

Chapter IV

Strategies and Factors for Survival and Healing

Life was neither something you defended by hiding nor surrendered calmly on other people's terms, but something you lived bravely, out in the open, and that if you had to lose it, you should lose it on your own terms.

-Edwidge Danticat (*DB* 201)

Survival becomes a crisis for trauma victims. The Caribbean concept of recovery from trauma opens up new avenues which offer possibilities for survival and healing. The protagonists of Danticat's narratives struggle to move ahead in life owing to their traumatic past. While a few like Martine surrender to fate, a majority of them display a heroic courage in their battle against trauma. They adopt diverse strategies to overcome the catastrophic loss and embrace life. There are also few factors which aid them in their journey towards recovery.

The Caribbean methods of healing draw sustenance from the native religious traditions. In Sophie's case, Grandmother Ife gave her a statue of Eruzile, the Vodou Goddess, to comfort and heal her, "“Later that night, Grandma Ifé gave Sophie her statue of Erzulie and told her, “My heart, it weeps like a river,” she said “for the pain we have caused you” “(*BEM* 157). As a child Sophie always longed for a mother like Eruzile. She was the healer of women and desire of men. She is a symbol of courage and strength. Her complexity lies in the dual personalities of being compared to Virgin Mary and also as a beauty with many husbands. Sophie prefaces the loss of her virginity by recalling the story of a bleeding woman transformed into a butterfly by

Erzulie. By breaking her hymen, she too becomes free from the pain of testing. The Goddess thus helps the women to depart from their bodies which were the root cause of their annoyance. Ife believed that the Vodou goddess Erzulie would aid Sophie to come out of her suffering. Despite Erzulie's contradicting characters, Haitians always turn to her at the time of crisis. Danticat in an interview to Lyons tells about the opposing nature of Erzulie:

Erzulie is a figure that I too am very much drawn to. There's the red-eyed Erzulie, who you don't mess with. There's the Erzulie who's young and beautiful. There's the Erzulie who's a crone figure. Erzulie has all the manifestations of all the different stages of a woman's life. She can be cruel and demanding and jealous but can also be the goddess of fertility and of love. She is enigmatic, sensual and powerful. You can see how Erzulie would be embraced by Sophie's family, especially the grandmother, because there are several aspects of them in her, but she is also many things that they are never going to be allowed to be. (194)

Though few virtues of Erzulie can be seen in Sophie's Grandmother, there are also many qualities which no women can adopt from Erzulie. She made men to be her slaves, raped them, and ultimately took their lives.

In *DB*, Anne responds to her isolation and her guilt by taking refuge in religion. Her conversations with her husband and daughter centred around miracle stories. As she could never speak of her past, she uses these stories to interact with her family.

Psychotherapy helps Sophie to lead a new life. It is a collaborative treatment based on the relationship between an individual and a psychologist. A psychologist provides a supportive environment that enables people to converse with someone who is objective, neutral and nonjudgmental. Psychotherapy assists people to live contented and more productive lives. Sophie along with Buki, an Ethiopian student and Davina, a middle-aged Chicana attended the therapeutic classes organized by the therapist Rena.

Like Sophie, Buki and Davina too could not lead a peaceful life owing to their traumatic past. Their life was hollow due to the fact that they were unable to differentiate the oppositions- the past and the present. To seek the inner peace, they draped themselves in white dresses and scarves, as the colour white stood for peace. They sat on green heart-shaped pillows which Davina had made, as green symbolized life and growth. The session started with a serenity prayer seeking the blessings of the Almighty to grant them a better understanding of life , *““God grant us the courage to change those things we can, the serenity to accept the things we can't and the wisdom to know the difference””(BEM 205-206).*

Sophie took the statue of Eruzile to the class and laid it next to their other keepsakes. The session proceeded with optimistic words which boosted them. It helped them believe that they were strong and beautiful souls capable of enduring the adversities of life. Owing to the pain they underwent, they were able to understand the sufferings of the fellow human beings. Davina was the first to begin the session and the others echoed her words. Sophie's voice grew louder than the others:

“I am a beautiful woman with a strong body.” Davina led the affirmations. “We are beautiful women with strong bodies”. We echoed her uncertain voice. “Because of my distress, I am able to understand when others are in deep pain.”

“Because of our distress, we are able to understand when others are in deep pain.”

I heard my voice rise above others.

“Since I have survived this, I can survive anything.”(206)

These affirmations on strength, beauty, and empathy helped them to regain their lost confidence in life.

Women in *BEM* have an affinity towards each other despite their differences. In the case of Sophie and Buki, trauma was passed on from one generation to another by their female ancestors. Though these women were the sole reason behind their unhappy lives, Sophie and Buki never looked at them as their rivals. It was because they knew that their ancestors themselves had been subjected to such practices like testing and FGC. These practices can be considered as the representation of patriarchal values which subordinate women in a male-dominated setup. The women practiced it as a way to retain their tradition and to ensure the purity of their future generation. Nothing had been intentionally done except for their ignorance. This is evident in Buki’s letter to her dead grandmother:

“Dear Taiwo. You sliced open my soul and then you told me I can’t show it to anyone else. You took a great deal away from me. Because of you, I now carry with me an untouchable wound.”

Sobbing, she handed me the piece of paper. I continued reading the letter for her.

“ Because of you, I feel like a helpless cripple. I sometimes want to kill myself. All because of what you did to me, a child who could say no, a child who could not defend herself. It would be easy to hate you, but I can’t because you are part of me. You are me.”(206)

In the meeting, Sophie, Buki, and Davina wrote the names of their abusers in a piece of paper and watched until the candle flames consume it. The ritual of burning the names signals a symbolic revenge against their victimizers. Sophie did not feel happy at the end of the meeting but realized that she was moving closer in the ordeal of becoming free. She never felt bad about burning her mother’s name as she was aware that they both shared the same pain, “I felt broken at the end of the meeting, but a little closer to being free. I didn’t feel guilty about burning my mother’s name anymore. I knew my hurt and hers were links in a long chain and if she hurt me, it was because she was hurt, too” (207). Sophie loved Martine, in spite of the testing she imposed on her. Martine’s tests on Sophie were misguided attempts to reclaim the power over her own body. Martine tried to restore herself in the image of Sophie by her belief in *Marasas*.

Unlike Martine, Sophie was rational. Sophie wished to be a sensible mother and determined to avoid her turn in the fire by ensuring her daughter’s happiness. She

wanted to put a stop to the mindless practices in the name of culture thereby enabling a happy life for her posterity. She wished her daughter to lead a peaceful life which was devoid of nightmares, “It was up to me to avoid my turn in the fire. It was up to me to make sure that my daughter never slept with ghosts, never lived with nightmares, and never had her name burnt in the flames” (207). Finally, Buki blew up a green balloon and released it while the others watched. They were unsure of its destination but happy to see it float out of their hands, “ It was hard to see where the balloon went, but at least it had floated out of our hands ” (207). The green balloon symbolized their prosperous future.

Sophie exhibited a great love for her daughter and had a firm belief that her daughter was the only person who would never desert her. Martine too had the same belief on Sophie therefore, the fear of abandonment was the reason behind disapproving Sophie’s affair with Joseph. Martine’s wish to be omnipresent in her daughter’s life resulted in Sophie’s agony.

In a meeting with the therapist, Sophie revealed her findings about testing. It was a tradition practiced in Haiti and all the women clan in her family had been subjected to it. Sophie confided to the therapist that she could be angry neither with her mother nor with her grandmother as they did something to make them feel like good mothers. The therapist asked Sophie if she hated her mother. Sophie told that her mother wanted to reconcile with her and she was prepared to accept it. She tried to forget her past so that she could look at her mother in a new light. She firmly believed that people were capable of living in two places at once which helped to envision her mother as a stranger :

“I want to forget the hidden things, the conflicts you always want me to deal with. I want to look at her as someone I am meeting again for the first time. An acquaintance who I am hoping will become a friend. I grew up believing that people could be in two places at once. Meeting for the first time again is not such a hard concept.” (212)

Sophie hesitated to proceed with the confrontational therapy as she had to deal with the past. But Rena advised her that the past if not confronted can anytime intrude in the present. Sophie felt doubtful to set things right from the beginning in her relationship with her mother, so she wanted to start it afresh.

According to the therapist, Sophie’s visit to Haiti was something like a confrontational therapy. She asked Sophie if she was able to reclaim her mother line in Haiti and quoted an example of a woman who went back to Brazil and took a jar full of dust from her mother’s grave. She did it to keep the mother line with her. Sophie answered that her mother line was always with her as blood made them one, ““My mother line was always with me,” I said. “No matter what happens. Blood made us one ””(212).

Confrontation with an unmasked figure would help both Sophie and Martine in leading a normal life. This solution was offered by the therapist when Sophie revealed her about Martine’s pregnancy and her aggravated nightmares. Martine’s conception had made her nightmares worse since it brought back the images of rape. As shedding the past and connecting with the present became impossible for both mother and daughter, Sophie’s therapist suggested in giving her father a face, so that he no more remained a shadow which tortured them:

“What about your father? Have you given him more thought?”

“ I would rather not call him my father.”

“We will have to address him soon. When we do address him, I’ll have to ask you to confront your feelings about him in some way, give him a face.”

“It’s hard enough to deal with, without giving him a face.”

“Your mother never gave him a face. That’s why he is a shadow. That’s why he cannot control her. I’m not surprised she’s having nightmares. This pregnancy is bringing feelings to the surface that she had never completely dealt with. You will never be able to connect with your husband until you say good-bye to your father.”(214)

Exorcism, a kind of release ritual was also recommended by the therapist to help Martine. Martine was afraid of therapy as she thought it would make her memories more real. So the therapist felt that the exorcist ritual which involved similar practices as in Sophie’s sexual phobia group would help her to escape from her dreadful memories:

“ If she’s afraid of therapy, perhaps your mother should have an exorcism.” I am not joking. She should have a release ritual. The kind of things you do with sexual phobia group. You can help.”

“ She is afraid to deal with anything that would make this more real.”

“ It has to become frighteningly real before it can fade.”

“ It’s always been real to her,” I said. “Years and years of getting raped every night. Could you live with that? This child, it makes the feeling

stronger. It takes her back to the time when she was carrying me. Even the time when she was living with me. That's why she is trying to get the child out of her body.”(224)

The therapist suggested Martine take up this task as early as possible because only if her fears became real, it could seek an end, else it would continue to haunt her and prove catastrophic.

But Martine could never reconcile with her past as she dreaded of reliving the moment of rape, “The process of making peace with one's self becomes impossible when it is experienced as bringing back the helplessness and the shame of the past”(Krystal 83). Since Martine's nightmares of rape echoed in Sophie, she desperately wanted to get rid of it. The therapist suggested both the mother and daughter to revisit the site of horror by which they will get liberated from their nightmares:

“ During your visit, did you go to the spot where your mother was raped?” Rena asked. “In the thick of the cane field. Did you go to the spot?” . . .

“You and your mother should both go there again and see that you can walk away from it. Even if you can never face the man who is your father, there are things that you can say to the spot where it happened. I think you'll be free once you have your confrontation. There will be no more ghosts.”(215)

The cane field of Haiti where Martine got raped was responsible for their nightmares, so the therapist suggested them to utter whatever they liked to the spot to get rid of the shadowy figure in their dreams.

Revisiting the site of horror helped Sophie in healing. Martine's body was taken to Haiti by Marc and Sophie. As a part of Haitian tradition, a handful of dust was thrown over Martine's body at the time of the funeral. Unable to witness the dust being shovelled on her mother's body, Sophie ran down the hill to the cane fields. She removed her shoes and began to beat the cane stalks and finally became free. The site of horror became the site of healing when she intrepidly encountered it. Martine's fear to attend therapeutic classes and to encounter the scene of rape did not liberate her from her nightmares but Sophie's confrontation with the cane field- the site which was responsible for stirring up the nightmares helped in healing her:

They were only a few men working in the cane fields. I ran through the field, attacking the cane. I took off my shoes and began to beat a cane stalk. I pounded it until it began to lean over. I pushed over the cane stalk. It snapped back, striking my shoulder. I pulled at it, yanking it from the ground. My palm was bleeding. (238)

Sophie's encounter with the cane fields was a part of the healing process. She imagined the cane stalk to be her father's ghost and attacked it physically. As Van Der Kolk and Van Der Hart point "Many patients who are victimized by rape and other forms of violence are helped by imagining having all the power they want and applying it to the perpetrator"(178). By attacking the cane Sophie is beating back the hurt enacted upon her mother's body.

Grandmother Ife believed that Sophie will feel relieved after her encounter with the cane fields and to ensure this she shouted, ““*Ou libere?*” Are you free?”(BEM 238), which was echoed by Tante Atie’s affirmation *Ou libere!*. According to the Haitian notion, a daughter becomes a woman only after her mother’s death. Sophie had become a woman after Martine’s death and so she was supposed to act and answer sensibly for the question *Ou libere ?*. Ife expected Sophie to be rational in her answer, so she said, ““you will know how to answer””(239). Ife and Atie boosted Sophie’s confidence and helped her in healing. Martine’s transformation had taken place through her death which would make her eternally free from her unhappy life. Sophie confronted her links with the past and the common bonds of suffering that existed between her and her mother:

There is always a place where women live near trees that, blowing in the wind sound like music. These women tell stories to their children both to frighten and delight them. These women, they are fluttering lanterns on the hills, the fireflies in the night, the faces that loom over you and recreate the same unspeakable acts that they themselves lived through. There is always a place where nightmares are passed on through generations like heirlooms. Where women like cardinal birds return to look at their own faces in stagnant bodies of water.

I come from a place where breath, eyes, and memory are one, a place from which you carry your past like the hair on your head. Where women return to their children as butterflies or as tears in the eyes of the statues that their daughters pray to. My mother was as brave as stars at dawn. She too was from this place. My mother like that woman

who could never bleed and then could never stop bleeding, the one who never gave in to her pain, to live as a butterfly. Yes my mother was like me.(238-239)

Sophie's epitaph for Martine not only exhibit the strength of Haitian women but also the intensity of their suffering. These women pass on an emotional legacy for the future generations. Sophie dressed Martine in crimson red which was considered to be a loud colour for burial. She wanted her mother to look "like a Jezebel, hot blooded Erzulie who feared no men, but rather made them her slaves, raped them and killed them. She was the only woman with that power" (232).

Sophie's liberation marked the break in the vicious cycle of trauma endured by the Caco women. The struggle for recuperation from their past is seen in almost all the women characters in *BEM*. Sophie's successful recovery from trauma marked a profound change in the Caco family by releasing the future generation from the destructive cycle of pain.

Like Sophie, revisiting the site of horror helped Amabelle in self-healing. She revisited the massacre river on her final journey to Alegria. This journey made her realize the fact that nothing was left for her in the Dominican Republic except the waterfall where she and Sebastien had spent their time. On her way back to Haiti, she stopped at the massacre river and met the professor who had lost his sanity in the slaughter:

I looked to my dreams for softness, for a gentler embrace, for relief from the fear of mudslides and blood bubbling out of the riverbed, where it is said the dead add their tears to the river flow.

The professor returned to look down at me lying there, cradled by the current, paddling like a newborn in a washbasin. He turned around and walked away, his sandals flapping like two large birds fluttering damp wings, not so much to fly as to preen themselves. He, like me, was looking for the dawn. (*FB* 310)

Amabelle's act of entering the Massacre river suggests that she is ready to confront and reconcile with the past, "Old age, with its losses, imposes the inescapable necessity to face one's past. This development determines that one either accepts one's self and one's past or continues to reject it angrily"(Krystal 83). Amabelle integrated with her past and avoided eternal despair. After long years of darkness, she awaited the dawn along with the professor whose life too was irreparably damaged by the massacre. Recognising the professor to be a fellow survivor, she felt that he too wished to recover from his trauma. By swimming in the river, she gave birth to a new self. Her final words 'looking for the dawn' marks the fact that she aspired a good future, "Returning to the water is an attempt to make whole that which was broken and what better place to heal than by returning to the source of the original rupture"(Wallace 212).

Yves tried to forget the slaughter with the help of farming. He kept himself occupied throughout the day and felt very happy to see the sprouts coming out of the hard seeds. He became a successful farmer and made his living out of it. Amabelle, on the other hand, diverted herself with the help of sewing, "He and I both had chosen a life of work to console us after the slaughter. We had too many phantoms to crowd those quiet moments when every ghost could appear in its true form and refuse to go

away”(274). Amabelle and Yves kept themselves busy to keep their nightmares at bay.

Unlike Yves and Amabelle, Father Romain chose love to heal himself. After being arrested in Alegria, he was locked up with Father Vargas for helping Haitians in the Dominican Republic at the time of the massacre. The massacre made him a fragmented self. He withdrew from the church services and got married. He fathered three children and the new lives helped him to forget the dead ones, “One has to feel love to be able to believe in its existence. Most of all, one has to feel love in order to be able to accept one’s own self and one’s own past”(Krystal 89). The experience of the slaughter gave him a better understanding of human life:

“ It took more than prayers to heal me after the slaughter,” he said with a sadness that he was too distraught to show when I first saw him at the border. “ It took holding a pretty and gentle wife and three new lives against my chest. I wept so much when they arrested me. I wept all the time I was in prison. I wept at the border. I wept for everyone who was touched, beaten, or killed. I took a love closer to earth, closer to my own body, to stop my tears. Perhaps I have lost, but I have also gained an even greater understanding of things both godly and earthly.”

(FB 272)

Similarly, Sebastien’s love for Amabelle helped in healing his childhood scars, “His favourite way of forgetting something sad was to grab and hold on to somebody even sadder (54)”. He tried his best to help Amabelle to come out of her parents’ loss.

As she witnessed too many nightmares owing to her parents' death, Sebastien suggested her to dream positive:

“I don't want you to dream of that river again,” he said. “Give yourself a pleasant dream. Remember not only the end, but the middle, and the beginning, the things they did when they were breathing. Let us say that the river was still that day.”

“And my parents?”

“They died natural deaths many years later.”

“And why did I come here?”

“Even though you were a girl when you left and I was already a man when I arrived and our families did not know each other, you came here to meet me.” (54-55)

He insisted her to cherish the living memory of her parents rather than thinking about the way they died. He persuaded her to dream and think positive to put an end to her nightmares.

Cherishing the good memories provides an alternate way to avoid traumatic memories. In *FB*, after witnessing the massacre, Amabelle started to envision Sebastien and Mimi drowning in the river in the same way as her parents and Odette had. To avoid such thoughts, she imagined about Henry's citadel which she had visited as a small girl and felt safe, “Each time I closed my eyes I saw the river and imagined Sebastien and Mimi drowning the way my mother and father and Odette had. To escape these thoughts, I envisioned Henry I's citadel as I had seen it again that afternoon, its closeness to the sky, its distance from the river. With my childhood

visions of being inside of it, protected, I fell asleep” (227). The memory of the citadel helped Amabelle to escape her fears over the fate of Sebastien and Mimi,

Amabelle’s childhood vision of the citadel provides not only a retreat from the traumatic present embodied in the site of the river, but also a resource, a specific memory from which she attempts to draw the necessary psychic strength to endure the aftermath of the present crisis. (Saunders 104)

Gaelle, the fabric vendor in *CSL*, wanted to take Claire on her daughter’s death anniversary because she wanted to remember that day in a different way. She longs to be with small girls such that she could forget her dead daughter, “‘ Yes. I will take her. Tonight.’ . . . ‘Why now? Why tonight?’ he managed to say. ‘It’s now or never.’ The fabric vendor reached down to wipe Claire’s face, but the girl pulled away. ‘I need another way to remember this day’”(CSL 32).

Gaelle yearns for a new beginning. Her psychological devastation after her daughter’s death had made others to control her. She neither wished to die nor move on with her life in a monotonous way. She wished to witness the unfolded surprises which life would offer her, though in a way she was also scared about it :

And her losses had not made her stronger; they had made her weak. They had given others control and power over her. She didn’t want to continue being weak, but she didn’t want to die either. She was too eager to see what would come next ,what her husband and daughter had missed .She was both hungry for life and terrified of it. Her evenings with these men let the rage and confusion disappear for a

while and allowed her to sell thread and cloth and remain close to the graves of the people she really loved. (159-160)

Gaelle's willpower to survive is stated in the above lines. Despite the loss of her husband and daughter, she never gave up. The men around her could offer her only a kind of temporary solace yet she was determined to stay at Ville Rose and was ready to take life as it comes.

Max Junior in *CSL* remembered a day at lighthouse to keep away from the memories of his son, Pamaxime. It was the day in which he thought that he witnessed a supernova explosion above the sea. He also thought he witnessed the night sea swirl into a massive funnel. Later the water retreated like a tsunami in reverse, "He was remembering this, he knew, as a way of avoiding thinking about his son"(199).

In *Untwine*, when Giselle realized that life had to move on without her sister, she thought about her lover Jean Michel Brun and her encounters with him to divert the thoughts of Isabelle, " In the total silence of the hospital room, I try not to think too much about Isabelle. Because if she comes to me now, if I keep dreaming about her, I will never wake up. I will never leave here. Instead, I think about Jean Michel Brun" (*Untwine* 113). Thinking of her dead sister would never allow her to move forward in life, so she cherished the memories of her lover. Jean Michel's gift of Frida Kahlo's, *The Two Frida's* suggested that her life will not remain eternally sorrowful but will soon be transformed into a lively and cheerful one:

It takes me a while to figure it out, but eventually I do. I think he's trying to tell me what everyone's been telling me in one way or another since Isabelle died, that I won't be the bloodless Frida forever,

that one day, my heart will be full of life again. He could also be telling me that Isabelle might have survived the crash, only to endure a life full of devastation and pain, something that still remains a possibility for the rest of us. (299)

Concentrating on future helps the past to fade away. Anne and her husband tried to forget their life in Haiti and sustained in their relationship by focussing on future. They restricted their memories by never delving too much into each other's past to ensure the safety of their marriage. Both accepted the other's statement on Anne's brother and never probed too much into it. Anne voluntarily believed her husband's story about his brother as she concentrated more on her future. She carefully avoided the articles which were written on her brother's murder:

After the daughter was born, she and her husband would talk about her brother. But only briefly. He referring to his "last prisoner," the one that scarred his face, and she to "my stepbrother, the famous preacher," neither of them venturing beyond these coded utterances, dreading the day when someone other than themselves would more fully convene the two halves of this same person.

He endorsed the public story, the one that the preacher had killed himself. And she accepted that he had only arrested him and turned him over to someone else. Neither believing the other nor themselves. But never delving too far back in time, beyond the night they met. She never saw any of the articles that were eventually written about her

brother's death. She was too busy concentrating on and revising who she was now, or who she wanted to become. (*DB* 241)

They never wholly discussed the happenings of the night at which the preacher was murdered. They both discovered a kind of salvation through their affection for their daughter, Ka. Though they never appeared to be healed, it was a kind of survival strategy.

Isolation was the technique adopted by Anne's family to live a secured life in US. They stayed aloof as much as possible from the rest of the society. They never took part in the Christmas celebrations among the Haitian communities in New York, as they felt it would bring them more attention. They never wished to be noticed in any particular way. They never got close to anyone as it would invite unwanted questions about their life in Haiti:

When her daughter was a girl, before going to the Christmas Eve Mass, they would drive around their Brooklyn neighbourhood to look at the holiday lights. Their community associations were engaged in fierce competition, awarding a prize to block with the best Nativity scenes, lawn sculptures, wreaths, and banners. Still, Anne and her husband had put up no decorations, fearing, irrationally perhaps, that lit ornaments and trimmings would bring too much attention to them.(74)

The time span of thirty-seven years and a new place did not relieve the Dew Breaker from his agony. He lives in constant fear of being recognized by his victims. Ka's father tries his best to make amends by transforming into a new man and by living an evil-free life. His decision to join the militia might have been a way

to regain the power that was stripped from him when his father lost his land. He makes the full sense of his power by the ways he used to threaten them. He is not presented as irredeemably evil. The violence-prone society like that of Duvaliers has transformed a common man in to a torturer.

Anne used to tell miracle stories to her family. When Ka asked her to tell a story, she desperately wanted to tell the story of her husband's transformation but she could not, "*A long time ago, more than thirty years ago, in Haiti, your father worked in a prison, where he hurt many people. Now look at him. Look how calm he is. Look how patient he is . . .*"(72). Anne's life oscillated between the present and the past, "It was like this, her life a pendulum between forgiveness and regret, but when the anger dissipated she considered it a small miracle, the same way she thought of her emergence from her occasional epileptic seizures as a kind of resurrection"(86). Anne's love for her family made her believe that atonement and reparation is available for all.

The ideal deeds of empathy and consideration offered by the family and community help the trauma survivors to return back to normal life. In *FB*, after the massacre, a stranger offers an orange to Amabelle to heal her cuts. Neighbours take care of Sebastien's mother and provide her tea when she was struggling to deal with her children's death, "The exemplary and spontaneous acts of compassion from neighbours, family members and total strangers embrace survivors in their grief and help them to recover some sense of normalcy" (Meacham 132).

Similarly, Claude, a patricidal night talker, was healed by community embrace in *DB*. After his sentence in prison for murdering his father, his mother had put him

up with a family in Haiti. The Haitian community helped him to forget his past and lead a fresh life. Being a stranger, Claude at first was unsure of his life in Beau Jour. They knew that he killed his father but still accepted him because his mother told them that he was their blood:

“ I’m the puzzle and these people are putting me back together, telling me things about myself and my family that I never knew or gave a fuck about. Man, if I’d run in to these people back in Brooklyn, I’d have laughed my ass off at them. I would’ve laughed my ass off at them. I would’ve called them backward-ass peasants. But here I am.” (DB 102)

Dany’s aunt took a special care of Claude which kept him at ease, ““Everyone here’s been cool to me, especially your aunt. She’s really taken me under her wing””(101). Though Claude was not happy with his life at Haiti, he still was thankful to the fellow Haitian community as they transformed his life with their love and care, ““I can’t honestly say I love it here,” Claude seemed to be wrapping up, “but it’s worked for me. It saved my life. I’m at peace here, and my family seems to have made peace with me. I came around; I can honestly say I was reformed in prison. I would’ve been a better citizen than most if they hadn’t deported me””(103).

Claude, the patricidal Night Talker, had found consolation among the villagers of Beau Jour. They accepted him readily even though he was a stranger. He was content with his life in the village and was healed by community embrace but Dany looked at Beau Jour as a lost haven. It was the place where Dany’s parents were murdered; hence he could not forget it even in Brooklyn. His aunt Estina who stayed at Beau Jour had managed to get over the past:

The village is marked by a nightmare and fixed in time for Dany as Haiti is for many “diaspora” but for Claude, who has never known it as a home from which he was exiled, it is a space that allows a non-creolophone Haitian, with a criminal past, to start again. Dany needs to bring himself to see Beau Jour the way Amabelle sees Massacre River, that is, as a site of horror and healing. She does so by rethinking space as liminal and borderless, marginal locales that have become relational crossroads. (Dash 37)

Dany is a symbolic representative of the Haitian diaspora who views the place as the lost haven. He has to transform himself like Amabelle in *FB* if he wishes to be healed.

Community bonding is also seen in *CSL* which helped the protagonists in the process of healing. When the fisherman Caleb was drowned in the sea, his wife was comforted by the rest of the fishermen community and the town’s mayor. In the same way, the entire town joined hands in search for Nozias’ missing daughter, Claire, which gave him a moral support. When Max Junior was about to drown in the sea, he was saved by the town’s people. In an interview to *National Public Radio* (NPR), Danticat states that her characters in *CSL* achieve healing by helping one another and by coming together as a community:

I don’t think of them as victims. I think of them more as survivors.

And the way that they survive is by the sense of community that this town offers. One of the things that Claire’s mother liked to say was we must all look after each other. Because their town is so small, and they’re sort of precariously always on the verge of instability, the

healing comes through their coming together as a community.

(Danticat)

Danticat's trust in the community is evident from the above lines. When Haitians stand together in a united front they can they survive the adversities of life.

Family and friends helped Giselle in the process of overcoming the agony caused because of Isabelle's loss. They tried to convince her that Isabelle's survival would have resulted only in a life of desolation and despair. Sharing the grief relieved the mental agony. Isabelle's family exchanged their memories of her amongst themselves and felt relieved, "At the lunch, which is supposed to be a combination birthday celebration and wake, some of us tell stories about Isabelle. We barter our grief, exchanging pieces of her that were solely ours"(*Untwine* 290).

Female bonding was also a supportive factor in the healing process. In *DB*, the political atmosphere in Haiti made Freda, Rezia, and Mariselle to migrate to US. They developed a close friendship in the course of getting their diploma degree. They never had a good understanding of what had been taught in the class yet they believed they might help each other with the lessons. Their sorrows enabled and deepened the bond between them.

Likewise in *FB*, Yves' mother Man Rapadou helped Amabelle in building a new life. She played an important role in Amabelle's simple routine by helping her with sewing and cooking. Man Rapadou confessed her guilt of poisoning her husband to Amabelle which she had not admitted to anyone else.

Similarly in *Untwine*, Tina's friendship helped Giselle to come out of her sorrow. When Giselle witnessed a widening circle around the sun called Glory, she

was reminded of the way she and Isabelle bid goodbye to it, “I tell her about Isabelle always not wanting to say a full goodbye to the glory, so that it would keep coming back” (303). She insisted Tina utter a good bye in the same manner, “ I keep my eyes closed and try to keep the glory fully and colorfully alive in my memory. “Good?” Tina whispers. “Bye,” I say” (303). Tina was able to fill the vacuum in Giselle’s life which was created after Isabelle’s death. Thus Danticat’s women characters help each other at crucial points of life. They draw courage and sustenance through their bonding and set an example for the future generation.

In spite of witnessing inhumane atrocities, malice, and hatred many Haitians survive as they have the indomitable willpower. The characters of Danticat remain hopeful even at the face of unfathomable loss. Regardless of their experiences which mutilated their body and spirit, the protagonists never give up. Their perseverance and courage help them to emerge successful in life. Danticat’s novels are testaments to the resilient spirit of Haitians and celebrations of human survival despite the horrendous agonies.

Dantiat’s texts advocate the fact that the haunted past should be halted in favour of building a promising future. Empathy and love are the healing agents in confronting the troubled past. In writing about Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the United States, she not only speaks of personal healing but also aims for cross-national healing by breaking the national borders.