Cosmopolitanism, Transnationalism, and Glocality in Junot Díaz's Characters

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Abstract: This essay discusses, on the one hand, Díaz's search for cultural identity in his story cycles. The repetition of characters, especially that of Yunior, breaks with the 'aura' of singularity and uniqueness in order for the author to immerse himself in New York's Dominican community as the storyteller who tries to recover a lost but fragmentary cultural tradition. On the other hand, there is an exploration of the concepts of cosmopolitanism, transnationalism and 'glocality,' that is, the local in the global, as well as the (in)hospitality of which Oscar Wao, the protagonist of the novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, is a victim in both the Dominican Republic and the United States, as a result of his cultural hybridity.

Keywords Cosmopolitanism, Discrimination, Dominican Republic, Globalism, Glocality, Immigration, Junot Díaz, Multiculturalism, Racism, Short story cycles, Story teller, Transnationalism, United States of America

Introduction: Dominican American Writers

Immigrants from the Dominican Republic make up the fourth largest group in the United States after Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Cubans. In New York City, Dominicans are the second largest Latino group after Puerto Ricans. Yet Dominican migration is relatively recent compared to that of other Caribbean countries. In New York City, according to a new study by CUNY's Center for Latin American, Caribbean and Latino Studies (CLALCS), Dominicans have become the largest Latino group in the city, surpassing the Puerto Rican population, which has historically been the city's largest Hispanic group. "According to the Census data analyzed for the report, there were about 747,473 Dominicans in the five boroughs in 2013, compared to the 719,444 Puerto Ricans" (Fox News Latinos)[1]. Ninety-seven

[1] See Fox News Latinos. http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/lifestyle/2014/11/13/nyc-dominican-population-surpasses-puerto-rican-community-for-first-time/

percent of the Dominican population in New York City lives below the poverty line (Dodds 160).

Dominican immigration is relatively recent if compared with that of Puerto Ricans and Cubans. This immigration increased during the 1980s and the 1990s as a consequence of the dire economic crisis that befell the country. The importance of Dominican immigration to New York City has been showcased mainly in literature, which reflects the Dominican-American cultural identity in the context of cosmopolitanism and transnationalism. Contemporary Dominican-American writers were either born or raised in the United States. These writers make up a more recent group, one that can be described as "the hyphenated literature group" because, in almost all their novels, cultural identity seems to straddle the fence between identifying as Dominicans or Americans. In the 1990s, a group of Dominican-American writers emerged: Julia Álvarez, Angie Cruz, Loida Maritza Pérez, Nelly Rosario, Josefina Báez, Ana-Maurine Lara, and Junot Díaz.

Junot Díaz, among others, is the most renowned Dominican-American writer. This may be the result of his having been awarded the Pulitzer Prize (2008), the MacArthur Fellowship (known as the Genius Grant) with carries a $500,000 prize and, perhaps more important, because his novel have been widely sold.[2] When Junot Díaz won the Pulitzer Prize for *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, readers were already familiar with Yunior, the character-narrator in the novel. Díaz introduces as well a new character, the protagonist Oscar Wao. The plot unfolds in Washington Heights, New York, and in New Brunswick, New Jersey, where immigrant families from various Latin American countries share their lives. Among these newcomers, we find Oscar Wao, his mother, Belicia, and his sister Lola. Also, we come across Yunior, Lola's former boyfriend and Oscar's friend. The novel's first chapter, "Ghetto Nerd . . ." presents us with a non-encompassing multiculturalism. However, not all characters negotiate their cultural identities in like manner. If Yunior is a typical example of integrated multiculturalism, Oscar, is a victim of two cultures: the Dominican and the American. Whereas Yunior limits his citizenship to the United States, Oscar strives to be transnational.

Yunior has been included, as a unifying element, in most of Diaz's books: *Drown* (1996), *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), and *This Is How you Lose Her* (2012). Rafa is another character who reappears throughout Diaz's story cycles. Others like Oscar Wao and Lola are created to give rise to other tales. In Diaz's books, story cycles are linked not only by characters, but also by themes, countries, regions, events, symbols, syntactical structures, and tonality. Such a literary genre has a long-standing

[2] Other awards conferred to Junot Díaz are: John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation Fellowship (2003), US-Japan Creative Artist Fellowship/the National Endowment for the Arts, Fellowship at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University, John Sargent Sr. First Novel Prize, and The Massachusetts Book Awards Fiction Award, all in 2007. That year, he was also included among the thirty- nine best Latin American Young writers.

tradition among ethnic groups in the United States. Díaz takes advantage of this narrative structure to tell the story of a family within the context of Dominican immigration to New York City (Jennifer J. Smith 1). In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, there are also characters that share local and cosmopolitan spaces simultaneously. The purpose of this study is an examination of Díaz's search for cultural identity in his story cycles. The reappearance of characters, especially that of Yunior, breaks with the "aura" of singularity and uniqueness so that the author is enabled to immerse himself in New York's Dominican community as the storyteller who tries to recover a lost but fragmentary cultural tradition. Moreover, I discuss the cosmopolitanism, the transnationalism and the "glocality," that is, the local in the global, as well as the (in)hospitality of which Oscar Wao is a victim in both the Dominican Republic and the United States, as a consequence of his cultural hybridity.

Junot Díaz's Short Story Cycles

Unlike chapters in a novel, in the short story cycle—also known as a short story sequence, composite novel, or a short story novel—each narration is introduced as an independent unit, though together they create a certain tension among each other with regard to perspective and character development. According to Jennifer J. Smith, "the cycle uncannily acts out these central tensions of modern American experience and articulates the sense that the identities that arise from them, whether personal, ethnic, or national, resist stasis" (3). In Diaz's story cycles, characters undergo not only the stress associated with modern American life, but that of the Dominican Republic as well. These characters move from one era to another, from space to space and, as further detailed, from one text to another. These movements seriously impact on character transformation. Jennifer Smith provides a link between hybridity and the search for identity in short story cycles. The repetition of characters and themes breaks with the works' uniqueness. Characters and themes are repeated as well as language structures. For example, the slang of a particular cultural community and she observes that "one such common element, noted by both Nagel and Davis, is the genre´s affinity to oral storytelling. In the case of individual cycles, the case is often made for the volumes´ indebtedness to authors´ ethnic backgrounds and the storytelling traditions of that group" (Smith 16). Having grown up in the New Jersey Latino community, Díaz, as a Dominican-American storyteller, employs those oral resources employed to retell from memory the *barrio*'s cultural experiences. Yunior, his alter ego, takes on the role of storyteller by means of the different story cycles.

Yunior: A Postmodern Storyteller

In his noted essay "The Storyteller," Walter Benjamin observes that the storyteller had disappeared after the Second World War, partly because of the artists'

inability to convey experiences along with the ethical transformation the world had undergone (112). Another characteristic of "the storyteller" is to take into account the "practical" usefulness of information. The storyteller gives advice regarding daily life's practical problems. Thus, Yunior embodies the Dominican community's problems in the United States. As a storyteller, he narrates in *barrio* English slang, exhibiting his community's capacity for analysis and interpretation. Yunior, who has also the ability to navigate through Dominican and the American cultures, comes across as a postmodern storyteller who connects with his people by means of a type of writing that comes close to orality. Junot Díaz and his alter ego, Yunior—they share a similarly sounding name (yunó-yunio)—exchange the "experiences" of Dominicans residing in New York with the English-reading public, through the author's published story cycles. The marketing success of his books may be attributed to the invention of this new storyteller. If the novel, according to Benjamin, is the end result of a solitary and vain act, Díaz's stories generally come much closer to the "wisdom" of the storyteller, especially in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,* as a composite novel.

The narration cycle that makes up the three books, a sort of large composite novel with Yunior as the main narrator, is a project close to its author's heart, a *Künstlerroman* ("artist novel"), or a "Bildungsroman composite novel." To become a storyteller, Junot-Yunior must undergo a double rite of passage: transitioning between childhood and adulthood, and by having emigrated from the Dominican Republic to the United States. But, what defines Yunior's wisdom as a storyteller? He portrays himself as someone who understands, who interprets masculinity issues, the family, cultural hybridity, bilingualism, the mystery of being here and there, of the now and then of the Dominican community in America. Yunior talks about the community and to the community in a colloquial language frequently sprinkled with "fucks", "ass," and "pussies," that is, the "hood's" slang. His narratees are Oscar, his friends (the boys), the "niggers," the "Negro," and his family.

Díaz found in Yunior an earlier version of himself, the narrative voice that would allow him to bring together his later story cycles. We find Yunior in three of the short story collections that make up *Drown* (1996): "Israel," "Fiesta, 1980," and "Aguantando" "Israel," the collection's opening story, is the author's foundational text of the short story cycles. It includes, for the first time, Yunior's narrative voice, at the age of nine, along with that of his interlocutor, twelve-year-old Rafa. That summer, the boys were sent to the countryside in the Dominican province of San José de Ocoa, while their parents remained in New York City. This story also reveals the dichotomy of "here and there" caused by the double migration of countryside/city and Dominican Republic/United States.

Surrounded by abject poverty in the countryside, Yunior and Rafa, Yunior's older brother, torment Israel, a boy who hides his deformed face behind a mask. Rafa derives pleasure from kicking Israel, hitting him over the head with a bottle, and tearing his mask off to view the true facial appearance of this Dominican boy. It is in this story

that the first lessons of "masculinity" are thus included: "Rafa spit. You have to get tougher. Crying all the time. Do you think our papi's crying? Do you think this is what he's been doing the last six years?" (*Drown* 14). The spit/cry dichotomy is enthymematic. Rafa resorts to the missing father's image. Since the father does not cry, he is a man. By contrast, because of his apparent cowardice, Yunior is called a "pussy" by his brother. Masculinity building, both within Dominican and American cultures, is a constant in Díaz´s story cycles. In *Masculinity after Trujillo: The Politics of Gender in Dominican Literature*, Maja Horn examines sexual relations, stressing Dominican masculinity as defined in literary texts, during and after the Trujillo dictatorship. The dictatorship and its discourse create a masculinity matrix . According to Horn, "today´s hegemonic notions of masculinity were consolidated during the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo" (1). She moreover argues that Trujillo's masculinity discourse is a response to the racialized notions of said discourse and to the psychological emasculation of Dominicans during their country's military occupation by the United States (1916-1924).

In the story "The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars," Yunior travels to the Dominican Republic and visits a cave, the "Cave of the Jaguar," considered by another character to be the "birthplace of the nation" (71). In his descent to the cave, Yunior experiences fear and begins to shout for help, making others pull him out. For his apparent cowardice, Yunior is called a "pussy" by the other characters. For Jacqueline Loss, cowardice and the epithet "pussy" constitute proof that this story "ridicules the universal search for truth and originality and the construction of national foundations on the basis of an obscure descent" (812). Besides denoting cowardice, mention of a vagina by a character during the descent reflects a fear of a return to the maternal womb and to nation creation, a return to the known that is also unknown, the *unheimlich*, the return to ". . . the hole [that] is blacker than any of us" ("The Sun…," 71). In later stories, Yunior will have to learn lessons of masculinity so as not to be called a "pussy." Reference to a vagina links cowardice with the female organ while it figuratively emasculates the character.[3]

In another story from *Drown*, "Fiesta, 1980," Yunior's character undergoes several changes. He is living in New York City with his parents. He, perhaps three years older than in the first story, discovers that his father is cheating on his mother with a Puerto Rican woman. Not only is there a geographical change (city/countryside), but also one of age. In addition, the identity issue between Dominicans and Puerto Ricans is introduced by this allegorical romance: Dominican wife, Puerto Rican lover. In these initial tales, in lieu of the absent father, the older brother, Rafa, becomes a father figure and eventually turns into a model of masculinity for Yunior. The latter vicariously learns Rafa's strengths and weaknesses when dealing with women and in adapting to various social and cultural circumstances, both in the Dominican countryside and in an

[3] Through a methonym, women are reduced to their sex organ. The female sex organ, therefore, is synonomous with lack of courage and masculinity.

American city. Yunior's identity is consequently shaped by Rafa's. In the end, Yunior becomes "the bright one" who likes books. If, in Rafa's view, Yunior was a nine-year-old "pussy," he later becomes a "dick," like their father Ramón (*Drown* 38). In the beginning, Yunior dislikes that which he lacks and his father has: phallus, power, authority. His relationship with his father is one of ambiguity (odiettamo): "I still wanted him to love me" (*Drown* 27). The absence of the father figure produces the emotional ambiguity that characterizes Yunior's relationship with his father and the insistence on masculinity awareness.

Moving on to the novel, in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), Yunior reappears in the role of character-narrator, a friend of protagonist Oscar Wao and lover of Lola, Wao's sister. As storyteller, Yunior is the repository of Oscar's documents as well as the collective and familiar memory of his neighborhood. Oscar replaces Rafa after his death as Yunior's interlocutor. Of the two, Yunior has the upper hand because he is the model that Oscar must follow when it comes to learning what it is to be a man. As roommates at Rutgers University, Yunior and Oscar develop a friendship. Yunior learns of Oscar's life and eventually becomes his mentor, confidant, and advisor when it comes to women. Yunior is simultaneously agent and witness. He is able to relate Oscar Wao's problems of adaptation because he himself has had to 'overcome' some of these issues. The relationship between the short stories cause tensions on account of the changes that Yunior underwent throughout the three books. Oscar's monstrosity, as he sees it, is an allegory of the Other's teratology; the immigrant monstrosity that Yunior wants to project out of himself.

In *This is How You Lose Her* (2012), Yunior is the character-narrator in eight of the nine stories that make up the collection. His appearances are not chronological. If in the novel we find a Yunior who is attending the university (his brother Rafa already dead), in these narrations we find him in different phases and situations: still a boy, an adolescent, a young student and, later, a university professor in a triangulation of desire with Rafa and Nilda; in short, with multiple girlfriends. Perhaps one of the events that had a great impact for Yunior was Rafa's death. Inevitably, Yunior becomes Rafa or, even worse, what he hated most, their father. He turns irreversibly into a "dick": an unfaithful womanizer, a drunk, the stereotypical Dominican male in the "hood." For this reason, the narrator, referring to Yunior, avers: "You claim you're a sex addict and start attending meetings. You blame your father. You blame your mother. You blame the patriarchy. You blame Santo Domingo" (176). As a direct object of the verb "to blame," Dominican culture, patriarchy and family become related.

In the stories, Yunior's family is composed of the father (absent from most stories), the mother who takes on the father's role, Rafa, and Yunior himself, the storyteller. In addition, there are Anglo, Puerto Rican, Cuban neighbors as well as a group of friends: Melvin, Oscar, and his sister Lola. There is also a narratee whom the narrator always refers to as "the Nigger" and "Negro." In several of the stories and in the novel, Yunior goes to college and later becomes a professor. He thus overcomes the

abjection of the spaces of social marginalization. Then he becomes witness and narrator of Wao's vicissitudes. If the latter could not cope with the monstrosity that is cultural hybridity, Yunior, as storyteller, manages to assimilate himself into mainstream American culture.

Cosmopolitanism, Transnationalism, and Glocalism

The success of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is due in part to the fact that Junot Díaz composes a cosmopolitan novel informed by global cultural forms, such as video games, science fiction, and TV shows that appeal to many American citizens. The protagonist´s conflict is caused by the fact that he is a "global" citizen whose ethics come from a local pre-capitalist society. In the novel, there is a clash between local and global forms of cultural expression in the Dominican-American community. *The Brief Wondrous life of Oscar Wao* is a composite novel—some of its chapters were published as short stories that could be read independent of each other.[4] In this novel, Yunior continues as a central character who will undergo several changes throughout the plot. Oscar Wao, the new character, becomes a celebrity. Yunior discovers in his friend Oscar the replacement voice for the late Rafa. Given Wao's importance as a character, I would now like to focus on him in regard to cosmopolitanism, transnationalism, and glocalism.[5]

I frame my discussion of cosmopolitanism on the following premises: 1. Being a world citizen is a privilege of social elites. The poor immigrants are reduced to their community's ghetto and live the local part of their culture in the context of the global; 2. Oscar's strangeness is perceived as a monstrosity. There is another teratology: Oscar Wao is an overweight Dominican-American hybrid that is rejected both in American and Dominican societies. He was denied hospitality in both countries; 3. as a hybrid, Oscar Wao is neither one nor the other and both at the same time, but the third space that Homi Bhabha proposes, rather than a privilege, is a disadvantage. As a poor immigrant, Oscar Wao is unable to access "world citizenship." On the contrary, he becomes stateless. As a result, video games and science fiction are the only spaces he can inhabit without fear.

I would now like to reflect on some of the ideas of the stoic philosophers to frame my discussion. Immanuel Kant was one of the most important in terms of the dissemination of the stoic philosophers' ideas about "universal community" and "world citizenship" (Nussbaum 4). The famous "world citizen" adage is owed to Diogenes the Cynic who, when asked the question "where are you from?" answered, "I am a citizen of the world" (Quoted in Nussbaum 5). To this maxim, Nussbaum argues that "class, rank, status, national origin and location, and even gender are treated by the Cynics as

[4] Among independently published stories in the *New Yorker* feature "The Sun, the Moon, and the Stars" and "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao."

secondary and morally irrelevant attributes"[5]. Race, religion, sexual orientation and ethnicity, which are not necessarily integrated into national origin, should have also been included.

According to Nussbaum, the stoics argued regarding world citizenship: "Each of us dwells, in effect, in two communities-the local community of our birth, and the community of human argument and aspiration that is, in Seneca's words, 'truly common, in which we look neither to this corner nor to that, but measure the boundaries of our nation by the sun'"[6]. I disagree with this position in general, and Seneca's, in particular. This may be true for the upper class, white European and American men. For many individuals, poverty, hunger and illiteracy reduce them to the ghetto. They can only "look to this corner." For them, there is no such thing as "community of human argument and aspiration." Meanwhile, Hierocles proposes a series of concentric rings or centrifugal forces, which somehow define the relationship with society before reaching world citizenship status. From the center out, these rings consist of family, neighborhood, city, region, country, continent and eventually the world. We should also take into account factors such as class, race, religion, and sexual orientation, mentioned before. Many individuals do not achieve world citizenship due to obstacles and forces that pull them in one determined direction.

Life for Yunior and Oscar in a city like New York has been altered when it comes to cultural relations, especially if we keep in mind that their trips to the Dominican Republic make them members of a multinational community. The concept of "transnationalism" proposed by Elisabeth Maria Mermann-Jozwiak could be used to challenge the idea of the concentric circles. In her article, the critic states that Junot Díaz's novel is "a response to uncritical celebrations of difference and multiculturalism's narrative of the integration of ethnic subjects" (1). According to the author, the concept of transnationalism is a tool used to analyze the break in thinking from the country of origin and reflect on the domestic and international (17). Mermann-Jozwiak talks about Díaz's novel, in general, as a response to the integrated multiculturalism in the United States.[6] By contrast, I see several positions within the novel. The position of Yunior, the narrator, is very different from that of Oscar Wao. As Yunior is a typical case of integrated multiculturalism, Oscar, is a victim of two cultures: the Dominican and American ones.

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[5] On the one hand, transnationalism refers to people across borders and is connected to cosmopolitanism; on the other, glocalism or the glocal refers to living locally in a global society. My argument is that a person can live in a global society and travel across borders and that such travel alone does not make him or her a cosmopolitan or transnational. Poverty, racism and discrimination persist in societies that seclude individuals in socio-economic ghettos.

6 Contrary to critical multiculturalism that includes a critique of racism and discrimination in a multicultural society, integrated multiculturalism celebrates cultural diversity while white men retain the power.

While transnationalism leads the reader to think about the two cultures, as a hybrid, Oscar is "neither ... nor," he does not feel "at home" in either society and thus ends up being a victim of both. Instead of the hospitality with which, according to Derrida, an immigrant should be treated, Oscar finds both societies to be inhospitable. Actually, Oscar is "glocal," meaning he lives the local aspects of Dominican culture in a community in New Jersey, in the context of a globalized society like the United States.

In Brunswick, New Jersey, while attending Rutgers University, Oscar has to face the uncertainty of his hybridity:

The white kids looked at his black skin and his afro and treated him with *inhuman* cheeriness. The kids of color, upon hearing him speak and seeing him move his body, shook their heads. You´re not Dominican. And he said over and over again, but I am. "Soy dominicano. Dominicano soy". After a spate of parties that led to nothing but being threatened by some white boys, and dozens of classes where not a single girl looked at him, he felt the optimism wane." (*The Brief…,* 49; emphasis mine).

Neither Dominican nor American Oscar will have to face the "fragmented and schizophrenic experience where 'the truth of the (lived) experience no longer coincides with the place in which takes place'" (Jameson quoted in Mitchell 268). Years later, after graduating from Rutgers, Oscar gets a job as a teacher at Don Bosco High School, in the United States. This time, black students make fun of him: "In the old days it had been the white kids who had been the Chief tormentors, but now it was kids of color who performed the necessaries" (*The Brief…,* 264). Like the character Jean Veneuse in the novel *Un home pareil aux autres* de René Maran, "the white race would not accept him as one of his own and the black virtually repudiated him" (Quoted by Fanon 67). As students make fun of him because of his obesity, Oscar is also called Haitian several times, the worst possible insult for a Dominican. Paradoxically, two Haitians end up saving him after the beating he received from a character named The Captain in the Dominican Republic. In the story "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao," published previously to the novel, Yunior observes the following to his friend: "What is it with us niggers and our bodies? Not even Fanon can explain it to me" (106). It is precisely Fanon who makes the same observation in *Black Skin, White Masks* with regards to a character, Jean Veneuse: "He does not understand his own race and the whites do not understand him" (64). Likewise Oscar finds himself entrapped by the lack of racial and cultural understanding.

Rejected in the two countries because of his racial and cultural lack of definition, Oscar can only inhabit the monstrosity of a third space made up by video games and science-fiction novels. There is a teratology of the Hybrid-Other that resists to be defined. As the cannibals and men with one eye on their foreheads and dog muzzles purportedly seen by Spanish conquistadors at their arrival in the Caribbean, Oscar is seen and sees himself as a monster: "and there was Oscar, keeping me up at night talking about the Green Lantern. Wondering aloud, if we were orcs, would not we, at a racial level, *imagine* ourselves to look like elves?" (*The Brief…* 178. Emphasis in the

original).[7] Oscar is also seen as a *nerd*, which represents another type of monster: the intellectual (in Benjamin's sense). For this reason, he cannot find a girlfriend and then tries to commit suicide: "[B]ut Jenni must have had brain damage or been really into fat loser nerds [...]" (183). Neither American nor Dominican, and immersed in the world of fantasy novels, Oscar decides to become an English writer. Incidentally, his nickname "Wao" refers to the Anglo-Irish writer Oscar Wilde: "I'm going to be the Dominican Tolkien, he said" (192).[8] Through mimicry, Oscar expresses his double articulation of hybridity, as well as his ambivalence toward taking in the English language and American culture. But Oscar is neither gay, like Oscar Wilde, nor is he Dominican or American, let alone English. Like a Dominican Tolkien, Oscar sets out in an impossible return journey where he attempts a reading of the Dominican Republic as though it were a work of fiction.

Oscar's inner conflicts worsen: if, on the one hand he struggles to belong to both American and Dominican cultures; on the other hand, he strains to assert his masculinity. I once again quote Horn for whom, in the Dominican Republic, "today´s hegemonic notions of masculinity were consolidated during the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo" (1). The Dominican dictator was well known for his insatiable sexual apetite. Moreover Horn argues that Trujillo's masculinity discourse is an attempt to address the racists notions that arose during the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republican (1916-1924). Being obese, black and nerdy, Oscar has no success when it comes to women. After a few failed attempts at attracting girls, he returns to the Dominican Republic and falls for Ybón, a "strange girl" who is having sexual relations with an army officer, a "Capitán".

On his return to the Dominican Republic, Oscar meets a girl, Ybón, with whom he manages to have sex after a long courtship. The obstacle between his desire and the girl is her boyfriend, an Army captain who rose during the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic (1965) and worked in the repressive force "La Banda Colorá" during dictator Joaquín Balaguer's twelve-year government (1966-1978). The triangulation of the Ybón affair is essentially a pretext for competition, a test of masculinity between Oscar and a Dominican military stud, Capitán—it is hard to compete in masculinity with a military man. Oscar's masculinity construct seeks to adhere to a Dominican cultural identity.

[7] Orcs are greenish-brown monsters; they are villains serving the "powers of darkness." Elves, on the contrary, are white, endowed with great beauty and supernatural powers. Oscar thinks of himself as a Latino orc who turns into an American elf.

[8] John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892-1973) is an English writer best known for *The Lord of the Rings*, a fantasy book. As a Dominican Tolkien, Oscar returns to the Dominican Republic and read its society and culture as it were a science fiction book. The novel is full of references to science-fiction and fantasy books. Díaz confessed his passion for science fiction and has been working on several other novels. *New Yorker* published an excerpt entitled "Monstro" in one of its 2012 issues.

In a conversation with Ybón, she asks him to go back to his country (USA), but Oscar replies "This is my home," meaning the Dominican Republic. "Your true home, my love is United States," she replies, to which he claims, "A person cannot have two homes" (318). Finally, Oscar dies as a result of the second beating he received by The Captain. Horn explains that "Oscar's death was neither wondrous nor mysterious (no fukú here) but rather he is killed as a result of his overstepping the scripts of hegemonic masculinity in the Dominican Republic" (128). Oscar's sister Lola mourns his death, stating that "She would never return to that awful country (RD)." She then declares, "Ten million Trujillos is all we are," (324) referring to the cruelty and authoritarianism of the Dominican dictator. This statement can also be read as the machoism embedded in the Dominican culture and the emasculation of Oscar's masculinity that this entails.

Conclusion

In these story cycles, Yunior, as storyteller, tries to understand the complex hybridity that defines Dominican-American culture. The same structure found in these story cycles reveals tension and conflict among the stories as well as among the different cultures that intersect the characters' cosmopolitism and transnationalism. Yunior is a character caught in the net of meanings that entail these story cycles. Junot/Yunior almost share the same essential voice that straddles two cultures, two worlds (DR/US) and two time sequences, (past/present). Díaz seems to agree with this position when he concedes in an interview: "I always lived in a situation of simultaneity" (Lewis).[9] But in a story "The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao," published in 2000 previous the novel, Ybón, Oscar´s girlfriend, tells him: "A person can't have two [homes]" (116). Consequently, one cannot dwell in two languages, because it is true that residing in a second language may release one from the prison of one's native language; language "does not merely reflect culture, history and differences, it also produces them" (Chambers 12). Thus, if language produces culture, the subject is likewise a product of language.

Junot/Yunior's acquisition of the English language transformed him into a mainstream subject. For him, the balance of life on the hyphen, of an in-betweeness, is broken in favor of the hegemonic language and culture. In his introduction to Fanon's book, Bhabha states that difference -in this case cultural as well as gender-based- is erased with the colonizer's invitation when he says: "You're a doctor, a writer, a student, you're *different*, you're one of *us*" ("Forewords," xvi). It is precisely in that ambivalent use of "different" (being different from those who are different makes you the same) that the unconscious speaks of the form of Otherness." Upon the erasure of ethno-racial difference, Dominican-American writers construct themselves as hegemonic once they

[9] See the interview with Marina Lewis. http://www.webdelsol.com/Other_Voices/DiazInt.htm

are recognized as equals. Bhabha's "neither nor and both" becomes "more one than the other," that is, the hegemonic self that rejects the other.

As an antagonist of Yunior, Oscar fails to become a cosmopolitan or a transnational citizen. His hybridity does not "shift the dual logic Self/ Other of the identities of difference" (Bhabha. "The Commitment…", 3). As a hybrid, he is "neither one nor the other" (Bhabha. "The Commitment…", 10). The privileged status conferred by Bhabha to the concept of "third space" with respect to the hybrid becomes a disadvantage as Oscar lives in a status of double marginality. What happens to Oscar is a "double" tragic flaw: his incapacity to develop his masculinity in accordance with cultural models runs parallel to the impossibility of belonging to either American or Dominican culture.

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