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Corinne Bigot

When does a place of residence become “home”? This question, raised by critic Avtar **Brah** (1996, 1) about her own migrant life and diasporic self, resonates throughout diasporic literature, maybe more poignantly for those women whose role consists of turning a place of residence in the host country into a home, but who are also expected to maintain a connection to the first home country and its traditions. In this chapter, I will examine the depiction of diasporic women’s lives in contemporary short fiction by three women writers who are interested in tracing women’s efforts to redefine their identities and their lives in the new countries and their emotional bonds to their homeland—Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, Edwidge Danticat and Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni. They have been engaged in gendering the experience of diaspora, using their fiction to depict complex and problematic relationships and bonds to the new country and the imaginary homeland. The writers themselves are diasporic women. Danticat left Haiti when she was twelve in order to join her parents in a heavily Haitian-American neighbourhood in Brooklyn in 1981, and she has lived in New York and Miami thereafter. Divakaruni was born in East India and moved to the US in 1976, after graduating from the University. She has lived in Ohio, California and Texas. Adichie, who was born in Southeastern Nigeria, went to the United

States (Philadelphia) at the age of nineteen and has been moving between America and Nigeria ever since. Most of their protagonists are women who were born in Haiti, Nigeria or India and came to the US in the 1980s–2000s, illustrating what **Brah (1996, 179)** has referred to as the feminisation of diaspora, which has characterised the end of the twentieth century.

As their works are home-centric and tend to focus on affective relations and family relationships, it would be easy to dismiss these stories as “domestic” fiction. Yet even the so-called “domestic fiction” offers the unique advantage of condensing critical issues such as conflict of powers, the reconfiguration of gender relationships and, in diasporic literature, the “contested” identity (**Brah 1996**) that characterises the diaspora within small spaces—notably a woman’s house and kitchen. In keeping with this, home and home food are prevalent motifs in contemporary diasporic fiction. The trope of home enables the writers to convey “the fragility of the articulation between the two halves of a life” (**Král 2009, 40**), while the conflict between American and home-cooked foods may reflect an immigrant family’s progress and/or their emotional and vital connection to a home country that often turns into an “imaginary homeland”, as **Rushdie (1992)** famously put it. For home is also a *discourse*, a discourse of locality: a place with which we remain intimate even in moments of intense alienation from it, and thus a spiritual, imagined location.

Diasporic fiction, as I read it, is centrally concerned with a profound feeling of in-betweenness and a need to interrogate the tension between belonging and longing. In this chapter, I will rely on Brah’s (**1996, 16**) idea that the concept of diaspora “offers a critique of fixed origins while taking account of a homing desire”. Her concept of “diaspora space” is also relevant to my chapter, defined by her (*Ibid.*, 208) as “the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location

as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural and psychic processes”, and the site “where multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed” (Ibid.). Although Danticat, Divakaruni and Adichie have also published novels, their short story collections have been chosen for the scope of this chapter, interpreting them as kaleidoscopes—offering kaleidoscopic visions and versions of women’s diasporic experience. The writers make full use of an art form that should be seen as a “total object, complete with missing parts” (Hunter 2007, 172), which enables them to provide the reader with “snapshots” of their heroines’ lives in order to “catch” these lives, emphasising “discontinuity rather than continuity”. Similarly, they use small and mundane details such as labels on jars of food, stains on a glass, the smell of a dish, the touch of a scarf or the feel of snow on one’s skin to bring a revelation about their characters’ complex lives and sense of identity.

Their stories depict diasporic women who try to make sense of home and self in the diasporic space, embracing loss, painful memories and change. In this chapter, I consider how these writers refuse to play into lyrical celebrations of homelessness and cosmopolitanism while considering the impact of emotional bonds (to the home countries and to their mothers) that can stifle women as much as sustain them. Particularly, I will focus on the motifs of home and home food in their short fiction, which convey a “homing desire” that, according to Brah (1996, 16; 192), is distinct from any uncomplicated longing for the lost homeland. These writers’ female characters never consider a return home as the one act that would solve all their problems and, above all, recompense for the loss of a fixed identity. Rather, these writers depict them as people whose feet are “planted in both worlds” (Danticat 2011, 51).¹ In these stories, the connection to the homeland is maintained, it cannot be severed, but the characters are shown to experience its complexity, including pain, especially when they have left violence behind.

I will also show that Danticat's, Divakaruni's and Adichie's stories, through domestic slippages, show that "the private space of the home is never too disconnected from the history of slavery, servitude, violence and exile" (Nair 2013, 49), but also stage resistance and resilience.

Foregrounding the bodies of humble kitchen poets or pottery makers, these writers propose a "non-appropriative relationship" to the "motherland," as Caroline Rooney (1991, 100) defines it, together with a reappropriation of devalued knowledge and identity.

The Homing of Diaspora, the Diasporising of Home

Brah (1996, 190) posits that the concept of diaspora embodies a subtext of home. Similarly, Françoise Král (2009, 40) notes the prevalence of the trope of home in diasporic literature: "home becomes the reflection of the immigrant's life abroad". What is more, home is a useful trope since it "marks the inscription of the diasporic self into the new land, but... also allows him to shelter his other half and keep the country alive again" (Ibid., 40). The "new home" can be the evidence of success, bearing witness to a successful journey to the promised land or, on the contrary, the new home can be seen as a place of confinement where the old self becomes locked up. Further, for the new immigrant, it is also the place where she experiences homesickness and dislocation, where identities become "contested". In Danticat's, Adichie's and Divakaruni's stories, the new home in America epitomises the "diaspora space" as defined by Brah (1996, 208), since cultures meet and clash. Therefore, their stories "interrogate and undermine any simple or uncomplicated sense of origins, traditions and linear movement" (Chambers 1994, 16) and so often criticise discourses that convey these simplistic visions.

Through some of their male characters, the stories expose what Adichie (2009b) has called elsewhere "the danger of the single story", a simplistic vision of a people or a country as "only one thing". For instance, Adichie's "The Arrangers of Marriage" and Divakaruni's "Silver

Pavement, Golden Roofs” feature a male character who clings to a discourse that either consoles him as he experiences rejection (therefore rejecting all things American and praising his homeland) or, on the contrary, encourages him to reject his homeland in his effort to become American-American. Both stories debunk these binary visions, the separation between “them” and “us” by staging the arrival of a young woman in the (disappointing) Promised Land. Thus, the narrator of Adichie’s “The Arrangers of Marriage” is a young Nigerian woman who has only met her husband twice since their arranged marriage. The “new husband”, as she refers to him throughout the story, is a doctor who has lived in America for some time. The dingy flat the young woman discovers when she arrives, her “new home”, bears no resemblance to the pictures she imagined when he spoke of his “house” (2009a, 197). On the surface, the story illustrates “the disjunction between the representations of immigration internalized by immigrants which haunts them when they set foot in the promised land and the less glamorous and more brutal experience of immigration”, a salient feature of diasporic works (Kral 2009, 85). The young woman literally notices the cracks in the pictures—frayed carpeting (Adichie 2009a, 167), rust clinging to the sides of the sink (171) and a broken sidewalk (173). More importantly, the story mocks the husband’s obsession with becoming “mainstream” American and exposes what can only be called a tyranny of thought—his “single story” of Nigeria and America. From the moment she arrives, the narrator gets reprimanded by her “new husband” for speaking Igbo and is corrected when she uses British English words. The husband controls what she should say telling her she should say “cookies”, not “biscuits” (174), what she should want, as he changes one brand of biscuits for another (174), and what she must eat and like, as when he explains, “We’ll get pizza... it’s the one thing *you have to* like in America” (176, my emphasis). The reference to pizza and biscuits is part of the central trope of food in the story, that first serves to

reveal the young woman's sense of nostalgia and alienation, which for instance appears when she feels she cannot swallow the American pancakes he serves her (171), but is also used to criticise the man's obsession with becoming mainstream American.

In diasporic fiction, food is a prevalent trope, and cooking food from home versus adapting to American food becomes a recurring trope, symbolising the immigrant's progress in adapting to life the new country²—or their failure to do so. Diasporic fiction is rife with second-generation immigrants who refuse to eat “home” food because their parents' “home” is no longer theirs, and “home” food becomes a symbol of their difference.³ For instance, in “Mrs. Dutta Writes a Letter” by Divakaruni (2002, 30), the fact that the characters (an upper middle-class Bengali family) cannot bear the smell of the Indian food the man's mother cooks when she comes to live with them shows that they have adapted to the new country and adopted an American way of life. What is more, in Danticat's “Caroline's Wedding” (1996a, 215), the Haitian mother bemoans the fact that her daughters did not like her deep-fried pig skin or the pumpkin soup she prepared for the celebration of Haitian Independence Day—a day which the girls claim is not theirs. For her part, Adichie powerfully revisits the trope of home food versus foreign food in “The Arrangers of Marriage”, so as to expose the immigrant's loss of identity as well as the male character's “fixed discourse”, which forces him to reject everything Nigerian as inferior and praise all things American. The female narrator, who remembers her aunt's advice that a successful marriage is based on home-cooked meals, prepares her new husband a dish from home, namely coconut rice. The husband eats it up (2009a, 178), but the next day he brings his wife “a *Good Housekeeping All American Cookbook*” (179)—a title that indicates there is no room for another culture in the new home. The man clearly believes that eating such American food as pizza (here Adichie's irony is obvious, since before becoming mainstream American

food, pizza was despised as immigrants' food when it was only eaten by the Italian immigrant community) will help him become what he calls "mainstream American", but in doing so he loses his identity and deprives his wife of hers. Adichie (Ibid., 179) clearly criticises a man who dismisses the home food he loves as foreign food to be ashamed of: "I do not want us to be known as the people who fill the building with foreign food". He has also changed his name and does not want to speak Igbo anymore.

In this case, I see the American kitchen where a young Nigerian woman cooks American chicken for her new husband who tries to become "American-American" as a diaspora space where, in Brah's (1996, 208) words, "multiple subject positions are juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed". Adichie makes it obvious by having her two characters adopt two different positions. While the husband obviously believes that by changing his name (and hers) and by eating American food he can become "American-American", the young woman feels that the ties to her home country cannot simply be cut off and believes that she can embrace life in America without changing everything about her. She wishes to retain her name and not to stop speaking Igbo altogether.

With "Silver Pavement, Golden Roofs", Divakaruni also criticises a heteropatriarchal discourse, although the situation is reversed as "Uncle", a Bengali Indian-American who has long lived in America, turns his flat into a beleaguered Indian home. The narrator is also a young woman who has just arrived in America, as she is to live with her aunt and uncle while attending college there. She discovers that their flat does not resemble a typical American home at all (Divakaruni 1996, 40). More significantly, their first dinner, which her aunt spends all afternoon cooking, makes her feel as if she had never left Calcutta at all (42). To justify his choices, "Uncle" summarises his vision of life in America: "The American hate us. They're always putting us

down because we're dark-skinned foreigners" (43). According to these words, "Uncle" has developed a binary vision of life, based on a division between "them" and "us", and an artificial construction of identity which, as Hall (1990, 227) shows, is doomed to fail if one believes in "a fixed origin to which [he] can make some final and absolute return" like Uncle does, recreating this idea at home. By contrast, the young woman, despite encountering thugs when venturing out of the flat with her aunt, seems to be ready to embrace America, including its thugs and its harsh climate. When the snow starts falling, she goes out on the balcony, even though the cold "carves a freezing path all the way into [her] chest" (55). Feeling the sting of snow on her hands, she marvels at the beauty of it all, "drawing [her] breath in at the silver marvel of it" (55). Although the cold hurts her body, the narrator uses snow to change the gritty landscape into a silvery world, as she sees that snow has turned "the dirty cement pavement" (55) into silver. However, the ending does not suggest that the immigrant can solve her difficulties simply by adopting a positive vision of the host country: her experience of feeling the "beauty and the pain" as "part of each other" (56) when she looks at her snow-covered hands (56) reveals that she is aware that her new life will also be harsh. Snow is not merely used as an element that symbolises America's harsh climate and the Indian immigrant's sense of alienation. The girl's experience is both unique and mirrored and repeated by the experience endured by others, which the snowflakes may suggest as snowflakes are fractal: flakes that come in a variety of sizes and shapes and create complex and unique shapes are the result of the aggregation of microscopic crystals that each looks like the flake itself.

(Dis)Connections

While "Silver Pavements, Golden Roofs" focuses on the girl's vision of what America can be like, rather than her relation to India—although the very title can be read as an attempt to bring

both worlds together—Danticat’s, Adichie’s and Divakaruni’s stories reveal a complex interplay between connection, dislocation, alienation and loss by drawing attention to the complex emotional connection, whether a noose or a lifeline, that their female protagonists have with their former homes and families. Stories such as Adichie’s “The Thing Around Your Neck” (2009a) and Danticat’s “The Water Child” (2005) foreground the woman’s sense of being cut off from home since family hopes and expectations have turned her everyday life and struggles in America into unspeakable secrets. Danticat’s heroine cannot answer her parents’ letters and keeps silent about her abortion when she finally phones them (2005, 54). Similarly, Adichie’s heroine has never provided her family with her address in America since she cannot tell them about her struggling life there, all the more so as she left her Nigerian-American relatives after her aunt’s husband tried to molest her. The young woman is both cut off from home *and* stifled by her family’s expectations. The connection to home is constructed via the image of an abstract noose that leaves no doubt as to the danger of these expectations: “at night something would wrap itself around your neck”/ “the thing that wrapped itself around your neck” (119; 125). Although the story is narrated from the young woman’s point of view, “The Thing Around Your Neck” is told in the second person. The narrative choice enables her to convey the complexity of her protagonists’ lives in the new country. The narrator recounts her own experience as if she were speaking of another person’s, as if to speak about oneself were inevitably to speak about and to another. It poignantly suggests a sense of estrangement from herself, and Adichie’s narrator shows this as a survival strategy, due to her intense feeling of alienation: “nobody knew where you were, because you told no one” (2009a, 119). The choice also conveys the violence of racialised perceptions as the heroine notes that everyone she meets fails to see who she is, fixing her with an identity not her own: “many people at the restaurant asked when you had come from

Jamaica, because they thought that every black person with a foreign accent was Jamaican” (119). Thus, for a time the narrator does not reveal her name, until a customer at the restaurant asks her what her name is (120). By contrast, she only refers to this man who becomes her lover as “he”, depriving him of a name, as if he could only be defined by his gender. The story depicts their relationship as both liberating, since she feels that the thing around her neck “starts to loosen” (125), and reductive, since the man has never seen her for anything other than an exotic woman—the Other, a look which, as Stuart Hall (1990, 233) puts it, “fixes [one], not only in its violence, hostility and aggression but in the ambivalence of its desire”. For the man is shown to have a single story of Africa (and India and China), and he chooses Akunna because of who she is. She is the embodiment of third-world Africa, and yet another embodiment of the third world. Just as he has travelled to India, to see “real Indians”, he wants to go to Lagos to “see how real people live, *like in the shantytowns*” (Adichie 2009a, 120, my emphasis). The scene in the Chinese restaurant where he boasts of his recent visit to Shanghai and his request that Akunna cook real Nigerian food for him indicate that his taste for exotic food is mirrored by his desire for the exotic Other. However, in a telling scene, “real Africa” gets its revenge as the man literally cannot stomach the food she has cooked for him: “after he ate *garri* and *onugbu* soup, he threw up in your sink” (123). In the story, Adichie uses food to comment on interracial relationships and relationships of power between colonisers and the colonised (which is further shown by the fact that the man is pleased when the Ghanaian store owner believes him to be a white South African), but also to reveal that the young woman will eventually have the upper hand as she gradually understands what he needs from her.

In “The Word Love”, Divakaruni looks at a young woman’s stifling bond to her home country and her conflicting allegiances to suggest that although they invoke the trauma of separation and

dislocation, diasporic spaces are also potentially the sites of new beginnings. At first, by contrast to Adichie's story, it is suggested that fitting in the new country while maintaining the connection with India is possible. When the young woman moves in with her white American boyfriend, the first thing she brings into his flat is the batik hanging her mother gave her (Divakaruni 1996, 61), a highly symbolic gesture asserting her connection to her mother, her Indian heritage and her desire to bring the two homes together. Yet the batik *hanging* may also suggest danger. When her mother eventually learns that her daughter lives with a white man, she severs the connection and disowns her. The girl's boyfriend proves incapable of understanding her pain, as his vision of life has no room for complex loyalties to a relationship that proves stifling. At the end of the story, when she leaves her lover, she leaves the batik behind: "you will not need it in our new life, the one you're going to live for yourself" (71). The final paragraph suggests the possibility of a new life and a new beginning, although this means embracing change and loss: "[a]nd a word comes to you out of the opening sky. The word *love*. You see that you had never understood it before.... like rain it washes away inessentials, leaving you hollow, clean, ready to begin" (71). Divakaruni's narrator also uses the pronoun "you" as a survival strategy, introducing distance, as if she were speaking about and to another self. Yet she also suggests the possibility of having multiple selves, as she is about to start her new life. Eventually, this may also be a means to suggest that hers is an exemplar of the diasporic experience, indicating that life in the new country can never be summarised as success or failure. Both Adichie's and Divakaruni's stories explore complex and painful emotions at the core of the diasporic experience for women, due to their complicated emotional connection to the first home country. They never deliver simplistic messages about failure or success, but try to catch complex emotions and senses of identity.

The Song of the Masala

In keeping with this, Divakaruni's, Adichie's and Danticat's stories never envision the new country and the former home as separate or opposed. Rather, most female protagonists are aware of the ambiguity embedded in the words "home" or "my country", and the country they inhabit is, as Edwidge Danticat puts it elsewhere (2011, 49), "one of uncertainty".⁴ These women never simply criticise or praise one home; rather, they try to make sense of what "home" means and of their multiple identities, which have to be constantly redefined. For home is also one's family, including those in India, Nigeria and Haiti, and home also means tradition passed on by women. Thus, in the coda to *Krik? Krak!*, Danticat's narrator (1996a, 221) evokes her anger at Haiti's culture silencing women that has been passed on by the women she calls the "kitchen poets", one that prevents her from writing and condemns her to "carve onion sculptures and potato statues". As mentioned before, the kitchen is the site of everyday lived experience, a place where "feelings of rootedness" (Brah 1996, 4) grow out of ordinary daily practices, and it features prominently in these stories. In Divakaruni's stories, the kitchen is believed to be the place where the women can feel in control. Yet, family meals are necessarily "a forum for a fierce power struggle" (Certeau (de) et al. 1998, 120), and this may be observed in Adichie's "The Arrangers of Marriage", Divakaruni's "Meeting Mrinal" and "Mrs. Dutta writes a letter",⁵ as the American kitchen turns into a battlefield between genders and generations. Further, the kitchen can also be the place where women stage their resistance, as may be read when Adichie's heroine speaks Igbo to herself while preparing American dishes and teaches the African American neighbour she has befriended to say "I'm hungry" in Igbo (Adichie 2009a, 182). However, the kitchen can also be the place where women feel trapped and the site where their "perfect lives" explode. Analysing the trope of cooking in Indo-Caribbean fiction by women, Supriya Nair (2013, 61)

notes that “the song of the masala”⁶ is certainly an ambivalent one, as cooking appears as both a symbol of entrapment and a symbol of creativity, if not freedom. It is equally ambivalent in Divakaruni’s fiction, in which cooking and serving home-cooked food is a prevalent motif. For instance, in “Affair” (1996) cooking becomes synonymous with freedom, yet with a twist. The kitchen is first presented as the only space where the narrator, who describes herself as neither elegant nor witty, feels in control since her sophisticated and witty husband often humiliates her. In the central episode, she tries to take her revenge on him by making his chicken curry unbearably hot and leaving the rest of the dinner uncooked (1996, 234). Her husband, however, defeats her by simply picking up the phone and ordering pizza, leaving the kitchen a mess for her to clean up. Yet it is the protagonist’s talent at cooking that will offer her a way out, as the editor of the magazine that publishes her recipes asks her to write an Indian cookbook. Unpaid, unappreciated domestic labour thus turns into a job that will provide her with financial independence. The end suggests that this may also help her leave her loveless marriage, as she realises that she is talented enough to get a job as a chef.

However, Divakaruni’s use of the trope of home food also enables her to debunk the vision of the perfect Indian wife and mother. Her protagonists are described as “well-bred Indian girl[s]” (1996, 172), and as the last story in her 1996 collection “Meeting Mrinal” indicates, they can spend a lot of time in the kitchen grinding spices and preparing perfect meals (1996, 274), in the belief that marital bliss depends on this.⁷ However, life in America teaches them otherwise. The narrator has tried very hard to “be the perfect wife and mother, like the heroines of mythology [she] grew up on” (298) since she came to America. Yet when her husband falls in love with his American secretary, she realises that however “perfect” she tries to be, however perfect her home-cooked meals are, her husband will leave her. The fact that the story opens with the

narrator taking out a pepperoni pizza out of the freezer (273) should be read as a sign of her rebellion against the expectations that were forced upon her, rather than as a symbol of her adaptation to American life, since she decides that she has “wasted” too much of her life grinding spices and should take classes at the local college instead (274). In this story, Divakaruni clearly criticises the wide range of expectations that make women feel “like a complete failure” (298), and through her narrator Divakaruni pays tribute to those many struggling women’s imperfect lives as “Meeting Mrinal” ends with the mother and son drinking to their “precious, imperfect lives” (300). As the comma in the final sentence suggests, these lives are precious because they are imperfect. Although the narrator and her son share the *pista* milk she has prepared, the ending does not suggest home cooking ensures happiness and perfect lives. Nor is it seen as something to be despised or rejected. Eventually, the raised glasses acknowledge the fact that both mother and son no longer feel trapped.

The Other Side of Dailiness

As we have seen, Divakaruni and Adichie use the trope of food to expose unequal power relations. The trope of food also enables all three writers to show that “the private space of the home is never too disconnected from the history of slavery, servitude, violence and exile” (Nair 2013, 49). Adichie’s “The Arrangers of Marriage” mocks the male protagonist who eats up the coconut rice his wife has prepared for him but forbids her to cook what he calls “foreign” food and provides her with an all-American cook book, yet like all references to food in the story, the battle between American and African food is used to evoke larger issues. The husband’s ban should be read in connection with his other gestures, which are clearly reminiscent of what colonisers did in Africa: he asks her to stop speaking Igbo and changes her Nigerian name for the American one which he writes on an official form (2009a, 173). In Danticat’s “Seven”, Haiti’s

past suddenly emerges when a customs officer throws away the food the woman brought from Haiti: “the customs man unwrapped all her gifts—the mangoes, sugarcane, avocados, the grapefruit-peel preserves, the peanut, cashew and coconut confections, the coffee beans, which he threw into a bin” (2005, 40). While the list evokes the riches of Haiti, with the word “preserves” speaking of a wish to preserve home, the mention of sugarcane and coffee beans recalls the country’s history and, more specifically, slavery.⁸ Thus Divakaruni, Adichie and Danticat all reveal what the Canadian short story writer Alice Munro (1991, 19) calls “the other side of dailiness”, where domestic slippages occurs, as familiar objects take on new, frightening meaning. In their fiction, this becomes a means to conjure up the other country. The fact that the collections all alternate stories set in America and violence-ridden Nigeria, India or Haiti helps readers make the connections between the two homes. For instance, the husband’s gestures in “The Arrangers of Marriage” parallel the missionaries’ gestures in “The Headstrong Historian”. Domestic slippages may shatter the peace of the new home by evoking the violence an immigrant has left behind. Food is also affect and, thus, memories of smells and food can be unbearable when attached to violence. In “The Blooming Season for Cacti” (Divakaruni 2002, 171), the smell of a typical Indian dish suddenly forces the narrator to remember her mother, and the riots⁹ during which she disappeared: “the air is cumin and coriander, a roasted brown smell. They must be frying samosas inside. My mother used to make the best samosas, fat and crisp”. The smell also brings other smells with it—the air of the water tank in which the girl hid during the riots in Mumbai (172), and the smell of the oranges she ate while the riots raged under her on the streets and heard the screams of the women who were being raped (183)—and which resurface in the narrator’s memory. In Adichie’s “The American Embassy” (2009a, 131), a mother whose child was killed by soldiers knows she will never eat pepper soup again because

the murderers smelled of pepper soup. Or in Danticat's "Caroline's Wedding", food is presented as a component of Haitian culture, which Caroline's mother preserves. She keeps cooking bone soup, a traditional Haitian dish, which she believes can cure anything, from colds to Caroline's infatuation with an American boy. This seems rather funny, until we relate the *bone* soup to Caroline's body: her mother was pregnant when she was arrested in an immigration raid and then jailed, and she believes this is why Caroline was born without an arm (Danticat 1996a, 159).

Thus, the bone soup is a reminder that violence is a determining factor of migration.

Horror often resurfaces in Danticat's stories, which offer several instances of domestic slippages.

In "The Bridal Seamstress", an old Haitian seamstress is interviewed in her house in Queens by an intern, who is a second-generation Haitian-American. During the interview, looking at her gold thimble, the seamstress suddenly starts telling the story of the "dew breakers", the Haitian policemen who invaded people's homes at dawn to take them away. She explains that one of them lives in a house on her street, which means that her only choice is to "move, again"

(Danticat 2005, 131). The comma before "again" indicates that Beatrice is doomed to constant flight, since she will always be haunted by her ghosts. However, the meeting proves crucial for the young woman who understands that such people as the old seamstress are the people she wants to write about (138). Their stories deserve to be told; their stories, she understands, are also hers. The ending suggests that the young intern feels the compulsion to tell, an urge that marks the second generation, and that she might become haunted by "postmemory", a received memory that is "distinct from the recall of contemporary witnesses and participants" (Hirsch 2008, 106), but which haunts the second generation or those who receive it, as theirs:

Growing up poor but sheltered in Sommerville, Massachusetts, Aline had never imagined that people like Beatrice existed, men and women whose tremendous agonies filled every

blank space in their lives. Maybe there were hundreds, even thousands, of people like this chasing fragments of themselves. Maybe Aline was one of them.

(Danticat 2005, 137–38)

At the beginning of the story, Aline is described as very different from the protagonists of Danticat's earlier story, "Caroline's Weddings" (1996a, 177), whose parents had never sheltered them but have told them many stories about the violence that forced them to flee from Haiti; however, the very last words of "The Old Seamstress" indicate that Aline's "sheltered" life changes after the encounter with the old seamstress. The words "one of them" may mean that she now sees herself as part of a community that is haunted by its past.

Re-Membering and Storytelling

Although horror can resurface and invade the new country, these women's ability to survive is also foregrounded in the stories. In Danticat's "The Funeral Singer" (2005) the peace of the Manhattan Haitian restaurant the three women go to after their classes is shattered when stories about Haiti and its violence are shared. The word "home" takes on yet other meanings—the people they left behind, but also their destroyed homes and the relatives who were killed (Danticat 2005, 170; 172). But the restaurant is also the place where the women gather plantains, goat, pigeon peas and rice to cook "an entire meal *together*" (Ibid., 172, italics mine). Therefore, doing cooking together as well as sharing stories enable the women to celebrate those who died. In fact, the story ends with the three survivors—an orphan, a widow and a rape victim—raising their glasses "to the terrible days behind [them] and the uncertain ones ahead" (181).

As the adjective "uncertain" suggests in the previous episode, this writing resists resolution or closure. If we take into account Adrian Hunter's (2007, 138) theory that the short story—a genre

that is disproportionately represented in the colonial and postcolonial cultures—can be defined as “minor literature”, and a genre that “stage[s] a creative resistance to the entailments of ‘power and law’” (Ibid., 140), the choice of this genre to depict these women’s diasporic experience becomes relevant. Their stories endlessly criticize hegemonic racial and gender discourses and refuse to provide simplistic answers to these women’s dislocated lives. Like the individual stories, the complete collections read as “a total object, complete with missing parts” (Beckett 1983, 38, quoted by Hunter 2007, 93). Since the collections discussed here offer fragments of many broken and dislocated lives, they may be said to rely on a poetics of the missing piece/peace. Danticat’s, Adichie’s and Divakaruni’s stories constantly and harrowingly remind their readers of the missing peace and the missing pieces, the broken fragments of lives and the families that have been shattered by exile and violence, whether due to ethnic riots or political dictatorship. This raises the question of whether these narratives can be read as “reparation narratives” which, in Supriya Nair’s (2013, 120) analysis of Caribbean fiction, aim to “breach space, to piece the broken fragments together, to make the muted voice heard, to perceive the unseen and the absent”. Danticat’s, Adichie’s and Divakaruni’s collections do celebrate the absent and make the muted and silenced voices of diasporic women be heard. They also name the dead when they evoke political violence in Haiti¹⁰ and religious riots in India,¹¹ as well as Nigeria,¹² where thousands of people, and women in particular, disappeared. Thus, for example, in “Caroline’s Wedding” (Danticat 1996a, 167), a priest standing in a Brooklyn church recites the names of the 129 Haitian refugees who drowned at sea that week and makes a special call for a woman and baby, whose names are unknown. In the same way, “The Blooming Season for Cacti” (Divakaruni 2002, 179) explicitly mentions the rape victims who killed themselves after the Bombay riots. And in Adichie’s “A Private Experience” (2009a, 47; 56), two women who

share a hideout during the riots worry about the daughter or sister they were separated from when violence broke out, and one of them will never find her sister again.

Therefore, *Re-membering*, in particular through naming, are central to these narratives that are haunted by women who have “never been heard from again” (Danticat 1996a, 177) and whose bodies were never found. Remembering through naming is a means to resist erasure, especially when there are no records of a person’s death and the political regime denies any wrongdoing. Danticat’s “The Missing Peace” (1996a, 112) describes the quest of an American woman who is looking for traces of her mother in a village in Haiti. She will never find her mother’s body, nor any grave, as soldiers prevent them from entering the cemetery and threaten them (Ibid., 118). Danticat gives voice to Haitian women’s subjection under the Duvalier regime (Alexander 2014, 103), all the while offering them a form of silent speech: the girl and the woman whisper their mothers’ names, while the American woman sews pieces of cloth onto her mother’s blanket (Danticat 1996a, 120–21). The fact that the protagonist of Adichie’s “The Headstrong Historian” (2009a, 214), who was given a Christian name by missionaries, officially changes her name from Grace to the name her grandmother gave her takes obvious symbolic significance when the narrator reveals that “Afeamefuma” means “My Name Will Not Be Lost”. Naming women is also a way to celebrate their lives and to repair the connection to women in the homeland, a bond with communities of women that may have been lost when the young woman left for America to live a life that is very different from her mother’s and grandmother’s. Danticat’s *Krik? Krak!* (1996a, 224) ends with a coda entitled “Women like us” in which the narrator’s mother asks her daughter to name each of her braids after the 999 women who were boiling in her blood. The narrator concludes (Ibid., 224): “this was your testament to the way these women lived and died and lived again”.

Many of these stories foreground connections to communities of women, often emphasising orality—storytelling—and/or humble manual work. In “The Unknown Errors of our Lives”, Divakaruni (2002, 220) celebrates a young woman’s connection to her grandmother, and more largely, her cultural legacy, conveying a “homing desire” that Brah identifies in diasporic fiction, and which celebrates a connection to the homeland that is not simply a desire to glorify it at all cost. Rather, in the story it is a means to acknowledge the transmission and validity of oral culture and emotional connection, since after her grandmother’s death, the young woman who seems well-adapted to her American life, remembers the stories her grandmother used to tell her and integrates the mythical characters and animals, as well as elements of her American life, into her paintings. Another example is provided by “The Intelligence of Wild Things” (Divakaruni 2002), whose narrator, a well-adapted and apparently content Indian-American woman, recalls a scene from her childhood where the mother and the children shared food and stories. She actually conjures up an imaginary kitchen, an imaginary motherland, where storytelling and cooking and sharing food are presented as a means to reconnect to the past, to deal with loss and nostalgia (Divakaruni 2002, 40): “that dim kitchen, our own cave, with its safe odors of coriander and fenugreek, three people, cross-legged on the cool cement, making for food each other while the stories wrapped us in their enchantment”.

As Caroline Rooney (1991, 99) points out in her study of African diaspora fiction, the *OED* definition of motherland is native country. However, in relation to cultural history, the motherland usually signifies “the country belonging to no one, so open to adoption by the colonizing country, as its other land” (Ibid., 100). But Rooney (Ibid.) posits that there are “other stories, other versions” and that “motherland can be taken to roughly signify a different relation to the land, for instance, a non-appropriative one”. Thus, the stories by Divakaruni, Danticat and

Adichie do offer these other versions, these other stories, and a non-appropriative relationship to the motherland.

The humble home in the imaginary motherland becomes a crucial space where connections are recreated. As “Women like Us”, the title of Danticat’s coda to *Krik? Krak!*, suggests, the stories feature bonds to communities of women, who are not only mothers, but may include previous generations. The coda also retraces the narrator’s progress: at first the narrator criticises the “kitchen poets”—undoubtedly an allusion to Paule Marshall’s (1985, 3–12) “poets of the kitchen”. However, while Marshall pays tribute to them, Danticat (1996a, 220) first blames them for stifling their daughters and preventing them from speaking up: “they make narrative dumplings and stuff their daughters’ mouths so that they say nothing more”. Thus, the kitchen poets, the women who, like many other women, have been “excluded from public life and the community of knowledge” (Certeau (de) et al. 1998, 153), are not only silent but also silence their daughters. The narrator also recalls her mother’s anger and disappointment when she told her she wanted to be a writer. So, writing and cooking are first shown as irreconcilable opposites (Danticat 1996a, 219): “writing was... an act of indolence, something to be done in a corner when you could have been learning to cook”. However, the narrator (Ibid., 220) changes her opinion about these “kitchen poets” as she sees that they have provided her with a “survival soup”, intimating that their cooking and their words have helped her to survive: “women in your family... whose fables and metaphors, whose similes and soliloquies, whose diction and *je ne sais quoi* daily slip into your survival soup, by way of their fingers”. In her novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory*, Danticat (1996b, 151) explains that Haitian men insist that a woman’s ten fingers all have a purpose: “Mothering. Boiling. Loving. Baking. Nursing. Frying. Healing. Ironing. Scrubbing.... her ten fingers had been named for her even before she was born”, which Simone

Alexander (2014, 106) calls a “body theft”. By way of contrast, “Women like Us” (Danticat 1996a) suggests resilience and resistance, as the women’s fingers have enabled their daughters to survive. In the end, the fingers that braid the braids, the fingers that cook and the writer’s fingers are no longer seen as irreconcilable opposites. For the narrator realises (Ibid., 222) that the kitchen poets are also the ones who told her that women like her have a voice and a tongue, even that tongue is “patois, dialect, Creole”, the one whose whispers pushed her, encouraged her and urged her “to speak through the blunt tip of [her] pencil”. Thus, while Danticat seems at first to pick up Marshall’s concept to criticise these women, she too eventually pays tribute to their influence. She also realises that her mother “introduced her to the first echoes of the tongue that [she] now speak[s]” (Ibid., 224). This is why the mother’s choice of words to criticise her daughter (Ibid., 220), “Krik? Krak! Pencil, paper”, suggests that orality and writing can be reconciled since “Krik? Krak” refers to traditional call-and-response in Caribbean culture. Choosing this phrase as a title for her collection, Danticat gives pride of place to orality and the Creole art of storytelling, pays tribute to the women who told her stories and offers another form of storytelling.

Thus, Danticat’s “Women like us” illustrates a trait in the African diaspora fiction that Carolyn Cooper (1991, 65) identifies as “a recuperation of identity accomplished by reappropriating devalued folk wisdom, the body of subterranean knowledge often associated with the silenced language of women and the primitiveness of orally transmitted cultures”. The same holds true of Adichie’s “The Headstrong Historian” (2009a, 214–15), in which storytelling is associated with manual work as a grandmother tells her granddaughter stories and recites oral poetry while making pottery: “Nwamgba... was thrilled by the child’s solemn interest in her poetry and her stories, the teenagers’ keen watchfulness as Nwamgba struggled to make pottery with newly

shaky hands”. By revealing that the girl’s Christian teacher claims that “the call-and-response her grandmother had taught her could not be called poetry because primitive tribes did not have poetry” (Ibid., 216), Adichie both criticises Western and colonial visions of the ancestral art and defines West African traditional call-and-response as poetry. The recuperation of identity is also made clear when Grace, as an adult, claims the name her grandmother gave her.

The passage also foregrounds the grandmother-granddaughter connection, the old woman’s hands and her activity. Adichie (Ibid., 218) ends the final story of her collection with the image of a hand and a touch: “on that day... Grace... simply held her grandmother’s hand, the palm thickened from years of making pottery”. The ending foregrounds an old woman’s hands that bear testament to her humble manual work, the ancestral art of pottery-making. It also foregrounds being touched in both senses of the word: in *Touching Feeling* Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (2003, 14) points out that “to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle... and always to understand other people” so that “the same double meaning, tactile plus emotional is already there in the single word ‘touching’” (Ibid., 17). In my view, therefore, these women writers rely on a poetics of touch as well as a poetics of survival when they choose to create connections to the motherland.

Although they may look at the bonds that stifle diasporic women, they eventually privilege bonds rather than rupture. They are also capable of embracing loss and change, as well as acknowledging the pains and conflicts inherent to the diaspora, in particular when they left their countries plagued with conflicts. Through domestic slippages and the tropes of home and home food, they remind their readers of legacies such as slavery or colonialism, but as their narratives rely on survival strategies and a reappropriation of devalued cultures, they suggest that their protagonists, who are aware of their complex identities, will make sense of who they are in the

new home country, however uncertain their futures may be, however imperfect their struggling lives in the new country are. It is therefore no surprise that Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni (2002) chooses two very different quotes as epigraphs to her second collection. First, she provides a quote by the Antiguan-American novelist Jamaica Kincaid warning readers that “who you are is a mystery no one can answer, not even you”, and, then, an extract from a poem by the American Toi Derricotte starting with “the desire to touch/ the desire to speak”. Rather than offering nostalgia for their other lives or deciding to cut off their connection to the past and to their homeland, they suggest that what matters is to be touched and to touch. Finally, by associating writing and braiding her hair, writing and cooking, by opening “Women like Us” with the mother urging her to use her ten fingers, they draw attention to women’s bodies and humble gestures, in order to evoke and praise alternative models for women writers to follow.

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¹ In *Create Dangerously*, recalling how people in Haiti silenced her when she expressed critical opinions about Haiti, Danticat (2011, 51) finds solace in her brother’s words: “The *Dyaspora* are people with their feet planted in both worlds”.

² See, for instance, Louise DeSalvo’s memoir, *Crazy in the Kitchen* (2004), in which she points out (12–13), “my mother thinks that eating this bread will change her . . . maybe my mother thinks that if she eats enough of this other bread, she will stop being Italian-American and she will become American-American”. See also Paula Torreiro Pazo’s and Anita Mannur’s analyses of the generation gap in *Diasporic Tastescapes* (2016) and in *Culinary Fictions* (2010).

³ See the prevalence of the home-cooked pack lunch motif in diasporic memoirs. Thus, Linda Furiya’s bento box becomes “a glaring reminder of the ethnic difference between my peers and me” (2006, 5). In *Daughter of Heaven*, Leslie Li (2005, 12) similarly recalls that the “weird Chinese food” she brought to school made her stand out as an outsider. Yet, like Furiya, Li secretly loved the food (20). See also Paula Pazo’s analysis of the “lunch bag” motif in *Diasporic Tastescapes* (2016).

⁴ Danticat (2011, 49) notes that for her brother, “my country” is simply Haiti, while for her, it is much more complex: “My country, Jean, is one of uncertainty. When I say ‘my country’ to some Haitians they think I mean the United States. When I say ‘my country’ to some Americans, they think of Haiti”. She thus defines her country as Haiti’s “tenth department”, or “floating homeland”.

⁵ The mother-in-law takes charge of the kitchen and reintroduces Indian food in an all-American kitchen, against her daughter-in-law’s wishes.

⁶ Nair alludes to Rosanne Kanhai’s essay, “The Massala Stone Sings”, published in *Matikor: The Politics of Identity for Indo-Caribbean Women* (1999).

⁷ See for instance how the Indian-American journalist Shoba Narayan (2004, 197; 212) presents her recipes in her culinary memoir as recipes for marital bliss. She explains that she cooks channa masala on weekends for her husband and children who are “ravenously hungry for some home-cooked food” and serves pongal after a week of eating out at restaurants, as a “wholesome cleansing food”. The suggestion that her home-cooked food makes the family whole and wholesome is obvious.

⁸ Cashew trees, originally from Brazil, were introduced in India by the Portuguese colonizers. Furthermore, any mention of any agricultural product also evokes environmental issues such as deforestation in Haiti.

⁹ Riots in Mumbai, in December 1992 and January 1993, in which around 900 people died.

¹⁰ The Duvalier regimes (1957–1971 and 1971–1986) resulted in the murders of dozens of thousands of Haitians. During François Duvalier’s presidency, 30,000 to 60,000 Haitians were murdered by the Tonton Macoute. Hundreds of thousands fled the country. The situation did not improve when Papa Doc was succeeded by his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier.

¹¹ The Bombay Riots took place in Mumbai, in December 1992 and January 1993, they resulted in the deaths of around 900 people.

¹² Adichie’s “A Private Experience” takes place in Kano (Northern Nigeria) when a riot breaks out. Previous riots are mentioned and may refer to the 1980 riot in Kano, when 1,177 civilians were killed, and to the 1991 violent riots

between Christian Igbos and Muslim Hausas also Kano, in which 100 people are reported to have died. In 2004, two days of religious violence claimed thirty lives.