoffing at the story, the narrative suggests that the priest’s exhortation of justice, idealistic and limited as it may be, holds more persuasion than the boy himself first realizes.

In encountering his family’s history through the frame of local history and national politics, the narrator begins to see himself and his family in a different context. In addition, the family secrets risk exposing the family to intrusions from the state via the police, as the lone Catholic policeman, Sergeant Burke, attempts to sow dissent when referring to the past events the boy’s family wants left unspoken. Gaining such knowledge about the past initially alienates the narrator and exiles him from his family. As he listens to the whispered accounts of his grandfather’s killing of a policeman, he imagines “falling, falling down to the river of the



hallway,” imaginatively placing himself in the place of the murdered policeman, who he is supposed to view without sympathy. Later, the boy is unfairly apprehended by Sergeant Burke, who intimates that he knows the boy’s family history while attempting to give the false impression to the community that the boy is a police informer. Burke’s insinuations and the subsequent ostracism the narrator faces from his family and his community reinforces his desire to probe into the mysteries of the past.

Ostracism by family and community entails expulsion from a national community, the boy implicitly believes. Ironically, he attempts to run away to Chicago, which would entail going to the destination where the accused informers and actual informers of the narrative have supposedly escaped. Thus, the boy futilely attempts to mimic the supposed journeys of his uncles, almost as if unconsciously branding himself an informer although he is truly innocent. Besides repeating the flight of family members, the boy’s attempt to run away parallels the history of exile and immigration within Ireland. While the narrator, with the help of his brother, eventually executes a clever ruse to dispel the rumors of him being an informant, this initial ostracism prefigures the more entrenched psychological exile the boy experiences within his family and home as he gains a deeper understanding of history.

Since the narrator cannot share the information he gains about his mother’s secrets with anyone, he feels increasingly exiled. His awareness of his mother’s knowledge about her father ordering Eddie’s execution and his eventual discovery that she helped the real informer, Tony McIlhenny, escape because she had been in love with him before he married her younger sister, imparts knowledge to the boy that his father never shares. He is complicit in his mother’s secret, and yet this drives a wedge between them for his knowledge reminds her of the ever-present shame and regret she carries. The narrative emphasizes images of the house increasingly stifled

by the pressure of unspoken secrets and knowledge. The narrator portrays himself as transforming into a ghostly presence as he gains more awareness of the past. Recalling his initial childish excitement at thinking a ghost was haunting the house, he describes his mother standing at the same spot “with her ghosts” (228). The narrator reflects, “Now the haunting meant something new to me—now I had become the shadow” (228). His painful awareness of how his knowledge of her past haunts the mother afflicts her son who longs to ameliorate his mother’s sorrow. The image of his mother standing on the stairs, consumed with the ghosts of the past, prompts the narrator to describe her as “Haunted, haunted” and he adds regretfully, “How I had wanted to know what it was that plagued her, then to become the plague myself” (242). The narrator finds no relief or closures in unraveling the mystery of his family’s past. The knowledge has the power to entrap him and others who share it, leaving them feeling consumed by the past.

Although the knowledge of his family’s secrets leaves the narrator feeling burdened and alienated from those he loves, this painful knowledge provides him with insight into a counter-history. While the narrator cannot speak openly of the family history he has learned without betraying his parents, he searches for ways to articulate what he has learned. He decides to narrate his family’s history in Irish while studying the language in school, telling his parents that the essay he reads in Irish is on “local history” (203). Ironically, he is able to deploy this national language, signifying Irish history and cultural heritage because neither of his parents really understands Irish. Thus, the boy at once reveals and obscures the family secrets while inserting them into a national context.

The haunting and psychological sufferings endured by the characters who feel trapped by the horrific events of the past do not resolve or find closure in the narrative. However, the narrative does suggest that addressing the trauma of the past and understanding shared suffering

enables those suffering to see their experiences in context with others experiencing similar tragedies. The mother recounts an argument she has with the vengeful Sergeant Burke, who after prompting the recollection of the family's secrets, asks the mother to put an end to the secrecy and the suffering it has caused within her family. She responds to the sergeant, "It's grand to say let it stop to people who have been the victims of it. What were they supposed to do? Say they're sorry they ever protested and go back to being unemployed, gerrymandered, beaten up by every policeman who took the notion" (215). The mother's response here highlights one of the dangers of seeking premature closure or demanding that the past be laid to rest; those still suffering from it are asked to disregard and silence their continued experience of injustice. While the confrontation with Sergeant Burke allows the mother to articulate her grievances in political terms and connect her and her family's suffering to the wider social injustices, the narrative incorporates a response to the implicit question of how to respond in the face of violence and systemic oppression.

Although the family history remains obscured, the boy's growing knowledge of it allows him to gain a critical understanding of this personal history, seeing it in the context of world events. Furthermore, he begins to see his family's history and its connection to politics. His father's criticism of empires resonates with the narrator. When discussing the idea that France was ally to the Irish, his father argues "really, it's just a case of one empire or another" implying that France's imperial interests override any concern they might exhibit toward Ireland and questioning the sincerity of that concern against political interests. He then declares, "France and America were republics; they should never have gone on to become empires. Real republicans would never do that" (163). His father decries not just the local injustices he

experiences and witnesses at the hand of the British Empire; rather, he criticizes the whole system of imperialism that he sees in direct conflict with fairness and political autonomy.

While the father criticizes imperialism, he remains suspicious of easy rhetoric that glorifies republicanism without adhering to its ideals—in other words, without actively helping the people it is meant to benefit. After his previous remark, he adds bitterly, “who ever met a real republican? Rarer than a real Christian” (163). This resonates with an earlier remark made in regard to Eddie’s decision to “fight for freedom” to which he bitterly responds, “Freedom. In this place. Never was, never would be. What was it, anyway? Freedom to do what you liked, that was one thing. Freedom to do what you should, that was another. Close enough to one another and far apart as well” (46). The father’s implicit criticism that “[f]reedom to do what you should” remains lacking in Northern Ireland suggests that the oppression in an imperialist society and concomitant violence engendered by sectarianism restrict people from acting ethically. The father’s suggestion that freedom requires something deeper than nationalist struggle raises the issue of justice, framing it as a necessary component to freedom and one that may remain lacking, even if political parity or autonomy is achieved for the minority Catholic population in Northern Ireland. Thus, the boy begins to deepen his understanding of the political conflicts that surround him.

The political education he gains from his father’s values and ideals and the family history he learns offers a sharp contrast to the political education promoted in his school. In a chapter aptly titled “Political Education,” a visiting Anglican priest urges the schoolboys to think of England and Ireland as family members. In the face of communism, the priest argues, “[o]ur internal disputes are no more than family quarrels; faced with an external enemy, the solidarity of our Christian family must reassert itself, be galvanized to protect, as each part of the

variegated Irish family has protected down through the centuries, its own essential freedoms” (207). In an attempt to channel their anger and discord toward the communist “enemy,” the visiting priest employs the image of the nation as family to urge for unity. One of the teachers echoes this rhetoric the following day when asked about prejudice against Catholics in Northern Ireland, claiming the boys must “[f]orget those old distinctions. That was a family quarrel within the Christian family. It would work itself out.” He continues urging his students to view history from a global viewpoint, asserting “We must recognize the irrelevance of our own internal differences in face of the demands of world history” and that “History was about trends, not people” (209).

The narrative highlights the irony of these claims with these rhetorical statements following the narrator’s increasing discovery of how much history concerns and defines him and those around him. Furthermore, the feeling of family unity advocated by the speaker aims to de-politicize and de-historicize the situation in Northern Ireland in an effort to turn attention to anti-communist efforts. For the narrator, and presumably others in his community, whose family histories are marked and marred through being intertwined with political oppression, the exhortation to view the political situation in Northern Ireland as a family squabble may at once ring hollow and also hit too close to home. While the priest’s lecture is framed as a deployment of cynically motivated imperialist nationalism, the narrative advances other understandings of nationalism to counter those which advocate adherence to an imperial agenda. The novel engages with the formation of postcolonial nationalism, yet it does not uncritically celebrate an oppositional nationalism, as it continually turns attention to the need for nationalism to move beyond binary distinctions promoted by colonialism and anti-colonial opposition.

Flannery discusses how Deane roots the narrative firmly in anti-colonialism while simultaneously deploying the narrative to reveal the destructive effects of divisive politics and rigid notions of national identity. As Flannery asserts, “He addresses the debilitating repercussions of oppositional politics, as well as the cultural representations and narratives that underwrite this political culture” (Flannery 73). The awareness of how deeply embedded national politics is within his family shapes the narrator’s desire to adopt a “global vision” as part of an attempt to come to terms with the devastating information he has learned. The narrative subverts the “global vision” advocated by the speaker and teacher at school preaching anti-communism. The narrator, reflecting upon the eruption of turmoil within his family that is bound up with national politics, muses that it seems a small quarrel now, deciding, “Global vision. Perhaps that was what I needed” (209). The narrator’s decision at this moment highlights the narratives situating of the family history as embedded within national history and constitutive of national politics and anti-colonial struggle. The text formulates a global vision by revealing how postcolonial nationalism, although embedded within local politics and history, connects to larger understandings and ordering of the world. Although the repercussions of oppositional politics can result in one becoming trapped within the past and within parochial concerns, the narrative suggests that oppositional, anti-colonial politics can also result in a worldly vision arising from empathy.

The father’s actions provide a poignant counterpoint to the “repressive and monolithic” postcolonial nationalism that Harte describes Deane as criticizing. Although the father maintains an awareness of the colonial oppression, he remains wary of the ways in which the oppressed can replicate oppression, as evidenced by his criticism of American and French empires. His anger at the British colonial system and the suffering it has engendered in his community and family does

not preclude him from extending sympathy to a man who has lost a loved one to political violence, as he has. The narrator recounts how during the Troubles, a young soldier is shot at the doorsteps of his parents' house. The father of the young soldier travels to the house seeking to find out about his son's last moments. The narrator's father invites the man in, assuring him that his slain son did not suffer and offering him sympathy. In recounting the incident, the narrator's father declares, 'Poor man, [...] I feel for him. Even if his son was one of those. It's a strange world.' (245). The father's declaration of empathy for a man, ostensibly an enemy, but one who has suffered a similar agonizing loss as the father, highlights the importance of recognizing similar losses as a means of working through suffering.

The eruption of the Troubles ironically coincides with the family home and the family history contained within finally gaining a measure of peace. The narrator's mother experiences a stroke rendering her speechless, and the narrator imagines that his mother's silence has allowed her and his father to gain mutual understanding. He envisions that "in her silence, in the way she stroked his hand, smiled crookedly at him, let him brush her hair, bowing her head obediently for him, she had told him and won his understanding" (243). In addition, when the narrator returns home for his father's burial, he goes to the spot on the staircase where his mother first noticed a haunting presence in the beginning of the story, noting that now "[t]here was no shadow there" (245). It is as if the turmoil of the outside world, the mother's stroke, and the father's death has moved the haunting of the past into the conflict and turmoil of the present. The novel concludes with the narrator imagining his mother in the same spot where she originally saw the ghost, but this time he imagines her in the evening about to arrive when they will bring the father's body to the church and the mother will pause to look there upon returning home, "to stare out at the spire under which, for that night, before the darkened altar, he so innocently lay" (246). The image of

the father's innocence, preserved in death, overwrites the images of ghosts and shadows that serve as haunting reminders of past traumas and shameful secrets.

The story, with its emphasis on secrets, continually points to the concealment of the past. However, the irony is that the existence of the novel discloses the family secrets the narrator has kept to himself. By offering this narrative of family history that serves to illuminate national history and advocate an understanding of the past as a means of addressing current oppressions, Deane underscores how the family is shaped by, and shapes understandings of, national history. Although Renan claims that forgetting is constitutive of nationalism, the narrative reveals that for those still experiencing the past's presence in their lives, forgetting is not an option. Indeed, the ability to remember, as Parker notes in regards to certain characters in the novel, is often framed as a punishment since it brings pain to those recalling past betrayals and horrors. However, the narrative itself ultimately reveals that remembering and grappling with the past in order to better understand the world offers a means of addressing the traumas that continue to haunt generations.

### **One by One in Darkness**

Madden's novel often contrasts warm, familial recollections with a sense of Bhabha's "unhomely" that pervades the family space now marked by political violence and tragic loss. The narrative opens and closes with an image of home, first describing what the word home conjures for the characters. The first chapter begins with Cate, the middle daughter, returning home from London for a visit and as she takes in her once-familiar surroundings she notes that "Home was a huge sky; it was flat fields of poor land fringed with hawthorn and alder. It was birds in flight; it was columns of midges like smoke in a summer dusk. It was grey water; it was a mad wind; it was a solid stone house where the silence was uncanny" (1). By interweaving the description of



the landscape and geography with an image of home, the narrative characterizes the family house as bound up with and defined by the region surrounding it. Despite the warm memories the home holds for the family members, the initial description emphasizes the silence within the home as “uncanny” (ibid). In framing this uncanny aspect of the family home, the narrative structures itself around portraying the fraught national history and traumatic events that have embedded themselves within the image of the home, thus revealing how the site of familial love and warmth also contains a representation of the “unhomely”.

Portraying the intertwining of political turmoil with private loss allows the narrative to highlight how family and national politics are embedded within, and constitutive of, one another. Michael Parker sees the novel as offering “an explicit engagement with the larger narrative of Northern Ireland and its impact on identity formation, alongside [Madden’s] recurring concern with the nature of family politics” (177). The depiction of “the nature of family politics” allows the text to highlight the ways in which the history of Northern Ireland, and issues of nationalism and national identity, impact and shape the familial realm while family history often engenders political responses. By showing the complex interactions between family history and national history, the narrative both offers a critique of historiography and suggests that confronting political traumas in a viable manner entails rethinking ideas of home and family within the larger world.

The narrative offers critiques of traditional historiography and official accounts of political violence to counter the reductive, simplistic narratives such accounts offer. Helen’s statements regarding journalism’s tendency to utilize reductive accounts of complex and shifting situations offers a meta-commentary on the shortcomings of the official news accounts. She complains to her journalist friend David: “the medium is a blunt weapon in itself, that’s the

problem. It isn't fitted to dealing with complexity, it isn't comfortable with paradox or contradiction, and that's the heart of the problem, if you ask me'" (51). The narrative itself both highlights the gaps in official accounts of history and political turmoil and seeks to explore what remains excluded from such accounts. The "complexity," "paradox," and "contradiction" that Helen diagnoses as missing appears in the narrative's portrayal of differing reactions, motivations, beliefs, and even in characters' contradictory beliefs and ideas.

Recurring reflections on the limited ability of official historiography to capture the full import of the situation in Northern Ireland repeatedly draws attention to the disjuncture between such accounts and the lived experiences the narrative seeks to recreate. While watching a news program examining the history of the Troubles and looking at the televised images of the past, Helen reflects, "It had been like that, yet not like that: the pictures told only part of the story" (60). Helen's recognition of the ways in which such historical accounts fail to fully convey her lived experiences echoes an earlier moment when, as a student, she must respond to an essay prompt asking her to "[d]escribe and assess the circumstances which led to the Partition of Northern Ireland" (163). The removed wording of the assignment ironically contrasts with the way in which the Partition of Northern Ireland and the ensuing political turmoil has engulfed and shaped Helen's environment. Her family life, with political arguments occurring between different relatives and family members wanting to leave the country, becomes the site that mirrors the lived history her homework asks her to describe. However, history, as a discourse and an academic subject studied in school, fails to offer full understanding of the experiences and events impacting people experiencing such history.

In contrast to the official discourse of history, the novel highlights characters' different interactions and understandings of the subject. Charlie, the father, loves history and seeks to

impart this interest to his daughters. He does so by frequently showing the children historical landmarks and sites. Likewise, he relishes news stories about “a farmer somewhere who’d found something on his land: a Viking sword, or a pot of coins, or even a dug-out canoe from the Iron Age” (63). His vision of history contains a more organic view by seeing it as embedded within the landscape and still a part of the present, even if it remains distinct and not completely comprehensible. Rather than circumscribing and bounding history, as more official accounts seek to do, Charlie views history as connected and intertwined with the present. Such an understanding of history resembles his wife’s father’s view, who, as Emily recalls, believed “all the things that had happened in the past were linked in an extraordinarily simple way. History was no more than the effect of one day following another [...] spooling back from the present” (113). Such an understanding that does not seek to impose a premature closure or segregate the continuing effects of history as official accounts often do offers those who possess such an understanding a means of grappling with the past. The distinction imparted by this understanding of history as bound up with the present appears in the narrative as Helen reflects on her father’s historical interest:

[Her father] loved history and he was always talking about it. Uncle Brian talked about history a lot too, but she would never have said that he loved it. There was a difference, although she wouldn’t have known how to explain or define it. For her daddy, it was the fascination of thinking about people who had lived hundreds, even thousands, of years ago, where he lived now; there was something about the odd combination of closeness and distance that caught his imagination like nothing else. (63)

The “odd combination of closeness and distance,” or the paradoxical nature of history as both contained in the past and alive in the present, offers a means for understanding the deeply affecting and shaping role of history in a national context.

Charlie’s love of history spurs him to historicize important events and key political moments in the narrative. He shares this interest in history with his daughters, not only by pointing out historical sites, but also by drawing their attention to the history-in-the-making that surrounds them. When the entire Quinn family attends a civil rights march, Charlie tells Helen, ‘You’re looking at history’ (80). His commentary provides context and highlights how history is not removed and in the past, but exists in the present. Helen’s memory of her father’s historical commentary reveals his influence on her awareness of the shaping of historical narratives. Her reflections on historiography underlines the crucial role her familial experiences played in developing an historical understanding that allows her to view the time and place around her critically.

In offering access to history through stories and lore and commentary, the family also provides access to historical understanding, which in turn, shapes ideas of nationalism. As Parker’s statement quoted previously states, Madden deliberately focuses on diverse and differing reactions to counter images of the nationalist community as homogenously atavistic. She portrays each of the Quinn sisters eventually “read[ing] the same text differently” to explore the varying reactions to oppression and to trauma. The sisters make differing life choices in the face of growing up alongside the violence in Northern Ireland. Cate, after forgetting her bag in a shop and accidentally setting off a bomb scare, resolves that she wants to leave Ireland. Helen, however, has the opposite reaction, arguing with a nun at school about her plans to study law at a university in Belfast in order to fight for civil justice. Sister Benedict tries to offer a *realpolitik*

account of what will likely happen to Helen if she stays in Northern Ireland and commits herself to trying to attain justice within the court system, asserting ““Helen, you can throw your life away if you want, but it won’t make any difference to anyone except yourself”” (158). Despite her teacher’s warnings about the insurmountable challenges Helen’s idealism will encounter, Helen remains unwavering, responding, ““This is where I’m from. This is my home.”” (159). Thus, the sisters develop different relationships to home, yet the narrative revolves around how the family life provides them with a sense of solidarity, even as they lead different lives.

At times, familial interactions parallel the structure of state power. For instance, Emily’s experience of growing up with a rigid, controlling, and unloving mother encapsulates an experience meant to illuminate the effects of oppression and colonial domination. The narrative comments on the contrast between Emily’s outward subservient attitude and occasional fits of temper as a child, noting,

Her spirit was broken by the time she was twelve, but spirits, whether those of a child or a society, never break cleanly, and the people who didn’t understand this were shocked when the dull, quiet girl, so eager to please, suddenly displayed a violent temper. They thought these two sides of her were at odds; couldn’t understand that the malevolence was the logical corollary to the obsequiousness. (114)

Thus, the narrative correlates the effect of repression on Emily’s personality with the experience of an oppressed society to highlight how oppression, whether private or political, rarely results in the simple control it seeks to enact. In this instance, the familial experience offers an allegorical understanding of the national experience, whereby colonial subservience breaks into outbursts of political upheaval and strife.

The narrative also deploys the differing beliefs and attitudes of various family members to depict the varying political responses within Northern Ireland. As Parker points out, Madden highlights the diversity of the Northern nationalist community, and she does so by depicting the differing beliefs of various family members. Madden portrays the solidarity of the nationalist community through details including how the Quinn family, “like almost all the families they knew, had hung a black flag from the window of their house [in memorial to thirteen people shot dead in Derry]” (130). However, the narrative also highlights the conflicting reactions and beliefs of those who hold nationalist ideals. Charlie frequently argues with his brother, Brian, regarding Brian’s tacit acceptance of violence. Although the Quinn family becomes the site where Republican values are inculcated, to a certain extent, the family members contest and argue about political beliefs and commitments, mirroring the ways in which nationalism and national struggle are contested among members of a national community.

The narrative depicts how national experiences are filtered through the familial realm and defined by familial experience and identity. For instance, Charlie’s mother urges him to participate in a civil rights march. Likewise, Emily reflects on growing up listening to the drums in Loyalist celebrations and realizing “those people hated her, *hated* her, and would give her and her family no quarter. And she felt not just the mild fear that was so habitual that she took it for granted, but also a bitter anger” (115). Thus, Emily’s recognition that she and her family are designated as a minority group and disliked on the basis of that sparks outrage. The family offers a connection beyond the individual realm to the social world. When Helen hears of her uncles suffering abuse during an interrogation, Helen imagines “Peter being dragged out of an army jeep, being sworn at and kicked, she saw soldiers scream abuse in his face, saw them twist his arms up behind his back until he cried out [...] Helen felt a terrible anger now too, an anger she

would never forget” (103). Such pivotal experiences offer the characters a means to connect their experiences with wider injustices.

In addition to familial experience providing a window to understand social injustices, the novel portrays how familial ties and affection appear as markers of value for the price paid for political violence. Peter argues with Brian’s attempt to minimize or justify a bombing that has killed innocent civilians, he asks ‘if it had been one of your family killed, if it had been Lucy, or Declan, are you telling me you would still be talking the way you are?’ (129). Peter’s question, which implicitly asks Brian to empathize with the victims of the bombing on the basis of his own love for his family, offers an example of how familial ties, while engendering nationalist solidarity, also undercut strident calls for violence and retaliation. The narrative echoes this sentiment against violence when Charlie urges his daughters, after the funeral of the older brother of a schoolmate killed while planting bombs for the IRA, to “[n]ever forget what you saw today; and never let anybody try to tell you that it was anything other than a life wasted, and lives destroyed” (105). Charlie’s assertion is made in response to clapping and cheers at the funeral in response to a military-style salute of firing guns at the gravesite. Thus, the father’s moral call for recognizing the value of individual lives contrasts with a violent nationalism that urges bloodshed and the sacrifice of lives. However, the narrative reveals how both conflicting responses emerge from the same community and out of the same experiences of shared oppression.

The conflicting and varying views emerging from the familial realm reveal how oppression, although it may be experienced among a larger group, does not engender uniform responses. Indeed, certain characters’ explicit rejections of political commitment reveal acquiescence to an exploitative order for personal comfort. The youngest sister of the Quinn

family, Sally, offers a critique of her mother's relatives who offer justifications of the ongoing political oppression. "It's the likes of Aunt Rosemary who annoy me [...] She isn't even trying to understand what's happening here, and at some deep level, I don't think she really cares, so long as her nice cosy middle-class life goes on the same as it's always done" (143). Sally's statement regarding her aunt's lack of political awareness embodies a critique of the classism in Rosemary's stance. Sally continues, "I don't think she'd even want peace here if it meant a significant change in the material quality of her life" (ibid). Unlike Deane's novel, which is set in an earlier time period and represents the situation of Catholics mainly of a working-class background, *One by One in Darkness* charts the social changes stemming from the emergence of a Catholic middle-class in Northern Ireland. The emergence of this middle-class reveals the economic issues underlying the political oppression as it begins to allow for distinctions between national, religious, and socio-economic identity to become more apparent. For Aunt Rosemary, economic affiliation trumps her religious and expected national affiliation. However, for Sally, witnessing the economic marginalization that compounds the political marginalization facing her students causes her to recognize the damaging nature of a colonial political system as well and leads to her criticism of those who align themselves with such an order out of self-interest. In these widely different political views held by members of the same family, Madden reveals the diversity within national communities and thus subverts homogenizing views of these communities by revealing how other interests and experiences shape political responses.

Via the family history and depiction of the family struggling with the aftermath of trauma, the novel depicts not only the diverse views within communities, but also the complexity of views held by individuals and how experiences, particularly within the home continue to shape and shift those views. Charlie, the father of the family, is killed by Loyalist gunmen who



mistake him for his brother, Brian, who is involved in the IRA. His death, the trauma at the center of the story that haunts the characters whose perspective of mourning shapes the narrative. His death provides the impetus for characters to rethink their ideas of and responses to nationalism. As Sally notes in regard to her uncle, Brian,

‘I remember years ago you’d have heard him talking about a thing being an ‘act of war’. If you said about the IRA having done something he’d have answered you at once about things the British army had done, or the British government. And he still is a Republican, he always will be; it’s too deep with him for that ever to change. But there are things he can’t stomach now, things he won’t defend.’ (142)

This offers one portrayal of how understandings of nationalism and national struggle change with experience of national trauma invading the home. His brother’s death spurs Brian to reevaluate his former justifications for violence or militant nationalism as the effects of such violence become more personal. Through writing trauma and incorporating the experience and effects of trauma into the narrative, *One by One in Darkness* highlights the need for a nationalism that does not perpetuate loss and suffering but offers an implicit call for justice in the recognition of shared suffering and sorrow.

The sisters’ visions of responding to the traumatic death of their father emphasize images of the home, yet it is a home that is bound up in the world and affected by the world. In effect, these visions emerge from the home made “unhomely,” according to Bhabha’s terms, in an attempt to understand how such a space might generate a response to political traumas. Cate frequently envisions nature and landscape as markers of home. While grieving her father’s death, she imagines a memorial to the victims of the Troubles that at once incorporates the outside world within an inner space:

She imagined a room, a perfectly square room. Three of its walls, unbroken by windows, would be covered by neat rows of names, over three thousand of them; and the fourth wall would be nothing but window. The whole structure would be built where the horizon was low, and the sky huge. It would be a place where you could bring your anger, as well as your grief. (149)

From the first page, Cate has associated the sky with home. Her imagined room thus invokes home with the image of sitting inside and looking out at the sky. Thus, while home is linked with the bloodshed and trauma wrought by the political conflicts of the outer world, it also offers an imaginative space for catharsis, a safe place to experience “anger” and “grief.”

Their father’s death causes each of the three sisters to reevaluate their visions of home and the world. Sally, who is the most homebound of all, becomes more politically involved due to witnessing the effects of national politics and national upheaval on the community surrounding her home. Meanwhile, Cate who has lived a cosmopolitan life working for a fashion magazine in London, searches for a new type of domestic and familial experience. The purpose for her trip, revealed later in the narrative, is to disclose to her family that she is pregnant. Although this initially causes conflict with her family, especially her mother who is unhappy about her having a baby out of wedlock, the family eventually supports her, implicitly recognizing the new baby will bring happiness to them in light of Charlie’s death. However, despite the connection and happiness the family share in the final chapter of the novel, the narrative concludes by depicting the trauma that has been at the heart of the story yet not disclosed till the end.

In the final scene, while Helen tries to fall asleep, she recalls how as a child she would lie half-asleep, half-awake and imagine herself in the sky, looking down on the world. She would

envision looking down at the earth, seeing sights such as “Mountains, deserts, tangled jungles; fabulous cities, dusty villages” (179). These imagined sights comprise the wider world, but in her childhood imaginings, Helen would then proceed to envision Ireland while picturing herself moving closer and closer to her home, until she was able to look down at her family in their house. However, this childhood imagining has been indelibly marred by her father’s death because “now when she lay longing for sleep, a different image unrolled inexorably in her mind, repeated constantly, like a loop of film but sharper than that, more vivid, and running at just a fraction of a second slower than normal time, which gave it the heavy feel of a nightmare” (180). This image consists of her father sitting in his brother’s kitchen, drinking tea, when the ordinary, familial scene is disrupted by masked gunmen who break into the house, shooting Charlie.

The withholding of the portrayal of Charlie’s death until the conclusion allows the narrative to foreground its importance. His death is central to the text and much of the narrative depicts his family’s efforts to cope with the loss and sorrow they feel in his absence. By structuring the novel so that his death appears at the end, Madden “writes trauma” by building the narrative around depicting the effects of trauma ultimately concluding with a portrayal of how traumatic events imprint themselves upon survivors memories. Thus, despite the characters attempts to come to a resolution, the narrative underscores how closure often remains unobtainable or elusive for those who continue living with the grief engendered by trauma and loss.

The narrative builds a political critique into its conclusion by portraying the devastating and continuing effects of violence and terror. Helen’s memory of her childhood imaginings, which provided her with a sense of safety and comfort are now intertwined with the image of a

space of familial comfort now marked by her father's murder. This shapes her corresponding view of the world, as the narrative voice notes,

in an abrupt reversal of the gentle descent of her childhood, Helen's vision swung violently away, and now she was aware of the cold light of dead stars; the graceless immensity of a dark universe. Now her image of her father's death was infinitely small, infinitely tender: the searing grief came from the tension between that smallness and the enormity of infinite time and space. (181)

Helen's sense of her father's death as "small" in contrast to the universe underscores the hard reality that his death comprises just one of the countless numbers of violent, unnatural deaths arising from political violence and oppression, remaining pivotal for her yet unremarked within the universe.

Helen continues to reflect:

No pity, no forgiveness, no justification: maybe if she could have conceived of a consciousness where every unique horror in the history of humanity was known and grieved for, it would have given her some comfort. Sometimes she felt that all she had was her grief, a grief she could scarcely bear. (181)

In her final moments of reflection upon her terrible grief, Helen's tentative vision of a "consciousness" that understands the horrors she and others like her have experienced advances a possibility not realized in the narrative, or in the actual world. However, this vision supports the novel's implicit criticism of such horrors and extends its protests against them by imagining a universal sense of justice with the power to address the suffering endured by those experiencing outrages and abuses.

Helen's recollection of her childhood imaginings emphasizes the intertwining of the home with scenes representative of the world. Similar to the protagonist's adoption of "global vision" near the end of *Reading in the Dark*, Helen's dream-like visions emphasize flying away from the homely and familiar to view from a promontory point landscapes and sights representing the globe, thus presenting her with the opportunity to acquire a similar "global vision." Yet the return to the home-like and familiar at the end of her dreaming emphasizes the interconnection between her family home and the wider world. This "global vision" near the novel's conclusion emphasizes Spivak's idea of "planetarity," which serves to counter globalism, or a vision of the world as an abstracted entity. "Planetarity" is meant to invoke the idea of a shared planet where all human beings live. Helen's vision encompasses this through the recognition of her family home as intimately connected with the global sights she imagines. However, this interconnection between the home and the world acquires a different resonance as her childhood visions are now intertwined with the repetitive and haunting image of her father's murder. Her final reflections grapple with how home and family, now marred by the violence of the outer world, spur a reimagining of her earlier global visions to imagine a "dark universe" where she cannot imagine, only long for, some sort of consciousness that recognizes her grief.

Despite the tentative hopes for healing advanced by the family's support of one another and the promise of new life that Cate's soon-to-be born child brings, the narrative closes on an image that emphasizes the lack of any closure or completed sense of healing that closes off the past. In this, the novel aims to enact the "empathic unsettlement" that La Capra discusses as an explicit counter to any unwarranted sense of uplift or easy closure. The final lines of the novel state "[i]n the solid stone house, the silence was uncanny. One by one in darkness, the sisters slept" (181). Thus, the narrative circles back to the opening description of the house as

“uncanny,” emphasizing that, despite the repeated scenes of familial warmth and love within the house, its containment of historical and national trauma has rendered the space meant to be safe and comforting eerie through the interventions of the outside world. The image of the sisters sleeping “[o]ne by one in darkness” likewise highlights the sense of closeness and solidarity shared by the sisters yet emphasizes that they remain separate in their shared grief as well.

Thus, the narrative highlights the experience of trauma as at once individual and alienating, yet also serving as a powerful bond between those that have shared in the experience. By utilizing the family narrative to chart the continuing effects and personal losses incurred through political violence, Madden emphasizes the costs of trauma while exploring how familial experiences offer a tentative means for addressing such trauma.

### **Conclusion:**

These two novels exploring haunting memories of the past both close with the image of the deceased father. In both texts, the father embodied a more tolerant worldview than one typically embraced or advocated within the highly divisive sectarian society. Both explore a sense of haunting and loss to represent the intrusion of political violence into the home and how that makes the space that is supposed to be familiar “uncanny”. The two novels differ in their historical focus and placement, with Deane’s novel representing the resentments simmering below the surface that eventually erupt during the coming turbulence of the Troubles, and Madden portraying the characters reflecting on the turmoil of growing up during the Troubles. They also differ in their emphases on haunting and trauma, with Deane focusing more on haunting and ghostly presences that represent the after-effects of trauma while Madden represents characters’ experiences of trying to understand and come to terms with a traumatic event. Yet both novels share a concern depicting the relationship between trauma and

nationalism. As Peach argues in his discussion of the use of “Nachtraglichkeit,” the deployment of haunting and suppressed memories that recall historical traumas can undermine the stability of nationalism without doing away with nationalism entirely. Writers such as Deane and Madden use the portrayal of haunting to articulate the way national communities are shaped by such traumatic events.

In depicting a society where nationalist struggles continue as the outgrowth of the historical legacy of colonial dominance and anticolonial struggles, both novels explore how the violence erupting from such struggles affects a society. In depicting the experience of various family members’ and family members’ varying responses to the political intrusions within the family sphere, the novels represent the way such “unhomely” experiences spur reconsiderations of national identity. Particularly, the novels represent alternative imaginings through depicting characters mourning family members and in doing so, searching for solutions to the political violence that has intruded into the home.

Deane and Madden use the portrayal of haunting to articulate the way national communities are shaped by such traumatic events. As Peach argues in his discussion of the use of “Nachtraglichkeit,” the deployment of haunting and suppressed memories that recall historical traumas can undermine the hidebound stability of nationalism without doing away with nationalism entirely. This might allow for the kind of “global solidarities” Gibbons mentions as emerging from an engagement with nationalism arising out of an oppressive past. In his formulation, nationalism does not necessarily restrict focus to one country or national history, but rather can allow for finding commonalities and connections across the globe. Such envisioning appears near the end of both novels represented in the struggle to understand particular and local traumas and histories. In this envisioning of global connections emerging

from addressing the haunting of national history, the texts suggests that postcolonial nationalism, to be a force against oppression, must address its past in order to mitigate against simply copying an imperialist form of power and repeating abuses of the past. A similar critique in the interest of imagining global solidarity appears in the novels examined in the next chapter, which depict recovering memories of repressed trauma in concert with re-conceiving of national boundaries and of familial relationships.



## **Chapter Two: Crossing Boundaries of History and Confronting Trauma in Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines***

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Shadow Lines* both focus on national history while representing trauma as crucial to the plot and the structuring of their narratives. While many critics have rightly noted that the authors, to a certain extent, utilize the family narratives as "microcosms" of national history that may represent the nation allegorically through the family, I would argue that while this usefully highlights the way national history is encapsulated within family history in the two novels, Roy and Ghosh's narratives are not simply encapsulating national history into the form of a family saga. While the family story does serve as a microcosm of national history in certain instances, the family stories and histories also illuminate the ways in which the family appears as the site where nationalism is formed and enacted. Characters both utilize and resist the nationalist discourse via familial interactions. In portraying national trauma as bound up in the familial realm and with familial politics, the two writers investigate historiography. These explorations reveal current limitations and challenges facing a postcolonial nationalism which often must confront the effects of a colonial past and the pressures of globalization that can further enhance divisions within the nation.

In this chapter, I explore the critiques of historiography and of inherited forms of nationalism and its limitations in the texts. Both novels reveal that nationalist discourse often relies upon a gender divide that places women within the home rather than the public or national sphere. In addition to critically exploring the gendered dimensions of nationalism, Ghosh and Roy both explore nationalism against the backdrop of cosmopolitanism and globalization, respectively. While Ghosh's novel explores cosmopolitanism's idea of being at home in the

world against the complications raised for those with a postcolonial background, Roy's examines the intersection of globalization and a colonial legacy. Thus, both novels examine nationalism as vis-à-vis what are often presumed to be westernized ideas of the world.

In investigating postcolonial nationalism and its limitations, both novels portray moments of utopian hope where imaginings of places without borders and boundaries occur. Although Roy and Ghosh both focus on representing trauma as linked to national turmoil, these novels also contain utopian hopes and ideals that appear alongside the representation of trauma. These utopian hopes center on imagining alternative familial arrangements that also gesture at different national arrangements. Such imaginings serve to criticize current social structures and gesture toward the effects of removing oppressive forms of nationalism that continue to act as divisive. The freedom hoped for in such imaginings critiques existing power structures.

While Roy and Ghosh utilize family sagas in offering literary depictions of Indian postcolonial history, the narratives do not stop at simply encapsulating national history in the form of familial stories. The representation of trauma in these works, which appear with portrayals of sacrifice, repetition of the past, and the process of 'acting out/working through' move the narratives away from strictly allegorical accounts of national history. Both novels depict the importance of memory and family history as sites for confronting and coming to terms with traumatic experiences that have been excised from official historical records. In doing so, the narratives represent attempts to 'work through' trauma, often in ways that destabilize or undermine taboos and boundaries while seeking to imagine new ways of belonging to the home and to the nation.

The narratives represent how traumatic effects from the past lead to the processes that La Capra describes as ‘acting out/working through.’ The conclusions of both novels focus on instances when characters appear to recreate scenes of prior trauma. These representations that reveal the effects of trauma illuminate how characters’ experiences can reveal the workings of national history upon its subjects. By investigating these processes, the authors reveal how the imposition of borders and boundaries via nationalist discourse can result in national, political, and social oppression as policing these boundaries often entails silencing, excluding, or even eliminating those perceived to threaten such boundaries. The novels portray characters who have experienced losses through the imposition of and policing of these national boundaries attempting to come to terms with these losses. In attempting to understand them, the novels depict the processes of ‘acting out,’ or repeating the traumatic event, and ‘working through’ or attempting to frame and come to terms with the event.

While the application of trauma theory allows for understanding of the narrative’s depiction of and critique of nationalism, adopting this analytical framework is not to argue that personal psychological experiences can represent the entirety of national history or national identity, but rather that understanding how these processes are embedded in public as well as private experiences illuminates potential new understandings of national history and national power. In other words, by representing the experience of characters confronting traumatic losses and coming to terms with feeling trapped in the past, the narratives offer a means to understand how a violent nationalism can oppress, or even excise, members of its community. In exploring the effects of such violent oppressions and exclusions, the authors ultimately engage in offering imaginative portrayals of confronting the legacy of trauma to underscore possibilities for forming communities that do not rely on such violent or oppressive means for formation.

Both novels focus on what is obscured or left out of history in order to depict how history can become a haunting force for those forced to confront its erasures. In using literature to depict the shaping of the historical record and historical narratives, the two novels incorporate “writing trauma,” according to La Capra’s term. In examining historiography, the novels also draw attention to stories that are excluded. In addition, to make apparent the effects of traumatic events often unrecorded, the writers incorporate into the structure of the narratives of “a shattering break or caesura in experience which has belated effects” (186). Roy and Ghosh incorporate such experiences into the texts through a focus on the violent deaths of characters sacrificed to a collective rage and paranoia directed against those perceived as outsiders and threatening to the social order and national identity. These deaths become the focal points of the narratives, even as these deaths are only presented obliquely before being fully portrayed near the end. Structuring the narratives in such a way allows for depicting the aftereffects of trauma and loss for survivors. Through these depictions, the narratives emphasize how such overlooked or repressed histories continue to be experienced and lived even while remaining officially unacknowledged.

In Ghosh’s novel, he focuses on the aftermath of Partition, when India and Pakistan were split into two separate countries upon gaining independence from Britain. Since the splitting of the two countries was meant to reflect religious boundaries, with Pakistan providing a homeland for Muslims, many non-muslim Indians left what became Pakistan to escape communalist violence. Ghosh’s novel focuses on the interweaving of two family histories, one Indian, who have had to flee Pakistan and later are affected by communalist riots when some of them return for a visit, and a British family whose interactions with the Indian family reveal the legacy of colonization upon the two nations. Roy’s novel focuses on the legacy of colonialism as well,

exploring the family history of Indians who, as the uncle proclaims, have begun to identify with the English rather than with their nation and history. In Roy's novel, though, the focus is on the continuing oppression of the caste system in tandem with continued exclusion of women from national and political power. In examining this, as well as the encroachment of globalization and its ability to further entrench such inequalities, *The God of Small Things* offers a critique of a nation that has failed to fully liberate all its citizens with the advent of independence.

The narratives' inclusion of representing trauma and focusing on its continuing, even if unacknowledged presence, allows for critiques of historiography that advanced revised formulations. Focusing on omissions and absences wrought by national trauma leads to the narratives portraying repression and exploring attempts to come to terms with the past in an effort to understand what has been lost and repressed. The two writers reveal how history itself is a troubled category, relying on forgetting and elisions. In this regard, they recall and work against the "forgetting" Renan asserts as crucial to nationalism. In addition to writing trauma in order to investigate historiography, both Roy and Ghosh also seek to undermine Eurocentric, imperialist conceptions of history that continue to marginalize India and other non-Western regions.

Roy's novel takes as its epigraph John Berger's claim that: "Never again will a single story be told as if it's the only one." Critics have noted the epigraph serves as a call for multiple stories and multiple narratives rather than the dominant and singular-voiced narratives of the past. In writing against such dominant and singular-voiced narratives, Roy interweaves multiple storylines and viewpoints into a narrative with a voice incorporating a focus on childhood experiences and mentalities to express what remains not yet incorporated into hegemonic discourse. Ghosh incorporates such a focus on childhood experiences and imagination to evoke

that remaining outside of hegemonic discourse as well. Both novels offer stories that portray multiple viewpoints and overlap in time as a means to explore how history arises from multiple stories rather than a single monolithic one.

Both authors explore marginalized historical accounts to offer counter-histories that critique dominant colonial constructions of history as well as bourgeois nationalism and monolithic globalization that emerged as dominant narratives in its wake. Roy crafts a counter-history that focuses on and validates the small details, items, and people that remain marginalized in official narratives. This motif provides a protest against the ordering of the world that seeks to focus on larger events or the powerful to the exclusion of the small and seemingly powerless. Critics have noted how the “small things” alluded to in the title of Roy’s novel appears to refer to the narrative’s recurring emphasis on what remains overlooked and undervalued or considered unimportant in the wider scope of official history. R.S. Pathak notes, “What Roy seems to emphasise through this prettification of the ‘small’ is that the marginal entities also have relevance in the broad scheme of things and the time has come when they should be given due place and significance” (18). Thus, by emphasizing the significance of “small things,” Roy reveals the counterpart to larger history and narratives, often national or worldly in scope.

Likewise, Ghosh’s narrative critiques the omissions and silences of official historiography that seeks uniformity at the cost of recognizing the stories that do not match dominant constructions of history. As Anjali Roy notes, Ghosh’s revisionist historiographic project incorporates elements from the premodern oral discourse of “storytelling in opposition to the written documentation favoured by western historiography and the novel to call attention to the ‘narrative’ of history. He retells the stories of the minor personages and the unknown players

of Indian nationalism to retrieve those counter-narratives occluded or appropriated by official bourgeois nationalisms” (Anjali Roy 42). Anjali Roy contends that this incorporation of elements of oral history, or what she terms “microstoria” offers a feminine counterpart to masculinist historiography. Thus, the “microstoria” allows for an illumination of overlooked or occluded aspects of history while also critically examining how such aspects become subordinate to the dominant conceptions of history.

Partha Chatterjee notes that one of the problems facing postcolonial nationalism is that it has been posited as a product of modernity and Enlightenment, yet lauding it as an outgrowth of modernity can obscure the ways in which not everyone in the nation attains access to its power. He notes that the problem of nationalism for post-colonial nations lies in the fact that “[n]ationalism sets out to assert its freedom from European domination. But in the very conception of its project, it remains a prisoner of the prevalent European intellectual fashions” (*Nationalist Thought* 10). Chatterjee’s criticism highlights the danger of scholarship that views post-colonial nationalism as if it has been already imagined by the West. Seeing post-colonial nationhood as constituted by colonial powers that previously dominated it inhibits conceptions of what postcolonial nationalism could be. Chatterjee’s criticism stems from a desire to for postcolonial societies to imagine nation and community without relying on the universalization of European concepts. He argues that such a critical awareness of nationalist discourse’s reliance on this universalization “might allow us the possibility not only to think of new forms of the modern community, [...] but, much more decisively, to think of new forms of the modern state” (*The Nation and Its Fragments* 13). This need for thinking of new forms arises from the recognition that national liberation occurring after decolonization has not been translated into a

freedom from varying types of oppression that continue to affect marginalized or subaltern members of postcolonial societies.

Roy and Ghosh investigate, critique, and re-imagine nationalism in ways that explore the paradox Chatterjee notes of postcolonial nation-states often feeling bound to an inherited form. In doing so, they represent ways to imagine new types of community and national belonging. While these authors are critical of post-colonial nationalism, they are also wary of the dangers of universalist, Western criticism that would view the post-colonial state's failings as signs of its subordinate status to the West. These authors portray national history and nationalist discourse in ways that probe its constructions, yet they also are aware of the ways that larger forces such as globalization impact and underlie nationalism.

In their novels, Ghosh and Roy address the question that has concerned many postcolonial writers; namely, how does one write about postcolonial nationalism in a way that reveals the oppressions of the colonial order yet still advances a critique of the newly independent nation for its failures to include all members in its promise of liberation? Both writers emphasize exclusions from official national history, and they depict the violence entailed in creating a nation that reflects sectarian or inegalitarian visions. In depicting this violence, Roy and Ghosh draw attention to those who are sacrificed for nationalism's aims, and those who sacrifice for the ideal of a national community only to have their hopes belied.

Despite the criticisms of chauvinist or homogenizing tendencies within strident nationalism, both narratives also emphasize the need for national liberation and underline the abuses of colonialism that motivated the struggle for national independence. Including key scenes in the narratives where British visitors impart imperialist views of India allows for a depiction of the



continuing impact of the colonial legacy, especially within the realm of the family. Additionally, the cross-generational family sagas that frame the narratives allow for an examination of the ways in which colonization and the struggle for national independence has impacted previous generations. Thus, the narratives reflect on how familial experiences can shape and form nationalist sentiments and experiences through familial interactions providing a sense of cultural and national identity. However, the family politics can often serve to instantiate exclusionary notions of identity, even while perpetuating oppression within the home on the basis of needing to protect the family.

The narratives emphasize how national violence often arises from a perceived need to purge what is foreign or alien. Meenakshi Mukherjee, while noting that nationalism often relies on a dichotomy of “us” versus the “other,” observes: ‘the construction of the nation is a two-way process, entailing on the one hand a broad homogenization despite seeming differences of what lies within the boundaries and a projection of alien-ness upon what is situated outside’ (qtd. in Banerjee 198). The results of this two-way process are depicted in both narratives through focusing on the ways the drive for homogenization within the nation results in scapegoating and marginalizing certain populations within the nation. In addition, the “alien-ness” of what lies outside often appears to be less starkly different than at first supposed, as the narratives reveal foreign presences intertwined with the history of certain locales. By depicting those who are sacrificed to attain the illusion of homogeneity or unity, the narratives reveal the cost of this two-way process and how nations must recognize multiplicity within if they are to be truly multitudinous and communal spaces.

In drawing attention to the problematic non-recognition of multiplicity, both authors underscore the gendered dimensions of nationalism. Many feminist scholars have noted how

nationalism relies upon a division between the public sphere and the private, domestic space of the home. Since women are typically bound by and associated with the domestic sphere far more, they are often excluded from national power. However, this formulation of public and private relies on a false division, for national power and private space overlap more often than is recognized. By drawing attention to the impact of national politics within the home, both authors reveal how gender roles' inculcation and solidification as well as the occasional resistance to such roles intertwines the familial realm and national demands.

Both novelists depict gender dynamics within the home to chart how gender inequality remains an issue in the post-colonial nation. By depicting gendered experiences and differing access to institutional power within the state, Roy and Ghosh reveal how the family becomes the site of reproducing and instantiating gender inequality. Due to this, familial interactions can reveal the impact of unequal access to national power.

Ania Spyra, in discussing the ways in which cosmopolitan ideals remain unobtainable for many women who remain overly-determined by the symbolic weight attached to their bodies, notes the conflation between women's bodies and the nation. Spyra notes how in India, the common nationalist trope appears whereby the body of woman is made to stand in for an entire religious or ethnic community. However, "the efficacy of the nation-as-woman trope depends on a particular construction of femininity as chaste, dutiful, daughterly, or maternal; in other words, as passive and submissive to the will of the father or husband." Women are deprived of real power or agency in this symbolic construction because "gendered constructions of the nation contrast with that of the state: whereas the first is seen as feminine, the latter, due to its power, is masculine" (4)

This conflation of woman with nation and men with state at once imparts a symbolic importance and burden of maintaining certain boundaries upon women while at the same time denying them access to political power. Spyra continues to argue that because of this symbolic weight, women are afforded “protection” on the basis of having their sexuality controlled and policed by the paternalistic state. In both narratives, sexuality becomes the site where women transgress national boundaries and call into question the construction of identity and belonging within certain communities. Thus, while home can serve as a site that allows for multiplicity, it can also become the site where gender identities and sexuality is policed in service of nationalist ideals. Both novelists portray the vexed meanings and experiences embedded within familial interactions, especially for women characters who do not adhere to prescribed gender or sexual norms.

The major women characters in both novels end up “homeless” in varying ways, either by being expelled from the house for their transgressions or living abroad and experiencing a rootless existence. While the severing of ties with the domestic space might offer the promise of liberation, in these narratives it usually entails the opposite as the characters are left more vulnerable, despite home being the site of oppression. Both authors reveal that without full participation and entry into national and public life, women can find neither safety at home nor freedom outside of it. In fact, the home becomes the site of social oppressions rather than an escape from it. However, the narratives suggest that simply leaving behind the home and family does not offer an easy solution or means to freedom from restrictive roles either.

Spyra explores the double-edged meaning of “belonging” which provides an obstacle to women feeling ‘at home in the world,’ which is often posited as the cosmopolitan ideal. She

critiques the gendered dimension of being ‘at home in the world,’ a formulation that presupposes a stable and safe haven to return to, which is more likely for men than women (5). Spyra asserts:

In a feminist reading of the term, the very definition of “home” becomes problematic, and it certainly cannot be read as an enclosure of a familial space, because as such it has often acted as an oppressive space for women, responsible, as Irigaray observes, for her reduction to a simple reproductive function. (5-6)

Spyra advocates for an analysis that utilizes Mohanty’s theory of home as ““an imaginative, politically charged space in which the familiarity and sense of affection and commitment lay in shared collective analysis of social injustice, as well as vision of radical transformation””

(Mohanty qtd. in Spyra). Utilizing Mohanty’s conceptions of home affords both a recognition of the ways in which the narratives reveal how oppressive relations are inculcated in the home and how home and family might offer new possibilities for understanding national communities and identity.

Although Mohanty’s ideal of ‘home’ remains unrealized within the novels, both narratives challenge the assumption of the home as a simple, bounded space safe from the conflicts of the outside world. In revealing how the public world intersects with the home and detailing how, especially for women and others who have been rendered powerless, the home exists as a site of private oppression intertwining with public exclusion, both narratives deconstruct the idea of home. The communal space Mohanty describes resembles utopian hopes dreamed or imagined at certain points in both narratives; while these utopian visions remain unrealized, they serve to critique the existing social order and imagine alternative familial spaces that do not reproduce existing inequalities but challenge such formations.

## *The Shadow Lines*

Amitav Ghosh's novel *The Shadow Lines* explores the history of Indian independence and the resulting Partition between India and Pakistan, examining the communalist violence erupting as a result. In depicting the historical legacy of such events, Ghosh utilizes familial stories and familial experiences to render the lived experiences and effects of these historical events. The story told by the narrator is often focalized through the memories of his younger self as well as recreating the stories others have told him. In the narrator's account of these family stories, the intertwining history of his family in India and friends of theirs, an English family, appear. In addition, the incorporation of stories from family members, such as the grandmother, Tha'mma and the narrator's cousin, Robi, reveal the effects of Partition and communalist violence upon the family. The narrator's understanding of the world beyond India's borders is also influenced by family stories as his cousin Ila, a daughter of a diplomat who travels around the globe, tells him stories of other places. Likewise, his uncle Tridib, whom he idolizes as a child, not only tells him stories of the Price family in England but also encourages the narrator to adopt a view of the world that, in some aspects, resonates with cosmopolitanism. At times, the family stories encapsulate national history, offering an allegorical account of the nation; however, the novel goes beyond simply allegorizing the nation to represent the trauma engendered by national history as well as an understanding of how official silences work to cover knowledge of such traumas and how those with knowledge of such experiences are drawn into rethinking national allegiances and understandings of identity.

The novel explores the fiction of "the shadow lines" that give it its title and stand for the borders between countries that come to symbolize borders in people's conception of the world and create divisiveness. Certain characters, such as Tha'mma, and Robi, commit themselves

wholeheartedly to upholding national boundaries. *Tridib*, however, offers the narrator a view into understanding how imagination constructs much of what people see in the world. This allows the narrator to ultimately realize the fiction of the shadow lines that dominate his life as a national subject. Ultimately, the novel highlights sacrifices demanded by violent nationalism and explores whether such sacrifices can achieve the ideals people hope nationalism will bring.

The novel “writes trauma” in order to convey the effects and aftermath of violence emerging from Partition. In representing trauma, the narrator focuses on familial stories that reveal the national experience. Ghosh undermines the supposed separation between national and familial realms by depicting how family homes and families are shaped by national events. His grandmother, Tha'mma, recollects telling stories to her younger sister about an “upside-down house” (123). The story refers to the grandmother's family home, which was literally divided in half during Partition when the two brothers whose families shared the house became embroiled in a feud. To amuse her younger sister, Tha'mma would tell her, “Everything's upside-down over there [...] at their meals they start with sweets and end with the dal, their books go backwards and end at the beginning [...]” (123). This childhood imagining mirrors the alienation from one's birthplace or home that so often occurred during Partition. In addition, the story of the feud itself reveals the effects of divisiveness within the family, for the narrator reflects, “In later years it always made my grandmother a little nervous when she heard people saying: We're like brothers. What does that mean? she would ask hurriedly. Does that mean you're friends?” (121). The grandmother learns early on the bonds of family can dissolve under the pressures of war and nationalism. The divided house foreshadows her further alienation from home when Partition results in her birthplace of Dhaka becoming part of a foreign country, and she becomes a citizen of another nation suddenly.

The divided “upside-down” house offers an example of the “unhomely” Bhabha discusses in regards to political intrusions into the realm of the home. The familiar place, suddenly made uncanny through political and national politics, reveals the estrangement suffered through Partition. Meenakshi Mukherjee notes, ‘houses have a synecdochal relationship with countries in this novel’ (qtd. in Khatri 74). This does illuminate the at-times allegorical representations in the novel, whereby the divided home represents the nation divided by Partition. However, while the story of the grandmother’s divided childhood home encapsulates the experience of Partition, it also reveals the power of nationalism to shape intimate relationships and experiences. Thus, the novel’s representation of home extends beyond allegory into also depicting the “unhomely” experience whereby familial space does not only mirror, but becomes the site whereby familial interactions shape understandings of and interactions within the public realm.

Ghosh investigates the ways in which historiography can obscure lived history. The narrative includes stories from the family history meant to illuminate lived history and/or experiences excised in more official accounts of national history. As Anjali Roy notes, this “retrieve[s] those counter-narratives occluded or appropriate by official bourgeois nationalism” (42). In seeking to undo this, Ghosh focuses on how nationalism relies upon what certain excisions. Ultimately, Ghosh portrays nationalism’s imagined constructions as opening the possibilities for new imaginings of communities and alternative histories.

Stories such as the grandmother’s contact with a terrorist in her college class and the family’s migration to India after Partition provide insight into national history through the lens of familial experience. The narration highlights this interweaving and juxtaposition of family lore with history, such as when the narrator listens to his grandmother recount the police raid upon

her college classroom, and, when asking why the police were raiding the class is told about nationalist movements fighting British rule. The narrator notes that upon hearing about the context of his grandmother's experiences, "I tried to fit her into that extraordinary history" (37). The grandmother's story, like much of the "microstoria" in the novel, highlights historical interactions that appear in the narrative filtered through familial experience.

In addition, the interactions between the two main families, one Indian and one British, illuminate the history of colonialism and the effects of imperialism. The intertwining of the two familial histories illuminates aspects of Indian and English history while examining the experience and legacy of colonialism that ties the two nations together. Such pairings occur throughout the novel as the grandmother's family becomes divided from relatives who shared the house with her as a child, and the division within the family mirrors that of Partition. Likewise, the romantic pairings similarly reveal the legacy of historical relationships, whether it is Tridib and May's cross-national, cross-cultural love story or the narrator's unrequited love for his cousin Ila, who as a child is close to him yet through her cosmopolitan and rootless lifestyle comes to appear to him as foreign and "improbably exotic." Such pairings and relationships highlight the aspects of familiarity and foreignness that the narrative engages in as it represents nationalism and its attempts to define the nation against those that may be at once considered outside the national community, yet are inextricably bound up in its story.

Home and family offer sites for imaginatively engaging with the effects of national history. However, these imaginative engagements also serve to reveal the "unhomely" aspects Bhabha identifies as they reveal political intrusions reshaping the home and notions of identity. When the narrator's cousin, Ila, decides to play house as a child, she uses her doll, Magda, to reenact a scene of bullying racism she experienced in England. In narrating the taunts, isolation,



and threats that Magda suffers for being so beautiful, with “hair that shone [...] like a bright golden light [...] and deep blue eyes” (71), Ila displaces her own experiences with racism onto the doll, yet the irony is that the doll she uses to embody her experience is white. Another irony lies in her portrayal of Nick Price as the hero who rescues “Magda” (really, Ila) from her bullying tormentor. However, the narrator later finds out that Nick actually abandoned Ila when she was being attacked and fled home to avoid being seen walking with an Indian. Thus, even in the childish imagining of home as an idealized space, the larger world with its racism and betrayals seeps into Ila’s play.

Since the narrative of *The Shadow Lines* revolves around the revelation of suppressed history, accessible mainly by memory and oral history, Ghosh draws the reader’s attention to the role of memory in its creation of identity and of national subjects. Sauvir Kaul, examining the role of memory in the novel, asserts:

In *The Shadow Lines* the shaping force of memory is enormously productive and enabling, but also traumatic and disabling; it liberates and stunts, both the individual imagination and social possibilities; it confirms identities and enforces divides. Memory is, above all, a restless, energetic, troubling power; the price, and limitation, of freedom; the abettor, and the interrogator, of the form and the existence of the modern nation-state. (126)

Kaul’s discussion of the double-edged nature of memory as both an agent of change and a factor in reinforcing divisions and conflicts elucidates the way the narrative writes trauma through its investigations of history and memory’s role in shaping historical understanding. Ghosh highlights this “shaping force” through interweaving memories into the narrative, thus disrupting

the linear flow of the story to emphasize the power of memory to intrude upon and affect conceptions of the present. Additionally, this interweaving of memory allows the narrative to highlight how a tragic death continues to haunt the characters. In representing the effects of loss, the narrative reveals how the absent presence of Tridib guides those who knew him into new understandings of nationalism and of understanding the boundaries that mark the world.

The loss that haunts the narrative, Tridib's death, signals the loss of an international, or what several critics have termed a "cosmopolitan" ideal of seeking knowledge across borders while it also instantiates that same ideal in those close to the character and affected by his death. In addition, the narrative represents trauma and loss in an effort to portray the silences and absences that often construe nationalism. While the character's death represents the loss of certain ideals, glimpses of his utopian vision offer an alternative to the divisiveness and restrictions demanded by strict ideals of national identity as well as the alienation that results from a colonial heritage. In portraying the mourning of these losses, Ghosh imagines a way to confront these historical traumas and provide a counter-narrative to dominant historiography and notions of identity.

The familial history reveals aspects of history that have been excised by nationalism. In addition, the familial interactions vis-à-vis the nation reveals the need for viewing the world beyond the illusion of boundaries. Ghosh uses mirror imagery repeatedly throughout the novel to emphasize the process of the other intertwining with, and constructing, the self. This mirroring of the self through the other takes place on a both a personal, psychological level and on a national level. The narrator states that Nick Price, a boy around his own age in England, "became a spectral presence beside me in my looking glass; growing with me, but always bigger and better, and in some ways more desirable [...] I would look into the glass and there he would be,

growing, always faster, always a head taller” (49). In many ways, having Nick as his mirror image underlines the colonialist construction the narrator contends with as a postcolonial subject having to imagine and measure his identity against an imperial identity. However, the mirror relationship becomes ironic when the narrator and Nick share a similar fate through their connection to Ila. While the narrator suffers from unrequited love for Ila during which Nick and Ila dwell in an unhappy marriage, the narrator reflects “I wanted to get up then and hold him, chest to chest, his shoulders to mine. But, of course, I didn’t – he did not know of the part he had played in my life, standing beside me in the mirrors of my boyhood: I knew he would not have understood” (186). While Nick initially exists as the other for the narrator, his imagination allows him to understand how Nick represents an aspect of his own identity and fate, one that he sympathizes with later in life.

Likewise, his cousin Ila serves as a mirror image for the narrator’s understanding of self. While noting that the two as children were considered to be so similar, relatives often remarked they could be twins, the narrator highlights the growing contrasts that emerge between the two as they grow older. Ila, unlike the narrator who remains rooted in his childhood home while growing up, travels across the globe. Ila’s cosmopolitanism appears as a defining feature of her story, yet this cosmopolitanism is not necessarily freeing; rather, it restricts her at times as it conflicts with gendered expectations and imperialist ideology. In representing the difficulties women face in navigating a cosmopolitan identity, the narrative suggests, as Shameem Black notes, “that in order to enable cosmopolitan liberation from repressive family practices, female characters must directly confront the source of that repression in domestic spaces” (47). The tensions between the ideals of cosmopolitanism and domesticity are brought to bear on Ila as her

attempts to find herself at home in India are thwarted by patriarchal expectations that she finds in conflict with what she sees as the freedom and personal liberation afforded in the West.

However, Ila's attempt to make a home in England does not yield what she seeks, either. While hoping to escape patriarchal expectations in India, she merely exchanges them for colonial constraints in gendered terms in England. Her marriage to Nick Price leads to a betrayal of her hopes as he flaunts his affairs in her face. His infidelity intertwines with racism as he informs Ila that his mistresses include a woman from Martinique and an Indonesian woman because "he just likes a bit of variety; it's his way of traveling" (185). Thus, Nick places these women and Ila as exotic curiosities that afford him the opportunity of experiencing the imperial privilege of "traveling" around the world that he no longer has access to in a post-colonial world.

Despite Ila's cosmopolitanism, she remains unable to find a home in the world she travels throughout, which, the narrative suggests, is due to her lacking a stable sense of home. The narrator describes Ila as being unconcerned with truly seeing the places she visits, and he attributes this to Tridib's account of how "the inventions she lived in moved with her, so that although she had lived in many places, she had never traveled at all" (21). What the narrator belatedly realizes is that due to her lack of a home, the "inventions" that travel with her are Ila's only source of constancy. Thus, Ila remains cut off from the various places she seeks to make home.

Mohanty's ideal of a feminist home, not as a site of domestic enclosure, but a productive, imaginative space remains foreclosed to Ila. The tentative exception to this lies in Ila's involvement with a political group. While Ila's involvement with radical leftists fails to measure up entirely to Mohanty's ideal (in embracing their ideas and causes rooted in mainly European

and Western outlooks, Ila includes her dismissing her own country's history as irrelevant and unimportant), it still offers her the one instance where she can engage with a conception of home and community not based on regressive patriarchal structures or imperial dominance. While the narrator mainly scoffs at Ila's notions, due to anger at her adopting a Eurocentric view that elevates her experience as more important than the narrator's, he later concedes that Ila's involvement with this political community allows her to act in the world in a truly brave manner. He notes that she "marched off to Brixton with her little crew of friends, to confront a gang of jack-booted racists armed with bicycle chains" and recognizes, "for me, I would not have dared" (103). Ila's inability to achieve the freedom she seeks suggests that for women to access full participation in national life, the domestic space must cease to function as a site of oppression and vice versa. In addition, the narrator's realization of how their different understandings of place and history have shaped them enables him to see the limits in Ila's vision as he considers his own attempt to see the world imaginatively.

The narrator's ability to utilize his imagination to envision other realities and ways of seeing the world comes from Tridib, who he sees as a mentor in this regard. The alternative historiography, and with it, the means to re-imagine the self and the world, that the narrative offers is embodied by Tridib. Tridib sparks the young narrator's childhood imagination with his stories of travel, and more importantly, his advocacy of imagination in viewing the world. Kaul notes Tridib's importance to the narrator as a teacher, and "[w]hat Tridib wants to teach him is to 'use [his] imagination with precision' (29), which means to be able to recognize the contemporaneity of the past, to be able to see historical memory as vital to any understanding of the present, and to be able to see different times and places as inextricably intertwined with one's own" (134). The understanding imparted to the narrator of the importance of "historical

memory” in understanding the present as well as understanding how disparate places and people are linked functions as the narrative’s endorsement of using imagination and historical understanding to navigate through the world.

After Tridib’s death, the narrator draws lines upon a map, reimagining the connections between various places as he charts the distances between various cities. His redrawing and reviewing of national boundaries, what Kaul terms “imaginative cartography” enables him to see the imposed fiction of “the shadow lines” or boundaries that define his experience. In drawing upon the power of imagination, the narrator is able to view how nationalism constructs certain realities. Yet, the narrative highlights the importance of being able to imagine other realities beyond those instantiated by hegemonic forces.

The narrator engages in an imaginative cartography that deconstructs the artifice of national borders when he begins drawing circles upon a map. He realizes by looking at the circumferences that cities in Thailand are closer to Calcutta than Delhi, and thus, the imposition of borders creates connections between disparate areas that geography belies. This leads the narrator to reflect on the constructed nature of borders and the underlying belief in “a special enchantment in lines” (228). He realizes that the hope statesmen and conquerors have that drawing lines on a map will separate areas of land from one another is undone by

a yet undiscovered irony—the irony that killed Tridib: the simple fact that there had never been a moment in the 4000-year –old history of that map when the places we know as Dhaka and Calcutta were more closely bound to each other than after they had drawn their lines – so closely that I, in Calcutta, had only to look into the mirror to be in Dhaka;

a moment when each city was the inverted image of the other, locked into an irreversible symmetry by the line that was to set us free – our looking-glass border. (228)

Thus, the narrator critiques and subverts the fiction of borders by noting how the creation of national identity and its desire to separate and distinguish itself from others leads to more closely aligning disparate areas when they are locked in conflict or war.

The narrator's consciousness of mirror images informs his understanding of larger transcultural connections. While he previously believed there to be totally separate realities across borders, he instead draws upon his earlier ideas of mirror images to inform his understanding of transnational connections. His childhood and familial ideas of mirror images were based upon an idea of his self reflected alongside others who he believed to be similar (i.e., Nick, Ila) yet also fundamentally different and defining of his self through their difference. He begins to understand how national borders function in a manner similar to his viewing of his mirror image through the others he imagines. Thus, he realizes that his grandmother's tale of the "upside-down house" encapsulates a truer understanding of how divided nations are inextricably linked in the ways they define themselves as opposing one another. He claims,

I grew up believing in the truth of the precepts that were available to me: I believed in the reality of nations and borders; I believed that across the border there existed another reality. The only relationship my vocabulary permitted between those separate realities was war or friendship. There was no room in it for this other thing. And things which did not fit my vocabulary were merely pushed over the edge into the chasm of that silence. (214).

The narrator's belated recognition of how nationalism and its discourse of borders affected his perception of reality leads him to this critique of the "silence" where experiences and complexities that do not fit in the dualistic conceptions of strident nationalism reside. However, the narrator also begins to realize that the realities of war or friendship are not such separate entities and that war can occur even within the spaces that are supposed to be unified by friendship or affiliation.

The narrator's realization of these issues is spurred by his search for newspaper accounts of a riot in Calcutta he remembers occurring during his childhood, he is stunned to find no record of this. However, he unwittingly stumbles onto an account of rioting in Pakistan and realizes this would have been the same rioting that led to Tridib's death. Thus, the narrator simultaneously discovers official reports of the riots connecting to his uncle's death as well as the silences in official accounts that conflict with his own memories and experiences. He reflects:

the madness of a riot is a pathological inversion, but also therefore a reminder, of that indivisible sanity that binds people to each other independently of their governments.

And that prior, independent relationship is the natural enemy of government, for it is in the logic of states that to exist at all they must claim the monopoly of all relationships between peoples. (225-6)

Thus, in spite of the communalist beliefs that fuel the riots, Ghosh presents such occurrences as arising from, but in conflict with, the nation-state. The narrator realizes that the silences surrounding the riots and Tridib's death result from the state's need to maintain the "monopoly of all relationships between peoples". This allows family to reproduce the state's power as the



nation-state seeks to produce feelings of familial-like devotion, yet, familial interactions have the ability to offer counter-narratives to nationalism. Tridib's death serves as such a counter-narrative in highlighting the silences and selective reporting of historiographic accounts. The narrator realizes Tridib's legacy, which has been to make him realize the fiction of borders, opens up a space of re-imagining relationships defined by the nation.

Ghosh investigates ways of reimagining the home's connection to the world in order to highlight how familial connections and feelings of affiliation can serve as a means to re-imagine identity. As Shameem Black notes:

Ghosh's fiction illuminates the intimacy between the familial and the foreign, his work suggests that a robust cosmopolitan sensibility requires close attention to the energies of domestic life. As Ghosh's work teaches us to understand the home and the world as collaborative rather than competing realities, his concern for home enables a contemporary cosmopolitanism that critiques masculinist and imperialist visions of world citizenship. (46)

Thus, Ghosh's vision of cosmopolitanism does not divorce itself from belonging at home or among a community but explores how those ties can establish and maintain a cosmopolitan outlook. This progressive form of cosmopolitanism seeks to undo and undermine the legacy of imperialism while exploring the ways in which the family encapsulates and provides alternatives to nationalist narratives.

In investigating and critiquing nationalist narratives, Ghosh evinces what Ian Almond terms "post-colonial melancholy," which he links to a loss of an identity imposed by imperialism that was never wanted in the first place, and resulting in an angst "which every postcolonial intellectual suspicious of his own nationhood has to face, of not having any identity at all" (98).

This tension between resisting identities imposed by colonialism or adhering to nationalist constructions that do not encompass a true reflection of the nation spurs the need for imaginatively seeing the world. The narrative represents Tridib's desire to do so as an attempt at self-liberation. As Almond notes, "Ghosh's characters do seem to be separated into the enlightened—those who have understood that if we don't try to create worlds for ourselves, 'we will never be free of other people's inventions' (31) – and the deluded, those who see a reality that has little or nothing to do with imagination" (97). The need to "create worlds" involves understanding nationhood as arising from certain conceptions of identity and exploring the construction of national and historical narratives so alternate realities and/or suppressed histories can be known.

Ghosh highlights the cross-cultural transactions and interactions that illuminate and provide understanding of both history and one's own implication within history. The narrative portrays desire as the impetus for transmitting knowledge, for, as Tridib informs the narrator, the only true knowledge can come from desire, which he describes as more than simple physical desire, but instead "a longing for everything that was not oneself, a torment of the flesh that carried one beyond the limits of one's mind to other times and other places, and even, if one was lucky, to a place where there was no border between oneself and one's image in the mirror" (29). In his description of desire, Tridib suggests a utopian vision for a sense of self freed from history that may not be achievable, yet offers an important critique of historical and national divisions. As Kaul explains,

Tridib's yearning, addressed to a time and space before subcontinental borders, before the historical alienation of culture and self, exists as an unqualified, untrammelled, trace-memory of psychic wholeness and identity. Such desire can of course only exist prior to

historical or geographical calculation, and is manifestly unrealizable. In its function as critique and utopian hope, however, it is quite as real as the shadow-lines that mock the limits of our political consciousness and imagination. (142)

This formulation of desire encloses an imagining of different social orders and ways of being. This desire allows for the imagining of other possibilities and realities beyond the “shadow lines” imposed by government and politics, and, especially regarding Ghosh’s text, divisive nationalism.

The love stories in the novel, especially May and Tridib’s, highlight interaction across boundaries. Critics have noted the parallels the text invokes between Tridib and May’s love story and that of the mythical Tristan and Isolde. Both stories involve lovers from different countries, separated by distance, coming together despite cultural divisions. In addition, Tridib initiates a romance with May when he writes her a letter explaining “he wanted to meet her [...] as a stranger, in a ruin. He wanted them to meet as the completest of strangers—strangers-across-the-seas—all the more strangers because they knew each other already” (141). Tridib’s formulation of himself and May as “strangers” who “knew each other already” highlights both the cultural and spatial distance between them, with him residing in India and her in England, and the connection they share through their families’ friendship.

While Tridib’s death appears to signal the loss of hope for the realization of his values of an undivided self and place, his memory and influence spur other characters to insights that help them see beyond the “shadow-lines” that otherwise limit consciousness and knowledge. Thus, the narrative represents his death as a sacrifice and one that continues to haunt those who loved him. However, in the portrayal of characters confronting the loss created by his death the

narrative represents the enactment of change and new understandings that can result from “working through” trauma.

Tridib is killed during a communalist riot when, at May’s urging, he rushes to defend his elderly great-uncle and the uncle’s caretaker although his efforts are futile as all three are killed. At the conclusion of the novel, May confesses to the narrator, “I thought I’d killed him. [...] For years, I was arrogant enough to think I owed him his life. But I know now I didn’t kill him; I couldn’t have, if I’d wanted. He gave himself up; it was a sacrifice. I know I can’t understand it, I know I mustn’t try, for any real sacrifice is a mystery” (246). May’s acknowledgment of the mystery of sacrifice points to the unknown aspect of Tridib’s decision –whether he willingly walked into the crowd knowing he was going to die, as May supposes, or whether he made a rash decision and was the victim of circumstance. Dhruvajyoti Bannerjee notes the ambiguous nature of Tridib’s sacrifice, wondering whether his death represents an attempt to throw off “restrictive notions of identity” that are imposed by national borders and governments, or if his death accords with a desire to author his own story, which he earlier advocated as a means to protect one from becoming caught in another’s story (201). While the narrative deliberately leaves Tridib’s motivations for his fatal decision unknown, Bannerjee’s suppositions highlight that his death remains mysterious, yet it spurs various reflections upon identity within the narrative.

In portraying Tridib’s death as a sacrifice, the narrative does distinguish it from the type of sacrifice typically undertaken in service of securing national borders or advancing national independence or autonomy. Unlike Tha’mma’s vision of national sacrifice, in which she asserts that bloodshed constitutes a nation (76), Tridib’s death is not meant to invoke warring and bloodshed in order to secure borders or instantiate a sense of unity against outside forces. Nadia Butt notes that Tridib’s death as a sacrifice is simultaneously ironic and not, as no one is saved

by his death. The borders, which sparked the communalist riots in the first place, the narrator comes to discover, are fictions imposed by nations. However, the narrative suggests Tridib's death can be read as an achievement of a real, not merely ironic, sacrifice for other ideals. Butt concludes:

The narrator is driven to map out a transcultural space like his uncle Tridib in the realm of the imagination to penetrate the shadows of illusory and fictive demarcations so that one could think beyond the spatial metaphors of ethnic hatred and thus could be able to heal wounds of the past with the exchange of interconnected histories, histories which encompass disparate people, cultures, civilizations, and countries. Thus Ghosh renders voice to silenced histories of ordinary individuals in his fictional narrative to commemorate their sacrifices as well as ideals for the subcontinent as a meeting ground of cultural and ethnic contact. (14-15)

Thus, Tridib's death both highlights the intrusion of national history and the possibilities for utilizing an awareness of history for understanding how it binds people of disparate identities together. Although Tridib's death represents the traumatic effects of communalist violence, the narrative portrays characters grappling with coming to terms with his loss in order to understand the effects of history upon them.

For the narrator and Robi, Tridib's younger brother, his death leaves them with the feeling that the past has been frozen in time. Robi remarks that "all it takes to set my hand shaking like a leaf, fifteen years later, thousands of miles away, at the end of another continent, is a chance remark by a waiter in restaurant" (241). Such experiences cause him to question the idea of fighting for freedom as he wonders, "How can anyone divide a memory? If freedom were

possible, surely Tridib's death would have set me free" (ibid.). Throughout the novel Robi is noted for his similarity to Tha'mma in that he willingly fights and views bloodshed as necessary if it is in the cause of certain ideals. However, Tridib's death causes him to question whether bloodshed pays for freedom as Tridib's blood has not freed him but has left him trapped in the past, still wrestling with the horrific memories he holds. In addition, he comes to reflect on the irony that those he opposes similarly believe the violence they inflict is justified in their fight for freedom.

For May, Tridib's death brings an awareness of her imperial privilege she was blind to before. She reflects upon her actions right before Tridib was killed, belatedly realizing that Tha'mma was correct in telling her to stay uninvolved as the mob approached. May remarks, "She said I didn't know what I was doing, and I'd get everyone killed. I didn't listen [...] But she knew what was going to happen. Everyone there did, except me" (245). Wrestling with her actions and Tridib's death causes May to reassess the way her moral certainties are based on privilege; however, she still maintains an awareness of the need to work for humanitarian causes as she reevaluates her actions. She volunteers for human rights organizations and voluntarily fasts after deciding "it might not be an entirely bad idea to go without something every once in awhile" (158). Although she herself laughs sheepishly at the limited and mainly symbolic gesture of her forgoing the privileges of a first-world lifestyle, her actions underline an awareness of the empathy and solidarity involved in meaningful cross-cultural connections and exchanges.

The narrator continues to seek understanding as he works through losing Tridib. While one method of doing so is the "imaginative cartography" in which he realizes the way histories of nations are tied together through the very boundaries that divide them, he also seeks insight from May. His encounters with May suggest an 'acting out,' which La Capra describes as what

might be a compulsive reenactment of trauma, or a precursor to ‘working through’ it. The final scene of the novel contains the narrator lying in May’s arms after spending the night with her. This intimacy with his uncle’s former lover suggests a reenactment of an earlier love scene that has indirectly led to the trauma and loss the characters struggle to confront through their physical encounter. Thus, *The Shadow Lines* final scene with its representation of ‘acting out’ may also highlight the ‘working through’ of trauma. While the ambiguity of the scene allows for it to be read as a compulsive repetition of the past, it simultaneously suggests an attempt at healing. While no such closure is achieved in the narrative, the representation of the attempt to come to terms with a haunting past offers insight into the necessity of doing so. The narrative thus emphasizes how exploring the losses incurred by violent nationalisms can offer insight into the construction of boundaries in order to imagine alternative arrangements. While the utopian hopes represented in the narrative are not achieved and may be unachievable, their deployment as critique and as a guiding map to a less divisive future allows for a tentative portrayal of national communities based on inclusivity and recognition of commonality across borders.

### ***The God of Small Things***

Arundhati Roy’s widely acclaimed novel, *The God of Small Things*, like Ghosh’s novel, explores a postcolonial India in order to examine how the promise of national independence has not brought about freedom for certain populations and how the legacy of colonialism intersects with globalization in order to continue to instantiate oppression. Like *The Shadow Lines*, the narrative writes trauma, yet in its narration also contains moments of utopian possibility that emerge as critiques against current power structures. While Roy’s novel examines the aftermath of colonialism in a post-independence India, the narrative also focuses attention on the inequalities and devastation wrought by globalization. Paul Jay argues that while this attention to

globalization might move the novel away from a strictly defined category of postcolonial literature, the “postnational” aspects of Roy’s novel are best understood as “demonstrat[ing] that the postcolonial condition itself is itself produced as part of the history of globalization, which is in turn connected to the forces of colonization” (101). Jay continues to explain, “The novel cannot be read as being *either* about postcolonialism or globalization. It is simultaneously about both because they are historically implicated with each other” (101). Roy explores this mutual implication by examining the way the postcolonial state can end up exploiting vulnerable citizens and globalization can further deepen oppressive power relations introduced by imperialism.

Roy explores the deployment of such power relations through an examination of familial relationships and politics. Thus, the novel compels its audience to consider how nationalism, with its adoption of the family as a legitimating metaphor, fails to safeguard actual families, particularly their most vulnerable members. As in Mohanty’s call for re-imagining home, Roy’s novel examines how home and family exists as sites for instantiating oppression, yet also can be re-imagined as sites where hegemonic power relations are challenged and new types of family arrangements might be conceived.

The story of *The God of Small Things* centers on the once-wealthy Kochamma family who own a failing pickling factory. The family consists of the aging mother/grandmother, Mammachi, an unmarried aunt, Baby Kochamma, the Oxford-educated son, Chacko, his divorced sister, Ammu, and her twins, Rahel and Estha. The frame story concerns the adult Rahel and Estha, who have returned to their family home in Ayamenem after being separated for much of their childhood. The novel interweaves a series of recollections of the fateful day that led to a tragic series of events that continue to haunt Estha and Rahel. The day recalled by the



twins is the day their cousin, Sophie, the daughter of their Uncle Chacko and his English ex-wife Margaret, came to visit. As in *The Shadow Lines*, the familial interactions surrounding visitors from England reveal the legacy of colonialism and its continuing effects. Sophie is admired and “loved from the start” for her light skin and Western features, while the twins are seen as “half-Hindu hybrids” who exist as a reminder of Ammu’s ill-fated marriage and subsequently disgraceful divorce. It is Sophie’s tragic drowning that leads to a series of events where Ammu’s lover, Velutha, is falsely accused and subsequently tortured and given a fatal beating by the police. The twins’ unwitting participation in this series of events traumatizes them and continues to haunt them.

The novel repeatedly returns to the idea of “the love laws” which, as imagined by the twins, dictates “who should be loved, and how. And how much” (33). The narration emphasizes that the family repeatedly breaks the love laws, and the consequences of doing so reveal how societies police interpersonal relationships and thus why family serves as both a site of oppression, where such policing of interpersonal contact takes place, and a site of rebellion, where love and affiliation not sanctioned by tradition or power can occur.

The portrayal of family life in *The God of Small Things* reveals how power relations are reproduced and enacted within the familial sphere. The paternalistic and authoritarian structures that characters first encounter in their childhood reproduce the power structures of the state, particularly for women who are excluded from legal protection and who often first realize their subordinate status within the home. Ammu and Chacko’s deceased father was a tyrannical bully who beat and intimidated family members throughout their childhood. When he callously and spitefully destroys Ammu’s favorite pair of boots, she develops “a lofty sense of injustice” (181). Thus, despite being a member of a privileged class, Ammu recognizes her marginalized position

through witnessing the domestic violence within her home and encountering the legal system's denial of her right to any of the family property. As Bloem notes, Ammu, "though technically a child of wealth and privilege [...] identifies with the poor and downtrodden because she has, from her earliest years, been treated as unwanted and undeserving" (141). Thus, Roy reveals how familial experiences can serve to reproduce national power and social injustices, and yet these experiences awaken protests against such hierarchical orderings.

Roy offers a critique of how patriarchal structures can serve to deprive women and children of their rights. Thus, political and social oppressions continue to be inculcated within the domestic space. The same disregard of her basic rights that Ammu first experiences within the family is reproduced in the legal disinheritance she experiences as a woman who has no claim to familial property. Her brother Chacko repeatedly reminds her: "What's yours is mine and what's mine is also mine," which Ammu bitingly attributes to "our wonderful male chauvinist society" (57). Rose Bloem, in her analysis of *The God of Small Things*, asserts that it reveals how "dystopic family constellations clearly reflect the pathologies of the community at large. It is through the situation of mothers and their children who are trapped in the intrigues of patriarchal, authoritarian families that we witness how the private domain is reflected in the public sphere" (215).

Such instances show how the narrative engagement with depicting familial oppression reveals how such experiences intertwine with and reinforce oppression in the public sphere. Bloem also notes that this depiction of the public realm inscribed within the private life arises from Roy's goal to

reveal how inextricably public and private are intertwined, [her] focus to a large extent also encompasses private, female space in a wider, political context. Through the encoded depictions of mothers and children who are subject to extreme familial and political tension, emerges the need to acknowledge those fundamental rights denied mothers and their children within patriarchal, political structures. (216)

Thus, while the family on one level provides a microcosm for the nation, with its patriarchal institutions and laws, the narrative utilizes the familial interactions to portray power relations and how oppression shapes those who experience it in conflicting ways. Characters may decry injustice and simultaneously perpetuate it, and such depictions reveal the effects of historical abuses that continue across generations.

While Roy attends to the complexities of subordination and the resulting resistances, rebellions, and complicities that result from such an experience, the narrative resolutely calls attention to those who have been excluded from power, especially national power. In bringing attention to the “small things,” Roy’s narrative centralizes what is often overlooked or seen as incidental. This includes not only literal small things, such as insects (moments when the narrative focuses on their description emphasizes what is overlooked as being beneath notice), but also children, homeless people, and untouchables, whose presence is marginalized within hegemonic discourse. Roy’s novel emphasizes their place in the fabric of the nation-state, which is crucial but often diminished in an increasingly globalized world. Her emphasis on the “small things” focuses the reader’s attention on how certain members’ of society are designated as worth less or overlooked.

However, despite the sympathy Roy evidences toward the marginalized, the depictions do not serve to reduce them to mere objects of sympathy by limiting their characterization as simply wronged victims. Rather, Roy depicts the complex and seemingly contradictory reactions of those who have been subjugated. As Anuradha Dingwaney Needham argues:

Roy does not present subordination as a stable, unproblematic condition from which resistance necessarily proceeds. Instead, in mapping varying degrees of rebellion and defiance against, and collusion with the dominant, she seems to be on the side of those critics of subaltern studies, who complain that because ‘subaltern mentalité’ is recuperated as ‘the mentalité of the subaltern at the time of opposition, at the moment of their action against domination’ (Masselos 2001: 192), the ‘dialects of collaboration and acquiescence on the part of the subalterns and the wide range of attitudes between resignation and revolt have been underplayed’ in this mode of historiography (Das Gupta 2001: 110). (Needham 379)

Roy’s novel then explores the dynamics often overlooked in examinations of those experiencing marginalization and oppression by representing the complex and contradictory reactions ranging from rebellion to participating in perpetuating oppression.

The dynamics of simultaneously resisting and inculcating oppression appear in the narrative through the twins’ attempts to grapple with the ordering of the world around them. Much of the narrative is focalized through their point of view as children, thus highlighting a perspective at once keenly aware yet not completely immersed in the social world. Estha and Rahel’s tenuous position within the family leads to them developing, as Strehle notes, “diasporic double-consciousness. They are not at home; not only are ‘they’ all wrong, but ‘home’ itself is

unstable” (137). In this household where they are seen as outsiders for being half-Hindu and are accorded less status due to their mother’s divorce, the twins become aware of their marginalization and also become less susceptible to accepting ideologies of home and family. Such a mindset allows them to gain an awareness of counter-histories that go against the dominant narratives.

The narrative repeatedly returns to the motif of history to explore its haunting and overwhelming power. In portraying the now-adult twins wrestling with their childhood, the narrative represents trauma by attending to the silences and gaps emerging from traumatic experiences. Estha, who feels complicit in Velutha’s death for his decision, when threatened, to falsely name Velutha as an abductor, has retreated into silence since childhood. Estha’s retreat into voicelessness “writes trauma” in depicting the desire to enclose and hide the recollection of trauma even as it remains ever-present while secreted in silence. The narrative voice highlights how Estha’s silence emerges from the contrasting nature of trauma as present and hidden:

[i]t rocked him to the rhythm of an ancient, foetal heartbeat. It sent its stealthy, suckered tentacles inching along the insides of his skull, hovering the knolls and dells of his memory, dislodging old sentences, whisking them off the tip of his tongue. It stripped his thoughts and of the words that described them and left them pared and naked [...] He grew accustomed to the uneasy octopus that lived inside of him and squirted its inky tranquilizer on his past. Gradually the reason for his silence was hidden away, entombed somewhere deep in the soothing folds of the fact of it. (11-12)

Estha’s silence simultaneously appears as comforting, enclosing him within a womb-like space, and prohibitive, taking away his means of expression and overshadowing his thoughts. His

silence both hides and highlights his trauma as a witness and victimized-participant in Velutha's death.

It is these silences and gaps, along with memory, that forms the basis for a counter-history that emerges in response to dominant narratives. Early on, the novel provides an encapsulation of this process in the local lore surrounding the "History House." The twins give this name to the abandoned estate they believe personifies history, the home of Kari Saipu, "Ayemenem's own Kurtz" (52). Local beliefs circulate that the Englishman who originally owned the house went insane after his underage lover was taken away from him. After his death, he supposedly haunted the grounds of the house until Velutha's father encountered the ghost one night and pinned it to a tree with his sickle. The story depicts childhood imagination and local, folk history crafting counter-narratives exploring the haunting impact of history.

In addition, the family history engages with the effects of trauma, representing it through literary depictions of time and memory that highlight trauma's effects upon understandings of historiography. The narrative voice asserts, "a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of whole lifetimes. And [...] when they do, those few dozen hours, like the salvaged remains of a burned house – the charred clock, the singed photograph, the scorched furniture – must be resurrected from the ruins and examined. Preserved. Accounted for" (32). This meta-commentary on the narrative's aim in depicting the "few dozen hours" that continue to reverberate through the twins' lives, shaping and affecting them, reveals the drive to understand violence and trauma in order to elucidate its effects and role. The narrative utilizes the family to explore this, but connects this exploration of trauma and violence to viewing its interweaving within national communities.

The hours that have such an effect upon the twins' lives encompass the drowning of their cousin, Sophie Mol, when the three children's plans to run away from home take a disastrous turn, and witnessing the fatal beating of Velutha, their beloved friend, and unbeknownst to them at the time, their mother's lover. These tragic incidents occur at the "History House," where policemen track Velutha and brutally beat him, knowing that his status as a member of the Untouchable caste enables them to do so without fear of reprisal. Thus, the "History House" becomes the site where trauma is enacted as Rahel and Estha witness the police's brutal attack.

In describing the attack, the narrative voice highlights the idea of history as imposing power and control. The narrator asserts, "What Estha and Rahel witnessed that morning, though they didn't know it then, was a clinical demonstration in controlled conditions (this was not war after all, or genocide) of human nature's pursuit of ascendancy. Structure. Order. Complete monopoly. It was human history, masquerading as God's purpose" (309). Roy emphasizes how the drive for control and order results in hegemonic forces inflicting violence upon those seen as threatening. In addition, the narrator explains that the attack on Velutha represents an acting out of the fear that underlies power relations built on a fear of difference, noting that the men carrying out the beating were "[i]mpelled by feelings that were primal yet paradoxically wholly impersonal. Feelings of contempt born of inchoate, unacknowledged fear—civilization's fear of nature, men's fear of women, power's fear of fearlessness. Man's subliminal urge to destroy what he could neither subdue nor deify" (308). In this passage, Roy highlights the forces compelling the policemen to attack Velutha for violating the proscribed social order. The narrator notes, "Unlike the custom of rampaging religious mobs or conquering armies running riot, that morning in the Heart of Darkness the posse of Touchable Policemen acted with economy, not frenzy. Efficiency, not anarchy. Responsibility, not hysteria" (309).

This passage underscores the use of violence by state power to maintain order and control. In contrast to the rioting mob which kills Tridib in *The Shadow Lines*, the violence here does not threaten to expose the shaky foundations of “order” or national power; rather, it emphasizes the state’s use of violence as justified by ideas of maintaining order, but maintaining order in the interests of those in power, not protecting the less powerful against abuses by those in power. In addition, the violence enacted reveals the authority of the state to make an example of someone seen as transgressing boundaries.

In describing the policemen as “history’s henchmen,” Roy highlights how often historiography focuses on events meant to consolidate and ensure hegemonic control and order. In calling attention to what power fears and what structure and order are meant to maintain, Roy, in the passage above, focuses on the experiences of those victimized and oppressed by history. “History” is thus aligned with dominant narratives that ensure the continuation of systems of power, while the familial history constitutive of the story reveals a counter-narrative that questions the construction of historiography and points to its gaps and silences concerning abuses of power.

National history appears through the structure of the family, represented by the twins’ attempts to understand the world around them. The family history reveals the impact of colonial history in charting the ways imperialism distorts interpersonal relationships. Roy reveals how the family comes to understand its own history as shaped by the legacy of colonialism. Chacko tells the children that they are “a *family* of Anglophiles. Pointed in the wrong direction, trapped outside their own history, and unable to retrace their steps because their footprints had been swept away” (52). Chacko’s formulation insightfully reveals the impact of colonialism, namely separating its subjects from their national history; however, he offers no solution for overcoming



this alienation. The sense of alienation he invokes resonates with the twins who must wrestle with their own understanding of and interpellation by history. The depiction of being trapped outside history underscores what Strehle describes as “an alienation from the India that evolved *after* independence as well as *out of* the experience of colonization that preceded 1947” (129). However, while Chacko’s statement figures the family as trapped outside of history, the narrative’s focus on colonialism’s crippling legacy underscores the familial experience as a counter-history.

Additionally, it links the legacy of colonial exploitation with the current system of neo-imperialism and globalization. Rahel’s experiences of racism within the US as well as the description of the damage wrought to land surrounding the family home by globalization reveal the continuation of an economic system of exploitation with links to colonialism<sup>1</sup>. In exploring these various instances of historical exploitation, the narrative calls attention to familial experiences in shaping and responding to such historical forces. This reveals the continuation of an economic system of exploitation with links to colonialism. As Janet Thormann explains, “Global inequality is aligned with the local inequalities that determine and limit the possibilities and choices of the characters, so that, as the law plays out in their narrative, they are inevitably subjects of brute force and excessive enjoyment of power, the underside of the law” (304). This “excessive enjoyment of power” enacted within the realm of law is also enacted within the family sphere, rendering it a site of exploitation rather than protection. Thus, the narrative aligns its depictions of home with Mohanty’s critique, which challenges the notion of home as “comfortable, stable [...] and familiar”. The novel uses its depictions of home and family as not safe and not comfortable to critique the role of the family in reinforcing hegemonic power. The critique opened up by these depictions allow the narrative to represent the notions of “an

imaginative and politically charged space” of “radical transformation” that Mohanty posits in opposition to commonly held views of home.

The critique of family and representation of challenges to hegemonic ideas of family and home emerge in the story’s depiction of “the Love Laws.” The transgression of these codes motivate much of the narrative as it charts the enactment of these laws and the repercussions for challenging them. In exploring relationships that violate these laws, such as inter-caste and incestuous relationships, the narrative reveals the family as a site of hegemonic control and one where human desire and connection threatens to disrupt and subvert the very control enacted within the family.

One such site of hegemonic control reinforced through the family occurs in the perpetuation of restrictive gender norms. The women in the Kochamma family, despite their own sufferings due to such restrictions, perpetuate the cycle of suffering onto the next generation. Rather than seeing the family as a source of sympathy and affiliation, Mammachi and Baby Kochamma place concern about the family’s reputation above the well-being of actual family members. When Mammachi learns of Ammu’s affair with Velutha, Ammu’s supposed crime is the harm she has done to the family, namely that “[s]he had defiled generations of breeding [...] and brought the family to its knees. For generations to come, *for ever* now, people would point at them at weddings and funerals” (258). Mammachi figures Ammu’s transgression as an attempt at destroying the social standing of the family. Thus, the narrative calls attention to the maintenance of a family’s social status as a form of reinforcing social inequalities and injustices. Under this paternalistic system, female sexuality is co-opted due to its role in reproducing familial structures. Sexuality thus becomes overly-determined as a site of maintenance and control, and violating norms threaten power structures that depend on the reproduction of familial structures

susceptible to hegemonic control. Thus, Roy calls attention to the ways in which even the most personal emotions are subject to regulation in order to “provid[e] a metaphor for the intricate relatedness of home and homeland, personal and national arenas of turmoil” (Strehle 127).

The narrative calls attention to the way public oppressions are engendered by and supported through interactions in the familial realm. Although Chacko stands up against his father’s bullying, he still absorbs his father’s Anglophilia, which “renders [him] servile and self-defeated” (Strehle 129). In addition, Chacko sexually harasses the women workers at the family factory, and his mother colludes with this by building a separate entrance to his room in order that the women will not be walking through the house. Likewise, the unmarried aunt, Baby Kochamma, marginalized within the family, projects her resentment regarding this situation onto her niece, Ammu. This leads to her plotting revenge against Ammu and her lover, Velutha, by falsely reporting a rape charge against Velutha that ultimately leads to his death. Rather than empathizing with her niece, she nurses bitterness against Ammu for resisting the marginalized status she has accepted.

Roy’s portrayal of the twins’ alienation underscores the way in which oppressive attitudes are carried across the generations. Despite Ammu’s own rebellions she can assert authority over her children in damaging ways at times. As Susan Strehle observes, “Having seen hypocrisy and brutality inside the mask of the well-behaved citizen, Ammu knows the failures obedience can produce as she knows their personal cost. Nonetheless, she raises her children to win prizes for comportment and docility” (136-7). Ammu’s at-times authoritarian and dismissive attitude toward her children is explained by the fact that “their wide-eyed vulnerability, and their willingness to love people who didn’t really love them, exasperated her and sometimes made her want to hurt them—just as an education, a protection” (43). Although she desires to protect them

from the pain she sees waiting for them, her admonishments and threats of punishment delivered to the twins often lead to them feeling alienated and exiled knowing they do not truly belong in their home. Although her recognition of the injustices within her home allows her to recognize the wider injustices in the world around her, the result of this is a double-edged sword whereby Ammu is defined as possessing “an unmixable mix...a mother’s infinite tenderness and the reckless rage of a suicide bomber” (63) whereby she wounds even the innocent and those close to her, including her own children, in her attempts to rage against the oppressive order that surrounds her.

The reinforcement of hegemonic control is not limited to only the bourgeois or well-off families. Vellaya Pappen, Velutha’s father worries that his son does not embrace the servile role transcribed to him. While seemingly paradoxical that he would wish his son to embrace his oppressed status, he recognizes that by resisting it, Velutha courts disaster. Ironically, Vellaya Pappen betrays his son by going to Mammachi to grovel and beg forgiveness for Velutha’s transgressions, thus informing her of Ammu and Velutha’s affair (256). This sets in motion the chain of events leading to Velutha’s death. The narrative highlights the transmission of social mores and social control through generations. However, it also notes how such cross-generational transmission remains uncertain, so that inter-caste love affairs and childhood friendships emerge that challenge existing social orders. In fact, Ammu and Velutha’s love affair as well as the twins’ affection and friendship for Velutha suggest another type of family or affiliation that does not perpetuate hegemonic rules or base itself upon power and exploitation.

Much of the scholarship around *The God of Small Things* has centered on a debate raised by Aijaz Ahmad’s assertion that the novel abandons a trenchant political critique in favor of retreating into the realm of the erotic. Others have noted though, that what might be

characterized as a retreat into the erotic could instead be viewed as a narrative exploration of how the personal and political intertwine, especially in socially forbidden relationships. Thus, sexuality offers a site of transgression and potential reformulation of communal ties. Brinda Bose, in responding to charges of the novel as upholding the realm of the erotic over the realm of direct political action, explores the ways in which personal politics become necessarily intertwined with desire. As Bose asserts, “the experience of desire—or desiring—in Roy’s novel, contrary to the idea that it proclaims ‘the erotic as Truth’ explores its many political possibilities and appears to reject finally any truth that would grandstand over and above the validity of the process itself” (89). In addition, Bose notes that in reading Ammu’s attraction to Velutha as indicative of a physical infatuation while downplaying or ignoring the passages that indicate her interest in his possible political ideals and commitments repeats a tendency to view women as less politically committed than men.

This debate concerning a withdrawal from political critique in order to focus on romantic relationships as political solution and an attention to the erotic has implications for nationalism. Such a critique suggests how a militant nationalist discourse can often overlook women’s contributions to and definitions within the nation-state by upholding masculinist standard of militancy. In discussing this perceived lack of commitment, Bose argues that what is often criticized as women’s lack of militancy may be indicative of women’s recognition that gender inequalities entail that they do have less of a stake in militant or nationalist endeavors because such struggles often fail to eradicate gender inequality (91-2). Thus, she argues for the need to attend to Roy’s trenchant critique of the way nationalism and militant politics often fail to dislodge unfair gender relations that serve capitalist exploitation.

However, Roy's critique is not limited to gender or sexual exploitation; rather, she interweaves a critique of class exploitation and caste prejudice into the exploration of how exploitative and unequal gender relations relate to class exploitation. Roy reveals how gender inequality, class exploitation, and caste prejudice reinforce one another by highlighting how the restriction of women's rights and their legal and economic dependence on patriarchal structures entails that their sexuality is policed. Yet while offering a depiction of the way varying oppressions interweave and reinforce one another, Roy remains attentive to the various distinctions between different forms of oppression. As Needham argues, "The critique of patriarchy, gender and caste that emerges, on the one hand, from Ammu's, the twins, and Velutha's individualized responses to their social-cultural circumstances, and, on the other, from the (loving) relationship between them does not subsume the one (for instance, caste) under the other (gender), or *vice versa*, nor does it assume that suffering one form of oppression by definition makes a person cognizant of other forms of oppression" (378). Thus, while the relationships emerging between those marginalized highlights a way for recognizing the bonds borne out of experiencing similar oppressions, the narrative also reveals the limitations of such relationships fully illuminating and undoing oppression.

While relationships and familial structures free from exploitation are never fully realized within the narrative, the emphasis on Ammu's transgression of sexual proscriptions in order to act on her feelings for someone belonging to the Untouchable caste underscores the potential for re-imagining social and national communities. By emphasizing Ammu's reclamation of her own desires and her transgression, the narrative reveals how power relations dictate the most intimate sorts of relationships between people. The expectation that Ammu, as a woman and a mother, must renounce desire, especially when it is focused toward someone outside her community,

underscores how her sexuality is inscribed within hierarchical structures. Therefore, her decision to act on her desires incorporates an embrace of autonomy and freedom in the face of a social order demanding their relinquishment. As Thormann explains, “Ammu’s radical refusal to give up on desire stands as the novel’s commitment to the good of the subject. As she chooses to love Velutha, she rejects the paternal law governing the regulation of women and at the same time breaks the rigidity of caste stratification” (305). Thus, Ammu’s act is transgressive both in terms of gender and class. Because the formation of gender is so heavily invested within the space of the family and the reproduction of familial structures, Ammu’s rebellion against gender restrictions causes shockwaves within the home as she seeks to rewrite the family history of abuse and patriarchal dominance.

The narrative’s criticism of the nation’s lack of inclusiveness and access to rights and protection for all its citizens appears in the emphasis on absent presences and highlighting of the bodies brutalized and seen as a threat. Critical attention in the portrayal of Velutha as a subaltern whose body becomes both the site of rebellion and the site of a brutal enactment of power underscores this representation of power embedding itself into bodies and lives. As Strehle notes, “Ammu chooses Velutha’s body as the focus for her rebellion against the order of her social world because, like her own body, his is heavily policed by Hindu caste proscriptions” (142). When Velutha is apprehended by the police who wrongly believe that he has kidnapped the twins, “his body is used by the posses of ‘Touchable Policemen’ as a blank slate on which to write the lessons of Indian caste history” (Strehle 143). By witnessing Velutha’s body becoming the site of “history,” Estha and Rahel become haunted by the memory of the violence inflicted upon him and by the absence caused by his death. Velutha’s killing haunts them, revealing the power of history to shape lives as well as the effects of local customs and state power coinciding

to police the bodies of citizens. Thus, the image of national history offered by the novel, which focuses on larger forces like colonization and globalization, also weaves in the account of Velutha's death to reveal how the nation can fail to protect and can punish its citizens.

The novel's penultimate scene contains an incestuous encounter between the now-adult Rahel and Estha. Their sexual encounter is described in minimal terms and noted for the fact that they once again break "the Love Laws" (328). The scene's ambiguity raises varying critical interpretations. Friedman summarizes the two views usually advanced in response, asking: "Does the incest presage a decadent and ingrown paralysis (a frequent charge against the Syrian Christian elite) or a rebellious new beginning based in a transgression enacted for love that holds out the possibility of healing?" (252). Some critics, such as Eldred point to the fact that Estha sees his mother's image in Rahel during their encounter as signifying that the incest "becomes repetition of the unproductive sexuality already inherent in the family and in the history house—without any suggestion that future generations might learn a 'history lesson' from them" and "As colonial hybridity may undermine the state, incestuous hybridity undermines the family, but this kind of family does *not* correspond with the positive effects of political revolution" (76-77). However, others have advanced a more optimistic reading along the lines of the second question, seeing the transgression as potentially healing. Thormann, describing it as "a radical refusal of difference and time and a nostalgic return to their connection to love, childhood, and the mother before the devastating effects of perverse law," emphasizes the subversive potential in the encounter (304).

The narrative description of the encounter between the twins tends to highlight both the compulsive repetition of the past and the potential for comfort and solace the twins find with one another. In this regard, the incestuous encounter represents an attempt to "work through" trauma



according to La Capra's terms. For, while the narrator notes that what the two share is "not happiness, but hideous grief" (328), it also offers tenuous hope that such an encounter that mirrors and reenacts the origins of the twins' trauma affords them the chance to confront the past in a way that may potentially enable them to address their long-silenced feelings of grief. In deliberately shifting between these two potential readings, the narrative seeks not to prematurely foreclose the narrative's depiction of terror and grief. In other words, a simple healing through one encounter would provide an unrealistically optimistic view of working through trauma, yet depicting the twins as remaining helplessly mired in the past would render the narrative's protest against social injustice impotent. Unless some small, tenuous hope for being marked, but not totally defined by the trauma of such injustice exists, even if only in possibility, the promise of a changed world would cease. Thus, the encounter between the twins' and their unorthodox attempt to "work through" the trauma of their childhood offers an instance of "empathic unsettlement" whereby the deliberately jarring nature of the scene brings into relief the deeply felt effects of such grief and anguish as well as the potential for addressing the underlying causes of such trauma.

In adopting a non-linear sequence, the narrative places the love scene between Ammu and Velutha, which occurs chronologically near the beginning at the novel's end. By first depicting the incestuous encounter that recalls the forbidden love affair that set the story into motion, the narrative foreshadows and focuses the reader's attention on the inter-caste love story at the heart of the narrative. In placing the love scenes as the conclusion, the narrative emphasizes a potentially, albeit tentative, utopian reading of the encounter. Thus, besides seeing the inter-caste relationship strictly as an apolitical retreat into the erotic, as Ahmed does, or as a political reclamation of women's sexuality, as Bose and others do, another possibility emerges in

the focus on a moment of transient happiness that the reader encounters knowing it has already been eclipsed by tragedy.

While the utopian possibilities remain only unrealized hopes, Needham argues that Roy “situates Ammu and Velutha’s relationship within a nexus of another set of relationships, which could (in a not yet possible future) come to constitute an alternative, more enabling family and form of community” (385). In discussing how many utopian writers undermine restrictive sexual mores in an attempt to free sexuality from control by restrictive social forces, Needham notes, “Roy’s utopian moments both share this preoccupation and extend it by aligning it with a project that attempts to recast a stronghold of patriarchal authority –the family and relations sanctioned therein through which women (and children’s) subordination is secured” (386). While the utopian moments remain just that, moments, within a text that otherwise focuses on the tragic consequences of subordination and subjection, the narrative highlights the tentative possibilities that remain unrealized but nevertheless their depiction reveals that another world besides the current one is possible. If Roy is “recast[ing] a stronghold of patriarchal authority” as Needham claims, this has implications for the nation-state that has utilized the patriarchal family as a way of disseminating its power. Thus, the utopian moments in the novel bring to light the need to refigure familial relations that will also refigure national relations.

### **Conclusion:**

The two novels both write trauma, representing its effects in the memories of survivors and in the silences that surround the violent deaths in the novel. Even though both writers focus on postcolonial India, the traumas and violence emerge from very different situations, inter-communal violence in Ghosh’s that underscores the conflict over national boundaries due to Partition, and the killing in Roy’s revealing the continuation of caste prejudice and class

oppression within a nation that has been meant to achieve freedom and independence. Although Ghosh's novel focuses more on colonization's aftermath in the newly independent and newly partitioned nation, and Roy's novel portrays colonization more tangentially while focusing on globalization's outgrowth and connection to an imperialist legacy that continues to affect the postcolonial society, both focus on the family as the site where history is learned and its traumas are experienced.

The novels portray 'acting out' of trauma in repetition of encounters that preceded the traumatic event, such as in the incestuous encounter between the twins in *The God of Small Things* and the narrator's desire to sleep with his violently murdered uncle's lover who was present at the time of the killing. These representations reveal a blurring of roles and boundaries in the family, or, to use the language employed by Roy's narrator, they violate the "Love Laws". In doing so, they reveal how home and family, with the double-edged meaning of belonging, as noted by Spyra, serve to both instantiate and police these boundaries while simultaneously providing the space where opposition to such boundaries will occur. While the boundaries instilled within the family structure that are meant to maintain purity of race, religion, caste, and nationality, the two novels emphasize how these do not remain stable. Indeed, since such notions of identity are often in flux in interpersonal relationships, the family offers a site of challenging and resisting these boundaries.

The novels depict "empathic unsettlement" emerging in such scenes where taboos are broken and boundaries are crossed. In representing the effects of trauma and the characters' attempts to work through it, the novels utilize the breakdown of expected roles and boundaries within the familial realm to underscore how trauma continues to impact survivors. In portraying the attempt to come to terms with it, the novels also highlight utopian hopes and moments within

the text, whether it is Tridib's desire for a place where the self is not divided, or the twins desire for a loving family not based on ideas of lineage and purity, or Ammu and Velutha's desire for another world than the oppressive one they occupy. Such gestures towards another way of being, while not realized within the stories, represent the need to imagine beyond systemic oppression and existing social orders. The novels suggest that it is perhaps in breaking the boundaries that national power designates the family as maintaining that home can become the space Mohanty imagines of radical transformation and political action.

## Chapter Three: Recreating Genealogy in Explorations of National History in Jamaican Literature

In his article “Jamaican Literature”, Martin Mordecai examines images of the family and home within the body of Jamaican national literature. When discussing the plot of *Tom Cringle’s Log*, a novel which centers on an enslaved man who was sold by his father, he notes how it provides a predominant theme within Jamaican literature. The novel reveals:

an instance of breaking apart of family, kinship, and nation. Every other dislocation is a more or less violent version of this one; the players may be different, but the effect is the same. Beginning with the idea of transplanted Jamaicans as people separated from family-kin and/or nation-kin, we can discuss Jamaican literature as the journey back to reconstituted kinship. (113)

Mordecai continues to explain that examining Jamaican literature through this lens allows for understanding the images of loss that predominate. He asserts: “Interpreted in this context, words like ‘displacement,’ ‘alienation,’ and ‘fragmentation’ point to brokenness but also to a possibility for wholeness” (113). He thus agrees with Barbara Lalla’s contention that, ‘In Jamaican fiction, a shifting emphasis from exile, loss and displacement to nationalism is ongoing’” (qtd. in Mordecai 113). Mordecai thus summarizes the ways in which portrayals of the family and the search for “reconstituted kinship” underscore the continuing search in Jamaican literature for a history and a nationalism that emerges from looking back at the losses of the past. Examining current Jamaican literature reveals that narratives of “reconstituted kinship” typically call attention to historical concerns with defining a Jamaican national identity as well as understanding present-day issues and social inequalities arising from the past.

The image of ‘reconstituted kinship’ appears in both Margaret Cezair-Thompson’s *The True History of Paradise* and Michelle Cliff’s *No Telephone to Heaven*. The authors represent the “reconstituted kinship” through the protagonists’ search for family history, which often entails a return to ancestral sites and the landscape. In Cezair-Thompson’s novel, the main character, Jean’s, visits to her grandmother’s country house and other sites that hold buried remnants of the past, offer her the chance to search for a buried and suppressed history. In Cliff’s novel, Clare Savage returns to her deceased grandmother’s home to reclaim it from the ‘ruinate’ (overgrowth) that has overtaken it, and in doing so, comes into contact with the buried history around her.

However, the protagonists in both novels first confront the image of broken families before beginning their search for lost and buried histories contained within family history. In *The True History of Paradise*, the novel begins with Jean learning of the death of her half-sister, Lana, and the narrative centers on her recalling her life experiences and various facets of her family history including her parents’ discord with one another, her mother’s refusal to recognize Lana, Lana’s turmoil, and other family crises and tensions. These familial issues are often presented in tandem with national upheaval and connected to historical flashbacks in the novel meant to provide insight not only into the family dynamics but the historical dynamics that contributed to the failure of these family relationships. In *No Telephone to Heaven* the rupture between Clare’s parents force her to examine her identity and what aspects of her heritage she claims as part of her identity. Cliff uses the story of the main character’s family to represent divisions and historical separations within Jamaica, but she also underscores how the notion of a national ‘family’ is undone by the socio-economic divide in the country. In offering a description of the resistance group that Clare joins, which aims for uniformity in appearance even as they

confront the very stark differences in life experiences and social circumstances that divide them, Cliff asserts “on this island, as part of this small nation, many of them would have been separated at birth. Automatically. [...] to get out would mean crashing through barriers positioned by people not so unlike yourself. People you knew should call you brother, sister” (4-5). With these lines, Cliff underscores how the image of national family is undermined by the inequalities of the society and describes these social divisions in terms of broken familial relations.

Thus, in the depiction of the broken family and search for “reconstituted kinship”, both authors strategically use genealogy to rewrite and re-imagine history. In discussing the portrayal of a matrilineal history in *No Telephone to Heaven*, Lisa Ortiz explains, “Cliff draws on this genealogy of women not as a strategy to search for Jamaican ‘origin’, but to find new ways to situate historical, individual, and family identity in a past and present that is constantly reproducing its own hybridity. Cliff’s use of genealogy, unlike traditional uses of ancestry, focuses on the intervention of an African and Amerindian presence into notions of ancestry embedded in a search for ‘origin’ that cannot truly be claimed in the Diaspora or elsewhere” (168). Cliff’s exploration of a genealogy that questions and undermines essentialist notions of identity occurs through the protagonist’s journeys away from Jamaica and subsequent return to the land in search of the history embedded there. These journeys lead to Clare’s political awakening and engagement. For Cezair-Thompson, the portrayal of genealogy occurs through the inclusion of ancestral voices that speak to the protagonist in interludes throughout the main narrative. These ancestral voices represent characters from various periods of Jamaican history. As the protagonist journeys across the island, these voices are interspersed with her reflections upon her life and inform an understanding of the present concerns facing the main character.

Ortiz, drawing upon Lionnet's definition of genealogy as 'the reconstruction of the self through interpretations that integrate as many aspects of the past that are deemed significant by the agent of narrative discourse' (qtd. in Ortiz 154), asserts that "Cliff uses this form of genealogy as a strategy for interrupting the official history of Jamaica and its inhabitants in an attempt to decolonize them in her representation" (155). Thus, while both novelists undermine official, colonial narratives of the past, they utilize the counter-histories they create with the characters' understandings of familial history to offer a reconstruction of Jamaican history that includes aspects of history often overlooked or excluded.

While both novels offer counter-histories that question historical constructions through their fictionalized genealogies, the two novels differ in their deployment of nationalism and representation of the respective protagonist's evolving understandings of nationalism and relationship to a national collectivity. Although the protagonists of both novels share similar backgrounds and undertake similar searches to understand their family history as a means for understanding their identity as Jamaicans, the two narratives offer different trajectories for the respective protagonists. Cezair-Thompson depicts the main character, Jean Landing, ultimately deciding she must flee Jamaica, leaving her homeland as it is engulfed in violence, embarking on a journey that takes her across the island only in order to leave it. Michelle Cliff's protagonist Clare Savage, in contrast, completes a circular journey away from and back to Jamaica and this circular journey allows her to return to her homeland with a new awareness of its suppressed past and the continuing legacy of colonialism and neo-colonialism that helps foster the violence and inequality she seeks to redress. While both novels share a concern with portraying nationalism through a narrative of recovering family history, Cliff does so with a portrayal of engaging in



anti-colonial nationalism while Cezair-Thompson limits the narrative to focusing on how family history intersects with and affects national identity.

*The True History of Paradise* and *No Telephone to Heaven* are both set in a post-independence Jamaica rife with violence. Although both narratives take place in a no-longer colonized Jamaica, the nation has to grapple with the fact that national independence has not liberated it; it still continues to be dominated by U.S. foreign policy as well as historical divisions. National independence has not led to a dismantling of the class system or the socio-economic divisions around skin color. Thus, the two protagonists, who grow up in the early years of national independence, must confront how Jamaica continues to be plagued by historical problems as well as struggle with overreaching foreign influence.

Both novels are set during a time of political violence and upheaval in post-independence Jamaica during the 1960s to the 1980s. Much of the violence in Jamaica arose from political infighting that was furthered inflamed when the C.I.A. decided to contribute arms and support to one political faction in hopes of swaying Jamaican government to adapt to foreign policies that favored the United States's foreign policy positions. The historian Laurie Gunst explains how much of the violence arose from the US's decision to support Edward Seaga, the head of the Jamaican Labour Party (JLP) and rival of Michael Manley, head of the People's National Party (PNP) who had maintained friendly relations with a Castro-led Cuba. The CIA decided to supply Seaga's affiliated political gangs with guns<sup>7</sup>. When the PNP decided to respond to the JLP's

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<sup>7</sup> The historian Laurie Gunst explains that "Manley took up the larger struggle of small, underdeveloped third world states against the overwhelming dominance of the old and new colonial powers. Even as Manley's PNP raised this banner, Edward Seaga began turning the rival Jamaican Labour Party into a reactionary force, thundering against Manley's warming friendship with Fidel Castro and his brave but foolhardy support for myriad third world insurgencies" (xvii). She continues to explain how Manley's politics drew fire from the United States, which saw his

arming themselves in kind, rival political gangs contributed to a widespread violence and upswing in crime. Gunst explains:

The American Eagle hovered fiercely over Jamaica's doomed experiment in democratic socialism and eventually routed it with the same methods the State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency had used elsewhere. The American press painted a harsh portrait of the island, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) devalued Jamaica's currency and destabilized an economy already battered by the oil price shock of the 1970s, and travel agents discouraged their clients from going to Jamaica, thereby crippling the industry on which the island depended for its survival. (xvii-xviii)

In addition to the overarching influence of US foreign policy toward Jamaica that affected its politics and economy, many Jamaican citizens suffered the direct result of the US supplying weapons to political gangs. Gunst describes how "Jamaica became yet another theater of the worldwide cold war [...] This drama not only went on in the corridors of the State Department, the World Bank, and the IMF; it played constantly in the rubble streets of Kingston, where Manley and Seaga armed their rival posses to maintain control of political constituencies in a tangle of slums and shantytowns" (xviii). Both novels portray this political violence as they depict it spurring the main characters in both novels into exile through immigrating to escape the violence.

While most people in Jamaica did not have the option of fleeing from the violence and crime, those that had the means to do so frequently did at this time. This context of immigration due to fear of violence informs the narratives of *The True History of Paradise* and *No Telephone*

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diplomatic overtures to Castro as a frightening sign of collaboration with an enemy. This in turn, led the US to supporting Seaga's JLP as a means to unseat Manley.

*to Heaven*. Both novels depict main characters confronting the dilemma of leaving one's homeland and thus, entering into exile. In depicting these experiences, the novels recall the history of exile that has defined a significant portion of Jamaican, and much of the Caribbean's, history. Historians and Caribbean writers have often noted how the annihilation of the indigenous population and the importation of enslaved Africans and other populations who often immigrated to Jamaica under economic duress led to a population that was marked by the experience of exile. This is the "dislocation" that Mordecai describes as a hallmark of Jamaican experience and literature.

The two authors draw upon and deploy the historical memory of those earlier exiles that constituted the creation of the Jamaican nation as they represent issues of exile and immigration facing contemporary Jamaica. While the two main characters in these novels experience a very different sort of exile from the experiences of those who suffered through the Middle Passage or indentured servitude, the separation from their homeland causes the characters to question their place in history and their national identity. In depicting characters facing such questions, Cliff and Cezair-Thompson raise issues of national allegiance and commitment to community arising from such experiences and dilemmas.

The portrayal of nationalism through literature has long been a concern to Jamaican writers and intellectuals who wished to establish and assert their own national identity as separate from colonial constructions and imperial discourse. Leah Reade Rosenberg observes that "[f]rom the anonymous author of *Adolphus* in 1853 to Lamming, Caribbean writers were engaged in the same project, namely, the creation of an authentic Caribbean identity through literature. This literature claimed political legitimacy for a people whose heritage included a history of conquest, genocide, slavery, and colonialism. Caribbean writers of all generations

faced the dilemma of creating authentic modern cultures for a region that European discourses had defined as the antithesis of the modern” (5). Rosenberg asserts the primacy of developing a Jamaican literature that reflected the experiences of the people comprising the island, noting that “[w]hether located in the Caribbean or living in exile abroad, Caribbean writers dedicated themselves to establishing authentic national literatures based on working-class and peasant culture. Not infrequently, they referred to this national, folk literature as the soul of the nation or the people” (1). The “soul of the nation” the writers attempted to create often led to them describing Jamaica in terms of birth and new life. For example, Rosenberg cites a 1938 play by Una Marson in which a character describes an uprising in Jamaica as ‘a new sort of maternity case. The birth of a soul’ (1). In utilizing the language of birth to describe the new nation, writers could claim the nation as something new and separate from Great Britain, thus making a claim for postcolonial independence.

While utilizing the language of birth to describe Jamaica coming into being as an independent nation, writers often turned to the family as a form for portraying the nationalism or national collectivity. Rosenberg notes a trend of Jamaican writers focused on nationalism deploying images of the the family to portray the island’s mixed population. The family provided a means for authors to imagine a national collectivity, especially in a country where the population consists of so many varying ethnicities and immigrant groups<sup>8</sup>. This trend noted by

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<sup>8</sup> Mordecai observes that Claude McKay offered utopian visions for Jamaica based upon the family. In addition, he notes that Jamaican poets during the 1960’s and 1970’s “move [...] in the direction of ‘home’, which is closely conceived as family, extending into community and directly addressing nation-family” (122). He discusses Louise Bennett’s poetry and how she aims to “reconcile[e], in her person and her work, an endless variety of family *bruck-up* fragmentations of color, class, mores, and language. Miss Lou [...] gathers Jamaicans into a family” (115).

critics reveal Jamaican writers exploring depictions of the family that emphasize divisions and separations within and from the family, frequently representing national tensions.

In turning to kinship to imagine national belonging, writers also utilize images of the home to imagine the nation. For Jamaica, which has been marked by experiences of migration and exile, depictions of homelessness arise frequently in conjunction with imagining the home. Thus, the idea of home frequently becomes tied to the loss of home and dispossession that has defined the history of much of the population. Lalla asserts that many Jamaican writers examine homelessness in order to understand this national condition, asserting “a growing number of these texts, often by reference to vagrancy, highlight feelings of homelessness within the Jamaica that should be home” (Lalla 18). And, “Some recent Jamaican writers have utilized alienated personae to present new or alternative visions that reveal previously hidden facets of society, rechart history, and reevaluate such concepts as civilization and savagery” (20). Thus, the homelessness and exile that characterizes the experiences of protagonists in recent fiction by Jamaican women investigating national history and nationalism reveals an attempt to question the historiography and constructions of national belonging. The experiences of losing and/or leaving home and remembering home when away from it spur the characters to reflect on the meaning of family and nation, thus allowing the narrative to represent how such issues impact understandings of nationalism.

In exploring experiences of homelessness, Cliff and Cezair-Thompson refigure earlier imperialist discussions based around inheritance to question the application of ideas of family, home, and belonging. In representing states of homelessness and disinheritance, both authors convey the failure of the state to provide an inclusive “familial” structure, and thus call upon images of family and home to rethink nationalism.

## The True History of Paradise

With its title, *The True History of Paradise*, Cezair-Thompson's novel announces its intention of revealing lost, forgotten, and suppressed histories in order to reveal the blind spots in colonialist constructions of history. The novel utilizes what Kelli Lyon Johnson, drawing upon Ellen McCracken's work, terms a "collective autobiography" whereby the protagonist's life experiences and family history encapsulate national experience. In this regard, *The True History of Paradise* recalls Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* in its formulation of a protagonist whose birth coincides with the birth of the newly independent nation. Thus, the main character, Jean Landing, begins her life "as daylight broke on the nation, born into that knowledge of nation and prenation, the old noises of barracks, slave quarters, and steerage mingling in her ears with the newest sounds of self-rule" (17). Thus, Jean's maturation is linked to the development of the nation, and the progression of her life parallels that of her homeland. Additionally, the narration highlights how the timing of her birth serves as a bridge, whereby she accesses "knowledge of nation and prenation." In this regard, the narrative repeatedly links Jamaica's attainment of independence with a recollection of the island's history.

The history of the island that figures so prominently in the narrative appears largely via the representation of ancestral voices appearing in interludes throughout the narrative. The "old noises" referred to above appear through chapters that incorporate the voice and story of an ancestor from an earlier period in Jamaican history. Jean is portrayed as having special access to these ancestral voices, which, while appearing as dream-like interludes, function in the narrative as a sort of folk memory. Each ancestor's story provide insight into moments of Jamaican history and the experiences of various groups that comprise the island's population.

The novel interweaves the ancestral voices with a main storyline concerning the protagonist, Jean Landing, and her experiences growing up in Jamaica. Jean's familial experiences reveal divisions and conflicts within Jamaican society at the time. Her parents represent very different outlooks and attitudes toward history and nationalism, with her father ardently supporting Jamaican independence and validating and emphasizing his non-European ancestry while her mother holds a more colonialist mindset, disagreeing with independence and upholding her European ancestry over her non-white identity. Her half-sister Lana, who throughout the novel remains confused and divided about her identity, suffers from mental breakdowns. The novel suggests that Lana's mental illness and eventual suicide emerge from feeling always divided and unaccepted, and the resulting trauma leads to an unstable identity. Lana's eventual suicide occurs at the beginning of the novel, and Jean receives the news on the day before she is supposed to leave the island. Jean has decided to immigrate secretly due to her belief that Jamaica has become too unsafe and violent due to political fighting. As Jean travels across the island to flee to the U.S., she is accompanied by her family friend and long-time confidant, Paul. During their journey, Jean recalls her life and family history and how those intersect with Jamaica's history. Throughout her journey and her recollections, the ancestral voices offer their own stories at points that intersect with Jean's life experience.

The ancestral voices portrayed in the story represent counter-memories that serve to challenge official historiography and understandings of what comprises history. Suzanne Vega-Gonzalez's asserts that writers who challenge boundaries of historiography through counter-memory reveal that "history is transmitted through its own protagonists, represented by the characters, some of whom speak and act from the world of the dead. The use of dreams and the otherworldly acts as a narrative strategy of transgression that calls into question the validity of

binary opposites like fact/fiction, life/death/, real/imaginary” (299). This use of “dreams and the otherworldly” appears in Jean’s ability to hear the ancestral voices. Although these are not portrayed as strictly supernatural occurrences, the novel presents the voices as appearing from beyond the boundaries of ordinary experiences and knowledge.

The novel presents a counter-history of Jamaica that counters colonial constructions of its history. The title, with its emphasis on “true history” aims to reveal the experiences of various populations in the island as constituting history in contrast to traditional historiography. The novel aims to focus on the experiences of various ethnic groups through the form of family genealogy. Jean’s story and the stories of her ancestors offer a multicultural vision of the island’s history since her family encompasses “African slaves [...] English, Irish, Spanish, Jewish, Germans, and Chinese” (297). In offering this mosaic-style vision of national history through the family genealogy, the narrative emphasizes the idea of the nation as a family. However, the image of family in the novel is emphatically not based on ideas of racial purity or separation but rather the incorporation of nearly all groups within Jamaica’s population. Thus, the familial experiences portrayed attempt to represent the multi-ethnic and multicultural make-up of the nation while exploring how such multiple groups might be conceived of as a singular, national entity.

With this interweaving of stories from various groups and within various periods of Jamaican history, the family history and genealogy offers a counter-history of the nation. While the more “official,” colonial versions of history are conveyed to Jean through venues such as the school and historical records, Jean receives a supplemental historical education through her family. Jean’s interest in history is nurtured by her father, Roy. Roy, an ardent supporter of Jamaican independence and anti-colonial in his political beliefs, encourages Jean to know the



history of the island. Jean recalls how Roy took her to see a statue of Columbus when she was as child and how that led to an argument between Roy and a schoolteacher who overheard Roy telling Jean that Columbus was not the first to discover the island. The schoolteacher takes issue with Roy's counter-history and its critical view of Columbus and the two argue. Jean remembers how "[i]t was so important to Roy to set Jean straight on the matter [...] He told her about the Arawaks and their peaceful life before the arrival of the Spanish, speaking long into the night with dramatic pointings and sweepings of his hands like a teacher in front of a blackboard" (56). Through Roy, Jean is exposed to a postcolonial view of Jamaican history emphasizing the indigenous experience rather than the history of its European conquerors.

Roy's character embodies the hope and vision for a postcolonial nationhood. His narrative provides insight into the evolution of the movement for Jamaican independence. In a dream visitation to Jean after his death, Roy discusses the evolution of his understanding of his national and racial identity. He explains when he enlisted to fight in World War II for England, "We weren't thinking about colonialism an' all that then. We didn't even see the irony of being shipped as fresh recruits to Britain on one of the banana producers' boats" (284). Roy is forced to contend with racism in England, but out of the experience of learning about the racism directed toward blacks and West Indians, Roy explains, "our eyes opened up to imperialism and racism and as we outgrew our colonial docility, we found other reasons to fight for and alongside England." Those reasons included that "[f]rom our seeing Englishmen toil in the ways that West Indians always had, from lying with the English in trenches and shelters, and from their ordinary kindnesses, the imperial structure we had just begun to notice, name, and suspect began to show cracks in which something new could emerge" (248). Roy's experiences in England help him see both the imperialism that has dominated Jamaica and also ways that this imperialism can be

undone, which leads him to becoming involved in the cause for Jamaican independence. Roy gives voice to the postcolonial nationalism emerging from international engagement in World War II and links this move for national independence with a recognition of the common causes shared by other colonies, other islands in the region, and, the English working class.

However, Roy dies early in the narrative, and his death symbolizes the death of the postcolonial national ideals he carried. During the state of emergency, Jean reflects, “She is saddened but in a strange way relieved, by the realization that Roy’s time came to an end with Roy: the early-morning energy of nation builders, the optimism of people waking from a satisfying dream into a satisfying day, just wasn’t here anymore” (283). In addition, Jean’s aunt Daphne, a close friend of Roy’s who also supports Jamaican independence, reflects that he would have been proud and pleased to see Manley in office (128). After Daphne’s sudden death, Jean reflects that “[i]t was her father she was mourning again. With Daphne gone, who would keep bringing up his name?” (213). Jean recalls her father taking her to visit Daphne’s, which was a central meeting place for many of the nation builders and visionaries around the time of Jamaican independence and mourns the passing of that time period. This reveals how Jean’s growing up has intertwined with key milestones in the nation’s development. In addition, her reflection on these deaths from members of the generation that worked for national independence suggests that the promise of Jamaican nationhood has been lost and did not live to see its promise.

While revealing how the family can provide access to counter-history, the novel also portrays the dangers of limiting or lacking historical understanding through contrasting the differing attitudes of family members. Although Jean gains an interest in history due to her father’s influence, this interest contrasts sharply with the feelings of other members of her

immediate family. Jean's mother, Monica, dismisses this interest in history. Monica symbolizes the embrace of colonial history within Jamaican society that seeks to minimize or disregard indigenous or African heritage in favor of European heritage. When the family visits an Arawak museum, Monica complains, 'We shoulda never come here. All dis badda-badda over a dead iguana, you woulda tink is Queen Elizabet' crown' (15). When Roy argues for the importance of understanding the indigenous history of the island, Lana retorts, 'I can't stand history' (15).

A distinction appears between the characters displaying an interest in history and utilize their knowledge of it to understand the present and the characters who discount history and remain willfully blind to its effects upon them. The novel connects a refusal to come to terms with history as signaling a crisis of identity. Lana's dislike of history as a child signals a deeper inability to grapple with the effects of history upon her life and her place within history. This inability to process the effects of her familial past upon her current situation and struggles leads to her repeated crises and breakdowns. Lana's crises are presented in tandem with political or national upheavals. Thus, Lana's mental instability foreshadows the instability racking the nation, and the political divisions are depicted as playing out within the family sphere and the home as the site where political arguments and debates are carried out. In addition, when the narrator comments, "Lana's convulsions anticipated the nation's: There was another election," it highlights the political instability that has woven itself within the home as well (204).

Lana's statement challenges the importance of understanding national history. Yet, the narrative depicts Lana, and Monica, the two characters explicitly uninterested in history, as the most unable to escape its grip. Past patterns appear to repeat compulsively with both Lana and Monica, who remain unable to escape the fates they try to avoid. Monica believes Lana is repeating her own mistake when Lana becomes pregnant while unmarried, and she remains

unable to reconcile with Lana after this because Lana's situation reminds her of her own past that she has worked so hard to bury. As Daphne explains to Jean, "*The thing about your mother [...] is she can't forgive herself [...] For what happened to her and Deepa. Not just the way she acted, but the way she felt*" (123). Thus, Monica's inability to reconcile herself to the feelings she harbored that led to her becoming disgraced leads to her witnessing the repetition of the same scenario in her daughter's life. For Lana, this lack of acceptance from her mother leads to a confusion of identity where she remains unable to know what aspects of herself to claim. Paul, Lana's boyfriend and a family friend, remarks to Jean that when Lana spoke about her Indian heritage, she "would just joke about it and call herself Monica's Coolie daughter" (92). This joking remark signals Lana's deeper conflict over what she sees as her divided identity. Her uncertain acceptance into the family because of her illegitimate status troubles Lana to the point where she ends up battling manic-depressive disorder and suffers repeated breakdowns.

In portraying familial conflicts and the repetition of patterns across generations, the novel represents the way historic tensions that remain unresolved continue to beset the national community. The ethnic divisions within the island come to be mirrored within the family. As Jean reflects, "Monica hated the Ramcharans so much that the hatred spread to everything and everyone Indian" (92). Thus, the familial conflicts represent the emergence and effects of historic divisions that continue to separate the island's population. In revealing how these historic divisions continue to be experienced by utilizing the frame of familial conflict, Cezair-Thompson underscores the importance of confronting and contending with historical legacies.

Lana's turmoil and her fate come to symbolize the state of Jamaica. By portraying Lana's turmoil as allegorical for the national turmoil, Cezair-Thompson suggests that the inability to confront history and its effects leads to experiencing internal divisions and strife. Lana

eventually commits suicide and her chosen method – setting herself on fire – parallels Jamaica in its state of emergency. The novel begins with Jean looking out at Kingston from her verandah and noting “[s]ince morning she has counted six fires” (3). While worrying about Jamaica being in a state of emergency, Jean receives the unexpected and devastating news of Lana’s suicide. Thus, the fires Jean has seen raging hit home but in an unexpected personal loss rather than in the form of political violence she has feared will reach her. However, the personal loss Jean faces signals the way that historical divisions that are not confronted can consume people, and the turmoil the nation experiences frequently connects to personal loss within the novel.

While many of the divisions and conflicts play out within the family sphere within the novel, Cezair-Thompson also suggests that exploring and revising family history and genealogical narratives can lead to new understandings of history and national identity. Although Jean occasionally fears that she will face the same fate of mental illness and suicide as Lana, wondering, “[t]hey are daughters of the same rank tropical growth, daughters of the same history, backed up against the same walls. Will the waters close around her, too?” (301), her fate is far different from Lana’s. Jean, unlike Lana and Monica, is able to embrace her varied heritage and accepts the multitudinous and, at times, conflicting, voices of her ancestry. By understanding how her own past is woven into the past of the nation, she is able to understand and utilize the counter-history she discovers in her family past.

The narrative repeatedly refers to “inheritance,” and one such occurrence is Jean’s formulation of the ancestral voices she hears that speak to her of historical experiences. It is in these interludes that the narrative depicts what has been lost through exile, slavery, and the legacy of colonialism as the voices often mourn for the people crushed under these historical forces. Jean links these voices to traditional beliefs in the protective power of ancestral

presences. Upon hearing a Cuban friend explain the cultural belief in *egun iponri* or “ancestors coming and going, living in and around a person”, Jean realizes “she had always believed in *egun iponri*. The vastly differing voices are not a floundering but a steadying influence” (297-8). Thus, Jean finds a way for the counter memories that are communicated to her to be woven into indigenous beliefs about ancestral presences alongside an understanding of her hybrid identity arising from various groups within Jamaican history.

However, despite Jean’s reclamation of a counter-history, it does not lead to an engagement with national politics or an understanding of how this counter-history might translate into tangible action in the present. Conversely, Jean’s friend Faye attempts to forge new understandings of Jamaican identity by utilizing her familial history to imagine a legacy of commitment to political action in favor of undoing race and class privilege. When the two girls are at school, Faye challenges a teacher’s history lesson and construction of Faye as Anglo-Saxon. Faye entertains the class by telling them about her ancestor Lewis Galdy, ‘who fell into a crack during the Great Earthquake of 1692 and was spat up some time later’ (74). She utilizes this family history to subvert the instructor’s Eurocentric bias in order to claim a Jamaican heritage for herself, claiming ‘I come from a long line of lunatics. *Jamaican lunatics*’ (ibid). However, besides being a moment of rebellion against the racist teacher, Faye later reveals that this story has a deeper meaning for her, explaining to Jean ‘I think when the earthquake swallowed my ancestor and spat him back up [...] I feel Jamaica was giving white people a second chance.’ Jean reflects that she feels “surprised at this bit of fancy. Faye usually saw things quite matter-of-factly” (125). However, what Jean does not seem to recognize is that Faye is struggling to find a narrative in her family lineage that allows her to craft an identity for herself as Jamaican. Being white, Faye is often mistaken for a foreigner, and she wishes to find

an identity that removes her from the exploitative power and privilege associated with the European ancestors in her past in order to commit herself to a Jamaican national identity.

Faye's retelling of her family history reveals how such revisions can lead to rethinking national identity. However, while Faye subverts colonial constructions of history, her attempts to enact political change ultimately remain unrealized within the novel. In contrast to Jean, Faye becomes involved in radical politics as a way to engage in anti-colonial nationalism; yet, her political commitments remain marginalized within the narrative. Since the narrative is filtered through Jean's perspective, her ambivalence and uncertainty overrides Faye's engagement and ideals. Jean notes that she and Faye "were both daughters of the nation, born in the morning twilight of Independence, but whereas Faye seemed to be growing at the same pace as the nation, Jean felt that she, herself, was lagging behind" (172). However, Jean also believes that Faye's political ideals and commitments render her out-of-touch, at one point reflecting "For years, Faye had been full of talk about class structure and revolution. Her talk had been hot, her meanings cold" (220). Faye is beaten in a near-fatal attack, and near the end of the novel, she is removed from the main storyline. At this point, she seems more likely to join Roy and Daphne as characters whose political commitments and ideals are remembered as part of the past and memorialized because of their death, but not fully incorporated into the narrative, remaining seen through Jean's perspective alone. Faye's near-death status suggests that, like Roy and Daphne, her national optimism belongs to an era in the past. Meanwhile, Jean, originally representing hope for the newly independent nation, decides to flee the island rather than remain in the political turmoil surrounding her.

The narrative celebrates survival through Jean's flight from the island to the US. In a dream interlude, the ghost of her father urges Jean to leave Jamaica and in another interlude her

ancestor Mary, an enslaved Yoruban woman, also urges Jean to flee so that she may survive and “mek dem know we is here” (300). This aligns with Lalla’s claim that Jamaican fiction often “includes a dispassionate sense of pan-exploitation. Writers perceive original characters and situations born of the elemental chaos that results from such exploitation, and they celebrate a survival and resilience possible, in such circumstances, only among an obdurate people” (13-14). However, the celebration of survival within the narrative may overshadow the loss of homeland this flight entails.

*The True History of Paradise* offers this celebration of survival through the ancestral voices that urge Jean to flee the island in order to continue surviving. The voices of collective memory and her own personal memory become Jean’s inheritance and virtually the only thing she can bring from the island with her. The closing lines of the novel reflect this as she states, “Panic [the Jamaican term for hearing voices] and history are mine” (331). While the novel closes with her claiming an inheritance of a counter history through collective, ancestral memories and her own past, we are left with no sense of how Jean might utilize this counter-history, only that she will carry it with her so that it may survive. However, it remains separate from any national commitment.

Jean’s emigration from the island, while it allows her to reflect on and value her heritage and how it has shaped her understanding of national identity, does not offer the possibility of portraying how such an understanding could lead to national commitment that engages with issues facing Jamaica. Teitelbaum observes: “Jean convinces the reader that she does not want to leave, that her flight from Jamaica is unavoidable. Her perspective is one of resignation. [...] the novel ends abruptly, leaving the reader wondering not about the future of Jamaica, but whether Jean will get away safely and what will happen to her in exile” (182-3). This shift away from the



state of Jamaica to Jean's flight from her homeland means that *The True History of Paradise*, while encapsulating a national history through the family narrative within the novel, does not focus this portrayal of national history on an examination of national commitment. As Teitelbaum ponders in response to a section of the novel that tells the story of ancestor of Jean's murdered during the Morant Bay uprising and referring to the ancestor killed, "one might ask: how might this historical narration differ if told by a committed participant, one who resists, rather than an account given by a passive and purportedly 'neutral' victim who happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time?" (151-2). While that would entail imagining a different novel, the statement does reveal how the narration often forecloses the possibility of resistance even as it portrays the historical inequalities continuing to affect the island. Likewise, the portrayal of Jean fleeing the island forecloses the possibility of resistance and though she feels strong ties to her country, she opts for leaving rather than utilizing her understanding of, and insights into, a counter-history to engage in national commitment or rethink national identity. Thus, while the novel may effectively articulate a sense of exile and displacement that has marked much of the Caribbean experience, it does not examine the implications of experiencing such exile and how understanding historical connections might intersect with hopes for an independent nation.

### **No Telephone to Heaven**

Michele Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* offers a story that parallels *The True History of Paradise* in many regards, although the protagonist's journey is circular, allowing her to return to Jamaica in order to imagine a new place for herself in the country she had to flee as a child. Both Cezair-Thompson and Cliff focus on how a counter-history can be created by the recovery of familial history and its uses in shaping understandings of national identity. While Cezair-

Thompson focuses on recovering a counter-history through Jean's experiences and the interwoven voices of her ancestors, the novel does not envision a means for this counter-history to be used in creating a sense of nationalism that can be utilized to bring the country out of the postcolonial issues and neo-imperialism that it faces. However, Cliff's *No Telephone to Heaven* offers a portrayal of identity being shaped by familial history and national history with the protagonist ultimately investigating the interweaving of those two in order to understand her national identity. This understanding leads to her participating in an anti-imperialist nationalist struggle, which, while ultimately leading to a tragic end when she is killed, also allows the narrative to portray a sense of purpose and commitment to change in the face of overwhelming opposition.

In *No Telephone to Heaven*, as in *The True History of Paradise*, Clare Savage, like Jean Landing, must struggle to find her identity in the conflicting views and values held by her parents. Clare's mother is associated with a black, rural identity while her father is associated with a light-skinned, urban identity. However, "Clare bridges the cultural heritage of both her parents (Hill Collins, *Black Feminism* 29). She embodies both the colonizer and the colonized and is the living present, future, of two irreconcilable ancestries" (Ortiz 156). Clare, who has inherited her father, Boy's, light skin and the ability to pass as white, is encouraged by her father to embrace her European ancestry to the exclusion of her African and Arawak ancestry. However, her mother, Kitty, provides a link to the non-European aspects of her identity. Out of this divided heritage, Clare must decide whether she wishes to embrace the class and racial privilege that comes from her light skin and her father's ancestry, or whether to claim the black identity her mother's side of the family provides.

Clare's struggles to understand her divided heritage emerges against the backdrop of Jamaica beset by violence. The novel is set during the late 1960s, when many wealthy landowners were attacked and sometimes killed. This turmoil causes Clare's family to leave the island for America. However, instead of finding a safe refuge in the U.S., the racial divisions within the family's history become more pronounced as they encounter racism upon their arrival. Boy reacts by deciding to pass as white. His wife, Kitty, who maintains a stronger connection with her black identity and roots in Jamaica, feels angered and alienated by the racism she encounters and her marginalization as an immigrant from a third-world country in America. Kitty eventually decides to return to Jamaica with Clare's sister, but leaves Clare, the lighter-skinned of the two daughters, with her father. Clare struggles to understand her mother's decision and her own identity in light of her parents' conflicting conceptions of self-identity regarding race. She leaves the U.S. as an adult to study in England and then travels throughout Europe. Although her various relocations leave her feeling distanced from Jamaica, she maintains a connection there via her friendship with Harry/Harriet, a queer, transgender man who helps activate her political consciousness. Eventually, Clare returns to Jamaica, deciding to commit herself to nationalist struggle.

By understanding herself as existing at the intersection of these conflicting histories, Clare is able to become "an agent of her cultural and family genealogy. After having been continuously displaced in her family tree, Clare's life must be decolonized [...] and reveal her history to the reader and to the character herself" (Ortiz 160). Clare tries to recapture the complexity of her ancestry in order to utilize it as a mean for engaging in national change. Ortiz explains "Cliff re-members for Clare the unofficial history of Jamaica in order to construct for her character a genealogy of both her British and her African and Arawak ancestry" (181). The

nation's "unofficial history" that is recreated through the narrative depicts the atrocities committed by Clare's slaveholding ancestors as well as the suffering of her enslaved ancestors. Clare utilizes this "unofficial" and "re-member[ed]" genealogy in order to imagine a place for herself in Jamaican society without replicating the injustices of the past.

Clare's reclamation of her family history does not simply stop at seeking out submerged parts of the past. Rather, Clare's family history becomes what Strehle terms a "counter-genealogy," whereby her explorations of her ancestry allow her to question and subvert dominant constructions of identity. Such investigations occur as she confronts racism in the U.S. and England and colonial constructions of history that erase the presence of Africans and indigenous peoples. When she returns to Jamaica and her grandmother's land, she seeks to understand how her identity as Jamaican includes the history of many groups. This investigation into her family history allows her to participate in the struggle for national collectivity and autonomy as she finds herself declaring: "I owe my allegiance to the place my grandmother made" (189). In discovering this allegiance, she decides she must align herself with a revolutionary group fighting to end racial and economic injustice.

Cliff's portrayal of lost history re-emerging thus serves the aim of calling into question how history is constructed to highlight dominant narratives and suppress others. Ortiz explains: "Cliff is interested in what is valuable in the autoethnographic recollection of *particular* emergences of the past. Her autoethnographic inquiry is not in the pursuit of the repressed history itself, but rather in the reversal of discursive practices" (169). This reversal of discursive practices allows for the investigation of the way nationalism calls upon images of the family while subverting supposedly "familial" ties between national members who do not share the same class, racial, or ethnic affiliation. Ortiz explains that "Cliff uses this form of genealogy [via

Lionnet] as a strategy for interrupting the official history of Jamaica and its inhabitants in an attempt to de-colonize them in her representation. Clare struggles with this submerged history and is brought to many inconsistent understandings of her ancestry” (155). Clare’s struggle to understand the competing accounts of identity and history made known to her through her family disrupts the official national narrative of unity and hierarchy she has been raised to believe.

Cliff underscores the ways in which severed ties of metaphorical families portray the stark inequalities and injustices within Jamaican society. The opening description of the resistance group that Clare joins first offers an image of unity through the narration’s focus on similarity in dress: “These people—men and women—were dressed in similar clothes, which became them as uniforms, signifying some agreement, some purpose [...] This likeness was something they needed, which could be important, even vital, to them” (1). The need for this likeness is underscored when Cliff describes how the group constantly struggles to overcome the social divisions they were raised with:

That was all to be expected, of course—that on this island, as part of this small nation, many of them would have been separated at birth. Automatically. Slipped into places where to escape would mean taking your life into your own hands. Not more, not less. Where to get out would mean crashing through barriers positioned by people not so unlike yourself. People you knew should call you brother, sister. (4-5)

The phrase “should call you brother, sister” suggests the ways in which familial ties are severed and undermined by the colonial divisions left in this society. In noting the barriers of class and status erected between those who should consider themselves related, the narration underscores how the legacy of racism and class divisions serve to undermine the enactment of familial bonds between those in the nation. However, the phrase also suggests that the political

struggle which these characters engage in engenders familial bonds. Thus, the “reconstituted kinship” emerges in the struggle for a nation no longer beset by colonial divisions or subject to neo-imperialist control.

The novel explores various instances of familial ties and relationships undermined by classist and racist distinctions. Cliff portrays instances where wealthy and/or light-skinned Jamaicans dismiss or refuse to acknowledge their connection to poorer, darker relatives as well as not valuing the familial bonds and affections held by poorer Jamaicans. The idea that class status serves to interfere with familial bonds and fraternal feelings between Jamaicans appears when Clare’s mother, Kitty, intuits her mother’s death. The class divisions prevent Kitty from being sensitive to the bond she and her now-maid, Dorothy share. Kitty expresses her grief “as if this would be her own loss entirely, not giving room at all to the fact that Dorothy had been one of Miss Mattie’s adoptions, and that Kitty and Dorothy had wet the same bed when they were small” (70). Kitty overlooks the loss she and Dorothy share out of her habit of seeing her as a servant whose role is to provide comfort to Kitty. Through this, Cliff highlights how class divisions undermine familial ties.

This non-recognition of familial ties appears again when a man who has been employed as a servant since his childhood decides to massacre his employer’s family upon their refusal to help him reclaim his dead grandmother’s body. The killer, Christopher’s, experience as an orphaned boy left to fend for himself among garbage dumps after his grandmother dies, represents that of the poorest in the Jamaican underclass, This final denial of a plot of land to bury his long-dead grandmother arrives after a series of denials and dismissals he has experienced growing up homeless until taken into servitude and being treated continually as a social pariah. The family that takes him in to work for him provides him a home but continues to

make it clear that he cannot be accepted fully into the family. They also convey that Christopher's own familial ties are not considered important enough to be given serious consideration. Christopher's story reminds the reader that although slavery has ended, a legacy of severing or ignoring family ties between the impoverished, particularly those working as servants, continues.

While the lack of recognition given to familial ties recalls the history of slavery, the loss and suppression of traceable ancestry also means Jamaicans have had to engage in revising fixed notions of identity built around bloodlines. Thus, Cliff offers a critique of the way notions of family are deployed within nationalism in an attempt to maintain control via the family and its reproduction. As Stitts notes, "[b]y refusing to replicate the modes of heterosexuality, including biological motherhood, *No Telephone* creates a space where national culture and resistance is enacted outside of the biological family" (69). However, while understanding that the traditional paradigm of the biological family does not necessarily provide a site for resistance, the idea of family and understandings of self that emerge from genealogy remain crucial in fomenting national resistance. When Clare asserts her connection to the guerilla group by emphasizing her African heritage, the leader retorts that in a society where light-skin is valued and privileged, this claim to her African ancestry could mean nothing. Stitts explains:

The problem, as the leader of this group reminds Clare, is that hierarchies of color are so deeply embedded in the Caribbean colonized subject that it is commonplace for members of the light-skinned middle-class to distance themselves from their poorer, darker relations. The denial of hybrid identity on the part of the Jamaican middle-class should not be replicated, *No Telephone* argues, by essentializing African identity. The guerilla leader's rejection of Clare's claim to authenticity through her ties to the land and her

grandmother buried on that land show that it is actions, not essentialist identity politics that count. (70)

In emphasizing that it is actions rather than essentialist notions of identity that matter for engaging in a nationalism that can free Jamaica from the vestiges of colonial legacies of racism, classism, and other oppressions, the narrative calls into question traditional ideas of familial relationships and how these might be resisted, re-imagined, and transformed in the endeavor of nationalist liberation.

With Clare's decision to return to her family land and join the resistance group, Cliff emphasizes the ability of engaging in a "reconstituted kinship" in order to advance shared goals and visions for a different type of society that rejects the stratification of the past. As Stitts notes, "*No Telephone* actively rejects the modes of nationalism inherited from the Romantic period through its refusal to constitute the source of national culture and identity as coming through the biological mother. Harry/Harriet's relationship with Clare and their work with the guerilla group become 'national sites' enacting the creation of a postcolonial Jamaican culture" (69). Cliff links this resistance group to historical struggles in the past for liberation and independence. Ortiz notes "Cliff's construction of a genealogy of Jamaican resistance engages with the sociopolitical circumstances of the slave trade and immigration that have minimized or eliminated the possibility of tracing ancestry" (170). Ortiz's account of Cliff's "genealogy of Jamaican resistance" suggests that the narrative utilizes this genealogy, linking resistance in the past to the present-day struggle, in part, in order to examine areas erased or suppressed in traditional genealogy. Clare's engagement with the resistance group both underscores the ways in which familial bonds have been erased and destroyed historically and the ways in which familial identity can serve to divide the national population. By joining the guerilla group, Clare attempts



to create a new legacy for herself that rejects the one of reproducing her family line merely to inculcate white privilege again<sup>9</sup>. Thus, the narrative represents a critical re-imagining of traditional genealogy to suggest that familial relationships might be reformulated to foster connections and community in a nation divided by colonialism and neo-imperialism.

One of the ‘national sites’ for creating this liberated Jamaican culture is the ruinate, or the land Clare inherits from her grandmother that has reverted to a natural state. The land has a double-edged power to both reveal and conceal the history embedded within it. As Ortiz notes, “The land is a living thing older than its people. Because it outlives them, it has the power to remember their history; it also proves to have the power to forget, conceal, and undo that history” (174). Through the clearing of the land and the work to make it productive in order to serve the needs of the guerilla group, Clare is able to confront tangible reminders of her past and the history embedded within the landscape. She also understands how the landscape itself works to conceal and shield the past from view, thus gaining a better sense of how to search for history in the land. As Clare explains to the anonymous guerilla she speaks with near the end of the novel,

I have educated myself since my return. Spoken with the old people...leafed through the archives downtown...spent time at the university library [...] I have studied the conch knife excavated at the Arawak site in White Marl...the shards of hand-thrown pots...the petroglyphs hidden in the bush...listened to the stories about Nanny and taken them to

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<sup>9</sup> Ortiz contextualizes Clare’s inability to reproduce, explaining, “Faced with her own infertility and the inability to leave a legacy of her own, Clare restores missing links between Jamaica’s past and its future by claiming it for the people” (75). Since Clare can no longer reproduce and her family line will end with her, her work with the resistance group becomes another means of continuing her legacy; however, she revises this from the more traditional expectations of reproduction and mothering to instead focus on political resistance and liberation.

heart. I have seen the flock of white birds fly out at sunset from Nanny-town ...duppies, the old people say. (193)

Thus, Clare combines formal, educational recognitions of history along with an awareness of the history contained in the landscape and the people to craft a counter-history of the island whereby she better understands her connection to it. By understanding her connection to this folk history that remains embedded within the landscape, Clare begins to understand how her familial connections allow her to reclaim history and participate in forging a new understanding of national identity. She links her decision to commit herself to political activism with her familial experience and legacy. She explains, "My mother told me to help my people. At the moment this is the closest I can come" (196). Thus, Clare manages to link her mother's hope for her with her evolving understanding of her need to make a commitment to the Jamaican people.

Clare's reclamation of her grandmother's land signals her reclaiming her history that allows her to engage in asserting her national identity. Ortiz asserts, "When Clare finally reclaims the ruinate, she gives land to struggling Black Jamaicans for use in the fight for economic independence. She is able to claim the heritage and the land but leaves behind her the guilt-ridden responsibility of being a landowner that had been her birthright as a descendant of slaveholders" (175). This reclamation offers a portrayal of how understandings of inheritance can be transformed to stop perpetuating the injustices of the past and instead craft a version of Jamaican identity that does not rely upon old, exploitative models. However, reclaiming the land and putting it to use for the people ends when Clare is killed. Clare and the other guerillas ultimately fail to achieve their goal of undermining and disrupting the ongoing exploitation of the tourist industry when they are gunned down by authorities who have been alerted to their plot. Although Clare's participation in this nationalist movement signals her finding a measure of

national identity that she was unable to achieve earlier, the movement that she joins does not provide a solution for the national problems she seeks to rectify. Richards asserts that in Cliff's description of the guerillas falling into the cliché of other militant groups, "Cliff's narrative tone is sarcastic here, yet she clearly represents the Jamaica of the early 1980's as in need of direct political action on behalf of the impoverished [...] Instead, the soldiers limit their concern with national culture to the misappropriation of the Maroon/Grandy Nanny myth by Western popular culture" (27). In focusing on the resistance fighters' decision to act around misappropriation of national culture rather than working to enact material change, Richards asserts what she sees as the root of the guerillas' failure to effectively utilize the Maroons' legacy and affect social change that would lead to a liberated society<sup>10</sup>. Although this may be the case, the narrative represents the shortcomings and tragic futility of their actions in the context of Claire's decision to engage in a nationalist effort as ultimately necessary in coming to understand her agency and ability to shape history rather than simply being shaped by it.

Cliff's interest in portraying this reclamation and revisioning of heritage aligns with Cezair-Thompson's investigation of the uses to which reclaiming familial identity can be put to. For instance, when Faye retells her family history, which has become part of national folklore, in a comedic, subversive manner, she attempts to undo the legacy of racism and exploitation that

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<sup>10</sup> Richards incorporates historical information regarding the folklore and oral history surrounding Nanny, which is alluded to in the novel. She explains: "Bilby and Steady speculate that the myth of Grandy Nanny is based on an actual person, whose story, passed down orally through the generations, has grown to mythic proportions [...] Nanny rebelled, fled to the mountains, waged guerilla warfare against the British, and founded the Windward Maroon settlement" (28). The novel portrays Hollywood filmmakers appropriating and distorting this folklore to sell a Hollywood love story that will bring commercial success. The guerilla fighters have previously styled their organization upon the Maroons, as Richards points out, "liv[ing] directly off the land, harvesting anything edible, clearing the overgrowth and planting food" (27). Since they see the Maroon legacy as an important cultural resource, they turn their attention to this misappropriation of national culture in an effort to strike against the neo-imperialist powers that aim to exploit Jamaica and its culture for the interests of hegemonic powers.

have characterized whites within Jamaican society. However, while Faye's single instance of subversive storytelling signals Faye's own developing awareness, it remains unconnected to a political movement. Clare's understanding of her family's ties to the land and how the tradition of using the land to feed the community serves as a political act reveals an understanding of how familial history and familial experience shape understandings of national identity. Clare and the other guerillas ultimately fail to achieve their goal of undermining and disrupting the ongoing exploitation of the tourist industry when they are gunned down by authorities who have been alerted to their plot. However, through Clare's attempts to engage in political resistance by re-imagining her family history, Cliff depicts enacting a counter-genealogy to recreate a national community that does not aim to reproduce the hierarchies and exploitations of the past.

### **Conclusion:**

While the experience of collective resistance leading to a new national community remains unexplored in Cezair-Thompson's novel and portrayed but not fully realized in Cliff's, the two works suggests that the trend Mordecai noticed of "reconstituted kinship" leading to nationalism continues to resonate in Jamaican literature. These representations of "reconstituted kinship" offer potential for imagining responses to more contemporary issues of political violence, exile, and lack of meaningful sovereignty. Both novels explore how understandings of genealogy are used to understand racial/ethnic identity as well as national identity. The texts depict how viewing the nation as a family both aims to recreate lost kinship networks and conceive new ways of understanding national identity that does not replicate the hierarchies of the colonial past.

While the multi-cultural, multi-ethnic families in the novels encapsulate the diverse and hybrid population of the island, the representation of the characters' struggle to understand their genealogy and family history against the issues of national commitment and nationalism suggest that re-conceiving of genealogy in a way that connects the history of the past to the present is necessary for engaging in understandings of "reconstituted kinship" that could offer alternative national arrangements. Both novels reveal how the family stories told to convey knowledge of the past are utilized as well to shape understandings of the present and influence national commitment and engagement.

While the two authors are concerned with Jamaican history, their representations of "reconstituted kinship" that re-imagines the nation have implications for the Caribbean in general, as the novels grapple with the effects of historical events that have shaped the region, such as slavery, migration, and exile. Exploring the re-creation of familial ties in the face of historical legacies of trauma and contemporary political oppression appears in other Caribbean literature as well. The next chapter explores the depiction of "reconstituted kinship" and the forging of familial ties in narratives that critique and undermine dictatorship and patriarchal nationalism.

**Chapter Four: Forging New Families: Resisting and Rewriting Patriarchal Nationalism in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao***

Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* and Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* both portray a pivotal time period in Caribbean history, the *trujillato*, or the thirty-year reign of the dictator Generalissimo Rafael Leonidas Trujillo in the Dominican Republic in order to explore the destruction wrought under his rule and its effects upon the survivors. Trujillo's rule exemplifies an instance of patriarchal nationalism, which Lynn Chun Ink describes as deploying an image of the family to serve the needs of nationalism. She asserts, "The family structure with the patriarch at the head offers a paradigm for a national hierarchy, serving as the organizing framework by which a nation is forged and perpetuated" (793). By offering stories that explore familial relations and their development in response to, and out of, the oppression occurring under despotic rule and as part of the legacy of colonialism, Danticat and Díaz utilize family as an absent presence to remind readers of those lost and destroyed through historical atrocities, and to depict a forum that allows survivors to create a sense of community and share and utilize memory.

While Danticat and Díaz both bring a focus to patriarchal nationalism via novels that focus on familial experiences, the two texts differ significantly. Danticat's novel *The Farming of Bones* focuses on the experience of Haitian migrant cane-cutters working on the sugarcane plantations of the Dominican Republic during Trujillo's rule. The novel, which is narrated by Amabelle Desir, a young Haitian servant in a prominent Dominican household, offers a story more focused on the experiences of those who survived Trujillo's massacre while Díaz's novel explores the effects Trujillo's rule had upon Dominican society and the Dominican-Americans who left the Dominican Republic to escape Trujillo's rule. Danticat's story is in a mainly rural

setting and narrated with a more elegiac tone that intersperses dream sequences and memories within the main storyline. Díaz's novel, by contrast, moves back and forth between New Jersey and the Dominican Republic while also switching time periods between the era of Trujillo's rule to the 1980s and 1990s to chart the experiences of the titular character's family relocating to the U.S. In addition, Díaz's narrative voice incorporates a wide-range of pop-cultural references, especially concerning sci-fi and fantasy genres, while employing a more street-slang style of narration. While the two texts differ widely in tone and scope, they both utilize family stories to explore the historical legacy of Trujillo's reign by bringing attention to the victims and survivors of his rule. In addition, the family histories recreated within the novels recuperate lost or distorted aspects of the history of Hispaniola, while simultaneously using the image of the family to represent what is lost due to the atrocities within this history.

Since the transmission and understanding of history often occurs through family stories, the loss of the family signals a loss of historical knowledge. The breakdown in cross-generational communication can lead to a loss of identity. However, the novels also focus on characters reformulating familial ties and forging new or substitute families out of the upheavals of exile and atrocities that destroy family structures and result in the loss of family members. Often these familial bonds are recreated in ways that critique and re-imagine nationalism.

Both novelists draw upon and participate in a tradition in Caribbean literature of offering works that challenge dominant accounts of history. As April Shemak notes, "Caribbean Literature has been distinguished by its engagement with national and subaltern histories. Novels coming out of the Caribbean typically reflect the sociopolitical issues that make up the region by engaging with the voices of the oppressed and, in doing so, challenge and transform conventional colonial constructions of history" (83). Danticat and Díaz utilize their fictional portrayals to

“engag[e] with the voices of the oppressed,” both by imaginatively recreating those voices and highlighting their absence from the historical record. In doing so, the narratives offer counter-histories that reveal the closures of traditional historiography and use imagination to explore lost and suppressed histories.

The time period of Trujillo’s reign, which spanned from 1930 to 1961, has left a mark on the history of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. As Kelli Lyon Johnson explains in “Both Sides of the Massacre: Collective Memory and Narrative on Hispaniola,” the massacre continues to haunt both Dominicans and Haitians, and consequently, “Remembering that mutual history and the regime that initiated it—the *trujillato* [...] is for both Haitians and Dominicans a painful negotiation of race, nation, and identity” (75). Lynn Chun Ink, in discussing the historical separation of the two nations on the island of Hispaniola, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, notes “[t]he separation of the eastern from the western side of Hispaniola fostered an unstable and often volatile relationship between the nations, fueled by the racial tensions arising from the importation of African slaves for labor in the early 1500’s” (790). These earlier tensions between the two countries sharing the same island erupted again in the deadly massacre of Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans in 1937. Johnson discusses the way the discourse surrounding the slaughter recalls earlier instances of nationalist violence. She notes how the Massacre River, which sits at the border separating the two countries, was named so for being the site where pirates were killed in 1728 by the Spanish, who controlled the area at the time, and that it “earned its name again” with Trujillo’s slaughter of Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans in the region (75). While exploring this recent historical atrocity, both novels also represent and connect the earlier history preceding the massacre to link Trujillo’s slaughter to the legacy of violent conquests that have occurred on the island since the first colonial conquests.



Australia Tarver discusses the reasons cited most frequently by historians for why the massacre took place, and in discussing the motives imputed to Trujillo for the massacre, provides context for understanding the racist fears regarding Haitians depicted in the texts. Tarver lists reasons that allegedly spurred the massacre, such as Haitian migrants, illegally entering the Dominican Republic, had begun to outnumber Dominican cane-cutters, and there was a general fear that their presence would come to dominate the region. She notes that others have argued that Trujillo wanted to demonstrate his power over Haitians in order to secure his control over the region, or that he was settling a score with Haitian president, Stenio Vincent, for the killing of Dominican spies discovered in Haiti. A theory also exists that Trujillo was responding to old antagonisms between the two countries, which originated in Haiti's conquest of the Dominican Republic from 1822-1824 when Haiti took control of the entire island in an effort to keep European colonial powers from making incursions after Haiti had ousted them in a fight for independence. And, Tarver notes, many have located Trujillo's desire to rid his nation of Haitians as rooted in ethnocentric ideas that Haitians were racially polluting the Dominican Republic because of their African ancestry (233). While the various historical motives are all alluded to within the novels, Danticat and Díaz bring specific attention to Trujillo's desire to maintain purity and thus secure control over the country as they explore how the drive to impose purity can support and maintain dictatorial abuses.

Richard F. Patterson contends that Trujillo made racial identity a cornerstone of his rule due to a desire to reaffirm his total control over Dominican society and perpetuate the myth of himself as a savior of the nation. Patterson refers to Paul Berman's work *Terror and Liberalism* to explain how major totalitarian movements rely on an idea of a 'pure' but threatened society and for Trujillo, "the necessary 'threat' was handed to him on a platter" because the influx of

Haitian migrants who came in large numbers to cut cane on Dominican sugar plantations, allowed him to construct an enemy. By eliminating the Haitians, “he could purport to defend Catholicism (against vodun and other African practices), and like Hitler, he could purify the race” (225). Thus, Trujillo’s anti-Haitianism allowed him to consolidate and expand his power while drawing on a legacy of colonial discourse. Danticat and Díaz depict how Trujillo was able to draw upon already existing notions of European superiority and a fear and suppression of African ancestry in deploying his formulation of a society that needed to be defended against outsiders.

While some have pointed to long-standing disputes over territorial control between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, other historians have questioned the supposition that there existed a deep hostility between the Haitians and Dominicans that could have fomented the massacre. Mireille Rosello discusses the historical studies of Lauren Derby and Richard Turits, explaining that “[t]heir thesis is that Trujillo did not so much exploit previous anti-Haitian sentiments. Instead, the 1937 massacre was used to persuade both Dominicans and Haitians that anti-Haitianism pre-existed the attack” (59). By promoting violence between Dominicans and Haitians living in the border region, the Trujillo regime was able to sever ties between the two peoples. As Lucia Suarez points out, “in the process of dividing the frontier region and setting up a Dominican nation stripped of ethnic Haitians, the tapestry of the Dominican and Haitian people—their intertwined histories and their growing free-will exchanges—was butchered into inexistence” (46). Thus, Trujillo’s furthering the divisions between the two peoples living along the border provided him with another means for him to reshape Dominican society in a way that extended his control.

Through their focus on familial ties and family life, Danticat and Díaz draw attention to the ways in which Haitians and Dominicans did share ties despite differences of nationality. Danticat recreates the interactions between the two peoples covered over or suppressed in light of anti-Haitian rhetoric in the Trujillo era and later because of the remembrance of the massacre. Díaz includes characters of mixed Dominican and Haitian heritage and depicts how the anti-Haitianism of Dominicans reveals a racial anxiety concerning shared African ancestry. Both authors' portrayals of mingling between the two nations allow them to undo the myths of enmity promoted during the trujillato<sup>11</sup>.

In challenging the exclusion of subaltern histories from the official record, writers often call into question the techniques and standards of historical writing. Suzanne Vega-Gonzalez explains how ethnic writers attempting to offer historical revisions challenge the epistemological assumptions of Western culture. She argues,

thus, from the literary discourse of the novel history is transmitted through its own protagonists, represented by characters, some of whom speak and act from the world of the dead. The use of dreams and the otherworldly acts as another narrative strategy of

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<sup>11</sup> The two novels contain references to characters of mixed heritage so as to reveal the continual interactions between the two nations and also how these characters challenge ideals of national purity and are placed in dangerous positions because of their liminal status. Danticat includes references to dark-skinned Dominicans who have been mistaken for Haitians and thus, also suffered attacks during the massacre (217). In addition, two Dominican women travel part of the way to Haiti along with Amabelle as they search for one of the women's Haitian husband who has been taken away by the Dominican military. Such characters reveal the interactions that took place between the two nationalities, undermining Trujillo's vision of a complete separation between the two countries. In Diaz's novel, the narrator describes a character as being "half Haitian half Dominican, that special blend the Dominican government swears *no existe*" to ironically subvert the denial of shared Haitian and Dominican heritage (26).

transgressions that calls into question the validity of binary opposites like fact/fiction, life/death, real/imaginary. (299)

By incorporating supernatural or mythical elements into their narratives, Danticat and Díaz engage in this work of transgressing the boundaries of historiography. Dreams and ancestral presences or memories allow for the narratives to access silenced or suppressed histories. For instance, in *The Farming of Bones* Amabelle has ghostly dreams of “the sugar woman,” a haunting figure symbolizing her enslaved ancestors. Díaz incorporates traditional folkloric beliefs, such as the Dominican idea of fukú, a curse believed to originate in the conquest of the new world. Such elements serve the narratives’ aim of producing counter-histories or critiques of dominant accounts of the past.

Memory plays an especially important role in both texts, as it becomes the preserver of history, especially in light of the fact that many historical subjects did not survive to offer their own story. Vega-Gonzalez notes, “Memory and sites of memory are especially relevant in the works of ethnic writers, as they represent the possibility of creating a counter narrative and a counter history” (208). Tarver, in designating Danticat’s novel as a “literary counter-memory” reveals the way in which the novel uses “individual and collective voices of [...] characters to challenge and revise accepted historical accounts” (233). The life experiences and ancestral presences portrayed allow the writers to dismantle and challenge the official nationalism of the trujillato. Thus, like the other novels in the study, *The Farming of Bones* offers a counter-history, and does so primarily through the literary depictions of memory and how those provide a means to question or undermine official accounts of history.

In addition, by focusing on the transmission of historical accounts through family stories, both narratives foreground the dynamics of how understandings of history and national identity are shaped by the family. Historical knowledge transmitted through the family may contrast with historical accounts promulgated by national power structures in ways that provide an important avenue for recuperating lost or suppressed historical knowledge and providing a voice for those marginalized by exploitative power arrangements. Kelli Lyon Johnson discusses how collective memory is often gendered since transmitting accounts of the past to young children typically falls to women. Noting this, she asserts, “collective memory reveals national identity and history through women’s eyes, in stark contrast to traditional history, which focuses [sic] on the lives, actions, decisions, deaths, and wars of men” (77). The novels in this chapter focus on how familial experiences influence and shape the transmission of history to future generations, often focusing on how domestic space is affected by national events (such as Danticat’s attention to the way familial relationships are undermined and severed by the pressures of migrant labor and the massacre) and how women’s bodies are used in the consolidation of national power (as Díaz depicts with storylines that focus on Trujillo’s sexual exploitation of women from prominent families as a means to secure his power). By bringing awareness to national upheaval rearranging and reshaping the family and on how traumas inflicted upon family members continue to affect future generations, the two novels reveal how collective memory transmitted through family stories and familial interactions allows for the family becoming a site where traditional history may be supplemented, challenged, and/or revised.

Both authors offer critiques of patriarchal nationalism in an attempt to reveal its connections to and continuation of aspects of colonial discourse that exploit vulnerable populations. Patriarchal nationalism, whereby national leaders attempt to appear as the head of

the national in an effort to legitimize control, occurs even in post-colonial societies that have wrested independence from the patriarchal nationalism of colonizing powers. Lucia M. Suarez notes that throughout the history of Hispaniola, patriarchal figures have appeared as promising figures of liberation only to turn into dictatorial figures who disenfranchise the people even further. She explains, “Time after time, the workers and the poor came out of their makeshift homes to support a newly emerged father figure who claims to be ready to lead the nation into an economically stable, more modern future. The people’s hopes are then crushed by quintessential patriarchs, such as Duvalier and Trujillo, who enrich themselves while failing to deliver on grandiose promises of improved education, work, and living conditions” (37). Thus, these patriarchal figures perpetuate a pattern of exploitation rather than serving as protectors of the nation or allowing for a more egalitarian system. As Sandra Cox notes, this raises vexed issues for postcolonial authors exploring nationalism because “[Trujillo] becomes both a figure ‘no one wants to build the image of a nation around’ and, paradoxically, a synecdochal representation of ‘the nation itself’ (Danticat, “An Interview with Junot Díaz” 90). In a fictive exploration of this paradox, Danticat and Díaz depict the connection between the Trujillato and national identity in their novels” (110). In depicting this connection, the two authors must focus on how Trujillo’s presence permeates the nation, instilling a silence and reluctance to speak out against his abuses for fear of reprisal.

Scenes that capture the official mythologizing of Trujillo, such as the details that note the prominent display of his portrait within homes to display proof of loyalty, are undercut with representations of the fear experienced by a population compelled to exhibit loyalty or face brutal punishment. Danticat and Díaz represent how Trujillo’s overarching presence came to signify the national experiences of the time period and also how his self-mythologizing as a hero

and savior of the nation covered the actual atrocities he authorized to secure his prominence. Thus, the novels attempt to both focus on the destructive effects of Trujillo's legacy and his continuing impact while displacing the actual figure of Trujillo from the text in favor of focusing on those suffering from his abuse of power and bringing awareness to the historical context that enabled his rule.

Because patriarchal nationalism sustains and extends many of the abuses of colonialism, both authors explore how patriarchal nationalism both during and after Trujillo's reign continues historical injustices on the island. The two narratives share a concern with depicting Trujillo's exploitations against the larger background of US domination in the region, which imposes neo-imperialism upon the two post-colonial nations. References to US occupations of both islands underscore how the national experience of both Haiti and the Dominican Republic have been marked by the agenda of the US, and the narratives highlight the alignment and continuation of both earlier, colonial political oppressions and more recent dictators with the domination of US foreign policy and economic exploitation of the West. Thus, the authors in their critical portrayals of Trujillo, seek to go beyond portraying him as a villain, although they do this as well, but rather to place his dictatorship in the context of neo-imperialism.

For Caribbean writers interested in portraying the trujillato, they often have to tackle the mythology that Trujillo constructed of himself as a deified figure. Richard F. Patterson discusses how such texts often utilize "a narrative structure that contains, reconfigures, and to a large degree demythologizes the man who exercised such corrosive control over Dominican life [...] and in doing so, perform a subversive and ultimately liberating function" (224). Danticat and Díaz both undermine and rewrite the discourse of patriarchal nationalism promoted during the trujillato by portraying the dictator as an abusive patriarchal figure. Danticat juxtaposes

Trujillo's portrait hanging in a Dominican household, meant to symbolize him as a protector of the nation, with the impending violence he inflicts upon the Haitians living in the Dominican Republic. Likewise, Díaz deconstructs Trujillo's self-mythology to reveal how his abuses not only affected Dominicans living under his regime, but continue to affect generations of Dominicans growing up in families who suffered from his abuses. These critical portrayals reveal his destructive and permeating influence upon Dominican and Haitian families alike while challenge Trujillo's own self-fashioning as savior of the nation. The authors reveal him instead to represent a continuation and new permutation of the suffering inflicted upon inhabitants of the island since its original conquest.

As Patterson notes, the issue for writers who fictionalize Trujillo rests on the question of "how to conjure up an evil that had once grown in intensity and pervasiveness until it became unutterable; and more generally, how to incorporate into a fictional structure such a well-known and infamous man without simply rehashing the archives of history" (224). He discerns a common pattern whereby writers "dismantle[e] Trujillo's grandiose mendacious myth and replace it with a different story in which the dictator appears not as a vicar of God but as a devil, apocalyptic beast, and psychopath who has turned his country into a wasteland of the spirit" (234). Danticat and Díaz follow in this tradition of portraying Trujillo as a figure of evil and destruction in order to counter the self-mythologizing that covered his abusive rule. Danticat reveals the horrific impact of the massacre and the ideology underlying it by depicting the violence and utilizing issues of memory and scenes of 'acting out' to reveal the resulting trauma. While Díaz also depicts the traumatic effects of Trujillo's reign upon its victims, the footnotes in his story provide a running historical commentary, one where he often deconstructs the mythology of the trujillato.



In bringing to light experiences that were often suppressed and erased, both narratives offer counter-histories and counter-mythologies that ultimately aim to perform a liberating function in suggesting alternative narratives and models to the exploitative patriarchal nationalism critiqued and subverted in the texts. While portraying the ways that patriarchal nationalism disrupts and destroys familial relations, the narratives remain attentive to how such relations also can engender political oppression at times. In revealing the simultaneous protective and exploitative aspects of familial relations, both writers explore how the family serves as the marker of what is lost and depict this loss by portraying severed family ties and the death of family members that recall losses from political violence and other historical atrocities. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* brings a specific attention to how familial patterns that repeat abusive relationships align with and/or grow from political oppression. *The Farming of Bones* depicts how Amabelle's incorporation into a Dominican family splits along her position as adoptee/servant and the tension between the two naturalizes oppressive social relationships. Finally, both novels reveal how family also can offer a model for building and sustaining communal ties as they portray the creation of surrogate familial relationships that sustain characters in the face of trauma and loss. The texts suggest that those familial relationships created out of trauma and loss offer a more viable form of nationalism, and one that might survive the devastating effects of dictatorship and diaspora.

In portraying the effects of patriarchal nationalism and conceptions of national community that sustain those who live as immigrants and/or minorities, both authors employ the form of a 'collective autobiography' to narrate the individual and familial history that reveals larger, national experiences<sup>12</sup>. By revealing how the protagonists' family history intersects with

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<sup>12</sup> Kelli Lyon Johnson, in her article "Both Sides of the Massacre: Collective Memory and Narrative on

national history, the authors reflect on ideas of collectivity that offer potential, if tentative, new visions of nationalism. As Lyn Chun Ink notes, *The Farming of Bones* “essentially critiques the kind of national identity imposed by imperialism and proposes a new community, but one that is never fully realized in the novel” (804). Although both narratives can only offer imagined alternatives, not fully realized ones, as Ink continues to explain, “Despite the absence of a definitive alternative, *The Farming of Bones* points to the urgent need to rethink the restrictive terms of national identity and to locate instead other alliances that accommodate the intersections of race, gender, and class, as well as experience” (804). In locating these other alliances, both Danticat and Díaz explore one of nationalism’s primary modes of transmission by exploring familial experiences that shape ideas of identity. In critiquing the abusive patterns of patriarchal nationalism, they portray other understandings of national identity grounded in shared experiences to subvert distinctions of race, class, and gender that often appear as divisive in nationalist rhetoric in order to shore up exploitative power structures.

Johnson discusses how Ellen McCracken’s term of “collective autobiography” applies to Danticat’s novel in regards to her use of a protagonist whose “voice [...] stand[s] for all those oppressed under the *trujillato*” (88). In offering “collective autobiographies”, both Danticat and Díaz focus on protagonists who, rather than belonging to dominant sections of society, undermine and destabilize notions of a typical or ideal national subject. In *The Farming of Bones*, Amabelle, although living and working in the Dominican Republic and fairly assimilated to Dominican society, is Haitian. She shares ties with both nationalities. And in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Oscar, a Dominican-American, fails to conform to ideas of

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Hispaniola” discusses Ellen McCracken’s term ‘collective autobiography’ to analyze the way in which Danticat’s novel “take[s] the voice of one narrator to stand for all the oppressed under the *trujillato*” (68).

Dominican masculinity. Amabelle provides a counter-voice to Trujillo's rhetoric of the Dominican Republic as a pure society. Oscar's extreme departure from the expected image of a Dominican man calls into question ideas of machismo within Dominican culture as well as constructions of minority identity within the US. By utilizing these liminal figures to focus their narratives around, Danticat and Díaz undermine ideas of national identity and reveal how such notions of identity often work to suppress certain experiences and impose certain power structures. Despite, and because of, their marginal status, both characters offer a subject for a "collective autobiography" due to their experiences intersecting with key aspects of regional history.

The narratives represent collective national experience and in doing so, they "write trauma" in order to explore its effect upon national identity and shaping of collective experience. Through representing the aftermath of national trauma, the writers advance tentative re-visions of national identity. In part, the experience of diaspora and migration shape the national communities, and the texts depict how dislocation from the actual nation necessitates rethinking national identity and sometimes creating collectivity out of that loss and/or out of the need to sustain communal ties in the face of having national identity marginalized or destabilized. In addition, violence experienced within the national communities, due to ethnic cleansing, political repression, and torture, necessitates exploring how such experiences impact national identity. In exploring the haunting memories and offering fictional recreations of testimonials from survivors, the texts pose questions regarding how nationalist discourse seeks to contain or repress understandings of violent oppression.

By offering narratives that depict the lived experience of trauma, Díaz and Danticat question nationalist discourse and offer critiques of imperialistic notions of national identity. As

Sandra Cox explains, the narratives reveal how nationalism disrupts kinship networks, and in doing so, evokes potential responses in readers to question nationalism. In arguing that the texts serve a testimonial function, she asserts that this could offer a perspective to readers that “may address the issues that affect the subaltern populaces against whom the consequences of global northern policies and actions are levied” and speculates that “[t]hese responses may lead to direct action on the part of readers but the more likely responses might be ideological. One such response might be a rejection of nationalist ideologies. Another may be a reconsideration of how global hegemony deliberate before intervening in affairs of sovereign states” (111). The literary representations of the loss of kinship networks engendered by nationalistic violence in which imperial policy often colludes could foster increased understanding and communication among international audiences and between those living in the centers of neo-imperial power and those living in the third-world. As Cox continues to assert, “this reconsideration could create a new paradigm for listening that is more likely to build coalitions through solidarity than to rationalize imperialist action through violence” (ibid). Thus, tentative moments of empathy, understanding, and potential healing that occur within the family or through kinship networks suggest that forms of collectivity centered on shared experience and empathy offer another model for family than that of nationalism that utilizes metaphors of the family structure for legitimizing itself, yet attempts to forge a sense of identity through divisiveness, racism, and other forms of exploitation.

### ***The Farming of Bones***

*The Farming of Bones* begins with a focus on daily life and domestic details that provide a contrast for the political horrors depicted later in the novel. Through describing the ordinary household life that provides the background for the main character’s life, the narrative offers a

portrayal of the “unhomely” described by Bhabha as Trujillo’s political oppression gradually appears and makes itself felt within the home. Amabelle Desír, a young woman, narrates the story. She was taken in as a child by a Dominican family after her parents drowned in the Massacre River while trying to cross back into Haiti. While given a home by the Dominican family who take her in, Amabelle ends up becoming a maid within the household, even though initially she and the daughter of the family, Valencia, are raised almost as sisters. Amabelle maintains connections to her Haitian identity through her interactions with other Haitian migrants working in the area, including Sebastien, her lover, who works as a cane cutter. When the massacre does erupt, Amabelle must flee the Dominican Republic and travel back to Haiti to seek safety. In the escape, she loses contact with Sebastien, who she never encounters again, and must survive an attack by a violent, nationalist mob. The novel interweaves the present time of Amabelle living in the Dominican Republic just before the massacre with sections of the novel that take place outside the chronology of the plot but often relate to it, and are usually comprised of Amabelle’s dreams or memories.

Amabelle’s ambiguous position in the household where she works and lives underscores the marginalization of Haitians in the Dominican Republic, even though a number of the migrants have lived most, or all, of their lives in the Dominican Republic. In addition, Amabelle becomes marginalized due to losing her own family and being taken into a household where she eventually becomes a maid. She is almost a member of the family, especially because she and the daughter of the family, Valencia, are the same age and have grown up together like sisters. However, Amabelle’s position as a servant and a Haitian prevent her from truly belonging to the family. Her orphaned status underscores the lack of official status she holds within Dominican society. Despite living most of her life and working within the country, she cannot claim that she

officially belongs. Her original familial heritage marks her as an outsider and her ambiguous acceptance into a Dominican household still keeps her marginalized and fails to allow her full participation within this society.

Amabelle's orphaned status reflects the larger situation of Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic. While Amabelle is somewhat protected from many of the abuses other migrants face, she becomes aware of the disenfranchisement facing her fellow Haitians. When listening to other immigrants discussing rumors of violence against Haitians within the Dominican Republic, Amabelle overhears the difficulties of living without citizenship. One woman complains, 'I pushed my son out of my body here, in this country [...] My mother too pushed me out of her body here. Not me, not my son, not one of us has ever seen the other side of the border. Still they won't put papers in our palms' (69). In addition to the refusal to recognize those born in the Dominican Republic as having any claim to citizenship, the government also ensures that migrants lack the official documents that could provide them with some status and access to resources. The woman later mentions how the sugar cane mills exploit the workers by keeping their papers so the workers are unable to leave the mills and 'they have this as a rope around their necks' (70). The image of the rope evokes an image of slavery and suggests a similar type of exploitation exists in the mills. This exploitation appears as the precursor to the ethnic cleansing that occurs later in the narrative. As Elizabeth Goldberg explains, "Danticat [...] figures genocide as the logical result of the sustained violation of human rights in the social and economic order that originated in slavery and is traumatically repeated in contemporary neocolonial global systems" (160). Thus, the narrative's opening focus on the daily life and trials facing Haitians within the Dominican Republic sets the stage for the political

violence and terror that later erupts, and Danticat reveals how the ordinary and more familiar oppression leads to the Parsley Massacre.

The lack of family structures that provide legitimacy and support to Amabelle and others in the narrative underscores how intimate experiences within the home are intrinsically related to the political realities shaping the characters' lives. In addition to portraying Amabelle as embedded within the daily concerns of a Dominican household, the narrative also focuses on her romantic relationship with a Haitian cane cutter, Sebastien. The portrayal of romance in the novel provides insight into domestic experiences, yet it also charts the destruction wrought by dictatorship and massacres. Susan Strehle explains, "Romance occupies center stage in *The Farming of Bones*, yet it has an absent presence. It is a marker for a place that remains empty, a measure for how much the massacre took away from the people it touched" (35). As Amabelle narrates her story retrospectively, her memories of Sebastien and their relationship mark what has been lost and remains unfulfilled to underscore the destruction wrought by the slaughter and how survivors such as Amabelle must confront the continual and permanent losses sustained in the event.

In addition to marking what has been lost, the romantic and familial experiences within the narrative also reveal how political oppression instantiates itself through the same intimate relationships that sustain the characters. Strehle also points out, "The romance elements [...] are not only a way to personalize history and to conceal political themes: they function as a critique of history, exposing the power relations that structure love" (32). Thus, the familial history and experience are not separate and a counterpart to political life but embedded within it. Amabelle's conflicted position within the Ignacio household, the same family that has been her benefactor, reveals how nationalist ideologies are supported and perpetuated through the family structure.

The Dominican family articulates the colonial ideology of race that upholds European heritage and elides an African one. When Valencia first sets eyes on her newborn daughter, Rosalinda, she exclaims upon seeing her dark coloring, ‘My poor love, [...] what if she’s mistaken for one of your people? [a Haitian]’ (12). This emphasis on color, and the fear of it “contaminating” Spanish blood, reveals the ordinary prejudice against Haitians that is premised on their more African heritage.

When Dr. Javier mentions Rosalinda’s dark skin, Don Ignacio recites his family’s genealogy to counter Dr. Javier’s implication: ‘My daughter was born in the capital of this country. Her mother was of pure Spanish blood. She can trace her family to the Conquistadores, the line of El Almirante, Cristobal Colón. And I, myself, was born near a seaport in Valencia, Spain’ (18). In reciting his family’s heritage, Don Ignacio reaffirms the privileged place that Spanish (and by extension, European) heritage holds within Dominican society. In asserting a genealogy that elides any African heritage, Don Ignacio speaks in rhetoric similar to Trujillo’s characterization that emphasizes the Spanish/European heritage of Dominicans as superior to the African heritage of Haitians as a means to legitimize his racist policies.

Later in the narrative, Father Romain, a survivor of the massacre who was imprisoned and tortured during it, suffering from trauma he experienced, continually babbles propaganda he was forced to recite in prison. Statements such as ‘Our motherland is Spain; theirs is darkest Africa’ and ‘We as Dominicans must have our own separate traditions and our own way of living. If not, in less than three generations, we will all be Haitians’ reveal the racist and colonial ideologies used to divide the Haitians and Dominicans (261). Father Romain’s statements encapsulate Trujillo’s justifications for the massacre and underscore how the dictator portrayed the Haitians as a menacing presence and a threat to the integrity and purity of Dominican society.



However, this rhetoric excludes the fact that most Haitians and Dominicans both have African heritage and that many Dominicans are dark-skinned and therefore visually indistinguishable from Haitians.

In the face of racist rhetoric, labor exploitation, and political marginalization, the Haitian community within the Dominican Republic seeks ways to build support systems. While Amabelle at first does not question her marginalized status within the household and within the nation where she resides, her interactions with other Haitian migrants begins to make her rethink her position within the Ignacio household. Amabelle chides Mimi, another domestic worker for calling her employers by their first names. When Mimi defends herself, Amabelle reflects, “I thought of Senora Valencia, whom I had known since she was eleven years old. I had called her *Senorita* as she grew from a child into a young woman. When she married the year before, I called her *Senora*. She on the other hand always called me Amabelle” (63). Interactions such as these help Amabelle begin to see the ways she is excluded from Dominican society. In the face of the violence against them and lack of protection they receive from the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the Haitian migrants begin to consider how their own government is complicit in their oppression. Tibon, a Haitian who flees with Amabelle and others during the massacre, discusses what compelled so many Haitians to travel to the Dominican Republic despite the fact that they would be treated as outsiders there. He asserts that “[t]hey have so many of us here because our own country—our own government—has forsaken us [...] Poor people are sold to work in the cane fields so our own country can be free of them’ (178). Additionally, her lover, Sebastien tells Amabelle, ‘Sometimes the people in the fields, when they’re tired and angry, they say we’re an orphaned people [...] They say we are the burnt crud at the bottom of the pot. I say we are a group of *vwayajé*, wayfarers’ (56). This description of the Haitian migrants as ‘orphaned people’

resonates with Amabelle, who is literally an orphan. In addition, the figuration of the migrants as ‘orphaned people’ appears in the narrative as Haitians experience nationalist violence perpetrated by the Dominican Republic and reflect upon their own government’s lack of response. For the Haitian workers, understanding this governmental neglect in terms of familial abandonment exposes the deep wrongdoing of the government by equating their lack of concern for their citizens with a parent abandoning, or even selling, their own child

This formulation of governmental neglect as parental abandonment appears later in the narrative when Amabelle recovers from the wounds she receives escaping a mob during the massacre. As she listens to other victims in a hospital for refugees, they invoke the founding fathers of Haiti, asking why their current leader has not responded to this violence. The survivors of the massacre offer the critique that our ‘so-called president, our Papa Vincent—our poet—he says nothing at all to this affront to the children of Dessalines, the children of Toussaint, the children of Henry’ (212). Thus, Danticat critiques the idea of patriarchal nationalism by revealing how patriarchal leaders fail to fulfill their responsibilities as “fathers” of the nation. In addition, patriarchal leaders can also use their role as father figure to justify the exploitation and violence they inflict.

However, the narrative connects this portrayal of the “orphaned” Haitians who have been abandoned by their country to those of other nationalities who have been exiled or forced to flee their homeland as well. Amabelle describes the situation of Valencia’s father, Don Ignacio, in such a manner, noting that due to his exile from his homeland of Spain, “he felt himself the orphaned child of a now orphaned people. Perhaps this was why he often seemed more kindly disposed to the strangers for whom this side of the island had not always been home” (78). Ironically, Don Ignacio escapes the violence of one national upheaval by leaving Spain and its

civil war behind only to take refuge in a country that eventually becomes engulfed in nationalist violence as well. Yet, despite, as Amabelle notes, his ability to empathize with Haitian migrants on the basis of his exile, he and Valencia fail to adequately take a stand against the authorized expulsion and killing that occurs, and their sympathy ultimately matters little during the massacre. They remain unable to translate their concern for Amabelle into actions that could save her and others from the nationalist violence around them.

The narrative attends to the double-edged nature of home as simultaneously a site of protection and exploitation, revealing the “unhomely” overlapping of the home and the political that Bhabha discusses. The familial bonds forged by Amabelle’s residence in the Ignacio household are ultimately undermined by the divisions of class, race, and nationality. The narrative explores how the domestic space, which at once offers a site where ties are forged based on sympathy and mutual experience, simultaneously becomes a site where national power is enacted, dividing familial bonds.

Trujillo, in adopting the role of a patriarchal leader, infiltrates domestic spaces and the daily lives of Dominicans. The narrative notes the myriad subtle ways Trujillo’s presence is felt, even by those who never, or rarely, encounter him. A portrait of Trujillo, painted by Valencia, is displayed prominently in the Ignacio household. Valencia’s husband, Pico, a soldier in the Dominican army, casually refers to operations near the border that foreshadow the massacre that will take place there. The dictator’s radio broadcast plays in the family living room. Details such as these reveal how Trujillo’s reign appears in and embeds itself within the seemingly private sphere of the home. Patterson notes that “Danticat’s emphasis on the victims of the terror almost compels the concomitant strategy of displacing Trujillo himself, as a character, from the novel’s narrative center [...] The dictator is perceived from a distance, as he naturally would be by the

most marginalized class of people living in the Dominican Republic” (227). While Trujillo as a character is virtually absent from the narrative, the way his presence infiltrates the narrative and impacts the lives of the other characters reveals the extent to which his rule takes place on the national stage as well as within the homes and personal lives of those in the Dominican Republic. In revealing this, Danticat emphasizes how such structures of power are experienced in the ordinary lives of people.

The narrative emphasizes how vulnerable the community of Haitians and Dominican-Haitians are due to their poverty and lack of national protection. Joël’s death, like many others in the novel, underscores the structural violence facing the Haitians. Joël is hit by a speeding car driven by Senor Pico, Amabelle’s employer. However, Pico barely notes the death, which reveals the low status accorded to Haitians within the Dominican Republic. In addition to this death, Sebastien’s father was killed by a hurricane, necessitating that he and his sister Mimi travel to the Dominican Republic looking for work. Amabelle’s parents drowned in the Massacre River trying to cross back into Haiti, and their illegal entry and fording a dangerous river reveal their precarious existence that placed them in such danger. Her parents’ death and others’ reflect what Elizabeth Goldberg terms “the sustained violence of poverty, oppression, and the colonial legacy” (160). In portraying these deaths, Danticat draws attention to traumatic memories that intertwine with historical legacies that lead to ongoing oppressions. The aftermath of colonization leads to Haitians, although technically independent and no longer enslaved, still economically dependent upon sugar plantations. Their own nation, kept in a subordinate position, has been unable to adequately provide for its citizens, which leads to them crossing the border to seek work in the Dominican Republic. The exploitation and discrimination the workers face as migrant laborers recalls earlier abuses perpetuated against those enslaved on the island.

Amabelle has recurring dreams of “the sugar woman” who represents the traumatic legacy of slavery. This woman appears in Amabelle’s dreams with a muzzle over her face and a locked collar around her neck, representing a slave, although Amabelle does not consciously recognize this. When Amabelle asks the woman who she is, she responds, ‘I am the sugar woman. You, my eternity’ (133). Identifying Amabelle as her eternity suggests that Amabelle is a descendant and thus continues the legacy the sugar woman represents. Amabelle’s own position of servitude, while not an actual enslavement, bears a reminder of the lack of freedom the descendants of slaves still suffer and suggests that the legacy of slavery is still felt centuries later. Thus, the sugar woman embodies an ancestral presence that haunts Amabelle with a reminder of historical trauma. Danticat reveals how cross-generational histories and haunting memories continue to intrude upon the present as the narrative highlights the connections between Amabelle’s situation and Haitians enslaved in the past.

Due to violent oppression within Dominican society and governmental neglect from their own country, Haitians in the Dominican Republic must recreate familial ties and structures to sustain themselves. The surrogate families they create allow them to keep ties to their old lives alive. Amabelle notes the desire of Haitian immigrants to emphasize common origins in Haiti, explaining “It was a way of being joined to your old life through the presence of another person” (73). This aligns with Australia Tarver’s assessment of how “even before the slaughter, Haitians on the Dominican side remember their lives in Haiti through communal recollections of food, rituals, and familiar locales. These recollections, Amabelle explains, were ‘how people left imprints of themselves in each others’ memories’ (Danticat 73)” (236). By building familial bonds with other Haitian migrants, the Haitian community in the Dominican Republic preserves

a sense of national identity in the face of a dominant political discourse that dehumanizes them to portray them as menacing outsiders.

For Amabelle and her fellow Haitian migrants, most of whom have lost people close to them, retaining and sharing memories of those deceased becomes crucial for remembering the dead and ensuring a sense of their own identity in the face of such loss. Kongo, one of the cane cutters, gives Amabelle a mask of his deceased son Joël's face, explaining that masks are for 'all those who, even when I'm gone, will keep my son in mind. If I could, I would carry them all around my neck, I would, like some men wear their amulets' (123). Thus, Kongo emphasizes the importance of remembering in the face of death. His way of remembering reveals Haitian traditions and in sharing his story with Amabelle, Kongo demonstrates how those in the migrant community turn to one another for support when they lack the communal and familial structures they would have had in their homeland. Kongo also delivers Sebastien's marriage proposal to Amabelle, explaining, 'the old customs demand he bring his parents to express his intentions to her parents. Since both your parents and his parents are absent, I came to you on his word' (122). This demonstrates the ways in which Haitians seek to maintain traditions and adjust to surviving without the familial and social structures they left behind in Haiti. In addition, the narratives focus on details like the carved masks highlights the African ancestry and culture preserved in the Haitian customs and rituals. Such details portray Haitian culture and African ancestry as valid in contrast to the racist rhetoric propagated under the trujillato. Thus, the common cultural ties nurtured by the migrant community offers an identity in light of the erasure and exclusion they face.

Memory plays an important role in the novel, especially in the incorporation of trauma's effects into the narrative. Danticat depicts how memory, with its ability to keep recalling the

past, can result in suffering survivors reliving the past. However, memory can also offer a means to come to terms with suffering and also find a means of retaining identity in the face of oppression. Father Romain, who is imprisoned and tortured during the Parsley Massacre, first returns to Haiti in a state of trauma where he has lost his memory and his own language and can only recite the propaganda he was forced to say in prison. Likewise, Amabelle feels consumed by memories of Sebastien and does not feel she can truly move forward in her life without him, instead describing her years after the massacre as “a living death” (283).

However, confronting memory may provide a way of ‘working through’ trauma. Years later, when Amabelle encounters Father Romain, she finds that he has regained his memory and has left the priesthood to marry and have a family. Father Romain’s recovery of his memory signals the value of his creed of memory, which Amabelle explains as the belief that “remembering, though sometimes painful—can make you strong” (73). This emphasis on the importance of memory, despite the pain it brings, resonates throughout the narrative as the characters must utilize memory as a means to understand their own stories and to find connections with one another. In addition, memory allows for the forging of cultural ties that becomes particularly crucial for Haitians who face the erasure and suppression of their cultural identity.

As familial bonds are severed due to migration and the violence of the massacre, Haitians seek to recreate familial ties through shared memories. Amabelle notes the importance of sharing memories for the Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic. As Australia Tarver explains, “even before the slaughter, Haitians on the Dominican side remember their lives in Haiti through communal recollections of food, rituals, and familiar locales. These recollections, Amabelle explains, were ‘how people left imprints of themselves in each others’ memories (Danticat 73)”

(236). These recollections become crucial for migrants living away from home and family who feel they need to preserve their identity in the face of displacement and erasure.

The recollections of the Haitian migrants function to provide what Tarver terms a “literary counter-memory.” Tarver explains how the novel functions as a literary counter-memory due to Danticat’s use of the “individual and collective voices of her characters to challenge and revise accepted historical accounts” (233). The “literary counter-memory” created by the text reveals the creation of a counter-history that challenges Eurocentric, colonialist historiography by offering views on Haitian history informed by the experience of the poor and dispossessed. Thus, the narrative portrays these counter-memories to reveal how those whose national identity is denigrated, suppressed, and/or denied find a means for recreating national identity. For instance, Amabelle recalls her parents telling her stories of Haiti’s history when she was younger. In addition, she remembers how “[a]s a child, I played in the deserted war rooms of Henry I’s citadel” (46). Such recollections and experiences of historical sites provide a sense of Haiti’s national history for Haitians and Haitian migrants seeking a means to remember their identity and retain a sense of culture.

In addition to utilizing memory as a way to confront and come to terms with history, the novel portrays the ways in which family becomes a site for recovery from the trauma of the massacre as well as oppression more generally. As Father Romain explains, ‘[i]t took a love closer to the earth, closer to my own body, to stop my tears’ (272). W. Todd Martin finds significance in Father Romain’s decision to have a family as a means of recovering from the devastation of the massacre because it signals an endorsement of Haitian identity. As Martin explains,



it demonstrates a repositioning of the Haitian over the Western [...] Father Romain gives up his Catholic orders for something more indigenous, a Haitian wife and family, symbolic of the *Lakou*, the family-oriented social structure that, according to Michael Laguerre, helped propagate voodoo (46). Embracing his wife and three boys is emblematic of his embrace of Haitian life and culture: of *remembering*. (249)

Father Romain's decision to marry and have children represents a decision to sustain Haitian life and culture and also implicitly rejects Trujillo's ideology of genetic superiority and purity as it demonstrates Haitians' interests in family life in contrast to Trujillo's portrayal of them as a threat to the 'purity' and lineage of the Dominican family.

Although Amabelle never manages to have a family of her own as she remains single after losing Sebastien to the slaughter, she becomes a surrogate daughter to Man Rapadou, the mother of another cane cutter she escapes with who takes in Amabelle. Amabelle becomes heir to Man Rapadou's memories, which serve as a counter-history of Haitian nationalism. Man Rapadou explains to Amabelle that when she discovered her husband had been persuaded, while jailed in a US army prison, to spy for American forces, she decided to poison him rather than allow him to betray her and his fellow countrymen. In recounting her decision to murder the husband she loved, she explains to Amabelle, 'Many people who were against the Yankis being here were going to die because of his betrayal' and 'greater than my love for this man was my love for my country. I could not let him trade us all, sell us all to the Yankis' (277). Ink asserts that Man Rapadou's statement "reveals that for women, nationalism binds together family, nation, and self" (800). However, Man Rapadou must face a decision when her ideals of "family, nation, and self" conflict. Ultimately, she decides to renounce her identity as a loyal wife to protect the national community she belongs to and which her husband threatens to endanger. Her

story offers a counter-memory of Haitian history, revealing her actions as a wife within the domestic sphere to be as crucial as those of soldiers. She poisons her husband while serving him dinner to prevent his betrayal of his countrymen; thus, Man Rapadou performs this sacrifice within the home and by engaging in tasks typically performed by women in the domestic sphere, even as her actions at once repudiate and affirm her identity as a wife.

While Amabelle and Man Rapadou share a bond in their common memories of suffering and loss, strengthened through their shared cultural identity, nationalism often obstructs relationships that might exist between women across national lines. Ink discusses the ways in which the relationship between Amabelle and Valencia is undermined by nationalism, and thus, reveals how nationalism relies upon a gender divide that incorporates women's identities as wife and mother to the nation. She cites V. Spike Peterson's assertion that "patriarchal nationalism fosters the gendered as well as class and racial, division of power 'dividing women from men and *from each other* (insofar as their identification with women as a group is disrupted in favor of identification with the male-defined group)' (7)" (801). Ink examines how Valencia is constrained within this nationalist ideology, explaining how "[t]he cause confines her to a particular gendered role" and "the one relationship that can provide her with some fulfillment [her friendship with Amabelle] is undermined by Dominican ties" (801). Although Valencia makes tentative steps toward resisting this nationalism when she decides to secretly defy her husband (an official in Trujillo's military) by hiding Haitians in her house during the massacre, she ultimately upholds her position as a loyal wife/citizen rather than taking an explicit stand against her husband, and by extension, Trujillo's rule. She justifies her decision to Amabelle, claiming, 'If I denounce this country, I denounce myself. I would have had to leave the country if I'd forsaken my husband. Not that I ever asked questions. Not trusting him would have been like

declaring I was against him” (299). Thus, for Valencia, loyalty to her husband equates to an allegiance to her country. As a loyal wife, she is unable to imagine an identity for herself outside the boundaries delineated by patriarchal nationalism.

Although the possibility for cross-national ties, or even the possibility of a shared identity as residents of the same island, emerges in Amabelle and Valencia’s interactions, ultimately patriarchal nationalism undermines this development as Valencia adheres to her proscribed role as a dutiful wife. Valencia’s inability to cross the boundaries that prevent her from forming a lasting friendship with Amabelle is especially sad because they both share similar feelings and experiences from having lost parent/s at an early age. Amabelle relates that “[Valencia’s] mother had died even before my parents had drowned, leaving us both to parent all our childhood dreams out of ourselves” (72). Despite this shared experience and a sister-like bond they develop as children, their different nationalities and class positions become further entrenched as they grow older.

However, even a shared nationality does not guarantee an understanding of the trauma inflicted by the massacre. When Amabelle returns to the Dominican Republic years after the massacre and meets Valencia again, she no longer identifies with her but instead sees herself in the young maid, Sylvie. The silences surrounding the massacre serve as barriers. In the portrayal of the massacre as an enigma about which it remains difficult to speak or comprehend, the novel “writes trauma” via the recurring memory of it that permeates the present, even for someone like Sylvie who has no direct memory of the event. Sylvie, born during the time of the massacre, represents the subsequent generation, and she appears bothered by the unanswered questions she has pertaining to the slaughter. She asks, ‘Why did they choose parsley?’ referring to the shibboleth, or the term to distinguish Haitians from Dominicans during the slaughter. Valencia’s

response, in which she admits ‘Do you know, Amabelle, that we have never spoken of these things, Sylvie and me?’ underscores the inability to adequately address the horror of the massacre through conversation. Although the horror of it provides common ground for Amabelle and Sylvie, the difficulty of speaking about the slaughter makes the silence regarding it become a barrier between the two women who cannot speak about it too directly.

In addition, Sylvie’s lack of awareness about the event reveals Caruth’s assertions regarding the inherent forgetting and repeated reemergence of trauma. Sylvie’s unanswered desire for an explanation reveals that for the younger generation, memories and signs of the massacre surround them yet understanding the event remains elusive. In addition, the young man who smuggles her across the border when she returns to the Dominican Republic years later mentions to Amabelle that he was a baby during the massacre and his father died during it. Despite the fact that his parents directly encountered the slaughter, the young man does not comment on it much. When he admits to smuggling workers across the border to work in the cane fields and Amabelle asks why, he replies, “‘The people here need their sugarcane and other things cut [...] and people suffer for lack of work in our country’” (307). His answer rationalizes his role in perpetuating the industry and situation that led to Haitians being vulnerable to attack. Of course, his answer is correct in its account of the circumstances pressuring Haitians to journey to the Dominican Republic in search of work. However, the young man appears uninterested and unable to see how he is implicated in the continuing exploitation of fellow Haitians. The lack of awareness coupled with a sense of the haunting of the past signals that this younger generation, while marked by the trauma of the massacre, has not found a way to come to terms with it or articulate its causes and its effects. However, this shared sense of trauma does suggest a means for rethinking nationalism.

Although the patriarchal nationalism propagated under Trujillo's reign severs familial ties, the narrative also portrays the forging of new ties and bonds to recreate familial ties in the face of loss and destruction. Ink asserts "the text attempts to reformulate a communal identity based on shared experiences, thus undermining the disavowal of community beyond national borders" (800). Thus, for Haitians and Dominican-Haitians affected by the massacre, forging sustaining support in light of shared experiences provides a means for rebuilding community and forging a national identity based around shared suffering and history rather than ideologies of purity and lineage.

In representing the after-effects of the slaughter upon survivors, Danticat reveals how dominant forms of discourse, such as the official testimonial-taking of bureaucrats, fail to fully convey the story of the massacre. As Amabelle asserts "it is perhaps the great discomfort of those trying to silence the world to discover that we have voices sealed inside our heads, voices that with each passing day, grow even louder than the clamor of the world outside" (266). Amabelle recognizes that despite her official silencing, her story is one that needs to be told. However, finding a way to tell her story so that it is heard is virtually impossible. When the government sends officials to record the testimonial of survivors, they are not interested in truly hearing their stories, only in adapting the words of the survivors to their bureaucratic purposes. As Yves states, 'You tell the story, and then it's retold as they wish, written in words you do not understand, in a language that is theirs, not yours' (246). Amabelle seeks to find a way to tell her story on her own terms. Yet, after her return visit to the Dominican Republic, Amabelle reflects that "[p]erhaps there was no story that could truly satisfy [...] mine too is only one' (ibid). Amabelle's inability to find a listener for her story on the one hand signals a breakdown in cross-generational communication. In addition, the experiences of exile and migration continue to

divide Haitian communities. It seems as if the slaughter will, like Amabelle's memories of her parents' drowning and her dreams of the sugar woman, become a haunting reminder of the past.

Amabelle's return to the river at the novel's end invokes the earlier loss now intertwined with the horror of the massacre, which is her parents' drowning in the river. As she reflects on her past, Amabelle sees the river as the site that has taken away those she loved yet it also offers a site to commemorate them. Thus, Amabelle begins to envision how her memory might serve as a legacy, which becomes significant to her after she reflects that "[t]he slaughter is the only thing that is mine enough to pass on" (266).

However, Amabelle discovers that while haunting memories may not find relief in telling, the narrative suggests that returning to the site of atrocity and loss to commemorate the dead may offer a tentative means of working through and addressing the loss that continues to beset her. This idea of revisiting the initial site of trauma appears earlier in the narrative, when Amabelle crosses the same river her parents drowned in to escape her own near-death this time. While she recovers from the injuries sustained in fleeing a mob of violent Trujillo supporters, she has another dream that bears echoes of the sugar woman she has repeatedly dreamt about. This time, though, the woman appears as a vision of maternal love and protection. Instead of wearing the chains that signify slavery, Amabelle notes that in this dream "[s]he is wearing a dress of glass, fashioned out of the hardened clarity of the river [...] Her face is like mine now" (208). Thus, the sugar woman appears not as a haunting figure but as an aspect of Amabelle's self finally revealed. In addition, the woman's clothes, which are formed by the river, suggest that she has found her identity by submerging herself in the site of death and destruction.

This dream suggests that Amabelle might find relief in the very place where she has lost so much. The idea of ‘acting out’ that La Capra discusses appears in the narrative at various moments—Father Romain’s recitation of the words he was forced to speak in prison, even after his release, Amabelle’s memory of an infant she watched as a child who had a fit which her father explained to her was the child’s unconscious repetition of his birth. The portrayal of ‘acting out’ underscores how the past continues to interrupt, and reside in, the present for survivors of trauma. When Amabelle returns to the river at the end, she submerges herself into it, thereby recalling the traumatic events of her parents’ death and her own near-fatal attack.

The novel’s ending with Amabelle submerging herself into the river offers varying interpretations. Some critics, like Goldberg, believe that Amabelle commits suicide. Others, such as Martin, contend that, despite her submersion in the river, the fact that she is swimming in shallow water means that “Amabelle decides to ‘go on living’” (250). Although the final scene does lend itself to both interpretations, I am inclined to agree with Martin’s assessment that the narrative positions Amabelle as continuing to live and that “she accepts her past, remembering (like Father Romain) who she is and where she has come from, painful as that past is” (ibid). This assessment of Amabelle’s actions at the end accords with La Capra’s notion of “working through” trauma whereby the survivor finds a way out of the ‘acting out’ of compulsively returning to and recalling the trauma. The narrative does not portray Amabelle as fully healed, in the sense that she has simply overcome the horrors of the past and closed them off. Rather, she experiences a sort of ritual rebirth or baptism by submerging herself in the water that allows her to carve out a role for herself as a survivor.

April Shemak suggests that Amabelle occupies the position of “midwife to the border,” in that she engages in a cleansing ritual at the end of the novel suggestive of an attempt at rebirth

(105). The midwife is a role Dr. Javier suggested, literally, to Amabelle earlier in the novel when he proposes that she return to Haiti to assist him in a clinic there (93). Shemak argues that Amabelle epitomizes the position of midwife because: “she herself is the child of the border—of both nations—and could potentially help the people of the border ‘give birth’ to a new transnational identity. That she is an orphan suggests that she does not have an extensive mytho-genealogy to impose upon the twin nations” (93). This contrasts with Valencia’s position as a loyal, upper-class Dominican wife and daughter. Thus, Amabelle’s orphaned position and, later, her decision not to marry and have children enables her to embody an alternative to the nationalist constructions of wife/mother. Instead, her abilities as a midwife allow her to transform the river into the site of a symbolic rebirth of the self.

Amabelle begins to realize that she must carry the stories of the massacre and remember the dead. She understands that she will begin to occupy a position like the sugar woman she dreams of, embodying a reminder of Haiti’s traumatic past. In her search to discover a way of memorializing those lost in the massacre, especially her lover, Sebastien, Amabelle seeks to remember those in danger of being lost to the official records of history. She thus seeks to create a different understanding of national history.

Shemak, in comparing Danticat’s novel to Julia Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies* asserts: “It is significant that once she fully comes into consciousness after returning to the Dominican Republic, Amabelle chooses not to tell her story, and she chooses not to return to Haiti, but to situate herself in the border between the two nations [...] This ambiguity over testifying reflects the inherently fractured subjectivity of the border and challenges the nostalgia for the nation that Alvarez’s novel reproduces” (106). For Amabelle, who has not had access to the fruits of national power but rather has been dispossessed by two nations due to her poverty



and marginal status, she has no memory of a secure citizenship or national belonging. Rather, her sense of national community emerges out of the shared cultural experiences of migration and loss. As she reflects on the trauma of the massacre, though, the narrative begins advancing tentative visions of a new type of nationalism. Ink characterizes these visions as offering an understanding of national identity that addresses collective losses:

[i]nstead of a nationalism that forces women to choose between themselves, their families, and their countries, the text envisions a collective identity that surpasses national boundaries and is instead based on mutual struggle and endurance. *The Farming of Bones* points to the importance of shared experience as a source of community, thus rejecting a collectivity structured along gender, class, or race lines. (804)

This notion of national community portrayed in the text appears in fleeting moments in the gathering of the cane workers, or the survivors of the massacre who share their stories with one another. Although these are tentative connections, the narrative highlights the importance of forging a national identity that acknowledges loss and the struggle for survival rather than relying on divisive notions of genealogy, race, and gender.

Amabelle experiences a moment of connection that suggests this type of national collectivity at the novel's end. She encounters the 'Pwofesé', a man nicknamed ironically due to the insanity he began suffering during the massacre. As Amabelle submerges herself in the river, in sight of the Pwofesé, who appears to be searching at the river, like herself, she wonders, "Would the slaughter—the river—one day surrender to him his sanity the same way it had once snatched it away?" (309). She recognizes the similarity of their experiences and their shared vision, noting that "[h]e, like me, was looking for the dawn" (310). Thus, Amabelle envisions

how connections emerging from shared suffering and trauma could result in a rebirth of the self that does not disavow the past. In addition, coming to terms with such shared suffering allows for new visions of national community. Rather than inhabiting the role of mother as physical reproducer of the nation, Amabelle finally occupies the role of midwife, assisting herself and her community to envision rebirth after experiencing ‘a living death’ (283).

### ***The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao***

*The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* centers on a family saga that spans life under Trujillo to life in the contemporary US as the text explores the regime’s aftereffects. The family saga has, at its center, the titular character Oscar a “ghetto nerd” whose passion for sci-fi stories and comic books paints him as an outsider to his Dominican-American community. In addition to the main storyline of Oscar’s struggles as an outcast who remains unrequited in love due to his low social status, the novel also interweaves the story of Oscar’s sister, Lola and his mother, Beli in order to reveal the shaping effects of Dominican and Caribbean history upon Oscar’s identity. The novel is narrated by a third-person voice, later revealed to be that of a character within the novel, Yuniór, who is Oscar’s college roommate and eventually, Lola’s boyfriend. The interweaving of these various characters’ stories and the flashbacks from Oscar’s present to the time of the *trujillato* in the Dominican Republic reveal the legacy of Trujillo’s reign by focusing on its consequences and continuing effect within the family.

Daynali Flores-Rodríguez explains that “Despite Díaz’s proclamation that his book is about dictatorial regimes, most literary reviews are reluctant to identify it as such, preferring instead the term ‘multi-generational familial saga’ to describe the novel. Díaz’s description,

however, reveals an intent to challenge authoritative narratives, especially those concerned with dictatorships” (94). I agree with Flores-Rodríguez’s account of the challenge to authoritative narratives of dictatorship provided by the novel’s rewriting of historiographic accounts and engagement with highlighting the mechanisms of portraying dictatorship; however, I would argue that Díaz undermines authoritative narratives by utilizing the ‘multi-generational familial saga’ in order to reveal the structures that perpetuate dictatorship and, simultaneously provide a site of resistance to a dictatorial legacy.

Díaz first introduces the reader to Trujillo by describing *fuku*, or the traditional Dominican belief in a curse. This is the curse that is supposedly visited upon the Cabral/De Leon clan, the family of the title character, Oscar. The narrator explains that *fuku* is “generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and Doom of the New World” (1). By linking the curse’s origins to the conquest and genocide of the Americas and the horrors of the Middle Passage, Díaz links Trujillo’s brutal dictatorship to these historical events, positing it as an outgrowth of colonization. While Díaz describes Trujillo as the *fuku*’s high priest (according to the narrator, whether he was the controller or controlled by *fuku* remains unclear (2-3)), Flores-Rodríguez argues that the stylistic decision to discuss the curse first and relegate the historical information about Trujillo to the footnote reveals Díaz displacing the dictator, and other typical systems or symbols of power from the main text to instead focus on the experiences of the victims and survivors whose voices often remain absent from historical accounts that focus mainly on the dictator. Thus, his literal marginalizing of the infamous leader is the first signal of demolishing and rewriting the Trujillo myth by “effectively displacing the traditional signifiers of power and oppression to the margins of the story” (Flores-Rodríguez 95). As Flores-Rodríguez notes, the literal marginalization calls into question the convention whereby novels

about dictatorship typically focus on the personality of the dictator. Instead, Díaz draws attention to the victims and survivors of Trujillo's atrocities as the narrative focuses on Oscar and his family's experiences.

This displacement of Trujillo from the narrative resembles Danticat's decision to portray Trujillo's presence and effects and represent his voice rather than include him as a character within the novel. Díaz similarly decides that rather than portraying Trujillo as a realistic character, he will instead focus on the myth and legacy of the dictator in order to undermine it. He does so by portraying Trujillo as villainous and diabolical in contrast to the dictator's self-deification. Díaz aligns Trujillo with monstrous sci-fi villains, designating him as "our Sauron, our Arawn, our Darkseid, our Once and Future Dictator" (2). By drawing upon sci-fi and fantasy genres to figure Trujillo as a super-villain, Díaz de-familiarizes the infamous figure and spurs readers into questioning their interpretive frameworks that might assume a prior knowledge of dictators and oppression (Flores-Rodríguez 95).

Since part of Trujillo's dictatorial legacy was to rewrite history, Díaz suggests that recourse for capturing lost history lies in the supernatural or fantastic, which can evoke the terrors and destruction of Trujillo's dictatorship. This attempt to craft a counter-history emphasizes the power of narrative. The narrator, in the novel's beginning, suggests that his telling of the story may function as a "counter spell" against the *fuku* engendered by the trujillato and prior to that, the original colonization and conquest of Hispaniola. In offering a "counter spell" through the form of a counter history, the narrator reveals the possibilities that revisions of history have in critiquing and undoing the destructive effects of patriarchal nationalism.

While attempting to portray Trujillo and his henchmen as sci-fi villains might run the risk of offering a two-dimensional portrayal, whereby they are simply portrayed as "bad" in contrast

to the “good” people who are their victims, Díaz continually reminds the reader of the complex systems of power that underpin and allow such dictatorships. Yuniór, the narrator, describes a *Twilight Zone* episode that evokes the kind of fearful mentality that existed during the trujillato:

In some ways living in Santo Domingo during the trujillato was a lot like being in that famous *Twilight Zone* episode that Oscar loved so much, the one where the monstrous white kid with the godlike powers rules over a town that is completely isolated from the rest of the world, a town called Peaksville. The white kid is vicious and random and all the people in the ‘community’ live in straight terror of him, denouncing and betraying each other at the drop of a hat in order not to be the person he maims, or, more ominously, sends to the corn. (After each atrocity he commits—whether it’s giving a gopher three heads or banishing a no longer interesting playmate to the corn or raining snow down on the last crops—the horrified people of Peaksville have to say, It was a good thing you did Anthony. A *good* thing.) (224)

Díaz uses these sci-fi/pop-culture references to reveal how living under Trujillo entails not only oppression, but also demands complicity with his atrocities. In describing Trujillo’s terrible power and oppression as supernatural, he undermines the typical dictatorship novel that renders the dictator in realistic, recognizable terms. As Flores-Rodríguez explains, “By borrowing the language of science-fiction to describe the characters and circumstances, Junot Díaz challenges the idea that simplification, exaggeration, and unreliability are exclusive to any genre, or that scholars and scientist have the last word on the representation of violence and oppression” (98-9). Instead, Díaz’s incorporation of elements of fantasy and sci-fi genres allows the narrative to reveal fictional analogies that highlight the trujillato’s destructive nature and its effects’ permeation into subsequent generations.

The sci-fi/fantasy illusions interweave with the narrative's other supernatural aspect, which is the *fuku* visited upon Oscar's family. Díaz's portrayal of the family curse offers a counter-history that criticizes the official ideology of the trujillato while simultaneously exploring how the abuses of patriarchal nationalism are replicated and enacted within the family at times. The family curse upon the Cabral/De Leon family represents the oppression, suffering, and subsequent exile many Dominican families experienced due to Trujillo's oppressive rule.

Through the supposedly "cursed" history of the Cabral/De Leon family, Díaz reveals how political oppression weaves itself into daily, familial lives and often destroys families. Oscar's grandfather, Abelard, a well-respected doctor and scholar, is imprisoned and tortured. His supposed crime was that he tried to prevent Trujillo from sexually exploiting his eldest daughter, Jaclyn. This story coincides with many other narratives surrounding Trujillo's reign and how he consolidated his power, in part, through sexual conquests. However, Díaz deconstructs this well-known and commonplace narrative as he designates it the "myth about the Girl Trujillo Wanted." Yunió asserts, "It's one of those easy stories because in essence *it explains it all*," arguing that it functions as a simplistic, reductive explanation for Trujillo's atrocities (244). Díaz destabilizes this commonly accepted narrative in order to explore aspects of history and power occluded by myths surrounding the trujillato.

Instead, the narrator advances the idea that Abelard incurred Trujillo's wrath by writing an expose of him. The book, obliterated without a trace, supposedly revealed Trujillo's supernatural powers and origins in its collection of folklore and peasant tales. In advancing the idea that Abelard's real crime lay not in his refusal to allow Trujillo's sexual exploitation of his daughter, but rather in writing and revealing the source of Trujillo's power, the narrative shifts the focus away from Trujillo's well-known legacy as a dictator and instead calls upon the genre

of sci-fi and fantasy to highlight the ways in which dictatorship rests upon abuses of power that are not simply contained within easy, explanatory myths. The story of Abelard's lost book calls into question the construction of explanatory stories, just as Danticat's novel draws attention to the way in which commonly held explanations for Trujillo selecting "parsley" as a shibboleth are only one story, and perhaps "there is none that could truly satisfy." Thus, both authors draw attention to the incompleteness and insufficiency of any narrative that claims to fully explain the devastating experiences emerging out of political terror, thereby foreclosing a full engagement with its complexity.

In addition, the story of the lost book shifts attention to the construction of national history and highlights the absences and gaps interwoven with official accounts. Abelard's lost book recalls lived history lost due to dictatorship and oppression. The narrative's repeated emphasis on the symbolic blank pages reveals how history is comprised of such gaps and incomplete and/or destroyed records. Thus, the blank pages recall those lost to history. The narrative suggests that understanding national history and identity involves confronting such absences from the past.

The image of blank faces and blank pages highlight haunting absences. Utilizing such imagery and calling attention to the absent presences within the context of the narrative represents the historical traumas forming the basis of the narrative. Embedding the experiences and effects of trauma within the narrative structure emphasizes its shaping effect on the characters and the history that surrounds them. By recalling the knowledge and narratives that have been suppressed or destroyed by hierarchical powers, the blank pages referred to repeatedly throughout the narrative suggest the long-standing harm that suppression of history causes. The image of the blank faces appear when foreshadowing trauma or impending harm. While serving

as omens of impending disaster for the characters, the image also suggest the dehumanization involved in living with the effects of dictatorship as well as trauma. Beli sees her adoptive father's face turn blank before he burns her, and sees one of the faceless men right before she is taken into the cane fields and almost fatally beaten by Trujillo's henchmen. The lack of facial features appears to correspond to the inability of language to fully convey the event itself. For instance, when Beli is assaulted, the narrator states, "Let me pass over the actual violence," and instead describes the damage inflicted, noting in conclusion, "All that can be said is that it was the end of language, the end of hope. It was the sort of beating that breaks people, breaks them utterly" (147). In electing to focus on how Beli experienced the assault rather than recounting the actual violence taking place, Díaz foregrounds the trauma sustained and its effects. The appearance of the blank faces preceding such an attack highlight the erasures and losses noted in "the end of language, the end of hope" (147).

In addition to national history occurring within the family, the narrative emphasizes how the family becomes complicit in upholding patriarchal nationalism, even while families suffer from its effects or aim to resist it. The infiltration of political power and dictatorship into every aspect of Dominican life affects the family as well, and in some cases, the family reproduces abuses similar to those carried out by the state or experienced at a national level. Thus, the legacy of dictatorship can continue to affect subsequent generations. Beli's experiences exemplify this most clearly. She suffers horrendously during the time in her childhood when she is a *criada*, even bearing the scars inflicted by her "adoptive" parents. Yet, with her own children, she becomes controlling and abusive, demanding that Lola do all the housework and eventually causing her daughter to run away. She also attempts to inculcate a violent masculinity based on dominance and exploitation in her son, Oscar. Her own motherhood is marred by the



trauma she experiences first as a young child and then as a young woman, when she is beaten by Trujillo's men. Likewise, Oscar's ostracism and fate represents the continuation of the trujillato, long after Trujillo's death. The same tacitly sanctioned violence occurring in Trujillo's era and that in the present leads to Oscar's death prompts Lola to vow she will not return to the Dominican Republic and proclaim, "Ten million Trujillos is all we are" (324). Lola's statement conveys not only the horrors wrought by Trujillo's reign, but also emphasizes the complicity and acquiescence that was widespread enough among the populace that Trujillo was able to rule. Through a narrative that explores the continuation of exploitative power structures that occur cross-generationally, Díaz utilizes the figure of Trujillo to both counter the dictator's own self-mythologizing and to explore the workings of power that enable such dictatorships to ascend to and maintain control.

In examining the power structures and hegemonic forces that enable the exploitative patriarchal nationalism of Trujillo, the narrative highlights the pervasive legacy of racism engendered by colonialism. Through portraying Beli's experiences, Díaz criticizes the social hierarchy aligned with skin color in Caribbean society. When noting that Beli's dark skin was taken to be a bad omen, the narrator comments, "That's the kind of culture I belong to: people took their child's black complexion as an ill omen" (248). Beli's continuing social exclusion due to her coloring reveals the ways in which the legacy of slavery continues to be experienced through racism and divisions built around skin color. In addition, when Beli is orphaned as a baby, she is taken by distant relatives and sold as a child-servant. The abuse she suffers at the hands of the "adoptive" family she must work for offers a portrayal of the widespread problem of poor children being used as indentured servants in Caribbean society. Just as Amabelle's marginalized position within the Dominican household where she works reveals the ways in

which social hierarchies and oppression can be transmitted through familial relationships and familial hierarchies, Beli's status as a *criada* or *restavek* among distant "relatives" reveals how the family and the home are sites that perpetuate hegemonic structures.

This awareness of the ways in which dictatorial abuses continue even when a dictatorship is no longer in place appears vividly in Oscar's life story. Oscar experiences a double marginalization as both a member of a minority within the US and as an outsider within his own community. His experiences are shaped by Trujillo's legacy, despite being born years after the dictator's death. The racism he suffers as well as the social exclusion for failing to embody a machismo identity reveals how those who have been oppressed by the same power structure can perpetuate its injustice by oppressing others. His death, which mirrors Beli's near-fatal attack in the cane fields, recalls other historical atrocities within the Dominican Republic, such as the assassination of political dissidents and the massacre of Haitian cane cutters.

While Oscar at first appears to be an anti-hero who repeatedly fails to achieve the standards of Dominican masculinity, the narrative deploys his lack of machismo to offer a critique of oppressive gender roles. The narrator asserts that "Our hero was not one of those Dominican cats everybody's always going on about—he wasn't no home-run hitter or a fly batchetero, not a playboy with a million hots on his jock. And except for one period early in his life, dude never had much luck with the females (how *very* un-Dominican of him)" (12). Thus, the narrative contrasts Oscar's character with the expected roles for Dominican and Dominican-American men. Oscar's constant inability to achieve the machismo expected of him provides stress and anxiety, as his Dominican identity is repeatedly questioned. Oscar's outsider, liminal status is spelled out most clearly by the narrator when Oscar begins college and "[t]he white kids looked at his black skin and his afro and treated him with inhuman cheeriness. The kids of color,

upon hearing him speak and seeing him move his body, shook their heads. You're not Dominican. And he said, over and over again, But I am. Soy Dominicano. Dominicano soy" (49). Significantly, this is the only time Oscar protests his peers' put-downs and taunting, and he chooses to do so in Spanish rather than English, signaling his embrace of his Dominican heritage, even if he does not conform to cultural expectations.

Yunior, the narrator and college roommate, provides a foil to Oscar as the outward embodiment of Dominican machismo with his athletic abilities and constant sexual conquests. However, as the narrative progresses Yunior's achievement of machismo is revealed to be hollow and inauthentic. While he denigrates Oscar's "nerdy" interests, he also shares them, although he is loathe to admit this. In addition, his sexual conquests fail to provide him with the intimacy and successful romantic relationship that he seeks. Eventually, he is compelled to ironically model himself upon Oscar as he realizes that Oscar's "failures" actually provide an alternative to the exploitative model Yunior wants to escape. Yunior nurtures a love for Lola, Oscar's sister, despite his pursuit of other women, and when he finally achieves a relationship with her, it is because he "made like Oscar" instead of adopting his usual posturing (198). Although Oscar unsuccessfully pursues romantic relationships with women, his devoted romanticism and quest for true love provides a definitive contrast to Trujillo's exploitation of women. Thus, Oscar's failure of masculinity, which initially earns the derision of others, especially Dominicans, also fails to reproduce the violence and chauvinism of patriarchal nationalism.

Besides serving as a foil to Oscar with his outward embodiment of machismo, Yunior's character serves as a narrator and witness for not only Oscar's individual story, but for the family history of the Cabral/De Leon clan. Yunior repeatedly refers to himself as the

“watcher,” emphasizing his role as witness. After Oscar’s death, he takes it upon himself to collect and preserve Oscar’s writings in an effort to guard the history they contain. Yuniór’s role portrays the forging of familial ties among a community that has suffered exile and diaspora. When discussing his decision to have the seemingly omniscient third-person narrator suddenly turn out to be a character within the story, Díaz illuminates his reasons for doing so in conjunction with cultural ideas of the family. He asserts, “One should also remember that in the Caribbean, which has suffered apocalypse after apocalypse, it’s rarely the people who’ve been devoured by a story that get to bear witness to its ravages. Usually the survivors, the storytellers, are other people, not even in the family” (*Slate* interview). In representing the destruction of families via the destruction of the Cabral family in the novel, Díaz reveals how such atrocities raise the need for a more expansive notion of family. Díaz proceeds to elaborate, “In the United States, you only get to visit a sick person in the hospital if you’re immediate family. Where I come from the idea of family is far more elastic, far more creative, far more practical, far more real” (*ibid*). In his description of a conception of family, Díaz highlights how continual historical upheavals within the Caribbean, from conquest and slavery onward, have necessitated developing an idea of family that incorporates those who may not be actually related, but become part of the family through participating in its history and storytelling. In this regard, Yuniór’s connection to Oscar’s family offers a vital means of preserving familial and national narratives in danger of being lost.

Confronting the trauma of the past often involves finding a way to narrate it. One of the main thematic concerns lies in the modes and methods of storytelling as well as the necessity for it. Thus, Oscar, after attempting to ignore his family’s past, realizes he must listen to it. When he returns to the Dominican Republic to learn his family story, he writes to his sister that he has

discovered “the cure to what ails us [...] The Cosmo DNA” (333). The narration explicitly links an understanding of genealogy and familial origins to working through trauma. Although Oscar’s tragic death prevents him from communicating the story he has uncovered, the narrator still offers hope that Oscar’s niece may be able to fulfill the mission her uncle died trying to complete.

Although Oscar remains unable to successfully transmit his story, Yuniór preserves the remains of Oscar’s writing in hopes that the story will one day be conveyed to future generations. He explains how he waits for a day when, he believes, Isis, Oscar’s niece, will arrive at his house. Yuniór expects that at some point she will be drawn to investigating her family’s past and will seek to read her uncle’s work. He hopes that “maybe, just maybe, if she’s as smart and brave as I’m expecting she’ll be, she’ll take all we’ve done and all we’ve learned and add her own insights and she’ll put an end to it” (331). Yuniór imagines that Isis will be able to understand her family’s history and thus, the larger history of the region that Oscar sought to recapture and portray. Yuniór believes that Isis’s ability to study and learn about a secret past will ultimately break the family’s curse<sup>13</sup>. Thus, the qualities that made Oscar such an outsider in Dominican-American culture—his interest in fantastical stories and secret lore—ultimately provides him and others in the Dominican diaspora a means to recover suppressed history. Additionally, it is the compiling of family lore and transmission of family stories that offers a means for constructing a history that speaks to the absences in the historical record.

### **Conclusion**

In their narratives of family histories emerging from the historical atrocities and traumas

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<sup>13</sup> In a talk given on October 23, 2009, Díaz highlighted the symbolism of Isis’s name (an allusion to the Egyptian goddess), linking the mythological Isis’s collecting and reassembling of her dead brother’s body to the role Isis plays in the narrative as the inheritor of the fragments of family history who will reassemble this history to break the curse.

of the island of Hispaniola, Danticat and Díaz portray how the violence wrought by patriarchal nationalism severs familial ties and destroys kinship networks. Both narratives portray how hegemonic forces of control are reproduced within the family, via racial exclusion, abuse, and/or inculcating restrictive gender roles. The narrative reveals how, through infiltrating familial spaces and disrupting familial life, patriarchal dictators such as Trujillo consolidate national power. The authors represent this consolidation of power promoting the inculcation of national identities that extend the similar abuses as those wrought by colonialism.

Yet, the two novelists bring different outlooks to the familial narratives within their texts. Danticat employs a more elegiac, lyrical tone in her novel which is narrated by a surviving eyewitness of the *trujillato*'s massacre. The depictions of family also focus on a more rural and traditional society whereas Díaz's novel, set in both the Dominican Republic and New Jersey, emphasizes the cultural dislocation of Dominicans who have fled to the U.S., and incorporates a street-slang style of narration to represent the cultural experience of ethnic minorities negotiating an identity within the U.S. In addition, Danticat's narrator focuses more on the familial bonds lost due to nationalist violence whereas Díaz explores how masculinity and ideas of machismo serve to propagate the legacy of patriarchal nationalism. However, despite the differing vantage points and narrative techniques, both writers reveal an engagement with understanding a legacy of trauma emerging from not only the historical period of the *trujillato* but from the Caribbean's history of repeated annihilations and oppressions, via the original conquest and colonization and continued through U.S. and first-world neo-imperial domination.

Depicting a legacy of trauma allows for representing the process of piecing together shattered, fragmented histories with the hope that such stories provide a means to address historical atrocities. In considering how such atrocities continue to shadow people, the novels

explore how considering family histories and experiences in the process of working through trauma allows for new types of nationalism that rely more on shared experience to emerge. Since the counter-histories are transmitted through families and surrogate families, the re-forging of familial ties or “reconstituted kinship” depicted allows for imagining national communities not based on oppression but rather based around structures of support and sustenance in the face of devastation.

As Cox claims, the novels representation of nationalism could prompt first-world audiences to reconsider ideological assumptions regarding imperialistic action undertaken by world powers to intervene in the affairs of postcolonial and/or third-world states. Via the novels’ utilization of familial narratives, the texts offer stories that draw upon a familiar paradigm (the multi-generational family saga) in order to prompt an engagement with aspects of national history that often remain under-explored or unaddressed. The novels link the history of Hispaniola to world history through an emphasis on historical events that have shaped the region and by portraying global affairs, such as colonization, slavery, genocide, and US neo-imperialism. In linking national history to global concerns, the family histories and the representation of re-creating and rebuilding familial structures out of trauma advocate a vision of family and national identity that is, as Díaz proclaims, “far more elastic [...] far more real.”

### **Conclusion: The Nation, The Family, and the World**

The novels in this study all, to varying degrees, fall under Bhabha's description of the "unhomely" in which "the border between the home and world becomes confused; and, uncannily, the private and public become part of each other" (141). The works considered here examine the merging of the border between the home and the world to consider the relationship between the national and the familial, and in turn, the relation of those spheres to the larger world. In this examination of "unhomely" homes that reveal familial experience shaped and bound up in the political realm, my aim has been to elucidate the way national experiences come to be understood through family history and family life and simultaneously, how family shapes understandings of national identity and nationalism. These recent postcolonial works exhibit an engagement with nationalism in the effort to represent its historical appeal, its limitations, and its possibilities for offering more liberatory social arrangements via the following: in exploring the "uncanny" depictions of family and home in Northern Irish literature, representing the coming to terms with historical traumas in Indian fiction, focusing on the construction of counter-genealogies in Jamaican novels, and imagining the creation of familial bonds and structures emerging as a survival technique in the face of widespread destruction and loss in the novels set in Hispaniola.

In examining the relationship between nation and family, this study takes into consideration the way the novels at times represent the relationship between the family and the nation allegorically. This occurs in moments where the novels utilize family members or family relationships to represent national ones, such as the feuding family in *The Shadow Lines* whose house split down the middle symbolizes Partition, or the twins in *The Farming of Bones* who,



with one being dark and the other being fair-skinned, represent the racial conflict occurring between Dominicans and Haitians. Such instances encapsulate national events that affect the families in the novels. However, while allegorical representations occur within the texts, the novels also go beyond allegory in order to examine the constitutive and mutually shaping relationship between nation and family. In addition to functioning allegorically, the families depicted in the text offer a means for representing the revision and recreation of national identity.

In depicting historical traumas that invade the home, these writers reveal how the nation and family shape and inform one another. I have argued that these texts reveal the family as a site that both potentially reproduces the nation and challenges national power. Utilizing La Capra's idea of "writing trauma" has enabled exploring how the novels attempt to convey the process of knowing and understanding trauma and its effects via stylistic and formal features in the text (via non-linear storylines, flashbacks, etc.). La Capra asserts that literature has the potential to convey the historical impact of trauma in ways that more conventional historiography may not be able to access. By doing so, the texts in this study explore the effects of national struggles and upheavals from the vantage point of those affected by them, often incorporating the experiences of those marginalized within the nation. For instance, Danticat and Díaz's "writing trauma" challenges the precepts of patriarchal nationalism by exposing its abuses and Ghosh's depiction of official erasures that contrast with the memories of those who were affected by traumatic events challenges the occlusions within nationalist discourse.

In considering the "writing trauma" that occurs within the texts, this study aims to consider how these literary representations challenge historiography and aspects of nationalist discourse that would obscure the traumatic event or attempt to co-opt the trauma in a way that sanitizes or minimizes it. My analysis has explored the way counter-histories and counter-

memories represented in the texts challenge official historiography and raise questions of how to understand or access voices that have been silenced in the official historical record. In analyzing these moments and their connection to “writing trauma,” I have tried to consider how trauma may bring together members of a national community and raise a call for rethinking terms of national identity and belonging. Such reconsiderations occur most vividly in the moments of “empathic unsettlement” La Capra refers to that serve to disrupt easy identifications or closure to bring the reader an awareness of the continuing effects of trauma instead. In reading moments such as the ending of *One by One in Darkness* which reflects upon the main character’s grief and struggle to envision a world beyond the one that has been marred by her traumatic memories as an instance of “empathic unsettlement,” we can consider what the texts’ representation of trauma prompts readers to consider.

The texts, in depicting effects of historical traumas and investigating constructions of national history and nationalism, often raise considerations of how to conceive of the relationship between the nation and the world. Particularly since the writers of these postcolonial texts are often writing for an international audience, the portrayal of national history often turns to issues of understanding global relations. As Sandra Cox argues, such representations may be valuable in the reconsideration and criticism of imperialist violence they might elicit in first-world audiences. In asserting that “this reconsideration could create a new paradigm for listening,” Cox’s suggestion offers a conception for thinking of this literature in terms of its globality.

The texts reconsider understandings of national identity in the light of working through trauma. These representations often lead to reconsidering the relationship between national identity and its connections to the world, or a larger, global identity. In such moments, the reconceptions of national identity gesture towards new understandings of the world and the texts

suggest that postcolonial nationalism, with the attending issues of neo-imperialism and globalization that have occurred in its wake, may need to incorporate alternative visions for the relationship between the nation and the world. This resonates with Paul Jay's description of texts that exhibit the transnational turn in literary studies: "They trouble received national narratives, not by erasing them, but by restructuring them within a broader, more complicated geographical and historical context dominated by a back-and-forth model of migration" (198). Likewise the novels in this study explore national narratives by re-conceiving of them in relation to issues of transnational migrations and/or globalization, pointing to the need, not to subsume questions of national identity but to re-envision them.

One way such alternative visions may occur is through the genealogical projects Mohanty advocates that involve rethinking boundaries of identity and envisioning home as a political space. In taking up Mohanty's idea of envisioning the family as a more inclusive and politically charged space rather than an apolitical one subsumed within the nation, I have attempted to show how the novels portray political and national developments occurring through and within the family sphere. In this way, the two spheres can no longer be seen separately with simply a metaphorical relationship binding the two. As Mohanty's argument for crafting "genealogies of community, home, and nation" underscores, such projects may allow for seeing connections and relations that occur across boundary lines of race, nationality, class, and others in order to allow for cross-cultural solidarity. The texts represent such genealogical projects in the "reconstituted kinship" that occurs in the Jamaican novels and the surrogate familial relationships that emerge in the threat of violence or face of oppression, such as the networks forged among Haitians marginalized by the Dominican Republic in *The Farming of Bones* or the imagined new yet unrealized and forbidden family that crosses caste lines in *The God of Small Things*.

The utopian moments that appear in several of the texts gesture toward an interest in exploring power relations in order to imagine alternatives to them. Although the depiction of utopian moments occurs most prominently in the works by Ghosh and Roy, they are also represented in other texts mainly via portrayals of dreams or wishes that often reveal a longing for a maternal figure providing comfort or a space for healing. The depictions of dreams in *The True History of Paradise* and *The Farming of Bones*, namely, offer moments where images of lost or longed-for maternal love appears in the characters' unconscious longing and represents a desire for understanding and healing of historical traumas. What such moments suggest, situated alongside the violence and divisiveness that often appears in the texts, is the need for imagining other ways of being and interacting. Such imagining allows for engagements with the traumas of the past to not be wholly dominated by that past and the political arrangements they seek to critique. While the texts do not portray traditional utopias that represent imagined and complete alternative worlds or societies, these utopian moments in the texts are significant for their engagement with this aspect of literature for it allows for political critique of current situations while recognizing the possibility of alternatives to such situations. In addition, the texts' containment of these moments as longing for possibilities that remain unrealized means that the novels maintain a grounding in the continuing effects of history and a recognition that those cannot be simply foreclosed or easily and wholly replaced with an alternative power arrangement.

In conclusion, the depictions of familial stories and interactions that reveal how the formation and shaping of national identity occur reveal that family also provides a site for rethinking national arrangements. While the utopian moments in the texts are presented as tentative hopes, they highlight the possibility for such rethinking to occur. In addition, such

moments also reveal a perspective moving beyond the scope of national politics or national history to consider how national identity is situated in a global context. While this study has taken into consideration the impact of globalization and the manner in which the novels exhibit transnational interests beyond a strict focus on nationalism, this is an area that merits further study. Such inquiry could consider how transnational identities intersect with an interest in national independence or liberation in order to explore Cox's supposition that such portrayals can elicit readers to reconsider how imperial powers intervene in the national affairs of other states. In addition, it could lead to an understanding of the "planetarity" vision advocated by Spivak in contrast to an idea of globalization that focuses on homogeneity. Instead, the complexity of familial interactions and reformulating of kinship that the novels depict ask readers to consider how transnational interactions occur in varied ways through lived experience.

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