

Chapter II

Society, Culture, and Politics as Agents in Creating Trauma

“Misery won’t touch you gentle. It always leaves its thumbprints on you; sometimes it leaves them for others to see, sometimes for nobody but you to know of.”

-Edwidge Danticat (*FB 224*)

Sociology is the scientific study of social behaviour and human groups. Its prime focus is on social relationships and the way these relationships influence the behaviour of the people. It helps to analyse the social features of human beings and the means in which they interact and change.

Auguste Comte (1798-1857) was a French philosopher who believed that a theoretical science of society and systematic investigation of behaviour were needed to improve society. He rated sociology at the top in the hierarchy of the sciences and called it the ‘queen’ and referred to its practitioners as ‘scientist-priests’. His works were translated by Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), a British social theorist, who offered insightful observations on the customs and social practices. Her book *Society in America* (1837) examined religion, politics, child rearing, and immigration in the young nation. It also focussed on gender and race.

Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) was a renowned French sociologist. He was educated both in France and Germany and was appointed to be one of the first professors of sociology in France. He emphasised that human behaviour should be understood within a larger social context and not in individualistic terms.

Another important figure in this field is Max Weber (1864-1920). A German by birth, he studied legal and economic history but was drawn towards sociology. He taught at various German universities. According to him, the social behaviour could be analyzed by subjective meanings which people attach to their actions.

Like Durkheim and Weber, Karl Marx (1818-1883) had a dual interest in abstract philosophical issues and the concrete reality of everyday life. He viewed society to be fundamentally divided between two classes which are in conflict in pursuit of their own interests. He believed that a system of economic, social, and political relationships maintained the power and dominance of the owners over the workers. He argued that the working class should overthrow the existing class system. He emphasised the group identifications and associations that influence an individual's place in society.

Sociologists view society in different ways. Some of them see the world as a stable entity. They are impressed with social institutions like family, religion, and government. There are others who view society in terms of many groups in conflict. The rest focus on the routine interactions which are seen among the people. These three views which are mainly used by the sociologists are termed to be functionalist, conflict, and interactionist perspectives respectively.

Functionalist perspective emphasizes the way in which different parts of a society are structured to maintain its stability. The key figure in the development of this theory is Talcott Parsons(1902-1979). In his view society is a system of linked components, each of which helps to maintain the system as a whole. If any aspect of social life does not account to the stability of society, it will not exist in future.

Conflict sociologists look society to be a system in constant struggle. Social behaviour is best understood in terms of the tension between the groups over power, resources, money, and political representation. Karl Marx is considered to be the father of the conflict theory. Conflict theorists are interested in how social institutions like family, education, government, etc., help in the privileges of particular groups and keep the others in submissive position. It differs from the functionalist perspective by means of advocating social change and redistribution of resources in a radical manner.

Interactionist theorists generalize on the day to day forms of social interaction. Their interest lies in shared understandings of everyday behaviour. They view the world as a system of meaningful objects which include material things, actions, relationships, and symbols. Symbols are considered to be an important form of human communication. George Herbert Mead(1863-1931) is a pioneer in developing this perspective. Herbert Blumer(1900-1987) expanded on Mead's work and coined the term 'symbolic interactionism'. The symbols have a social meaning which is understood by all the members of the society. Sociologists make use of all these perspectives since each offers unique insights into the same problem.

The Caribbean national policies along with its social setup and culture governed the fortune of its citizens. The people became victims of the social, cultural, and political turmoils whose stories went unnoticed. The writers of the Caribbean unearthed these stories which were silenced and transformed them into fictionalized accounts. They indulged in a painful process of depicting the horrors which had been hidden.

Caribbean literature, which was deeply concerned with history and slavery, started to depict personal stories when women writers came to prominence. Unlike the classical narratives of anti-colonial and Negritude that characterized the works of former Haitian authors such as Jacques Roumain and Jacques-Stephen Alexis, these women writers' works can be considered as testimonials that recorded social, political, and cultural maladies. These writers pioneered in depicting the shattered lives of the individuals which resulted in a realistic portrayal.

Violence, oppression, and suffering have been omnipresent in Haiti due to colonization, slave rebellions, dictatorships, coups, US military interventions, and drug trade. Danticat focuses on social, cultural, and political moments in Haiti's history to make the western reader aware of Haitian living conditions. Being a diasporic writer, she not only pictures the plight of Haitians in Haiti but also delineates the problems faced by them in the neighbouring countries. She limelights the social evils like racism and human trafficking in exile. Her novels take a unique position in interweaving the personal stories with the broad social issues.

The protagonists of Danticat's works are caught in the swirl of poverty, social evils, cultural ideologies, and political turmoil. Their personal lives are often determined by these factors which are responsible for creating dark episodes. These external factors made them live in exile, forced them to adopt a secluded life, and resulted in their trauma.

Poverty is the inability to meet the basic needs like food, clothing, and shelter. The sociologists conceive poverty in absolute and relative terms. Absolute poverty refers to a state in which individuals lack the resources necessary for subsistence. The

notion of ‘poverty line’ describes poverty in subsistence terms. In contrast, relative poverty is defined as a floating standard of deprivation by which people at the bottom of the society are considered to be disadvantaged in comparison with the national standards. Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the western hemisphere and most of its citizens live below the poverty line. They were unable to meet their fundamental requirements, as a result, their lives were miserable.

Haitians led a wretched life due to poverty. Most of the Haitians were cane cutters who worked for meagre wages. The impecunious life of the cane workers has a passing reference in *BEM*. Atie told Sophie not to complain about school because cutting cane was the only thing they were supposed to do when they were young:

Whenever she was sad, Tante Atie would talk about the sugarcane fields, where she and my mother practically lived when they were children. They saw people die there from sunstroke every day. Tante Atie said that, one day while they were all working together, her father-my grandfather-stopped to wipe his forehead, leaned forward, and died. My grandmother took the body in arms and tried to scream the life back into it. They all kept screaming and hollering, as my grandmother’s tears bathed the corpse’s face. (*BEM* 4)

There were no rituals performed to Sophie’s grandfather when he died. They just dug a hole and dropped him into the ground. Atie used to say that they were a family with dirt under their fingernails. It was Martine who helped in their upliftment after she moved to US.

In *FB*, the plight of Haitian peasantry owing to the US occupation is documented. The Yanki (North America) invasion of Haiti had left many of the Haitians in a dispossessed and impecunious state. Sebastien's mother told Amabelle that their house was taken by the Yankis as they wanted to build roads. This forced her son to leave Haiti in search of a better living in the Dominican Republic and their penniless situation made her daughter join him. Her weak lungs never allowed her to leave Haiti. When the Yankis left, the house was given back to them but Sebastien and Mimi were unaware of it.

Like Sebastien and Mimi, many Haitians migrated to the Dominican Republic for their livelihood. They worked as cane cutters in the sugar fields for meagre wages. Working in the cane fields proved to be perilous as it mutilated both their body and the spirit. Hence, they considered it as 'farming of bones' rather than 'farming of canes'. Sebastien too hoped to work in a different place as soon as possible, "Next year, I work away from the cane fields, in coffee, rice, tobacco, corn, an onion farm, even yucca grating, anything but the cane. I have friends looking about for me. I swear to you, Amabelle, this will be my last cane harvest, just as it was Joel's" (*FB* 55). When a fellow cane worker, Joel, died in an accident Sebastien considered him to be fortunate as he would no longer work in the cane fields. This was reflected in Amabelle's thoughts, "I knew he considered Joel lucky to no longer be part of the cane life, *travay te pou zo*, the farming of bones" (55).

Danticat's characters in *FB* are homeless victims living in exile. The Haitian cane cutters could neither go back to Haiti nor lead a decent life in the Dominican Republic. They were more like wanderers who belonged nowhere. The tiresome and monotonous work in the cane fields and meagre wages made them feel orphaned.

Sebastien told Amabelle, “Sometimes the people in the fields, when they’re tired and angry, they say we’re an orphaned people,” he said. They say we are the burnt crud at the bottom of the pot. They say some people don’t belong anywhere and that’s us. I say we are a group of vwayaje, wayfarers . . .”(56). The ‘burnt crud’ indicates their disqualified state, “To be at the bottom in the pot is to be just flesh; it is to be stagnant and incapable of ascending to the top of the pot” (Clitandre 40). The marginalisation of Haitians in the Dominican Republic is apparent in *FB*.

There were many oldest cane cutting women who could no more indulge in the harvest as they were weak and handicapped. These women were physically unfit as they were crippled owing to their tedious work in the cane fields. As a result, they could neither take up jobs like cooking and cleaning in houses in the Dominican Republic nor return to their homes in Haiti. They relied on wild roots and the kindness of their neighbours for food.

The monotony and drudgery involved in the cane cutting changed Joel’s father Kongo’s perspective of life. To him living was working in the cane fields whereas darkness symbolized rest, ““In sugar land, a shack’s for sleeping, not or living. Living is only work, the fields. Darkness means rest””(107). The workers lives were meaningless because of the reckless working conditions.

The poor are easily forsaken. The Haitians had no other means except to work in the cane fields of the Dominican Republic whereas the rich had more options. Tibon, a poor Haitian, explained their misery to Amabelle, ““The ruin of the poor is their poverty,” Tibon went on. “The poor man, no matter who he is, is always despised by his neighbors. When you stay too long at a neighbor’s house, it’s only

natural that he become weary of you and hate you” (178). Despite their hard work in the fields, Haitians were ill-treated by the Dominicans.

Danticat not only showcases the wretched living conditions of the cane cutters in her works but also depicts the pitiable lives of the fishermen community. In *CSL*, she portrays the struggles of the fishermen in Ville Rose, Haiti. Exploitation of sea by man had made fishing an unprofitable occupation. As seasonal fishing came to a halt, the sea could not replenish itself and consequently, there were less fish caught in the nets. Only a few in Ville Rose were wealthy while the rest, who were farmers, fishermen, and seasonal sugarcane workers remained in eternal poverty, “Ville Rose was home to eleven thousand people, five percent of them wealthy and comfortable. The rest were poor, some dirt-poor” (*CSL* 5). Nozias, a fisherman and the father of Claire, decided to give her away to Gaelle, a fabric vendor, as he could not afford to keep her. He was unable to make both the ends meet with fishing. He decided to leave the place and look for better prospects in the neighbouring Dominican Republic, “‘I’m going away,’ Nozias said. ‘Pou cheche lavi, to look for a better life’”(7).

Nozias always dreaded of feeding the children with his poor means, as a result, he was reluctant to cherish the bliss of fatherhood. He even went to the extent of castration before Claire’s mother started to live with him but fortunately, he changed his mind and left the hospital. He saw many young, healthy men waiting in the long queue to undergo the process. Thus poverty made Haitians lead a miserable life both in Haiti and in exile.

Haitians suffered discrimination when they migrated to the neighbouring countries. Discrimination is the denial of opportunities and rights to individuals

because of prejudice. Racism refers to the discrimination of people based on their race and it believes that a particular race is superior to another, “When racism prevails in a society, members of subordinate groups generally experience prejudice, discrimination, and exploitation” (Schaefer 248). According to functionalist perspective, racist views provide an ethical validation for maintaining an unequal society which deprives the minority of its rights and privileges. Racist beliefs discourage the minority to question their lowly status. Danticat’s *FB* deals with racial discrimination of Haitians in the Dominican Republic.

The novel *FB* is a portrait of 1937 massacre in the Dominican Republic. Its dictator Rafael Trujillo had ordered his men to massacre Haitians owing to their comparatively dark complexion than Dominicans. The massacre was carried out for a week which resulted in the deaths of approximately forty thousand people. The exact figure remained a mystery as many bodies were discarded by the military, “However the United States Ambassador to the Dominican Republic at the time, Henry R. Norweb, referred to the massacre in a message to President Franklin D. Roosevelt as a “systematic campaign of extermination””(*FB* 314). This move of Trujillo can be compared with Nazi and Fascist ideologies. Danticat in an interview reveals the similarities between Trujillo and other dictators:

Trujillo tried to model himself after Adolf Hitler of Nazi Germany and Francisco Franco of Spain. He eventually allowed some Jewish families who were fleeing Nazi Germany into the Dominican Republic in exchange for a lot of money and also with the hope of “whitening” the Dominican race. That was one of the motivations for the massacre. Trujillo wanted the Dominican Republic to be a whiter country and he

thought the influx of Haitians was preventing that from happening, even though it is also widely believed that he himself was of Haitian decent. (FB 323)

Most of the Dominicans are obsessed with white skin tone and this could be witnessed in Senora Valencia's conversation with Amabelle. Her daughter Rosalinda Teresa was darker than her son, Rafael. This difference in skin colour made her anxious about her daughter's future, "“My poor love, what if she's mistaken for one of your people?”" (12). Her son was fair but her daughter favoured the colour of the Haitians and could be easily mistaken for one among them.

The potential for violence becomes apparent when Valencia invited the cane cutters for tea. Her invitation for tea to Kongo and his crew left the workers with unanswered questions. The rumours of Haitians being killed as they were unable to trill the “r” in *perejil* circulated among the cane workers, so they were unsure to accept the invitation for the fear of being poisoned, “It was said that the Generalissimo, along with a border commission, had given orders to have all Haitians killed. Poor Dominican peasants had been asked to catch Haitians and bring them to the soldiers” (114). But Kongo accepted her invitation and offered his condolences. Pico, Valencia's husband, took the imported tea set and shattered them to pieces. His colour prejudices never allowed him to treat the Haitian workers as equals, “Senor Pico's reaction after Senora tells him she had tea with the cane workers, exemplifies the devastating racist mentality resulting from an established mythification of blackness” (Clitandre 34).

The symbolism of the twins' struggle in Valencia's womb depicts the colour conflicts that prevailed in Hispaniola, "Utilizing the twins as metaphor, Danticat constructs a powerful trope for the representation of Haitian-Dominican relations concerning the issue of race politics"(Robinson 86-87). Rafael, named after Trujillo, tried to strangle his sister Rosalinda who was darker and weaker. But eventually, Rosalinda survives in the duel while Rafael dies. Danticat thus brings out the fact that mutual survival is possible only through adjustment. The hostility and violence exhibited by Rafael and Trujillo would ultimately harm themselves rather than their counterparts.

The birth papers also determined the fate of the people in the Dominican Republic. The Haitians were anxious about their future because they were unable to provide proper education for their children as they had no birth certificates for them. Though they had lived there for generations it was impossible for them to assert their basic rights:

"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 our birth papers in our palms so my son can have knowledge placed into his head by a proper educator in a proper school."

"To them we are always foreigners, even if our granmemes' granmemes were born in this country," a man responded in Kreyol, which we most often spoke-instead of Spanish-among ourselves. "This makes it easier for them to push us out when they want to."(*FB* 69)

Amabelle could neither prove her as a Haitian nor as a Dominican as she had no certificates in her hand. She came to know that it was the same case even for those Haitians who believed the place to be their home, “I found it sad to hear the non-vwayaje Haitians who appeared as settled in the area as tamarind trees, the birds of paradise, and the sugarcane-it worried me that they too were unsure of their place in the valley”(70).

The condition of the cane cutters was even more pathetic as their birth papers were in the hands of the mill owners. This made them live a life of eternal servitude and prevented them from being independent. Their lives were always under threat as they were shot dead by the angry field guards. When the workers demanded more money for their hard work, they were struck by the machetes. Amabelle felt that the cane cutters were the ones who were easily targeted, “Things like this happened all the time to the cane workers; they were the most unprotected of our kind”(70-71). The cane cutters from Haiti never had choices to make in the Dominican Republic instead they surrendered to their fate. Sebastien and Amabelle’s love affair was never romantic as they were unsure of their future in the cane land. Unlike other lovers they were unable to express their love and affection for each other due to the hostility in the Dominican climate:

When the morning breeze lifted his torn and leaf-stained collar, he pressed it back down with his cane-scarred hands. His eyes surveyed all the familiar details of his fingers, pausing only for an instant when our pupils met and trying to communicate with the simple flutter of a smile all those things we could not say because there was the cane to curse, the harvest to dread, the future to fear.(131)

The peril of working in the cane fields are explicitly seen on Sebastien's hands which carried numerous marks from the pricks.

Language too played a major role in the discrimination of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. The Creole which the Haitians spoke made it easier for the Dominicans to keep them secluded and curb their basic rights. They were never treated as equals by the Dominicans and were always looked down upon, "Since language is articulated through voice, and body carries voice, both voice and body of the post-colonial Haitian subject are abused and manipulated to keep the Haitian in a stagnant position, and prevent any form of empowerment"(Clitandre 45). Haitian lives were less valued and Joel's death substantiated this fact.

Different pronunciations of the Spanish word for parsley- *perejil* and *pewejil* segregated Dominicans from Haitians. Haitians cannot trill the *r* in *perejil*, so they pronounce it as *Pewejil* or *Pesi* in Creole. Trujillo ordered his men to slaughter people who were unable to pronounce *perejil*, " a priori racial difference that supposedly separated Dominican from Haitian workers was produced not through its anchoring in "natural" difference but through its association with the trope of linguistic incompetence"(Mardorossian 47).

Trujillo chose parsley, a local herb for his racist propaganda against the Haitians. Parsley which was used for cooking and cleaning had been used for Ethnic Cleansing. Ethnic cleansing is the elimination of people based on ethnicity or race from a region by a more powerful and dominant ethnic group. This is done through

mass murder with the intention of making the region ethnically homogeneous. According to Amabelle, Trujillo used parsley to wipe out the Haitians from his nation, “We used parsley for our food, our teas, our baths, to cleanse our insides and outsides. Perhaps the Generalissimo in some larger order was trying to do the same for his country” (*FB* 203).

Amabelle’s expedition to Dajabon ended in her agony. She witnessed the burning of villages and mangled bodies transported in carts during her frenzied flights through the forests. The priceless lives of Haitians became worthless owing to the racist ideologies of the Dominicans. On their voyage Yves and Amabelle witnessed a girl’s corpse falling down from an oxcart. A machete had struck her at the temple and on both her shoulders. The cart also had few others tucked inside the blankets who were the victims of the massacre:

“The blanket was loose,” one said, tucking the sugar sack sheets beneath the cargo.

The loose blanket stirred. A groan could be heard coming from the cart. One of the men picked up a fist-sized rock and pounded on the head-or it might have been an elbow-pushing up the sack. There was no stirring. The man threw the rock away . . .

With the numbness of shock in his voice, Yves said, “At least we survived the night.”(169)

Tibon gave a clear picture of the massacre to Amabelle and Yves. The Haitians were loaded in groups on the trucks and were taken to the mountaintop. They

were either forced to jump from the cliff or killed with machetes by the Dominican peasants:

“The people who fight before going on the truck, some of us half dead, not knowing whose blood is whose, they take us out to a high cliff over the rough seas in La Romana. They make us stand in groups of six at the edge of the cliff, and then it’s either jump or go against a wall of soldiers with bayonets pointed at you and some civilians waiting in a circle with machetes. They tell the civilians where best to strike with machetes so our heads part more easily from our bodies.” Tibon used his bony hand to make the motion of a machete striking his collarbone. “They make us stand in lines of six on the edge of the cliff, then another six, then another six, then another six.”(173)

Tibon’s willpower enabled him to survive after jumping off from the cliff to the sea. He reassured himself again and again that he was a bird and fell down. When he managed to cross the water, he could see the peasants waiting with their machetes to strike the survivors. He held to a rock until night and managed to escape his fate. From the mountains Amabelle and her crew sensed the smell of human flesh burning, “There was no mistaking the stench rising towards us. It was the smell of blood sizzling, of flesh melting to the last bone, a bonfire of corpses, like the one Generalissimo had ordered at the Plaza Colombina to avoid the spreading of disease among the living after the last great hurricane” (181).

The helpless condition of the Haitians was apparent when Amabelle’s group encountered the Dominicans. After reaching Dajabon, Amabelle and others tried to

mingle with the crowd. As they tried to move forward, a group of young men approached them with parsley sprigs uttering *perejil*. They poked a broomstick in Tibon's skeletal arm and spat parsley chunks on Amabelle's face. Tibon wrestled with one of the youngest members of the group and lost his life. They waved parsley sprigs in front of Yves and Amabelle, "'Tell us what this is,'" one said. "Que diga perejil'" (FB 193). Though Amabelle had a practice of trilling the 'r' in the *perejil*, the precision of 'j' was little difficult for her. In spite of their efforts to pronounce, they were never given a chance to utter the word. Amabelle and Yves were shoved down onto their knees and parsley was stuffed in their mouths. Stones were thrown and they were badly beaten up:

A sharp blow to my side nearly stopped my breath. The pain was like a stab from a knife or an ice pick, but when I reached down I felt no blood. Rolling myself into a ball, I tried to get away from the worst kicking horde. I screamed, thinking I was going to die. My screams slowed them a bit. But after a while I had less and less strength with which to make a sound. My ears were ringing; I tried to cover my head with my hands. My whole body was numbing; I sensed the vibration of the blows, but no longer the pain. My mouth filled with blood. I tried to swallow the sharp bitter parsley bubbling in my throat. Some of the parsley had been peppered before it was given to us. Maybe there was poison in it. What was the use of fighting? (194)

The crossing of the river was a nightmarish experience for Amabelle. Amabelle along with Wilner and Odette, the fellow travellers, managed to cross the river. She swam along with the dead bodies which were thrown from the bridge into

the river. When a man's body floated past her with his face down, she turned it and felt relieved as it was not Sebastien.

Despite their marginalization in the Dominican Republic, the Haitians courage and determination were something remarkable. While Wilner was shot dead by a soldier, Amabelle closed his wife Odette's mouth to ensure that she made no noise. After reaching the shore Odette was unconscious and Yves tried his best to bring her back to life. Odette's daring personality was revealed, when she uttered the word *pesi* in Creole with her last breath. Amabelle envied the way in which she embraced death in a valiant and composed manner:

The Generalissimo's mind was surely as dark as death, but if he had heard Odette's "pesi," it might have startled him, not the tears and supplications he would have expected, no shriek from unbound fear, but a provocation, a challenge, a dare. To devil with your world, your grass, your wind, your water, your air, your words. You ask for perejil, I give you more. (203)

The survivor's camp at the border of the Massacre river was the terrain of traumatised individuals. After being rescued by a priest and a doctor, Amabelle and Yves were put in tent clinics organized for the survivors. An amputation was performed to a woman without an anaesthetic. Amabelle was startled to hear the survivor tales. Even the darker Dominicans had received the machete blow as they were mistaken for Haitians. The clinics were overcrowded and Amabelle could not differentiate herself from the rest of the survivors as they were all in the similar state of trauma, "I looked for my face in the tin ceiling above me as I waited for Yves to

return. With everyone lying face up and with their bodies so close together, I couldn't tell which face was mine" (217). Haitian president Papa Vincent remained silent and never spoke anything about the river of blood.

The trauma Amabelle suffered was both physical and psychological. The beatings made her handicapped and she was unable to make out things going on around her, "Perhaps my whole body was beyond feeling now, beyond healing"(199). As the injuries made a permanent scar on Amabelle's body, she viewed it as fragile and useless. When the neighbourhood children laughed at her, she realized that her charm and youth were lost to the beatings she suffered, "Now my flesh was simply a map of scars and bruises, a marred testament"(227). Amabelle's wounds reflect her tormented psyche. Her marred body becomes the agent of her agony. Though her bodily pain healed with time, she was psychologically tormented by the massacre, "Her broken and scarred body becomes a metaphor for the enduring effects of trauma suffered by her and her people. While her physical pain subsides with time, she and others remain locked in the past by the guilt of having survived when others died"(Meacham 131).

The survivors who entered Haiti were immediately identified as the victims of the massacre, "Some of the merchants and shopkeepers and their workers moaned as we moved among them. They recognized us without knowing us. We were *those* people, the nearly dead, the ones who had escaped from the other side of the river" (220). Their scarred body and their traumatic state made them easily identifiable.

Amabelle anticipated Sebastien and Mimi's return whenever she witnessed the new arrivals in town. She wished to realign her body which was crippled in the

massacre, “Thinking of Sebastien’s return made me wish for my hair to grow again- which it had not-for the inside of my ears to stop buzzing, for my knees to bend without pain, for my jaws to realign evenly and form a smile that did not make me look like a feeding mule”(229). Amabelle came to know Sebastien and Mimi’s fate through their mother, Man Denise. She narrated the incident which she heard from a traveller,

“He came here to see me on his way to Port-au-Prince. He said he saw my children killed, in a courtyard, between two government edifices there, in a place he called Santiago. He said he saw them herd my children with a group, make them lie face down on the ground, and shoot them with rifles.” (241)

Amabelle had no choice except to believe this because she heard similar kind of stories in the survivor camp. So she sank into a world of eternal despair.

The protagonists in *FB* experience trauma irrespective of class, nationality, and other differences. Amabelle’s employer Senora Valencia gave birth to the twins, only for the boy, Raphel, to die. Her father Papi was discontent due to his displacement from Spain. According to Amabelle, Dominican Republic never served as a home for the immigrants, “Like me, Papi had been displaced from his native land; 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 island had not always been home” (78). This shows the double sense of alienation that she shares with him and others uprooted by violence.

Kongo was another unhappy man who grieved over his son's death. His son, Joel, was accidentally killed by Valencia's husband Pico. His dislocation from Haiti added to his distress. He was destined to live in the Dominican Republic, so he felt there was no meaning in being nostalgic of Haiti. Past according to him was meaningless because of the displacement. When Amabelle reminded him of his son's lover who waited for his blessings, he told her that past faded with time, "Blessings? What for? My son's only a remembrance now, if even this. The one with the big mark under her nose, she is young, and the young do not stay young by keeping watch on the past. Soon she will find another man, my son will slip from her mind" (122).

The title *FB* not only refers to the mutilating work in cane fields where the cane cutters suffered a lot but also alludes to the characters like Amabelle, Yves, Papi, and Kongo who live like dead. These characters struggle to move forward in life, despite their efforts to reconcile with the past, "Danticat's characters are condemned to crossing and recrossing from one country to another, between the past and the present without ever finding answers (Dash 36)".

The collective Haitian trauma started to surface in the novel when Trujillo ordered the massacre of the Haitians. Danticat's reminiscence of 1937 massacre is apparent in her afterword to *FB*. She grew up hearing the stories of the massacre in the Dominican Republic. Even her family members who went there to earn a living did not return:

I remember hearing about 1937 massacre of Haitian cane workers in the Dominican Republic when I was a girl in Haiti. Nothing in great detail, but a phrase here and there, from one of my relatives.

Ou kwe yo tiye I tankou yo te tiye lot yon an 1937?

Do you think he was killed like the others were in 1937?

In the 1960s and 70s, a few men in my family had gone to the Dominican Republic to work in the sugarcane fields and had never returned. Their fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, daughters, nephews, nieces, were looking for explanations, for answers, and history was their only clue. When one or two of these men eventually come back, penniless and with only the tattered clothes on their backs, they were often scarred and mutilated, like soldiers coming home from war. Or they were on the verge of death. They, like many who had succeeded in reaching the Haitian soil during the first week of October in 1937, would come home to die. (*FB* 316)

Like Amabelle who awaited Sebastien's return, there were many in Haiti who anticipated the return of their near and dear. Their absence was answered through the history of the massacre. A very few of the survivors who escaped the massacre returned to Haiti in a crippled state and died shortly after.

When Danticat visited the borderland of Haiti and the Dominican Republic in 1994, she was surprised to see the massacre river filled with lively domestic activities like the children bathing in it, animals drinking in it, and women washing their clothes. From this Danticat concluded that 'nature has no memory' which she had stated in the afterword of the novel *FB*. She expected to witness a river full of blood but to the contrary, she saw people living in it. Though the Haitians never forgot about the terrific stories of the river risen to the great heights by blood, their present

impoverished life seldom allowed them to brood over the past. Despite the absence of the marker or plaque at the site, she knew that the best way to commemorate the tragedy is to put an end to the present horrors.

In 2012, on the seventy-fifth anniversary of the massacre, a group of Haitian and Dominican writers, artists and activists who belong to 'Border of Lights', a human rights collective formed in 2012, using art, education and policy as social justice tools in the Dominican Republic gathered at the Haitian-Dominican border for the first bi-national commemoration and remembrance of the massacre. They read poems, planted trees and floated candles and lanterns down the river. Danticat was unable to attend this historical event due to a death in her family. She had written few words in Creole and it had been read out by one of the participants at the event. An excerpt from the English translation of those words is stated below:

Come and gather children

Let us mourn

Hoping this will be

The last time we are torn

The last time we will cry

Or shake or burn or drown

Come and gather children

Let us mourn. (*FB* 319)

The above lines express Danticat's desire that history should not be repeated and the injustices against the fellow human beings should come to an end.

The memorial which Danticat was looking for at the massacre river was finally erected on 1st October 2017, on the eightieth anniversary of the massacre by Border of Lights. Both Haitians and Dominicans participated in the commemoration and paid their respects.

At the time Danticat was researching for this book, the genocide in Rwanda took place and even now we could witness many mass massacres like Las Vegas shooting which happened on October 2nd 2017. The fact that they are still happening around the world echoes the words of Senora Valencia in *FB*, 'We lived in the time of massacres'.

Danticat not only pictures the discrimination of Haitians in Hispaniola but also portrays their marginalization in US. In *BEM*, Martine warned Sophie to learn English as soon as possible to avoid the fellow students' mockery. This is because the Americans had certain inhibitions towards the Haitians. They were often addressed as 'boat people' and 'stinking Haitians' and were even blamed for spreading AIDS:

A lot of other mothers from the nursing home where she worked had told her that their children were getting into fights in school because they were accused of having HBO-Haitian Body Odor. Many of the American kids even accused Haitians of having AIDS because they had heard on television that only the "Four Hs" got AIDS-Heroin addicts, Hemophiliacs, Homosexuals, and Haitians. (*BEM* 48)

In *DB*, the struggle of Haitian immigrants is seen in the case of Eric, who works two jobs to earn a living. Dany, Michel, and Nadine are the other best examples. They were separated from their families in Haiti and worked hard in US to send them money. Their familial disconnections added fuel to their agony. The insecure lives of Haitians are realistically portrayed in the novel. Dany and Michel stopped visiting the nightclubs after a Haitian man named Abner Louima was arrested by the police. Eric's wife heard about killing of a man named Patrick Dorismond who was of Haitian descent by a US police officer, ““ No justice, no peace,” she chanted while stewing chicken and frying fish”(DB 47). Thus the prejudices over Haitians ended in their discrimination and the discrimination culminated in their distress.

In Sociology, deviance occurs when an individual or a group's behaviour violates the standards of conduct of the society. According to the interactionists, crime and deviance takes place in the absence of social institutions like family, school, and government. This is evident in the novel *CSL* in which Danticat portrays the gangster culture in Haiti. The gangsters were street children whose parents either abandoned them or were killed, leaving them homeless. They were addressed by various names such as *Chime*, *Chimeras* or Ghosts. These young men joined the older ones who had dealings with the politicians who in turn used them for executing their plans, “These older men were ‘connected’ - that is, ambitious business owners as well as local politicians used them to swell the ranks of political demonstrations, gave the guns to shoot when a crisis was needed, and withdrew them when calm was required” (*CSL* 66).

The gangs first operated from a former food-storage warehouse called Baz Benin at Cite Pendue, a kind of midlevel slum which was few kilometres away

from Ville Rose. The gang members nicknamed themselves as Piye and Tiye to suggest dangerous acts in Creole, Piye meaning ‘to pillage’, Tiye meaning ‘to kill’. Drug trade started to flourish in Haiti’s capital, Port au Prince, with the help of gangsters.

Bernard’s parents owned a restaurant at Cite Pendue. The gangsters frequented the restaurant and his parents could do nothing about it as the restaurant was their main source of living. Bernard joined the national police force to keep away from the gangsters. When any gang member was arrested in City Pendue, he was blamed for it. This eventually threatened the security of his parents. He was sent home during the training session due to a fatal asthma attack. His passion towards the radio programs enabled him to become a news writer at Radio Zorey. He also wished to start a radio show called *Chime*, or *Ghosts* for which the guests would be the gang members. When his idea was put forward at the station, it was rejected. Later a new program, *Homme a Homme*, or *Man to Man*, consisted of in-studio conversations between the gangsters and the political leaders was aired. The ultimate aim of this programme was to rule out the differences between the two. On listening to this show, Tiye and his crew mocked at Bernard saying “‘Hey, man, they stole your idea!’”(71).

Bernard was arrested for Gaelle’s husband, Laurent’s murder. Laurent was shot dead by one of the gangsters. His interest towards radio programs made him one of the sponsors of Ville Rose’s only radio station, WZOR. He was fascinated to watch the hosts and hostesses working from the control booth. During one of his visits to the radio station to deliver the sponsorship money, he was struck by three bullets and died on the spot. Tiye, who was believed to have a hand in it, declared Bernard to be the mastermind in executing it. Laurent’s death was one of the reasons for Gaelle’s

trauma. Tiye made a deal with the policemen for his release as well as Bernard's, "As head of Baz Benin, Tiye had collected drug-related dirt on everyone, from the lowest policeman in City Pendue to a few of the area's judges. And now he'd talked to the police and exchanged his slew of records, including records of bank deposits for bribes, for both his and Bernard's freedom" (79). Soon after the release, Bernard was found dead in his bedroom with three bullets administered skilfully to his heart and it was similar to the death of Laurent Lavaud.

The gang culture in Ville Rose took a toll on many innocent lives and it bestowed an emotional shock on the living ones. This was evident in Max Senior's views on the society. He expressed his unhappiness on changing scenario:

Idealists had been killed to make room for gangsters. Life had become so cheap that you could give anyone few dollars to snuff it out. When had they entered, he wondered, what Rimbaud, in his time, had called 'le temps des assassins,' the age of assassins? Maybe his generation was the problem. They'd built a society that was useless to their children. Still these children seemed to lack the will to sacrifice and build their own (187-188)

The drastic shift in the state of affairs has ultimately resulted in a meaningless life. The children could never imbibe any moral or social values in such a dystopian society.

The power dynamics in social hierarchy also resulted in the unjust victimization of the lower class. Gaelle used her money and influence to kill Bernard

without knowing the truth behind her husband's murder. She sought another type of justice as she felt there would be no proper trial.

A class system is a social ranking based upon the economic dispositions. It maintains stable stratification hierarchies and patterns of class divisions which are marked by discrepancies in wealth and power, "Marx viewed class differentiation as the crucial determinant of social, economic, and political inequality"(Shaefer 193). In *CSL*, the social hierarchy resulted in the despair of its people. Max Junior was forced to leave Haiti, since he had impregnated their housemaid, Flore. When Max Junior returned to Ville Rose from US, he was accompanied by his girlfriend Jessamine. Her father had abandoned her mother when she was carrying Jessamine, "The worst possible case of unrequited love, Jessamine had told him, was feeling abandoned by a parent"(CSL 100). Jessamine's story made Max Junior feel guilty as he casted his son in Jessamine's role and himself in the place of her dead father. He felt belittled for skipping his responsibility as a father. He fled away from home just to keep his secrets to himself. His visit to Ville Rose made him a grief-stricken man because he was unable to forget his past encounters with Flore and his friend Bernard. He visited Rue des Saints, where his friend had lived. Flore's revelation of her pregnancy was the reason behind his displacement from Ville Rose, "He was nineteen, banished from his home for creating a life just at the moment when his friend lay dying. The irony of this was still weighing on him"(117).

Max. Junior's meeting with Flore, the former housemaid, whom he had impregnated, added fuel to his agony. She came to meet him with their son, Pamaxime Voltaire. Max. Junior was unable to digest the uncertainty in his son's name, "But with 'Pa', a Creole prefix meaning both 'his' and 'not his', the child's

first name could either mean ‘Maxime’s’ or ‘Not Maxime’s’. Only the mother could know for sure”(98). The high social status enjoyed by Max. Senior’s family could neither accept a housemaid like Flore nor acknowledge their son’s affair with Bernard.

In *CSL*, Danticat’s portrays various facets of Haitian society in a fictional town. The novel includes several catastrophic events owing to natural disasters, stark class differences, and corrupt political system, “Within the book, the proximity of birth and death is heavily thematized: life appears as fragile and permanently threatened by nature’s or mankind’s outbursts”(Scheel). Danticat’s Ville Rose is a microcosm of Haiti. The characters in *CSL* encounter arbitrary violence, environmental adversities, and political corruption. As a result, they lead unhappy lives.

Danticat’s does not feel complacent in portraying the social issues of Haiti. Being a diasporic writer, she moves beyond the horizon to limelight the social evils in US. In the novel *Untwine*, she vividly pictures the child trafficking. On the way to the concert where Isabelle was to perform, the family met with an accident. A red minivan collided with their car leaving Isabelle critical. The attempts of their father to save them were in vain, as the van rammed twice into Isabelle’s door. The flute case rammed her face and then pierced her ribs owing to the impact of the collision. The officer in charge of the investigation revealed to the family that it was not just an *accident and they had started to probe into it. The driver of the van was a girl whose name was Gloria Carlton. She was a student in the school where Giselle and Isabelle studied. Giselle’s friends Tina and Jean Michel helped the case by unearthing the*

minute details of the girl from the net. They found that the girl had another name, Janice Hill.

When Giselle looked into the newspaper articles, she could see that Gloria's mother having a nervous smile on her face and the family never seemed to be wholesome. A few days later Giselle's family came to know that Gloria Carlton and her parents had disappeared. The officers found out that the girl as well as her parents had numerous aliases. Gloria and her parents were spotted by the bus driver. In the news footage, she remained cool and had a smile of relief on her face. When the reporters asked her if she had anything to say to Isabelle's family, she said, "I would change places with her if I could" (*Untwine* 261).

Later, it was revealed that the man and woman arrested were not her parents. She had been handed over to them by her most recent foster family and she took their minivan to escape from them. At last, Gloriana alias Janice was left free, "The state attorney was going to press child trafficking charges against the couples who'd traded Janice online. But due to Janice's extenuating circumstances, Isabelle's death was ruled a very unfortunate accident. Janice wouldn't be getting a driver's license anytime soon, but she wasn't going to jail, either" (279). The social evil like child trafficking was responsible for the collective trauma of Giselle's family.

In Danticat's works culture too plays a significant role in trauma creation. Culture refers to the ideas, customs, and behaviour of the people. A society consists of people who share common heritage and culture. Members of a society learn this culture and transmit it from one generation to next. According to Schaefer, "Culture is the totality of learned, socially transmitted customs, knowledge, material objects, and

behavior. It includes the ideas, values, and artifacts of groups of people” (Schaefer 55). In many societies culture is used to maintain the patriarchal structures. It privileges men over women.

Conflict theories in sociology state that the relationship between men and women has been traditionally unequal. Men occupy the dominant position whereas women are placed in the subordinate position, “Conflict theorists, then, see gender differences as a reflection of the subjugation of one group (women) by another group (men)” (Schaefer 280). The social fabric is a weave of human relationships in which men and women relate to one another in different ways. In a patriarchal society, female subordination is rooted in a set of customary and legal practices that block women’s entrance and success in the world.

The patriarchal setup of Haiti resulted in the discrimination of the female child. The birth of a boy was usually marked with the lights and the father would stay awake all night with the newborn but if it was a girl the midwife would cut the cord and leave. The mother would be ultimately left in the darkness. In a patriarchal society like Haiti, men always looked down upon women and considered them fit only for household chores and lovemaking which is echoed in Atie’s words, “*Our men, they insist that their women are virgins and have their ten fingers*”. Atie listed out the purpose of the ten fingers, “Mothering. Boiling. Loving. Baking. Nursing. Frying. Healing. Washing. Ironing. Scrubbing”(BEM 150-151). She desired to have six fingers on each hand as she could use the remaining two for herself. Women like Martine who stepped out of Haiti were considered to be fortunate.

New York gave a new identity to Martine. She became financially independent and started supporting her family in Haiti. She also enjoyed a love affair with Marc, which would not have been possible in Haiti as he belonged to the upper class. With the help of Marc, Martine tried to surpass not only the class confines but also the limitations of her body; however she failed in her mission. While Martine found solace in US, Sophie yearned to be in Haiti because it proved to be a safe haven with her Aunt Atie. Life in New York with her mother resulted in mental agony and pain. Sophie was forced by Martine to leave Haiti and travel to the metropolis of New York where she became an extension of her mother's geographies of pain. Sophie's self became fragmented in the new land owing to her mother's customary tests.

Testing is a Haitian custom practiced over centuries. It is a process by which a mother ensures her daughter's virginity by checking if her little finger can pass through the daughter's hymen. In *BEM*, Martine was tested by her mother Ife, until she was raped by a *Macoute* (Member of Haitian Paramilitary). She forced the same on Sophie in their Brooklyn home. Unable to distinguish between the past and the present, herself and her daughter, Martine misidentified Sophie's body as bearing the same scars that marked her. This flaw in Martine's character manifested itself in the way of customary tests intended to guard Sophie's purity. The tests were imprudent efforts by Martine to regain the authority over her body as she imagined herself as Sophie's twin, the *Marasa*. In Haitian Vodou, *Marasas* are kindred spirits, two sides of one unity. Martine's phobias, anxieties, and the tests she carried out left Sophie terrified.

Testing led to trauma. Sophie used the technique of doubling - imagining beautiful things to distract her mind to escape from the horrors of testing, "Doubling

refers to a split identity that characters such as Sophie Caco generate in order to cope with trauma in their lives” (Mardorossian 43). She disengaged herself from the present and thought of her childhood days in Haiti:

I closed my eyes upon the images of my mother slipping her hand under the sheets and poking her pinky at a void, hoping that it would go no further than the length of her fingernail.

Like Tante Atie, she had told me stories while she was doing it, weaving elaborate tales to keep my mind off the finger, which I knew one day would slip into me and condemn me. I had learned to *double* while being tested. I would close my eyes and imagine all the pleasant things that I had known. The lukewarm noon breeze through our bougainvillea. Tante Atie’s gentle voice blowing over a field of daffodils. (*BEM* 155).

Doubling was not a new technique that Sophie had adopted. All of her ancestors had doubled. Even the presidents had split personalities, a part of them being flesh and the other being the shadow, “That was the only way they could murder and rape so many people and still go home to play with their children and make love to their wives”(155). Robert Jay Lifton in his interview to Cathy Caruth explains the process of doubling, “And in Doubling . . . there have to be elements that are odd in two selves, including ethical contradictions. This is ofcourse especially true in the Nazi doctors, or people who doubled in order to adapt to evil” (137). Doubling helped Sophie to survive testing. Danticat explains in detail concerning the process of doubling:

Trauma victims often report feeling like they want to leave or that they leave their bodies while awful things are happening to them. Sophie feels like she not only leaves her body but that she takes her body elsewhere, which is why she sometimes has trouble remembering some things. That's what doubling is for her. She also mentions a more pathological example of people who purposely compartmentalize themselves so that they can brutalize others, people who, say, can be both loving father and a ruthless torturer all at once. (*BEM* 260)

In spite of 'doubling', the crippling weight of 'testing' psychologically shattered Sophie. Her rebellious nature urged her to put an end to her mother's insane ideology of keeping her pure, so she used a spice pestle to fail the test,

My flesh ripped apart as I pressed the pestle in to it. I could see the blood slowly dripping onto the bed sheet. I took the pestle and the bloody sheet and stuffed them into a bag. It was gone, the veil that always held my mother's finger back every time she *tested* me . . .
Finally I failed the test. (87)

Though Sophie like her female ancestors suffered the indignity of being tested by her own mother, she emancipated herself from the age-long tradition, "Sophie is implicitly identified as a revolutionary. She goes beyond her mother's own radical step of leaving Haiti by rebelling against the cultural mores that still oppress Martine" (Adjarian 97). Thrown out of the house, she married her lover Joseph who could never believe what she had done, "Joseph could never understand why I had done something so horrible to myself. I could not explain to him that it was like breaking

manacles, an act of freedom” (*BEM* 128). Women in Haiti are doubly victimized by its historical, political and social setup. Haitian women’s body is linked to the country’s history; thereby it forms the Haitian identity. As Sophie is against these cultural conventions, she is in a constant struggle with her Haitian identity.

Martine, Sophie, and Atie’s life brought out the reality that Haitian women had no control over their bodies. Atie’s words to Sophie reflected the same, ““Your mother and I, when we were children we had no control over anything. Not even this body.” She pounded her fist over her chest and stomach”(19). Their bodies became landscapes of pain and suffering.

Danticat encountered many criticisms after the publication of *BEM* from those who felt that she made unfair generalisations about the Haitian culture and for revealing the secrets of their community. This forced her to write an afterword in the form of a letter to Sophie while she visited her ancestral village which served as a model for the village in which the Caco family lived. She explained in the letter that not all Haitian mothers are like Martine and not all the Haitian daughters are tested like Sophie.

Like testing, Female Genital Circumcision (FGC) also becomes an instrument in generating trauma. Many writers and activists view FGC as intrinsically linked to the existence of a dominant patriarchy while others view it as an antiquated ritual. In many African countries, women are forced to undergo Female Genital Circumcision. Female circumcision has complex origins because diverse communities have performed it for various reasons. Though there are several different operations encompassed under FGC, infibulation and excision are overwhelmingly the most

prevalent. Sophie's friend Buki is a victim of FGC. Her grandmother had performed this ritualistic practice on her when she was a small girl. Buki had her clitoris cut and her labia sewn up when she was a girl. The history of female genital cutting is extensive and complex. Although the exact origins of female circumcision cannot be traced, it is known that the circumcision rite has occurred since antiquity. There have been historic documents dating from that of famous historian, Herodotus that report on the prevalence of circumcision and concluded that the practice originated in Ethiopia or Egypt:

Female genital mutilation is one of the least researched, least resourced, least talked about issues that the world faces today. It is a gross abuse of human rights, of child rights, of health rights. Over 140 million women bear the consequences, 3 million girls in Africa alone are cut a year. This is not just an African problem-it happens in Indonesia, Malaysia, Yemen, UAE, Kurdistan and of course, as we now know, in the US, Australia, and across Europe. This is a global problem and it is our problem. (Lalla-Maharajh)

Thus culture becomes an agent in generating trauma in women. The patriarchal society has the belief that women are by nature less intellectually and physically capable than men, so it excludes women from the forum. As a result of this policy of exclusion, the true potential of many women goes unfulfilled.

Similar to culture, politics is also a major factor through which people become the subjects of suffering. 'Power' is a commonly used term in politics and the state becomes the hub of power:

Political theorists have accorded such overwhelming importance to the state because it is through the state that power becomes centralized: the state becomes the centre of power. The extent of power invested with the state to organize, direct, and control the lives of individuals finds no parallel in other institutions. (Bose 18)

According to Weber, power is the ability to exercise one's will over others. Dilip Kumar Das in "Power: An Outline of Key Theories" quotes Foucault's views on power, "It flows through innumerable capillaries and spreads all over the social body. Hence, one needs to address the issue at the micro level by analysing the particular domains where power is exercised and disclosing how they are structured by power relations" (39).

Force, influence, and authority are the three basic sources of power. Force is used to impose one's will on others. Influence refers to the exercise of power through persuasion. Authority refers to institutionalized power that is recognized by the people over whom it is exercised. In dictatorships, one person has the total power to make and enforce laws. The dictators use coercion which includes torture and executions. The political unrest and insecure civilian life is commonly seen under dictatorships.

In Danticat's works, personal is politicized and politics is personalized. Her works chart the course of new modalities and conceptualization of political activity and therefore lays out new means and understandings of political action. Danticat was brought up in Duvalierist Haiti where she witnessed many disasters like people being arrested, people being murdered, and people leaving Haiti to live in exile. It was sad

but it was normal slice of life, as a result, her childhood traumas surface in her narratives:

Growing up in Duvalierist Haiti in the mid – 1970s, Danticat was aware to some extent of the political and social tensions that infiltrated into every family and every home. Her close-knit family sheltered her from the harshest realities of that time, but she and the other children inevitably “could hear the adults talking” about events outside the home. Silence and suspicion became elements of her experience, and children were “warned to be quiet.” People she knew disappeared unexpectedly, she heard of public assaults in the news, “executions were whispered about,” and aspects of everyday life, such as school, were often disrupted. (Munro, “Inside Out” 17)

In *BEM*, Danticat pictures the political unrest in Haiti. The novel was set in the Duvalierist regime from 1970’s to 1990’s which was marked by terror and violence. The changing political scenario of Haiti created distress among its citizens. Sophie left New York when the Duvalier dynasty started to crumble down. When Sophie was about to board the plane in Port-au-Prince, there was a riot going on for changing the name of the airport from Francois Duvalier to Mais Gate. The soldiers used tear gas and fired a round of bullets at a group of students who organized the protest, “One girl rushed down the hill and grabbed one of the soldiers by the arm. He raised his pistol and pounded it on top of her head. She fell to the ground, her face covered with her own blood”(BEM 33). Atie pointed out this and told Sophie that she was leaving for good.

Even in *FB*, the political unrest made men like Pico, Valencia's husband to be more cautious. He trained Valencia with the rifles and told her that she should know how to protect her as the situation demanded it, ““This is a different time,” he told her” (*FB* 137). She predicted the indifference in the atmosphere when she saw the military truck, ““It almost seems like we are at war,”” . . . (137). There were always many rumours prevailed in the Dominican Republic like war, invasion etc due to the greediness of the rulers. Though they relied on people from other lands for labour, they wanted their country for themselves. Amabelle never believed in the rumours of Haitians being killed because she thought that they were always indispensable for labour in the cane fields:

It couldn't be real rumors, I thought. There were always rumors, rumors of war, of land disputes, of one side of the island planning to invade the other. These were the grand fantasies of presidents wanting the whole island to themselves. This could not touch people like me, nor people like Yves, Sebastien, and Kongo who worked the cane fields. They were giving labor to the land. The Dominicans needed the sugar from the cane for their cafecitos and dulce de leche. They needed money from the cane. (140)

Papi, Valencia's father, had an aversion towards war as it took a toll on many innocent lives. He was born in the seaport of Valencia and served as an officer in the Spanish army. After witnessing many deaths, he started to dislike wars and fled from the bloody battles to settle in Alegria. When Beatriz questioned him about the political atmosphere in Alegria, he told that he never liked the country being run by military men. On the other hand, Pico, Valencia's husband, had a love for the military

and he blindly worshipped Generalissimo. He was christened after one of the freedom fighters of Dominican independence and dreamt of becoming the president of the Dominican Republic. He named his son Rafael after Generalissimo, the President of the Republic. He requested his wife to paint a magnificent portrait of the ruler with the country's red and blue flag with the white cross in the middle and the coat of arms with the shield: *DIOS, PATRIA, LIBERTAD*. GOD, COUNTRY, LIBERTY. Like Pico, there were many who re-baptized their children. During Rosalinda's baptism, Amabelle witnessed many children, who were aged between six to seven, were brought to the church for being re-baptized so that Generalissimo could become their godfather. Their names were likely to be changed to Rafael in Generalissimo's honour. During Rafael's unofficial wake, a radio program broadcasted the series of old speeches given by Generalissimo. Pico unmindful of his personal grief increased the volume and listened carefully to Generalissimo's words:

“You are independent, and yours is the responsibility for carrying out justice,” the Generalissimo shrieked . . .

“Tradition shows a fatal fact,” the Generalissimo continued, “that under the protection of rivers, the enemies of peace, who are also the enemies of work and prosperity, found an ambush in which they might do their work, keeping the nation in fear and menacing stability” . . .

“The liberators of the nation did their part,” the Generalissimo went on, “and we could not ask more of them. The leaders of today must play their parts also.” (97)

Trujillo's speech added more pressure to the political atmosphere of Haiti. His followers who blindly worshipped him were ready for any kind of attack, oblivious of its consequences.

The tension in the land had a great impact on the lives of the cane cutters. After Joel's death a night-watchman brigade was organised by the workers to protect themselves. Men like Unel wished to stay and fight while others who did not want to take risks wished to go back to Haiti before the bloodshed, ““ I will stay and fight,” Unel said. “I work hard; I have a right to be here. The brigade stays to fight. While we fight we can help others””(126). The soldiers formed a wall blocking the members of Unel's brigade who had machetes in their hands. Pico watched this encounter by standing on the front guard of the truck, giving orders to the cane cutters. Unel and his men were forcibly loaded in the trucks while few others fled from the scene:

“Kneel or sit,” Senor Pico repeated. “Lower your machetes. We will put you on the trucks and take you to the border ” . . . “No kneeling!” Unel cried out. “What you do in the cane fields is worse than kneeling!” Senor Pico shouted back. “You work like beasts who don't even know what it is to stand. Put down your machetes. I have no cane for you to cut now.”(154)

Pico's words exhibited the dismal life of the Haitian cane cutters. They were insulted and inhumanly treated. Their low status deprived them of their basic rights.

Amabelle's carelessness had put her life under threat. Doctor Javier warned her about the killings and informed her that he had intended to cross that river with a huge crowd of Haitians. He had planned this under the mask of celebrating an evening

Mass for the saint Santa Teresa. Sebastien too was aware of the mass and was angry with her as she blindly believed her employers, ““You never believed those people could injure you,” . . . “Even after they killed Joel, you thought they could never harm you”(143). As Amabelle’s past had too much of an impact on her, she was blind towards the present reality. Amabelle’s late realization of the matters around her left her with less options, “At this point it was a matter between our two countries, of two different peoples trying to share one tiny piece of land. Maybe this is why I’d never let the rumors engage me. If they were true, it was something I could neither change nor control”(147). She viewed the massacre in simple terms of clash between the powerful and the powerless, “She understands events around her in the more basic terms of injuries perpetrated by the powerful, the Trujillo and Vincent governments, against the migrant Haitian peasants”(Adjarian 103).

Despite their efforts to escape, the Haitians were arrested, tortured, and killed by the Dominicans. The priests who helped the Haitians were also detained. Father Romain was tortured with a rope around his head which was tightly twisted, as a result, he was severely injured.

The Haitian government did not take any measures to rescue the Haitians from the massacre. The burden of this historical past was distinct in the image of Sebastien carrying his dead father. Though his father’s dead body made him wobble, he managed to carry him carefully with a lot of perseverance:

“You can see it before your eyes, a boy carrying his dead father from the road, wobbling, swaying, stumbling under the weight. The boy with the wind in his ears and pieces of the tin roofs that opened the

father's throat blowing around him. The boy trying not to drop the father, not crying or screaming like you'd think, but praying that more of the father's blood will stay in the father's throat and not go into the muddy flood, going no one knows where." (34)

On the national level, the father refers to the indifferent rulers of Haiti, who remained deaf to the cries of the victims of the 1937 massacre.

The weight of the Haitian past was also depicted in the figure of Henry Christophe and the ghost-filled Citadel. Henry I, a slave who became the king, built the citadel to keep the enemies away and to safeguard the nation. Though the citadel was a symbol of Haitian architectural genius, it was also a place of terror as many people were killed while building it. In an interview, Danticat asserts the significance of this citadel in the novel:

When we leave the places we love, there is always something particular that we miss. For Amabelle that is this citadel, which is a very important monument in the north of Haiti. It is a strong memory marker for Amabelle because she was so small when she left Haiti and to her it was this massive place in the clouds that over the years came to stand in her mind for Haiti itself. She was always a child looking back at Haiti until she actually went up to the citadel and looked down where she used to live from the top of the citadel. That was an important moment for her. The Citadel, as great a point of pride as it is for Haitians, and as wonderful a symbol as it is of our genius, is also a kind of monument to how innocents can suffer for some larger plan,

because, as the tour guide says to Amabelle and the other visitors, a lot of people were killed constructing the citadel. Soldiers were also forced to march off the ledges to their deaths as both entertainment and punishment. (*FB* 322-323)

As a child Amabelle viewed the world from the citadel but now Henry's kingdom is haunted by weary ghosts, "And from the high vaulted ceilings, I could almost hear the king giving orders to tired ghosts who had to remind him that it was a different time-a different century- and that we had become a different people"(46). When Amabelle revisited this monument which was made into a tourist spot, she realised the truth of the king's atrocities, a past exposed of its splendour. Like the citadel which was stripped of its previous historical mightiness, Henry Christophe was also presented as a brutal and dictatorial figure by the tour guide whom she followed around the citadel:

"The king was sometimes cruel. He used to march battalions of soldiers off the mountain, ordering them to plunge to their deaths as a disciplinary example to others. Thousands of our people died constructing what you see here. But this is not singular to him. All monuments of this great size are built with human blood." (279)

Amabelle's observation on the citadel echoed the ambivalence towards Haitian history which eventually questioned its grandeur. The Haitian past with its glorious narratives and utopian dreams were inadequate for the people of the present.

Trujillo did not admit his guilt but he agreed to give money to the victims of the massacre and their families. When Amabelle came to know that the state had

appointed justices of peace to listen to the survivors and record their testimonies, she decided to meet them. Amabelle did not intend to receive the monetary compensation rather she wanted to get the information about Sebastien and Mimi. There were thousands of people waiting to tell their stories, so she contemplated to shorten it, “To pass the time waiting, I thought of many ways to shorten my tale. Perhaps Yves and I would go in together and make both our stories one. That way we would give someone else a chance to be heard (232). Amabelle and Yves went there for sixteen days and waited in the queue. But their perseverance was not rewarded because the head sergeant declared that there would be no more testimonials as the allotted fund has been exhausted.

The Haitian representatives were corrupted by the money given by Trujillo. Yves informed Amabelle that the priests were recording testimonies. They never promised money instead they wrote down tales for newspaper and radio. Yves was unsure about the authenticity of these collections as Generalissimo could buy anyone with his money, ““I know what will happen,” he said. “ You tell the story, and then it’s retold as they wish, written in words you do not understand, in a language that is theirs, and not yours””(246). The stories were documented in Spanish, so they would never know what has been recorded. Yves and Amabelle never found solace in these testimonies. The national violence on the commons occupies the centre of the text. It resulted not only in the massacre but also had a long lasting effect on the psyche of the survivors.

The anti-Haitian policies by the Dominican Republic were not the only reason for the massacre but the Haitian government had also failed to protect its citizens. The burning of the medal given to Haitian President Stenio Vincent by Trujillo

demonstrated the anger of the civilians against the inefficient leaders. Both the leaders framed policies which aided the division of two nations rather than bonding them.

Danticat condemns the powerful by privileging the voiceless in her text:

Danticat strips these individuals of their multidimensionality and reduces them to one-dimensional presences. The powerful become little more than uttered names or images that preside over domestic and institutional spaces. General Trujillo, for example appears as a painted portrait in the home where Amabelle works, while Steino Vincent appears as a photograph in the National Police quarters Cap Haitien. (Adjarian 103)

Danticat's *FB* can be considered as an extended reading of Rita Dove's political poem "Parsley". The poem is divided into two sections: "The Cane Fields" and "The Palace". The first part gives a view of the cane fields and details on the slaughter witnessed through the eyes of the Haitian. The second part explores the fluctuating mood and psyche of the General who ordered the slaughter of the Haitians who cannot trill the 'r' in *perejil*, "El General has found his word: *perejil*" (Dove 15). Thus the intertextuality of Dove's poem is apparent in *FB*.

The Haitians not only suffered under the reign of Dominican Dictator Trujillo but were also victimized in their own country under the rule of the dictator Francois Duvalier. He created a special operations unit called *Tonton Macoutes* in 1959. In Haitian folktales, *Tonton Macoute* is a mythical figure. The elders threatened the children with the fairy tales in which *Tonton Macoute* was a scarecrow with human flesh, "*If you don't respect your elders, then the Tonton Macoute will take you*

away”(BEM 137). Duvalier used the Haitian folklore as a tool to suppress the people. In reality, the *Macoutes* paraded in the streets with machine guns, torturing and killing people. Unlike the criminals who slipped into the houses at night, these *Macoutes* roamed in the broad daylight:

But the *Macoutes*, they did not hide. When they entered a house, they asked to be fed, demanded the woman of the house, and forced her into her own bedroom. Then all you heard was screams until it was her daughter’s turn. If a mother refused, they would make her sleep with her son and brother or even her own father.(137)

The civilian lives were under threat in Haiti because of the atrocities of the *Macoutes*. When a coal vendor accidentally stamped on a *Macoute*, he was shot dead. This was witnessed by Sophie and her grandmother, “I turned back for one last look. The coal vendor was curled in a foetal position on the ground. He was spitting blood. The other *Macoutes* joined in, pounding their boots on the coal seller’s head. Every one watched in shocked silence, but no one said anything”(116). The coal man Dessalines was named after a Haitian revolutionary leader, Jean-Jacques Dessalines. His death at the hands of *Macoutes* symbolizes the shattered dreams of the founders of the nation.

The fear of *Macoutes* made the Haitians live in exile. Atie’s friend Louise was startled at the death of the coal man. She wished to leave the place as soon as possible as she feared that she could be their next victim. When she revealed her anxiety to Ife, Ife replied that her family already had their turn with them. Sophie’s father was a *Macoute*. He grabbed Martine into the cane fields and raped her. Martine was too

stunned to make a sound and she was unable to see his face as he covered it with a black bandanna, “When he was done, he made her keep her face in the dirt, threatening to shoot her if she looked up”(138). Martine, who was traumatized after this incident, suffered a short period of insanity. She moved to US after recovery.

The detailed account of the horrors committed by *Tonton Macoutes* in Haiti is recorded in the novel *DB*. The novel is set in the period of the brutal dictatorships of François Duvalier and his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, who ruled Haiti from 1957 to 1986. The protagonist Ka, an artist, had a high regard for her father and she used him as the subject of her sculpture. Her attempts to preserve her father in the form of a sculpture resulted in carrying the burden of his past on her shoulders, “Ka must bear the weight of her father’s problematic legacy as a Duvalierist Macoute” (Dash 29). Ka’s father was a *Macoute*. He is not given a name in the text and is addressed as Ka’s father or the Dew Breaker. He is identified by the work that he executed:

Dew Breaker serves as metonymical extension of Duvalier and Danticat hides Dew Breaker’s proper name in the face of his job, a job serving the bloated name Duvalier. Danticat withholds his name while simultaneously naming the text after his metonymic role, thus displacing mystery onto the father. The “protagonist” must therefore be perpetually referred to as the Dew Breaker or as Ka’s father. He remains that “thing”, meaningful only in the context of the demand he fulfills: enforcing Duvalier’s lawful lawlessness, otherwise called *jouissance*. (Henton 5)

Dew Breaker's parents were land-owning peasants who lost their fortune soon after Duvalier came to power in 1957. The local army officials intended to build summer homes so they snatched the lands from the peasants. This move of the officials led to the fragmentation of many families including that of the Ka's father. Dew Breaker's father went mad and his mother disappeared. He then joined the Militia, the Volunteers for National Security, at the age of nineteen. The Volunteers came to his hometown to enrol people for a presidential rally in the capital as they needed a huge number to listen to president's Flag Day speeches. He was mesmerized by the procession of humanity standing before the national palace. He listened to the long speech of the president which served to be a warning to his enemies, "If anyone tried to topple him, the president threatened, blood would flow in Haiti as never before. The land would burn from north to south, east to west. There would be no sunrise and no sunset, just one big flame licking the sky"(193).

Ka's father readily accepted the offer of joining the Miliciens who were later addressed as *Macoutes*. He was given an identity card, an indigo denim uniform, a homburg hat, a.38, and the privilege of marching in all the national holiday parades. After his enrolment, he enjoyed all sorts of privileges starting from the merchants to restaurant owners and his favourite line for them was "“I volunteered to protect national security. Unfortunately, or fortunately as you like, this includes your own”" (196). His neighbours who looked upon him and his family earlier, now asked for favours addressing him as Sergeant, Colonel, General, and Little President.

The Dew Breakers adopted various strategies in torturing people. Some preferred to stay away from their neighbourhood when they executed such tasks while others voluntarily returned to their native to take personal vengeance on those who

had insulted them or denied their needs long before. Ka's father was different, "But he liked to work on people he didn't know, people around whom he could create all sort of evil tales"(DB 187). His behaviour at the inquisitions in Casernes eventually earned him a lofty reputation among the equals. He came up with physically and psychologically taxing trials for the captives in his cube:

He liked questioning the prisoners, teaching them to play zo and bezik, stapling clothespins to their ears as they lost and removing them as he let them win, convincing them that their false victories would save their lives. He liked to paddle them with braided cowhide, stand on their cracking backs and jump up and down like a drunk on a trampoline, pound a rock on the protruding bone behind their earlobes until they couldn't hear the orders he was shouting at them, tie blocks of concrete to the end of sisal ropes and balance them off their testicles if they were men or their breasts if they were women. (198)

Dew Breaker's captives had terrifying encounters with him. When a female prisoner who had been locked up in Casernes was interviewed after three decades for a documentary, she stammered a lot before narrating her terrifying encounter with the Dew Breaker. She was unable to recollect his name but could never forget him for what he had done to her. Unlike the other Dew Breakers, his style was unique, "“He would wound you, then try to soothe you with words, then he'd wound you again. He thought he was God”"(199).

Dew Breaker was assigned to kill a preacher. The preacher's Baptist church was the largest in Bel-Air, one of the oldest and poorest communities in Haiti's

capital. The rivalry between the preacher and the people in power began when the preacher started broadcasting his sermons, “ In his radio sermons, later elaborated on during midmorning services, the preacher called on the ghosts of brave men and women in the Bible who’d fought tyrants and nearly died”(185). They wanted him to just preach the Christian philosophy that the more they suffer on earth, the more they will be rewarded in heaven. But his sermons attempted for a reformation against the government. He quoted examples of brave men and women who halted massacres and battled against beasts. His final question ““And what will we do with *our* beast?”” (185), enraged the people in power. As a result, the church members were dragged from their homes in the middle of the night to the torture cells at Casernes Dessalines military barracks and were questioned about the preacher’s cliché, ‘What will we do with our beast’. In spite of their explanation that they were Christians and the beast meant Satan, the devil, they were tortured. The members of Human Rights Commission in their reports, after counting the corpses, detailed on the intensity of the torture they endured, ““*Impossible to deepen that night*. These people don’t have far to go to find their devils. Their devils aren’t imagined; they are real””(186). There were also few who refuted the ideology of the preacher as it had put his life as well as theirs in danger.

Dew Breaker had several reasons to convince himself to murder the preacher. He was a devout Catholic who hated the Protestants as they never allowed people to socialize and often talked about devil using biblical symbols which could be easily misinterpreted. Thus he felt that he would be free from guilt, no matter he killed him anywhere. He also believed that he would liberate the entire folks of Bel-Air from the Bible which enslaved them. Like the preacher, many had received warnings from the

national palace and when these warnings were neglected, the result proved disastrous. The president announced the execution of nineteen young officers whom he felt had betrayed him on the radio, “The president, also known as the Renovator of the Fatherland, had listed the officers’ names, roll-call style on the radio, had answered “absent” for each of them, then had calmly announced, “They have been shot””(189). The preacher’s warning came in the disguise of his wife’s death. She had been poisoned by the daughter of a rival pastor. In spite of it, he continued his sermons which enraged the members of the national palace.

In the prison, the Dew Breaker warned the preacher to stop his sermons. The preacher pretended to be brave but was afraid. He wished for a quick death rather than a prolonged suffering which he witnessed in his fellow prison mates:

From their skeletal frames and festering sores, he could tell that some of them had been there for a long time, waiting, plotting, and dreaming of their release. Many of them were forgotten by the world outside, given up for dead. For indeed they had died. They were being destroyed piece by piece, day by day, disappearing like the flesh from their bones. He didn’t want to die like that, stooped in a filthy corner of the cell with parasites burrowed in his flesh. (225)

The prisoners were men of different social status thrown into the living hell. They helped one another in the process of survival. The preacher wished to die with dignity.

The confrontation between the good and evil is seen in the Dew Breaker’s final encounter with the preacher. When the Dew Breaker came close towards the preacher, he grabbed a sharp piece of wood from the chair and aimed at the fat man’s

eyes but it landed on his right cheek, “The fat man’s shock worked in his favor, for it allowed him a few seconds to slide the piece of wood down the fat man’s face, tearing the skin down his jawline”(226). The goodness in the preacher left a permanent record on the Dew Breaker’s face. As the blood started to drip, he pulled out his gun and fired at the preacher, leaving him dead,

The preacher’s trace has been present from the beginning of the novel by way of the Dew Breaker’s scar. The preacher, also nameless, creates and becomes a reminder, a secret or mystery that the Dew Breaker must manage his entire life, an absence written on the face.
(Henton 6)

The preacher’s death was not a complete defeat as the mark he left on the fat man’s face was a brand that he had to carry for the rest of his life.

The mistaken identity united the lives of the victim and the perpetrator. Anne, the step sister of the preacher, mistook the Dew Breaker for a prisoner who had escaped. She insisted on entering the prison to see her brother but he said it was risky, ““In there,” she said.”I need to go in there.” “People who go in there,” he said slowly, “don’t come out””(232). When she questioned him of the tortures he encountered inside, he told her that he had escaped and he was free. He believed in it because he escaped from his past and would never return to it. She helped him recover from the injury the preacher had inflicted on him, without knowing the true reason behind it. He took her to US and married her. His killings came to a halt in the new land.

Haitian criminals lived a carefree life in exile. Emanuel Constant, the former leader of the Haitian Liberation Front, lived in the relative safety of US after torturing

and killing many people in Haiti. His photo with the heading in bold, “WANTED FOR CRIMES AGAINST THE HAITIAN PEOPLE . . . “torture, rape, and murder of 5000 people””(78) was pasted on a lamppost by the community activists. Anne removed it as she dreaded that her husband’s picture could also be on the lamppost one day.

In *DB*, Danticat exhibits the complex relationship that existed between US and Haiti. The novel showcases the political atmosphere of the two countries through Constant’s and Dew Breaker’s ability to remain free in the hands of the law. The story of the two criminals who escaped their brutal pasts served as a reminder of the pattern of violence that cycled through time. Constant’s posters started to fade such that the word ‘rape’ became ‘ape’ and the number five disappeared leaving a trio of zeros as the number of victims. The additions like horns and Creole curses which the public had added were also erased “turning it into a fragmented collage with as many additions as erasures”(79).

Anne was already aware of Constant’s story through the media. He created a death squad in Haiti after its president was sent to exile in a military coup. His followers attacked the president’s men with gasoline, set their houses on fire, and shot them. They peeled the skin off from the dead victim’s face which was called facial scalping. This was meant to make their faces unidentifiable. The president’s return made him flee to New York and he was tried in absentia in the Haitian court. He was sentenced to life in prison which he would probably never serve. Anne wished to pull down the flyer, “not out of sympathy for Constant but out of fear that even though her husband’s prison “work” and Constant’s offenses were separated by thirty-plus years, she might arrive at her store one morning to find her husband’s likeness on the

lamppost rather than Constant's"(80). Although a period of three decades separated the offenses of the Dew Breaker from that of the Constant, Anne always dreaded of her husband's fate.

Anne did not have the same fury that her daughter had towards Constant. She had mixed feelings, "What if it were Constant? What would she do? Would she spit in his face or embrace him, acknowledging a kinship of shame and guilt that she'd inherited by marrying her husband? (81). Being a devout Catholic and wife of a former torturer, she was unable to show her displeasure. Anne decided not to attend any more Mass with her husband for the fear of being identified by his victims.

The novel also encompasses the lives of the people who were the victims of the Dew Breaker. Danticat not only encapsulates the lives of the direct victims of Ka's father but also includes the lives of their children who are haunted by their parents' past. Dany is one among them. He had lost his parents to the dictatorship in Haiti. While his parents died at the explosion at their house, he managed to survive with his aunt whose hands were severely injured in the fire, "It was a large man with a face like a soccer ball and a widow's peak dipping into the middle of his forehead. The man was waving a gun at him as he opened his car door, and he only lowered the gun to drive away" (105). He was forced to leave to New York by his aunt as she wanted him to stay away from the murderers. In New York, he came across a barber who was renting rooms in his basement. The barber was none other than Ka's father who murdered his parents. Dany's father, a gardener, was mistaken for someone else in politics and this mistaken identity resulted in the family's disaster.

After checking into the barber's basement Dany could not sleep for months. He frequently visited the barber's shop for haircuts and closely monitored the man. He always became nervous during these encounters but the barber never tried to make any conversation with him other than his usual question, Would you like a shave?. Dany always accepted the shaves because he thought that the barber would get a chance to recognize him, "He always expected the barber's large hands to tremble, but it was his own body that quivered instead, his forehead and neck that became covered with sweat, melting the shaving cream on his chin, forcing the barber to offer extra napkins and towels and warn him to stay still to avoid nicks and cuts"(106). Though he intended to kill the barber by choking him to death, he did not attempt it for the fear of killing the wrong person.

The next victim is Beatrice, a bridal seamstress. Beatrice pointed to the house of a Haitian prison guard and revealed to her interviewer Aline that she was tormented by him in Haiti, ""We called them chouket lawoze," Beatrice said, the couch's plastic cover squeaking beneath her. "They'd break into your house. Mostly it was at night. But often they'd also come before dawn as the dew was settling on the leaves, and they'd take you away. He was one of them, the guard"" (131). This guard was none other than Ka's father. When she was asked to dance with him, she turned down the offer. So she was whipped until her feet bled and was sent home barefooted on the tar roads of Haiti in the hot sun. Aline wished to write such kind of realistic stories rather than the ones which were assigned to her.

Freda, Mariselle, and Rezia are the victims of the state-sponsored violence. Freda, one of the funeral singers of her generation, lived in exile. She lost her father to the regime. She became a professional funeral singer after her father's demise but

refused to sing for those who were responsible for her father's death, " I made a choice that I'd rather stop singing altogether than sing for the type of people who'd killed my father(179)". Her father was tortured by the *Macoutes*:

He'd had a fish stall at the fish market. One day, one macoute came to take it over and another one took my father away. When my father returned, he didn't have a tooth left in his mouth. In one night, they turned him into an old, ugly man. The next night he took his boat out to sea and, with a mouth full of blood, vanished forever.(172)

The intensity of the torture survived by Freda's father made him lose his hope on life.

The silence of the first-generation immigrants who faced the immediate consequences of the Duvalier dictatorship is portrayed in the novel. Poverty in Rezia's family forced her to live with her aunt who ran a brothel where she was raped by a uniformed man. Mariselle's husband was shot dead after leaving a gallery show where he displayed a portrait of the president which was disapproved by the government. These women who were emotionally wounded in Haiti hoped for a better future in US.

There are also indirect victims like Nadine, who lived in exile due to the political turmoil in Haiti. Denial of justice made the victims to be terrified of the future that awaited them. Though US proved to be a safe place to dwell, they were continuously assaulted by the severity of the past. Danticat's *DB* is encrusted with trauma and loss, "Through a complex weaving of multiple narratives that climaxes with the final chapter in which the title character finally relays his entire story, *The*

Dew Breaker illustrates the far-reaching effects of historical and political trauma upon generations of Haitians living abroad” (Michelle, Charles 60).

The clash between the civilians and the *Macoutes* in Jean-Claude Duvalier’s regime is also elaborated in *DB*. After the president and his wife escaped, the civilians were in a hunt for the *Macoutes*, ““Come out macoutes! Come out, macoutes!” daring members of the Volunteers for National Security militia to appear from wherever they were hiding” (*DB* 139). As the president and his wife planned to settle in France, a huge number of militiamen were left orphaned. This led to a combat between the commons and the *Macoutes*. Regulus, the father of Michel’s best friend Romain was the one highly sought after. He had beaten civilians and stolen their money. He confined people either in jail or in the grave. He had forsaken Romain when he was a month old. Romain last saw his father marching in the Flag Day parade in the National Palace grounds along with other *Macoutes*. Regulus had shot himself dead to escape law.

The mob ransacked the houses of the government officials and the mansions of the president. They looted all the possessions from tiles to toothbrushes, “Graffiti were going up everywhere. Down with the departed president and his wife! Down with poverty! Down with suffering! Down with everything you can imagine”(149). The radio broadcasted the message from the exiled president that he had determined to leave the nation’s destiny to the military. Six rich military officers were supposed to take control of the country. When the situation went out of control, the president was on the television to deny the rumours of his exile and assured the people that he was as ““unyielding as a monkey’s tail”” (163). Romain explained Michel that short

tail monkeys live on the ground while the long ones swing from tree to tree. The president was one of the long-tailed as he was looking for a different tree.

The political atmosphere in Haiti was largely responsible for the dissolution of the family setup. Leon was a shoeshine man and his son was one of the volunteers. His son left their house after joining the militia. When a bunch of philosophy students who enacted Samuel Beckett's *En Attendant Godot* was arrested by the volunteers, Leon and few others emptied the slop jars on them. Leon hated his son's profession but he felt that it was because of him that he was not arrested.

Michel lost his father three months before his birth and the reason for his death as described by his mother was something 'political'. Many men either lived in exile or were murdered under the Duvalier dictatorship. This made Michel have a kinship with the fatherless boys of his generation. When the mob dismantled Monsieur Christophe's tap station, water started to ooze out like the blood from a freshly slaughtered pig. Michel relates this to the political situation of Haiti. He felt that the water could be an offering to the dead no matter they could be militiamen or the civilians:

I wanted to let the water flow. There was probably so much blood being shed in different parts of the country that morning, the blood of militiamen at the hands of former victims, the blood of former victims at the hand of militiamen battling for their lives. Maybe the water could be a cleansing offering to the gods on behalf of all the dead, no matter what their political leanings had been. (146-147)

Politics was too very intertwined with the personal lives such that it was used as a tool by the people to mask their personal affairs. Romain planned a day out to La Sensation Hotel with Michel, hoping for an adventure. On their way, they witnessed people waving flags, ripping the posters of the president and his wife and had containers of kerosene to punish the *Macoutes*. Romain's revelation about Michael's father, Christophe, embarrassed him. Though he knew it already, it was too very painful for him to digest the fact that his father lived close by and yet he didn't acknowledge him as his son. To cover the illicit affair his mother told him that he had lost his father to something called 'political'. Even after coming home Michel was disturbed, "Though it was still outside, I went to bed trying to give impression that it was the country's political problems that were disturbing me. I'd let my mother keep her secret, I didn't want her to feel like a liar"(162). Incapable of admitting the truth, Michel stuck to his mother's version for the rest of his life. The concealment of secrets resulted in the disconnection in characters' lives. The fragmented plot echoes this disconnection, "The fragmentation of the book's structure itself enacts the brokenness of the lives portrayed and performs the concealment, displacement, and disconnection that the book also configures thematically"(Gallagher 148).

Thus Danticat's novels showcase social, cultural, and political contexts through which the protagonists become the subjects of suffering. Her fusion of the personal with social, cultural, and political factors cultivates a new insight and addresses the contemporary dilemmas of injustices. When asked about the role of her works in creating a change, Danticat explains the fact that writing is a means of taking part in the struggle. Despite her contributions in several other ways, writing becomes her primary response to voice against the injustices:

Toni Cade Bambara once said, “Writing is the way I participate in the struggle.” I have tried to participate in the struggle with my writing and also with other community activities. However, in whatever other ways I serve, writing will always be my first response. For example, if I see an injustice being done, my first reaction is, “Maybe I can write about it.” It’s an immediate reflex for me . . . However, I have no illusions that my writing can make large changes. On the other hand, a good novel, a poem, short story, or painting might change an individual heart, and who knows where they may lead. (Horn and Danticat 23)

Danticat firmly believes that art has the ability to make the necessary changes in the society.

Danticat’s literary space is an amalgam of history and fiction which address social, cultural, and political issues of Haitians. Her novels bring to the fore, stories of personal struggles against pervasive oppression and violence. By writing about suffering at the hands of the *Tonton Macoutes*, the massacre at the border, forced migrations, corruption, and social evils; she pictures the trauma of Haitians. The aftermath of these traumatic events has a huge impact on the psyche of the protagonists which will be analysed in the next chapter.