

Approaching Imaginative Mobilities through Rhythms of the City and the Body in Edwidge Danticat’s “New York Day Women”

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Abstract

In Edwidge Danticat’s short story “New York Day Women” from her collection Krik? Krak!, a young woman spots her mother, who she had assumed never left Brooklyn, in Manhattan, and starts to clandestinely follow her. This plot of the daughter trailing behind her mother is juxtaposed with vignettes in which the daughter remembers things her mother has said. Drawing on Lefebvrian rhythmanalysis, Caribbean theories of rhythms, and Mobility Studies, this paper analyzes how two types of mobility clash and intersect – the physical im/mobilities of walking and the imaginative mobility of remembering. Through this clash, the characters not only navigate their relationship to home, but position themselves in a home which spans Haiti and the United States. A rhythmanalytical reading of this story then achieves several things: It brings together Lefebvrian rhythmanalysis with Caribbean approaches to rhythm, it shows connections between a focus on rhythm and Mobility Studies; and it makes visible ways in which physical and imaginative mobilities, the mobilities of walking and remembering, can come together in everyday life to continuously forge a home.

Keywords: imaginative mobility, commemorative mobilities, rhythmanalysis, diaspora, Edwidge Danticat

Introduction

Edwidge Danticat was born in Port-au-Prince, the capital of Haiti, in 1969, and migrated to the U.S. at the age of 12 to join her parents. Her literary output, for which she has won numerous awards, [2] spans novels, short stories, children’s books, young adult literature, picture books, memoirs, and travel writing. Across these different genres, Danticat chronicles the diasporic Haitian experience in the U.S., writing about the attempt to become a member of the diaspora by getting from Haiti to the U.S., about the lives of Haitians and Haitian-Americans in the U.S., and about the way *dyasporas*, as diasporic Haitians are known in Haitian Kreyòl, are perceived back in their home country. [3] In Danticat’s writing, the spatial im/mobilities of moving, migrating, and fleeing are interconnected with imaginative mobilities. Through all these mobilities, characters navigate their relationship to home, a home that may

be Haiti, the U.S., or an entangled web of the two. In much of Danticat’s work, this reflection on home takes the form imaginative mobilities which play out on the level of memory; according to Bharati Mukherjee, Danticat’s work poses the question “how does a citizenry, even that portion of it now relocated far from the homeland, adapt to the reality of their past, and the nightmare of familial memory?” (691), while Justine Dymond summarizes that “Danticat grapples with the ethics of remembering and forgetting in her fiction” (144). Isabelle Penier sees Danticat’s focus on memory as “a feminist corrective to the project of nation,” as Danticat “recovers from obscurity the history of Haitian women who have remained only a token presence in Haitian historiography” (Penier 130).

This prominence of memory means that Danticat’s characters may be highly mobile even when they are not in the process of migration, remigration, or other physical im/mobilities. Even in a situation which looks, from the outside, like

one of fixity, people may be mobile by moving within a certain radius or mentally engaging with other places; conversely, highly mobile processes such as migration are punctuated by moments of stillness and waiting. My objective is to make legible this entanglement of movement and stasis on a spatial and imaginative level in Danticat's writing. In one of the stories in her 1996 collection *Krik? Krak!*, "New York Day Women," a young woman is walking around Manhattan when she spots her mother, a Haitian immigrant who she had assumed never left Brooklyn, and starts to clandestinely follow her around. This narrative of the daughter secretly following her mother is interspersed with short vignettes [4] comprised of phrases the daughter remembers her mother saying. In this story, then, two types of mobility clash and intersect – the physical im/mobilities of walking and pausing converge, for the daughter, with the imaginative, commemorative mobility of remembering things her mother has said in the past. The field of Mobility Studies, which was shaped by Mimi Sheller and John Urry, studies both physically observable movements and "imaginative travel, virtual travel, and communicative travel" (Sheller, "New Mobilities Paradigm" 793); in this article, I will be analyzing imaginative mobilities, particularly as they relate to the concept of commemorative mobilities. Through this concept, I aim to grasp how characters continue to grapple with a place they either remember themselves or know via their families' memories, arguing that these acts of memory are not just a result of spatial mobilities such as migration but that they constitute mobility in themselves. I further aim to make sense of this overlap of mobilities by reading Mobility Studies literature alongside Henri Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis and Caribbean theorizations of rhythm. In bringing together these approaches, I see imaginative mobilities as prismatically visible in, and enacted through, the rhythms of everyday life and its interruptions. [1]

The rhythmanalyst "concerns himself with temporalities and their relations within wholes" (Lefebvre 24). [5] A rhythmanalytical reading of "New York Day Women," then, implies two rhythmanalysts. One of them is the reader, who analyzes the rhythms playing out in the

mother and the daughter each walking, and thinking and remembering, in the city. The other rhythmanalyst, however, is the narrator-daughter herself, who diligently observes, and aims to interpret, her mother's rhythms and movements. After thinking together scholarly work on rhythm with Mobility Studies, I will go on to analyze the role of rhythms regarding several aspects of Danticat's short story: the rhythms of walking and remembering within the story, the repetition of certain words, the rhythms of imagined dialogues, the rhythms of money, and, finally, the rhythmic mobilities of the reader. Reading them together serves to analyze specific moments in the text and to interrogate how it interacts with discourses around *flânerie*, diaspora, and memory. This approach also makes it possible to read remembering and imagining as embodied processes which, by simultaneously embedding the characters in New York City and in the Caribbean, placing them in an entangled, multi-sited home.

Rhythms and/of Imaginative Mobilities

In his essays on *rhythmanalyse* (rhythmanalysis), Lefebvre analyzes the intersections of rhythms of the city with rhythms of the body. Lefebvre sees rhythm as that which is "most concrete" (3), by which he means that rhythms, be they vast or minute, are "lived, tested, touched in the sensible and the corporeal" (45). Lefebvre describes how, in a city, different rhythms come together –the rhythms of sound and noise [6], of the relentless churning out of news [7], of people walking and people stopping and pausing. Importantly, Lefebvre focuses on the way all these rhythms clash and interpenetrate. When a person is in a city, they inhabit not only their own bodily and mental rhythms, but also the rhythms surrounding them in their urban landscape. While the rhythmanalyst's "body serves him as a metronome" (Lefebvre 19), "objective rhythms *translate* themselves into our own rhythms" (Lefebvre 69; emphasis added). In this act of translation, new, additional rhythms may emerge. Through rhythmanalysis, it becomes possible to grasp the rhythms of the city and the rhythms of the city dweller together. One can then grasp the

im/mobilities of the city dweller, imaginative as well as physical, alongside the micromobilities of everything surrounding her –the many moving parts of the city, the im/mobilities of other people and those of vehicles. In this sense, Lefebvre’s approach bears resemblance to Georg Simmel’s conceptualization of city life. In Simmel’s 1903 essay “The Metropolis and Mental Life” (originally published in German as “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben”), he writes that people are “stimulated by the difference between present impressions and those which have preceded.” Such a difference between past and present impressions is particularly acute in cities, where they take place with “every crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupation and social life” (Simmel). While the person in a city, then, is entangled in a web of experience both pertaining to what is happening around her and what has happened in the past, the city itself is multiple and varied. Rhythmanalysis can thus link individual to collective, though manifold, experience.

Another aspect of rhythmanalysis which lends itself to a study of imaginative mobilities is that it is attuned to lacunae –to the tiny moments when a rhythm takes a break, or when it stops before it starts up again. Lefebvre writes that in rhythms there can appear “a lacuna, a hole in time, to be filled in by an invention, a creation” (44). A reading of im/mobilities informed by rhythmanalysis, then, sees im/mobilities not as progressing in a linear or neatly organized fashion, with different mobile and immobile strands running alongside one another, but as something which tends to happen in fits and starts. Lefebvre is particularly interested in the tension between being enveloped by a rhythm and having enough distance from it to perceive it in the first place. “In order to grasp and analyse rhythms, it is necessary to get outside them, but not completely” (Lefebvre 26). In such a reading, the mere fact that the narrator’s mother has left Brooklyn and can now be seen walking around Manhattan is a highly noticeable gap in the everyday rhythm which the mother and daughter had established together. It is this gap which creates room for everything which happens in the story: Both the daughter following her mother, which is an unprecedented, profoundly

new event in her life, and her reflections on things her mother has said and done, arise out of the lacuna left by the absence of their usual rhythm.

Rhythm as concept occupies a central role in Caribbean theory. The work of Martinican philosopher Édouard Glissant explores the unpredictable and “chaotic” (3) relations forming Caribbean cultures. Using the concept of “creolization,” Glissant describes “the encounter, the interference, the clash, the harmonies and the disharmonies between cultures, in the realized totality of the earth-world” (3), [8] thereby describing a clash which can be seen as rhythmic. Katherine McKittrick argues that, in the work of Jamaican theorist Sylvia Wynter, “[r]hythm does not privilege singular ways of being but rather insists, in advance, that collaborative engagement is necessary to who and what we are” (McKittrick et al. 870), and that rhythms are “central to the reconstitution of black life” (McKittrick 166).

The Caribbean theorist whose work on rhythm I want to focus on the most here, however, is Cuban theorist and writer Benítez-Rojo. He posits a certain rhythm as that which the different islands in the Caribbean have in common, arguing that “at least since the seventeenth century, there are rhythms common to the entire Caribbean, rhythms that follow kind of polyrhythmic and polymetric percussion very different from European percussive forms” (Benítez-Rojo 76). While he is here speaking of the very specific and literal rhythm of percussion drums, Benítez-Rojo finally has a very capacious idea of what rhythms are, describing

a polyrhythmic that is Cuban, Caribbean, African, and European at once, and even Asian and Indoamerican, where there has been a contrapuntal and intermingled meeting of the biblical Creator’s *logos*, of tobacco smoke, the dance of the *orishas* and *loas* ... Within this chaos of differences and repetitions, of combinations and permutations, there are regular dynamics that coexist (81)

In addition to this concept, and linked to it, Benítez-Rojo speaks of the “island that ‘repeats’

itself, unfolding and bifurcating until it reaches all the seas and lands of the earth” (3). Underlying this is an understanding of the Caribbean archipelago, the Caribbean “island,” as a place both mobile within itself and pulsating outward, in which nothing is fixed and static, but mobile and in a process of becoming. In addition to writing about the way shared Caribbean rhythms link different islands in the Caribbean to one another and positing the Caribbean as an island pulsating outward, Benítez-Rojo analyzes how the Caribbean is linked to the rest of the world through the totalizing historical social system of the Plantation. [9] Although these concepts are already linked in Benítez-Rojo’s work, I want to link them further, combining them to see New York City as a place embedded in a rhythmic Caribbean which is pulsating outward. Benítez-Rojo’s *repeating island* makes it possible to read the mother and daughter as not just walking around a city, but as inhabiting and navigating an entangled net of islands. In their Lefebvrian rhythms—their daily mobilities around New York, their quotidian rhythms—specific moments in their mobilities become visible. Taken together, these approaches to rhythm show how Danticat’s characters forge and navigate a home within the multi-directionality of memory and belonging.

Rhythms of Walking and Remembering

In “New York Day Women,” a particular kind of rhythm is created by switching between the daughter walking and the daughter remembering. At one point during their walk across Manhattan, the daughter observes first her mother and then two taxi drivers. “As my mother stands in front of Carnegie Hall, one taxi driver yells to another, ‘What do you think this is, a dance floor?’ My mother waits patiently for this dispute to be settled before crossing the street” (Danticat, “New York” 128). In this snippet, one of the taxi drivers, seemingly secure in his particular, vehicular kind of mobility, accuses another taxi driver of acting according to the wrong set of mobility guidelines: He is accusing him of acting as if he was on a dancefloor, and while dance is one kind of mobility, it is not the *right* kind of engagement with mobility for their current situation. What one taxi driver is accusing the other one of, then, is

following the wrong kind of rhythm. The mother, who is a part of these urban rhythms and who observes them, waits. According to Peter Adey et al., waiting, gaps, and moments of stillness are part and parcel of almost any mobility process: “When we are too focused on mobility as movement, we sometimes forget that it also may involve a great deal of waiting” (184), a claim shared by Peter Merriman when he writes that “[s]tillness, waiting, slowness and boredom may be just as important to many situations, practices and movements” (177). Lefebvre, too, sees moments of quiet not just as part of a rhythm, but argues that “the silences have a meaning” (96). [10] The paragraph ends with the mother having stopped her pause and continued to walk again, taking part in the rhythm in a way observable by her daughter. It is then that the paragraph stops and a vignette is inserted: “In Haiti, when you get hit by a car, the owner of the car gets out and kicks you for getting blood on his bumper” (Danticat, “New York” 128). On this page, the taxi drivers’ everyday spat about rhythms sets the stage for a much harsher rhythmic disruption. The present moment is punctured by a remembered statement; violence erupts onto the page. The anecdote is inserted once the mother is walking again, as this change in the rhythm makes another eruption of rhythm in the story possible. Furthermore, the daughter’s remembrance is linked to the paragraph that came before it in several ways: Firstly, on a superficial level, both the spat between the taxi drivers and the mother’s statement about blood on a bumper refer to cars. Secondly, both episodes point to conflict and the possibility of its resolution: While the short spat between the two taxi drivers seems to have dissipated, other conflicts, Danticat reminds us here, are more fraught. In both paragraphs, the issue at play is that two rhythms have clashed; in one case, those of two taxis, and in another case, those of a car and a pedestrian. While one situation can be solved by someone making a jokey, albeit aggressive statement, the other one ends with blood. Beyond these specific links between the two paragraphs, what stands out is the rhythm of the narrative thus created, the point at which one vignette switches for another. For Lefebvre, the rhythm analyst is someone who is at once

surrounded by the rhythms of their town or city, and who, through a crisis, disruption, or reflection, stands apart from the city's rhythms enough so as to be able to analyze them. It is not only the mother who is standing "outside" the rhythm at that moment, as she is patiently waiting to cross the road, but also her daughter, the narrator, who performs the switch between observing and remembering, thus stepping outside the rhythm. The disruption in the city's rhythm functions as an opportunity for reflection on the part of both the mother and daughter: while the mother is observing the spat, perhaps reflecting on how a similar situation would be handled in Haiti, the daughter is observing both the spat and the way it removes the mother from the rhythm, making her a rhythm analyst of the rhythm as a whole and of the pause in the rhythm in which her mother dwells. Lefebvre argues that "to grasp a rhythm it is necessary to have been *grasped* by it; one must *let oneself go*, give oneself over, abandon oneself to its duration" (27; emphases added). The daughter, who is grasped by her mother's rhythm to such an extent as to drop everything and follow her, is thus attuned to the gaps in her mother's rhythms. This rhythm analytical endeavor on the part of the daughter is matched by that of the reader, as the reader's task is to observe, and make sense of, the rhythms of the story. These at times rather jarring transitions are softened by the images of small flowers inserted between the two strands of the narrative.

As my mother stands in front of Carnegie Hall, one taxi driver yells to another, "What do you think this is, a dance floor?"

My mother waits patiently for this dispute to be settled before crossing the street.



In Haiti when you get hit by a car, the owner of the car gets out and kicks you for getting blood on his bumper.



Fig. 1: Flowers on Danticat, "New York" 128.

While these flowers highlight the division, making visible the gap, they also fill it. Standing in both for rupture and for continuity, they highlight the clash between the two strands while time bridging the chasm thus created.

Rhythms of Repetition: Dashing

Rhythm analysis is attuned not only to clashes and discontinuities, but also to connections. One way of doing that is to look at the verb "dash," which appears at several points in the story. The first time it appears is on the first page of the story, when the daughter narrates: "My mother, who accuses me of random offenses as I dash out of the house" (Danticat, "New York" 127). Later, the daughter uses the same word to describe walking behind her mother.

I follow my mother, mesmerized by the many possibilities of her journey. Even in a flowered dress, she is lost in a sea of pinstripes and gray suits, high heels and elegant short skirts, Reebok sneakers, dashing from building to building. My mother, who won't go out to dinner with anyone. (Danticat, "New York" 129)

Where, in the first instance, dashing is seen to be about the daughter escaping from her mother's gaze, and of being youthful and energetic in this dashing away from her, in this second instance, it is the mother who dashes, much to her daughter's surprise. In this moment, then, there is a kind of reversal, in which the daughter and the mother change places. The daughter performs the dual task of observing her mother's mobility—checking up on it; almost, at times, policing it—while remembering an instance where her mother did the same thing for her. The third time the word comes up, the daughter watches as "a bicycle messenger swings so close to her [the mother] that I want to dash forward and rescue her" (Danticat, "New York" 130). The daughter feels shaken from her observer's perch and instead wants to take an active part in what's happening by rescuing her mother, a wish which Kathleen Gyssels argues draws on "the vodou concept of the protecting

and caring ‘angel spirit’ (*ti bon ange*)” (9). However, the daughter decides to stay in the role of the rhythm analyst rather than intervene in her mother’s journey. The mother and daughter are nonetheless connected. In addition to rhythm, Benítez-Rojo identifies another key aspect of Caribbean life, something he calls “in a certain kind of way” (Benítez-Rojo 16). [11] He describes it as

something remote that reproduces itself and that carries the desire to sublimate apocalypse and violence; something obscure that comes from the performance and that one makes his own in a very special way; concretely, it takes away the space that separates the onlooker from the participant. (Benítez-Rojo 16)

Lefebvre sees the rhythm analyst as someone standing just outside a rhythm enough to observe it. While Lefebvre is focusing on the relationship of the rhythm analyst to the events and rhythms surrounding him, Benítez-Rojo is interested in the space between the onlooker and the participant. Like Lefebvre, he sees that space as fluid, amorphous, shifting. The thing which bridges it – the ineffable quality of being “in a certain kind of way” – is what he sees as warding off apocalypse and disaster; a drive to hope, to the future.

When the daughter says that “[e]ven in a flowered dress,” the mother is “lost in a sea of pinstripes and gray suits” (Danticat, “New York” 129), she is both clearly visible and enmeshed in a sea of others. The daughter juxtaposes the mother’s feminine outfit with the urban scene’s prevalent masculine style, and the mother’s casual dress with the business-like outfits of those around her. By doing so, the daughter is pointedly inscribing her mother into a city scene; she is also inscribing her mother, a diasporic Haitian subject, into diaspora. Both discourses have been often perceived as male. Although the flâneur is traditionally a male figure, scholarship has tried to make female flânerie, female ways of inhabiting and appropriating the city, visible. In *Routes*, James Clifford refers to “George Sand’s [...] dressing as a man in order to move freely in the city, to experience

the gendered freedom of the flâneur” (32). While Lefebvre always imagined a male rhythm analyst observing the city and chiming with its rhythms, flânerie, too, was imagined as male and only accessible through male codes. Clifford links this to Diaspora Studies, arguing that, despite “[d]iasporic experiences [being] always gendered” (258), this often remains unmarked. “When diasporic experience is viewed in terms of displacement rather than placement, traveling rather than dwelling, and disarticulation rather than rearticulation, then the experiences of men will tend to predominate” (Clifford 259). [12] “New York Day Women,” then, can be seen as not just a rewriting of the male flâneur, but also of the often-male diasporic subject. The mother dashing around Manhattan when the daughter was not expecting her to leave Brooklyn can be seen as a take both on flânerie and on a state of diasporicity. The concept of flânerie here reaches its limit, however, since the mother, as we find out later in the story, is not just enjoying the city, but on her way to work. While the mother does not fit in neatly with the concept of flânerie, she nonetheless points to a distinct way of inhabiting the city, as she walks “as though she owns the sidewalk under her feet” (Danticat, “New York” 130) while being a female, diasporic, laboring subject.

The term “dash,” moreover, has its own implications. In typography, a dash is a hyphen, a line between words, a kind of break. Much like the tiny flowers between the story’s plot and the interspersed vignettes, a dash is something which both connects and separates. Where a comma suggests a succession of events and a semicolon arguably points to a fuller rupture, a break almost as full as a full-stop, a dash does something else; quite literally, it dashes away from one part of the sentence and creates a line stretching to another part of the sentence. Dashes, then, most frequently frame an insertion into a sentence. They depart from the original sentence while keeping it intact, creating a space within an existing sentence. Of all the verbs one can use to describe mobilities of the body, it is significant that Danticat uses that word. While a typographical dash points to a departure, and a return, within the same sentence, Danticat frames the instances of dashing as scenes in which there

is both departure and a sense of circling back to the place departed from. Dashing, then, not only describes a physical movement through which the mother and daughter navigate their homes of New York and Haiti but becomes a shorthand for the way home is an entangled web of arrivals, departures, and the states in between. In the first sentence in which the word appears, when the narrator dashes out of her house while listening to her mother's reproaches, the "dash" suggests an energetic movement away from the mother while also suggesting a way back to her. In the second instance, when the mother is "dashing from building to building" (Danticat, "New York" 129), this is, firstly, an echo of the daughter's earlier dashing, thus connecting the two women, framing them as similar in their movements and bodily realities while reversing their relationship. Secondly, by adding "from building to building," Danticat suggests an ongoing movement in multiple directions, as each building is supplanted by another one. Here, the dashing away from one building can also be seen as the dashing to another building, all movement *away* therefore also being a movement *toward*. Where, in the first instance, the daughter dashes away from her mother's accusations and, in the second, the mother dashes by herself and the daughter is reduced to an observer, the third instance adds a further dimension, as the daughter wants to save her mother. We thus see three different aspects of their relationship play out here: One in which the mother is a figure of authority, one in which the mother is sole person observed, and one in which, once more, the roles are reversed and it is the daughter who seems to have the power to save the mother from hurt and harm. By focusing on the verb "dash," then, it becomes possible to read these three episodes together.

All three of these aspects of their relationship are open-ended, with departure and return possible in each one of them. The "dashing" resists a finality of departure or of arrival. Rather, it sees the points of arrival and departure as connected, as poles between which there is a dash, a typographical bridge. Not only is there a dashing, an element of movement and of change, in the relationship between the mother and daughter, but also in the movements of the bodies, and the movements of the city. While the

mother's and daughter's dashing is subject to the rhythms around it, the repetition of this verb also creates its own rhythms.

Rhythms of Imagined Dialogues

Although the short story, at first glance, consists of two separate, juxtaposed strands—the bold vignettes and the non-bold plot—the actual relationship between the two strands is more complicated. One vignette says, "Fat, you know, and cholesterol. Fat and cholesterol killed your aunt Hermione" (Danticat, "New York" 130). But instead of narration switching from this vignette to the level of plot, what follows in normal font is the daughter's following recollection of her mother: "My mother, who makes jam with dried grapefruit peel and then puts in cinnamon bark that I always think is cockroaches in the jam," before the daughter switches back to the present moment and describes how she is "trail[ing] the red orchids in her dress and the heavy faux leather bag on her shoulders. Realizing the ferocious pace of my pursuit, I stop against a wall to rest. My mother keeps on walking as though she owns the sidewalk under her feet" (Danticat, "New York" 130). There are thus not just two, but three levels of narration: The vignettes, which consist of the mother's proclamations and adages, the daughter's thoughts about her mother, and the plot. While the mother's utterings are offset by the font and the flowers, the daughter's memories and actions are grouped together in normal font. This both strengthens and subverts the dialogical relationship that is being laid out between the mother and the daughter: The daughter is elaborating on her mother's adages in a freewheeling, associative way—the mother's rant about cholesterol leads to a memory of the mother making jam—which nonetheless speaks to the vignettes and puts them in relation to her own memories. In this way, the daughter is expanding on what she remembers her mother saying, making the latter's position more legible to the reader. At the same time, this structure is being subverted, since what we are confronted with is not just the mother on one side and the daughter on another, or plot on one level and memory on another, but a more complex

interweaving of these elements. Gyssels describes how “the mother speaks directly to the daughter expressing her fear, frustrations, disappointment, while the daughter speaks to us about her mother, and the uneasiness she feels when she observes her mother” (3). Gyssels argues that, “[d]uring the narrative, the two voices never reply to each other, so we have two monologues rather than a dialogue” (3); however, I would argue that the daughter is very much replying to her mother, leading to a dialogue on the page. The mother’s description of what happens in Haiti when you get hit by a car was itself, presumably, an instance of commemorative mobility, as she remembered those kinds of situations and relayed them to her daughter. By recalling this description, the daughter is, in a way, mimicking her mother’s commemorative mobility and entering into dialogue with it. Both in the dialogue between the mother and daughter, and in the dialogue between Haiti and New York, a home is being imagined: not in any of these poles, but in the interplay, gradations, and tugs between them.

The vignettes of the short story are assembled by the daughter, and the mother does not get a chance to participate in this act of assemblage or to directly answer her daughter’s thoughts. However, the vignettes consist of things the mother has said to her daughter; they are scraps of remembered conversations. The daughter is weaving a dialogue out of her own thoughts and what she remembers her mother saying, thus not only folding her mother’s absence into her own presence but turning her absence into presence. What is interesting is that this happens while the mother is, in fact, walking just a few feet in front of the daughter. [13] According to Nick Nesbitt, “[h]istory is the absent presence in Danticat’s writing” (210), “[t]his absence form[ing] the very material of Danticat’s prose” (205). The daughter’s and mother’s dialogue, then, is an example of the way Danticat complicates ideas of absence and presence in this short story, within the short story cycle, and arguably in her work at large, writing absence and presence as not only coexisting but entangled.

These entangled mobilities are not only playing out through the structure of Danticat’s short story, but also through what exactly is being

remembered and described. In the paragraph quoted above, commemorative mobility takes place through food; food is both what is being remembered and the means through which memory takes place, both the means of transport and the thing that is being transported. [14] It is from this memory of food that the daughter-narrator switches back to describing how she is trailing her mother again.

It is not just the dialogue, but also this act of walking the city, in which absence and presence are interwoven. According to Michel de Certeau, “To walk is to lack a place. It is the indefinite process of being absent and in search of a proper. The moving about that the city multiplies and concentrates makes the city itself an immense social experience of lacking a place” (103). He argues that the person walking the city is engaging with absence both because she is continually walking and seeking, and because to live in a city is to be reminded of what used to be there, making cities into “presences of diverse absences” (de Certeau 108). The short story enacts the presence of/in absence not only in its depiction of the city, but in its discussion of home. It is not just that neither Haiti nor New York are fully present or absent on any given page of the short story, as they instead jangle up against each other, sometime one getting closer and the other receding, sometimes with the roles switched. Instead, the very notion of home is one that is only graspable through an interplay of absence of presence; both walking around the city and switching between the memory and present are ways of making this simultaneity of absence and presence tangible and traversable. Similarly, de Certeau sees the absence, and not just the presence, as an affordance: “Far from expressing a void or describing a lack, it creates such. It makes room for a void. In that way, it opens up clearings; it ‘allows’ a play within a system of defined places” (106).

Rhythms of Money

In the case of rhythms, the clearing de Certeau describes is being opened up within the context of money. The sharp dichotomy between Brooklyn and Manhattan in this short story needs to be placed in its historical context. In the 1990’s,

when this story is set, Brooklyn was still largely an immigrant, working-class borough. When the daughter thinks her mother never leaves Brooklyn, that is thus a statement both about the mother's class and about the mother's position as an immigrant –to the daughter, Manhattan is an environment both glitzier and more 'American' than she can comfortably picture her mother in. [15]

Money is also present both in the idea of rhythms and in their lived reality. For Lefebvre, behind every rhythm lurks money. He states this in no uncertain terms: "The essential? The determining factor? Money" (Lefebvre 34). While following her mother, the daughter sees her mother's journey as thoroughly enigmatic, a baffling mystery. The resolution, however, turns out to be quite banal: the mother is a caretaker for a young white boy, thus illuminating the story's title. "Day women," explains Kathleen Gyssels, are "'women who work during the day to make a living,' implying membership in the cheap labour force of (il)legal workers who fulfill difficult, badly paid jobs in global economies" (9). Gyssels' observation points us to the fact that money is "the determining factor" not just in the rhythms of the city, but in the rhythm pulsating outward from the Caribbean. The profound financial ways in which the Caribbean and New York are embedded in one another are rendered visible in the mere presence of the daughter and mother on the streets of New York, pointing to centuries of movement back and forth undergirded by money. They are also rendered visible by the mother's work as a caretaker. When the daughter is imagining her mother, she is imagining her mother as a flâneuse. But a flâneur is "[a]n aesthete who uniquely manages to engage with the realities of the modern city without fully surrendering to them" (Vermeulen 41), a luxury not afforded to the mother. In *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies*, Sheller analyzes ways in which the Global North has "consumed" the Caribbean, including through crops, art, human corpses, sex tourism, and labor. Consumption, too, can be seen as a way in which the Caribbean is pulsating outwards, embedding the mother in a flow of cash, labor, and consumption stretching from Haiti to the U.S. and back again. By making visible some

of the ways in which the mother is embedded in this process and yet letting the daughter view her mother through the lens of flânerie, Danticat is expanding the concept of flânerie, showing ways in which flânerie –taking in a city, owning the ground under one's feet– can be entwined with labor both on an individual level and in the context of vast historical processes.

The Reader's Rhythms

Many critics have focused on the ways Danticat makes visible connections not only within, but between the short stories of *Krik? Krak!*. Connections between the stories, such as characters reappearing, lead Lisa Muir to conclude that "*Krik? Krak!* should more appropriately be labeled a novel" (112) than a short story collection, while Amanda Putnam speaks of a "short story montage" (2). Rocio G. Davis argues that "the genre [of the short story cycle], as with the oral narrative, intensifies the normally participatory act of reading by insisting that we 'fill in the blanks' as we go along; the discovery of connections is transformed into the reader's task" (70). Davis even links the genre of the short story cycle to mobilities, arguing that "recurrence and development [are] the integrated movements that effect final cohesion" (66). [16] It is the reader who assembles these different instances. In "New York Day Women," this can happen through reading together the two strands of the narrative, or through a focus such as on the verb "dashing." On the level of the short story collection, certain names, characters, and events appear in one story and later in another, asking the reader to integrate the weave of one story into that of the collection.

In his paper "Mobility of Form," Ian Davidson sees such a weaving together of fragments as one of the ways in which literary form can be mobile, taking *Some of the Dharma* as an example. In that book, Jack Kerouac intersperses handwritten observations with text from his own notebooks, bringing together "theological meditations, instructions, journal entries and poems" (Davidson 553) on pages which are, themselves, subdivided. This assembling of fragments is, according to Davidson, a marker of formal literary mobility. In

“New York Day Women,” the transitions between the main narrative and the memories, too, lead to a mobility of form, since they make the reader jump from one plane to another, keeping a flexibility between them rather than settling into one form. Danticat links this mobility of assembly on the part of the reader to the interweaving of physical and commemorative mobilities on the part of the daughter. Focusing on the rhythms of reading ties in with McKittrick’s work on rhythm in Wynter’s writing. McKittrick et al. write

Positing rhythm as reading praxis, we can perhaps merge new or different stories together – tracking continuities, seeking out flows, noticing pauses that occur across a range of texts and ideas – and thus challenge disciplinary silos that currently define normative and disciplined ways of knowing. [...] Rhythmic reading is thinking together, always, even when we do not realize that we are doing such. (871)

Here, McKittrick et al. are, first and foremost, referring to the rhythms that arise when one reads different texts and talks to people about them, “moments where someone asks, ‘What page or section was that idea on again?’” saying that “it is precisely these lapses that initiate a discursive rhythm prompted by memory, return, and the sharing of ideas” (McKittrick et al. 871). They are not talking about the solitary experience of reading a single short story. However, “New York Day Women” functions like a collage in which different texts come together. The reader jumps from strand to strand, at times feeling compelled to jump back to an earlier part in order to see possible connections. Additionally, the conversational element McKittrick et al. mention – discussing something, and in so doing remembering a snippet, a snippet that may seem out of reach – is the very structuring element of Danticat’s short story. In a way, the daughter and the reader are reading together – the daughter is attempting to read and understand her present mother, the woman she is trailing behind, by trying to read and understand her past mother. The daughter, then, is “prompted by memory, return, and the sharing of ideas” as McKittrick

et al say (871); the reader is both observing this process and trying to make her own connections alongside the daughter.

This short story is less entangled with the rest of *Krik? Krak!* than other short stories from the collection. Even so, the fact that the reader of *Krik? Krak!* is attuned to connections across the collection means that she is reading “New York Day Women” with an eye to connection, thereby engendering the particular rhythm described by McKittrick, asking “‘What page or section was that idea on again?’,” moving backwards and forwards in the text. Moreover, “New York Day Women” does contain references to other short stories. One reference is arguably the name Hermione – “Fat, you know, and cholesterol. Fat and cholesterol killed your aunt Hermione” (Danticat, “New York” 130)–, which is almost mirrored in the short story “Between the Pool and the Gardenias.” In that story, the young protagonist remembers all the babies she has lost: “I called out all the names I wanted to give them: Eveline, Josephine, Jacqueline, Hermine, Marie Magdalène, Célianne” (Danticat, “Between” 80). This almost-sameness is not an accident, but part of the way in which Danticat “explores numerous techniques of re-connecting lost ancestry by braiding previous and current generations together” (Putnam 7).

A connection to other short stories in the collection is also created through the mention of the fictional Haitian town of Ville Rose. At first, the two poles between which “New York Day Women” moves are New York City – specifically, the boroughs of Manhattan and Brooklyn, in their respective specificity and difference – and Haiti. While other texts by Danticat, both in *Krik? Krak!* and elsewhere, have a more localized, specified sense of place, “Haiti” could here at first be seen to figure as a monolith. Comparing an entire country in the Global South to a set of boroughs in the Global North falls danger to creating an imbalance – while the city in the Global North is afforded complexity, the country in the Global South is flattened, and differences and diversity within that country rendered invisible. However, in the case of this short story, these two poles reflect the way the daughter sees and navigates them. Although Haiti and New York come together to create an imagined home, the

differences between the boroughs are part of the daughter's daily reality in a way that different places in Haiti presumably are not. Secondly, I would argue, "Haiti" has become a way for the mother and the daughter to name and carry a wide array of memories, people, practices, and feelings. "Haiti," then, is a capacious signifier, one that, for the daughter, points toward everything from advice her mother has given her to the clothes her mother is planning to send to relatives. The short story shows the extent to which these different aspects of the mother's and daughter's relationship to Haiti are both fragmented kernels –vignettes– and the extent to which they can be gathered together. While "New York Day Women" gathers the different parts of its assemblage into a narrative, and while *Krik? Krak!* as a whole weaves together stories from a variety of epochs and contexts, the term "Haiti" does similar work here. It is the signifier the mother uses to impart a wealth of experiences to her daughter, and it is the signifier the daughter takes hold of when remembering. Corinne Bigot underlines that home is always imagined, saying that it 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" (98). In "New York Day women," the daughter is imagining the capacious category of Haiti, with all its entanglements to New York, as home. There is, however, a paragraph in which the daughter names the specific, familial location of Ville Rose. She reflects, "My mother, who has now lost six of her seven sisters in Ville Rose and has never had the strength to return for their funerals" (Danticat, "New York" 133). By mentioning this particular locale, Danticat is tying this short story in with other work she has set in the town. [17]

Conclusion

In "New York Day Women," Haiti and Manhattan become perceptible through one another. The mother and daughter of this story are dashing around Manhattan, but this dashing connects them to both Haiti *and* New York. As Lefebvre writes: "The recollection of other moments and of all the hours is indispensable, not as a simple

point of reference, but in order not to isolate this present and in order to *live* it in all its diversity, made up of *subjects* and *objects*" (36; emphases added). It is the daughter's recollection of her mother's dictums about Haiti that allows her to live fully in New York, and to inhabit this moment; but it is also the daughter's recollection of her mother's dictums that makes her feel connected to that part of her life and family history. In this way, it is not just that Haiti is a repeating island, repeating, reverberating, and echoing all the way to Manhattan, but that Manhattan, too, is part of a Caribbean archipelago. Manhattan, too, repeats and reverberates, changing how Haiti is seen, lived, remembered, and embodied, an embodiment that, according to Amber Lascelles, "in its multiple literary forms, is a central part of this resistance and becomes a crucial way of engaging with diaspora" (230). Danticat links the im/mobilities of walking to the imaginative, commemorative mobilities of remembered statements; she also links these mobilities on the part of the daughter-narrator to those of the reader, who assembles the two narrative strands into a story and makes sense of the rhythm between and within them. Lefebvrian rhythmanalysis enables us to zoom in on specific, minute moments –the mother waiting at the crosswalk, one taxi driver talking to another, a dash out the door– while Benítez-Rojo enables us to read Haiti as "an island that repeats itself until transforming into a meta-archipelago and reaching the most widely separated transhistorical frontiers of the globe" (Benítez-Rojo 24). It is in this repetition of the island, this entanglement of Haiti and New York, that the characters continually forge and mobilize ideas of home.

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2021 as well as everyone at the colloquium held by the research platform *Mobile Cultures and Societies* at the University of Vienna in June 2021.

Endnotes

[1] This article is adapted from my dissertation on imaginative mobilities in Caribbean diaspora literature, which I am writing at the University of Vienna, and which is advised by Prof. Alexandra Ganser and Prof. Annegret Pelz.

[2] Including the MacArthur “Genius” grant in 2009.

[3] Amber Lascelles suggests reading Danticat’s fiction as belonging to “post-diaspora” rather than “diaspora,” arguing that “[m]oving away from defined origins and single distinct destinations, [the concept of post-diaspora] leaves room to push the fluidity of diaspora further” (228). While I agree that Danticat’s fiction moves away from single distinct destinations, I continue to find “diaspora” a fruitful concept.

[4] I call these insertions in bold “vignettes” to point to their short, fragmentary literary nature, and for the way they are distinguished from the surrounding text, as a vignette on a stamp is designed “as distinguished from the frame and lettering” (Merriam-Webster).

[5] Lefebvre exclusively uses the male pronoun.

[6] “He [the rhythm analyst] will listen to the world, and above all to what are disdainfully called noises” (Lefebvre 19).

[7] “[T]he media day unfolds polyrhythmically” (Lefebvre 48).

[8] Translation my own; the original states “la rencontre, l’interférence, le choc, les harmonies et les disharmonies entre les cultures, dans la totalité réalisée du monde-terre” (Glissant 3).

[9] Benítez-Rojo capitalizes the word Plantation “to indicate not just the presence of plantations but also the type of society that results from their use and abuse” (9).

[10] Benítez-Rojo, interestingly, uses both the terms “silences” and “plastic immobilities” to refer to rhythmic, physical, nonverbal acts “such as [women] ‘carrying their hands on their hips,’ or balancing baskets on their heads ‘with their arm rounded like a pitcher’s handle’” (Benítez-Rojo 79). I would, however, argue, that what he is describing is not so much silences or gaps the way I, drawing on Lefebvre, think of them here, but acts of physical, corporeal mobility beyond verbal language.

[11] Benítez-Rojo also identifies a third factor, performance (see Benítez-Rojo 16).

[12] It has long been the case that many diasporic subjects are women, however; see, for example, Avtar Brah on the “feminization of diaspora” (179).

[13] The field of Postmemory, shaped by Marianna Hirsch and others, studies how the second generation, or in some cases even third generation, relates to the trauma experienced by the parents (the first generation). Postmemory, then, offers a way to make sense of collective trauma. While “New York Day Women” is not immediately concerned with trauma, the daughter is one generation removed from Haiti and from her mother’s experiences and trying to make sense of them across that generational distance. For a thorough, wide-ranging analysis of the concept of a generation, also see Parnes et al.

[14] For an analysis of Haitian cooking in Danticat’s story “Caroline’s Wedding,” see Lascelles 231. Bigot writes about how diasporic writers “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” (98).

[15] Since the 1990’s, the demographics of Brooklyn have drastically changed; if the story was set in the 2020’s, the mother would arguably be more likely to live in Queens or the Bronx than in Brooklyn.

[16] Writing about another book by Danticat, Mukherjee says: “*The Dew Breaker* is a collection of linked stories (which seems to be a favorite form of the immigrant writer)” (690).

[17] Work set in the town includes Danticat’s 2013 novel *Claire of the Sea Light*.

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