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# Diasporic Identity in Junot Díaz's fictional world

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degree of "English Philology".

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I, Niels Hexspoor, declare this thesis, *Diasporic Identity in Junot Díaz's fictional world*, is my original work, written in fulfillment of the requirements for the master's degree in "English Philology" of the Palacky University Olomouc. I also declare that the publications cited in this thesis have been personally consulted.

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## Abstract

This thesis explores the notion of diasporic identity in the fiction of Junot Díaz. In it I will look at the presence of such a cultural identity within Díaz's published fiction, namely his novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and the two short story collections, *Drown* and *This Is How You Lose Her*.

"Cultural Identity and Diaspora", the 2005 paper written by cultural theorist Stuart Hall, serves as the theoretical backbone of the thesis, as Hall's definition of a diasporic identity is used as reference material in establishing the existence of a diasporic identity in Díaz's fiction.

Looking at the Dominican diaspora of the 1960, as well as the African diaspora of the colonial era, this thesis explores the presence of diasporic identity as well the larger overall effects of the diaspora on Díaz's most prominent characters. This is achieved by looking the way they exhibit the characteristics of a diasporic identity, as well as by assessing the role the English and Spanish language play concerning the Dominican diaspora. In this this thesis, I will also look at the effects of conflicting gender roles within the Dominican diaspora and at the lasting presence of the African diaspora, a remnant of the colonial history of the Dominican Republic.

## Acknowledgements

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I also want to thank Diana Bawadekji for her support and for proofreading my thesis.

## Methodology

In this thesis, I have analyzed the diasporic identity within the fictional world created by Junot Díaz, looking at the entirety of his work, consisting of his 2007 novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, and his two short story collections *Drown* and *This Is How You Lose Her*, published in 1996 and 2012, respectively.

I start by establishing Díaz's place within the Latino literary tradition, by looking at both the nature of Dominican immigration to the US in relation to the origin of the presence of other Latinos, such as Chicanos. I assess the impact of these differences in origin on Díaz's relation to the Latino literary tradition, making use of sources such as Takaki's *A Different Mirror* and Stavan and Acosta-Belen's *Norton Anthology of Latino Literature*.

I have based my analysis of Díaz's texts on the theory of diasporic identity as formulated by cultural theorist Stuart Hall. As Hall's theory was not originally written with literary interpretation in mind, rather focussing on cultural theory and discourse analysis, I have stretched his theory to make it applicable to the literary interpretation of Díaz's fiction. I have done so by using Hall's the main points of Hall's theory and comparing them to the behavior of the characters in Díaz's stories, looking for similarities to the key features of diasporic identity as described by Hall. The characteristics that are most prominently featured in this thesis are the inability to fit existing categorization, called *différance* by Hall, and a certain disconnection to the values of the original culture, in this case the culture of the Dominican Republic.

In addition to that, I have used a variety of interviews and statements by Junot Díaz on the matter of diaspora, language and masculinity in support of my findings.

For the analysis of the use of language regarding the Dominican diaspora in Díaz's fiction, I have relied on existing linguistic analyses of code switching between English and Spanish by Torres and Casielles-Suárez.

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# 1. Biography of Junot Díaz

Junot Díaz is an acclaimed Dominican-American writer of fiction, active since the late 1990's he has published two short story collections: *Drown* (1996) and *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012); as well as one novel: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2006).

Born in the capital of the Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo, Junot Díaz moved to Parlin, New Jersey, in the greater New York metropolitan area at the age of six, together with his mother and siblings, reuniting with his father, who had already been working in the US for several years.

Junot Díaz was exposed to writing whilst studying English at Rutgers University. Demarest Hall, the special interest dormitory, attracting which features prominently in his work is the place where his ambitions as a writer would come to fruition. After graduation Rutgers University, Díaz would continue his academic career by obtaining his MFA at Ivy League school Cornell University, where he would write most of his first short story collection, *Drown*.<sup>1</sup> Díaz is currently a creative writing teacher at MIT, the famous Boston-based technical university.

After *Drown* was received with critical acclaim, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Díaz's first, and to date only, novel, was published in 2007. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* would go on to win the 2008 Pulitzer Prize among

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<sup>1</sup> Ross Scarano. "Interview: Junot Díaz Talks Dying Art, the Line Between Fact and Fiction, and What Scares Him Most." *Complex*. December 17, 2012. Accessed November 30, 2016. <http://www.complex.com/pop-culture/2012/12/junot-diaz-interview>.



other accolades<sup>2</sup>, confirming his position as one of the defining voice of contemporary Latino-American literature.

Next to his work as an author, Díaz is active as an activist, having often voiced, as well written essays, on a variety of topics concerning ethnic relations in both the US and the Dominican Republic.<sup>3</sup> His outspoken opinions against anti-Haitian discrimination as well as anti-black racism in the D.R. led him to have his Dominican Order of Merit revoked by the Dominican government.<sup>4</sup> The Dominican Republic is actively engaged in the deportation of ethnic (black) Haitians. Díaz has cooperated with Haitian-American author Edwidge Danticat in condemning the deportation through several essays and through outspoken media interviews.

Recently, the New Yorker published an essay of his, along essays of other prominent authors, on the subject of president-elect Donald.<sup>5</sup> In the essay Díaz expresses his disbelief and concern over Trump's election, while also calling for what he describes as Radical Hope.

Additionally, Díaz is involved in supporting American writers of color, in an effort to help their narratives be heard. One of the ways he does so is with the Voices of Our Nation program, which helps writers of color develop themselves through workshops

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<sup>2</sup>Pulitzer.org. "Winners: Junot Díaz". Accessed November 30, 2016.

<http://www.pulitzer.org/winners/junot-diaz>

<sup>3</sup> Americas Quarterly. "The Dominican Republic and Haiti: A Shared View from the Diaspora." Americas Quarterly. Accessed November 30, 2016.

<http://americasquarterly.org/content/dominican-republic-and-haiti-shared-view-diaspora>.

<sup>4</sup> Daniela Franco. "Dominican Consul Revokes Medal From Author Junot Diaz."

NBCNews.com. October 23, 2015. Accessed November 30, 2016.

<http://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/dominican-consul-author-junot-diaz-anti-dominican-n450441>.

<sup>5</sup> The New Yorker. "Aftermath: Sixteen Writers on Trump's America." The New Yorker. November 13, 2016. Accessed November 30, 2016.

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/11/21/aftermath-sixteen-writers-on-trumps-america#diaz>.

and seminars. Díaz co-founded the program and currently serves on the board of directors.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>"Vona Community | Writing Workshops for Writers of Color since 1999." Vona Community | Writing Workshops for Writers of Color since 1999. Accessed November 30, 2016. <http://www.voicesatvona.org/>.

## 2. Díaz's place in the Latino literary tradition

Chicano literature holds an important position in the American literary landscape as the most prominent of form of Latin-American literature. It is the most well documented form of literature dealing with the position and identity of Latinos in in America. A literary tradition that can be traced back to early the colonial days of the western hemisphere, the genre was truly distinguished as such after the Mexican-American war, leaving many Latinos in the annexed south-west of the United States. The Mexican-American demographic was further enlarged through the subsequent migration from the south, making the Mexican-American a distinguished part of the cultural landscape in the South-West of the United States.<sup>7</sup> The Chicano barrios and their language has heavily influenced the writing style of Chicano authors, mixing English with the Spanish slang as used by the Chicanos in daily life. It is easy to see the similarities between the use of language in Chicano literature and Diaz's work, as are the similarities between the Mexican Barrios in the south-west and the Caribbean Barrios in New Jersey and the greater New York metropolitan area described by Díaz. Next to that, Díaz frequent use of Dominican-Spanish slang, inline with the use of Mexican-Spanish by his Chicano counterpart further establishes the link between Díaz's writing and the Chicano literary tradition.

Unlike Mexican-American culture which had been around and developed since the Mexican-American war, Dominicans only started emigrating en masse to the United states in the 1960's, in the wake of the assassination of long-time dictator Rafael

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<sup>7</sup>Ronald Takaki. *A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America*. New York: Back Bay Books, 2008.

Trujillo and the political instability that ensued. This resulted in a significant influx in Dominican immigration to US, as described by the MPI, the Migration Policy Institute:

The Dominican immigrant population in the United States, which stood at 12,000 in 1960, grew rapidly after that: reaching 350,000 in 1990 and 879,000 in 2010.<sup>8</sup>

Díaz's work tends to focus on early Dominican immigrants, with both primary narrator Yunió De Las Casas immigrating to the US in the 1970's and Belicia Cabral, the matriarch of the De León family central in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, moving shortly after the death of Trujillo:

In another time it would have been impossible, but with El Jefe dead and the Plátano Curtain shattered all manners of escape were now possible.<sup>9</sup>

The history of Dominican immigration, as well as its initial political motivation sets Díaz's work of fiction apart from Chicano literature, as many of Díaz's characters are first generation immigrants, with vivid memories of their life back in the Dominican Republic. They are not just connected to their country of origin through shared culture and history, but rather they are still actively participating in life in the Dominican Republic, albeit from a distance.

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<sup>8</sup> "Immigrants from the Dominican Republic in the United States." Migrationpolicy.org. September 15, 2014. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/foreign-born-dominican-republic-united-states>.

<sup>9</sup> Junot Díaz. *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. New York: Riverhead Books, 2007.

The Norton Anthology of Latino Literature acknowledges Díaz's remarkable place in Latino literature, as he is the first male Dominican-American author to publish novel length works of fiction. Classified in the anthology as a writer of the Latinidad era of Latino literature, referring to the term addressing the Latino-American community based on its transnational similarities.<sup>10</sup> The anthology praises him for his unique approach to the immigrant experience as his characters appear to be part of both worlds at the same time, both part of American culture as well as the Dominican one, being able to fluently switch between the two.

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<sup>10</sup> Coined by Felix Padilla in his 1985 sociological study of Mexican and Puerto Rican-Americans living in Chicago.

### 3. Hall's Theory of Diasporic Identity

A central theme in Díaz's work is the diaspora as it is experienced by the Dominican community in the United States. The Dominicans in Díaz's fictional world are subject to and part of two distinct diasporas and diasporic identities, one within the other, namely the Dominican diaspora within the larger African diaspora. The Dominican diaspora is the most prominent of the two in Díaz's writing and deals with the emigration of the Dominican people to the United States, fleeing the fascist dictatorship of Trujillo. The African diaspora, a result of the colonial history of the Dominican republic, is featured in Díaz, but less prominently than the Dominican diaspora. The African diaspora is mostly present in the ambiguous attitude Díaz's characters have to their African heritage. In this thesis, I will chiefly investigate the nature of the Dominican diaspora in the fiction of Junot Díaz, looking at the African diaspora mainly in regard to the long-term effect it has had on the cultural identity of the characters within the Dominican diaspora.

Díaz has commented on the duality of life within a diaspora himself, by referring to the line "estoy aquí, pero mi corazón es allá (I am here but my heart is there)" from the bachata song "Aqui pero allá" by Peña Suazo,<sup>11</sup> indicating that to Díaz, diasporic identity comes from the sense of being part of two distinct cultures at the same time. This is crucial in understanding Díaz's focus on what it means to be part of a diaspora.

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<sup>11</sup>"JUNOT DÍAZ." The New York Public Library. Accessed November 30, 2016. <https://www.nypl.org/audiovideo/junot-díaz>.

In focussing on diasporic identity rather than on the immigrant experience, Díaz's work approaches the process of migration from a different angle; a point of view in which emigration is central and the characters' relation to the country they left, the D.R., is more prominently explored than their relation to the US, the country they find themselves in after immigration. This is demonstrated by the characters in Díaz's fictional world, through the way many of them are effortlessly part of both American culture and the Dominican and African cultural diasporas at the same time.

Stuart Hall, a cultural theorist who shares Díaz's Caribbean background, hailing from Kingston, Jamaica, has written extensively on the nature of cultural and diasporic identity. In his essay *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Hall examines the nature of Afro-Caribbean identity within the Caribbean diaspora and as part of the African diaspora. Hall argues that according to the traditional view on cultural identity, the Caribbean identity is a process of perpetual production, rather than a predetermined, accomplished state. The latter is the traditional view of cultural identity "in terms of one, shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self', hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed 'selves', which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common."<sup>12</sup> Hall remarks that this view of cultural identity is often discussed in terms of archaeological discovery, attempting to unearth the identity hidden underneath layers placed by colonial rule. Hall would prefer the cultural identity of the Caribbean people to be explained in terms of production, the retelling fragmented stories, repurposing them to form an identity with imaginary coherence.

Rather than the traditional approach however, Hall favours the idea of cultural identity as,

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<sup>12</sup> Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora" (2005), 223

A matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past. It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.<sup>13</sup>

This theory allows for the Caribbean identity to be assessed incorporating the way it was positioned in terms of the dominant colonial regimes in control. According to Hall, this juxtaposition of Caribbean identity to the dominant white, European identity, which according to Hall "had the power to make us see and experience ourselves as 'Other'."<sup>14</sup> In this sense, Caribbean culture and cultural identity, such as the Dominican identities expressed by Díaz, differs vastly from European and North American, which tend to be less explicitly positioned to and explained in terms of foreign culture.

As Hall comes to the conclusion that Caribbean cultural identity is seated upon unstable points of identification and is therefore not a constructed through a

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<sup>13</sup> Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", 225

<sup>14</sup> Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", 225



continuous line, by rather framed on two axes; the traditional view of discovering one's identity through history, and the second view of *différance*, an innate otherness defining the diasporic identity, defying the conventional categorization of identity. Hall asserts that balancing between the historic approach and the deconstruction approach lies at the base of the formation of diasporic caribbean identity, which results in an identity characterized by hybridity, and which gains its meaning in comparison to the cultures that compose it.

Whereas Hall's theory focusses on the creation of diasporic identity based on the initial diasporas rooted in colonialism and the slave trade within Caribbean nations, in this dissertation I aim to apply Hall's idea of diasporic identity to the work of Junot Díaz, in order to investigate if the Dominican diaspora gives rise to a similar a diasporic identity within the Dominican-American community in Díaz's work of fiction. Additionally I will look at the impact the colonial African diaspora has had on the Dominican diaspora. This means I will stretch Hall's theory in order to see if his main points concerning the creation of a diasporic identity are present. I will look specifically for textual evidence supporting Hall's notion of *différance*, that is breaking the boundaries of preset binary categorization, and a resulting identity typified by hybridity.

## 4. The Diasporic Identity of Yunior and Oscar

In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, eponymous character Oscar and narrator Yunior differ in the way they experience and form their diasporic identities. I would argue that Yunior, in his role of near-omniscient narrator, as well as through the plethora of footnotes through which he explains historical backgrounds to the narrative at hand, expresses and forms his identity in a way which according to Hall fits the way a Caribbean diasporic identity is formed. Yunior seems to both bond with others over a shared differences as well as excavate the identity of the Dominican People in the larger context of its colonial and dictatorial past. Oscar shows no such interest initially. This has been acknowledged by Díaz at the 2011 Prague Writers Festival, in an interview with Martin Belk. Díaz feels too few Dominicans know about their national history as he stated that,

People have an allergy to history. This is something else for an artist to play with. I wrote a novel about Dominicans in New Jersey and Dominicans in the Dominican Republic in the 60s, and also the 50s, but let just say the 60s. The average Dominican Kid had no idea about the history I was talking about. People were thinking: 'Oh, you wrote footnotes explaining Dominican History in case a white person read this or an american read this, so they could understand what was happening.' I was like: 'No! I wrote this so that Dominicans would know what the hell was happening.' And I think that historical amnesia is part

of the weight of living in the modern world but for an artist it's a very powerful tool in our box.<sup>15</sup>

Next to that, Oscar seems to put no effort in being part of or forming a predetermined Dominican identity. He is often called out on his lack of Dominican characteristics, seemingly not fitting in the cultural archetypes of the Dominican Republic. The characters of Yunior and Oscar are clearly juxtaposed in the text in regard to their approach to their Dominican identity, as illustrated by the following quote:

What more sci-fi than the Santo Domingo? What more fantasy than the Antilles? But now that I know how it all turns out, I have to ask, in turn: What more fukú?<sup>16</sup>

Yunior then fits Hall's proposed approach to forming a cultural identity, as opposed to Oscar who appears to form his identity along the post-structural approach described by Hall, at least at the start of the novel. Both characters develop the way they form their respective identities through interacting with each other and are crucial to each others story. For Yunior, this development had already begun, in the short stories that disclose events of his youth.

Looking at Oscar first, in the first line of the first chapter, he is described as "not one of those Dominican cats everybody's always going on about."<sup>17</sup> It is important to note that the first chapter mentions that Oscar did in fact display typical Dominican

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<sup>15</sup> "2/3 Martin Belk with Junot Diaz, Prague Writers' Festival 2011." YouTube. May 08, 2011. Accessed December 02, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nYQ40N1OUAA>

<sup>16</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 6.

<sup>17</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 11

characteristics in his youth, but lost it due to the Fukú, the curse that grips the Dominican people and more specifically the Cabral family. A cultural phenomenon in the Dominican Republic, the Fukú is a manifestation of bad luck and its countercurse Zafa a goodluck charm to balance out the negativity of the Fukú curse. In Díaz's novel, Yuniór claims the Fukú to be undoubtedly real and related to the other supernatural occurrences:

It is perfectly fine if you don't believe in these 'superstitions'. In fact it's better than fine - it's perfect. Because no matter what you believe, fukú believes in you.<sup>18</sup>

The Fukú is repeatedly attributed to colonial history as Yuniór claims the Fukú to have originated in the colonialism, the European and African diasporas that preceded the Dominican people and their later diaspora. This gives prominence to the notion that Oscar's cultural identity is negatively influenced by the positioning of Dominican cultural identity within the colonial Afro-diasporic historical discourse. The Fukú curse is rooted in the lack of a sovereign, unified Dominican identity. That means Dominican culture is itself already seen in terms of other cultures, namely the Spanish colonial culture and the US in modern times. Hall said of this: "We are at the outer edge, the 'rim', of the metropolitan world - always 'South' to someone else's El Norte."<sup>19</sup> The search for a true, consistent identity is the curse that haunts the Dominican people, like Oscar, and dooms them to always be the "other" to some extent.

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<sup>18</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 5

<sup>19</sup> Hall, "Cultural identity and Diaspora", 228

Oscar is defined by his otherness; from white America; from Dominican-Americans subjected to the diaspora; from the Dominicans in the Dominican Republic. He embodies the otherness of the diasporic identity, his identity inherently différent, in the sense that he is neither a true Dominican, nor a true American. Oscar essentially destabilizes the immigrant/native binary structure, to speak in the terms of the deconstructuralism that influenced Hall. Oscar displays characteristics of both identities present without fitting in and being accepted by any of them:

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.<sup>20</sup>

Oscar way of speaking and demeanor are influenced by the American pop culture he loves and spends so much of in. These features make him deviant to most Dominicans, while his ethnicity and Dominican roots are deviant to white America. He is labeled an other by both. Hall asserted that a true diasporic identity is based on such a hybridity, the acknowledgement of "necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity."<sup>21</sup>

The basis for Yuniór's sense of cultural identity is harder to determine, as he narrates the story looking back at it, yet I would argue that Yuniór's cultural identity is more developed from Oscar's. He seems to have an identity similar to Oscar in their traits of otherness, but also demonstrates a sense of identity rooted in the national

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<sup>20</sup> Diaz, *Oscar Wao*, 49

<sup>21</sup> Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", 235

history of the Dominican Republic. He seems to be influenced less by Oscar than Oscar is influenced by him. Some instances demonstrate, however, how Yunior developed and expressed his identity through interacting with Oscar: “It was the curse that made me do it, you know. I don’t believe in that shit, Oscar. That’s our parents’ shit.”<sup>22</sup> But a more fundamental, noticeable difference between Oscar and Yunior is the fact that in spite of their many similarities, Yunior is no longer defined by his otherness during *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. He commented on Oscar’s nerdiness in comparison to his own: “Perhaps if like me he’d been able to hide his otakuness maybe shit would have been easier for him.”<sup>23</sup> Yunior, who stayed in the same nerdy dormitory and who had the same interests in fantasy literature and comic books as Oscar was never the “other” in the novel, rather he was accepted as Dominican by the Dominican-American community. Yunior also shows great interest in the history of the Dominican people and their nation, explaining a great deal of Dominican national history through the footnotes included in his narration. The analogy with Hall’s theory seems to fit Yunior to some extent, but less obviously so than it does Oscar, as Yunior’s hybrid diasporic identity is less pronounced, yet actively present below the surface.

The analogy between Hall’s cultural theory on diasporic identity and the roles of Oscar and Yunior in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* goes even further, as Oscar and Yunior, representing different approaches to the formation of cultural identity are in active discourse with each other throughout the story, pushing each other forward in the formation of their diasporic identities as subjects of the Dominican and African diasporas. Yunior and Oscar come into contact with one

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<sup>22</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 194

<sup>23</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 21

another during their college days and they have a tremendous influence on each other. Through their interaction, both characters develop their identity, enriching their diasporic experience to include aspects not present before they met. Despite agreeing to look out after Oscar, as a favor to his sister Lola, Yuniór was at first unaccepting of Oscar's weird tendencies:

Knocked Lola for a loop when I said I'd do it, but it almost killed her  
 dead when I actually did it. Move in with him. In fucking Demarest.<sup>24</sup>  
 Home of all the weirdos and losers.<sup>25</sup>

To Oscar, Yuniór serves as a frame of reference to his otherness and in recognizing the innate otherness present in Yuniór's character, parallel to his own otherness, Oscar is able to establish a sense of cultural identity based on his otherness. In spite of their superficial differences, Oscar is strengthened and encouraged to develop himself through recognizing the similarities between himself, Yuniór and other Dominican characters subjected to the diaspora. Oscar admires Yuniór and he serves both as his inspiration and guide on his almost heroic quest to finding love and lifting the curse he believes holds his family, for example, it was Yuniór who provided Oscar with the money he needed for his flight back to the Dominican Republic at the end of the novel. It is also in his fatal interactions with Ybón we can see how much Oscar is defined and helped by his otherness, even in the Dominican Republic, as Oscar and Ybón's interaction is described as taking place in English:

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<sup>24</sup> Demarest is a well known special interest dormitory at Rutgers University, with mandatory participation in at least one of their artistic special interest programs.  
<http://ruoncampus.rutgers.edu/apply-for-housing/continuing-students-housing-lottery/lottery/special-programs/demarest-hall/>

<sup>25</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 170

“The next time he ran into her in front of her house (he had watched for her), she said, Good morning, Mr. de León, in English.”<sup>26</sup> This is important for the development of Oscar’s identity as it shows that he is able to use his otherness as common ground in his communication with other people. Ybón, who like Oscar, has been defined by her otherness and who also lived as a part of the Dominican diaspora. In almost every sense, Oscar and Ybón are opposites of each other, as Oscar lived a sexless life west of the Dominican Republic and Ybón lived as a prostitute in Amsterdam. Their stories might be very different from each other, yet in spite of the difference, their otherness from the norm in the Dominican Republic and their lives as part of the Dominican diaspora allow them to identify with each other. They recognize each other's otherness, as is demonstrated when Yunior recalls the way Oscar described Ybón: “As though (Oscar’s words now) she were some marooned alien princess who existed partially in another dimension.”<sup>27</sup>

Yunior is interesting in the sense that his quest for a coherent diasporic identity is already in a further developed stadium than Oscar’s during the events of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, yet a similar development can be seen in his character when analyzing his development over the course of his life throughout the fictional world created by Díaz. If we look at his development as it takes place over the course of the events depicted in the short stories, we can see that, similar to Oscar, Yunior as well developed his cultural identity over the course of his life, always being both different to Americans and Dominicans alike, yet firmly rooted within both cultures. In the short stories like “Nilda”, in *This is How You Lose Her*, we can see how Yunior, like Oscar, was once defined by his otherness from Dominican-Americans and white Americans, without it serving as a path to identification or self

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<sup>26</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 280

<sup>27</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 282



realization as he proclaims that he “was fourteen and reading Dhalgren for the second time,” and that he “had an IQ that would have broken you in two but I would have traded it in for a halfway decent face in a second.”<sup>28</sup> The parallels between Yuniór and Oscar are clear, and Yuniór, prior to meeting Oscar, went through a similar process to form his cultural identity. In this process, Yuniór as well recognized the inherent difference of characters around him and through interaction formed a more complete sense of identity. The story “Miss Lora” shows one of these interactions. Firstly, it illustrates how like Yuniór was an inspiration to Oscar, so Rafa was to Yuniór, as becomes evident in the very first lines of the story:

You remember how all the other guys had hated on her — how skinny she was, no culo, no titties, como un palito but your brother didn’t care. I’d fuck her.<sup>29</sup>

The events of “Miss Lora” take place right after Yuniór’s brother died of cancer. After Rafa’s death, Yuniór is lonely and living vicariously through dystopian science-fiction, which ostracizes somewhat from his surroundings. The science-fiction then serves as a shared topic of interest between Yuniór and Miss Lora, herself an outcast in the neighborhood because of her physique and lifestyle. Both of these characteristics form a clear parallel with Oscar’s ordeal, albeit in a less extreme fashion. The affair with Miss Lora helps Yuniór come to terms with his diasporic identity, as he is able to process the loss of his brother and move out of his shadow and, by extension, the mold of the typical Dominican, achieving a more balanced cultural identity. Yuniór, like Oscar, seems to find a shared sense of diasporic identity through experiencing

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<sup>28</sup> Junot Díaz, “Nilda”, *This Is How You Lose Her*. Penguin Group. 2012. 31

<sup>29</sup> Díaz, “Miss Lora”, *Lose Her*, 149

bonding with others over their otherness. “Miss Lora” takes place before the events of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, around the time Yunior first meets and starts dating Oscar’s sister Lola, who appears in the short story as the unnamed “mujeron”, and who Díaz has confirmed to be Lola: “There’s a story, “Miss Lora,” with the girlfriend that he meets at Rutgers, who has his head shaved, and is a mujeron, that is Lola.”<sup>30</sup>

In their struggle in fitting in with mainstream Dominicans, combined with their difference in regard to dominant American culture, both Yunior and Oscar are forced to create a sense of diasporic identity, as was described by Hall, that is based on the recognition of otherness in the people of the diaspora, allowing for the creation of a shared cultural identity, regardless of the individual differences excavated by looking back at one’s personal family history. The act of looking back at history to determine a place and story of origin to serve a frame of reference to this *différent*, category defying, identity is frequently practiced by both Oscar and Yunior. Yunior shows, especially in *The Brief Wondrous Life*, he has extensive knowledge of the political and colonial history of the Dominican Republic as well as of that of the US, as he often demonstrates through footnotes. Oscar also displays a preoccupation with the past, more specifically on the Fukú curse he believes to haunt his family specifically and the people of the Dominican Republic in general, which lead him to research and write about his family history. Yunior does something similar at the end of “The Cheater’s Guide to Love”, the last story in *This is How You Lose Her*. It is implied here that the short story collection is a work of metafiction, written by Yunior as a cathartic assessment of his past mistakes. For both Oscar and Yunior, writing about

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<sup>30</sup> Richard Wolinsky, "Growing the Hell Up: From Middle Earth to NJ." *Guernica / A Magazine of Art & Politics*. November 02, 2012. Accessed November 30, 2016. <https://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/growing-the-hell-up-from-middle-earth-to-nj/>.

past events in relation to their cultural identity shows to be the way they put their lives in perspective. It is the way they create the frame of reference within which they position their diasporic identity.

Oscar and Yuniór's diasporic identities can both be interpreted to have been formed in line with Hall's theory. They have both been outcasts, yet were able to create a consistent diasporic cultural identity, based on their otherness, framed against the cultural history of the Dominican Republic and the US.

Díaz has weighed in on the theme of culture in his work while being interviewed by Martin Belk at the 2011 Prague Writers festival. He challenged the fixed definitions of cultural identity, asserting they are not as fixed as we wish to believe:

When we say someone is Dominican we think that that actually means something. But we know that if I asked any of you to give me a definition of what a Czech person is. Just write me a definition of a Czech person and I will go out on the street and in five minutes find you a Czech person who doesn't fit your definition. That is just the way it works, we can't come up with definitions complex enough to deal with how stupendously complex we are. We can't help it. Even though we know that it's impossible for a human being to fit comfortably inside of a definition, we can't help ourselves. We love to do it and certainly as an artist we are aware of the boxes that we make; Dominican; American; Czech. We are aware of the box and the impossibility for anyone to fit permanently in that box.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>" Belk, Díaz. Prague 2/3

These statements are in line with what Hall proposes in his paper, in the sense that a diasporic identity is based on hybridity and heterogeneity, breaking the boundaries of traditional categorization. Similarities can be found in the way both believe a cultural identity to be based upon unstable, changeable cultural and personal features, which gain prominence in their relation to conventional labels and historical discourse. Plotwise, this hybridity is expressed by the constant shifting between the US and the Dominican Republic by the main characters in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, especially in case of adversity. With Oscar, as well as his mother Belicia and sister Lola, the repeated traveling between in the countries at pivotal moments in the narrative accentuates the hybridity of their respective personalities and the importance both cultures hold in their lives.

## 5. The Language of the Diaspora

Language plays an important role in defining the realization of diasporic identity in the lives of the characters inhabiting Díaz's fictional world. Throughout his work, Díaz plays with bilinguality, in the sense that his work is written in English, featuring a sizeable amount of Spanish vocabulary and slang. Yet it remains important to keep in mind that all stories are narrated in English, even in a story such as "Ysrael"<sup>32</sup> which takes place entirely in the Dominican Republic, before narrator Yuniors spoke any English, conversations are not richer in Spanish than they are in stories taking place in the US. The importance of language and the fluency to switch between languages as well as cultures is immediately acknowledged and stressed by Díaz in the epigraph of his first short story collection, *Drown*, through citing Cuban-American poet Gustavo Pérez Firmat's poem from *Bilingual Blues*:

The fact that I  
am writing to you  
in English  
already falsifies what I  
wanted to tell you.  
My subject:  
how to explain to you that I  
don't belong to English  
though I belong nowhere else<sup>33</sup>

This epigraph is a telling example in analysing the role languages play in Díaz's work. The poem demonstrates the duality and inconsistencies of the diaspora as becomes evident by looking at the last two lines. This fits the aforementioned

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<sup>32</sup> Junot Díaz, "Ysrael", *Drown* (Faber & Faber, 1996), 2-15

<sup>33</sup> Gustavo Pérez Firmat, *Bilingual Blues*, Miami 1995.

assessment of life as part of the Dominican diaspora according to Hall's theory, who described the inconsistent, heterogeneous histories which result in a galvanized diasporic identity. The characters within diaspora live mainly in the United States and as such come in contact with English in their daily lives. Even though Dominican-American characters often communicate with each other in Spanish and often have it as their first language, they are very much a part of the English speaking society. The epigraph by Pérez Firmat thus aptly captures the nature of the English language within Díaz's writing.

A similar duality is also expressed and acknowledged by the characters in stories. In "Negocios", Yuniór's father, Ramón de las Casas (Papi) is shocked by the sudden switch in language when he returns to the D.R. on a holiday:

Seeing the country he'd been born in, seeing his people in charge of everything, he was unprepared for it. The air whooshed out of his lungs. For nearly four years he'd not spoken his Spanish loudly in front of the Northamericans and now he was hearing it bellowed and flung from every mouth.<sup>34</sup>

Illustrating the feeling of separation from the Spanish language felt by a first generation immigrant, it also puts the perceived status of Spanish in perspective. In the US, Spanish is regarded with certain degree of contempt and its speakers are at times faced with discrimination. Typical of the Latin-American immigrants in Díaz's work, Ramón quickly switched to English as his primary language, similar to other characters that had recently immigrated. One such character is Eulalio, Ramón's

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<sup>34</sup> Díaz, "Negocios", *Drown*, 155

Guatemalan roommate who “had been in the States close to two years and when he met Papi he spoke to him in English. When Papi didn’t answer, Eulalio switched to Spanish.”<sup>35</sup> The language switching shows how they are struggling with the duality, even though Eulalio is a native Spanish speaker, he starts speaking in English and would later mock Ramón for not speaking English. The first quote shows how Ramón would later have a similar attitude towards Spanish, not speaking it aloud in public.

There is a noticeable difference in the attitude toward languages between the true first generation immigrants, such as Yuniór’s parents, and the second generation, such as Oscar and Yuniór. On several occasions, the second generation of Dominicans shows how they struggle with the Spanish language as well as with English. In “The Cheater’s Guide to Love” for example, Yuniór’s love interest, a Dominican exchange student is challenging his status as a Dominican:

She’s always trying to prove you’re not Dominican. If I’m not Dominican then no one is, you shoot back, but she laughs at that. Say that in Spanish, she challenges and of course you can’t.<sup>36</sup>

This places the diasporic cultural and linguistic identity in a new perspective. In spite of Yuniór’s identification with the Dominican Republic and Dominican culture, he is no longer regarded as a true Dominican by non-diasporic Dominicans, because of his limited fluency in Spanish. This is not the only time Yuniór mentions his Spanish is not without flaws as in “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” he recommends the following about taking dates out to dinner: “Order everything in your

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<sup>35</sup> Diaz, “Negocios”, *Drown*, 132

<sup>36</sup> Diaz, “The Cheater’s Guide to Love”, *Lose Her*, 193

busted-up Spanish. Let her correct you if she's Latina and amaze her if she's black."<sup>37</sup> This further proves Yuniór's conflicting relation to bilingualism, at times a blessing, at times a curse. Another such conflict can be found in Oscar's final day. As I stated before, Oscar was able to find love and free himself of the Fukú's grip because he and Ybón connected over their shared diasporic experience. However, the bilingualism that came along with his diasporic experience also proved to be his undoing. When he is held at gunpoint by El Capitan's goons, Oscar begs them to let him go, to which they respond: "Listen, we'll let you go if you tell us what fuego means in English. Fire, he blurted out, unable to help himself."<sup>38</sup>

The negative effects of the English language and bilingualism are shown here once. This makes the role of bilingualism even more difficult to define as good or bad, blurring the lines between English and Spanish. I believe this demonstrates how the characters do not truly belong to English yet at the same time they do no longer belong to Spanish, which results in a hybrid language, such as the one Yuniór uses in his narration.

Díaz's work has been included in *Rotten English*<sup>39</sup>, an anthology of code-switching literature written by Dohra Ahmad. As such it, it allows for Díaz's use of languages to be placed in perspective compared to the other variants of English (or vernaculars, following Ahmad's terminology) used in English literature. Ahmad stresses the political nature to the use of vernacular in literature, referring to James Baldwin's essay "If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me, What Is?" in which he described language as "a political instrument, means and proof of power."<sup>40</sup> Ahmad raises the use of vernacular in literature as means of addressing these issues of

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<sup>37</sup> Díaz, "How to Date a Brown girl, Black girl, White girl or Halfie", *Drown*, 113

<sup>38</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 322

<sup>39</sup> Dohra Ahmad. *Rotten English: A Literary Anthology*. (2007)

<sup>40</sup> Ahmad, *Rotten English*, 17



language, power and discourse as well as a strategy used by characters to reclaim parts of their identity:

But in just as many cases, characters use languages strategically to take control over their circumstances. We frequently see how words that wound can be reclaimed: “faggot,” for example, in the case of R. Zamora Linmark’s Edgar; or “nigger” for Junot Díaz and Roddy Doyle.<sup>41</sup>

Ahmad’s view corresponds well to the attitude towards language Díaz’s characters harbor; the political and social realities presented by the characters allegiance to both Spanish and English and the use of language to establish and reclaim the African identity and heritage lost in the diaspora.

The code switching in Diaz’s work has been analyzed in linguistics terms, among others by Lourdes Torres (2007) and Eugenia Casielles-Suárez (2013). Torres proposed three different application strategies of code switching in Latino American literature, namely transparent code switching, gratifying bilinguals and radical bilingualism. Transparent code switching is aimed at monolingual english speakers and only uses common nouns, is italicized or offers direct translations within the text. The second strategy of gratifying bilingual is described as incorporating more unmarked and untranslated Spanish, including Spanish expressions, catering more to the experience of bilingual readers. The third strategy proposed by Torres is radical bilingualism, texts which feature entire phrases or paragraphs of untranslated Spanish, accessible almost uniquely to bilingual readers.<sup>42</sup> According to Torres,

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<sup>41</sup> Ahmad, *Rotten English*, 29

<sup>42</sup> Lourdes Torres. “In the Contact Zone: Code-Switching Strategies by Latino/a Writers.” (2007)

Díaz's work should be classified as gratifying bilinguals, because the use of Spanish is not limited to common nouns and concepts and it is not translated nor italicized, but there is too little alteration between English and Spanish for her to consider Díaz use of Spanish and English as radical bilingualism. In response to Torres's findings, Casielles-Suárez asserted that the code switching in Díaz does not fit the proposed categories. She believes Díaz's code switching to more than the mere gratifying of bilinguals. She proposed Díaz's use of language is radical in its own way, coining the term radical hybridism in regard to Díaz's fiction. This differs from radical bilingualism in the sense that texts like the *Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* are not necessarily alternating between Spanish and English as often as a radical bilingual texts would, but rather insert and mix English with Spanish, to the extent that the boundaries between the two become vague. Casielles-Suárez gives several examples, such as the instances of language switching within a single word,<sup>43</sup> as well as a massive borrowing of Spanish words. The function of the borrowing has been addressed by Díaz in a quote featured in Casielles-Suárez:

When does a loan word become an English word? Is "hacienda" a word in Spanish or English? You know what I'm saying? The point is I'm pushing the dates on a lot of these words. I decided I don't need a hundred years for the Oxford English Dictionary to tell me that it is okay to adopt this or that word as part of our normal vocabulary.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Examples given by Casielles-Suárez include: "Culocrat" and "northamericana".

<sup>44</sup> Ch'ien 2004: 204. Quoted in Casielles-Suárez

Additionally, Casielles-Suárez opened her paper with another interesting quote by Díaz, in which he reflects upon his use of Spanish and the way he presents it, unitalicized and without quotation marks:

For me allowing the Spanish to exist in my text without the benefit of italics or quotations marks a very important political move. Spanish is not a minority language. Not in this hemisphere, not in the United States, not in the world inside my head. So why treat it like one? Why 'other' it? Why de-normalize it? By keeping Spanish as normative in a predominantly English text, I wanted to remind readers of the mutability of languages. And to mark how steadily English is transforming Spanish and Spanish is transforming English.<sup>45</sup>

Díaz would further comment on his relation to bilingualism during an interview with the Buenos Aires Review, stating that: “My immigrant position, both in Spanish and in English—I’m as much an immigrant to Spanish as I am to English—means that I have no confidence of either language or in either language.”<sup>46</sup>

It is important to note, however, that *Drown* has included a vocabulary list on its final pages, seemingly conflicting with the strategy of gratifying bilinguals proposed by Torres or radical hybridism proposed by Casielles-Suárez. However, the list is written in the voice of the narrator and although explaining the meaning of the Spanish used in the short stories, the translations are written in a deadpan, almost ironic manner. This serves as a decent compromise, providing explanation to

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<sup>45</sup> Ch'ien 2004: 204. Quoted in Casielles-Suárez

<sup>46</sup><http://www.buenosairesreview.org/author/admin/>. "Junot Díaz:." The Buenos Aires Review. May 13, 2013. Accessed November 30, 2016. <http://www.buenosairesreview.org/2013/05/diaz-constant-state-of-translation/>.

readers who do not speak Spanish, without losing the political function of normalizing Spanish.

The concept of radical hybridism, together with the statements on the subject by Díaz himself go along with the attitude towards language and bilingualism in the stories. The identity of characters such as Yunió and Oscar is not bound nor defined by any of the cultures they take part in. Their language is as much a hybrid of Spanish and English as their cultural identity is a hybrid of Dominican and American cultural influences, defying conventional categorization.

## 6. Masculinity and Gender roles in the diaspora

As becomes evident through analyzing the characters of Oscar and Yunior, sexuality plays an important role within the work of Junot Díaz, to an extent that it appears to be an important sign of social acceptance within the respective culture. Cited by Díaz as one of the key themes in his writing, masculine gender roles and their cross-cultural differences are prominently featured in Díaz's work. He has reflected on masculinity and the hyper masculine environment he grew up in and made the following remarks:

I did all the stupid male shit you were supposed to do in my community. I spend a lot of time pretending I couldn't read, I mean it, I was a guy who was pretty smart but in public I played the role. That for me was important box. There's a moment when a guy wakes up and realizes you can waste your whole life passing for masculine, you can waste your whole life performing a role. That has become a great source of my art, thinking about how much time I gave to this formula.<sup>47</sup>

Díaz's statements about his personal experience with masculinity are reflected in his work. His diasporic Dominican characters show a different pattern in regard to their attitude towards masculinity compared to the Dominicans of the Dominican Republic. Traditional Dominican masculinity is best represented by the real life Dominican

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<sup>47</sup> Belk, Diaz. Prague 2/3

diplomat Porfirio Rubirosa<sup>48</sup>. In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Rubirosa is described as the most famous example of Dominican masculinity:

In the forties and fifties, Porfirio Rubirosa—or Rubi, as he was known in the papers—was the third-most-famous Dominican in the world [...]. A tall, debonair prettyboy whose “enormous phallus created havoc in Europe and North America,” Rubirosa was the quintessential jet-setting car-racing polo-obsessed playboy, the Trujillato’s “happy side”. [...] Rubi was the original Dominican Player.<sup>49</sup>

In his early youth, before he was hit by the fukú, Oscar is likened to Rubirosa because of his macho behavior, showing how Rubirosa serves as a frame of reference to which Dominicans measure masculinity.

A stand-out character of traditional Dominican masculinity in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Dionisio the Gangster mirrors the exploits of the real life archetype of Dominican masculinity, set by Porfirio Rubirosa. Like Rubirosa, the Gangster is described a traveling dandy playboy:

In the forties the Gangster was in his prime; he traveled the entire length of the Americas, from Rosario to Nueva York, in pimpdaddy style, staying at the best hotels, banging the hottest broads (never lost

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<sup>48</sup> Porfirio Rubirosa was a Dominican diplomat and playboy, famed for his female conquests, notorious for his close ties to the Trujillo regime. Rumored to be acting as a spy for Trujillo, forensic historian Daniel J. Voelker concluded Rubirosa to have served as the primary inspiration for Ian Fleming’s James Bond.

[http://www.voelkerlitigationgroup.com/files/will\\_the\\_real\\_james\\_bond\\_please\\_stand\\_up.pdf](http://www.voelkerlitigationgroup.com/files/will_the_real_james_bond_please_stand_up.pdf)

<sup>49</sup> Diaz, *Oscar Wao*, 12

his sureño taste for the morenas, though), dining in four-star restaurants, confabbing with arch-criminals the world over.<sup>50</sup>

The similarities with Rubirosa go even further, considering that both are married to a Trujillo; Rubirosa to Rafael Trujillo's daughter, Flor de Oro; the Gangster to his sister. If Rubirosa can be seen as the blueprint to the masculine gender role, then out of all the characters in Díaz's fictional world, Dionisio is its closest representation. Dominican masculinity can then be defined as having sexual prowess and dominant strength as its pillars.

Another character whose behaviour is defined by the hyper-masculine expectations of his community is Yuniór's older brother, Rafa. Like the Gangster, Rafa fulfills the role assigned to Dominican man. He is prolific in his sexual endeavors, and asserts his dominance through his physical strength and commanding demeanor:

Rafa was still boxing then and he was cut up like crazy, the muscles on his chest and abdomen so striated they looked like something out of a Frazetta drawing. He noticed her because she was wearing these ridiculous shorts and this tank that couldn't have blocked a sneeze and a thin roll of stomach was poking from between the fabrics and he smiled at her and she got real serious and uncomfortable and he told her to fix him some iced tea and she told him to fix it himself.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 121

<sup>51</sup> Díaz, "Nilda", *Lose Her*, 33

His deteriorating health limits him in fulfilling his role, yet it does not stop him from trying to live up to these expectations of masculinity. He is shown to have remarkable strength despite his illness and still imposes his dominance on his younger brother:

Someone had thrown that lock at me. Someone who, when he was still playing baseball for our high school, had had his fastball clocked at ninety-three miles per hour. That's just terrible, Rafa clucked. They could have taken your eye out. Later, when Mami went to bed, he looked at me evenly: Didn't I tell you I was going to fix you? Didn't I? And then he laughed.<sup>52</sup>

Rafa is juxtaposed to Yuniór as he is seemingly not bothered by the expectations of hyper-masculinity, but rather seems to revel in them. Yuniór is less accepting of these traits of hyper-masculinity, often citing them as negative traits. Yuniór's mixed feelings about his own promiscuity in "Miss Lora" serve as a distinct example:

Both your father and your brother were sucios. [...] Sucios of the worst kind and now it's official: you are one, too. You had hoped the gene missed you, skipped a generation, but clearly you were kidding yourself.<sup>53</sup>

The quote is striking, as it displays Yuniór's dismay at his own behavior, while at the same time accepting it as almost inevitable. Yuniór continues his promiscuous

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<sup>52</sup> Diaz, "The Pura Principle", *Lose Her*, 118

<sup>53</sup> Diaz, "Miss Lora", *Lose Her*, 161



lifestyle after “Miss Lora” and he seems unable to fully free himself from the Dominican machismo. After the events of “The Cheater’s Guide to Love”, the last story in *This Is How You Lose Her*, Yunior is broken and struck with remorse over a breakup caused by his cheating ways. Yunior acknowledges the role the Dominican attitude has played and tries using it as an excuse: “You blame your father. You blame your mother. You blame the patriarchy. You blame Santo Domingo.”<sup>54</sup> In the end, Yunior turns to writing as his final attempt at redemption.

Similar to Yunior, Oscar also shows an urge to gravitate towards the Dominican masculine archetype. “You should have seen him, his mother sighed in her Last Days. He was our little Porfirio Rubirosa.”<sup>55</sup> Not only was he compared to Rubirosa when he was still a child, more importantly, his quest for love sees him pursuing and validating hypermasculine behavior, for example when he starts to imitate his cousins, “if only because he had started to suspect that in their Latin hypermaleness there might be an answer.”<sup>56</sup> Next to that Oscar’s struggle with masculinity shows how Dominican masculinity is perceived as a requirement for a Dominican identity. When Oscar’s behaviour deviates from the Dominican standard of masculinity, his flouting of the norm is considered so extreme by Dominican society that they not only doubt his masculinity, but by extension, his Dominican identity. The doubt is not only imposed on Oscar by other people, Oscar has, at least to some extent internalized the equation of sexual prowess with Dominican identity. This becomes evident when, for instance, he tells Yunior he heard “from a reliable source that no Dominican male has ever died a virgin.” To which Yunior replies that “it’s against the laws of nature

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<sup>54</sup> Diaz, “The Cheater’s Guide to Love”, *Lose Her*, 176.

<sup>55</sup> Diaz, *Oscar Wao*, 12

<sup>56</sup> Diaz, *Oscar Wao*, 30

for a dominicano to die without fucking at least once.”<sup>57</sup> Even though Oscar is in many ways the complete opposite of the archetypical Dominican womanizer, is not exempt of the influence of that idea, shaping the way he considers Dominican men should behave and striving to be similar.

Another manifestation of Dominican masculinity within the diaspora can be found in the frequent occurrence of double lives. These double lives are typified by the principal characters finding a new partner in the United States, next to them having a wife and children left behind in the Dominican Republic. Appearing in many of Díaz’s short stories such as “Otravida, Otravez” and “The Cheater’s Guide to Love”, the double life is most prominently featured in “Negocios”. “Negocios” follows Yuniór’s father, Ramón, during his early days in the US. He has arrived alone, leaving his wife and two sons behind in Santo Domingo. He gets married to a Dominican-American woman called Nilda and has a child with her. As time passes, he is occasionally confronted with his disloyalty to his Dominican family by his Puerto Rican friend Jo-Jo, after which he shows occasional signs of remorse, for instance when looking for his family whilst back in the Dominican Republic for a holiday. In the end, Ramón only decides to have his Dominican family come over to the US after his relationship with Nilda deteriorates, and he subsequently abandons her:

With his back killing him and his life with Nilda headed down the toilet, Papi began more and more to regard his departure as inevitable. His first familia was the logical destination. He began to see them as his

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<sup>57</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 174

saviors, as a regenerative force that could redeem his fortunes. He said as much to Jo-Jo. Now you're finally talking sense, panín, Jo-Jo said.<sup>58</sup>

In a sense, Ramón's feeling of guilt is opposite to that of his son Yuniór's. Where Yuniór feels guilty about his infidelity, but feels he can't help himself because of the Dominican expectation of masculinity, Ramón does not appear to feel guilty of his own accord, but rather as a reaction to his new environment, e.g. his friend Jo-Jo.

It is noticeably how, within the context of the Dominican Republic, the hypermasculine Dominican values are not the source of much conflict. Yuniór's mother repeatedly forgives her husband for his cheating behaviour and even comes back to him, joining him in the US. Characters such as the Gangster seem not troubled by their masculine lifestyle. It is the diasporic experience that seems to change the way gender roles are imposed on the male characters in Díaz's work, putting the Dominican masculine ideals in a new perspective. Within the new context of the United States, character such as Yuniór start to doubt the value of the Dominican masculine expectations, while Oscar at first glance seems to have disposed of them altogether. Yet even though they seem to have gained a new perspective on the Dominican perception of masculine values, they are not freed from its influence completely. The gender role becomes a problem, because a part of the people supposed to carry out the role do no longer feel comfortable playing it. They start having moral objections, due to a changed context and a different frame of reference. This is an important source of conflict for both Oscar and Yuniór, who, due to their warped attitudes to masculine values appear to be stuck between the two colliding cultures. They are not able to live comfortably in the role the Dominican

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<sup>58</sup> Díaz, "Negocios", *Drown*, 161

community imposes on them, yet they are not capable of truly denouncing hyper masculinity. They neither accept the role, nor are they capable of fully rejecting it. Their masculinity in turn, becomes an amalgamation of the different cultures that have shaped them. Once again, we witness the formation of a new hybrid, a hybrid masculinity, formed by American values and Dominican hypermasculinity, echoing Hall's idea of a hybrid, diasporic identity, that fails to be captured by the definition of either of its originators. It is important to keep in mind Díaz has repeatedly stated in interviews that he does not believe hypermasculinity is a problem unique to the Dominican Republic, nor that it should be interpreted as a defining feature of Dominican men:

For me, I always joke around when I think about the way that the conversations around Dominican men unfold. That in some ways, it's a blind. It's really just a way to talk about masculinity in general. It's like Dominican men are this larger metaphor for a specific kind of masculinity, which is in many ways general. If you were able to bring in the women of any culture, like, if you brought in all American women, and said, "Hey! Would you recommend American men?" You would not get many votes. You would not hear them saying, "Oh yeah, American men, they're wonderful. All that child support we get." All that child support we don't get, I mean. "How many of us are battered and are in fucking shelters?"<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> The Atlantic. Accessed November 30, 2016.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2012/09/the-baseline-is-you-suck-junot-diaz-on-men-who-write-about-women/262163/>.

I do not believe, however, that this disqualifies the pattern observed in the characters' different attitude towards masculinity, nor does it conflict with Hall's idea of a diasporic cultural identity. There is a noticeable difference in attitude towards masculinity between older men, such as Ramón de las Casas and Dionisio the Gangster, and the next generation of Dominican men, such as Oscar and Yunió, who grew up in the diaspora. The diaspora creates the distance needed for the younger generation to reassess their cultural values and masculine identity, similar to Hall's proposition of diaspora that "unified these peoples across their differences, in the same moment as it cut them off from direct access to their past."<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", 227

## 7. The Female perspective of the diaspora

As male gender expectations are a source of conflict for the men of the Dominican diaspora, so are female gender expectations to the women of the diaspora. The female voice is less prominent in Díaz's writing, yet it is not absent. "Otravida, Otravez" is written from the perspective of Yasmin, whilst Yunior narrates the story of Beli in great detail. The most prominent female voice in Díaz's fiction is, however, Lola De Leon, Oscar's sister, the central character in two chapters in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

The second chapter of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, starts narrated in the second person, and continues as a first person narrative narrated by Lola. It focusses on Lola's relationship with her mother, Beli. From the start of Lola's narrative, her strained relation to her mother and the Dominican patriarchy are evident. Lola introduces herself as a "punk-chick" with her hair shaved short, a rebel and a misfit within the Latino community of Paterson, New Jersey. She expresses her wish to escape, from her mother and from the Dominican community:

She was my Old World Dominican mother and I was her only daughter, the one she had raised up herself with the help of nobody, which meant it was her duty to keep me crushed under her heel. I was fourteen and desperate for my own patch of world that had nothing to do with her. I wanted the life that I used to see when I watched *Big Blue Marble* as a kid, the life that drove me to make pen pals and to take atlases home from school. The life that existed beyond Paterson, beyond my family,

beyond Spanish. [...] You don't know the hold our mothers have on us, even the ones that are never around—especially the ones that are never around. What it's like to be the perfect Dominican daughter, which is just a nice way of saying a perfect Dominican slave.<sup>61</sup>

Lola characterizes her childhood as one of forced obedience and degradation at the hands of her mother, while she was constantly dreaming fleeing her influence and expectations. Lola felt there was no place for her within the Dominican community, nor in the United States. She dreamed of running away to a different country:

I just lay in my room with stupid Bear-Bear and sang under my breath, imagining where I would run away to when I grew up. To Japan maybe, where I would track down Tomoko, or to Austria, where my singing would inspire a remake of *The Sound of Music*.<sup>62</sup>

Lola eventually runs away with a guy called Aldo, but is disillusioned by the experience, still dreaming of running away further. Her mother ends up catching her and sending her to the Dominican Republic as a punishment. In Santo Domingo, Lola is an outcast at her school because she is from the US. She describes how she is excluded even more so than she was in the Dominican community in New Jersey. "If you think it was tough being a goth in Paterson, try being a Dominican York in one of those private schools back in DR."<sup>63</sup> In spite of her apparent role as an outcast, Lola enjoyed her life in Santo Domingo, to the extent that she even contemplated

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<sup>61</sup> Diaz, *Oscar Wao*, 55-56

<sup>62</sup> Diaz, *Oscar Wao*, 57

<sup>63</sup> Diaz, *Oscar Wao*, 71

staying there longer. Lola's time in the Dominican Republic had important implications for her personality as well. She was able to redefine her femininity and was able to come to terms with the expectations placed on Dominican women after experiencing it from a Dominican perspective, as is shown by the following quote:

Rosío has me dressing up like a “real Dominican girl.” She's the one who fixed my hair and who helps me with my makeup, and sometimes when I see myself in mirrors I don't even know who I am anymore. Not that I'm unhappy or anything.<sup>64</sup>

Lola shows that in the Dominican Republic, she is able to better fit in the role of the Dominican girl. Next to that, she shows a new found appreciation of her own body and its feminine features. After making love to her new Dominican boyfriend, who complimented her on her curves, Lola said: “I stood in front of the mirror naked and looked at my culo for the first time. A tesoro, I repeated. A treasure.”<sup>65</sup> As she is now adapting to the role she was so adamantly refusing in the US, Lola starts to question her identity. I believe this is where Lola's diasporic identity comes into fruition. Before going to the Dominican Republic, Lola was dismissive of many aspects of the Dominican community. In Santo Domingo, she would internalize the aspects of Dominican culture she had before rejected. What results is a the conception of a diasporic identity which fuses the two world, as has happened to other Dominican characters in the diaspora. This is in line with Hall's propositions, as he established that diasporic identity originates in the way people break the boundaries of

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<sup>64</sup> Diaz, *Oscar Wao*, 71

<sup>65</sup> Diaz, *Oscar Wao*, 73



categorization, instead incorporating aspects of the constituent categories in forming a hybrid cultural identity.

Compared to her daughter, Beli initially shows she has similar personality. Like Lola, Beli was stubborn and had a difficult relation with her mother figure, La Inca. La Inca admitted so to Lola during her stay in the Dominican republic:

Abuela snorted. Guapa soy yo. Your mother was a diosa. But so cabeza dura. When she was your age we never got along. I didn't know that, I said. She was cabeza dura and I was...exigente.<sup>66</sup>

Beli also rebels against her mother, and societies expectations, longing to find a place for herself. Beli's rebellion, however, turns out far worse than Lola's; the fukú of the Trujillo regime catches up with her, and breaks her. She loses her child and she is raped. After Trujillo's assassination, La Inca is able to send Beli to the United States, where she would be safe of the crumbling regimes wrath. Beli underestimated the impact immigration would have on her as she laughed when La Inca told her to do so:

Oh, Beli; not so rashly, not so rashly: What did you know about states or diasporas? What did you know about Nueva Yol or unheated "old law" tenements or children whose self-hate short-circuited their minds? What did you know, madame, about

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<sup>66</sup> Diaz, *Oscar Wao*, 75

immigration? Don't laugh, mi negrita, for your world is about to be changed. Utterly.<sup>67</sup>

The combination of the horrors she suffered at home and the harsh immigrant experience would turn out to be pivotal in Beli's shift in personality. She would turn out to project on her children the same high expectations La Inca had for her. Denying Lola the rebellion she had once craved herself, to prevent her from making the same mistakes she made.

Like the male characters, the female characters show how they struggle with the expectations placed on them. Both Lola and Beli initially show frustration over the conventional gender roles that are imposed on them, but also find empowerment in their developing sexuality.

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<sup>67</sup> Diaz, *Oscar Wao*, 160

## 8. The African Diaspora

The African diaspora is the focal point of Hall's original theory of a diasporic identity and is also prominent in Junot Díaz's fiction. The African diaspora is present in both Díaz's Dominican Republic, as well as in his United States. The Dominican characters' attitudes towards African identity are inherently mixed, as racism is of frequent occurrence in the Dominican Republic and the American Dominican community, whilst the African diaspora is at the same time an important aspect of Dominican identity, both within and outside of the Dominican Republic.

Beli is the darkest character in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and her storyline shows how her dark skin is both praised and a source of discrimination. When she went to prestigious high school El Redentor, she was faced with classmates who were mostly white Dominicans. "She never would admit it (even to herself), but she felt utterly exposed at El Redentor, all those pale eyes gnawing at her duskiness like locusts—and she didn't know how to handle such vulnerability."<sup>68</sup> Through the description of Beli's first love interest, Jack Pujols, we can see how beauty in the Dominican Republic was often equated with whiteness:

Jack Pujols of course: the school's handsomest (read: whitest) boy, a haughty slender melnibonian of pure European stock whose cheeks looked like they'd been knapped by a master and whose skin was

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<sup>68</sup> Díaz. *Oscar Wao* (Kindle Locations 945-946).

unflawed by scar, mole, blemish, or hair, his small nipples were the pink perfect ovals of sliced salchicha.<sup>69</sup>

The quote shows how Jack's handsomeness is linked directly to his European heritage and white skin color. The ethnic dynamics of Dominican society are further exposed when Beli and Jack get caught having sex:

Factor in that he'd been caught not with one of his own class (though that might have also been a problem) but with the scholarship girl, una prieta to boot. (The fucking of poor prietas was considered standard operating procedure for elites just as long as it was kept on the do-lo, what is elsewhere called the Strom Thurmond Maneuver.)<sup>70</sup>

Here we see how ethnicity is only part of the story, as Beli's skin color is regarded in combination with her social class. At times, however, Beli's skin color is a source of affection, the Gangster, for example, often refers to her as "mi negrita", using it as a term of endearment.

The struggle with ethnicity, race and racism in Díaz's fiction is by no means limited to the Trujillo era Dominican Republic. Race is a frequently mentioned trait in the stories set in the United States. Throughout Díaz's work, there is a tendency of Dominicans comparing a dark complexion, curly hair and big lips to Haitians in an insulting, negative way. Here we can notice a clash between the Dominican identity and the African diasporic identity. In a minor quote in the short story "Ysrael", Yunior

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<sup>69</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 89

<sup>70</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 100

explains the way Rafa addressed him in front of his friends, giving insight in the way Dominicans regard Haitians and their typical characteristics:

He had about five hundred routines he liked to lay on me. Most of them had to do with my complexion, my hair, the size of my lips. It's the Haitian, he'd say to his buddies. Hey Señor Haitian, Mami found you on the border and only took you in because she felt sorry for you.<sup>71</sup>

The theme of linking Haitian appearance and by extension African physical characteristics is recurring in Díaz's work. For instance, when in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Oscar returns from a family visit in the Dominican Republic, his uncle calls him out on his sun-tanned complexion: "Great, his tío said, looking askance at his complexion, now you look Haitian."<sup>72</sup> Whilst talking with Yúnior about racism in the US, the Dominican exchange student in "The Cheater's Guide to Love" shows how native Dominicans do not consider their dislike of Haitians to be racist: "So Dominicans love Haitians now? That's not about *race*. She pronounces every syllable. That's about *nationality*."<sup>73</sup> It becomes apparent throughout Díaz's work however, that the underlying issue is, in fact, about race. The Dominican characters hold a specific place within American society. They are both of African descent as well as Latinos, disrupting the categorization typically by American society. Díaz has commented on this at the 2013 Americas Latino Festival in Denver,

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<sup>71</sup> Díaz, "Ysrael", *Drown*, 2

<sup>72</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 32

<sup>73</sup> Díaz, "The Cheater's Guide to Love", *Lose Her*, 192

A country that had created this weird consensus that had no connection to reality in the northeast, around how white, blacks and Latinos and Asians took up certain categories. These groups were these certain neat, tidy things and they each, sort of, did and represented these spaces and that that was the way it was going to be. Now, of course this is all a lie, none of that is true. Nobody can divide any group that neatly. I came from a community that profoundly disrupted what we could call the ethno-racial commonplaces of the northeast. So that you had Dominicans who were coming in, who, for all intents and purposes, looked completely African American and were Latino. So this uneasy thing that had been created in the New York City area of Latinos being this weird middle category between white and blacks completely gets thrown out of the window when Dominicans come in.<sup>74</sup>

This feeling, not fitting the established categories within American society is underlined by the attitudes of some of the characters in Díaz's fictional world. It shows when Yunió describes one of his brother's girlfriends: "She was from Trinidad, a cocoa pañol, and she had this phony-as-hell English accent. It was the way we all were back then. None of us wanted to be niggers. Not for nothing."<sup>75</sup> The quote is interesting because it shows how it is not only Dominicans that want to escape being categorized as African Americans. This connects well with Díaz's statements on the subject, since a Trinidadian would defy the American ethnic

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<sup>74</sup> Americas Latino Festival Denver. "Junot Díaz - Art, Race and Capitalism." YouTube. November 22, 2013. Accessed December 02, 2016. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GQH-nVX8hT4>.

<sup>75</sup> Díaz. "Nilda", *Lose Her*, 39

conventions as much as a Dominican would, being both black and a Caribbean immigrant. But as with Díaz's characters in the Dominican Republic, the American Dominicans have also internalized their African heritage to a degree. Evident in Yunió's narration is his frequent use of the words "nigger" and "negro" in reference to other Dominicans and, more notably, in reference to himself. This shows how Yunió identifies as black, even though he does not fit the typical category of the African American. Junot Díaz has acknowledged the importance of his own African heritage for both his art, as well as for his personal identity,

My problem was that I wanted to belong to both groups simultaneously, and yet each group was trying to get me to commit only to them. Relationships might be monogamous but identities certainly are not. [...] My African roots made me what I am today," Díaz said. "They're the reason I'm from the Dominican Republic. They're the reason I exist at all. To these, roots I owe everything."<sup>76</sup>

Coming back to Hall's theory, which focuses partly on the role of African heritage on Caribbean cultural identity, we see that the characters in Díaz behave along the way Hall described. The African identity of the Dominican characters "challenges the fixed binaries"<sup>77</sup> of ethnic categorization and is the source of a hybrid identity, in which the African heritage an important constituent.

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<sup>76</sup> Sandra E. Garcia, "Hispanic Heritage Month: A Story That Can't Be Told Without Afro-Latino Roots." Fox News. October 11, 2011. Accessed December 02, 2016. <http://latino.foxnews.com/latino/lifestyle/2011/10/11/hispanic-heritage-month-story-that-cant-be-told-without-afro-latino-roots/>.

<sup>77</sup> Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", 229

The presence of the African identity in Díaz's work is perhaps best metaphorized by the fukú and zafa. The fukú and zafa mentioned in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* are a typical manifestation of the Dominican attitude to the African diaspora and their own African identity. The fukú, the ever present curse, or series of curses, is claimed to have found its origin in colonial history:

They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. Fukú americanus, or more colloquially, fukú—generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World.<sup>78</sup>

The black mongoose, coming to the aid of both Belicia Cabral and her son when they face the fukú's supernatural manifestations, can be seen as both an embodiment of the African diasporic identity as well as the zafa counter-curse. Mongooses can be found in the Caribbean as a direct result of colonialism. For their use in pest control, the mongoose was introduced to plantations in the Caribbean in the late 1800s. The creature has since established its presence in the local ecosystems, yet is considered by biologist to be problematically invasive.<sup>79</sup> The link with the African slave trade is easily established, as they too were brought from

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<sup>78</sup> Díaz, *Oscar Wao*, 1

<sup>79</sup> "Invasion Biology Introduced Species Summary Project - Columbia University." Invasion Biology Introduced Species Summary Project - Columbia University. Accessed November 30, 2016. [http://www.columbia.edu/itc/cerc/danoff-burg/invasion\\_bio/inv\\_spp\\_summ/Herpestes\\_auropunctatus.html](http://www.columbia.edu/itc/cerc/danoff-burg/invasion_bio/inv_spp_summ/Herpestes_auropunctatus.html).



another continent against their will, forced to work at the same plantations. The mongoose is further established as a representation of the african diaspora by the “absolute black of its pelt”.<sup>80</sup> The relation of both the fukú and the zafa-like mongoose to the African diaspora is metaphoric for the relation between the Dominican people and their African heritage. It is at times a negative relation like the fukú curse, yet it is also a blessing and an inescapable part of the history and cultural identity of the Dominican people.

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<sup>80</sup> Diaz, *Oscar Wao*, 149

## 9. Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to investigate the diaspora and the diasporic identity of the Dominicans in Junot Díaz's fiction. I have done so by looking at Díaz's place in and relation to American Latino literature, and by comparing effect of the diaspora on Yuniors and Oscar to the cultural theory of Stuart Hall. Next to that I have looked at the effect of language and bilingualism, masculinity and gender roles and the African diaspora on the diasporic identity of the characters in Díaz's writing.

In comparing Yuniors and Oscar's diasporic experience, I came to the conclusion that both characters have a diasporic identity. Oscar and Yuniors both break the conventions of categorization, corresponding to what Hall, building on the work of Derrida, called *différance*; breaking the perceived binaries of cultural categorization, resulting in a cultural identity typified by heterogeneity and hybridity. That means Yuniors and Oscar have created a diasporic cultural identity, based on their otherness. They are able to connect with other people over the recognition of a shared sense of otherness, which serves as a source of identity, an identity formed along the principles of *différance* and hybridity described by Hall.

The use of bilingualism in Díaz's work shows how the Dominican diaspora left its mark on the language of the characters in Díaz's work. Characters within the diaspora are faced with the necessity to switch languages, as Spanish is shown to hold a socially unfavorable position in the US. Characters such as Yuniors, who have grown up in the diaspora, have difficulty speaking Spanish later in life. Analysis of the linguistic aspect of Díaz's code switching by Casielles-Suárez brought to light

how the mixed usage of English and Spanish is radically hybrid. This concept of radical hybridity gives further prominence to the notion that diasporic characters such as Oscar and Yunior are not bound to either English, nor Spanish. Instead, they use a hybrid, in which English and Spanish exist simultaneously, on an equal footing.

Looking at the realization of masculinity and male gender roles within Díaz's work, a trend of diasporic Dominicans rejecting the hypermasculinity imposed by the Dominican community in the context of the US as well as in the context of the Dominican Republic. As with the other themes explored, the diaspora has an effect on the attitude its subjects harbor towards gender roles. Yunior and Oscar, for example, are more troubled by the expectations placed on masculinity than their older counterparts such as Ramón or the Gangster. The rejection of the established gender role thus seems tied to exposure to the diaspora. I also noted how the rejection of these values, although pronounced, is not complete. Yunior relapses in the hyper masculine role, even though he disapproves of it. Oscar is in behavior the most distant from the prototypes of the role such as Rubirosa, yet wishes he would possess some of its characteristics, showing that the gender role is not completely rejected. Once more, this creates a hybridity of the gender role, as its original values are neither embraced nor completely rejected.

A similar phenomenon is observed in the female characters Lola and Beli. They would both initially reject the gender roles of the Dominican community, but would both find great empowerment in their sexuality, and the way it could assert control over the sexualized patriarchy. In their rejection and embrace of these gender roles, the female characters create a similar hybrid realization of their gender roles, in light of the diaspora.

The role of the African diaspora cannot be understated, as it is an important source of the otherness of the Díaz's characters. This becomes evident first of all in the depiction of racism in the Dominican Republic, both in the Trujillo era and in the stories in a more contemporary setting. Often claimed by Dominicans to be a nationalist problem with their Hispaniolan neighbors the Haitians, the text clearly undermines this idea, showing how the root of the problem is a larger issue with race. This provides an interesting inconsistency, as African features are at times praised as attributes of beauty as well. Next to that, they are shown, through the *fukú* and *zafa*, to be an integral part of the Dominican cultural identity, its inconsistencies included. The *fukú* and *zafa* aptly represent the African diaspora as both a blessing and a curse. Additionally, in being both of African origin as well as Latin-Americans, the Dominican immigrants clashed with the American notions of what it means to be black, white or Latino.

The general trend in light of Hall's theory shows the Dominican characters subjected to the diaspora defying several of the preset categories existent in American society. They defy to some extent categories projected on Americans, Dominicans, African Americans and Latinos. In failing to fit neatly within these preset definitions, the Dominican Americans in Díaz's work have created a hybrid cultural identity. This hybrid incorporates characteristics of many of the categories the characters fail to be completely accepted by. This is demonstrated by the several themes I have investigated in this paper. The new cultural identity is diasporic in nature and does not only defy existing categorization, but carves out a new position for itself within American society. In doing so it reestablishes and redefines the existing categories (black, white, Latino) in America as well.

This leads to an interesting angle for further research, as I suspect the diasporic identity that has been formed in the United States, might not specifically be a Dominican diasporic identity, as I believe might incorporate more of the Latin Americans in the US, leading to a more unified Latino diasporic identity. This would require further analysis of the use of Spanish, and more specifically the use of different national variants. Díaz himself has stated in an interview with the Buenos Aires Review that his use of Spanish is not uniquely Dominican, but incorporates words from different variants of Spanish such as Puerto Rican and Mexican Spanish.<sup>81</sup> This would go along with the classification of the Norton Anthology of Latino literature, which classifies Díaz as part of the pan-national Latinidad movement. Moreover, it could fit Hall's idea of the formation of diasporic identity, as US Latinos are together in a similar environment, cut off from their respective home countries, yet able to identify with each other based on shared differences to mainstream American culture. Also, they already are categorized in and approached as a single demographic, the Latino demographic. This research would have to include several Latino writers, as it could help to establish similarities in the realization of a distinct, pan-national, diasporic Latino identity.

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<sup>81</sup> The Buenos Aires Review. <http://www.buenosairesreview.org/2013/05/diaz-constant-state-of-translation/>.

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## Annotation

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### Abstract:

This thesis explores the notion of diasporic identity in the fiction of Junot Díaz. Looking at the Dominican diaspora of the 1960, as well as the African diaspora of the colonial era, in this thesis I analyse the presence of diasporic identity as well the larger overall effects of the diaspora on Díaz's most prominent characters, concerning the way they exhibit the characteristics of a diasporic identity and the role the English and Spanish language play in regard to the Dominican diaspora. This thesis also looks at the effect of conflicting gender roles within the Dominican diaspora and at the lasting presence of the African diaspora, a remnant of the colonial history of the Dominican Republic.