

## **EXPLORING FEMININE SUBJECTIVITY IN CARIBBEAN HISTORY: A NEW HISTORICIST PERSPECTIVE IN EDWIDGE DANTICAT'S THE FARMING OF BONES**

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### **Abstract**

*Set within the context of Caribbean literature, this paper deploys New Historicism to posit in its argument that history as used in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* exposes the socio-political dilemma hindering the Caribbean people from realising a seamless sense of Caribbean-ness. To this end, the study unravels the various layers of Caribbean history to challenge forces that have made the Caribbean people to suffered setbacks, first, in the ways their leaders not only hijacked their nations in terms of bad leadership but by doing so, have set precedence that have continued to hinder the Caribbean people from realising the essence of selfhood. Second, the paper exposes the relational tensions that have created divisions among the Caribbean people. The essence of these is to sustain the argument that Caribbean women writers do not only use their texts as a platform for decrying gender imbalances within patriarchal setting or deploy history as a form of writing back to the dominating centre but that by engaging with history, they too write to the Caribbean nations to interrogate the state of nation-state and question the notion of selfhood in the context of the Caribbean. Thus, the paper reveals the relationship between authorial intentions and text-meaning by loosening various historical knots that provide context for interrogating the sense of nationhood in the Caribbean.*

**Keywords:** Feminine, Caribbean, History, Perspective, Historicism.

## Introduction

The terrain of writing particularly in cultural discourses whether as creative endeavour, a critical enunciation or a discursive practice is, in the most part, a subjective domain. Among the Caribbean writers, to be specific, writing provides an arena of contestation where, on the one hand, they design discourses that enhance their power or constantly reverses written (and even spoken) codes that objectivise them. In Cultural Studies, writing is said to be subjective when a writer (re)creates polarities (consciously or unconsciously) that undermine or interrogate social structures within a given society (as is the case with Postcolonial writings), separates or distantiates human relationships (as is seen in Gender discourses), negates claims of disinterestedness in historical factuality (as with New Historicism) or intentionally overturns existing structures within a written text (as exemplified in Deconstruction) etc. And because this is so, writing, on the other hand, becomes an inscription of 'reverse-discourse' or a "scandalous reversal of subjective position" (Robert, 2007:625) where the hitherto objectivised subject of writing rises to "...challenge, subvert and undermine the ruling ideologies" (Michel, 1982:117) with respect to what the 'universal subject' gives him/her to think.

In line with the above proposition, Perry (2007: 274) maintains that "the weak and strong forms of oppositional discursive practices have been designated as re/citation and de/citation...and counter-identification and disidentification..." With this, writing becomes a constant shift of paradigmatic patterns – of evidence and of "a struggle against ideological evidenceness on the terrain of that evidenceness, an evidenceness with a negative sign, reversed on its own terrain" (Michel 1982:117).

Consequent upon this, subjectivity as a coordinate in theoretical discourse entails, using the words of Bello-Kano (2015:12), "the realm of *intentionalactivities* of human beings" aimed towards redefining existing structures or towards altering same. Because of the self-mediatedness of writing, the innocence of history is therefore shrouded with doubt. This is so largely because even though history intends to present "things as they are without rhetorical adornment or poetic imagery" (White 1978:3), it is limited by or due to the subjectivity of 'intention'. The reason for this is that history is a social construction through which society is patterned in layers. These layers are, most times,(consciously) designed in binary in an attempt to signify a facet of humanity in relation to the 'Other'. This position is premised on the ground that history is a reflection of social formations

that define an era which in itself defines social relations within time and space. To especially the Caribbean writer (whether male or female) therefore, it is not such social formations that define their writings but the interplay of forces which negate, undermine and repress the very humanity of the Caribbean ‘Other’ within such social formation.

In light of this, ‘History’ – which Carr (1987: 55) calls “a social process, in which individuals are engaged as social beings...” can be seen as a (linguistic and or literary) trope used to designate the humanity of a people or, to borrow from Carr, a “verbal construction that is always in one way or the other political and hence a vehicle of power”. With this, the notion of ‘colonial history’ carries with it a notation of writing by agents of colonialism about the colonised from a privileged position. Based on this, writers from the colonised nations (largely of African, Caribbean, and African-American orientation) recreate such historical contexts in their texts in order to reconceptualise or dislodge the irredeemable image of “Whiteness, otherness, margins, *and* decentring” (Robert 2007:622, my emphasis) inscribed in repressive historical discourses or texts. This way, history becomes, in Derrida’s (1978: 235) words, “a doctrine of indoctrination almost ineffaceable ...” Such writers, in the most part, provide (in their writings) historical models or discourses that enunciate, according to Young (2007:623), a “strategy of ... retaliation, of overturning” repressive historical structures enshrined within a text.

Drawing from the above, it can be said therefore, that most discourses by Caribbean women writers, like their male counterparts, are subjective. Their writings are largely patterned according to (or in order to reflect the tension within) historical, social and political formations that have denied (and have continued to deny) the Caribbean people a true sense of humanity. In their case, they recreate historical contexts not only to contend with repressive social and cultural formations but also with post-independent structures that have continually placed hindrances to and ignored the essence of their humanity as women and that of the Caribbean people in general.

The focus in this paper therefore, is to, first; explore the permeability between the intentions of Danticat as a Caribbean women writer in the way she reconstruct historical realties in her texts to re-examine and re-contextualize issues in the Caribbean. The second is to show that New Historicism provide adequate theoretical ground for exploring how past experiences carry with them some daunting and haunting shadows that follow a people into the present.

Furthermore, the New Historicist angle in this paper unveils some biases hidden in texts that are said to capture Caribbean history. These biases, the paper offers, are rendered to undermine or re-contextualise some distorted historical factuality that has continued to sore the wounds of difference among the Caribbean people.

When this theoretical position and discursive angles are taken together, they would open up the “‘intentional predicate’ or ‘human meaning-making’” (Bello-Kano 2015:12) in the engagement with historyin EdwidgeDanticat’s*The Farming of Bones*. The implication is that in context-sensitive theories such as New Historicism, text and context, as Bello-Kano (2015:17) posits, are often “held in constant tension” as they continue to shift or blend according to the intentional stands of the writer. Hence, Said’s (1977: 24) argument that the goal of analysis is to reveal the dialectic between individual text or writer and the complex collective formation (i.e. context) to which his work is a contribution becomes justifying.

### **New Historicism**

The term “New Historicism” (the American branch of British “Cultural Materialism”) - ‘historicism’ referring to the view that the past was truly, fundamentally different (Bertens, 2001:141) – describes the work of a group of theorists influenced by the mixture of Marxism and post-structuralism, and in particular, the work of Foucault (1926-1984), which is concerned as it is, with, in Foucault’s (1982: 208)words, “the different modes by which, in our culture, human beings are made subjects”. In specific terms, these theorists, borrowing from poststructuralism, focused “...on power, on the discourses that serve as vehicles for power, *and* on the construction of identity...” (Bertens 2001:140, my emphasis).

Coming from this position, Bello-Kano (2015:44), submits that New Historicism:

is involved in power (“power-knowledge”, what he [Foucault] calls the “relations of domination” that articulate discursive practices into a historically specific apparatus, for example, the disciplines, the practices of surveillance and control...power is a key element in (New Historicist) discourse in that it is these practices that constitutes subjects).

Discernable from the above summation is that ‘history’, to the New Historicist, provides an unstable ‘context’ in literary discourses because, as Greenblatt

(1980:2) posits, history creates a space for "...self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process". Based on this, Veeser (1989:xi) argues that one of the key assumptions of New Historicism is that "every expressive act is embedded in a network of material practices...that no discourse, imaginative or archival, gives access to unchanging truths nor express inalterable human nature". In light of this, there is good reason, then, to accept Brannigan's (1998:6) definition of new historicism as "a mode of critical interpretation which privileges *power relations* as the most important *context* for texts of all kinds" and his claim that "as a critical practice it treats literary texts as a space where power relations are made visible."

Even though Abram and Harpham (2012:218) maintain that New Historicism is concerned with reading a text "from its historical context" rather than dealing with it in isolation, this definition is rather porous following the New Historicist point of view above. This is because historical contexts are virtually unending as they depend on the purpose for their interpretation and are affected by the information available to the interpreter of such historical context per time. In this vein, the New Historicist, due to the complexities of cultural artefacts, argues that no any one approach is capable of providing a complete picture of what has happened or, most importantly, what it means (Dobie 2012: 177). This is because what is perceived as history is, according to Dobie (2012:178), "what has been handed down in artefacts, stories, making history a narration, not a purely unadulterated set of precise observations."

The assumption here is that 'history' in its narrative form is a 'text' (i.e., narrative trope) and because of this, the New Historicist seeks to unearth such historicity (which itself is not free from subjectivity) within a textual code by examining the cultural context - the anxieties, issues, struggles, politics (and even more) of an era in which it was created. Like Foucault (1982) and Bello-Kano (2015), Dobie (2012:181) submits that "the New Historicist critics are interested in understanding a culture's power structure" implicated within a literary text. In light of this, literary interpretation, to the new historicist, involves acknowledging all the social concerns that surrounds (or hides within) a text - the customs, institutions, and social practices it depicts. Hence, the New Historicists see a text as an instrument of political awareness and a statement of ideology. In this vein, reading a text from the New Historicist perspective is to see literary texts as tools for modifying or reifying historical context, because, to them, all texts are social documents and, as such, they reflect and affect the world that produces them. This is because, as Foucault foregrounds, "social relations

are, intrinsically, relation of power" (qtd in Bertans 2001:142). Their focus, therefore, is to unravel the "far hidden and unsuspecting sources of, and vehicles for, power and the question of how power has worked to suppress or marginalize rival stories and discourses". By so doing, they uncover the stories of "the disempowered, the marginalized, those whose voices we hardly ever, or never, hear" (Bertans 2001:143).

It is from this perspectives that new historicists such as Louis Montrose argue for "the historicity of texts and textuality of history" (Abram & Harpham 2012:245) and for a form of cultural poetics which is both historicist and formalist (i. e., textual). Pointedly, the New Historicist "seeks to hold 'structure' (history) and 'text' (representation) in the same breathe" (Bello-Kano 2015: 44). The reason for this, as Bressler (2003:185) argues, is that "...an intricate connection exists between an aesthetic object - a text or any work of art - and society" hence, a text cannot be evaluated in isolation from its cultural or historical context. As a result of this, Bressler (2003:185) points that "we must know, the societal concerns of the author, of the historical times evidence in the work, and of other cultural elements exhibited in the text before we can devise a valid interpretation" of such a text. It is with this in mind that Montrose (1989:21) concludes that the New Historicists hold the position that:

the interdependent processes of subjectification and structuration are both ineluctably social and historical; that social systems are produced and reproduced in the interactive social practices of individual's group; that collective structures may enable as well as constrain individual agency; that the possibilities and patterns for action are always socially and historically situated, always limited and limiting; and that there is no necessary relationship between the intentions of actors [authors] and the outcomes of their action.

### Understanding the Intentional Stance of Edwidge Danticat in *The Farming of Bones*

Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* can be understood by tracing her encounter with some socio-historical conditions that have reshaped the humanity of the Haitian people particularly during the 1930s. Born in 1969, the Haitian-American author who was introduced to and influenced by the Haitian practice of story-telling early in life was, through it, exposed to the harsh living condition in Haiti and how these have reduced them to labour force in the Dominican and the resultant massacre that ensued in the quest for better their condition of living.

Her novel *The Farming of Bones* is therefore a testimonial to the plight of the Haitians especially during the reign of Trujillo.

Danticat began writing at the age of nine and at the age of 12, she moved to the United States to live with her parents in a heavy Haitian American neighbourhood. As a teenager, she was unable to adjust to her new surroundings and thus turned to literature for comfort. At the age of 14, she published her first writing in English titled "Haitian-American Christmas: Cremace and Creole Theatre" followed by "A New World Full of Strangers" in a city wide magazine written by teenagers. She graduated from Clara Barton High School in Brooklyn, New York and was then enrolled at the Barnard College in New York City. She completed her B. A. in French literature and went on to obtain a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Creative Writing from Brown University in 1993. As her thesis, she laid the foundation of her first novel *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994). This training, therefore, equipped her with the basic skills of transposing history into work of fiction. Other novels written by her include *The Farming of Bones* (1998), *The Dew Breaker* (2004), *Brother I'm Dying* (2007).

*The Farming of Bones* is therefore, a political novel as it recapitulates her concern with the life experiences of the Haitians. A political novel, according to the new historicists is one that uncovers the subtext of historical and political conflicts and oppressions (Abram and Harpham 2012:248). In particular, the novel provides the backdrop for the systematic discrimination and eventual massacre of thousands of Haitians who had migrated to the Dominican during the reign of Raphael Leonidas Trujillo Molina in 1937. In an afterword to *The Farming of Bones*, entitled "Nature Has No Memory" Danticat (1998:316-317) recounts:

I remember hearing about the 1937 massacre of Haitian cane workers in the Dominican Republic when I was a girl [...]. In the early 1990s, I met an artist named Ernst Prophète whose grandmother, he told me, had survived the massacre. In her honour, he had painted a graphic painting of her crossing the Massacre River with a trail of blood following in her wake [...] this painting rekindled my curiosity in this event and started my quest to reunite the stories of the lost cane workers of my childhood with the survival tale of my friend's grandmother and others like her.

Allowing herself certain liberties to combine history with literary aesthetics, she made up "all the characters except Trujillo and Henry I" (Danticat 1998:320).

Hence, the novel, to her, provides a space for reconstructing history. She acknowledges this in an interview when she points that "I feel that fiction will

give me the freedom to recreate things as I imagined they happened. Writing this novel made this story, these series of stories, a lot more visual... And that's the only way I felt I could convey it to others" (Danticat 1998:324). The reason for rewriting such upsetting historical realities using the novel form, to her, is to egg on the Caribbean people particularly the Haitians and Dominican people "to learn to be better people, better neighbours".

### **A Depiction of Feminine Subjectivity in Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones***

Danticat's intentional revision of history in *The Farming of Bones* is not only to present the history of the Haitian massacre from the Haitian perspective but also to deconstruct some historical narratives that project Trujillo as the epicentre of the 1937 Haitian massacre in the Dominican Republic. The reason for this is that evidence in most historical text such as Eric Paul Roorda's "Genocide Next Door: The Good Neighbour Policy, the Trujillo Regime, and Haitian Massacre of 1937" (1996); Wucker, Michele's *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola* (1999); Carolina González's "Living on the Line: Fear of the Haitian-Dominican Border Dweller" (1997) and Julia Alvarez's *In the Times of Butterflies* (1995) point to Trujillo as the "dictator [who] gave order to kill all Haitians living in the Dominican side of the border" (Gonzalez 1997:4).

Contrary to the positions taken by these writers, Danticat uses literary aesthetics to presents a version of history that presents Trujillo as the symbolic representation of a larger Dominican culture of hate against the Haitians. In light of this, Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* presents three issues that are worth noting in this study. The first is that Trujillo signifies the unifying essence of Dominicans in the collective struggle to close up relational space between them and the Haitians. The second is that to single out Trujillo as the initiator and perpetrator of the massacre is to "drastically narrow responsibility and culpability for the massacre of Haitians" (Caminero-Santangelo n.yr:9). And the third is that any effort made to repress history will hinder the Caribbean people from knowing, to use Achebe's words, the place where the rain began to fall on them.

Although several historical texts such as Eric Paul Roorda's (1996) "Genocide Next Door: The Good Neighbour Policy, the Trujillo Regime, and Haitian Massacre of 1937" and Winn Peter's (1992) *Americas: The Changing Face of Latin America and the Caribbean* present three factors, namely; race, language and religion as the cause of the lingering hatred between the Dominicans and the Haitians, Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* dwells on two - race and language. To

foreground this reality, the novel begins with the birth of twins (a boy and a girl) – one black, and the other light-skinned; a symbolic depiction of racial differences that separate the people. The implication of this projection is to show that at the instance of birth, the Caribbean child is initiated into the politics of (racial) identity. Conscious of the sense of separate peoplehood and its danger to the Caribbean people, Señora Valencia, the mother of the new-borns and the wealthy Dominican woman for whom Amabelle works asks Amabelle “what if she is mistaken for one of you” (p.12). This method of signification, in new historicist perspective, is called thick description – when small actions which seem to have no particular significance in themselves can, along with other actions, suggest how a given people see their world.

Hence, Señora Valencia, the mother of these twins represents Hispaniola and the twins represent the two rivalry dwellers of the island – the Dominicans, the light-skinned and Haitians, the dark-skinned. It is no wonder, therefore, that Señora Valencia tells Amabelle to “see what we’ve brought forth together, my Spanish prince and my Indian princes” (p.29). In this racial space, the dark-skinned girl, from birth, signifies disadvantage and the boy, the light-skinned, signifies advantage. This is why, as captured in the novel, the girl is said to be “...badly placed” (p.19). Considering the way the two children are positioned as they come out from their mother’s womb, Doctor Javier quarrels that “...the other one tried to strangle her” (p.19). In trying to explain the strange position of these children further, the Doctor says that:

Many of us start out as twins in the belly and do away with the other...sometimes you have two children born at the same time; one is stillborn but the other one alive and healthy because the death one gave the other a life transfusion in the womb and in essence sacrificed itself (p.19).

This imagery points to the fact that the relational tension between the Dominicans and Haitians is first, because of racial difference. Commenting on this racial divide in the Caribbean, Winn (1992:288) avers that “if Haiti was black, African and voodooist, then the Dominican Republic would be white, Spanish and Catholic.”

The collective hatred of the Dominican people against the Haitians is therefore, upheld by racial gap build upon the belief that their “...motherland is Spain” (260). This racial consciousness shows the elusiveness of the Caribbean essence, the rejection of social permeability among the Caribbean people and the existence

of relational gaps that eventually created the tension that built up into the 1937 massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. As Father Romain mechanically re-echoes:

Our motherland is Spain; theirs is darkest Africa, you understand? Our problem is one of dominion...we, as Dominicans, must have our separate traditions and our own ways of living. If not, in less than three generations, we will all be Haitians. In three generations, our children and grandchildren will have their blood completely tainted unless we defend ourselves now, you understand? (p.260).

In his historical text, Roorda (1996:304) sums up this reality as follows:

The societies that share the island of Hispaniola are markedly different, and their relations have been tensed and often violent...By 1930s, there was a large Haitian presence in the Dominican Republic, one comprised of two groups. One was predominantly male brigades of *braceros*, or agricultural workers, who were contracted to work on the sugar plantations in the south and east...The other, more firmly rooted group included families of workers, smallholders and entrepreneurs, established in the north and west. Many of these people were Dominican by birth but culturally and ethnically Haitians. Over the course of years, these independent immigrants established a bicultural identity for the border provinces of the Dominican Republic. The prevalence of Haitian Creole, the religion of *Vodun* and the Haitian gourde as a medium of exchange demonstrated that the province was less "Dominican"...

Based on these facts, one can see through that the Dominican people are concerned about the eroding presence of the Haitians into their borders. This concern is expected considering that they were racially different. Hence, the fear of infiltrating the Dominican with the burgeoning racial admixture, as Danticat expressed in her novel, made them to seek ways through which they could obliterate the Haitian people living within their borders.

Danticat also captures linguistic variation as yet another factor that created separate consciousness between the Dominicans and Haitians. The concern with this phenomenon in *The Farming of Bones* is important in that it serves as the tool with which the humanity of the Haitians is determined given that there are other

Dominicans that wear dark skin as well. The contempt with which the Haitian language is held by Dominicans is metaphorically captured by Amabelle thus:

Sabastien...feels haunted by the crooning of pigeons. Their cry, he says, sounds like it's not meant for others to hear, but like each howling pigeon is trying to bury its head deep inside itself. He imagines that the way pigeons moan is the same way ghosts cry when they are too lonely or too sad, when they have been dead so long that that have forgotten how to speak their own names (p.25).

This metaphor explains the antecedents of Haitians as the offspring of African slaves. The effect of this comparison is that the Haitians have become ghosts who have lost contact with their language and hence, resort to Creole as their linguistic code. This linguistic code, as expressed in the novel, "sounds like it's not meant for others to hear" (p.25).

In essence, these two factors - racial and linguistic difference - provided the platform for the wholesale hatred of the Dominicans. This foregrounding is crucial in that it provides the platform for understanding the basis for the collective hatred of the Dominican people against the Haitians. This is why Sagás (2000:46) argues that "the Trujillo regime and its intellectuals did not invent antihaitianismo; it already was an integral part of Dominican culture." Hence, the incidences of violence in this novel validates Sagás' claim as it graphically shows how the violence against the Haitians provided a moment of collective Dominican national unity and its role in the eventual massacre of Haitians.

In her novel, Danticat evokes this moment in the following description:

Someone threw a fist-size rock, which bruised my lip and left cheek. My face hit the ground. Another rock was thrown on Yves...The faces in the crowd were steaming in and out of my vision. A sharp blow to my side nearly stopped my breath... Rolling myself into a ball, I tried to get away from the worst of the kicking horde...My scream slowed them a bit... Their air vibrated with a twenty-one-gun salute. People applauded and stormed their feet and sang the Dominican national anthem (p.295).

As these murderous mob carry out this beatings, Trujillo is only a vague if not psychological presence inside a nearby cathedral from which the mob is waiting for him to emerge. This portraiture deliberately decentres Trujillo from the centre

of this narrative in order to explore what the Jungian principle calls, "the collective unconscious" (Microsoft Encarta 2009) of the Dominican people. The use of the following phrases in the quotation above: "the crowd", "the kicking horde", or just the words "them", "people", the infinitive pronoun: "someone" and the nameless faces who come together to sing the national anthem, places the weight of Haitian massacre on the entire Dominican people.

Consequent upon these, the description sums up to agree with Caminero-Santangelo's (n.y:11) position that "violence is more than event-specific...and more than person-specific, as well. It has to do with the whole history of the construction of a Dominican nation and the production of the "subaltern" as the Other of that nation." As Beverley (2004:8) writes, the notion of "nation" rhetorically sutures over the gaps and discontinuities internal to 'the people'. But it is in those gaps and discontinuities that the force of the subaltern appears."

Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* is therefore set to reconstruct the violence enacted upon the Haitians as the mark of the "gaps and discontinuities" that produces the Haitian labourers as subaltern, or better put, the demonic Other which incurs the collective hate of the Dominicans. By so doing, the novel presents Trujillo not as the essence but as a synecdoche representation of a much larger national and racial hatred that led to the 1937 massacre. To further her intentional stands in this direction, Danticat, from the very first page of the novel opens the narrative not with deaths from the massacre but with the death of a Haitian sugarcane worker, Joël. To show that the Haitian lives were less valued than the Dominican lives, Danticat shows how Señor Pico, a wealthy Dominican, refuses to stay back after running over his victim as he is in a hurry to return home to see his newborns. To further prove the existence of random killing of Haitians in the Dominican, Danticat presents

another woman [who] began telling stories that she'd heard. A week before, a pantry maid who had worked in the house of a colonel for thirty years was stabbed by him at the dinner table. Two brothers were dragged from the cane field and macheted to death by field guard... (p.114).

These killings not only reveal the disposability of Haitians living in the Dominican but they point, not to Trujillo's genocidal orders, but to the larger national history of racism in which Haitian lives are cheapened.

In order to perpetrate their violence against the Haitians, the Dominican people used the limitation of Haitian language as test which is today referred to as "the parsley test". As captured in the novel:

Two soldiers laughed, watching. The young toughs waved parsley sprigs in front of our faces.

"Tell us what this is," one said. "Quedigaperejil."

At that moment I did believe that had I wanted to , I could have said the word properly, calmly, slowly...even though the trill of the *r* and the precision of the *j* was sometimes too burdensome a joining for my tongue (p.295).

Wucker (1999:49) further explains this reality in his historical book when he says:

For the Haitians...the soldiers applied a simple test. They would accost any person with dark skin. Holding up sprig of parsley, Trujillo's men would query their prospective victims: '*Cómo se llama esto?*' what is this thing called? ... Haitians, whose Kreyol uses a wide flat *r*, find it difficult to trilled *r* in the Spanish word for parsley, *perejil*. If the work came out as the Haitian *pèsil*..., the victim was condemned to die.

Crucial to the understanding of this experience is that Danticat uses this language barrier to show that the Haitian kreyol-sounding *pèsil* summarises summation that the subaltern *can't* speak. As a corollary to this, therefore, the Dominicans conspire to exterminate the Creole-speaking-language-deficient Haitians from their side of the border in order to avoid the looming encroachment of the Haitian (deficient) culture into the Dominican (refined) cultural space.

## Conclusion

Using new historicism to read Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* shows that historical truths are political – they are truths in as much as they provide consciousness that continues to privilege a particular class of people at the expense of another. With this understanding, this paper has used new historicism to unknot Danticat's concern with history in her novel – to provide counter-narratives that heal the wound of difference in Caribbean history. Through the analysis it is clear therefore, that she deploys history to unknit the notion that the 1937 Haitian massacre is engineered and perpetrated by Trujillo and some political class. On the contrary, the paper shows how she has provided 'historical

facts' that indict the entire Dominican people for the crime against the Haitian people.

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