REIMAGINING RETURNS:
the Preservation of Caribbean Identity and Generational Trauma of Exiles Through Cultural Memory

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“We live in a time when memory has entered public discourse to an unprecedented degree. Memory is invoked to heal, to blame, to legitimate. It has become a major idiom in the construction of identity, both individual and collective and a site of struggle as well as identification” - Michael Lambek and Paul Antze

II. Introduction

Edwidge Danticat’s Haitian-American novel, *The Dew Breaker*, and René Marqués’s Puerto Rican play, *Un niño azul para esta sombra*, present the struggle and internal conflicts associated with offering a perspective of a historical event, throughout generations. Both of these texts are written between the boundaries of cultures that place the narrative in a translocative and transtemporal state. While Danticat’s novel tries to reconcile the traumatic pasts and histories through the preservation and repression of memories through generations, Marqués’s play shows how the burden of carrying the political ideals and cultures of previous generations has destroyed any chance of a future for the child protagonist. The role of children is deemed essential in these texts to further their parents desired narratives of their personal history and collective national history.

In the first section I explore how memory is defined, particularly in relation to trauma and within social groups such as families. I then move on to relate memory to the imaginary landscapes that are created in these narratives, which reflect on the colonial history of the countries and the traumas that have been passed down from it through postmemory. Finally I bring the conversation to speak on how these narratives of return are searching for answers in the
memories that they have encountered and constructed, to reveal a broader narrative of the countries they once knew and longed for.

René Marqués, who was born in 1919 and lived most of his life in Puerto Rico, has also made his homeland a central theme in his writing. Marqués remained a politically keen person throughout his life, aligning himself with the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party that fought for independence. The history of the island plays a key role in understanding the importance he places on the political status of the nation in his play. Puerto Rico became a Spanish colony in the 15th century with the arrival of Columbus and remained so until the Spanish-American War, in which the United States acquired Puerto Rico in 1898. Since then, Puerto Ricans did not become legal citizens of the United States until 1917. It wasn’t until 1948 when they were allowed to become autonomous with their government and elect their own governor. During the 1930s the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party gained popularity and infamy as it used radical tactics to work towards independence. During the 1950s the party led multiple armed revolts against the American government, and continued on until 1965 when the death of its leader led it to dissolve.

René Marqués comes to write his play in 1958, after the peak of revolutionary activity in Puerto Rico, and just at the start of the Duvalier regime in Haiti. As neighboring Caribbean nations, Haiti and Puerto Rico have both faced distinctive histories, in which the past of colonial oppression and revolts for freedom have persisted. Their traumatic pasts have led to a generation of writers who are faced with having to confront the history of their countries and the effect it has had on the following generations.

René Marqués’s play, *Un niño azul para esta sombra*, published in 1960, presents a similar nonlinear structure as Danticat’s novel, which allows the audience to actively construct
the past of the child protagonist’s life and that of previous generations. The play narrates the story of a young Puerto Rican boy, Michelín, who is caught between his father’s pro-independence ideals and his mother’s Americanized sentiment, and lacks any freedom of his own identity. The story serves as an allegory for the nation’s struggle for a defined status; exploring the irreconcilable perception of illusion and reality in the mind of the child protagonist and ultimately ends with Michelín’s death, symbolizing the insurmountable struggle to reach a concord between identities. The trauma presented in this text is not only inherited from the past but also forged in the present moment.

Michelín’s mother, Mercedes, controls his physical world, while his inner world is dependent on a self-created, false relationship with his absent father, encouraged by his aunt Cecilia. Kate Douglas explains the complex relationship between text and readers of autobiographies focused on traumatic childhoods in “The Ethics of Reading” from her book *Contesting Childhood*. She argues that childhood narratives are driven by these encounters among fragmented selves and voices, mementos and intertexts (Douglas, 154). The same could be said about works of fiction such as Marqués, were much of the childhood narratives tend to be illusions deriving from external influences. Michelín’s solitary world is emphasized in the first act by his dreams and illusions, in which his mother poisons his favorite tree, symbolic of his father. In this dream sequence, we also witness the dissolution of his parents’ marriage, as his father is imprisoned. The impression of temporal coetaneity of the play gives the illusion of time not passing, and a cyclical timeline where the past, present and future co-exist, as the story begins with Michelín preparing to celebrate his tenth birthday, but ends with his own death on the same day. This fragmentation of reality, dreams, and illusions mimics the experience of transmitting and processing memory, from remnants of the past. In creating and transmitting
memory there can be strife between the one producing it and the receiver, as demonstrated by the text.

To comprehend the significance of Danticat’s novel setting, an understanding of Haiti’s historical background is necessary to see how events that preceded the novel add to the trauma experienced by the characters. Haiti has been marked with a history of trauma from its colonial period, to dictatorships and natural disasters. Edouard Glissant, a specialist in Caribbean identities and cultural expressions, describes the modern history of Haiti as a “non-history” because from the moment Europeans reached the island of Hispaniola in 1492, it has been plagued by crimes and brutal exploitation that have made it impossible for its people to build a collective memory to give shape and sense to the events taking place on the island. (Ibarrola, 26) Its revolution and liberation in 1804 made Haiti the first country in the western hemisphere to abolish slavery completely. In 1957 Dr. François Duvalier was elected as President of Haiti, paving the way to the start of a dictatorship between him and his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier, that would end with an estimate of over 40,000 Haitians killed during the regime that ended in 1986. The paramilitary police –tonton macoutes- was largely made up of poor uneducated men, given land to remain loyal. The Duvalier regime is characterized by how it seemed to replicate, in a more intense manner, the corruption and repression that had governed the politics of the country in earlier periods of European colonialism (Ibarrola, 31).

Edwidge Danticat was born in Haiti in 1969 and encountered the difficulties of the regime that led to the dispersal of many families, such as her own. By the time she was 4 years old both of her parents had left Haiti, without her, leaving her in the care of her aunt and uncle. She led a childhood of in-betweenness as her life was split between two countries and two homes. When she was twelve she joined her parents in Brooklyn, New York, where she would
become part of the larger Haitian community that had fled there to escape the Duvalier regime that terrorized the country.

The internal struggle of parents with repressed memories is presented as well in Edwidge Danticat’s novel, *The Dew Breaker*, which is a collection of stories of Haitian exiles linked together by a shared traumatic past, as victims and perpetrators, and the struggles of passing on this history through generations. Danticat’s work focuses on Haitian migrants and each of her novels or collections of short stories revolves around political, social and emotional upheavals. She confronts the conflicts between personal identity and national remembrance of past traumas through the relationship of Ka and her father, whose past in the *tonton macoute* as a torturer during Haiti’s François Duvalier’s dictatorship, is erased by his accounts of a false history. *The Dew Breaker* as a trauma fiction shows how trauma itself is destined to return as an “impossible history”, with the chaotic realities of individual and collective suffering, and the difficulty of this confrontation (Collins, 5). Danticat’s novel explores conflicts between the collective memory of a nation and that of individuals who wish to obscure it.

*The Dew Breaker*, while testifying to traumatic experiences, adopts a textual politics of dissociation; allowing the text and reader to distance themselves from the event. The traumatic event is reconstructed in dialogue between reader and text, demanding an active reader to piece together the history being told. Danticat’s novel actively dislocates any notion of history as linear and consecutive by writing each story at a different timeframe, and she sees her novel exploring what she has called “the silences of history,” which are perhaps those perspectives that are often suppressed (Collins, 10). These partial testimonies not only hint at the *systematic* and invisible violence of American complicity with Haiti’s repressive regimes but also intimate the *epistemic* violence that occurs with the appropriation of experience in representation. Danticat precludes
the appropriation of the trauma by problematizing the accessibility of traumatic events to the audience. Rather than testimony, there is a textual politics of distancing and indirection, so a reader must work to reconstruct Haitian history and the possible relations between the characters. The novel's structure creates a lack in access to memory, as the discordance between chapters and timelines appears, distancing the reader from the events while simultaneously allowing for access through their personal accounts.

The novel takes place in contemporary Tampa, Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn. All the characters reference a past Haiti, except Ka. Her mind returns to her father's scene, and produces a landscape of Haiti through a dream of her father's past. Ka's act of dreaming for her father suggests a simultaneous break and connection, which echoes an *imaginary*, but also a dream (Henton, 4). Ka, knowing nothing of Haiti except what she could find out through newspapers and books, relies too much on that information to complete an imaginary landscape of her family’s past. Following her father’s confession of being a prison guard, not a prisoner, the landscapes she had formed become distorted by the revelation of false memories.

Ka’s father vanished along with her sculpture, which portrayed him as a figure victimized by Duvalier’s regime, in a vulnerable, yet dignified way. She made this object in order to tell her father’s story of imprisonment, as he had explained it to her. However, throughout the first chapter Ka becomes aware that what she had been told was untrue and her sculpture was a misrepresentation of her father’s past. Her father reappears without the statue, which he has destroyed, and confesses that he was not a prisoner, but a jailer, torturer and murderer during his time in Haiti, for which he came to be known as the Dew Breaker, as he broke the serenity of the grass in the morning dew as a militant.
After being introduced to Ka and her father in the first chapter, “The Book of the Dead”, the book moves onto “Seven” were the struggle of immigration is presented as a woman reunites with her husband in New York after seven years apart, but fears having to adjust to her new country. In “Water Child” a woman called Nadine deals with the trauma of the aftermath of an abortion, and the absence of her lover, who we learn is the man from “Seven”. In “The Book of Miracles” Ka’s mother, Anne, is presented. She goes to mass and sees fliers searching for a man who committed murder and torture in Haiti and envisions it being her husband. She fears for a day when her husband will be discovered as a murderer, and her daughter will realize his true past. “Night Talkers” follows Dany on his return to Haiti, were he hopes to find closure in the murder of his parents, by telling his aunt that he has found the man responsible and hopes to avenge their deaths. “The Bridal Seamstress” focuses on Beatrice, en emotionally unstable woman, who claims she knows about a former Haitian prison guard who whipped her feet for refusing to dance with him, and says he follows her wherever she goes. “Monkey Tails” is focused on a man named Michel recalling the anarchy that took place after Jean-Claude Duvalier was removed as dictator, leading to a track down of the tonton macoutes, such as his father, who had carried out violence through out the regime. In “The Funeral Singer” three women in an English course in New York bond over their traumatic pasts in Haiti. One woman recalls her father being arrested and then vanishing in the sea, another tells of how her husband was murdered for painting an unflattering portrait of the President, and the last one recounts being raped by a militia member. In the final chapter titled “The Dew Breaker”, the story of Ka’s father is clarified. It reveals how his relationship with his wife has been troubled since he murdered her brother, a priest, for allegedly preaching against the government. The priest scarred Ka’s father face after being questioned by him, leading Ka’s father to fatally shoot him. After he escapes,
Anne finds him and believes he was the victim on an attack, not a perpetrator; and they agree to flee to New York were he promises himself to never harm anyone again and to never discuss his past. However, the scars from the past always remain present in literal and metaphorical ways. The pastor describes the scar he gave him as:

"A brand that he would carry for the rest of his life. Every time he looked in the mirror, he would have to confront this mark and remember him. Whenever people asked what happened to his face, he would have to tell a lie, a lie that would further remind him of the truth" (Danticat, 227).

Danticat’s novel refuses any uncomplicated access to experiences of trauma, handing over the strain of unraveling the past to the readers. It interweaves the individual and communal trauma faced by each story’s narrator, thematically and allegorically. Danticat’s text splits into often-disconnected “chapters”, and manages to move unsystematically across different spatialities and temporalities, and integrates the stories through fragmented sections that comprise the chapters, a kind of violence perpetrated on the text itself, which mediates the epistemic violence of representing trauma (Collins, 14).

In Danticat’s novel the composite accounts of memories allow the reader to look into the same traumatic event from different vantage points, and to appreciate the disparities as experienced in language. In Unclaimed Experience, Cathy Caruth shows how the traumatic crisis must “be spoken in a language that is always somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims our understanding” (5). The language in Danticat’s text attempts to clarify in each chapter the trauma behind Ka’s father, but with each revelation it challenges the reader’s ability to ever fully understand the trauma.
The inherent differences in textual mediums between Danticat and Marqués create a question of access as well. In Marqués play, much of the stage directions reveal fundamental qualities about the characters that would perhaps be overlooked by an audience who only has access to the dialogue between the actors. In reading the play the reader is given much more direct interpretation of the actions than from observing a performance, as the author can speak directly through the texts what each action and expression is supposed to signify. In contrast, Danticat’s novel allows for nearly all of the pivotal information to be accessed to the reader through the narration, as much of the dialogue in the text lacks the depth of emotion that is expressed through the characters internal processing of their grief and trauma.

Marqués’s *Un niño azul para esta sombra* shows the conflicts between personal memory and a collective national memory, as they do not always coincide with each other. This struggle is internalized by the protagonist, who is forced to carry the burden of his parents’ regrets and disillusion through translocative and transtemporal landscapes, showing the effects of trauma on the individual and the way it manifests itself through generations. Danticat’s *The Dew Breaker* shows the struggle of explaining difficult pasts, with the erasure and censorship of trauma, which seems to prevail regardless of the efforts to keep it from reaching further generations. The emphasis both texts place on the generations following those with first hand experience with traumatic event reflect how postmemory is an integral contributing factor to the collective understanding of trauma in relation to a national identity.
III. Defining Memory and Trauma

Ernst van Alphen describes the trajectory of memory to be fundamentally indexical, having a clear continuity of direction between the event at the beginning and memory as a result. But he argues that in the case of the children of survivors, “the indexical relationship that defines memory has never existed. Their relationship to the past events is based on fundamentally different semiotic principles.” (van Alphen, 486) The lack of this direct link to the past leads them to become reliant on language or objects of memory to develop an understanding of the events that took place. These indirect forms of transmitting memory from person to person allow for biasness over their preferred narrative to influence the receiver of memories. In Danticat’s and Marqués’s texts, memory is used as a tool to further define their respective national identities via children who are facing the trauma of their parents’ past. The way memory is treated within the texts, through a collection of multiple personal accounts, gives way for a biased narrative of events, as they are generated by varied narrators with their own subjectivity that shape the characters and the landscapes around them. The attempts at preserving and reconstructing memory manage to conceal the trauma the characters within the texts have faced, with conflicting perspectives of history. We can understand how this is done, by defining memory and how it is acquired by a collective and reproduced for the readers in these texts.

In Jan Assmann’s Collective Memory and Cultural Identity, he describes two types of memory, communicative and cultural. Communicative is said to rely on its proximity to the everyday, meaning it is based more on the individual’s experiences rather than an epoch point which can be referenced by all. Communicative memory loses value as it distances itself from the present, as this memory cannot reach a larger group as much as cultural memory. He defines
cultural memory by its distance from the everyday; saying that it has its fixed points, pivotal events of the past, whose memories are maintained through cultural formation and institutional communication, by “figures of memory” referring to physical relics and oral histories (Assmann, 129). Kate Douglas provides a more general definition of cultural memory, saying it explains the relationship between memory and the individual who is bound within a culture or cultures, reflecting the way in which people collectively remember the past and imagine the future. (Douglas, 23) Aside from the figures of memory that construct it, Assmann characterizes cultural memory by its relation to the group or “concretion of identity”, capacity of reconstruction, organization, obligation, and reflexivity.

Marianne Hirsch uses Jan Assmann’s foundation of communicative memory to describe postmemory, a transmission of often-traumatic experiences that precedes the second generations yet is so ingrained in them, leading to the formation of memories in their own right. Hirsch views the role of family structure and the relation of memory to a group in order to establish the construction of postmemory. Through her understanding of Assmann’s collective memory, the individual is always part of a social group with a shared belief system that is used to frame and shape memories into narratives. Hirsch views the family as a “privileged site of memorial transmission” as it surpasses an embodied experience (Hirsch, 110).

In Danticat and Marqués’s texts the burden of past traumas is passed to a second generation of children by postmemory. Hirsch’s belief in a uniform social group that passes memories is challenged by Marqués’s text, Un niño azul para esta sombra, as he illustrates the ideological divide within a family and its effects on the transmission of memory to a new generation. In the text, the political conflict between the parents leads to the mother obscuring the fate of her husband, a political dissident who has now died, from her son Michelin, who is
not given any hope for his father’s return. While the son has been denied the truth, he has also had his own fantasies of the past and a deluded future bolstered by others who wish to shelter him from trauma. Hirsch describes how national/political and cultural/archival memory are trans generational: “they are no longer mediated through embodied practice but solely through symbolic systems.” (Hirsch, 110) These symbolic systems embody what Assman considers cultural memory in the way it relies on the archival rather than the communicative practice between people, it is less reliant on what is said and more dependent on the representative and metaphorical formations of memory.

This poses a question of how Danticat’s and Marqués’s cross-cultural narratives allow for cultural memory to assume a role of transmitting trauma for future generations, with the desire of preserving a national identity among those who do not have a direct link. As both texts present themselves from a child’s perspective, the implications and ethics that come with passing memories and trauma can be challenged through the objectivation of culture, which is the materialized figure of memory. Hirsch describes this objectivation of postmemory:

“Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up.” (Hirsch, 106)

She acknowledges the disparity of memory when it is reliant on secondary accounts and relics. Hirsch views Assmann’s connections of individuals to family, social groups, and historical archives as being lost in direct links to the past, and forfeiting embodied connections due to the structure of postmemory, which forms breaks by in intra-, inter- and trans-generational inheritance. (Hirsch, 111) These rifts recognize the impossibility of an objective collective and
cultural memory. Cultural memory results from societies obsessions with remembering, and individuals and cultural groups that are constantly offering counter-memories and histories that challenge existing collective memory. (Douglas, 23)

In Marqués text the point where memory formation and preservation takes on the largest role for the protagonist is when he begins to dream. Here Michelín begins to source his own version of history from the stories he has been told of his father that paint him as a hero. He decides to believe the stories of his aunt Cecilia rather than his mother because they are favorable to him and give him hope of his return. When Michelín’s only friend, Andrés, says that he would not like it if his father were imprisoned like his, he claims that he would hate to have a father like his, that would not die for his ideals (Marqués, 21). His perception of history is limited to communicative memory composed of oral histories, as practically all the physical relics of his father have been destroyed. In his dream he remembers once overhearing his mother argue with his father about his revolutionary manuscripts that she burned, in fear that they would be found and used against him (Marqués, 78).

Cultural memory in Marqués text can best be seen when speaking about the statue near his home that Michelín destroyed. After a military ceremony, Michelín pours paint over a tin Statue of Liberty to blind her, draws a knife over her heart to kill her, and paints the devil on her to condemn her soul. The symbolism placed on the statue is representative of the oppressive forces that led to his father’s demise. His attempts to destroy her are also trying to subdue any memory of his father as a failure in his movement, by eradicating any sign of a past political regime.

In The ethics and aesthetics of representing trauma: The textual politics of Edwidge Danticat’s The Dew Breaker, Jo Collins attempts to examine how Danticat’s text shows the
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possession of traumatic experiences through the victims and direct or indirect witnesses. Collins
uses Cathy Caruth’s framework in *Unclaimed Experience* to define trauma and its role in history.
Caruth describes individual trauma as being inexorably historical, as the individual attempts to
grasp and negotiate trauma by positioning it within history, and seeking to recover and
reconstruct how it unfolded (Collins, 6). She argues that, for the traumatized, history can never
be completely known. Instead, the traumatic episode always escapes understanding: never fully
experienced at the time of the event, trauma is destined to return as unassimilable and
“impossible history”.

Collins views trauma as an aporia: devastating, unknowable, and relentless. (6) The
evident inability for it to be accurately reproduced outside of the victims’ and perpetrators’
 minds leaves readers with an incomplete memory that can only be viewed as an outsider, never
fully grasping it. In order to understand the trauma there is a demand for its revision and
requalification, examining the language behind it. For Caruth, this looking at trauma is an
explicitly textual conception of history, unlike Assmann’s perceptions of memory that relies not
only on communicative language, but on physical relics as well. Collin claims that for Caruth,
trauma demands to be, yet cannot be, read (Collins 6).

These gaps in Caruth’s reading of trauma lead Collins to see language as failing to create
access and reproduce the traumatic experiencing for others. By resisting the linguistic
possession, undermining any attempt to write and record trauma historically, the physical relics
remain a vital part of preserving both communicative and cultural memories (Collins, 6). Collins
claims that writers such as Danticat and Marqués differ from Caruth in their vision of trauma
fictions as capable of bearing witness, because they enable audience healing through the
experience of reading (Collins, 7). Caruth remarks that, “trauma is not locatable in the simple
violent and original event in an individual’s past, but rather in the way its very unassimilated nature – the way it was precisely not known in the first instance – returns to haunt the survivor later on” (4) The response to these events often “occur[s] in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena”(Caruth, 11) These hallucinations or intrusive thoughts are present in Danticat and Marqués’s works as the children of parents who have faced trauma are forced to confront the effects of postmemory.

Caruth uses language as a means of representing trauma, claiming that it is always a form of access to understanding as long as it remains literary, allowing for interpretations through our own comprehension of it. Danticat’s text focuses on the language aspect by using each chapter to form a clearer picture of the trauma that Ka’s father carries with him. But is this same access to language that creates a discrepancy in creating a complete understanding of his past trauma. With each chapter’s revelation of the past, a synthesis of Ka’s father’s true character is revealed, but along with it comes the trauma of others that he has affected. In the end trauma can no longer be limited to just Ka’s father’s perspective, as Ka had initially experienced at the start of the novel. The composite accounts of memories in the text permit the reader to have a more objective understanding of trauma, accounting for the discrepancy in language used by each of the characters. But even with the vantage points creating an access to a cultural postmemory, language remains a site of conflict, allowing for objects of memory to hold a greater importance in the text.

In *The Dew Breaker*, Ka’s attempts to speak for someone else’s pain are futile, as the sculpture of her father is destroyed, along with the story that the physical relic attempted to convey. Her attempts at perpetuating a collective memory of him fail as the truth of the situation is revealed. The symbolic end to this false trauma goes to show that the limitations of language
for trauma exist within the text, and the characters and reader come to realize their deception of history through it. Ka creates a sculpture of her father in an attempt to honor him for his past traumas; she does this unaware that it was he who was a perpetrator rather than a victim. Collins claims that the presence of the sculpture symbol might remind us of Caruth’s argument that figuration of trauma is often incompletely symbolized and cannot be “fully known” (6). This alludes to Ka’s lack of knowledge over her father; the sculpture could speak more for her father’s past than her own words. In some ways Collins views the sculpture as more representative of the trauma as the sculpture can approach it without claiming complete grasp of it, as language tends to do. The lack of language gives the sculpture subjectivity in representing trauma that is self-aware, unlike the language in each character’s memory that claims objectivity over the traumatic events. Hirsh describes the ways in which these postmemorial works can serve as tools for captivating those who did not experience a memory, but still link them to the social understanding of the event:

“Postmemorial work strives to reactivate and re-embody more distant social/national and archival/cultural memorial structures by reinvesting them with resonant individual and familial forms of mediation and aesthetic expression. Thus less-directly affected participants can become engaged in the generation of postmemory, which can thus persist even after all participants and even their familial descendants are gone.” (Hirsch, 111)

Her emphasis on creating a link through the familial form is especially present in Danticat’s work through the way that Ka chose her father’s figure to represent a national memory. The sculpture was meant to outlive her father and preserve the trauma he had allegedly experienced. The chapter titled “The Funeral Singer” has another victim of Ka’s father’s crimes explain the trauma she endured having witnessed her husband’s murder. She shares with other Haitian
women who had experienced similar events how she coped with trauma by following her mother’s beliefs in the after life. “My mother used to say that we’ll all have three deaths: the one when our breath leaves our bodies to rejoin the air, the one when we are out back in the earth, and the one that will erase us completely and no one will remember us at all.” (Danticat, 177)

This emphasizes the relationship between traumas and postmemory in the text, in which repressed pasts always find a way to reveal themselves, to both the reader and younger generations of characters that did not bear witness to trauma.

Trauma calls for acknowledgement, and carries with it an apparently ethical obligation for others to bear witness to it, to aid in its reconstruction. Douglas explores the relationship between childhood trauma literature and the reader, claiming that readers commonly feel ethically bound to particular modes of witnessing, and aim to demonstrate their intellectual and emotional commitment, and even gratitude, in receiving this narrative. (Douglas, 169) Danticat’s novel works in a structure that allows the reader to slowly uncover the true narrative of initially seemingly disconnected stories. They work from a starting point of lack, as the protagonist characters are unknowing and unable to obtain a true history, and only come to experience loss with the revelations of their lack in memory. The revelation of trauma is something experienced by Ka, in that the history and memories she had learned and aimed to preserve had been incomplete and fabricated. These cross-cultural narratives allow for cultural memory to serve as a way of transmitting trauma for future generations, but with a push back from the protagonists, as some of them reject the identities given to them. While the desire to preserve a cultural and national identity is prevalent in all these texts, it ultimately becomes a struggle for all to uncover the traumas or to separate themselves from them.
IV. The Imaginary Landscape of the Colonialized Experience

In Jennifer E. Henton’s “Danticat's *The Dew Breaker*, Haiti, and Symbolic Migration”, she attempts to explain *The Dew Breaker*’s aestheticizing of Haiti as not just a physical landscape, but as a symbolic one that is used to evoke loss, through Lacanian psychoanalytical principles. Throughout the novel Ka’s family conveys an imaginary landscape of Haiti to Ka. This image is further developed by Ka herself through her dreams of a place she has never been to herself. In Rene Marqués’s play *Un niño azul para esa sombra*; the boundaries between reality and the imaginary are constantly being blurred by Michelín’s memories as he tries to come to terms with the absence of his father, Michel. Although throughout the play the only place physically seen is the boy’s home, by the second act Michelín has been completely entranced by a dreamed imaginary landscape of his house, as his now deceased father materializes in front of him.

Henton attempts to move from the western framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis to one that takes into account the burdens of racial difference, colonial heritage, and subaltern identity that comes with a novel based on such a “third world” subject.

“Danticat's Haiti engenders the psychoanalytic subject differently because Haiti castrated the colonial father early on and this castration is immutable. Still, the "third world" subject already resides at the site of psychoanalytic inquiry. For it is the gaps or silences that demarcate the psychoanalytic cause — and therein speaks the Other.” (Henton, 3)

She claims that this diversion of high culture discourse is due to Haiti’s history in which they successfully freed themselves of colonial hold; this ‘Other’ she describes being the subject of the rulers from a Western perspective. In Marqués’s play similar ‘gaps or silences’ that haunt Haiti’s
past are also present. As an argument of ancestry arises between the parents in the text, the colonial history of Puerto Rico is put at the forefront of their ongoing conflicts that surpass the current political issues of the nation. In contrast to Haiti’s past, which served as the archetype of colonial freedom in the western hemisphere since it’s self-liberation in 1804, Puerto Rico has remained under Spanish and later American rule since the Columbian era. The differences between these two nations allow for an understanding on how historical burdens continue through generations by postmemory. These historical connections bring in a new level of the crisis, that of political freedom, caught between a search for individual identity and a materialistic world, which gradually destroys the possibility of becoming an autonomous individual (Hildebrand, 42).

Michel constantly argues with his wife, Mercedes, over her Americanization of her son’s name from Michel to Mike. She argues that he also has no claim to calling him by a French name since he was “born in Mayagüez, not in Reims or Toulon”, although his grandfather was a Frenchman who fled to Martinique for being a revolutionary (Marqués, 22). This leads him to criticize her constant intent to assimilate into Eurocentric culture:

MICHEL—Ah, ma cherie, pero mi abuelo nació en Lyon. De los tuyos, por cierto, no sé de ninguno cuya ascendencia se remonte a los hijos de la revolución norteamericana. Hubo sí baturros, corsos y africanos. Una mezcla tan Buena como cualquier otra, desde luego. Pero el caso es que anglosajones… Ya ves. Hay razones para un Michel en mi familia. No hay ninguna para un Mike en la tuya. (Marqués, 66)
Mercedes, Michelín’s mother with her high-class upbringing and inheritance, divides the family as she contributes the main financial income after Michel’s dismissal from his job at the university for his outspoken political ideals. Within the family an otherness is created as they attempt to maintain their own individuality while trying to fit in to the status quo of the nation that is struggling with its own identity. Mercedes reflects the colonial rule, while Michel and his absence demarcate the Other.

MERCEDES- La tradición en mi familia ha sido la lucha por una sola libertad: la libertad que nos da el dinero y la posición social. Jamás concebí la libertad que tú amas como un fin por el cual se pueda matar o morir. (Marqués, 75)

Mercedes is an embodiment of American ideals of capitalism that have been imposed on the nation. Her refusal to see his perspectives and the length he is willing to go for the causes he fights for further emphasizes the colonized mentality Marqués alludes to. On this matter of the ‘Other’ literary critic Julia Kristeva has stated, in reference to Lacan: “castration is, in sum, the imaginary construction of a radical operation which constitutes the symbolic field and all beings inscribed therein” (McClenen, 132). The castration refers to Michel’s inability to escape the grasp of the colonial mindset, which remains in the symbolic field. In Desire in Language (1980), Kristeva describes the symbolic as the space in which the development of language allows for the child to become a "speaking subject," and to develop a sense of identity separate from the mother, entering into the cultural and the social realm.

Anglo-Saxons…You see. There are reasons for a Michel in my family. There’s none for a Mike in yours.

2 MERCEDES- The tradition in my family has been the fight for one singular liberty: the liberty that gives us money and a social standing. I never conceived the freedom that you love as an end for which you can kill or die for.
For Kristeva, people’s relationship to language is always a question of desire and lack, while Henton argues loss rather than lack is what leads the symbolic landscape to integration within the narratives of migration. Loss and lack is differentiated by the first hand experienced had with the landscapes, those who experience loss have had access to the past trauma or landscapes. Those experiencing lack rely on the imaginaries of others to form their own landscapes via the understanding of those who have had experienced trauma. *The Dew Breaker’s* first line, "My father is gone." (3), sets the novel to work from a space of loss and moves the narrative from a Western psychoanalytical terrain through two main points that Henton describes as Haiti and Ka's subjectivity. Haiti represents the unequivocal and objective landscape of the past, while Ka’s subjectivity is a reflection of postmemory that attempts to bury trauma. As a second generation American and the daughter of expats, Ka experiences lack and works through it by attempting to imitate the loss of Haiti her parents experienced by forming imaginary landscapes of the past. Danticat moves away from the dogmas of psychoanalyst’s introspection through a western lens into a survey of the landscape. Henton claims that this reversal allows Danticat’s text to testify to the idea of loss rather than lack, by the weight the narrators, who are Haitian exiles, carry over those who are not, and emphasize the arrival of psychoanalysis such as Kristeva’s. Henton’s underscoring of the roles in migration allows for a clear delineation of how their established symbolic landscapes are reliant on lack or loss:

“Migration reflects the subject's ability to traverse the registers of imaginary and the symbolic. The subject of the oppressed intimates that of the symbolic and must be initiated by loss, not lack. The difference hinges on lack as a deficiency as opposed to loss stemming from losing. Losing more closely approximates the colonized experience.”

(Henton, 3)
Henton sees migration as an entryway to the symbolic landscapes, created by those experiencing loss. Those who have not been faced with migration can only reflect on the symbolic through lack. In Danticat’s text Ka’s father has to create an imaginary landscape for himself in order to cope with the trauma he has caused and endured, and prevent it from passing on to his daughter. His denial of the past reflects a landscape of loss, where he tries to convey to his daughter he could be welcomed back to Haiti, even though he knows that any possibility of that is completely lost to the fact that he is a wanted criminal there. Ka’s father remains the subject of the oppressed that Henton describes, as he was the one who had to live through the Duvalier regime, not his daughter, and has experienced loss through migration. It is not until Ka realizes that she was also being oppressed, by her father’s deception, that she comes to experience loss rather than lack. Henton describes the colonized experience as dependent on loss because it once had known freedom, but is now deficient of it. Haiti’s past historical landscapes will always place Ka’s father in a loss, akin to that of Puerto Rico’s as seen in *Un niño azul para esa sombra*.

In Marqués text he also works from a space of loss as Michelín grieves for the absence of his father, and through the broader narrative of the loss of a national identity in Puerto Rico, as reflected through his mother. From the very beginning of the play Michelín in described as having big eyes that open to life with a ‘shuddering and precocious clairvoyance’, yet they are said to be lacking ‘the innocent amazement of childhood’ (Marqués, 10). The sense of loss in not only reflective of the character, but of the audience itself as it tries to decipher him. “We feel so lost before him, not knowing whether we should treat him as a child, as an adult or as a monster” (Marqués, 11).

This space of loss within Danticat’s novel is seen through Ka’s parents and their exile from Haiti, and they have created an imaginary of being subjects of oppression by lying to Ka
about her father’s past as a militant and prison guard. While Ka never knew a dictatorship that mirrored the ‘colonized experience’, she filled the gaps of her perspective of Haitian history with an imagined community, as she relied on her father’s accounts of the past. 

“Exiles describe the spaces in which they live as liberating and also confining. Their depictions of “imagined communities” either are comforting and capable of solidarity or threaten to repress difference and destroy the individual…Consequently, spatial dialectics in exile writing relate to many factors regarding both real and imagined territories of existence.” (McClennen, 3)

Ka’s father’s exile has led him to create a nostalgic view of the past as he reminisces about white sandy beaches, while also caught in trauma of his role in murders, which he wishes to repress. As a result he represses his individuality to conform to a national narrative that ignores the true past, as seen by other characters in the book who return to Haiti in hopes of retribution only to find that they had created an imaginary, in which an actual catharsis does not occur.

Haiti’s historic past in the text explores the colonized experience through access of the landscape. Ka’s father conveys Haiti’s colonial past, as he is able to have a fuller understanding of its history having lived there, but represses it from others as a colonizer. Meanwhile his daughter remains absent of a colonized perspective, having access to Haiti’s landscape only by those who chose no to obscure it from her. Ka is an outsider and the past Haiti she imagines is allowed to be pleasurable, despite her family’s alleged adversity. Henton describes how Haiti serves a jouissance, Lacan's concept indicating insufferable pleasure, to the western narrative through its conquest over the colonizers. Haiti's eradication of slavery contradicts the idea of Africa's barbarism because Haiti attained the "high"-minded ideal of liberty independent of white benevolence (Henton, 4). Yet there is once again a revival of the colonizer, through their self-
imposed dictatorship. Haiti’s landscape is working from a loss of the colonizer, as Haiti was the first to overthrow colonialism in the West.

Henton claims that Haiti’s lack of an imaginary "motherland" that many Caribbean islands have through colonialism has lead Haiti to remain its “own source of imagination". In an analogous way, Ka’s mother, Anne, has used the singular experience of exile and migration to create an imaginary for her. She claims that Ka lacks Haiti’s ‘Other’ scene and has no claims on a subjectivity of her own because she has not experienced a loss, nor does she know of her father’s past. Unlike other characters, her loss of her father is not the result of physical torture. Yet, like the other characters, Ka articulates the disintegrating line between memory and fantasy of her father before any other character (Henton, 9).

In Marqués’s text Michelín attempts to solidify his own perception of reality through his dreams, as he imagines his father returning home to him after prison. Yet in these imagined encounters his father warns him to not dwell on his past or use him as an escape from his reality.


In the play Mercedes’s insistence on Americanizing Michelín’s name to Mike reflects her

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3 MICHEL—Listen, son, it is not good to play so much in the past. It can be…it can be dangerous. We can lose awareness of the present. And it is necessary to live in the present. Even though the present is more painful than reality. No, there is no possible escape. It is horrible, I know. But the reality is, it doesn’t matter how painful, you have to face it. I should tell you… There in the Andes, life is not easy.
desire to join the culture imposed on her, and further delineates the divide between herself and Michel. In Danticat’s novel her father chooses Ka as her name because it represents a good angel; symbolic of her as her father’s imaginary savior. Henton claims children cannot save parents and that this can be read as his desire to hold her as his reminder from his prison guard past (8).

With the understanding of her father’s past comes a loss of him that has been symbolic throughout the novel like his missing name that marks them (Henton, 7). Henton claims that the statues Ka makes of her father are not symbolic enough because they do not contain enough language and are just abstract representations of him. In Un niño azul para esa sombra, Michelín creates a symbolic figure much more capable of containing Henton’s idea of language, as he views a quenepo tree as a father figure and his make-believe protector (Hildebrand 38). His mother poisons his favorite tree after it does not produce any fruits and he breaks down as if he felt the poison himself. The destruction of the tree is parallel to that of Ka’s father destroying her statues, but he does see the symbolism behind them and the false history of himself they perpetuate. Mercedes is incapable of seeing the tree as anything more than just that: She asks Michel, “¿Cómo quieres que pueda yo adivinar y fomentar todas sus absurdas fantasías?” (Marqués, 77) In the play, Michelín’s mother tells him that the stories he had been told by his aunt Cecilia about his father living in South America as a miner are not true, and instead he died as a beggar in New York (Marqués, 111). The discovery of his father’s true fate destroy his imaginary, to the point were he can no longer live, and poisons himself with the same venom his mother used on the tree.

In Marqués’s play, there is a circular structure that places the past, present and future in the same temporal landscape. The audience is swept up by the illusion that time has stopped for a
short while, as Michelín dreams of a future with his father and goes through the memories of him, while soon returning to the same scene as if no time had passed at all (Hildebrand, 38). The circularity is apparent as the first and third acts take place in Michelín’s tenth birthday party. The play that started with the celebration of his birth ends with his death. The escape to the continental United States brought both Michelin and Ka’s parents a disillusioned confrontation with the reality that they could not repress their personal history from their children.

Danticat similarly has a non-linear structure that allows the child to be moved in to the symbolic landscape, with the first chapter actually serving as the final point in time. Throughout the novel the mother’s appearance shifts Ka from a delusion to a literal dream, leading Ka to a symbolic return to Haiti through the mother’s imaginary (Henton, 9). Ka imagines her father’s dream where he dips his hands into Haiti's sand and blood comes up (Danticat, 30). Ka’s mind produces an imaginary dream of her father's. Henton claims that her act of dreaming for him echoes an imaginary and a dream, therefore allowing herself to become symbolic (5). Knowing nothing real of her family’s past in Haiti the scene is symbolic of her loss of her father as a victim; along with the statue she made of him that he destroyed, symbolic of her now oblique heritage with her beliefs in her family’s past now dismantled. “This complex traversal of dream, image, symbol, hallucination, all return Ka to Haiti.” (Henton, 5)

Throughout the novel the conflict between Ka and her perception of her father echoed how the imaginary landscape of Haiti that has been created for her reflects lack and loss. Ka has always been reflective of an absence in history, when her father used to take her to the Brooklyn Museum to look at the Egyptian exhibits that he always treasured, her focus always went to the absences of these relics from the past:

“I would stand there for hours admiring them. But all you noticed was how there were
pieces missing from them, eyes, noses, legs, sometimes-even heads. You always noticed more what was not there than what was.” (Danticat, 199)

Ka is working from the desire, delusion, and demand of her family’s past, while still faced with lack of an authentic history. Henton claims that desire is used to free herself, while resulting in a delusion, which is distant from the demands of society. This desire of defining her loss echoes Haiti’s colonial past that destroyed familial life for modernity's demand through slavery, and then prevailed through the Duvalier regime (5)
V. Narratives of Return

In previous sections it has been shown how trauma and memory theory has allowed readers to understand how collective memories of events are formed. This ranges from cultural memory focusing on entire generation of people, to communicative memory within a group such as a family. The narratives fostered by these memories persist within the texts through the objects of memory that serve as reminders of the pasts. But the preservation of memories does not exist within Danticat’s and Marqués’s texts without forming fictitious imaginaries of the landscapes they describe as home. In a postcolonial context, these narratives of physical and psychological return reveal the complex relations between homelands and the characters’ seeking to heal from the trauma that occurred there. The characters either aim to try to forget, repress, and replace those memories or look towards retribution. They struggle to reach a cathartic return that will provide healing from their past traumas.

Elizabeth Walcott-Hackshaw explores Edwidge Danticat’s autobiographical relation to *The Dew Breaker* as it borrows pieces from her own life to construct the landscape of Haiti as one awaiting the return of those who have had to flee due to the Duvalier regime. Walcott-Hackshaw describes how Danticat’s Haiti does not have to restrain itself to follow a single perspective. “The place we call home may be a fixed location offering rooted security, grounding, a continual reference or *point de repère*, or it can be an ambiguous, enigmatic, shifting space that destabilizes and promotes feelings of transience.” (71) Walcott-Hackshaw considers Danticat’s own experience with migration in her search to define the Haitian landscape created and its relation to the homecomings and the Diasporas it receives.
Danticat had watched as parents both leave to the United States without her by the time she was four, leaving her with her uncle and an intolerable uncertainty of her future in Haiti. (Walcott-Hackshaw, 72) By the time she was 12 she was able to reunite with her parents in New York, which led the way to her creation of an American landscape that merges with the Haitian immigrant experience. This simultaneity of two national experiences is present in The Dew Breaker, as the characters struggle with the burdens of immigration, yet are never distanced from the Haitian community in the United States. Danticat’s familiarity with the immigrant experience allows her to present numerous perspectives on migration that are not a confined to her singular personal narrative. The Dew Breaker shows the contrast of successes and failures in immigration with characters such Gabrielle Fonteneau, the famous Haitian television personality who wants to buy Ka’s statue of her father at the beginning of the novel, in distinction to people like the couple in the second chapter, “Seven”. In that chapter a husband is reunited with his wife after being apart for seven years. He works jobs as a janitor and shares a basement apartment with two other men. His wife stays alone all day in the apartment with the radio tuned to Haitian stations, out of fear of getting lost on her own in the city and not being able to speak to anyone. When the weekend arrives, her husband finally convinces her to step outside and visit a park in Brooklyn, but this only brings on loving memories of the time long before they were younger and did things in Haiti like go on picnics surrounded by other Haitians who spoke the same language and shared the same culture.

For René Marqués his experience with migration did not come from one of need as Danticat’s family, but rather a desire to expand on his own scholarship. He was born and raised in Puerto Rico, but continued his studies of literature and theater in Spain and the United States. Although he lived in both countries, he remained highly critical of the jurisdiction they had over
his home. He belonged to the Generation of ‘45, whose characteristics were marked by the US invasion of Puerto Rico in 1898. This generation is characterized by pessimism and questioning of the Puerto Rican essence, denouncing the issues in the country.

Through his writing, Marqués strove to mediate the relation between the world discovered or revealed in his work, and the reader who receives and participates with the text. Wanda Balseiro Chacón describes Marqués’s purpose in writing Un niño azul para esa sombra. “El propósito del escritor consiste en señalar los males que produce la colonia y denunciar el supuesto progreso económico versus el estancamiento político y social existe.” (2)  His vision of the colonized country and its manifestation through political, economical, social, cultural, and religious movements remain the crucial themes in his work. The absence of a sovereign nation is a theme of conflict that manifests itself in his discourse and stands out in his participation of the nationalist movement. (Balseiro, 8) The characters in Marqués’s text echo his persistent desire to bring autonomy to his country. The reflection of his own ideals in fiction can be read as his attempt to incite a revolution among the audience in a smaller scale.

Marqués allows little room in his play to go against his political agenda, as he vilifies Mercedes, the mother figure, for standing in the way of her husband’s plots, and literally destroying his life’s work by getting rid of his manuscripts. Mercedes attempts at reconciliation with her resentful son, Michelín, are fruitless as he refuses to look beyond her past actions. In the end Michelín’s act to end his own life the way his mother killed his favorite tree, which was emblematic of his father, show Marqués’s uncompromising attitude towards political dissonance. Marqués writes Michel, the father, as a headstrong dissident that aligns with his political ideals

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4 The purpose of the writer is to point out the wrongs produced by the colony and denounce the supposed economical progress versus the political and social stagnation that exists.
and could almost be a self-portrayal, but his decision to make him defeated shows the recognition of the eventual failure of his nationalist movement.

In Marqués and Danticat’s texts the reader is made to look at the fathers as perpetrators of crimes, Michel having been convicted of attempted terrorism in Puerto Rico, and Ka’s father living in disguise in New York after committing murder in Haiti. But we are also simultaneously made to feel sympathy for them via their children. The labeling of the fathers as fugitives and convicts prevents a return for them and their children, who are unaware of the true nature of their exiles. While Michelín is kept in his homeland while his father is in exile, he finds that it is no longer a home for him as it was dependent on the idea of freedom his father created for him. He longs for a return in the feeling of being at home, with his father, which proves to be impossible for him. For Ka she had been in exile with her father since she was born after he fled Haiti, unaware of anything that could have been missing from her home. The discovery of her family’s past leaves her with a longing for homecoming of a true Haiti. For the authors, it is a return for them as well to be able to write about their countries, and search for reconciliation with the political pasts and presents that ensued in them.

Edwidge Danticat’s and René Marqués’s experiences with migration have allowed us to grasp a connection between their works, as they search for a return to their homelands within the characters of their texts. In Marqués’s text, the exile of Michel from his country comes to signify the loss of home and a national identity to his son Michelín, as the father succumbs to the oppressive state that he fought against. There is a symbolism of the father, Michel, being exiled to prison, and only returning home to finds that there is no hope for him there. His life in New York, under the patriarchy he fought against leads to his eventual death. Michelín’s father and grandfather never got to experience a return to their countries, as his grandfather was living in
exile until his death and his father was never truly welcomed back. The only way Michelín’s father could continue fighting for his home was away from it. Though Michelín has not left his country, he remains waiting for the return of his father and the principles he brought with him. Michelín’s literal dream in the text is of a long awaited homecoming for his father.

As described earlier, the narratives of return are not limited to physical manifestations, as psychological returns can approach the issues in a metaphorical manner. The metaphorical returns of the father-figures in both Danticat’s and Marqués’s texts are used as a symbol of potential amends for characters that had faced trauma, that cannot be completed without the revelation of the truth to them. Ultimately Marqués provides no room for healing from the past, as Michelín ends his life with poison. After Ka is told the truth of her father’s past, her only access of a return to Haiti is through imaginaries such as dreams, because she has never physically been to the country. In the end, Danticat leaves her future inconclusive, as the first chapter ‘The Book of Ka’, is chronologically the last. Ka is left with the disillusion of her family’s past in Haiti and a long journey home, both literally and metaphorically.

The fifth chapter of The Dew Breaker, ‘Night talkers’, provides an insight on what a return to Haiti might look like for Ka, in a search for resolution and answers. The chapter follows Dany, a man who returns to Haiti after living in New York for ten years, to tell his aunt that he has discovered the man who murdered his parents, now working as a barber in Brooklyn. In his stay he dreams of how telling Aunt Estina about his discovery, and relives his memories of the day he watched a man, who we now know as the Dew Breaker, kill his parents and blind his aunt. Dany reveals that he once went into the man’s bedroom late at night with the intention of killing him, but the fear of mistakenly killing the wrong man stopped him. He is introduced to Claude, who has been forced to return to Haiti after having killed his father in New York.
“We have a few boys here in the village who have been sent back. Many don’t even speak Creole anymore. They come here because this is the only place they have any family. There’s one boy here. I’ll take you to visit him. You can speak to him, one American to another.” (Danticat, 96)

Claude and Dany are linked as foreigners in the country that is meant to be their home by the fact that they have become distanced through it in their migrations. Dany sees how Claude has been accepted into the community, despite his crime and leaves him disillusioned because of the acceptance of violence in the society he considered home. His idea of somehow achieving a moral retaliation against that man who destroyed his family is shattered. Claude explains to him what his experience returning to Haiti has been like:

“It’s like a puzzle, a weird-ass kind of puzzle man, . . . and these people are putting me back together, telling me things about myself and my family that I never knew… Man if I’d run into these people back in Brooklyn, I’d have laughed my ass off at them. I would’ve called them backward-ass peasants but here I am.” (Danticat, 102)

Claude did not return to Haiti in hope of answers and Dany did, but in the end both homecomings end up being reconciliations with their own pasts. Dany sees that although he can continue to search for vengeance for his family, it will not guarantee that he will find it celebrated in his home country, as they knowingly accepted Claude. A cathartic return is lacking in Danticat’s and Marqués’s texts, leaving the trauma unresolved and echoing the feelings of melancholy in their depictions of migration and exile.
VI. Conclusion

Edwidge Danticat’s *The Dew Breaker*, and René Marqués’s *Un niño azul para esta sombra* both reflect on the difficulties of transmitting memories about traumatic events or periods. Danticat and Marqués each write as people who have been personally affected by the ongoing political conflicts of their respective home nations, and continue aiming to elucidate and reconcile with those histories. Danticat’s novel was written years after the inspired events of Duvalier’s regime and divided her family for years. It presents a structurally incongruent narrative that allows the reader to imitate the acts of reflection that witnesses of trauma undertake in attempts to cope with their pasts. Marqués writes his play in 1960; soon after radical events involving the Puerto Rican Nationalists movement unfolded around him and still remain in the consciousness of the initial audience of his play. He manages to confront the difficulties that will arise later on with addressing the situation to following generations and preserving the memories around it. As demonstrated in these texts, memory is a foundation to grasping a cultural and national identity, particularly to migrants and their succeeding generations. Memory allows for a metaphorical return to landscapes that are perhaps unknown to them. As both texts explore the difficulties of trying to escape a past or present of colonialism, the collective identity and narrative of the nation becomes of utmost importance.

In Danticat’s text the different narrators struggle to maintain a cohesive narrative with each other, as their experience with the period of the Duvalier regime has left them with varying degrees of trauma and conflicting accounts of events. The circulation of cultural memory of trauma within social groups to the subsequent generations demands to be in agreement with the larger national memory; otherwise the groups attempt to take over the national memory with their own narrative. The physical and symbolic reminders of trauma allow for a broader narrative
of memory to be told, aside from through language. In both texts objects of memory play a major role in the revelations of repressed memories. In *The Dew Breaker*, Ka’s statue of her father leads to his confession. In *Un niño azul para esta sombra*, the statue of liberty that Michelín destroys foreshadows the reveal that his father was destroyed by the overarching powers of the United States. The objects do the work of conveying cultural memory aside from language, by filling in the gaps of what is conveyed through language, and enhancing the narratives. In both texts this struggle is present across generations, and is evident through the way they create imaginary landscapes of the past. These settings frame the narratives of postmemory as they aim to preserve them. These imaginary landscapes given to the generations of those that did not bear witness, such as the protagonists Ka and Michelín, come from the parental generation. They are reflective of the oppressive powers of the colonial history of the nations, in the way that they repress and revoke autonomy of identity to those being given false accounts of memory and history. The disillusion that comes with the realization of these fantasies allows the generations that did not bear witness to trauma to perceive the feelings of loss that their predecessors felt.

At the end of Danticat’s book, Ka’s mother, Anne, attempts to expand on her daughter's perspective on her father’s past, but Ka hangs up, leaving her with a recording telling her to "hang up and try again". Danticat leaves the readers with an ambiguity of whether Ka will choose to preserve the memory of her family’s past in the way she had been raised to believe or whether she will search for more authentic memories. In Marqués text, Michelín chose not to preserve any memory at all and ends his life instead. The conflicts between maintaining a national memory versus that of individuals or social groups remains unsolved, as the links between memory and identity show how arduous agreement on a single narrative of trauma can be.
VII. Bibliography


