The Undercommons of Black Freedom
— An Analysis of Fragmentation and Fugitive Acts in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* —

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> There's no remembering, no healing. There is, rather, a perpetual cutting, a constancy of expansive and enfolding rupture and wound, a rewind that tends to exhaust the metaphysics upon which the idea of redress is grounded.
>
> Fred Moten, *Black and Blur* (ix)

Introduction

Danticat explores crucial themes about Haiti, including the feminization of poverty, violence against women, Haiti's role in the global economy, political challenges, and discriminatory immigration policies.[1] In the 2009 documentary *Poto Mitan: Haitian Women, Pillars of the Global Economy*, Danticat serves as the writer and narrator. This documentary examines the lives and challenges of Haitian women in the context of neoliberal globalization. It highlights their struggle for education and economic autonomy within a global economy that exploits their labor. The film raises questions about power structures, global justice, and the treatment of Haitian female textile workers by factory owners and fellow citizens.[2]

The Sugar Babies, which is also narrated by Dandicat, draws a link between the horrific 1937 massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic, the persisting exploitation of contemporary Haitian sugar cane workers who are subjected to conditions reminiscent of modern-day slavery in the Dominican Republic, and the exploitation of Africans during the Transatlantic Slave Trade. In its initial stages, the film addresses its own role as a form of testimony.

The depicted conditions in the films bear a resemblance to those in *Farming*, marked by a form of enslavement. The annual influx of Haitians into such circumstances mirrors the estimated victims of the 1937 massacre. Danticat urges a reconsideration of how historical perspectives have shaped attitudes and highlights the impact of current policies on the Haitian population. While the massacre is historical, its injustice persists, raising concerns about its perpetuation. Danticat's narrative voice engages readers as witnesses to Amabelle's experiences, evoking a sense of unease and prompting reflection on colorism and xenophobia in the interconnected histories of the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

This paper posits that the novel's amalgamation of imagination, factual accounts, and oral components amplifies the endeavor of bearing witness and positions the novel as a repository of testimonial accounts.[3] The objective of this study is to investigate novel archival methodologies and their influence on the portrayal of historical trauma. It centers on the facets of testimonial narratives within the novel and their portrayal

through literary devices such as metaphor, collaborative storytelling, and the establishment of a commemorative repository.

1. Trauma and witness

In *Farming*, Danticat vividly portrays the harsh reality of Haitian cane workers during a government assault. She challenges the sanitized image of cane cutters and sheds light on the historical truth of racial violence and oppression. Haitian and diasporic writers, including Danticat, emphasize the importance of confronting authority creatively, cautioning against disregarding aesthetics (Jana Evans Braziel 42). The act of cutting cane, known as ‘kout kouto,’ is a brutal attack on the workers’ skin. The novel’s protagonist, Amabelle Desir, witnesses the harsh conditions on the sugar plantation where she works, and her lover, Sebastien Onius, bears the physical toll of this labor. Navigating the cane fields involves enduring extreme heat, pests, and painful cuts from the cane itself.[4]

A prevalent motif within Danticat’s body of work revolves around a profound exploration of the challenges associated with disengagement from one’s place of origin.[5] Immigrants grapple with the formidable task of redefining and reconciling their individual and collective narratives with the novel stories they encounter. As D. Quentin Miller astutely observes, “There is an underlying apprehension of abandonment, as is often evident in various immigration chronicles: the apprehension that history will fade into obscurity” (161).

The Dominican Republic and Haiti bear witness to a profound cultural schism rooted in racial, linguistic, and socio-economic disparities, alongside geographical divisions.[6] In the course of such migration, as articulated by Angela Watkins, the process of memory reconstruction unveils the traumas experienced by black women and challenges the official narrative of Haitian history, which accentuates resistance and triumph. *Farming* is anchored in the events of the 1937 massacre and was forged in response to the absence of official recognition of this historical trauma. This narrative underscores the enduring influence of Haiti’s tumultuous past.

Farming, named after the labor of cane workers in 1937, weaves together multiple stories in a Dominican village, Alegría, a sugar industry hub. Centered around the Parsley Massacre orchestrated by Governor Rafael Trujillo, it follows Amabelle, a young Haitian laborer, and her relationship with Sebastien Onius, a fellow cane worker. The narrative focuses on their journey to the border during the massacres, their separation, and Amabelle’s quest to find Sebastien. It also explores Kongo’s grief over his child’s death, caused by an incident involving a speeding jeep driven by Senora’s husband. Yves, a friend of Sebastien, helps Amabelle cross the border, and they develop a romance. The novel provides the Dominican perspective through characters like Papi and Senora, who grapple with national events and personal sorrows. Danticat portrays these characters subtly, veiling their voices and contours.

Amabelle is a witness to the crimes carried out by military regimes in the name of political power and racial hatred. Amidst rumors of a Dominican purge circulating among the Haitian workers, Amabelle devises a plan to escape back to Haiti. She must go to and cross the Dajabón River, the site of her parents’ terrible drowning when she was a young girl. At the age of eight, Amabelle suffered the loss of her parents, who died while attempting to cross a river in Haiti to purchase cauldrons.

Amid witnessing and experiencing horrifying violence, the path to safety is marred by psychological

and emotional trauma. Sebastien attempts to make Amabelle aware of the imminent danger faced by Haitians or those of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic. They had planned to escape together with a few others, but the chaos ensues earlier than expected, disrupting their plans. Forced to leave with Yves, Amabelle returns to Haiti. She spends years trying in vain to search for news of Sebastien. Ultimately, she discovers that Sebastien died in the massacre.

Amabelle grapples with survivor's guilt and reconciles with the realization that she has "chosen a living death" due to her perceived lack of courage (Miller 283). While she physically survives the slaughter, her spirit essentially perishes during the harrowing events of 1937. Amabelle, despite her role as a narrator, finds herself without a nation and lacks a clear future: "Land is something you care about only when you have heirs. All my heirs would be like my ancestors: revenants, shadows, ghosts" (278). This sense of alienation is a consequence of a traumatic history.

2. Fragmented memories

The massacre in 1937 and the subsequent violence of the new order caused a contentious memory question in Haitian life. As depicted in *Farming*, the memory question is essential in the reshaping and redefining of Haitian politics and culture, first under Trujillo's regime that held power from 1930 to 1961. Therefore, it is imperative that we incorporate the examination of memory into the exploration of the "official" history within the economic, political, and cultural frameworks, as we will undertake in our investigations of the role of archives. Steve J. Stern writes: "Tracing the history of memory struggles invites us to consider not only the genuine gap and tensions between top-down and bottom-up perspectives but also more subtle interactive dynamics within a history of violence and repression" (xxi).

Two years after the release of *Farming*, Eleanor Wachtel interviewed Danticat. During this conversation, Danticat discussed the inspiration behind her writing, rooted in her visit to the Massacre River and her exploration of the genocide.

> I had heard so much about the Massacre River, going from the first massacre of the colonists in the 19th century to this present massacre . . . I think I had built up in my mind this angry, raging river, this body of water that just did not forget . . . I felt that . . . I would sense the history, that I would see it as though unfolding on a screen . . . it amazed me that there were people washing clothes, that there were children bathing, that there were animals drinking. The ordinariness of life was striking to me.[7]

Readers of *Farming* are made aware of the presence of antecedent problems that require exploration to fully engage with the narrative. This awareness is conveyed through Amabelle's reflections and the conversations among the characters.

In *Farming*, we are presented with fragments and glimpses of Amabelle's life and reflections, conveyed through the medium of shadows. The shadows, those elements of her reality that are unwelcome or lie dormant, are also presented in fragmented form. Amabelle is surrounded by and discusses shadows throughout the novel. The first reference comes when she recallsers her father's warning to her not to play with shadows. Shadows, being visually dark but not tangible, seem to represent suggestions of danger, rather

than actual danger. For example, the shadows that Sebastian helps her fight are just dreams, representations of danger but not danger itself. Amabelle eventually concludes that all her ancestors are shadows — dark spots on the horizon that disappear as soon as she reaches for them. As Amabelle grapples with the shadows cast by her own survivor's guilt and the imperative for self-preservation, she concurrently engages with shadows that predate her existence, lingering in the fabric of her surroundings.

Amabelle grapples with reconciling her homeland's perception of race, rooted in the historical significance of Haiti as the first black republic. At the same time, her experiences highlight the Dominican Republic's unique concept of race and the devaluation of black identity, creating a complex situation that requires her thoughtful consideration. In *Farming*, during a period of feverish delirium, Amabelle dreams of her mother's comforting presence. Her mother reassures her by saying, "Your mother was never as far from you as you supposed...you were like my shadow. Always fled when I came to you and only followed when I left you alone" (208). Danticat intricately portrays Amabelle's struggle not only with her country's shadows and projections but also with the Dominican shadow imposed upon her. This duality of shadows involves the Dominican Republic's reluctance to acknowledge its African heritage, leading to a pervasive fear among both Haitians and Dominicans. This fear stems from a collective unwillingness to confront the undeniable facts and realities of their intertwined and individual histories.

The massacre originated from a desire to eliminate and erase the African lineage present in many Dominicans, while simultaneously grappling with the inability to eradicate the connection to a shared African heritage from the past discursively, imaginatively, and materially. In the context of a juxtaposition between Haiti's predominant blackness and the Dominican Republic's perceived whiteness, the latter is seen as being at risk of extinction. Despite both nations being previously influenced by whiteness, Haitian liberators like Dessalines declared all citizens to be black, championing blackness with pride due to the nation's historical significance as the first free black republic.

Throughout the narrative, Danticat places readers in the role of witnesses as she unveils the life of Amabelle. As readers, we are presented with the choice to engage with and confront the fragmented and fissured community depicted in the narrative. Through Amabelle's perspective, we witness the horrors and harrowing incidents in the protagonist's life, gaining an understanding of the profound impact of the massacre on her friends and other characters. Despite its fictional nature, *Farming* provides readers with a unique opportunity not only to interpret the events within the narrative but also equips them with the necessary tools, means, and perspectives to establish connections with the tangible and consequential subject matter it delves into.

3. *Farming* as testimonial archive

Jennifer Harford Vargas offers a comprehensive exploration of how non-conventional archival methodologies are utilized within Danticat's literary work. It also underscores the shortcomings of conventional testimonial procedures and how Danticat's work unveils the corruption inherent in official testimonial practices.

Farming highlights the importance of innovative forms of testimonies, along with oral and physical methods of bearing witness to and transmitting accounts of oppression. Renée Larrier contends that *Farming* incorporates oral testimonies into the historical narrative, providing a platform for those typically

marginalized in the production of history due to factors like social class, language, gender, or censorship. Despite its clear categorization as a novel, the text blurs the lines of authenticity. It can be seen as a representation of a document that, despite its importance, remains inaccessible to the public.[8]

In *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor accentuates a novel vantage point regarding the pivotal role of performance within the context of the Americas. Whether manifested in the realm of theatrical productions, formal state occasions, or grassroots demonstrations, Taylor posits that performance should be recognized as a substantial medium for the preservation and transmission of knowledge. She adeptly illustrates how the repository of embodied memory, conveyed through gestures, spoken language, movement, dance, song, and various modes of performative expression, offers distinctive perspectives in contrast to those derived from conventionally written archives. Such a perspective assumes particular pertinence in the reappraisal of historical facets of transnational interactions. Taylor provides comprehensive definitions for the concepts of “archive” and “repertoire” as follows:

> ‘Archival’ memory exists as documents, maps, literary texts, letters, archaeological remains, bones, videos, films, CDs, all those items supposedly resistant to change . . . The repertoire, on the other hand, enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing – in short, all those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge. (19–21)

The archive does not always oppose the repertoire; instead, it functions as a means of conveying specific historical narratives, as evident in colonial contexts. The embodied knowledge encapsulated in the repertoire contradicts the documented knowledge contained within the archive. In simpler terms, archival memory has traditionally been favored over embodied memory in the hierarchy of knowledge and the former has been given primary epistemic importance and has frequently been romanticized as being immutable. Consequently, the repertoire can broaden the scope of the archive, which, in turn, provides a framework for reevaluating canonical texts and critical approaches (Vargas 1162).[9]

However, as Taylor’s comprehensive study illustrates, and as Danticat’s novel vividly portrays, this Eurocentric model, which discredits various other methods of knowledge creation and preservation, is not only rooted in colonialism but is also flawed (Ibid). Highlighting the fact that the archive and repertoire operate as an ideological apparatus, Taylor writes;

> This means that the repertoire, like the archive, is mediated. The process of selection, memorization or internalization, and transmission takes place within (and in turn helps constitute) specific systems of re-presentation. Multiple forms of embodied acts are always present, though in a constant state of againness. They reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next. (21)

This is because “embodied and performed actions do indeed create, document, and convey knowledge” and often “work in tandem and they work alongside other systems of transmission — the digital and the visual” (Ibid).

As April Shemak, Jennifer Harford Vargas, and Joyce White contend, *Farming* offers a performative

testament to the state's acts of repression and disappearance through the narratives shared orally by Haitian laborers and the corporeal expressions they employ to convey their testimonies. This paper contends that the novel exemplifies how imaginative, oral, and embodied methods of communication and documentation collaboratively produce testimonial histories. Because knowledge is preserved and conveyed through experiential practices, performance serves as a means of passing on cultural memory and collective identity across generations via repeated actions and behaviors.

4. Specters as residues of cultural memories

As Taylor points out, the literary history of American colonialism is marked by a spectral cultural memory, which is evident in Edwidge Dandicat's novel.[10] This memory invokes the principle of surrogation, containing within it the recollection of forgotten substitutions. The scenarios of encounters play a pivotal role in shaping our comprehension of colonial America, but also continue to influence our present in a form of hauntology that revives and rekindles past narratives (Taylor 28). The spectral figures, which manifest as death and shadows, urge us to examine the alternative aspect of performance's existence, as Derrida termed it, its "hauntology." The ghost refers inherently to a repetition, a revenant in the sense described by Derrida, which manifests itself in the form of performance in a novel. This concept of the "hauntology of performance" rests on the premise that performance reveals "that which is perpetually and inherently present. Taylor writes; "performance makes visible . . . that which is always already there: the ghosts, the tropes, the scenarios that structure our individual and collective life." Through their performances, these specters transform future imaginations and phantoms. (Taylor 143).

Based on Taylor, one can argue that performance, therefore, extends beyond individual experiences by characters (as in the case of *Farming*) and transcends mere achievement or execution. Depicting each character's horrifying experience in fragmented forms embodies a quasi-magical practice of invocation. It stirs emotions that it does not possess but only seeks to depict, summoning memories and sorrow that pertain to a different body. Hauntological performances possess the capacity to summon and reveal the influential gathering of those who have perennially coexisted alongside the living.[11] The recognition that we have previously encountered these apparitions, which mold our understanding of the self and society and structure our narratives of strife, involvement, and resolution, is what lends performances their perceptual potency (Taylor 143).

As outlined by Vargas, Danticat's utilization of alternative archives diverges from the conventions of traditional historical narratives by providing precedence to non-scripted customs like oral narratives, physical gestures, dance, culinary traditions, and ritual prayers over conventional written records, architectural structures, maps, and literary texts. Vargas posits that this approach contests the Eurocentric framework of knowledge creation and documentation, which often discredits various other forms of knowledge. The employment of alternative archives in *Farming* contributes to a portrayal of historical trauma that is more intricate and multifaceted. these alternative archives facilitate the inclusion of a wider array of voices and perspectives, thereby challenging prevailing narratives and revealing the corruption inherent in the official testimonial procedures. Furthermore, the use of alternative archives accentuates the significance of embodied memory and how the body can serve as an effective means of testifying against oppressive conditions. Overall, the incorporation of alternative archives in *Farming* contributes to a more holistic comprehension

of historical trauma.[12]

5. Fragments, fugitivity, and undercommons

Previous research has already pointed out that *Farming* incorporates various formal fragments. How do we explain this variety of formal fragmentation, and what does it mean in the context of postcolonialism? Previous studies on this fragmentation astutely highlight that the text's performance of repeated fragmented storytelling not only presents historical facts (such as massacres) that constantly float within and outside the text but also continues to let us hear the ghostly voices of people who have been excluded and marginalized under hegemonic ideologies like imperialism, colonialism, and white supremacy, which led to the occurrence of those events. The voices that persistently float within and outside the text serve as historical testimonies. Therefore, in this study, I want to examine how this fragmentation enables the complex construction of personal and collective testimonies by invoking the concept of "fugitivity."[13]

The harsh realities of slavery make it impossible to depict the idyllic classical landscape with its idealized figures on a plantation. The tensions underscore the violent separation caused by slavery between mothers and their children. Yet, they also highlight how these individuals simultaneously disrupted the institution of enslavement itself. This disruption, the dynamic interplay between personhood and objecthood, is described by Fred Moten in the introduction to his work, *In the Bre*ak.[14] Moten explicates, "The history of blackness is testament to the fact that objects can and do resist." He asserts that blackness, representing a continuous and specific upheaval, functions as a persistent disruption that disrupts conventional narratives. This disruption challenges the prevailing notion that personhood and subjectivity are equivalent. Subjectivity, which hinges on the subject's control over both itself and its possessions, faces an unsettling influence from the objects it holds, leading to a sense of the subject being possessed, infused, and transformed by the very objects it assumes ownership of.[15] The 'history of blackness' goes beyond the modern nation-state of the US back to early Caribbean sources that are part of this transhistorical and transgeographical history. These 'irruptions' and 'strains' that 'anarrange' in turn invite an anamorphic reading to register how enslaved mothers both distort and invite us to distort these master images that still harness them for plantation imagery. Based on the argument by Sinanan and Moten, I read this anarrangement as a dialectic between unfreedom and as-yet-to-be-realized innate freedom.

As Maia argues, the presence of black individuals becomes tangible when they break free from the constraints of conventional existence, where blackness is often relegated to its hidden or marginalized aspects. The undercommons becomes evident in "the strangely known moment, the gathering content, of a cadence, and the uncanny that one can sense in cooperation, the secret once called solidarity" (Harney and Moten, 42). Within the concealed unity of collective gatherings, blackness can bring something into existence through the strategic act of plotting an escape (Maia 144).

I analyze the texts using the framework of the undercommons theory, as articulated by Fred Moten and Stefano Harney. According to Harney and Moten, the undercommons constitutes a collective space primarily for black individuals who exist in a world that demands self-management but, paradoxically, faces criminalization as ungovernable. As Harney and Moten articulate the encounter with blackness shaped by this inherent structural contradiction, their concept of the undercommons signifies an ambivalent space and condition that numerous racialized individuals must navigate collectively. This is particularly evident when

these individuals find themselves simultaneously positioned as both peripheral and central to colonial and capitalist power dynamics. Amabella and her companions' experience was, in numerous aspects, a fugitive space created by black people within the "undercommons." They occupied space within and in resistance to the pervasive imperialism and its antiblack values and commitments. Harney and Moten attribute these contemporary practices to historical acts of escaping enslavement, the establishment of maroon communities, and black protest movements. The concept of the fugitive undercommons can also be connected to decolonization movements in Africa and can be observed in ongoing instances of flight from oppression and conflict.

Heather Merri asserts that the undercommons represents an external space, essentially a 'nonplace' where creative and influential forces intersect with the alternative perspectives and transformative initiatives of the black Radical tradition. This perspective aims to deepen our understanding of blackness, prioritizing it over the pursuit of recognition or validation within a White supremacist system (Merri 75).

The uncanny feeling, the eerie sensation that lingers, is the presence of something more within the undercommons, which can be the prophetic coalition actively striving for the abolition of oppressive systems (Harney and Moten, 115). In the secrecy of the gathering, blackness can summon something into existence by strategizing and executing an escape (Maia 144).

> If there is such a thing as freedom whatever it is is much more accurately denoted, precisely because it is emphatically deferred/displaced/deconstructed, by the term/activity of escape. That which is called freedom is not, nor could it ever correspond to, the completion or the achievement of an assignment. Freedom is a practice — a *fugitive* act — of its own (un)making, a structure that is the very apotheosis of the terribly redoubled double edge (freedom's articulation in bondage; its dearticulation and rearticulation in flight). (Emphasis added, Moten, *Stolen Life*, 228)

According to Haney and Moten, their aim is not to suppress the general antagonism but to experiment with its informal capacity. This experimentation takes place in the undercommons, or wherever and whenever this experiment occurs within the general antagonism. They also propose that the experience of "[b]eing possessed by the dispossessed, and offering up possession through dispossession, is such an experiment" (109–10).

They challenge the traditional perception of the "here-now" and indicate a move towards non-linear conceptions of time. This intentional act of rejection, the choice to not be constrained by a particular spatial or temporal framework, especially one characterized by anti-blackness, exclusion, and violence, serves as the foundation of the "undercommons" theory. In the book's introduction, Jack Halberstam conveys that the endeavors of "fugitive planning and black study" are fundamentally focused on making connections. They entail forming alliances with the fragmented aspects of existence, a fractured state of being that, Re'al Christian asserts, embodies blackness, remains as blackness, and will, despite all challenges, persist in its broken form, as this book does not propose a solution. The undercommons is a space that is always there but frequently goes unnoticed.

> To enter this space [the undercommons] is to inhabit the ruptural and enraptured disclosure of the

> commons that fugitive enlightenment enacts, the criminal, matricidal, queer, in the cistern, on the stroll of the stolen life, the life stolen by enlightenment and stolen back, where the commons give refuge, where the refuge gives commons.[16]

Halberstam emphasizes that Harney and Moten's interpretation of the undercommons underscores that it is not primarily a space for rebellion and critical analysis but a timeless and ever-present one. The undercommons serves as a reflection of our connection to time, highlighting that black and marginalized bodies exist in a non-linear temporal framework due to a history of erasure. Grounded in Afrofuturist principles, it evolves into a space characterized by negation and resistance. Scott Ruff writes,

> Slavery and its afterlife . . . have positioned the African American outside of architecture, in a vestibular condition which also applies to the oceanic passages of the transatlantic slave trade and the self-organizing undercommons that sustains Black aesthetics. (87–88)[17]

When elucidating the meaning of "Black aesthetics," Ruff cites Fred Moten and Stefano Harney's book, *The Undercommons*, stating that "Black aesthetics as a transformative politics starts with sonic forms and expands to encompass all creative practices in the collective act of shaping and making the world" (Ruff 87–88).[18]

Building upon Ruff's argument, Christian contends that the undercommons functions as an intermediary space for non-dominant modes of social, political, and aesthetic dialogue that cannot be accommodated within the traditional commons or mainstream spaces. Within the undercommons, there exists a refusal of the "call to order" proclaimed by the institutional voice. As Christian writes,

> The Afrofuturist installation rejects order by collapsing time, juxtaposing it against the seemingly sincere authenticity of the period room as a display form. Instead, it draws upon collective traditions within the home to redefine the "our" to which a period room extends its gesture.

Estévez notes that the black radical tradition's focus on performative ontology and black fugitivity carries significant artistic implications (57). Fugitive actions go beyond recognizing black existence within formal liberties, subject status, or citizenship. According to Moten, the distinctiveness of black actions resisting confinement is not just about rejecting exclusion (*Universal*). It involves establishing an "aesthetic sociality" through the rejection of what has been denied to blackness (*Blackness* 160).[19] Moten draws from Laura Harris's scholarship on dissident social structures and their link to the concept of blackness as a process of creation and replication[20] In essence, this rejects the idea of seeking entry into abstract, uniform citizenship and subjectivity. Black aesthetics does not seek inclusion in a universal concept of freedom but asserts a communal way of life formed "from and as a sensual commune" (*Blackness* 199) through ongoing performative actions.

Through their act of "refusing what is refused them," which is the ideal of self-ownership as a person and self-governance as a citizen, and by confirming what has been imposed upon them, namely radical dispossession and indebtedness, they create a condition that makes it possible for their resistance to thrive.

This fusion of "refusal and consent," manifested in aesthetic and social action, gives rise to fugitives who elude capture by sovereign authority, the symbolic structure, and the standards of individual identity. They achieve this by engaging in acts of mutual support and cooperative improvisation.

6. Fugitivity and affirmative refusal

Regarding this particular form of fugitive style, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson underscores the pivotal notion of "affirmative refusal," which involves rejecting forms of visibility within settler colonial contexts that expose Indigenous communities to commodification and control. She characterizes these creative approaches as opposition to representation, advocating that all resurgents should function as disruptive elements challenging the colonial narrative. In this sense, resurgent practices serve as a purposeful act of disengagement from the colonial state. However, these practices are not solely disruptive in nature.

> They are grounded in a coded articulation . . . as theory and process and as affirmative refusal, resulting in the creation of not just points of disruption but collective constellations of disruption, interrogation, decolonial love, and profound embodiments of nation-based Indigeneity. They are artistic processes based in the infinite creative wealth of grounded normativity. (198)

This observation also holds true for our analysis of *Farming*, as Edwidge Danticat portrays Amabelle's act of fugitivity as a form of resistance against prevailing powers.

Moten articulates that fugitivity embodies a "desire for and a spirit of escape and transgression of the proper and the proposed".[21] From this fugitive imaginary, the incessant "possibility of a general, often gestural refusal [that Moten has] been trying to think under the rubric of abolitionism" arises (*Stolen Life* 103). Against the lawful imagination, we are asked to think a politics of fugitive refusal. In contrast to the lawful imagination, we are prompted to contemplate a politics of fugitive refusal.

> [Fugitivity is] a desire for the outside, for a playing or being outside, an outlaw edge proper to the now always already improper voice or instrument. This is to say that it moves outside the intentions of the one who speaks and writes, moving outside their own adherence to the law and to propriety. (*Stolen Life* 131)

These were/are relations of domination that existed and persisted within the philosophical, political and aesthetic frameworks contained in the Enlightenment as well as in the capitalist and colonial worlds constructed around the aforementioned ideas.

As a result, within the black radical tradition, blackness is conceptualized as a perpetually dynamic force that transcends established Western philosophical and political paradigms through the practice of performative decolonization actions.[22]

Some individuals of African descent, positioned beneath the market's surface, actively pursue their freedom by digging, metaphorically tunneling through barriers, with the aim of engaging in acts of vindication and insurrection. They approach this endeavor as if unrestricted mobility is a necessary requirement, treating exclusion as a more appealing choice than the acquisition of power (*Stolen Life* 198).

It is Moten's contention that the concepts of what Paul Gilroy identifies as moribund and Orlando Patterson identifies as tragic fail to encompass the fugitive subjectivity that white supremacist laws have attempted to eradicate by excluding it from modernity or making it imperceptible by relegating it to the realm of lawless imagination.

If one seeks a cosmopolitanism within the realm of fugitive resistance, it manifests as "the aspiration for a sub-cosmopolitanism that could eliminate the Kantian demarcation" (*Stolen Life* 194)). In this notion, one can discern a resonance with Moten's previous scholarship on "the undercommons," as elucidated in Stefano Harney and Fred Moten's work *The Undercommons*. As Moten observes, contrary to the oppressive self-images that individuals often project, which frequently lead to a compulsive inclination among those subjugated to embrace the delusional authority of the oppressor, the concept of "blackness" persists in the transformative, fugitive, and profoundly imaginative sociopoetic endeavor of rejection (Ibid).

> Such work is inseparable from the hope for an *undercosmopolitanism* that might abolish the Kantian line and its recursions to and recrudescences of exclusionary state and national determinations — its conflicted, melancholic, imperial, and postimperial patriotisms — even as it materializes antinational ways of being together from the exhaust(ion) of internationalism. (Ibid, italics mine)

As Stephen Dillon states, "freedom for the fugitive did not come from hiding or engaging in armed struggle — it came from running." Freedom operates as a form of biopolitical control that conceals coercion under the guise of consent, all the while transforming freedom into an outcome of imprisonment. In other words, "freedom is not something one possesses — one is possessed by freedom." Being familiar with the act of running, having experienced the necessity of running, and most importantly, having a desire to run, embodies the concept of the "politics of fugitivity." In his argument that fugitive individuals and underground movements managed to evade neoliberal ways of thinking and cultivated alternative notions of freedom, Dillon aligns with Foucault's assertion that the complete subjugation of life by power is never absolute: "It is not that life has been totally integrated into techniques that govern and administer it; it constantly escapes them." Dillon continues,

> Thus the neoliberal-carceral state's ability to capture life (bodies, subjectivities, psyches, knowledges, and affects) is never total. If neoliberal freedom was one way to govern thought and populations, then its power was not complete. To be possessed does not mean one is lost to what has taken hold; something remains: an excess, a remainder, a surplus that escapes a structure that appears to be (and feels) total. (81)

In numerous respects, this act of escape is intrinsic to the mechanisms of power. The tools employed to create life consistently exert pressure on the essential raw components required for the process. The interaction between power and its subject invariably leaves something in its wake. The technologies employed in shaping material existence continually yield both "embodied life" and "unintegrated life" concurrently. There is a perpetual interplay between formation and deviation.[23]

7. Massacre River

The historical significance of the Massacre River extends beyond its name, which originated from the 1728 slaying of French buccaneers. During the Parsley Massacre, this waterway accrued further historical significance as it became a repository for numerous casualties resulting from the violence. This complicated association with tragic events leaves an indelible historical trace and serves as a haunting mnemonic of a bygone era. For Amabelle, the river holds not just historical but also intensely personal resonance. It was the site where her parents met a tragic demise, with her as a helpless witness to their drowning, and it comprises the passage she must traverse to regain access to Haiti and escape the horrors of the massacre. Throughout Amabelle's life, the river maintains a profound presence. Upon her initial arrival in the Dominican Republic, she is encountered near its banks by her prospective employers. Consequently, this river assumes the role of a perpetual companion, emblematic of the myriad transitions that punctuate her existence. It is also the very location where the traumatic incident of Wilner's shooting unfolds (Wilner is a Dominican-Haitian who is escaping the turmoil. As he tries to cross into Haiti, he is shot by soldiers from the Dominican Republic).

The river symbolizes death as an omnipotent and unceasing force in her existence. Within the narrative's fabric, the river stands as a poignant emblem of sorrow, as Amabelle and her companions grieve the loss of those who succumb while endeavoring to traverse it on their sojourn back to Haiti. Upon her initial attempts to reconstruct her life in Haiti, Amabelle grapples with the daunting prospect of confronting the river, which serves as a visceral symbol of her grief. This internal turmoil hinders her from bearing witness to the atrocities she has borne witness to. Nonetheless, over time, she embarks on the arduous journey of grappling with her sorrow and initiates a form of reconciliation with the river. She returns to its banks and floats in its waters, seeking solace from her past and offering a tribute to the violence she has experienced. It is a poignant reflection of the poignant moment when her father, in vain, attempted to carry her mother across the river: "The water rises above my father's head. My mother releases his neck, the current carrying her beyond his reach. Separated, they are less of an obstacle for the cresting river. I scream until I can taste blood in my throat until I can no longer hear my own voice (51–52)."

This poignant tableau underscores the profound role that the river plays in Amabelle's life and the enduring trauma of her past. Her parents' ill-fated endeavor to traverse the river emerges as a deeply resonant symbol of the grief and disconnection wrought by the violent occurrences during the Parsley Massacre. Danticat's rendition of the river in the novel encompasses a multifaceted spectrum of dimensions, ranging from the spiritual and physical to the historical and personal, as expounded by Régine Michelle Jean-Charles.[24]

> My father reaches into the current and sprinkles his face with water, as if to salute the spirit of the river and request her permission to enter. My mother crosses herself three times and looks up at the sky before she climbs on my father's back. The water reaches up to Papa's waist as soon as he steps in. Once he is in the river, he flinches, realizing that he made a grave mistake. (51)

In Jean-Charle's analysis, the actions undertaken by the parents as they approach the river carry consider-

able significance. The father's act of anointing with water, his salutation to the river's spirit, and his quest for permission to enter all reflect a syncretic fusion of Vodou and Catholicism. In contrast, the mother's gesture of crossing herself signifies a Catholic ritual. These combined actions convey a spiritual amalgamation, where the river itself emerges as a spiritual guiding light, with each ripple bearing profound symbolic meaning (91).

Joël's death serves as the catalyst for Amabelle's recollection of her parents, marking a juncture where "life and death intersect, and Amabelle's trajectory undergoes a permanent transformation," as noted by Joyce White (34). In the novel's denouement, she revisits her own inception and the commencement of her life as an orphan in the Dominican Republic, by recounting her parents' narrative. Ultimately, at the conclusion of the novel, Amabelle returns to the river, reminiscing about the day when her parents met their tragic end, recounting: "I watched their faces as they bobbed up and down, in and out of the crest of the river. Together they were both trying to signal a message to me, but the force of the water would not let them (308)."

In a culminating symbolic moment, after a melancholic and inconclusive return to Alegría many years later, Amabelle immerses herself in the waters of the river at Dajabón. This location not only bore witness to her own suffering but also served as the backdrop for her parents' tragic demise decades earlier. This river, aptly known as the Massacre River, carries profound symbolism as it represents both blood and tears, while possibly alluding to a form of cleansing or purification:

> The water was warm for October, warm and shallow, so shallow that I could lie on my back in it with my shoulders only half submerged, the current floating over me in a less than gentle caress, the pebbles in the riverbed scouring my back. 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 . . . . [I] am looking for the dawn. (310)

The novel culminates with a poignant and melancholic ambiance as Amabelle reconciles with her individual losses and the two momentous tragedies that have left an indelible mark on her existence. Nevertheless, within a wider framework, closure remains elusive, and it is apparent that the massacre was never subjected to a comprehensive investigation, with its instigators escaping accountability. The narrative serves as a stark reminder that Trujillo continued his rule over the Dominican Republic until his assassination in 1961, while Haitians, even in the present day, grapple with violence and discrimination on the other side of the border.

These depictions within the novel underscore a pivotal facet, and some scholars interpret Amabelle's revisit to the river as a gesture stripped of hope, underscoring the intricate and agonizing history linked to that location. They consider that the affliction wrought by the river upon the lives of Haitians was a product of its utilization and the historical incidents that unfolded there, rather than being an outcome of its inherent geographical attributes.

Notwithstanding the temporary serenity experienced by the river, Amabelle's symbolic embodiment of the border fails to resolve the deeply entrenched divisions and conflicts associated with it. The border persists as a space that other Haitians will continue to traverse, and the outcomes of these journeys will

vary, with some individuals surviving while others succumb. This underscores the enduring migration that endures to this day, as Haitians persist in crossing the border to toil in Dominican sugarcane fields under deplorable conditions. In Haiti, Amabelle spends the remainder of her life haunted by the massacre, which claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Haitians, including her loved ones. Danticat's acknowledgments, as expressed by Shemak (106–7), cast light on these ongoing challenges, reflecting the enduring hardships faced by Haitian laborers: "The very last words, last on the page but always first in my memory, must be offered to those who died in the massacre of 1937, to those who survived to testify, and to the constant struggle of those who still toil in the cane fields" (312).[25]

For both Jean-Charles and W. Todd Martin, Amabelle's return can be seen as devoid of hope. There is no optimistic conclusion to the narrative. This interpretation aligns with the above-quoted Danticat's perspective on the predicament of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. Martin argues that "Amabelle . . . having returned to Haiti after escaping from the Dominican Republic, has existed in a 'living death' for the last twenty-four years." The only moment of potential renewal in Amabelle's life is her final act of entering the water, where she paddles "like a newborn in a washbasin." However, the true source of hope at this moment remains uncertain in Martin's interpretation (248). Jean-Charles also posits that this constitutes the genuine denouement of the literary work, representing the contemporary ordeal faced by individuals laboring in the sugarcane fields. The power of *Farming* is that it speaks as much to the present-day situation in the Dominican Republic as it does to the 1937 massacre (95).

Illustrating the concept of the "undercommons," the lives of Amabelle and other characters serve as exemplars of the enduring legacy of slavery. In this post-slavery era, fragmented testimonies give rise to melancholy. Simultaneously, they form "a melancholic hope, where a way of remembering and being opened up by the often unacknowledged forms of violence and cruelty that social arrangements produce and rely on" (Winters 21). It is this melancholic hope, characterized by "receptivity, vulnerability, and heightened attunement to loss and damage" (Winters 213), that both constitutes and engenders new possibilities and imaginative prospects. The recurring memories of Amabelle, encapsulated within fragments in *Farming*, serve to foster the development of customs and communities that bring to light "the breaks, cuts, and wounds of history and human existence" in Haiti (Winters 248). Amabelle's testimony further extends to encompass the spectral voices of individuals who have endured exclusion and marginalization as a consequence of hegemonic ideologies such as imperialism, colonialism, and white supremacy, which were the root causes of the events in question.

Conclusion

Moten demonstrates how aesthetic expressions echo and reshape experiences of suffering, fear, and escape. He argues that terms like "politics" and "critique" imply opportunities for self-governance on political, intellectual, and personal levels, but inadvertently maintain racial oppression by implying "inadequacy" and attempts to "fix" or "improve" it. In contrast, "fugitive planning" and "black study" embody spontaneous, collective involvement and reflection, embracing the adequacy and wholeness of ordinary individuals. "Black sociality (and radicalism)" manifests as ongoing instances of informal cooperation, depicted as fragments of testimonial records in *Farming*. In these records, individuals identified as black have transformed the pain of their experiences into the captivating beauty of extraordinary rhythmic

expression.[26]

George Shulman argues that Moten, by reevaluating racial impasse, turns conditions of stagnation and denial into the paradoxical basis of life, characterized as a creative means of escape. Beyond dispossession, the undercommons, much like the characters in *Farming*, acts as the cornerstone for fresh expressions of collective awareness and escape routes. These fugitive routes, by circumventing state authority, generate subversive modes.

These routes, by circumventing state authority, generate subversive modes. These contemporary activities can be traced back to black protest movements and escape from servitude, as described by Harney and Moten. The concept of the fugitive undercommons also finds connections with decolonization movements in Africa and is observable in ongoing efforts to escape repression and conflict.

[Notes]

1 This work is supported by JSPS KAKENHI Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (c) [23K00365]. The term *Breath, Eyes, Memory* is hereafter, *Breath* and *The Farming of Bones* as *Farming*. Unless otherwise mentioned, Subsequent citations from *Farming* are made parenthetically.

2 Siham Bouamer and Loïc Bourdeau, 6.

3 I draw upon the arguments presented by J. Harford Vargas to construct this thesis, especially 1162.

4 I have referred to Jacqueline Brice-Finch.

5 D. Quentin Miller, 161. While Miller primarily denotes the separation from one's home country to another, I intend to emphasize that this separation encompasses not only international but also domestic contexts.

6 Ibid.

7 Wachtel, 107.

8 I have referred to Michael Dash for this argument.

9 I also referred to Taylor, 19–27.

10 Astrid M. Fellner, 38–39.

11 I also referred to Fellner for this argument.

12 Vargas also underscores this point.

13 Sinanan, 392.

14 Sinanan, 391–2.

15 *In the Break*, 1

16 Harney and Moten, 28.

17 This is also quoted by Christian. See also Scott Ruff.

18 I have referred to Christian for this argument.

19 Moten, *Black and Blue*. I also referred to John Brooks, 229.

20 Laura Harris elucidates the notion that “These descriptions also reveal a concept of blackness as inherently diverse and variegated, one in which the state of mixture remains incomplete, and distinctions are not absorbed or transcended but rather retained within the framework of a historical narrative that relies on speculation” (50).

21 Ibid. As Estévez clarifies, Moten's use of the term “transgression” does not align with Western concepts of free will, moral judgment, or entrepreneurship. Rather, the transgression he refers to is developed “within the context of relations of domination and not external to them” (Saidiya Hartman 8).

22 Ibid.

23 Elizabeth A. Povinelli scrutinizes how alternative social spheres and initiatives give rise to fresh prospects for existence within the framework of both commonplace and exceptional instances of neglect and surveillance (109).

24 Jean-Charles, 91.

25 This part is also mentioned by Shemak,94. See also Tegan Zimmerman, especially 161.

26 I referred to Shulman, 278‒9.

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