(Re) imagining Haiti through the eyes of a seven-year-old girl

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Abstract
Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat's new novel Claire of the Sea Light (2013) explores themes of love, loss, and death. The first character that is presented to us is Claire of the Sea Light, a seven-year-old girl, whose mother died giving birth to her and who is missing. It is at the intersection of this little girl’s loss that all the other characters and topics unfold. Madame Gaëlle, an upper class woman who has a fabric shop in Ville Rose, decides to adopt Claire in order to give her a better life. In this essay I demonstrate that Edwidge Danticat articulates the nation as fundamentally constructed by the feminine positioning the daughter relationship with her biological mother and her adoptive mother as the most important bonds that the seven-year-old girl has throughout the novel. Women assume the role of guardians of the whole town, while at the same time, question and challenge Haiti’s economic and social infrastructure. Furthermore, the author engages in a special literary creativity through the symbols of the sea, the frogs, and the ghosts to give a voice to displaced, marginalized, exploited and oppressed Haitian people as well as its nature. The purpose of the paper is to show a new way in rethinking feminist methodologies for researching the nation-state. Although the novel is set before the earthquake of January 2010, it is difficult to resist the temptation to see in the little girl’s loss the nation-state’s desire for repair. The imaginary reconstruction of the nation is located in modern Haitian literature as scholar Michael Dash mentions in Haiti and the Americas (2013). The theoretical framework of my paper is mostly based on works of feminism, identity and gender relations by Nira Yuval-Davis, Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, and bell hooks.

Note on the Author

Iliana Rosales Figueroa did her B.A. in French and English at Universidad Veracruzana in Mexico. She studied her M.A. in French at the University of Missouri and her Ph.D. in Romance Languages at the University of Cincinnati. She currently teaches at Xavier University. Her research interests include Comparative studies on Hispanic and Francophone Caribbean literatures with an emphasis in the representation of power, resistance, and space. Her research agenda also focuses on postcolonial studies, cultural studies, and 20th and 21st century Latin American fiction.

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