Healing Cosmopolitanism in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*

Florian Schybilski

University of Potsdam, Germany

The field of cosmopolitanism and its study has been dominated in the past and is being dominated now by discourses originating in the European/North American sphere. As South American philosopher and cultural theorist Walter Mignolo points out, such an imbalance of discursive power and perspective indicates that larger colonial structures have not disappeared with formal decolonization. Coloniality persists. What steps can we take to mend the scars it continues to inflict? In pursuit of this question, I read Haitian American writer Edwidge Danticat's 1998 historical novel *The Farming of Bones* to investigate possibilities for truly postcolonial cosmopolitanisms that negotiate these colonial legacies under the aegis of "critical cosmopolitanism" as "compris[ing] projects located in the exteriority [of modernity] and issuing forth from the colonial difference" (Mignolo *Local Histories/Global Designs* 5).

The novel's action revolves around Haitian-born Amabelle Désir, who recounts her life before, during, and after the "Parsley Massacre"—i.e., the genocide of Haitian workers in the Dominican borderland in 1937. Even though the Republic of Haiti and the Dominican Republic have formally been postcolonies since the 19th century, I argue that the narrative's setting points to colonial continuities in multiple ways. On the one hand, the two states are forced to continue their colonial legacies as plantation economies that supply the North American and European markets with agricultural products such as sugar. Haiti was even re-subjected to imperial control and exploitation by the US invasion and military occupation from 1915 to 1934, which left its population even more impoverished. On the other hand, Danticat addresses continuing coloniality through the subjection of Haitian migrant workers in the Dominican Republic's ethno-nationalist racial regime, which perpetuates the dehumanizing and exploitative European ideology of race. This makes the Dominican officials' superficially "anti-colonial" rhetoric of national liberation, likening the Parsley Massacre to the Dominican War of Independence against Haiti (1844-1856), ring hollow since they do not step *post* the colonial.

In exposing this hypocrisy, Danticat deconstructs the nation-state as a supposedly effective tool for decolonization by showing how it reproduces colonial logics and hierarchies that ultimately stand in the way of healing the wounds that colonialism has inflicted. Her narrative develops from and is situated in a space from which European colonial modernity likes to distance itself as its "exterior" or "Other." This coincides with a change towards a critical perspective on the modernity-coloniality complex that deconstructs the "interior" / "exterior" binary by reflecting on the centrality of colonial spaces for European self-understanding. *The Farming of Bones* thus produces a dialogical relationship that participates on eye-level in the discourse of political modernity.

Danticat puts this critical cosmopolitan perspective to work through her characters who aid in the deconstruction of the nation-state by performing what I call healing cosmopolitanism. This strand of cosmopolitanism is spearheaded by members of the healing professions who aim to practice healing on a literal as well as a metaphorical level. These characters are instrumental in saving lives. They counteract the nationalistically motivated genocide and live up to their identities as healers by tending to the survivors' physical and mental wounds after the massacre. They also enter into a transnational alliance with each other and the protagonist Amabelle. This speaks to a larger political desire for decolonial healing from coloniality that puts the "post" in postcolonial. They are not primarily concerned with the nation-state as their primary point of reference or locus of moral allegiance. Instead, this metaphorical healing projects an alternative cosmopolitan form of conviviality that centers on the human need for healing from continued coloniality and the duty to care for one another. The novel realizes its political potential vis-à-vis the reader by deploying *témoignage*, i.e., "bearing witness," as a literary strategy that is equally affective and effective.

My notion of healing cosmopolitanism builds onto Mignolo's conception of critical cosmopolitanism as different from Eurocentric cosmopolitan projects insofar as it is meant "to reconceive cosmopolitanism from the perspective of coloniality . . . and within the frame of the modern/colonial world" ("The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis" 723). Its goal is formulated as "diversality," i.e., "new forms of projecting and imagining ethically and politically, from subaltern perspectives" (743), in which these hitherto silenced colonial subjects play an active role out of their own volition and on their own terms. I interpret diversality as formulating a vision of political self-empowerment as well as epistemological justice that underscores the necessity for people in the exteriority to "know themselves" rather than be reduced to passive

subjects of knowledge-making in the *white* "interiority" of modernity. At the same time, Mignolo marks its potential for alternative worlding, i.e., "the project that connects the diverse subaltern satellites appropriating and transforming Western global designs" (746). The intended result is "the relentless practice of critical and dialogical cosmopolitanism" (744). He positions this new type of cosmopolitanism from below–the "exteriority" against cosmopolitanisms articulated from Eurocentric perspectives that pretend to be "universal." To rectify this racist imbalance, he suggests "border thinking" as "the recognition and transformation of the hegemonic imaginary from the perspectives of people in subaltern positions" (736-737) and claims it "as the necessary condition for a future critical and dialogical cosmopolitanism" (743). The critical cosmopolitan potential of Mignolo's project lies in an alternative worlding that promotes unity among people in the postcolonies by going beyond the divisive nation-state framework and calling for these potential allies to inscribe themselves into and change the discourses dominated by *white* European modernity.

Based on her research on the island of Nevis, anthropologist Karen Fog Olwig shows that such cosmopolitan designs do not necessarily require a "reconception" as Mignolo would have it. She suggests that cosmopolitan practices enacting critiques of and providing alternatives to the Eurocentric, universalist notion of Enlightenment cosmopolitanism have always already been present in vernacular forms in the Caribbean since the beginning of Atlantic slavery. One of these Caribbean cosmopolitan traditions arises out of resistance to the practices of the Atlantic slave trade, as part of which the enslaved were individuated as strangers to each other and rendered powerless by separating them from their families and communities. Olwig describes "an openness to strangers and a willingness to engage with the unknown" (421) as lasting effects of this cosmopolitan resistance. The characteristic "openness" arose at the time of forced migration from the need of "developing social relations with others that could turn them into persons of social and moral worth and thus negate their 'socially dead' slave status" (421). This cosmopolitan practice, countering Orlando Patterson's diagnosis of social death in slavery, is dictated by external circumstances. Yet it constitutes an act of claiming subjecthood through the mutual affirmation of its practitioners' moral value that arises out of their own political volition. Olwig's notion of a Caribbean cosmopolitanism in which people recognize each other as moral referents enacts a fuller version of humanity than what is offered by the narrow, Eurocentric conception of the mono-lingual and mono-ethnic nation-state enacted in the Dominican Republic. As such, it segues with

and roots my own notion of 'healing cosmopolitanism' as a decolonial practice derived from *The Farming of Bones*.

In her *testimonio*-like historical novel, *The Farming of Bones*, Haitian American writer Edwidge Danticat gives space to exactly this decolonial practice that interrogates received, European categories in the Haitian and Dominican postcolonies. The narrative coagulates around a fictionalized retelling of an episode of ethnic violence that occurred in the Dominican Republic in 1937. This state-backed genocide ordered by the Dominican president Rafael Trujillo was carried out with the help of the military. It turns on a racist, ethnocentric notion of a nation that calls for the restoration of a supposed original "purity" of the Dominican nation-state. However, the project of a nation based on ethnos runs into complications. Ironically, it is not possible for the Dominicans to distinguish "insiders" from "outsiders" visually—the ethnos they are trying to purify does not have any marks that would reliably distinguish it from Haitians. They resolve to use the Spanish word for parsley, *perejil*, as a shibboleth to find out the French-speaking Haitians who typically cannot pronounce it. In the nationalist government's eyes, this proves that they do not belong. The genocide has accordingly become known as the Parsley Massacre, or El Corte and kout kouto on the Dominican and Haitian sides, respectively. Although this shows the futility of equating nation with ethnos, this idea continues to have very real and murderous consequences.

In my interpretation of *The Farming of Bones* as a form of *testimonio*, I draw on Jennifer Harford Vargas's work that convincingly argues for the expansion of the literary genre of the *testimonio* because "imaginative fiction, particularly the novel, has been an important medium through which writers have engaged in the testimonial project, especially when contesting state-sponsored violence and social death" (1163). The work that Danticat's fictionalized narrative does as *testimonio* sidelines earlier concerns with questions of facticity as well as the narrator's first-hand authority and purity of intention, as formulated through John Beverley's assertion in the aptly titled *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth* that "[u]nlike the novel, testimonio promises by definition to be primarily concerned with sincerity rather than literariness" (32). With her observations on form – specifically arising from her contrapuntal reading tracing the oscillation between chapters narrated in "documentary realism" and the bold-print introspective chapters that she calls "prose vignettes" (1164) – Harford Vargas re-emphasizes the importance of this exact literariness. This category comes to bear on the production of *testimonio* by marking out the different narrative modes whose interplay "functions as a politicized aesthetic device" (1166) and focuses the acts of oral telling

and witnessing between survivors of the Parsley Massacre inside the story world as integral to building social memory (cf. esp. 1165-1169). These observations privileging readings of Danticat's literariness over the question of facticity and "sincerity" revalorize orality, challenge Eurocentric epistemology maintaining that transmission of knowledge-as-truth is to take place only through previously authorized written or printed forms, and ultimately speak to the Haitian community's potential to gain decolonial epistemic autonomy (variously called validity, authority; cf. 1163, 1167, 1169, 1173).

Beverley's influential genre definition also maintains that "[t]he position of the reader of testimonio is akin to that of a jury member in a courtroom" (32). However, in my own reading experience, *The Farming of Bones* involves readers in a co-operative and co-constructive narrative process rather than placing them as arbiter of veracity. Extending Harford Vargas's reading, I therefore argue toward the end of this article that the socially generative act of witnessing exceeds the story world and engenders material, political effects through the mutual recognition between author, characters, and readers who are interpellated into an alternative approach to worlding.

On the macro level, the fictitious biographical self-narrative of Amabelle Désir expresses a *desire* coded into her very name to transcend the logic of "language and lineage" (20). Danticat uses the story's factual background to critique the European notion of the monolingual nation that the erstwhile ruling powers France and Spain left as their (post)colonial legacy. Danticat puts special emphasis on President Trujillo's strategy of using the word *perejil* as a shibboleth that is meant, as already argued, to distinguish the Haitian-French from the Dominican-Spanish linguistic and, by extension, ethnic groups. In doing so, Trujillo and his followers are shown to subscribe to a deeply Eurocentric idea prescribing the linguistic, ethnic, and cultural congruence in a country, which is at odds with postcolonial realities. This way, what had been established as the dividing line between European peoples was applied to the colonies and not only lingers as the dividing line after the end of direct colonial rule. It is actively appropriated and radicalized by a political faction looking to consolidate its power, which then charges it with meanings of national and racial "purity" to be used against a supposed internal enemy that has to be purged.

Danticat thinks along borders that are artificially put in place, which help expose the deployment of the shibboleth *perejil* as part of what I would call "scientization." Scientization describes a rhetorical justification strategy that may be applied to untenable and discriminatory claims that

often try to mask privilege by portraying it as "natural" or "objective" superiority. It selectively taps into scientific or scientific-sounding discourses to furnish these claims with a veneer of legitimacy. By inventing an empirical yet baseless procedure that is meant to determine national belonging, the Trujillo government is following this exact strategy by identifying linguistic proficiency as a prime indicator of belonging. The façade is that of a "scientific" procedure, whereas the categories of ethnos/genealogy and language are falsely declared congruent in the process. This is meant to lend credibility and legitimacy to what is produced as a supposedly "objective" difference between the Haitians and the Dominicans in order to suit the government's political needs. It constitutes a racializing move that charges the otherwise inconsequential linguistic difference between French and Spanish with negative meaning and extends it to the two groups' respective bodies. This illustrates the genocidal calculus with which the Dominicans deploy language as a border to justify a racial hierarchy of humanity among people who inhabit the same island. It forcefully demonstrates the need for states to break the mould of Eurocentric national modernity in favor of different, critically cosmopolitan modes of conviviality.

Haitian protagonist Amabelle Désir recounts her life in the borderlands of both the Dominican Republic and Haiti before, during, and after the genocide. Her life story is shaped by the death of her parents, who drown when attempting to cross the border river back into Haiti when she is eight years old (21, 50-52). She is taken in by a Dominican family living in the town of Alegría, who take pride in their Spanish, i.e., formally *white*, roots (296). Alegría means "joy" in Spanish, which later on prompts a character to raise the question of whose joy may be invoked in the Dominican plantation economy or whether the town may have been named in an ironic gesture (253). It is also extraordinarily close to the Spanish word *alegoría* and thus invites readers to interpret the town, its inhabitants, and the plot as stand-ins in a larger (trans)national allegory. Such an allegorical mode of reading allows *The Farming of Bones* to take an important step toward a shared, healing history of the Dominican Republic and Haiti that helps address the trauma that binds the two states to each other. Danticat's novel works toward opening a channel for communication so Haitians and Dominicans may face their shared past and reconcile over it. On a larger level, *The Farming of Bones* is also a reckoning with how persisting coloniality privileges a nineteenth-century European notion of nation-as-ethnicity that made both the genocide and the continuous repression of its memories possible in the first place. By narrating Alegría and the potentialities that come with its inhabitants,

Danticat writes in a critical, healing cosmopolitan mode that goes beyond the nation as a supreme moral referent and political principle. In its function as a (trans)national allegory, *The Farming of Bones* addresses European colonialism and its legacies as obstacles that must be overcome on the path to Mignolo's goal of diversality.

The narrative is primarily focalized through Amabelle as an autodiegetic narrator, who recounts the events of her life as if giving testimony to the reader. Following Mignolo's notion, her being non-*white* and located in the Caribbean already suffices to position her in the "exteriority" of European modernity. The subalternity arising from her location in the global economic and racial order is paralleled by her position vis-à-vis the enduring coloniality of power and its stratification along the lines of "racial purity" in the Dominican Republic—a state that is formally decolonized but retains a racially stratified plantation society.

As a Haitian who grows up among Dominicans, she is made by the border river dividing Hispaniola in different ways. The death of her parents, who are literally swept away by the border, is the first instance of the river that simultaneously connects and separates the two states inscribing itself into her life. During the time of the genocide, she is a young woman and situated in the Dominican borderland adjoining Haiti. When the violence starts, Amabelle and her partner Sebastien decide to flee with the help of Dominican doctor Javier and two Catholic priests. They are separated, and Sebastien is presumably killed, so Amabelle is forced to continue her escape with another group of refugees. This is when the Dajabón River acquires a second meaning as a border shielding Amabelle from further pursuit after she crosses it into Haiti. The quest for certainty about her partner's fate takes Amabelle back across the border river after the instigator, Dominican president Trujillo, is assassinated in 1961. Her short reunification with her erstwhile playmate Valencia in Alegría makes her realize that if she had trusted her surrogate family, her partner Sebastien and his sister would have been protected either in the sugar mill where they worked or in Valencia's household (299-300). This illustrates the fact that Amabelle is caught in a liminal space between her Haitian ethnic community and her Dominican adoptive family. Ironically, it is Sebastien who convinces her not to trust the latter and flee with him, which seals their fate (147).

Finally, upon Amabelle's return from her visit to Alegría, there is a shift in the conceptualization of the river. It changes from an entity that is keeping people apart to a potential source of communion and healing. Standing beside the river, Amabelle thinks about the person nicknamed

"professor" who lost his sanity in the massacre and remains in close contact with the river.

> I wanted to call him, but only by his proper name, not by the nickname, Pwofesè, the replacement for "crazy man," that he had been given. I wanted to ask him, please, to gently raise my body and carry me into the river, into Sebastien's cave, my father's laughter, my mother's eternity. But he was gone now, disappeared into the night.
> I removed my dress, folding it piece by piece and laying it on a large boulder on the riverbank. Unclothed, I slipped into the current.
>
> 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. (309-310)

In these last lines of the book, Amabelle moves into the embrace of the river, which becomes an epistemologically privileged liminal space. Danticat portrays it as a vessel uniting Amabelle with her traumatic memories rather than a border shutting her out. This epistemological property is underscored by the name and presence of the "professor." They point to the act of "professing" in the sense of performatively committing to something as well as the occupational designation "professor" as a person who is engaged in inquiry, knowledge creation, and knowledge dissemination. Through Amabelle's submission to the river that killed her parents, the border acquires new meaning. It becomes integral rather than external to an understanding of Amabelle's lifeworld that encompasses both the present as well as the memories that haunt her as "shadows" of the past. She submits to the border that has shaped her life and thus appropriates these traumatic memories rather than chasing the "shadows" away. Transposed onto the two nation-states in conflict, this example of border thinking has the potential to connect rather than separate the history of Hispaniola that has been split in two. It invites readers on both sides to follow Amabelle *into* the border and interrogate the nation-state's arbitrariness. The aim would be to adjust from a nationalistic, confrontative perspective to a relational, cosmopolitan perspective that may lead to reconciliation and heal the trauma effected by the ill-fated fantasy of an ethnically homogeneous nation.

In the national context, the separation of "interior" from purported "exterior" follows the logic of "racial purity." This dividing line is put in place by Dominican President Trujillo and by Valencia's husband, Colonel Pico, as its literal executor. Like the physical barrier of the river

that is made meaningful as a national dividing line, ethnicity and race become insurmountable borders for Amabelle over the years. She recounts a short episode from her childhood, which already hints at the racial hierarchy in Dominican society that is more and more strongly enforced as she grows older. Read as a national allegory, it illustrates that not only Amabelle and Valencia but also Haiti and the Dominican Republic must outgrow this border together.

> Even though she [Valencia] was supposed to sleep in her own canopy bed and I was to sleep on a smaller cot across from hers, she would invite me onto her bed after her father had gone to sleep and the two of us would jump up and down on the mattress, play with our shadows, and pretend we were four happy girls, forcing the housemaid – Juana – to come in and threaten to wake Papi who would give us a deeper desire for slumber with a spanking. (6)

French-speaking Amabelle is thus received, at first, on similar although not equal terms with the family's daughter Valencia, which gives her access to a different, Spanish-speaking culture. Despite her father Don Ignacio's proud claim that "[s]he can trace her family to the Conquistadores, the Line of El Almirante, Cristobal Colon" (18), Valencia temporarily elevates Amabelle by means of play to her own privileged status. The lack of bias in the young, "properly Spanish" Valencia underscores that Amabelle's social integration is theoretically possible. Don Ignacio's statement taking pride in supposed racial purity, however, speaks of the colonial racializing power structure to which the family adheres when relegating Haitians to a lower rank in the social hierarchy. Forced to work as colonial domestic servants, the Haitian migrant laborers are barred from meaningful personal relationships with their "masters," who perceive themselves as racially "pure" Europeans. Indeed, as she matures, Amabelle is increasingly excluded from the interiority of Dominican society represented by the family's house and the domesticity associated with it. She eventually loses the status of exceptionality accorded to her as a child and is relegated to the exteriority, i.e., a subordinate position outside of the house. Amabelle remains formally bound to the Dominican household and joins the other Haitian émigrés Juana and Luis, who are part of the family's servant ranks.

Although Valencia and Amabelle's relationship remains somewhat special throughout the years, it becomes uneasy for reasons of social decorum and hierarchy—i.e., the Dominican society's racism toward the Haitian workers—and never returns to the initial state of childlike innocence. The naiveté with which Amabelle seems to unquestioningly bear her transition to enforced servitude is striking and may speak to the

degree to which she has been indoctrinated by racial ideology. However, this purported naiveté is put into perspective during the genocide. Other Haitians trust the Dominican family and recognize them as well as established, propertied, bourgeois Haitians as a source of protection. They survive by seeking and finding shelter with them. Amabelle, however, harbors distrust against her Dominican surrogate family and decides to flee the violence with her Haitian partner, Sebastien.

Sebastien, who works in the nearby sugar mill and plans to return to Haiti, is the only one able to temporarily scatter the traumatic hauntings of Amabelle's past, which the novel repeatedly refers to as "shadows." He convinces her to flee rather than seek shelter in Alegría. In turn, Amabelle convinces him to join cross-border commuter Doctor Javier and the local clergymen Fathers Vargas and Romain, who are planning to evacuate as many Haitians as possible from Alegría shortly before the massacre starts. However, the clandestine operation is found out, and Sebastien is presumed to have been killed by the Dominicans. This traumatic memory thus joins Amabelle as one of the "shadows" following her for the rest of her life. As such, Sebastien literally embodies the multiple meanings behind the title *The Farming of Bones* as "working to the bone" when being cut all over by the razor-sharp sugar cane leaves, the dehumanizing "cultivation" of the laborers' bodies as agricultural labor machines, and, ultimately, their bodies being cut down like sugar cane in the field in the genocide carried out by Dominican troops.

The genocide of Haitian workers is the culminating point of Dominican ethno-nationalism. These days, many lives are cut short by the soldiers' machetes that are supposed to make the genocide look like a popular uprising. This time of crisis is when healing cosmopolitanism comes to the fore as practiced resistance to this ethno-nationalism. There are three characters who clearly overcome the dividing lines of the ethno-nationalist ideology put in place by the Trujillo regime. These are the ones organizing the escape for the Haitian migrant workers: Catholic ministers Father Vargas and Father Romain—Dominican and Haitian, respectively—and Doctor Javier. I argue that what unites these three characters in their act of resistance is their shared respect for and the moral obligation they feel toward human life. As such, they counteract the social death visited upon the Haitian workers—the dehumanization that marks them as expendable in the first place—and enact the cosmopolitan legacy of mutual recognition formulated by Olwig (cf. 421-423). Together they try to conduct the Haitians' escape in an organized fashion but are arrested and tortured once their plan is discovered.

The figure of Dominican Doctor Javier is of interest to me because he cultivates a special relationship with Amabelle. He has been trained as a medical doctor and puts his calling into practice by caring for people on both sides of the Dominican and Haitian border. While his family has established itself in Alegría on the Dominican side, he regularly traverses state lines to practice at a small clinic that has "only two Haitian doctors for a large area" (21). His moral obligation toward his patients arising from his identity as a member of the healing profession makes him put human need before national allegiance. This leads me to believe that he practices "healing cosmopolitanism" in the sense that he is thinking, feeling, and, most importantly, acting beyond the nation to invoke Robbins's and Cheah's shorthand for cosmopolitanism.

My notion of healing cosmopolitanism identifies it as a mode of worlding that focuses on healers as a community sharing an ethos that binds them to each other as well as to their patients. In the case of *The Farming of Bones*, it encompasses medical practitioners, and it is flexible enough to also accommodate Fathers Vargas and Romain as healers of the soul. Their practice subverts the category of linguistically inflected national identity as put in place by the Dominican state, which can be seen in these characters' active efforts to save Haitian lives as well as Doctor Javier's refusal to be tied down by the arbitrary border between the two states in the performance of his duties. Instead, they privilege the far less restrictive category of human need as their ultimate moral referent. Together they construct their own cosmopolitan and decolonial counterproject to the narrative of "racial purity" inherent in the Eurocentric logic of nation. This counterproject unites the doctor and the priests and prompts them to undertake their clandestine operation, contravening the genocide. While the two clergymen are known to survive (255), this cosmopolitan alliance presumably costs Doctor Javier his life.

Amabelle's expertise as a healer is formally introduced right in the beginning of *The Farming of Bones* and acquires a new meaning in the context of this cosmopolitan alliance. Although hesitant at first, she takes control of the situation when Valencia goes into premature labor. Doctor Javier does not reach the house in time, so she must rely on her own knowledge that stems from the coincidence that "[b]irths and deaths were my parents' work" (5). Memory of this knowledge returns as she laments that "[my father] and my mother were gathering leaves to cram into rum and firewater bottles before rushing off to a birthing. Without remembering what those leaves were, I couldn't lessen the señora's pain" (7). She shares part of her parents' occupational knowledge and skills and successfully applies whatever she remembers, such as breathing

techniques to manage the pain, methods to keep the circulation going, and how to help the newborn to start breathing. She even saves the second, unexpected girlchild from being strangled by the umbilical cord (7-11).

Race enters the birth scene as Valencia attributes meaning to the phenotypical difference between male and female infants:

> "They differ in appearance." She wanted another opinion.
> "Your son favors your cherimoya milk color," I said.
> "And my daughter favors you," she said. "My daughter is a chameleon. She's taken your color from the mere sight of your face." (11)

The exchange may be interpreted as strengthening the bond of the two women by proxy of the child whom they brought into the world together. This is supported by the emotional attachment that links Amabelle and Valencia across difference as well as the sense of duty as a healer expressed by Amabelle's refusal to leave the room even for a short time: "Anything could happen in my absence, the worst of it being if a lady of her stature had to push that child out alone, like a field hand suddenly feeling her labor pains beneath a tent of cane" (7). Valencia's remark about phenotype marks her newborn daughter as different, which simultaneously works as identification with Amabelle. This indirectly associates her with the chameleon metaphor, hinting that Amabelle may possess the same power, enabling her to pass as Dominican because of the involuntary cosmopolitanism of partly having been brought up on the Spanish-speaking side. This contradicts President Trujillo's ethno-nationalism insofar as it speaks of an understanding of "Dominicanness" that lies within the realm of performance rather than genetic identity, i.e., it may be acquired rather than being exclusively passed down by blood lineage. Valencia actively calls the institutional ideology into question by repeating her claim to affiliation with Amabelle beyond national borders when Amabelle visits Alegría after Trujillo's death:

> "During El Corte, though I was bleeding and nearly died, I hid many of your people," she whispered. El Corte – the cutting – was an easy word to say. Just as on our side of the river many called it a kout kouto, a stabbing, like a single knife wound. "I hid a baby who is now a student at the medical school with Rosalinda and her husband. I hid Sylvie and two families in your old room. I hid Doña Sabine's people before she and her husband escaped to Haiti. I did what I could in my situation." . . . "I hid them because I couldn't hide you, Amabelle. I thought you'd been killed, so everything I did, I did in your name." (299)

Not only does Valencia assure that she took the risk of aiding and abetting the national enemy, but she also provides the reader with a very powerful

image, recounting that with the beginning of the massacre, she started bleeding herself, which coincides with Amabelle's own portrayal of the events (151-153). Her postnatal bleeding gives expression to Valencia's feeling of guilt and her solidarity with the people harmed and killed. This is a very strong metaphor indicating her connection with the persecuted Haitians, which could only come into existence because of Amabelle's involuntary cosmopolitanism that eventually provides Valencia with a measure of reflection on her own privilege.

Despite this heartfelt connection, the racial hierarchy imposed in Dominican society remains clearly discernible even in the most intimate moment of giving birth. Valencia is right away occupied by the ambiguity of skin color in relation to national belonging: "'Amabelle do you think my daughter will always be the color she is now?' Señora Valencia asked. 'My poor love, what if she's mistaken for one of your people?'" (12). Her concern is with social status but it also illustrates both a tacit sense of the injustice and violence that is meted out to Haitians in the Dominican Republic and the fact that skin color provides an insufficient basis for adjudicating national belonging. Social hierarchy is further marked linguistically as Valencia calls Amabelle by her first name, and Amabelle responds with the honorific "señora." This is also the case in her interior world, disclosed only to the reader. She has clearly internalized the Dominican racial hierarchies as she matured, which finds expression in her fear that "a lady of [Señora Valencia's] stature" may have to give birth "like a field hand" (7). This makes it impossible for her to relate back to Valencia in the same immediate and intimate, supposedly non-hierarchical way. The disparity between Valencia's assumption and Amabelle's interior world is reiterated during the climactic episode of ethnic violence in the Dominican frontier when those suspected of being French-speaking Haitians were forced to undergo a shibboleth test:

> At that moment I did believe that had I wanted to, I could have said the word properly, calmly, slowly, the way I often asked "Perejil?" of the old Dominican women and their faithful attending granddaughters at the roadside markets, even though the trill of the *r* and the precision of the *j* was sometimes too burdensome a joining for my tongue. It was the kind of thing that if you were startled in the night, you might forget, but with all my senses calm, I could have said it. But I didn't get my chance. Yves and I were showed down onto our knees. Our jaws were pried open and parsley stuffed into our mouths. My eyes watering, I chewed and swallowed as quickly as I could, but not nearly as fast as they were forcing the handfuls into my mouth. (193)

Amabelle's experience distinguishes her from, and at the same time unites her with, other Haitians in the diaspora who have crossed the border looking to sustain themselves. Amabelle is, indeed, culturally and—most importantly—linguistically better adapted than other Haitian agricultural and domestic workers because she has lived with the Dominican family from the age of eight and has thus spent part of her formative years imbibing the Spanish language as well as cultural codes and mores of Dominican plantation society. The cultural capital she embodies makes her a peculiar character since she is perhaps the only Haitian whose pronunciation of Spanish may allow her to pass as Dominican. Theoretically, she is capable of passing the shibboleth test, which would deconstruct the equation of linguistic and racial identity. In practice, however, she shares in the other Haitians' experience of racial discrimination, economic exploitation, and involuntary cosmopolitanism as she is pushed into the position of a migrant laborer. This contradictory experience precludes her from *feeling* Dominican in any way, so her façade buckles under stress. The fact that she "forgets" she may be able to pass the shibboleth speaks to the severity of both the traumatizing moment of shock arising from the immediate experience of genocidal persecution and her mental subjugation in the Dominican plantation economy. Her location in a liminal space partially inside and outside of Dominican society does not allow her to claim Spanish as a medium with which she would feel comfortable and helps point readers toward inconsistencies in the logic of ethno-nationalism.

Doctor Javier, a fellow itinerant between cultures, tries to build a rapport with Amabelle across this cultural divide by conceiving of her as a fellow member of the healing professions. He repeatedly invites Amabelle into the imagined community of healing cosmopolitans once he learns of her skills as a midwife and her late parents' expertise as "herb healers" (19). Doctor Javier tries to win Amabelle as a supporter for the border clinic, which is presumably the same clinic that later provides shelter and treatment to her and so many others during and after the killing. I find his relationship with Amabelle particularly remarkable because Doctor Javier respects her skills inherited from herb healers, which indicates his respect for indigenous epistemologies and healing knowledge. He thus takes a step beyond Eurocentrism and against its claim to scientific universality. His efforts also show that he respects Amabelle in her role as a medical professional *and* woman by offering her work at the border clinic that would allow her to develop as an individual and unmoor herself from the quasi-feudal exploitation to which she, as a Haitian, is subjected. This

constitutes another step beyond Eurocentrism in the form of bourgeois gender ideology.

Doctor Javier eventually fulfils his felt duty toward Amabelle as a fellow healer and warns her of the impending massacre. He explains the situation in Haitian Kreyól so no Dominicans may overhear them and urges her to leave with his help. This emphasizes the clandestine character of the operation and shows that he actively goes beyond ethno-nationalism's obsession with a single national language to accommodate his allies and moral referents.

> "Will you go?" he asked.
> I wanted to have had more warning. I needed to know precisely what was true and what was not. Everything was so strange. What if the doctor too was part of the death plot?
> "I cannot leave my man and his sister," I said.
> "A large group is crossing with me tonight.," he said. "We have two trucks. I can make a place for them. We'll gather in front of the old chapel. I've already spoken to Father Romain and Father Vargas. They are celebrating an evening Mass for Santa Teresa. It is almost her time. We will make it seem as if everyone is coming to Mass."
>
> I knew nothing about this Santa Teresa. Perhaps it would help me to know more about these saints that Juana adored, that this whole valley seemed to adore. (141)

Doctor Javier delineates the plan that relies on the priests and the mass to give the gathering of Haitians an air of regularity not to raise any suspicion. Fathers Vargas and Romain use their institutional credibility to shield the refugees. They are following a secular approach in the sense that they are willing to help any Haitians, not only their own congregation. Neither does their daring plan rely on any abstract notions of salvation in the afterlife but focuses on creating an impact within this mortal world. The alliance of healing cosmopolitanism into which they enter with Doctor Javier suspends any such distinctions in favor of a broader, humanitarian practice and outlook. It thus dovetails with what Olwig describes as "incessant 'linking up' with others—this negation of strangerhood" (422) that lies at the heart of diasporic Caribbean society.

The choice of a mass for a diversion emphasizes Amabelle's unique location in a cultural borderland that unites Haitian and Dominican cultures but denies her full identification with either of them. She briefly reflects on this circumstance when admitting that Santa Teresa—a Spanish saint revered by both Haitians and Dominicans—is virtually unknown to her. She takes this as an opportunity to learn more about the religious culture that unites the two sides and to symbolically reconnect with her fellow Haitians on a spiritual level. At the same time, her willingness to go

through with the proposed plan speaks of a certain trust she places in Doctor Javier and the Catholic priests as they show themselves bound by a higher moral authority.

Catholic priests Fathers Vargas and Romain share an outlook on moral authority that is transnational by default. Not only will they, as religious servants, ultimately feel accountable to the moral authority of God in the afterlife rather than the Dominican head of state. Their allegiance in this mortal world, too, lies with another head of state, i.e., the Pope ruling over the Vatican and Catholics worldwide. Furthermore, as a proselytizing religion, Christianity's transnationalist stance in terms of who may be accepted as Christian contradicts the ethnic exclusivity promoted by Trujillo. There is no question about the Catholic church's blatantly racist history and its complicity in the European colonial project. However, the role it plays in *The Farming of Bones* speaks to its inherent healing potential and makes a point about the competing frameworks of identity and the resulting overlapping allegiances at work in the novel. The sovereignty of the Dominican state is exposed as limited in the degree to which its constituents are prepared to follow state doctrine—i.e., whether or not they translate Trujillo's mono-ethnic fantasy into reality. The cosmopolitan characters feel compelled to counteract the genocide and heal the wounds it inflicts as they are bound by faith in larger, transnational sources of moral authority.

Such healing cosmopolitanism politicizes the act of bearing witness. As Harford Vargas argues, it "creates a transnational culture of mutual responsibility and reciprocity for oral communication among the Haitians" (1168). More than that, however, the novel deploys this act as a literary strategy. Amabelle and Danticat are both conduits who extend this relationship of bearing witness to the readers of the novel. Explicitly marking this as a literary strategy alongside the characters' identities as healers highlights a link to cosmopolitan and human rights organizations that provide medical support and whose self-understanding is based in bearing witness and advocacy work. Médecins Sans Frontières / Doctors Without Borders, an association of medical professionals and journalists, is one such organization and expresses their core responsibility as *témoignage*. Volker Westerbarkey, former chairperson of Doctors Without Borders Germany, frames it thus,

> Alongside medical aid, we also work to ensure that people in need are not forgotten. Since MSF was founded in 1971, "témoignage" has been an important principle of the organisation. This French noun stems from the verb "témoigner," which means to "bear witness." In practice this means that we see ourselves as witnesses

> in the war zone where we offer aid, and as a voice for people in need. Again and again we decide to publicly denounce acts of violence against individuals or ethnic groups, and the abuse and violation of human rights. The aim is always to protect life and to improve the situation of the victims. MSF's public criticism and clear voice sometimes mean that we risk being disallowed from working in a state, and this is why we use this form of témoignage very carefully. ("Médecins Sans Frontières: Humanity – Also (Especially) in Warzones" 62-63)

Following Westerbarkey's definition, the characters in the fictionalized world of the novel perform *témoignage* for each other as an expression of a desire for mutual healing. Danticat's narrative, too, performs *témoignage* for those who have remained subaltern in history. The novel creates and puts into circulation memory of stories that may have been told at the time but were either forgotten or never heard outside of their narrator's own immediate context. Danticat thus deploys *témoignage* as a literary strategy that has political clout as it works toward non-corporeal, decolonial healing that dissolves the power structures of coloniality. It follows an imperative to privilege human needs, such as conviviality and justice, over arbitrary racial hierarchies and political forms that support them.

Danticat does not use the word *témoignage* but underscores that it is performed by members of the church during and after the massacre. Her narrative repeatedly points to the important roles that clergy fill wherever corresponding state structures prove inadequate. Notably, this is the case in the border clinic where Amabelle's escape comes to an end after having crossed the border river. Chapter 30 opens in the following way:

> We were found the next morning, at dawn, by a priest and a young doctor who were walking the savannas, looking for survivors. Yves had carried Odette's body some distance from the riverbank in the dark, far enough that we could no longer see the river and the bridge.
> The priest called for help, and suddenly we were surrounded by men and women in different stages of hurt and healing, asking where we were from, had we seen this and that person from this or that camp or this and that mill. (204)

Traumatized by the experiences of the preceding days, Amabelle relies on the medical care provided by nuns at the border clinic. She has literally lost her voice and remains in a passive, observing mode throughout the chapter. This constitutes a narratological change that shifts Amabelle's position from that of an autodiegetic narrator, toward that of a heterodiegetic narrator meaning that in this chapter she relies on observation rather than directly participating in the action. The change to a reporting mode aligns with the idea of *témoignage* and emphasizes the

importance of the bilateral act of bearing witness in the healing process that takes place at the border clinic and at later stages in the narrative.

Amabelle's observations at the border clinic are valuable because they point to two aspects that are essential to recognizing healing cosmopolitanism as a form of critical cosmopolitanism. Firstly, the cosmopolitan practice at the border clinic is centered on human need rather than national allegiance. With medical professionals and clergy working together to save the lives of fellow humans regardless of their nationality or ethnicity, the clinic functions as an extension of the moral alliance into which Doctor Javier, Father Vargas, and Father Romain have entered in Alegría. Secondly, Amabelle's account speaks to the central importance of being able to tell one's own story as a means of dealing with trauma. I read this as a self-reflexive meta-comment on Danticat's own position as an author who enables a dialogue with colonial modernity and makes it possible for Amabelle to give testimony of the events by uniting fact and fiction. Amabelle recalls,

> I couldn't remember how long I had been asleep. But when I woke up this time, the nuns came through the room and handed out plates of corn mush with black bean sauce and a slice of avocado. I refused by shaking my head, but they left the plate near me anyway.
>
> As they ate, people gathered in a group to talk. Taking turns, they exchanged tales quickly, the haste in their voices sometimes blurring the words, for greater than their desire to be heard was the hunger to tell. One could hear it in the fervor of the declarations, the obscenities shouted when something could not be remembered fast enough, when a stutter allowed another speaker to race into his own account without the stutterer having completed his. (208-209)

The characters recounting their stories bear witness to each other. So does Amabelle, who remains confined to her bed and voiceless for six days in the exchange with Danticat and the reader, which marks a shift in narrative focus with Amabelle now listening to and re-telling other people's stories rather than her own (cf. Harford Vargas 1169). Other characters, too, enter these conversations, such as a Haitian justice of the peace who records the survivors' statements and a bishop accompanied by priests who help people reunite with their friends and families amid the chaos (209). This topos of clergy and state servants doing healing work by listening keeps coming up in Amabelle's search for Sebastien and Doctor Javier. The immense desire to be listened to later on articulates as a riot when a justice of the peace announces that the blood money Trujillo has agreed to pay to keep the peace between the two states has run out and no further testimony would be taken (236). The clergy, too, are exhausted and

overburdened by narratives of trauma. After a time, they stop listening to stories of the massacre so the affected must rely on each other because no alternative structures are put in place (254; cf. Harford Vargas 1172).

This readjustment to a relational mode of storytelling brings to the fore the parallels between three levels of *témoignage*. On the first level, Amabelle and other healers bear witness to the other characters' stories within the narrative. On the second level, Danticat frames these relations by constructing a fictionalized narrative, which allows her to reach out into two directions at once: she practices *témoignage* for Amabelle and simultaneously bears witness to her own entanglement with history as a Haitian American who writes in order to come to terms with her own history and her family's past (cf. 311-312). On the third level, the reading experience engendered by *The Farming of Bones* creates a relationship of *témoignage* between the reader and Amabelle as well as the reader and the author Danticat. Inviting readers into this cosmopolitan imaginary may prove an equally affective and effective educational experience, making them aware of colonial ways of thinking and arbitrary borders that continue to limit human solidarity. Healing cosmopolitanism thus has the power to compel readers into action—on both sides of Hispaniola as well as in the spaces that continue to aid and abet coloniality under the guise of "globalization" or "development"—to understand more about the figurative and material borders that connect their histories yet keep humans apart.

The healing cosmopolitanism in *The Farming of Bones* performs border thinking that interrogates Eurocentric conceptions, which are often abstract and out of touch with postcolonial realities. It is based in concrete practice uniting people who contribute to different kinds of healing and mount resistance to a colonial, Eurocentric notion of a nation that imperils their and their fellow humans' lives. This decolonial vision of healing cosmopolitanism works against racism and patriarchy by accommodating indigenous epistemologies and dismissing bourgeois norms of domesticity. This is evidenced by Doctor Javier, who instantaneously recognizes Amabelle—the daughter of herb healers and a midwife in her own right—as a fellow medical professional and tries to convince her to start working with him, presumably at the same border clinic that saves her life and the lives of so many others in the wake of the genocide.

Danticat frames this political vision of healing cosmopolitanism in an act of writing back that critiques the unquestioned import of the European idea of the ethno-nation-state and the catastrophic repercussions its application has brought about for the people inhabiting the island of Hispaniola. In its function as a *testimonio,* the novel claims equal status as

interlocutor and the right to a critical dialogical relationship with the political modernity that articulates as the nation-state. It puts the "post" in postcolonial by formulating an alternative vision of postcolonial worlding as transnational solidarity and conviviality. Danticat accomplishes this goal without external narrativization—the characters performing healing work and their actions speak for themselves, indicating a vision that reaches past the colonial obsession with making difference meaningful as "race." She politicizes her literary creation, on the one hand, through her characters' humanitarian, cosmopolitan stance geared toward mutual healing from persisting coloniality, and thus participates in a larger critical debate about how true decolonization within the postcolonies could look like. On the other hand, she politicizes the reading experience in a human rights context by speaking to the reader as a potential ally in a relationship of *témoignage* that is carefully crafted from a combination of genres, notably the historical novel and the *testimonio*. As such, *The Farming of Bones* is a successful critical cosmopolitan endeavor that interrogates Eurocentric conceptions of the nation-state and rearticulates them in a truly *post*colonial mode that negotiates cosmopolitanism as healing from persisting coloniality.

Works Cited

Beverley, John. *Testimonio: On the Politics of Truth*. University of Minnesota Press, 2004.

Danticat, Edwidge. *The Farming of Bones*. Abacus, 2013 [1999].

Harford Vargas, Jennifer. "Novel Testimony: Alternative Archives in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*." *Callaloo*, vol. 37, no. 5, 2014, pp. 1162-1180.

Mignolo, Walter D. *The Darker Side of Western Modernity. Global Futures, Decolonial Options*. Duke UP, 2011.

---. "The Many Faces of Cosmo-polis: Border Thinking and Critical Cosmopolitanism." *Public Culture*, vol. 12, no. 3, Fall 2000, pp. 721-748.

---. *Local Histories/Global Designs: Coloniality, Subaltern Knowledges, and Border Thinking*. Princeton UP, 2000.

Olwig, Karen Fog. "Cosmopolitan Traditions: Caribbean Perspectives." *Social Anthropology*, vol. 18, no. 4, November 2010, pp. 417-424.

Westerbarkey, Volker. “Médecins sans Frontières: Humanity – Also (Especially) in Warzones.” *Global Citizenship. Perspectives of a World Community*, edited by Roland Bernecker and Ronald Grätz. Steidl, 2018, pp. 60-64.