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DECOLONIAL HOPE AGAINST THE FOURTH INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION IN EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S *CLAIRE OF THE SEA LIGHT* (2013)

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ABSTRACT: This article explores Edwidge Danticat's last novel, *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013), as a response to Modern/colonial ideologies of progress that continue to emanate from predictions of a Fourth Industrial Revolution. After an analysis of the work of Danticat as literature of the American hemisphere instead of merely Haitian or Caribbean literature, this article contends that the text's portrayal of nature, the environment, and the past aligns with visions of decolonial hope rather than with the linear progress of the Fourth Industrial Revolution. Through the stories of a small community in Haiti, *Claire of the Sea Light* portrays the degradation of the environment that ravishes the country and does so in relation to the external forces that affect it, presenting a coloniality of climate associated to racial dynamics of the American hemisphere. The blending of human narratives and environmental ones in the novel nevertheless offers possibilities for resistance and a hopeful vision of the country rooted in decolonial ecologies and Caribbean epistemology. Granting equal importance to the stories of non-human actors in the narrative, the novel positions itself outside the Modern/colonial tradition to embrace a decolonial poetics that offers hope in a world which has proved to continually reproduce its own coloniality as new technology is developed.

RESUMEN: Este artículo explora la última novela de Edwidge Danticat, *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013), como una respuesta a las ideologías modernas/coloniales que siguen emanando de las

predicciones de una Cuarta Revolución Industrial. Tras un análisis del trabajo de Danticat como literatura del hemisferio americano en vez de literatura meramente caribeña o haitiana, este artículo argumenta que el retrato de la naturaleza, el medio ambiente y el pasado que el texto realiza se ajusta a visiones de esperanza decolonial más que al progreso linear de la Cuarta Revolución Industrial. A través de las historias de una pequeña comunidad en Haití, *Claire of the Sea Light* también plasma la degradación medioambiental que asola al país y lo hace en relación a las fuerzas externas que lo afectan, presentando una colonialidad del clima asociada a dinámicas raciales del hemisferio americano. La amalgamación de narrativas humanas y medioambientales en la novela sin embargo ofrece posibilidades de resistencia y una visión esperanzadora del país basada en ecologías decoloniales y epistemología caribeña. Darles igual importancia a las historias de los actores no-humanos en la novela la posiciona fuera de la tradición moderna/colonial y abraza una poética decolonial que ofrece esperanza en un mundo que ha demostrado reproducir su propia colonialidad a medida que desarrolla nueva tecnología.

INTRODUCTION

The aftermath of the 2010 earthquake in Haiti left behind a clear picture of the hemispheric dynamics of inequality that have existed in America since the end of the nineteenth century or even earlier. The U.S. organized "the entire postearthquake 'recovery' project involving foreign government organizations, nongovernmental humanitarian aid organizations, missionaries, researchers, engineers, building companies, and many kinds of zealous volunteers" while at the same time the Port-au-Prince airport was placed under U.S. control in order to prevent the affected Haitians from reaching the continent in order to reunify with family (Sheller 15; 34). These twin images exemplify the logics of the Fourth Industrial Revolution much better than the "boardrooms and parliaments" where Klaus Schwab contends this phenomenon is being shaped (27). Ultra-rapid information and communication technologies indeed allowed these volunteers and helpers to organize and reach the disaster area, as well as to draft sophisticated recovery plans. The other side of the coin that Schwab and others do not consider is that the recovery process that was put into motion enabled "islanding" effects that perpetuated and accentuated the underclass' immobility and lack of resources. Suffice it to say that these volunteers were consuming the little drinking water that was being filtrated for survivors and building schools in a context

where most people cannot afford schooling and are in dire need of construction jobs (Sheller 76-77).

Schwab's premise that "[t]he Fourth Industrial Revolution represents a significant source of hope" (22) seems ironic considering that the preface of his book *Shaping the Future of the Fourth Industrial Revolution: A Guide to Building a Better World* (2018), written by the CEO of Microsoft Satya Nadella, identifies Amazon and other companies with a long history of exploitation as the leaders in this process. With all that is characteristic of the Fourth Industrial Revolution post-earthquake Haiti has only managed to become a puppet of those who own the technological capital and its environmental needs have been consistently ignored. The Interim Haiti Recovery Commision (IHRC) was orchestrated by the U.S. State department. The organization was composed of 17 voting members, many of them international, René Préval, the president of Haiti at the time, not being one of them (Dupuy 14-15). This article aims to debunk Schwab's hopeful predictions for another idea of hope put forward by decolonial and postcolonial environmental scholars through the analysis of Edwidge Danticat's novel *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013). Danticat's novel is a text that underscores the coloniality of climate that prevails in Haiti, weaving a narrative that places nature at the center. Her view sharply contrasts with Schwab's probably well-intentioned projection of a "human-centered future" and his urge to utilize natural resources for the best interest of every human on the planet (23-24). Differently, decolonial visions of environmentalism do not approach nature as a potential exploitable resource, but as an entity on its own, associating views like Schwab's to the modern colonial divide between nature and culture.

This article explores the figure of Danticat as a powerful voice for reflecting the state of affairs of the American hemisphere during a period whose identification as the Fourth Industrial Revolution hides a biased pro-capitalist ideology. Instead, *Claire of the Sea Light* offers a panoramic vision of the power dynamics between the different nations of the hemisphere and the hegemony of the United States over the rest. I will furthermore contend that Haitian writing is always imbricated within the cultural politics of U.S.-Haitian relations. As the dreams of the postcolonial nation or the Antillean Confederation have faded, Jacques Roumain has insisted that the key for the successful imagination of Haiti's political life after the revolution is to see it as part of something larger (5), namely, the American hemisphere. In fact, Michael Dash describes Haitians as "liminal citizens of the hemisphere

transformed by U.S. imperialism" (222-223). This is perhaps why Edwidge Danticat, a Haitian-American residing in the United States and who writes in English, has been considered by some the national writer of Haiti.[1] Together with the exploration of this perspective, *Claire of the Sea Light* projects throughout its pages a sense of decolonial hope that better negotiates the logics of an increasingly though unequally connected world.

EDWIDGE DANTICAT AND CARIBBEAN-AMERICAN HEMISPHERIC RELATIONS

Edwidge Danticat (1969-present) left Haiti when she was twelve years old to join her parents in Brooklyn. She has claimed that upon reaching her destination she discovered "books about [herself] to help [her] interpret [her] ever-changing country from afar" but also that she felt out of place and missed her home in Haiti terribly (Danticat, *Create Dangerously*[2] 59; 61). Both claims might explain why she sets most of her works in the Caribbean country. She comes back like Marcel Numa and Louis Drouin did, though imaginatively. Numa and Drouin were two migrant Haitians who enjoyed comfortable lives in New York but who chose to join a guerrilla group, Jeune Haiti, in 1964 to try to knock Duvalier's dictatorship down—a regime supported by the United States. The attempt resulted in their public execution on 12th November that same year (Danticat, *CD* 1-2).

Haitian political life, as well as Haitian contemporary writing, is inseparable from its relation with the United States. The country has been for more than a century subordinated to the interests of its neighbor power, displacing other nations since the military occupation of 1915 (Dupuy 15; Lennox 693). The U.S. has never used its technological capital for improving the situation of its impoverished neighbor, which has instead been a test ground for certain policies

[1] An article featured in the cultural section of the Spanish newspaper *El País* (https://verne.elpais.com/verne/2017/04/18/articulo/1492512207_689285.html) took notice of a map drawn by a user of the popular forum Reddit which chose the most representative fiction work for each country of the globe. Edwidge Danticat was the chosen writer for Haiti, as was the case with the Dominican Junot Díaz, another immigrant writing in a foreign language. This shows how the country's experiences can be better recorded from a distance, as it provides perspective and a less nuanced vision of history. In fact, Bharati Mukherjee contends that in countries like Haiti "provocative national literature is banned" and that upon reaching another location writers acquire a more complete "'historical sense' of the homeland" (682).

[2] From now on *CD*.

and a place from where to extract raw material with no ecological consideration. This is what president Bill Clinton admitted as special envoy to Haiti after the disaster regarding the policy of rice that he enforced upon the country: "I had to live every day with the consequences of the loss of capacity to produce a rice crop in Haiti to feed those people because of what I did, nobody else" (quoted in Dupuy 14). Haiti is "one of the largest importers of U.S. food in the Caribbean Basin" and supplies the country with the cheapest labor force (Dupuy 15) despite the difficulties Haitians face in order to migrate. This is due to the U.S. support of Haitian regimes—including two brutal dictatorships—which prevents fleeing Haitians from being classified as asylum seekers, as well as to argue that the American military occupation (1915-1934) left an economically developed country (nothing further from the truth) (Lennox 695; 700).

Populari and far-reaching Haitian voices such as writer Edwidge Danticat's are increasingly dropping the successful immigrant narrative. In *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013), Edwidge Danticat's last novel (there have been other publications but these are either children's books, young-adult fiction, or short stories, the case of the acclaimed 2019 collection *Everything Inside*), the hemisphere lingers behind all that happens in the society that the writer describes. In other works—in particular *The Farming of Bones* (1998)—the Haitian-Dominican border has had a predominant role, but this is not detached from the interference of the United States. The border's current location dates from the 1929 Treaty of Haitian-Dominican Borders, which was revised in 1936 "strongly encouraged by the United States, keen to stabilize a potentially volatile situation for their own benefit" (Fumagalli 20). The rebirth of the sugar industry in Hispaniola attracted the Americans, who "owned eleven out of the twenty-one sugar mills operating in the country and 98 per cent of its sugar exports were absorbed by the United States' market" (20). This border has become a signifier of the precarity of "migratory labor system[s]" (Martínez ix) and also of the colonial legacies that inform hemispheric conceptions of race and social class. The management of the border by U.S. forces and its later nationalization under the control of the Dominican Republic set "the pattern for the exploitation of the Haitian workforce" (Fumagalli 20). Since then, it has been the setting of multiple violent episodes including the racially-based massacre of the Haitian peasants working on the borderlands (many born under Dominican jurisdiction) mandated by the Dominican dictator Rafael

Leónidas Trujillo in 1937 (Turits 589-591). This is the episode that *The Farming of Bones* narrates.

Claire of the Sea Light follows the steps of *The Farming of Bones* and extends its concerns to the environmental realm without ceasing to situate Haiti as the result of external influences and as a participant in an intricate net of unequal global connections. The novel relates the disappearance of a seven-year-old girl, Claire Limyè Lanmè, after she finds out that her father (Nozias Faustin), a fisherman, is going to give her away to the town's fabric vendor (Madame Gaëlle Lavaud) because he believes he cannot provide her with a good upbringing and that he might someday die at sea while fishing. Although it is not mentioned explicitly, migrating to the United States is something that could be in Nozias' mind, or at least in Claire's, as she seems to denote when she claims that she "wonder[s] all the time where he was chèche lavi, looking for a better life" when he goes to "another part of this sea, someplace where she could not spot his boat" (221). After the disappearance, Claire does not appear in the novel again until the very end. As if the narrator was looking for her throughout the town of Ville Rose and the contiguous neighborhood of Cité Pendue, the rest of the chapters revolve around the struggles and memories of the different inhabitants of these places, who share a net of "unacknowledged connections" (Gibby 356). The possibility of abandoning the area—the intended destination being the United States—is ever-present throughout the narrative in the minds of several of the characters (as a goal or even as something that has already happened).

Though it was written after the occurrence of the natural disaster, Danticat chooses to set her novel in 2009, just before the earthquake, in order to, in her own words, hang "on to something that was" (Danticat, "New Novel" n.p.), portraying the essence of the human and non-human relationships that sustain the community depicted and thus providing a clue on the values that might help to deal with the crisis. However, there already are signs of natural degradation throughout the novel that might imperil life in this community, such as the extinction of an animal species or the houses being "dragged downstream year after year in flash floods" because "the rivers were swelling in response to the lack of trees, the land erosion, the dying topsoil" (Danticat, *Claire*[3] 52). Depicting natural degradation is constant not only in the novel analyzed but in all of Danticat's oeuvre. According to Kristina Gibby, her fiction "disrupts tourist fantasies

[3] From now on *CLS*.

[about the Caribbean] through her portrayal of Haiti's environment" (347). This argument is reminiscent of what Malcom Ferdinand calls "a reversal of th[e] touristic perspective," listening to insider voices from the Caribbean world (*Decolonial* 2). Danticat brings these voices to American audiences rather than portraying stories of success of immigrant Haitians. While she still captures the difficulties of the diaspora, she does so in terms of a long-lasting hemispheric racism which still determines lives on the island. Danticat pays attention to the island, pointing to the fact that, regardless of how many narratives of migration are created, the Caribbean is still in existence and demands our attention.

DECOLONIAL HOPE IN *CLAIRE OF THE SEA LIGHT*

> [Claire] had to go back to see her father and Madame Gaëlle, whose own sorrows could have nearly drowned them. She had to go down to the water to see them take turns breathing into this man, breathing him back to life
>
> Edwidge Danticat, *Claire of the Sea Light*

Many scholars have pointed out that *Claire of the Sea Light* is a hopeful narrative, a surprising fact considering that most of the plot revolves around the disappearance of a little girl whose mother died and who lives with her father in conditions of poverty. Still, Maxine L. Montgomery underscores Claire's "ability to utilize legend and lore from the past in charting a hopeful future" in the novel (317). Silvia Martínez-Falquina describes Danticat's work as an articulation of "narratives of memorialisation, resilience and *hope*" (emphasis mine; 844) and Gibby highlights the unidealized and sometimes cruel portrayal of nature in the novel as a framework for a narrative of "*hope*, communion, and belonging" (emphasis mine; 363). It is Martínez-Falquina's contention that the narrative's denouement—when the whole community, rich and poor, attends to one of the characters who tried to commit suicide—stands as a hopeful image of the future, presenting a world that is fairer, where class divisions are not so striking, and where community is the value that prevails (848).

Martínez-Falquina's choice of words when she claims that "Max Jr. [was] being returned from the sea" implies that there is an agent in the action, potentially the sea or some kind of water spirit. In fact, it is towards the end of the narrative when Claire makes her appearance again that natural elements acquire a more autonomous

role in the text, pushing Claire to come back to her father and Gaëlle, rather than just framing it. Not only does this hopeful narrative imbricate all humans into the same world-ship, as Ferdinand would say (*Decolonial* 21); non-human actors are also part of the story, more in consonance with Jason W. Moore's valuable concept of the Web of Life, "nature as us, as inside us, as around us" (3). This is what I have chosen to call, based on Malcom Ferdinand's vision of a decolonial ecology, decolonial hope, which stands in sharp contrast with Schwab's human-centered futurity. Ferdinand's proposal for a truly decolonial ecology is that we apprehend the world instead of the Earth, the difference being that we do not only take into account human quantitative understandings of the Earth such as property and resources, but the world in all of its dimensions, not just the human one (*Decolonial* 19). This is a relationality which, in opposition to the connectivity of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, is not valued through modern parameters. In his own words:

> The political recognition of the presence of non-humans giv[es] rise to a world between humans and with non-humans. If nature and the Earth are not identical to the world here, the world includes nature, the Earth, non-humans, and humans, all the while recognizing different cosmogonies, qualities and ways of being in relation to one another. (*Decolonial* 19)

This text's conflation of human stories of suffering and hope with environmental stories of degradation and rebirth all coexisting in the same plane, as well as being intermixed with knowledge from the past (as I will discuss later), adjusts to the myriad of dimensions that Ferdinand demands for beginning to confront the colonial/environmental problems that the very concept of a Fourth Industrial Revolution implies: a vision of progress as the increasing capacity to create wealth (Schwab 32).

But before going back to the end of the narrative, when Claire conflates her experience with that of the mountains, the maroons, and the water spirits, let us analyze the story of another character of Ville Rose: Madame Gaëlle. Throughout her storyline the relation between coloniality and environmental degradation is ever-present. Madame Gaëlle's is the richest character in *Claire of the Sea Light* and perhaps also the most tragic one, as her daughter dies in a motorbike accident and her husband is murdered. Though these events might seem to be designed to uniformize all the characters—rich and poor—in the face

of death and tragedy, the narrative always imbricates them within a bigger frame of coloniality, as when Gaëlle reflects on the sinking of the houses: "[h]ers and Laurent's was now the only house so close to the rivers. The other houses, newer yet shabbier, had been dragged downstream year after year in flash floods, many with entire families inside" (*CSL* 52). The incident reflects a structural problem in Haiti: erosion, consistent in the Caribbean since the colonizers mistook "diversity for fertility" when they arrived (DeLoughrey, Gosson, and Handley 6; Lowenthal 14). Not only are the heavy rains a bad combination with erosion. Deforestation, an activity which American ships have routinely carried out on the island (see Danticat, *CD* 67), also adds to the equation. The degradation of nature together with the death of the people who lived in those houses are presented as a result of coloniality (particularly U.S.-American coloniality), placing both victims at the same level. It is not only that citizens from the Global South are victims of the bad quality of resources, as seems to be Schwab's worry (see Schwab 147, where he mentions the impact of climate change on people's health conditions but not on the environment), but that both citizens and nature suffer the consequences in the same way. This connection is also present in the narration of Gaëlle's pregnancy.

In the same chapter—"The Frogs"—Gaëlle reminisces about her pregnancy, which is framed around another ecological event: the extinction of the town's frogs due to the high temperatures resulting from climate change: "[i]t was so hot in Ville Rose that year that dozens of frogs exploded" (Danticat, *CSL* 41). Unlike other instances of adaptation, this is not the natural cycle that Gaëlle is "fool[ed]" into inferring from the event: "that a normal cycle was occurring, that young was replacing old, and life replacing death, sometimes slowly and sometimes quickly. Just as it was for everything else" (Danticat, *CSL* 41). Just like the premature death of her daughter which is predicted with this paragraph, the phenomenon is not to be expected within a healthy course of events. Instead, a whole animal species does not have the time to adapt to the increasing temperatures and hence dies. As Pieter Vermeulen insightfully explains, current debates like those on the Anthropocene—the idea that this geological era is entirely determined by human activity on the planet—"misrepresent the role of capitalism" on phenomena such as climate change (11). Since it has been more or less been concluded that the beginnings of the Anthropocene date from the first uses of fossil fuel (Crutzen 23), it is surprising that it is not immediately associated to the first wave of

colonization in the Americas, as the expansion of land and the cheap labor that the slaves provided hugely accelerated the processes that led to the First Industrial Revolution (Malm and Hornborg 63). Both the citizens who descend from those slaves and the animals from their lands live the effects. Schwab's contention that the wealth created by the First Industrial Revolution is still to be celebrated in spite of "the spread of colonialism and environmental degradation" (Schwab 32) follows a largely fallacious logic.

Such a relationship between the American underclass and the degradation of American lands is present in Gaëlle's storyline. Despite her fear that "should the temperature continue to rise, she too might burst" like the frogs (41), both mother and daughter survive. Like Schwab's, Gaëlle's logic is not correct. It is not a coincidence that instead Claire's mother did not survive her own labor, as it happened in conditions much more precarious than Gaëlle's. In this case, the analogy works; it was not the heat that caused Claire's mother to die, but the poverty that is also a result of coloniality, like climate change is. As such, it is clear that we need another model, and the decolonial hope present in the narrative might be the answer. The idea of a Fourth Industrial Revolution is itself questionable, as it is being described by more than biased texts like Schwab's, who, in his writing, associates "the world" to "the West" and "civilization" to "Western culture," and largely relies on the linear progression of time. Instead, according to decolonial scholars, who unlike postcolonial scholars focus on an epistemological deconstruction of the colonial worldview (Ferdinand *Decolonial,* 176; Quijano 31), there are other terms by which to apprehend the world and its events such as for example a spatial epistemology (Mignolo 2), the world-systems perspective in detriment of "the linear evolution of modes of production from pre capitalist to capitalist" (Grosfoguel 72), the new connections across the American hemisphere instead of the old colony-metropolis relations (Fernández Jiménez 3) or the exploration of understudied historical landmarks such as the Haitian Revolution "as sources of vision for the future" (Escobar 38). As this last example shows, there is a particularly high number of other knowledges coming precisely from the Caribbean because of how its foundational myths stem from what Ferdinand calls the slave ship to contrast it with Noah's Ark.

Caribbeans do not limit themselves to imagining their history reduced to the legacy of "the Guinea Basin, Europe, or the pre-colonial Americas" (Ferdinand *Decolonial,* 132), but have created a non-linear imaginary of what is born from under the sea—from the "womb abyss"

(Glissant, *Relation* 6)—as a result of all the was lost in the Middle Passage (Ferdinand, *Decolonial* 133). This knowledge is not recorded in history books or stored in museums; hence it is not identifiable through a linear logic, but emerges from the sea at different times, never fully present but never fully gone. For Ferdinand "[b]etween modern and indigenous people, the Caribbean presents these third terms, who are symbolized by the enslaved colonial Negroes [sic], with a genesis of their own that is based in the transatlantic slave trade and colonial slavery" (*Decolonial* 132). Bill Ashcroft explains how awareness of this historical identity is present in the literature of the archipelago in how the collective memory of a slave past is often invoked in order to choose how to live the present and strive for the future

> For those Caribbean writers and artists working in the borderland of language, race and identity the past is the constant sign of the future. One of the most common, and popular, examples of this is the limbo dance, a performance of slave history, which re-enacts the crossing of the Middle Passage in a continual reminder of memory, survival and cultural resurrection [...] The dance is a metaphor of slave history that celebrates the present with the continuous re-enactment of future hope. (53)

As I said, this is not a historical memory, but an archipelagic memory in which the snippets from the past make an incursion on the island like the waves of the sea do on the sand of the beach, only to erase them minutes later with a new wave. Therefore, the sea—and the beach—proves a central setting for many parts of the narrative, because "the currents between and among islands reveal a wider horizon," as Jonathan Pugh would put it (11). And, eventually, the novel's own structure resembles Pugh and Chandler's island theory of relationality that "recasts the world as rich and full of creative possibilities" (84). As I mentioned in the introduction, the novel is structured around Claire's disappearance at the beginning, just to later span the rest of the area where she lives and explore the lives of those supposedly unconnected to this event. According to Robyn Cope, the way in which all the apparently fragmented parts of the novel in the end are related to one another despite the characters not knowing it reflects the fact that "not just for Haiti but for the whole world [there is an] interdependent nature of human interaction and history [...] a powerful poetics of relation in which no person is separate from

humanity and no moment exists outside the temporal continuum" (101). It is these connections that the narrative makes that also provide the greatest elements of hope, in particular the connection with non-human actors and with the past.

This is nowhere more present than in the last chapter, which adopts Claire's point of view to show the reader her thoughts at the decisive moment of her disappearance. During this chapter, Claire ceaselessly wonders about her mother. She seems to ponder the reasons why she died during childbirth and Gaëlle did not. In an act of allegiance to her origins Claire considers whether she should follow her mother's essence and become a presence by the shore of the sea:

> She'd heard some of the fishermen's wives say that the spirits of those who's been lost at sea would sometimes come ashore to whisper in their loved ones' ears. She would make sure [Nozias] felt her presence too. She'd sneak down at dusk to collect fallen coconuts and grab salted fish left out to dry and she'd stop by and say a few words in her father's ear while he slept. That way she would always be in his dreams. She would go away without really leaving, without losing everything, without dying. (235)

Claire's plan for disappearing lies in conflating her identity with that of her lost mother, who in the narrative is sometimes presented as the maternal figure of "Mami Wata (Mother Water), an Afro-Caribbean water-spirit" (Montgomery 316). In the same way that these characteristically Afro Caribbean figures, orally-transmitted as part of the creole folklore of the islands, "provid[e] continuity for the dispossessed" (Dayan 5), they also ground Claire to her identity "in the face of maternal absence or loss" (Montgomery 318). Claire's loss is an allegory for the collective loss of the Afro-Caribbean subject and also for those dispossessed in the present such as Nozias. Like Mami Wata, Nozias also suspects that his fate lies in the sea, not an uncommon destiny for the fishermen of the town, whose crumbling boats do not offer enough protection.

Another idea that Claire has as a response to her own and her father's situation is re-enacting the lives of the maroons in the mountains of Haiti. This is an interesting part of the narrative, because early on it is explained that when Claire's mother died, before being handed to Nozias, she had lived for three years with her mother's family in the mountains. This can be read literally or can also be interpreted as an example of magical realism in Danticat's narrative,

a feature common in this author. This last interpretation comes from the fact that this family never appears again in the novel and is not considered as an option for taking care of Claire when Nozias worries that he will not be able to. Instead of looking for her relatives when she comes back to the mountains at the moment of her disappearance, Claire explains that this is where the maroons lived:

> Like the fugitives in Madame Louise's stories—les marons—she would hide inside what was left of Mòn Initil
> She would be the first at the foot of the sky. She would find a cave large enough inside Mòn Initil to live in, and at night she would lie on beds of ferns and listen to the bats squeal and the owls moan. She would dig a hole to catch rainwater for drinking and bathing. And she would try very hard not to disturb the marooned spirits who had found refuge there before her. (*CLS* 234)

Since the times of the American plantation maroons were the escaped slaves that usually hid in the nearing mountains and developed an alternative social organization (Roberts 4; Hantel 88; Ferdinand, *Decolonial* 146). Together with the constant references to water spirits, the maroons also hold great relevance in the story, again exemplifying the equal importance of humans, non-humans, and historical memories in the novel. This particular episode merges personal and collective memories as equally relevant characters and foregrounds the importance of natural elements—the mountains in this case—in the (hi)story that is trying to be transmitted.

Maroons have become crucial figures in black utopian thought (Zamalin 169) because they represented the possibility to escape the oppressive society and "create a fully autonomous community" (Roberts 4). Together with creolization—and possibly on the opposite side—marronage has become a key concept in Caribbean anthropology defining "a form of cultural opposition to European-American culture" (Wing xxii). Andreas Malm (3) and Ferdinand ("Colonial Silence" 184) underscore the historical importance of natural elements in the resistance against colonial capitalism as was the case of the maroons in the mountains, since their success greatly depended on geography (Ferdinand, *Decolonial* 147), hence the conflation of the mountains and compassionate relatives in the novel. Claire seems to explore this possibility but her eventual return, however, seems to align with criticism on the concept of marronage as a cultural model in the present. Ferdinand in fact contends that

Malm's article ignores the forced nature of such retreat and does not consider which other ways of inhabiting the world may have arisen had the slaves not been deprived of their own cosmogonies and ontologies ("Colonial Silence" 185). Édouard Glissant does not consider marronage fit to the Caribbean existence in the present because of "its inability to think about the existential conditions and effects of futurity on the formation of subjectivity, choosing instead flight at expense of the beginning again *with* history's pain" (emphasis in the original; Drabinski 79). According to Glissant, marronage does not strive towards the future and does not make use of trauma and pain, despite their existence, to articulate the present. This is what Claire seems to understand when she decides to go back, "go down to the water to see [the villagers] take turns breathing into this man [that had fallen in the sea], breathing him back to life" (*CLS* 238). Like Ferdinand who contends that "the Maroons put into practice another way of living together and relating to the Earth" (*Decolonial* 147), Glissant appreciates some aspects of marronage such as the right to a culture's opacity, but advocates for the need to move beyond it.

This is where the beach—not an uncommon Caribbean sight—that appears at the end of the novel comes into play. Between the mountains and the sea lies the beach in the landscape of this narrative, and that brings us directly to Glissant's own articulation of hope and futurity. Glissant's ideas, despite his characteristic philosophy of creolization, a concept close to postcolonial hybridity, are not incompatible with decolonial philosophies. The decolonial hope that I have been describing so far refuses to rely on Western epistemologies. However, that does not imply a return to precolonial forms of inhabitation. Just like Ferdinand proposes the "enslaved colonial Negro [sic]" as the ethnogenesis of Caribbean culture and society, Glissant's ideas are all about finding newer options in between. In the same way as the maroons created something new, becoming "children of the Americas" in their flight (Ferdinand, *Decolonial* 151), Claire explores her possibilities after going through the passage that the mountains represent—a rebirth—to finally arrive at this beach where the last scene develops.

For Glissant the beach is an element that unites the mountains, that is, the past, "the historical home of the Maroons, who escaped slavery to set up their own society," with the Caribbean Sea, the future, "the island's opening onto the rest of the world" (Hantel 88). In her brief interlude in the mountains Claire, like Glissant, "links the tradition of the Maroon repudiation of the plantation to a new

future whose synthesis transcends both that gesture of refusal [and of] submission" (Wynter 638). The novel is not defeatist, it is full of hope. This hope is situated in current Haiti and points towards those real examples which provide the key for articulating a better future. When Ashcroft contends that invoking pre-colonial memory might help to situate post-colonial communities "outside of imperial structures of linear history," he does not mean that those communities must retreat from the system of which, like it or not, they are participants. It rather advocates for alternative and new decolonial ideologies and explanatory myths that might improve the daily lives of the inhabitants of these communities. As seen, all these elements are present throughout the novel and especially at the end, where a hopeful decolonial option is proposed for imagining the future of Haiti.

CONCLUSION

Descriptions of the impending Fourth Industrial Revolution emphasize "connected life" (Xu, David and Hi Kim 91); decolonial hope emphasizes relationality. For a myriad of scholars, what makes the Caribbean cosmogony so special and informative is relationality, a non-linear worldview associated with the geography of the archipelago in which past, present, and future knowledges coexist. Relationality thus transcends linear epistemologies that inform narratives of neoliberal progress such as rag-to-riches immigrant novels. In *Claire of the Sea Light* Danticat has created a narrative which is relational in its very structure, where the community rather than the individual is the protagonist of the story, in turn apprehending Haiti as part of an island, the island as part of an archipelago, and the archipelago as part of a hemisphere, one dominated by complex hierarchical relations.

In an interview with Jeffrey Brown, Danticat explains that the novel is about "showing this way of life […] this communal system that's really maintained the country where people don't have that many [sic] support except from one another" (Danticat, "New Novel" n.p.). The resolution points towards these small moments that provide the possibility of (emotional and material) healing when all the members of the community—including non-human ones—share their resources and their knowledge. As Danticat put it in the same interview, talking about the possibility for resilience in small communities, "the town is the hero [where] you get to see the mayor, who is also the undertaker," but there is a lot to be done. She insists

on showing this aspect of human organization in Haiti "that is not talked or heard about" ("New Novel" n.p.). Danticat's energy reminds us of Glissant's hopeful statement that he "still believe[s] in the future of small countries" (*Caribbean Discourse* 3). The text rather wonders what would happen if the forgotten fishermen, who are "at the bottom of the social hierarchy" (Gibby 357) of Ville Rose's but an integral part of the Haitian community, were provided with "a bigger boat […] where the crazy waves would not get them" (Danticat, *CSL* 221). What if the resources that are needed by the islanders were kept rather than being exported with all the rest, enriching the American elites but impoverishing the lowest classes? This discourse emphasizes Haitian resilience but also the need for its global participation in equal terms (Cope 100) rather than the Fourth Industrial Revolution's celebration of technological advancement without a change in the system.

Claire of the Sea Light enlightens readers with the portrayal of a real and critical situation—the environmental and humanitarian crisis of Haiti as a peripheral country of the American hemisphere—through a lens not often explored: decolonial Caribbean ontology. Furthermore, the world that Danticat presents readers with is not a hopeless one, but rather all the opposite. By apprehending all those elements that have sheltered and protected Caribbeans throughout their history—African and indigenous knowledges in the mountains are the clearest example—as part of the same community, *Claire of the Sea Light* imagines futures for the community of Haiti which so far has been abandoned by the powers that be in their quest for wealth acquisition. The image at the end makes it clear: the sea that had swallowed so many returns Max Jr. to a caring community where divisions seem to be suspended. Claire, who has gone through an enlightening experience in the Maroon mountains, looks at the scene from the beach, that represents adaptation and rebirth. This is the community that is ready to face the earthquake and other ecological crises that might approach. This is where the future takes shape.

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