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The Dominican Immigrant Alienation in the Short Fiction of Junot Díaz

Odcizení dominikánských imigrantů v krátkých povídkách Junota Díaze

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Abstract

This diploma thesis deals with a literary analysis of the collection of short stories by an American-Dominican author Junot Díaz. The central subject of his work *Drown* is the problematic of immigration mainly from the Dominican Republic to the United States. This diploma thesis is focused on a detailed study of the alienating consequences caused by the uprooting of characters from their Dominican culture and nation but at the same time by the effort to assimilate with the new culture, in this case with the culture of the United States. Each of the ten stories of the collection of short stories *Drown* is separately evaluated and subsequently the possible causes of the alienation are deduced. Alienation is not only restricted to the culture and nation, but it also plays an important role in considering conflicts within the family members. Secondly, the thesis analyses the matter of not being able to adapt to the new environment. For a broader scope of all the probable causes and manifestations of the alienation, another three short stories by Junot Díaz published in *The New York Time* are added to for the analysis. Junot Díaz repeatedly mentions some of the poignant historical events of the Dominican Republic. For better orientation, the brief history of the Dominican Republic as well as the major points of the U.S.-Dominican relations are included in this diploma thesis. The introduction also consists of biographical information about Junot Díaz and short theory of postcolonial literature.

Anotace

Tato diplomová práce se zabývá literárním rozbohem kolekce krátkých povídek americko-dominikánsého autora Junota Díaze. Jelikož ústředním tématem jeho díla *Drown* je problematika imigrace, a to především z Dominikánské republiky do Spojených států amerických, tato diplomová práce je soustředěna na detailní rozbor následků vyplývajících z odrhnutí a odcizení se od své původní kultury a vlasti a zároveň snahy asimilovat se s novou kulturou, v tomto případě kulturou Spojených států amerických. Každá z deseti povídek této kolekce je jednotlivě analyzována a následně jsou z ní vyvozeny možné příčiny způsobující odcizení, nejen od své vlastní kultury, ale také vzájemné odcizení rodinných příslušníků. Pro širší spektrum možných příčin a projevů byly k rozboru kolekce *Drown* pro tuto práci přiřazeny další tři krátké povídky od Junota Díaze a to: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, *Nilda* a *The Sun, the Moon, the Stars*. Vzhledem k tomu, že sám autor často zmiňuje některé důležité události týkající se historie Dominikánské republiky, pro lepší orientaci je součástí diplomové práce stručná historie Dominikánské republiky a jsou zde zdůrazněny i nejpodstatnější události zachycující americko-dominikánské vztahy. Na úvod jsou také zmíněny informace o autorovi Junotu Díazovi a stručná teorie o postkoloniální literatuře.

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1 Introduction

The thesis attempts to analyze the Dominican immigrant experience in the United States as reflected in fiction. As a main source for this study the collection of ten short stories *Drown* by Junot Díaz was selected. Among other sources two short stories were included which were published in *The New Yorker*: “Nilda” (2000) and “The Sun, the Moon, the Stars” (1999) and the third short story “The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao” published in *The New Yorker* as well in 2000.

The purpose of this thesis is to estimate all the possible issues which have origins in relocating from one’s country of birth to the chosen host country and how it influences one’s personality, his behavior and basically all his life. Since a feature of modernity is the ever increasing movement of millions of people migrating from poorer countries to wealthier ones, this theme is relevant to the post-modern age.

Each of these thirteen stories bears a different set of features, they are consequently analyzed separately. The author himself divided the stories into three groups. The first group describes the characters’ life before immigration. The second set of stories comments on the immigrant experience after migrating of one particular family in the United States. Additionally, the last group and its main elements stand outside these two categories. The stories “Aurora” and “The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao” do not follow the typical de las Casas family history. According to Kevane, Díaz’s stories may be categorized as “family stories” and “New Jersey stories” (Kevane 2003:72). Díaz switches between the groups of the stories and does not give to it any exact chronological order. Apart from the analysis of the thirteen stories, the diploma thesis also briefly incorporates the relevant history of the Dominican

Republic and the theory about postcolonial literature. The conclusion contains a summary of all themes the stories are built up from.

The stories may be classified as follows: “Ysrael,” “Fiesta, 1980,” “Aguantando” and “No Face” as the “family stories” where Díaz depicts the life de las Casas family back in the Dominican Republic. “Drown,” “Boyfriend,” “Edison, New Jersey,” “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie,” “Negocios,” “Nilda” and “The Sun, the Moon, the Stars” can be included into the set of “New Jersey stories.” Finally “Aurora” and “The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao” are the separate and distinct stories.

A majority of the stories are narrated in the first person singular and together with the slang Díaz uses in dialogues, often embodying English and Spanish code switching within one sentence so that the narration is very gripping. Díaz obviously applies his own immigrant experience with living in his bi-cultural surroundings and in marginal neighborhoods in the Dominican Republic as well as in New Jersey. The author is familiar with many of the aspects creating the essentials of these short stories. Designed to primarily represent and observe the American-Dominican existence, only in a handful of cases are other nationalities and their status as immigrants in the United States mentioned. One exception to this claim is the story “The Sun, the Moon, the Stars” where the protagonist dates a girl from Cuba.

The objective of this diploma thesis is to show how the Dominican immigrant characters experience the new life without the severe poverty they often dream of and the steps they need to take before, only some of them manage to reach the desired aim. The thesis also analyzes the issues connected with postcolonialism and assimilation, yet at the same time the still omnipresent aspects of alienation.

Relevant literature used included publications by Bridget Kevane: *Latino Literature in America* (2003) and the chapter called “Junot Díaz *Drown*:

Revisiting “Those Mean Streets” written by Lizabeth Paravisini-Gebert and published in *U.S. Literature: A Critical Guide for Students and Teachers* (2000).

1.1 Junot Díaz

Junot Díaz is a Dominican-American writer with a large and powerful Dominican family background. "Vengo de una familia muy dominicana, como se dice allá 'dominicano full',"¹ Díaz says (EFE 2008). He was born in Villa Juana (1968), one of the suburban neighborhoods belonging to the capital city of the Dominican Republic; Santo Domingo. He immigrated at the age of six with the rest of his family to New Jersey where, already before that time, his father had been working.

He was taken away from his home country and became an immigrant in the United States which not only has influenced his own coping mechanism which he developed through reading but had also an impact on his literary work. "The solitude of being an immigrant, the solitude of having to learn a language in a culture from scratch, the need for some sort of explanation, the need for answers, the need for something that would somehow shelter me lead me to books," Díaz says (Lahiri 2008). His [partially autobiographical] novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) significantly bears the whole group of features referring to the issues of immigrant children.

As far as his work is concerned, the most remarkable piece of work is the afore mentioned novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), the movie rights of which have been bought and is currently being prepared for the movie screen. It took Díaz 11 years to complete this novel. However, these 11 years of attempting to finish one book in the end brought him unexpected success. In 2008 Díaz's novel won the Pulitzer Prize. His second best known work is a collection of short stories called *Drown* (1996). Díaz also received the Eugene McDermott Award, the 2003 U.S.-Japan Creative Artist Fellowship from the National Endowment for the Arts, a fellowship at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University and the Rome Prize from the American Academy of Arts and Letters. His fiction was published in *The*

¹ Translation: I am from a very Dominican family, as is said over there 'dominicano full'.

New Yorker, *African Voices*, *Best American Short Stories* (1996, 1997, 1999, 2000), in *Pushcart Prize XXII* and in *The O'Henry Prize Stories 2009* .

Díaz graduated with a B.A. from Rutgers University in New Jersey in 1992 with a major in English. Then he was employed at Rutgers as an editorial assistant. Additionally he studied in the graduate program at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, and in 1995 he earned his M.F.A. Throughout his university studies he worked at many different jobs. Currently he teaches creative writing at Massachusetts Institute of Technology and works as an editor for the *Boston Review*.

In the interview with Richard Edwards for *Every Writer's Resource* Díaz claims he started to write because he wanted to step outside the world of being a ghost among many other immigrants. He became conscious of the fact that if it is not he who makes the change, then nothing will alter. In his work, Díaz proceeds to share his experience as a Dominican immigrant in the United States. He transfers a message of what is it like to live in a multicultural environment and with a chaotic cultural existence. Edwards addresses Díaz with a question about his ideas for the stories, e.g. where they come from. Díaz states they are usually emotional memories which he tries to convert into words.

Considering the language Díaz uses in his stories, he does not want us to easily understand everything at once. He underwent the feelings of being out of the context, with no idea what was going on, being pushed away from the society he is supposed to live in and facing the language barrier. This is actually the way he makes the readers feel, confused and asking questions. Who among intellectual readers may understand the specific vocabulary of Dominican drug dealers? Only a small amount of people who are not directly connected with the world of drug dealers are able to catch the exact meaning.

Additionally, the instant presence of Spanish idioms is another attractive feature, especially for readers who do not speak Spanish. Not only is this the

matter of language as a system used for utterance, but it is also uncovering something deeper. Díaz is expressing himself and lets the characters express in their mother tongue. First of all he does so because he deliberately wants to confuse his readers. Secondly, implicitly there is pretty tight association between his “inner” language and the importance of some of the parts of the sentences written in Spanish. Obviously the written sentences which really carry important meaning, whether hidden or perspicuous, are in Spanish. For instance in “Aurora” when Lucero is explaining his manner of getting touch with their clients and describing his personality he says: “You should have seen me in school. Olvídate”² (Díaz 1996:52). The same situation with the sense of confusion is created when Lucero names Harry by the Spanish word *pato*³ and *cabrón*⁴ with the meaning of someone behaving cowardly. At last, every Latino character is portrayed more naturally if he uses his mother-tongue.

Junot Díaz is not the only Dominican-American fiction writer. Julia Alvarez is also a fiction writer living in the U.S. but born in the Dominican Republic. Her most known work is *!Yo!* (1997). These authors and their narrations have considerable success and take a part in contemporary American literature and American fiction. Their work may be classified by the term “minor literature.” Minor literature is written by authors who are the minority, in these cases Dominicans living in the U.S., and are surrounded mainly by language that is not their mother tongue. The mother tongue is replaced by the “major” language and for Díaz and Alvarez Spanish is becoming the “minor” language. Spanish is used as an exceptional component of the writing. “Minor writing therefore abuses the discursive structure of the “major” language to its own creative ends” (Koy 2012:73). Minor literature is there to emphasize the experience of being displaced and colonized and therefore it

² Translation: 1. literal: Forget it.

2. metaphorical: Do not think about it, it is a waste of time.

³ Translation: duck

⁴ Translation: goat

should stay in the status of “minor.” “Whenever minor writing achieves the status of the majority, it will lose its revolutionary character and thereby become a meager imitation of the colonial-imperialist ideology” (Koy 2012:73)

Interestingly, throughout the collection of short stories *Drown*, there is a high occurrence of Spanish words especially regarding family members, names of food and pejoratives. Focusing on these word groups, recognizably they are among the first words a child acquires. When Díaz specifies that the ideas for the short stories originate in his emotional experience, these very familiar and first words must be linked together with his earliest life memories. In the interview with Rafael Pi Roman⁵ he alleges that the Spanish language in his novel and stories is the substance making them real. Díaz writes about Hispanic immigrants living in the U.S. and Spanish is an element behind all of this stories which must not be omitted.

To sum it up, the style of narration in the stories is powerful because Díaz is not trying to convince us about poverty or nor is he writing with disrespect on one of the two cultures. On the other hand, he writes about one of them, without exaggerated examples of stressed Dominican or American typical cultural features. Of course he mentions some of the prominent features of both cultures but never with sharp criticism. Díaz stated this approach in an interview: “I took extreme pains for my book to not be a native informant. Not: This is Dominican food. This is a Spanish word” (Paravisini-Gebert 2000:165). He just lets the reader visualize the scene, accept it as this is a certain type of the reality or think about the whole as a disgusting manner how some people manage their lives.

⁵ Source: rpiroman, *Junot Diaz interview with Rafael Pi Roman Part 1 of 2*. Online video clip. Youtube. Youtube 16 Feb. 2011. Web 11 Aug. 2013.

1.2 The History of the Dominican Republic and the U.S.- Dominican Relations

The island of Hispaniola was firstly discovered by Christopher Columbus in 1492 and he named it *La Española* (Hispaniola). By the second time Columbus arrived to the island, he settled down the city named after the queen of Spain Isabella. After the year of 1496, the capital city was Santo Domingo de Guzmán. Santo Domingo was a point of departure for another discovering and conquering courses.

In the 17th century France occupied the west part of the island, of what is on present days Haiti, and the island Hispaniola was divided into two parts: the Spanish part Santo Domingo and the French part Saint Dominique. The French also occupied the east part of the island for another 22 years. The east section was conquered by General Toussain L'Ouverture, the leader of the black-slave rebellion in Haiti. The whole situation was pacified by General Leclerc who was sent to the island by Napoelon Bonaparte. Leclerc constituted the French government for the whole island of Hispaniola. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the east part were never fully reconciled with the French government. Additionally, their language and customs were still far way different from the French culture. In 1808 the east part was declared independent firstly from France and secondly from Haiti as well. In 1822 The Dominican Republic declared its independence from Spain for the first time, only to be captured and occupied by the French shortly thereafter. In 1844 the French-Haitian occupation ended and the constitution of the Dominican Republic was inspired by the constitution of the U.S.

The Dominican Republic was very devastated after so many years of battles and disorder. The republic was influenced by unstable economy and almost no financial reserve. Besides, the danger of the Haitian invasion was still present. President Santana hoped for some kind of protection from the side

of the U.S. In that epoch, the U.S. rejected any idea of providing them protection. In 1861 when the U.S. Civil War began the Dominican Republic lost its autonomous status, once again becoming a colony of Spain. Yet the annexation to Spain did not last long and in 1863 after great turmoil, Spain was losing ties with the Dominican Republic and finally in 1865 the independence of the Dominican Republic was declared for the third time. Unfortunately, the Dominican Republic had to confront great mayhem in the following years. Only between the years 1865-79 the republic was ruled by 21 distinct governments. In this period the U.S. started to open doors for possible investors. The president of the U.S., Ulysses Grant began to speculate about annexing the Dominican Republic to the U.S. but in 1870 Congress undermined his ambition.

Between years 1916-24 the Dominican Republic and Haiti were fully governed by the invading U.S. troops. The republic underwent a significant period of outer prosperity. New roads were built as well as hospitals, schools, water piping and power stations. The Dominican Republic was modernized and in some way stabilized. In 1924 in regular elections was elected as president Horacio Vásquez and in the same year the last American troops left the island.

In 1930 a thirty-year cruel dictatorship of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo began. More than any other event in the history of the Dominican Republic, Díaz mentions Trujillo's dictatorship abundantly. Trujillo was supported by all of the American presidents during these thirty years. They insisted on having somebody to govern the country who would secure the republic, restrict the weapon usage and stabilize commercial advantage for the U.S. In 1937 Rafael Leónidas Trujillo ordered the massacre of thousands Haitians living and working in the Dominican Republic. This massacre is also known under the term of *El Corte* or *Parsley Massacre*. Yet Trujillo signified for the U.S. a certain kind of danger. They were afraid that his terror might result in rebellion and establish basis for a communist revolution. As a result of this thread, the

Organization of American States suggested severance of diplomatic relations. In 1961 Rafael Leónidas Trujillo was assassinated and the circumstances of his death have not been clarified till even up to now. In 1962 Juan Bosch was democratically elected as the president of the Dominican Republic. In the beginning he was supported by the U.S. but later the U.S. troop invaded again the Dominican Republic in 1965 falsely assuming a Communist takeover.

In the 80's definitely ended the period of the Dominican sugar industry and so the living condition got worse and at the same time it caused a wave of emigration to the U.S. Between 1989-90 the U.S. registered about 900 000 Dominicans living legally or illegally in the U.S. The emigration was not only the matter of the 80's, it already started during the epoch of the Trujillo dictatorship. Especially the east coast of the U.S., New York or New Jersey were places of a rich Dominican-immigrant web.

1.3 Postcolonial Literature

The term of “postcolonial literature” and “postcolonial studies” was firstly applied for the works of authors living in Great Britain having roots in one of the former British colonies. These works began to arise in the 50’s and 60’s of the 20th century. The works were mainly written by people who immigrated to the UK, or whose parents did, from Africa, south-east Asia and Caribbean. The term “postcolonial” is not only connected with literature, and it was especially in the beginning linked up with politics, sociology, anthropology and economics. The expression “postcolonial” is also narrowly bound to the term “multicultural.” “(...) postcolonial literature belongs to the larger multicultural project of introducing cultural diversity across the curriculum” in schools or in national context (Sharpe 2000:116).

As the initiating publication concerning this new emerging kind of literature, Edward Said’s *Orientalism* (1978) is considered. Edward Said stressed how Western cultures understand the east ones: they are recognized with prejudice and as if they were really inferior. Said’s publication differs from the previous works in the way he added academic information on colonialism. Another important critic is Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak who in the terms of postcoloniality deals with identity, ethnicity and gender. The third significant author of on postcolonial literature is Homi Bhabha who focuses on the immigrant experience, surrounded by two cultures but not belonging to either of them.

Of course, the postcolonial literature is not only the question of literature created in Great Britain’s colonies “(...) the term of “postcolonial” has greater currency in imperial centres like Britain and the United States, as well as former colonies like Australia, New Zealand, and Canada, than in Third World nations” (Sharpe 2000:114). To the English-speaking countries we may

naturally add France and her (former) colonial holdings as well as those of Spain, Italy and Germany.

Although the Dominican Republic was never a political colony of the United States, Díaz's short stories collection *Drown* (1996) as well as his novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) include to a great extent features of postcolonial literature, since Dominican Republic was militarily occupied and economically dominated by the United States.

The authors write in English, the language of the colonizer, but mostly, they reflect their primary culture. If the writer is of the first generation who immigrated from his family, he most likely emphasizes his memories of the home country, the lost home. They describe the traditions and sometimes strict insisting on them. On the other side, the authors reveal their hope, dreams and wishes for the future life in a new country and subsequently confronting the reality. Additionally, they unfold their feelings of unfulfilled desires, of uprooting and the always present feeling of being the "other." In the second stage, they often write about fictive or even real return to their roots. They also focus on living between two homes, cultures, and comment on how they actually do not belong to neither of them. Probably the most famous example is Salmon Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (1980). As an immigrant himself, Díaz's collection of short stories and his novel, both works articulate salient elements of postcolonial literature.

2 Ysrael

The short story “Ysrael” expresses the alienation, whether it is the alienation caused by being different or not staying in the home town or home country. Ysrael, the protagonist of this story, is a child who got injured horribly when he was a little boy. A pig rushing into a house chewed off a significant part of his face. The physical appearance of his face does not allow him to lead a normal life. In a way, his position may be considered as the one what an outcast of the society would have. Besides this significance, the character of Ysrael stands here in the first place as a target of curiosity for his peers.

The two boys, Yunior and Rafa, are bored almost all of the time. They are forced to spend their summer vacation at their boring uncle’s place in the countryside and undeniably they are not completely reconciled with this fact. “(...) but the campo⁶ was like nothing like our barrio in Santo Domingo.” “We worked hard at keeping busy” (Díaz 1996:4). As young boys they really did not appreciate the nature girdling the town of Ocoa. The countryside meant for them the place with nothing exciting to do.

Therefore, Ysrael was the sole figure of diversion from boredom. They were fed up with the common source of amusement, for instance searching for girls or toughen up roosters. They desired to see Ysrael’s devastated face that was under the mask. Yunior and Rafa perceived him as something monstrous and mysterious at the same time. Furthermore, the way they talk about his facial deformation is quite explicit. Díaz does not hesitate to draw a precisely clear picture of Ysrael’s face. Also, the whole act of curiosity acquires a sense of cruelty. Yet in no way would they have expected to encounter any similarities in their life stories. Their behavior may be understood as very childish or disrespectful and as if they felt no pity for another’s misfortune. Yet in fact this attraction for and other people’s accidents and bad luck appears to

⁶ Translation: countryside

be universal in every human being. According to Valerio-Holguin at the forefront of the possible causes of their intentions stand their surroundings.

In the majority of Díaz's stories, the main characters, Yunior and Rafa, and the other characters as well, live in the countryside and/or in marginal neighborhoods both in the Dominican Republic, and New York City. These spaces are represented as sordid, dirty, and abject, where fights and beatings are staged or where the characters psychologically torture each other. (Valerio-Holguin 2007:5)

While trucking down Ysrael and consequently talking to him, mainly Yunior figured out, that there are particularly the same things they experience. Both of their fathers are away from the families working in the U.S. and hence there is a moment when they share a certain type of equality. In contrast Rafa does not share exactly the same enthusiasm. Instead of sympathizing, he reached this decision to cut off the moment and lead the whole situation to its intended end.

Rafa is already bothered by any indication of Ysrael's humanity, but the discovery that this boy, whose condition should emblemize complete alienation, receives more attention from his father than the brothers themselves do, proves to be totally unbearable. (Connor 2002:150)

Noticing the clothes Ysrael is wearing and the kite he is playing with directs them to the conclusion that Ysrael is probably financially better off than they were. "Ysrael's sandals were of stiff leather and his clothes were Northamerican" (Díaz 1996:15).

Furthermore, according to Connor, besides the psychological identification between Ysrael and Yunior there is also another symbol of closeness. From orthographical point of view, the first names of the Dominican boys would not be originally spelled with Y in Spanish. Likewise the similarity between these two boys and their names, Connor claims that in the name of the main protagonist the readers may also find the connection between the author's

name “Junot” and traditionally spelled “Junior”. Connor adds that Díaz has never declined possible linkage to his character. (152)

Of course Yunior fancies the idea of taking off Ysrael’s mask but on the other hand he was scared. In Yunior’s reasoning of the whole situation we encounter two distinct worlds. The first one is the one of a growing up individual being in everyday contact with someone who is older than him and has a status of a role model. It is not utterly claimed that Yunior is fond of everything Rafa does but he definitely looks up to him. In addition, since their father abandoned the family, Rafa is the only man whose position also stands for the natural male authority. On the other hand, understandably, there is the infantile world in Yunior’s thinking. More importantly than the fact he could not resist buying sweets it is shown when their aunt told him no one wanted to see under the mask for the reason that if he did he would be sad for the rest of his life. It got stuck in Yunior’s head and this is what he was afraid of. “I had never been sad more than a few hours and the thought of that sensation lasting a lifetime scared the hell out of me” (Díaz 1996:9). Nevertheless as almost always the world of Rafa’s influence prevails. In this story, Díaz repeatedly foreshadows Rafa’s superiority contrasting with Yunior’s childish spirit.

Although both of them seem to be totally uninterested in the country, each of them recalls the time spent in the countryside contrastingly. “I didn’t mind these summers, wouldn’t forget them the way Rafa would” (Díaz 1996:5). Apparently, for Yunior were these summers the only time when the two brothers more or less got on well. “Back in the Capital he rarely said anything to me except Shut up, pendejo⁷” (Díaz 1996:5). In correspondence with the relatively calm environment in the countryside, comparing with the capital city, Rafa’s manners were converted into less aggressive displays. “In the capital we Rafa and I fought so much that our neighbor took to smashing broomsticks

⁷ Translation: fool (vulg. an asshole)

over us to break it up, but in the campo it wasn't like that. In the campo we were friends" (Díaz 1996:5). In other words, there was no one to whom he had to prove that he is a real man and not a child playing around with his little brother. Santo Domingo was the centre of all the actual diversion and where his macho potential had solid ground for growth. Not only does Rafa torture Yuniór physically, but he also shouts verbal abuse at him, pointing out his physical appearance. "It's the Haitian, he'd say to his buddies. Hey Señor⁸ Haitian, Mami found you on the border and only took you because she felt sorry for you" (Díaz 1996:5)? Yet, indeed, from this first story in the story collection, Díaz lets the readers discern what the relationship between the two brothers is going to be like. Younger Yuniór is under great psychological pressure produced by Rafa.

The last quotation making allusion to Yuniór's dark complexion and his hair and lips are equally important taking into account geographical and historical point of view of the island. Obviously, Rafa presumably depicts not only his disgust for the other part of the island, highlighting African roots which Rafa has as well. Nevertheless, it is the feature emphasizing the feeling of being different and confused by the idea of identification, ethnicity and belonging somewhere. It is as if Rafa knew what they were going to experience after they move to the U.S. Not only once does Díaz bring out the topic of Haitian nationality.

Along with all of these themes, the topic of sexuality is mentioned as well. "This, he said, is shit. Worse than shit, I said. Yeah, he said, and when I get home, I'm going to go crazy—chinga⁹ all my girls and then chinga everyone else's" (Díaz 1996:4). Rafa comments on the enjoyment of having a girl; additionally, once again, in contrast to the boredom of the countryside. Rafa is clearly the one who dominates in talking about his experience and

⁸ Translation: sir

⁹ Translation: to have sexual intercourse (vulg. to fuck)

desires. As Yunior himself admits, he is on the receiving end of these narratives, always listening, sometimes without understanding but it really does not bother him because as he claims all that Rafa is saying may be useful for him in the future. Certainly Rafa's monologues make Yunior feel as if he had reached his full manhood. Interestingly, Yunior was confronted with very unpleasant situation when a man sitting next to him on the bus was touching his penis. Yunior is shocked but does not wait a second to verbally deflate this man. He is not given a lot of time to think about what had happened but surely at this age all of these events, including Rafa's stories and manipulations, leave Yunior thoroughly puzzled.

As can be seen, at least for Ysrael and Yunior, the United States has the significance of hope and help. Ysrael hopes that soon he will be in hands of a specialist and he will be able to undergo an operation which would completely restore his face. Yunior likewise hopes that their father is preparing everything to take the rest of the family to relocate to the U.S. and to live under better conditions. Indeed, Rafa is again of a different opinion and very promptly rejects Yunior's belief that Ysrael will get the needed operation. Rafa probably can not bear the idea that this boy who is supposed to rank lower than Yunior and Rafa might be possibly treated better than them.

In conclusion, the opening story of *Drown* paints the theme of alienation in an exceptional manner. The image of Ysrael may be physical interpretation of what Yunior is feeling and the circumstances he has to deal with. Díaz also suggests in this story that the aggression, violence and early sexual activity are not only the consequences of Latino ghettos in the U.S., but rather something embedded in their personalities.

3 Fiesta, 1980

The story “Fiesta, 1980” presents very accurate picture of the father’s role in de las Casas family. Most of the scenes take place at the family party in the apartment of Yuniór’s aunt. Due to a problem Yuniór has, being sick while travelling by his father’s van, Yuniór is forced by his father to be the only person at the party who is not permitted to eat. “Fiesta, 1980” also reveals Ramón’s hostility towards his wife and children and the affair he is having with a Puerto Rican woman. Essentially, the author highlights classical gender roles within a Hispanic family. From the cultural point of view, Díaz in “Fiesta, 1980” depicts what a typical Hispanic party looks like.

The father’s Ramón character dominates the plot. Although the whole Yuniór’s family finally managed to be settled down in the U.S., the father is still absent in the lives of other family members, as if they lived separately in two different countries with only a few changes.

Ramón left the Dominican Republic and his family with good intentions. He was supposed to get a job in the U.S. and provide the family with a sufficient financial support and lay aside another part of the money so that when he returned back to the Dominican Republic, they would not have to be worried about their economic situation. Certainly, the family was not completely acquainted with the obstacles Ramón had to face in finding a job in the U.S., including finding the cheapest accommodation possible and being able to save some money. He also has to deal with a new culture and especially the foreign language. Kevane remarks the majority of these types of immigrants work long hours, seven days a week for very low wages and only a minority of them can eventually obtain a stable job and basically better life conditions and thrive (80).

The encounter with other Hispanic immigrants is not always as friendly and supportive as might be expected. Of course every immigrant is in need of

getting out of the U.S. the most possible. All feelings of compassion subsequently go out of the way.

Moreover, lacking any sympathy for the suffering and deprivation of their fellow countryman, these characters, both ironically and maliciously, validate the notion of the American Dream by showing utter contempt for those who fail to succeed in America. (Koy 2012:74)

Along with all of these struggles, Ramón is confronted with disillusionment from his American dream. “Like most immigrants, Ramón believes he will make his fortune in the United States and then return” (Kevane 2003:79). Yet doing all of it mainly for the family, there is no surprise when he slowly becomes alienated from them and looking for other means of survival. Probably not even he would have assumed in the beginning that he would go so far and marry another Dominican woman to get him a secured American citizenship. Nevertheless, it should not be claimed that all of this is the only reason for his later attitude towards his own family.

Father Ramón is still living with the family in this story, yet he is displayed as a partly-missing element in the family. From Yuniór’s narrative Ramón’s key function is threatening them and demonstrating who the boss in the family is. Despite of the little time he spends with them and his very reserved communication at home, he does not lose his status of authority; conversely, his authority is even strengthened. The climate in the family really changes when he is finally at home. Everybody is walking on their tippy toes and truly tries to act in a way so that nobody irritates the father: it all together creates a very tense atmosphere. Virtudes, the mother, was looking forward to dancing at the party and simply enjoying it but the moment when Ramón arrives at home, her mood alters more into being nervous. “That morning, when she had gotten us up for school, Mami told us she wanted to have a good time at the party.” “We—meaning me, my brother, my little sister and Mami—

waited for Papi to finish his shower. Mami seemed anxious in her usual dispassionate way” (Díaz 1996:26).

Yunior is the one in “Fiesta, 1980” who is in a real trouble with his father. Every time they travel via his father’s Volkswagen van, “brand-new, lime-green and bought to impress” (Díaz 1996:27), he feels sick and inevitably throws up. Of course Yunior could not help himself and the more he tried not to vomit the greater the possibility of his sickness. As a result of Yunior’s nausea, Ramón takes Yunior for trips around the city to train his stomach which actually did not bring any improvements. “I look forward to our trips, even though at the end of each one I’d be sick. These were the only times me and Papi did anything together“ (Díaz 1996:35). Given that every time he is in the van he feels sick, he amazingly still does not mind these trips. Supposing he had not been suffering from nausea, he would not spend any time with his father. In fact, it is really in a desperate situation; the only time the father and his son do anything together is when Ramón makes him feel both mentally and physically even worse. Imaginably, Yunior wanted to prove to his father that he at least tries to be a good son and was trying to deal with the missing father’s love. Obviously, he hoped that next time they went on the trip again, he will not vomit and Ramón finally shows him some parent love. “I still wanted him to love me, something that never seemed strange or contradictory until years later, when he was out of our lives“ (Díaz 1996:27). On the other hand, at least he gets more of this mother’s attention and care. She is asking him how he feels and giving him mint bonbons. She feels sorry for him every time they set up for the van training again.

Besides that, there are also other circumstances when Yunior is badly treated because of his problem. At the party, to prevent the possible disaster in the van, by his father he is not allowed to eat. Again, Ramón did not hesitate to

make threats. “If you eat anything, I’m going to beat you. ¿Entiendes?”¹⁰ (Díaz 1996:37). In this case, he is entirely excluded from the rest of the family because, of course, every host at the party and every child is eating, apart from him. At a typical Hispanic party the quality and quantity of the food is really important, yet he must abstain from enjoying this part.

Yunior once attempted to bring into light his father’s physical abuse of him through writing an essay at school. In other words, he apparently drew a picture of Ramón’s many creative ways of punishment. Unfortunately, his essay was not taken seriously by the teachers so he had to rewrite it.

Furthermore, Yunior’s car sickness undeniably symbolizes something else. He is internally exhausted with the awful situation at home, noticing his mother almost shaking when Ramón shows up at home, seeing his little sister Madai “scared to open her eyes” (Díaz 1996:26), when Ramón raised his voice. Even his big brother Rafa gives an impression of being little bit timorous when Ramón has the word. Yunior’s entire mental strain is intensified by the fact that both sons, Rafa and Yunior, knew about their father’s infidelity; the affair he was having with one Puerto Rican woman. It may be understood as if Yunior was expressing his total disgust by throwing up. Vomiting especially in the van Ramón is so proud of may be the only way Yunior can signal his feelings to his father.

Food deprivation-coupled here with Yunior's penchant for vomiting when not deprived-is mirrored in the text by the many secrets, the many silences Yunior must keep, and which threaten to burst out, destroying the false harmony of the family, just as his vomiting destroys their forced rapport as they travel together in the car. (Paravisini-Gerbert 2000:169)

At the end of the story Díaz illustrates evidence for this interpretation. Yunior is watching his parents who are sitting silently next to each other in the

¹⁰ Translation: Do you understand?

van and they finally seem little bit contented; Ramón is even gently touching his wife. Yet it does not last even a minute and after this observation, Yunior thinks about his parents, and his time to throw up arrives.

Regardless the consequences emerging from cheating, Ramón is not bothered by the idea that his two sons may reveal this piece of information at home. Specifically, there are two probable options. Firstly, Ramón has such power and knows that Rafa and Yunior would never be courageous enough to betray him and tell it to their mother, from the fear they have of their father. Or the second more frequently suggested alternative indicates that he was simply utterly indifferent to the notion of guilt; he did not care whether his wife found out about the affair or not. He is fully aware of the matter she was dependent on him and even if she was familiar with his affair, she would not do anything about it. The boys tolerate their visits at their father's mistress, as Rafa calls her "Papi's sucia¹¹" (Díaz 1996:43), because they in fact had no other choice. In the beginning they were taken there separately and they had not told each other about it. When Yunior discovers that Rafa knows about her as well, it brought him considerable relief; he could share this experience and secret with someone else. Before that, he had to deal with the circumstances alone. Additionally, he felt like he did something unacceptable. "I just sat there, ashamed, expecting something big and fiery to crash down on our heads" (Díaz 1996:36). His mother Virtudes is able to sense that Yunior was upset about something but understandably when she asks him what was on his mind, he easily deviated it to troubles at school.

In "Fiesta, 1980" Díaz also includes the theme of gender roles in a Dominican family – "the male macho and submissive Latina" (Kevane 2003:82). Ramón is the father who has absolute control and dominance over the rest of the family. Logically, he insists on perfection at home. His wife is

¹¹ Translation: literal: dirty
metaphorical: mistress

supposed to look after their household and children and she should not get involved with anything else. The children must behave or if they do not, they know perfectly what follows next. These manners are understood as nothing unusual. “(...) and he also is allowed to react violently when things are not as he expects them to be” (Kevane 2003:82). As noted earlier, Ramón’s affair leaves him genuinely calm without any remorse. Similarly to having a right to be aggressive when everything is not in accordance with his expectations, he is allowed to have a mistress. “The protagonist’s father is accustomed to the idea that he can have a mistress and have his wife to serve him (...)” Moreover Kavane also adds the Hispanic wives whose husbands are cheating on them must pretend like nothing was going on and simply respect him. (Kevane 2003:82).

Plenty of events in “Fiesta, 1980” take place at Yuniór’s aunt Yrma party. Yrma and her family are new comers to the U.S. and they desire to celebrate their arrival. Naturally, all the family members and some other people are invited to the extended family party. They organize an illustrative Hispanic party where a lot of food is provided, Hispanic music is played and after eating everybody dances or talks to someone. Following the notions of multiculturalism Díaz portrayals transfer their habitual culture and ethnic heritage to another foreign country. As Yuniór comments, even their apartment was so Dominican-like as if it was moved all the way from the D.R. to the U.S.. “(...) the place had been furnished in Contemporary Dominican Tacky.” “I mean, I liked plastic sofa covers but damn, Tío¹² and Tía¹³ had taken it to another level” (Díaz 1996:32).

As in other short stories (“Ysrael,” “The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao,” “No Face”) Díaz foreshadows the sexual elements together with Dominican manhood of the young boys in this story as well. Firstly, at the

¹² Translation: uncle

¹³ Translation: aunt

party when Yuniór meets his uncle who offers him a beer or rum and explains to Yuniór and his mother that if he were back in the D.R., he would be definitely having sexual intercourse. Secondly, Rafa is very persistent while getting into contact with the girls at the party. Yuniór was not this sort of boy and only watched Rafa. In this context, Yuniór does not fancy or identify with Rafa's motives. Indeed he detects the same manners as his father: "(...) Rafa is becoming like his father—toward the relentless pursuit of women and sex" (Paravisini-Gerbert 2000:169).

In a broader context, the story is told from the perspective of a young and very sensitive boy whose family structure is again falling apart. Despite his age, he is accurately perceiving what the future of this family will look like. He longs for the father's love; on the other hand, he makes a lot of allusions regarding his mother's attention, her physical appearance and in general very frequently describes her in details. It is certainly understood that Ramón is cruel and as Yuniór calls him old-fashioned, hence there is still a wish that they all could stay together.

4 Aurora

From the beginning of the story Díaz describes the dismal surroundings of three people living in Dominican-American immigrant community in New Jersey. This story does not follow the de las Casas family history and its plot is partially set apart of the other stories.

Almost everything for them is measured by a completely different type of scale. Since they were children the drug-abusing youth has probably never be given a chance or lesson how to effectively spend their free time. When not running down the streets of a dangerous neighborhood, passive entertainment such as TV created more likely their best company as they prepare to distribute their illegal drugs. “It took us four hours of TV to sort, weight and bag the smoke” (Díaz 1996:47). This brief reference to TV interestingly points out the importance and other concept of some of the day activities.

In order not to lose anybody who Cut is close to, there is an obvious tendency to keep the possible relationships to a very narrow circle. This behavior comes as a consequence of a certain type of insecurity. When Aurora is trying to catch up with Lucero, Cut is definitely not interested in getting in touch with her, neither on his side nor on Lucero’s side. Feelings such as envy or jealousy may play their roles as well but more it is the anxiety about the loss of somebody as it had probably happened in the past. We have to take into account that they are not only co-workers or partners; more or less they are a family to each other. Regarding their job, or the thing they do for living, it is understandable if Cut does not wish having around them a bunch of people knowing exactly what they do. In other words there is no need that anybody else is acquainted they sell drugs. For instance if a rival drug dealer kidnap Aurora, he can get detailed information from her or by other ways police might got involved as well.

According to some passages of this story they live like animals, in conditions which are not compatible with at least basics of healthy living style. “I put my ass down on the old mattress, which stinks of pussy” (Díaz 1996:49). “Always puke, in a closet or on a wall” (Díaz 1996:55). People leading this kind of life, living from day to day, do not count on staying in one place for a long time although some of them dream of nice, warm and steady home, despite the fact that it is something that the majority of them missed when they were kids. Home, a place to stay is here more understood as a place to sleep, have sex with someone, eat and partly work. They are mainly occupying apartments or buildings they have broken into and converted them their temporary homes. Due to this vivid narration, readers can common day life of drug dealers and drug addicts like Aurora.

When Lucero says he did not know where she was hanging out. Aurora says to Lucero: “Yo ando más que un perro”¹⁴ (Díaz 1996:49). This sentence is precisely expressing the lack of home, no permanent spot where to turn back for safe feelings with the right company. On the other hand, by this expression Aurora may mean the freedom she is given now and enjoys after the experience with being put in to jail.

The chapter sketching the daily routine of their job is really persuasive. From the first view nobody would say this may be as scheduled and serious job as many others jobs are. Evidently each of them works on different task and has distinct vision of the possible growth of the thing they are dealing with, but all over they run the business well together. They have the true appearance of business partners and call each other partners. Not until we consider it as an illegal activity, can we admit Cut and Lucero use in a way a correct method for continuing to another day. Almost everybody in this world is expected one day to stand up on his own feet, whether it is

¹⁴ Translation: literal: I walk more than a dog.
metaphorical: I have no home but I am free.

at the age of 15 or 25, regarding culture, life conditions, and family background. Under their circumstances these two boys found the way to do it. They took certain type of benefits from their surroundings they have been raised in and do their best.

Aurora, the young skinny girl who is 17 years old but actually looks like if she were 12, may be the character representing Díaz's mother. "(...) and his own mother almost unable to cope with a situation imposed on her by a frustratingly deprived environment (...)" (Ibarrola-Armendariz 2010:220); "Mami might have been skinny, a bad thing on the Island, but she was smart and funny and that's hard to find anywhere" (Díaz 1996:56). Curiously not only is the physical appearance coincident with what we imagine Aurora to be like, but some of the personal characteristics are the same as well. Aurora's childish, weak and shaky body is supposed to be connected with her incapability to manage to keep chemically stable and learn something from the previous situations, still searching for the unsuitable company. On the other hand she would not have to be lost utterly. She has got an artistic talent which Lucero recognizes as a good trait.

The whole relationship between Aurora and Lucero is highly unbalanced and begs many questions. They do not exactly know what they expect from each other. I would say that Lucero definitely cares for her, even though his attitude towards her is sometimes rejecting and he does not seem to stick only to her. Maybe it is just a matter of pity, black consciousness and memories of the good times they had spent together. He gets the point and knows that she is seeing someone else and she is receding from him but then she always comes back. What triggers her decision to return to Lucero is not that clear. She often takes advantage of his position, for example the drugs and money he has access to. Obviously she is willing to see him when she needs something and Lucero, noticing her vulnerable posture, usually waits before lending her a helping hand. In their relationship can be detected both

an emotional interconnection and manipulative dependence between them. If there are any true feelings for Aurora on Lucero's side, he is not allowed to show them anyway. It would be the sign of weakness and he would be probably disrespected for it.

This roving uneasiness, seeking for the company on many sides, significantly points to a feeling of belonging nowhere; the culture, country, family, language. "This community's alienation and exile come from this marginalization from mainstream, (...) (Paravasi-Gebert 2000:166). These people have probably the problem with integrating themselves into one type of community. They often do not know if they should be a part of their home country which many of them spent some time of their childhood in or on the other side if they should totally immerse their lives into the new country, the United States, and its culture. As a result of this mental split they logically do not fit into none of two possible communities. Not occasionally they know where their roots originate from but they still realize the inside disconnection.

Paravasi-Gebert refers to a brittleness that mirrors the bleakness and misery of the lives portrayed which entirely corresponds to one simple idea in the story. "When I'm fifty this is how I'll remember my friends: tired and yellow and drunk" (Díaz 1996:57). This depicts the mood and whole atmosphere of a given society and how the maybe not yet absolutely damned boy Lucero is sensing this gloomy environment. Unfortunately there is nothing else that can be expected from people who are living on drugs, alcohol and sex. From what Lucero is saying, he is definitely conscious of these unhealthy and lost-looking individuals. The good point about it is that he admits it and it could be one of the motivating elements for getting him out of this vicious circle. Yet there is very little chance which would let this change happen.

5 Aguantando

In the story “Aguantando” Díaz determines throughout Yuniór’s narration the living conditions of Yuniór, Rafa, their mother and grandfather in the Dominican Republic before they left for the U.S. They live at the edge of total poverty and the daily struggles they all have to confront. Yuniór is the only one in this story who still positively hopes that their father will come back, even though he barely knows him. On the other hand, the rest of the family becomes more pessimistic and after years of hopeless waiting they become reconciled with the idea that their father will never return.

Yuniór draws a clear picture of the family’s financial and economical background: they live under a leaking roof in a neighborhood which is dangerous. Above that, the most affordable food for them is of course the cheapest food, such as “boiled yuca, boiled platano¹⁵, boiled guineo¹⁶” (Díaz 1996:70). Apparently, if they do not have enough money for proper food including sometimes cheese, meat or beans, their mother will not have sufficient financial means to pay for not only the mandatory school uniforms, books and pencils for school, but also even for basic clothing, for instance sandals which she had to sew for them from a piece of paper. In order to be able to purchase the antiparasitic treatment, they are forced to skip a couple of dinners. Since they do not live exactly bellow the penury level yet, their mother does not forget to point out this information regularly. “The only way we could have been poorer was to have lived in the campo¹⁷ or to have been Haitian immigrants, (...)” (Díaz 1996:70). Living in one of the suburbs of the city provides at least their mother with a job, seemingly not very profitable but at least she had one in a chocolate factory.

¹⁵ Translation: banana

¹⁶ A special Dominican term for unripened bananas.

¹⁷ Translation: countryside

In the sentence already quoted, the topic of the Haitian nationality is emphasized by the author again like in the first story “Ysrael”. The people of Haitian nationality were looked down upon by Dominicans. Haitians had African roots and for that reason they thought them to be something less. Additionally, during the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo, the Haitians were not only expelled from the Dominican Republic, but mostly drastically killed.

If the one of the previous stories “Fiesta, 1980” is to be compared with “Aguantando,” Díaz portrays here another type of family alienation. While in “Fiesta, 1980” the family lives after the years of waiting together in the U.S., the alienation is captured from a psychological point of view; the problems produced by the long-term family separation, the father’s arrogant behavior, his extramarital affair and miscommunication. On the other hand in “Aguantando” the physical distance between members of the family appears to be the main obstacle, at least for Yuniór. In both stories they undergo the issues arising from Ramón de las Casas’s absence, yet from various points of view.

In this story the character of their father is pretty much likened to a plastic sandwich bag where the valuable photographs of Ramón must be hidden. This is the only way Yuniór knows his father, through the pictures. Everything which has at the least little bit of value must be covered with plastic so that it does not get soaked. These photographs are really valuable for their mother because she keeps only them in a safe dry place. Everything else can be affected by the poor-quality roof and the destructive rain, apart from the photographs. “(...) everything we owned was water-stained: our clothes, Mami’s Bible, her makeup, whatever food we had, Abuelo’s tools, our cheap wooden furniture” (Díaz 1996:69). Besides the very rare letters and calls, it was the only connection they had with Ramón. Obviously, there is no surprise Yuniór’s associations of his father are mainly images of picked up fragments he sees in the pictures yet these are prominent for him. The fact Yuniór does not recall any moment when he would spend together with his father causes his

emotional alienation. The memories Yuniór has are more or less converted into material and concrete items. “He was a cloud of cigar smoke, the traces of which could still be found on the uniforms he’d left behind. He was piece of my friends’ fathers, of the domino players on the corner, piece of Mami and Abuelo” (Díaz 1996:70). Yuniór realizes that everybody else actually knows his father better than he does. At that point he was still naively waiting for him and later on as a narrator he admits it and is surprised by his own delusion about his father.

At the forefront of this hopeless waiting unquestionably stands Yuniór. In a way, they all innately hope Ramón will come back one day and he will solve the problems of impoverishment they have had to face up to this point. “Yuniór clings to this hope, despite his mother and Rafa’s experience, both of whom are disillusioned. Yuniór, only nine, still believes” (Kevane 2003:76). The boys image him returning like a rich man, with a German car, dressed up in costly clothes and gold. Yuniór is the least acquainted with the previous letters and his father’s false promises, so he is the one believing in his father’s return sincerely. He is not aware of the manner of their father abandoning them. On the contrary, Yuniór perceives his father as a hero, admiring him while observing the pictures. Although he claims he does not think of him often, he desires to know him better. Moreover, Yuniór also makes reference to his physical appearance. He wishes his father was a piece of him as well, not only the “piece of Mami and Abuelo” (Díaz 1996:70). “His dark unsmiling eyes were my own” (Díaz 1996:70). Twice Díaz highlights the importance of the eye-recognition.

Interestingly, Yuniór fills his time with one typical boy activity. He stresses a number of times how he frequently climbs trees. Naturally, it gives him the possibility to look at people and his surroundings from a distinctive perspective. He senses the certain type of security when he is up there. Possibly he has the feeling he can control the occurrences happening in his

surroundings. Yet, equally important is the metaphorical significance. Yunior is up in the trees like he was above all of the adults' problems and perception of the reality. One day he must consider climbing down and confronting the real world.

In general, Yunior has a very kind and close relationship with his mother. He definitely admires and loves her. As a little child, he always describes her with fastidious details. When their mother is really dispirited, has no money to feed them and needs to take a vacation, she sends Rafa and Yunior to their relatives. Clearly, Rafa is at the age when this is exactly what he wants: to be with other people than with family. "He didn't mind going anywhere; (...)" (Díaz 1996:74). On the contrary Yunior was a different case. He simply did not want to leave his mother and any kind of sympathy or consolation from Rafa and his grandfather were absolutely useless. The fact that he would eat there better and have a broader scope of things to do was not interesting. Probably he felt like he was losing another important person in his life. "I never wanted to be away from the family. Intuitively, I knew how easily distance could harden and become permanent" (Díaz 1996:75).

Their relationship suddenly changed once the mother comes back after she unexpectedly left them only with their grandfather. She believed in Ramón's promise that he would return to the family and so she prepared a home coming party for him. After realizing it was unreasonable belief, she fell into a deep depression. The entire situation got even worse when Yunior does not linger in asking repeatedly to see the photographs of his father. Naturally, the mother's abrupt departure must have been a nightmare for Yunior. However, he was given the time to grow up and at that point he slowly learned to be less attached to the people he loves. Regarding the modifications Yunior makes with the thoughts of his father into things, and he does so in the same way when he becomes reconciled with mother's colder attitude after she returns home. "I still had baseball and my brother. I still had trees to climb and

lizards to tear apart“ (Díaz 1996:84). He does not precisely exchange the image of his mother into these explicit objects but essentially he turns to them.

Díaz also refers in this story to the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic and its most violent effect after Trujillo. “The most dramatic use of the U.S. policy power was the military intervention during the 1965 Dominican civil war“ (Atkins 1997:230). Yuniór’s mother was one of many victims who were struck by the American intervention. “(...) her skin dark and her hair surprisingly straight and across her stomach and back the scars from the rocket attack she’d survived in 1965” (Díaz 1996:71) before Yuniór was born.

Concerning the Spanish word “aguantando” and its meaning in English, as usual, the word translated does not bear only one meaning. The possibilities of the infinitive form “aguantar” are as following: “endure,” “put up with,” “support,” “tolerate,” “repress” or “withstand.” In relation to the plot of this story, one of the possible options “aguantando” may be translated as “enduring”. They all have to be enduring the poverty they live in, the unfilled expectations and the family separation, “(...) the resentment of the children abandoned in the country or in a marginal neighborhood in the Dominican Republic” (Valerio-Holguin 2007). Yuniór has to withstand the matter that even though his father is alive and they cannot be together, he lived with him for four years and other members of the family remember him better while he does not know him at all.

6 Drown

“Drown” is the episode set mostly in the New Jersey where Díaz focuses on the break-up of friendship Yuniór had with his teen best friend Beto and all of the free time activities they had been engaged together. Coupled with the split between Yuniór and Beto, the author also proceeds to the theme of homosexuality. The central figure of Beto portrays the contrast of one young immigrant who longs to leave the dismal neighborhood and the second immigrant, Yuniór, who does not have any tendencies of changing his place of residence and especially is against running out on his mother. In this manner, Díaz also comments on the matter of one’s future. When compared with the previous story “Aguantando,” Yuniór’s mother is described in “Drown” with opposing dimensions. Surprisingly, the character Rafa is not even once mentioned in the story.

Right in the beginning, Yuniór’s narration depicts the everyday and ordinary crimes they were committing with Beto. Apart from Yuniór’s way of earning money by selling drugs, they were stealing, breaking windows and urinating on the steps of other’s people apartments on a daily basis. Yuniór and Beto were in a way a professional stealing couple and they were proud of it. “Both of us had seen bad shoplifters at work. All grab and run nothing smooth about them. Not us” (Díaz 1996:97). Interestingly, when they went to the mall and planning on shoplifting, they paid a visit to the stores such as a bookstore or a record store. One may be assuming that these two teenage boys might have had another field of interests. The criminal behavior and their spare time activities do not really match with reading books. Díaz implicitly reveals that Yuniór and Beto are not only this stereotype of delinquency teenagers, but, on the contrary they are intelligent and also both bear educatable potential which is simply not fully supported.

Had they lived and hunged out in a different district and been not inserted in this Hispanic locality of the city, they might have had a higher range of opportunities. Díaz presents the question whether the problem is settled in the boys' personalities or if it is actually the matter of their socio-economical background. Indeed, in the stories illustrating the life before they moved to the U.S., there is a clear hint of a certain kind of misbehavior as well. Seemingly, they are predisposed to violent behavior. Taking into account the way Yunior and Rafa act, Yunior was in his youth the one who was always more restrained. Yet even when Yunior was younger, he unveiled some destructive and in a way cruel sides of his character. "(...) I was always in trouble. From punching out Wilfredo to chasing somebody's chickens until they passed out from exhaustion" (Díaz 1996:77). Back in the D.R. they lived in one of the marginalized parts of the capital city where the area provided them with many opportunities to perpetrate small misdeeds as well. In other words, now with this background under consideration one question is foreshadowed. What is the cause of their anti-social and criminal behavior? It may be the immigration or pulling out young children from the culture they were born into, the long or final family separation, the conditions they live in and the general way they are looked upon. Or, on the other hand, their manners might be completely the same no matter where they had settled down.

Díaz also plans another side of the vandalism. One aspect is very clear; Yunior and his friends belong to the agents causing the defacing and break-ins of buildings. On the other side, his circumspect mother explains to Yunior what danger lurks in their location and how unsafe they are. These revelations forced Yunior to thoroughly check the windows on their departure from the apartment. Yunior's mother probably does not have, or does not want to have, any idea that her son may be one of the, as she calls them, *morenos*.¹⁸

¹⁸ Translation: literal: brown

metaphorical: Somebody of dark skin with an offensive connotation.

In the case these young teenage immigrants continue to attend school, the majority of them is definitely not evaluated as prospective college students. The handful of the students who may be perhaps an exception sooner or later get unmotivated. One teacher from the school Yunion goes to compares the students to a space rocket. "A few of you are going to make it. Those are the orbiters. But the majority of you are just going to burn out" (Díaz 1996:106). On the assumption that there would be only a small seed in Yunion of planning to escape from the only American surroundings he knows, at this moment the teacher destroys it. "I could already see myself losing altitude, fading, the earth spread out beneath me, hard and bright" (Díaz 1996:106). Yunion clearly converted this teacher's statement into the idea that there would probably be no chance for him to accomplish anything else than what is he doing now that he is doomed. Furthermore, by revealing this image of the disappearing rocket, Yunion indicates his awareness of the unsatisfactory circumstances of his existence.

One of the exceptions is Beto who is going to college. In a broader perspective, considering their intelligence, they should both go to college. Moreover, Yunion may be even smarter than Beto. When Yunion decides to skip a day at school, besides watching TV, another activity he does is go to the library. Beto does not like the idea that Yunion may know more than he does. "He hated when I knew something he didn't" (Díaz 1996:94). Yunion is failing some of the classes on highschool, but on the other hand when he gets bored he turns "nerdy" and goes to the library. At that moment when they are in the swimming pool Beto does not know what *expectorating* means. Yunion himself points out the fact that Beto does not operate by this type of knowledge. "Beto hadn't known what expectorating meant though he was the one leaving for college" (Díaz 1996: 94).

Since Beto is more disgusted from everything around him, he makes an effort and aspires to leave. "(...) he hated everything about the neighborhood,

the break-apart buildings, the little strips of grass, the piles of garbage around the cans, and the dump, especially the dump“ (Díaz 1996:91). Beto tries to push Yuniór forward as well but Yuniór remains the same and does not intend to look for other opportunities. “I don’t know how you can do it, he said to me. I would just find me a job anywhere and go” (Díaz 2000:91). The situation in Yuniór’s and Beto’s family is little bit different. Beto’s family does not function perfectly either but at least his parents and he live together. Yuniór does not want to leave his mother to go to college since he feels “as a son I feel I owe her that much” (Díaz 1996:96). Secondly, Beto’s family stands definitely better financially.

Yuniór’s mother Virtudes character has radically changed in this story. Although in “Aguantando” Yuniór claims she was exhausted when she came home, “We could never get Mami to do anything after work (...)” (Díaz 1996:73). She is still in a way characterized as a lively woman. Conversely, in “Drown” she is depicted as if she totally lost any kind of enthusiasm for life. Over the time, her personality had been converted into the mood of utter calmness. “She’s so quiet that most of the time I’m startled to find her in the apartment.” “She has discovered the secret of silence (...)” (Díaz 1996:94). Supposed, the time they were waiting for the father to come back to the Dominican Republic, that whole situation worked for her as a drive, she was hoping something better would come. Presently, however, there is not much for her to hope for. Her husband left again with another woman for Florida, calling her from time to time and “begs for money” (Díaz 1996:101), promising that [if she comes down to him to Florida, he will go back to her]. Yuniór has to make clear that what he promises her, are plain lies.

Yuniór also stresses his mother’s stillness by a captivating comment. “You have travelled to the East and learned many secret things (...)” (Díaz 1996:94). Recurrently, Díaz foreshadows Yuniór’s good general knowledge of

the world. Yuniór is here referring to the principles of Eastern religions about which other people of his age and background would have no idea.

Regarding the friendship between Beto and Yuniór, it went through atypical stages. They were best friends and Beto was a really important person in Yuniór's life. Basically, in this story it is rather his mother and Beto both who are the closest beings for him. Everything was harmonious between them until Beto unveils his sexual orientation. It puts Yuniór into a confusing and uncertain situation. He did not know that Beto was homosexual, as he named him by a Spanish term *pato*.¹⁹ Yuniór firstly tries to avoid remaining in touch with him but after a while he realizes he wants to meet him again. "(...) but he was my best friend and back then that mattered to me more than anything else" (Díaz 1996:104). Even though Yuniór definitely did not feel comfortable with Beto's sexuality, he agreed on meeting again. They went together to the swimming pool and after that they had second sexual intercourse. Yuniór's mother of course does not know anything about it and does not really understand why Yuniór was not keen on getting in touch with Beto, even though Yuniór attempted to clarify the problem. After Beto leaves for college they never speak again, although Yuniór is sneaking around his place but does not want to admit it to his mother. After all Yuniór becomes conscious of the fact that the person who is going to stay in his life is his mother and that for now they have each other.

The title of this story, as of the collection, metaphorically signifies destruction. Represented in the story "Drown," Beto and Yuniór will never be friends again because of the Betos's discovered homosexuality. This true about Beto ruins their friendship once forever. As children they spend their time by totally unproductive activities which do not lead them to any perspective future. Moreover, Yuniór will most probably never take any kind of chance

¹⁹ Translation: literal: duck

metaphorical: Insulting way to call someone who is gay.

which would provide him with better life conditions and the feeling of obligation to stay with his mother will hold him in the same place.

In conclusion and also as for the title of the story, Yunior loves spending time in the swimming pool. He says: “While everything above is loud and bright, everything below is whispers” (Díaz 1996:93). His perception of being under the water level reveals the fact that in a way he is satisfied with where he is, since it is what he knows and is not really disturbing. On the other side if he tries to swim up above the water level, it is like going out to another world which he does not know at all and he would have to learn how to walk the new world. He mentions it only once that he would like to be away from everything. When a red-haired Southerner drives around Yunior’s neighborhood and offers him a job with the U.S. government, Yunior states “I ain’t Army material” (Díaz 1996:100). The next time he sees this man in his car, Yunior is hiding himself and in this particular moment he wishes he were not where he was now.

7 Boyfriend

“Boyfriend” is one of the chapters dealing mainly with the present life of the characters. There is barely any perspective conveying images from the previous life still living in the Dominican Republic or early immigrant experience. Kevane divides the ten stories of *Drown* into two groups: “The Family Stories” such as “Aguantando” or “Ysrael” and “The New Jersey Stories.” Kevane claims the preceding story “Drown” may be placed on the edge of both of these groups and is crucial in the collection. On the other hand, “Boyfriend” is solely a New Jersey story.

“Boyfriend” focuses on the problem of a couple that is in the constant process of breaking up. The girlfriend, as the narrator names her, is still languishing for the preservation of the relationship, waiting for the boyfriend to be with her again. The boyfriend sends out clear signals that he no longer finds her so attractive anymore, defending himself with excuses that he needs time and space. The occasional sex they have when he comes to actually pick up his things signifies for her a glimmer of hope. The narrator, knowing the boyfriend better and witnessing the whole situation, understands it better than she does.

Díaz sets up this story with the narrator being high on marihuana, specifying what kind of effects it has on him and pointing out his greater physical resistance. “Most people it just fucks up. Me, it makes me sleepwalk” (Díaz 1996:111). Judging from the first sentences, a reader may be expecting this story to reveal information about personal drug testimony. Yet the author allows the turn to happen right by the following narration and unveils the true course of this story. Besides this episode, the motif of concealing emotions is mentioned a few times throughout the collection, especially in “Aurora.” Díaz decided to dedicate one whole story to the matter of love, some of the feelings and emotions connected with relationships and break ups which normally among his community must be hidden. Any demonstration of emotions on the part of the male would be considered as a weakness and for that reason no one

really talks in such an elaborate manner on this subject.

The narrator, most probably Yuniór, eavesdrops to the daily love dramas while the couple screams at each other living in the flat below him. He pays special attention to her since she is the one who regularly lives in the flat [and perhaps may wish to take advantage of her unsatisfactory situation]. The poor construction of the building permits him to be a witness of each step she makes. He is not bothered by hearing every argument, sexual intercourse or her crying. On the contrary, it is a kind of pleasure for him and he benefits from their turbulence relationship. He figures that this works for him as a perfect entertainment and finds the best spot for listening to them. “These two had a thing about the bathroom. Each one of his visit ended up there. Which was fine by me, it was where I could hear them best” (Díaz 1996:113).

With Yuniór’s profound observation, Díaz actually foreshadows Yuniór’s earlier relationship with a Puerto-Rican girl named Loretta. Yuniór compares what the couple does, particularly how she handles losing her boyfriend, with how his relationship was with Loretta. He needed to reflect on another relationship to realize for instance what his ex-girlfriend had on her mind while lying silent in bed. Everybody in the community for his sake abstains from any kind of sweet talk about these issues. Precisely this is what brings him back to those days with Loretta and analyzing the time passed together without any social restrictions. Indeed, it is obvious that his inner reaction towards love is much more deeply experienced than the one which is performed.

At one point the narrator claims that he cannot have any of the arguments perceived as hurting others because in fact he is really used to hearing quarrels all around him since he was little and he has certainly been many times a part of them. He explains: “It would have broken my heart if it hadn’t been so damn familiar. I guess I’d gotten numb to that sort of thing” (Díaz 1996:112). The disharmony of everything what surrounds him since he was almost born creates an ordinary element of his life. Moreover among the

people he is in touch with there is an unwritten yet standard rule: emotions should not be revealed. Nevertheless, there is one precise moment when Yuniór admits to a certain degree to himself that there is something that may hurt him. Loretta exchanged him for, according to her, a successful worker from Wall Street. This statement was for Yuniór an affirmation that struck him. “No amount of heart-leather could stop something like that from hurting” (Díaz 1996:114).

Regarding Yuniór’s perception of other’s people relationships, Díaz remarks once again in the Spanish language. Yuniór fancies some of the components their partnership is made of. The very simple element of talking was missing while they were spending time together with Loretta. “Not even when we were cool together” (Díaz 1996:113). He would have probably appreciated it if Loretta had talked to him about whatever happened to her during the day and apparently Yuniór’s only interest would not have been sex, as it is for the boyfriend in the flat below. At this point, Yuniór discerns that Loretta had no more desire to be with him and he only now catches the true meaning of her silence. Even though the relationships of these two people is in a way dramatic, including bawling sessions, so that she is constantly crying and then again allowing the boyfriend to have sex with her, Yuniór favors it because evidently the girlfriend still longs for the boyfriend, in contrast to Loretta.

Considering the Spanish language, Yuniór admires how much Spanish they talk. Díaz emphasizes that the matter of Spanish language still works as a call for the home country; a factor that he personally rates as something more valuable. On the other hand, he explains that talking Spanish is understood as lower class. He describes the boyfriend and the girlfriend as if belonged to the higher class. Judging from their appearances, the clothes they wore, jewelry and the fact that they never talk about a boss; he states: “too high-class for a couple of knuckleheads like us” (Díaz 1996:112). It honestly surprises him when he hears the two of them talking in Spanish. This is what he would wish,

his girlfriends using the mother tongue. He definitely would not be expecting to hear Spanish from two people looking like models.

Even the sounds of another Romance language, in this case Italian, reminds him consequently of a familiar and significant aspect of this sensation. However, almost at the same time he stopped fully appreciating these interlingual exchanges because when this girl talks to him in Italian, it tells him the proper reason why she is with him. “I reminded her of some of the Sicilian men she’d known, which was why I never called her again“ (Díaz 1996: 113). Yuniór could not bear such a type of comparison and he was genuinely offended.

In one paragraph, Díaz embodies two opposite attitudes toward Yuniór’s social status and partly to his origin as well. Firstly Yuniór acquiesces that he and his friends would not be appropriate for a girl below, even though she is of the same ethnicity and race. It is an incompatible social class, taking into account the level of financial and economical conditions. He is aware of the fact that his standard of living is nothing to be proud of. A comparison served “to remind me how bad I was living” (Díaz 1996:112). On the other hand, he knows his value for the country he comes from and being matched together with men of European race who may be dark-skinned and speak the language which is at least of the same linguistic root. It directly compels him to decide never to date any girl who reflects on him in this way again.

Additionally to the point of race, Díaz makes an allusion considering the cardinal rules of Latino neighborhoods. He knows that the boyfriend does not hesitate to get in touch with white girls. Dating a white girl may be regarded as breaking conventional rules but, on the contrary, also as a certain kind of success. According to Kevane, Yuniór indicates that the deed of mixing the race is not very admissible. “In the narrator’s opinion, the boyfriend has crossed an unspoken, yet understood, racial boundary of loyalty” (Kevane 2003:77). There are many correlations between Yuniór, Loretta, the boyfriend and the girlfriend. Considering the matter of race, the relationships are

comparable as well. Loretta left Yunion for a white man from Wall Street in the very same way Boyfriend dates white girls.

In the end of the story Yunion manages to invite the girlfriend to his apartment and gets to talk to her. He was probably expecting their meeting to be more lively but indeed they do not have much in common. Yunion explains this gloomy atmosphere by her downcast mental condition and his intestinal discomfort. It is a paradoxical conclusion given how much time he spends stalking her. He knows almost about everything going on in her life and when they finally meet in person, they wait to finish their coffee and go. During their conversation they make one interesting comment to find commonality. While she is looking for a topic to talk about, she highlights what she sees on the table; a small part of a marijuana seed. Yunion clarifies the sleepwalk effect it has on him. She gives him some advice, taking a teaspoon of honey every night. This should prevent him from sleepwalking. In one short sentence Díaz offers transparent closure not only of this story. Yunion says: "I never tried the honey and she never came back" (Díaz 1996:116). It does not only state that he keeps on smoking, but it illustrates the way they live now is unchangeable and will continue to the future. Yunion will never get out of the miserable world of drug-dealers, smoking and drinking and she, basically Latino women, will be still seeking men like the boyfriend for whom women are just another means of fulfilling their sexual appetite.

8 Edison, New Jersey

The next story of the collection “Edison, New Jersey” is according to Kevane’s division one of the exclusively New Jersey stories. At the forefront of the story, the narrator’s and his colleague’s job is installing pool and card tables. Díaz allows the readers to look inside their daily routine, including dealing with customers; how Yunion and his colleague Wayne are able to treat them. He describes their customers’ villas, which are enormous so the wealth of these people is very perceptible, especially for boys who have grown up in a poor Latino neighborhood. Seemingly, this episode treats mainly these business and materialistic motives. Yet equally, of course, Díaz proceeds to Yunion’s principal desires.

As well as in the previous story “Boyfriend,” the narrator emphasizes in “Edison, New Jersey” the element of racial boundaries. On one side it is him, a Latino boy installing pool tables, crossing these boundaries everyday to the other side, white and wealthy customers. The contact and communication with the customers is obviously not based on trust. Kevane also highlights this considerable element. “(...) he describes their uneasiness with trusting him because he is not white” (Kevane 2003:78). Kevane comments on the fact that the narrator is conscious of the customers’ watchfulness. His awareness is apparent above all and he clarifies how the customers behave when they need to leave their houses while letting the boys work inside. “I am sure you’ll be all right, they say. They never sound too sure.” “(...) they agonize over leaving, linger by the front door, trying to memorize everything they own, as if they don’t know where to find us, who we work for” (Díaz 1996:123).

The narrator is unconcerned about the matter of distrust the customers are showing. He does not go over to this way of acting; neither does he commit any punishable crimes. What he does instead he calls exploring. He goes around the house and only discovers what possibilities it would give him.

Robbing is the primary aim of his “exploring;” nevertheless these little delicts such as taking cookies from the kitchen or razors from the bathroom cannot be regarded or compared to another major kind of stealing. Yet, to him it definitely brings feelings of causing damage to the property and to the owner. Additionally, it is his response to their suspicious behavior: he is proving to himself that he can have what he wants, even though this idea lies outside of his real life. He feels he is smarter than the customers and that they do not know what he would be capable of. He comments on how their customers think they pay enough attention to not lose anything from their mansions. He stresses their jobs, very often they work in good positions, for instance doctors, diplomats or presidents of universities. He indirectly refers to their level of intelligence they should have and concurrently describes how easy it is for him to outwit them when caught in places he should not be by simply asking for the location of the bathroom. “(...) you would be surprised how quickly someone believes you’re looking for the bathroom if you don’t jump when you’re discovered, if you just say, Hi” (Díaz 1996:123). They all have their university degrees and huge houses, earn a lot of money yet he discerns he is the one who can outsmart them.

Coupled with these feelings of being in a way superior to them, making the little robberies and vandalism, the narrator expresses a certain type of hatred and envy. This is what he would like to have, including one of the pool tables. He sticks considerably to the material values. When he is about to leave with one of the customer’s maids, he forces her to take with her all of the expensive clothes she has. She does not care that much and simply wants to leave it behind. He longs for the status of a wealthy person, like his customers are but he is aware of the fact that he can never reach this dream to be like them. The closest moment when he experienced what it is like to have enough money to not even think about spending it was when he was still together with his girlfriend and he had stolen a significant amount of money so she could buy

whatever she wanted. He states: "(...) I liked going into a place and saying, Jeva, pick out anything, it's yours. This is the closest I've come to feeling rich" (Díaz 1996:125). He might have felt rich but he knew this was only temporary and consisted stolen money which his girlfriend did not like at all. The narrator encounters himself in never-ending financial struggle; this is his perception of the situations. At every payday he calculates how much time it will take him to save a sufficient sum of money to buy a first-class pool table. He would be able to give up buying underwear and limit his food only to pasta. However, he realizes even this spending restriction would still not suffice to buy such a pool table. His dreamt up pool table symbolizes the status of achieving the status of being rich and as he himself claims, "this figure's bogus" (Díaz 1996:128), so it will probably never happen.

The memories of Yuniór's last relationships and consequent break-ups are still present in his mind. In "Boyfriend" he tries to cope with the recent break up by following another girl's life. In "Edison, New Jersey" he does not want to talk about women. On the other hand, Wayne needs to share with him his present situation. Wayne has a wife but does not hesitate to be unfaithful to her and this is what Yuniór cannot support. When he meets one of his customer's maids, a Latino girl, the narrator automatically feels sympathy for her and he aspires to, in his eyes, save her from the white boss. His memories come to him and at the same time he hopes she will like him and possibly have sex with him. When he finds out that she had moved back to this white man, he is disappointed because as a Dominican she should stay faithful to her race while the unwritten rule of racial interference should not be taking place.

In summary, throughout the main themes of this episode, the desire of being rich holds a vital position. In the last paragraphs Díaz compares Yuniór's life to a lottery. They play this little game with Wayne when Yuniór always guesses where they are heading first in the following morning. "It passes the time, gives us something to look forward to" (Díaz 1996:139). He waits for the

day when he has the fortune in his hands. The chance of being right among all of the cities and possible places for delivery is very low, although he claims he's already been right. There may be a clear parallel to guessing the right numbers in a lottery. The narrator says: "You can't imagine how many times I've been right" (Díaz 1996:139). He may be questioning himself why it does not work in other areas of his life, why does he not hit the right chance and get rich and date a girlfriend.

9 How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie

“How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie” is a kind of fictional manual for boys, probably in his age group, explaining what should be done before the girl comes to an apartment and how a boy should behave depending on what ethnicity of the girl is. The narrator is a young boy very explicitly describing each step of a date without any social restrictions. The author does not divide the story into specific parts or focus always on one of the mentioned races. Instead, he combines them all together as it comes to the “instructor’s” mind. The first clear distinction of the girls is whether they are outsiders or insiders: Díaz clearly refers to the economical background of the girl, if she is used to this sort of neighborhood. In other words, it is essential whether she is from a rich family or not. He gives advice about where to take Latino or white girl for dinner and he even particularizes the topics which should be talked about. Kevane aptly calls this manual “instructions on how to play the game and successfully score with them” (Kevane 2003:78).

In the second paragraph of this episode, Díaz unfolds the theme of the narrator’s origin. Throughout the whole collection in some of the cases the Dominican characters value their origin and are pretty offended if someone confuses their ethnicity. Apparently while writing this manual, the main character requires hiding as many Dominican signs as possible. “Take down any embarrassing photos of your family in the campo, especially the one with the half-naked kids dragging a goat on a rope leash” (Díaz 1996:143). Naturally, for a person who tends to finally grow up and move from the childhood to the period of adolescence or the start of adulthood, just imagining someone else seeing the photos may be an embarrassment itself. Nevertheless, in this case it is also a matter of masking one’s true family immigrant background. The narrator continues and adds: “The kids are your cousins and by now they’re old enough to understand why you’re doing what you’re doing”

(Díaz 1996:143). Many of the family members are in the same situations, dealing with the same stereotypes and they most likely had to progress from a younger age to understanding things like adults do.

In order to make a greater impression regarding his family background, personality and education, he forces himself to appear like somebody he is not. He manipulates himself on the basis of stereotypes into being something better so he can please women of diverse ethnicities. The narrator informs the reader about his personal preferences. “The white ones are the ones you want the most, aren’t they, (...)” (Díaz 1996:145). White girls for the narrator are the most wanted as if they were a kind of separate specie. From what he explains, if a white girl is approachable, she is the one who will let the whole date continue further to the total end the narrator is hoping to occur than with any other Latino or black girl. Still, he is aware of the fact that this desired end will take place only in a minority of cases. “But usually it won’t work this way. Be prepared” (Díaz 1996:148). He also makes allusion to the white girls’ ignorance and lack of particular knowledge. Yet in this occurrence he is able to pay no attention to it. “She’ll say, I like Spanish guys, and even though you’ve never been to Spain, say, I like you” (Díaz 1996:148). The fact that he speaks Spanish does not mean he is Spanish, of course. This term is very clear for him and only he would designate people from Spain Spanish. Every immigrant who wants to live with at least an intermediate level of life condition in the country he decided to immigrate to must learn and acquire a lot about the completely unknown culture. Likewise, a white girl saying she likes Spanish guys has absolutely no idea that a boy from the Dominican Republic or another country of Latin America feels a huge difference. Obviously, the opposite side of the issue of immigration, the natives in the country, show ignorance about the details of the origins of the many immigrants. On the other hand, he appreciates dating Latino or black girls as well. The advantage is, especially if they are insiders, they know the neighborhood. It is therefore never going to be

choking for them and all together it means that he can act more naturally. Yet they are not that approachable because they are not unknown in the neighborhood.

In a broader context, this dating is not only a matter of his personal interest. Other people acquainted with the “date” are waiting for “updates.” In fact, a highly prominent feature in the process of growing up is obtaining new experiences in the field of sexual activity. The narrator includes advice on how often to call and when the phone is ringing or even the boy is the one who should call his friends if the date goes the right way. Having a girl and sex with her belongs to greater social prestige and higher status. It is the minor motif in the novel *The Brief Wonderful Life of Oscar Wao* and a number of short stories: the Latino machismo. If a boy does not accomplish this critical component of personal evolution and is not sexually active, he loses the respect of the others. In the previous story “Edison, New Jersey” rather than admitting to his friend that there was nothing between him and the maid, he decided to lie and say how amazing the sex was.

The two forgoing stories address the theme of racial distinctiveness in relationships and crossing the boundaries by hybridizing two ethnicities. The title of this “instructional manual” is a peak of it and according to Kevane it is established on racial labeling, yet not from deep sociological and psychological points of view. The adolescent narrator has already created theories and accepted the stereotypes about races. He gives a very confident impression. The little bit childish yet sincere manner of giving advice on this topic convert the possible seriousness of this argument into a less controversial one.

10 No Face

With this story Junot Díaz returns back to the theme of the opening episode. A boy whose face was partially bitten off by a pig comes here to the centre of attention. Instead of the prevailing narrator Yúnior, this story is assumably told by Ysrael himself. Comparing the two stories “Ysrael” and “No Face,” “Ysrael” captures the life of the boy seen from the perspective of two other young boys. On the other hand “No Face” is narrated by Ysrael himself and offers more personal insight into his life. The author also emphasizes the fact that Ysrael is not alone in his “under-mask world” and that there are still human beings whose lives are not any better than his.

Not only does the motif of a deformed face appear in these two stories “No Face” and “Ysrael,” but the author also includes this concept into his novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. More than a certain person, in the novel the no face man comes in dreams and his presence indicates the possible coming of bad luck and from the totalitarian point of view connected with the feared security apparatus of the dictatorship of Trujillo. Díaz implicitly explains in the novel all the sufferings of Dominicans caused by Trujillo under the term of *fukú*. *Fukú* originates in an old African tradition and the term works in this novel as a curse. Everybody who got somehow involved into the matter with Trujillo, then he never knew what was going to happen to him or other members of the family. “It was believed, even in educated circles, that anyone who plotted against Trujillo would incur *fukú* most powerful, down to the seventh generation and beyond. If you even thought a bad thing about Trujillo, *fuá*, a hurricane would sweep your family out to sea (...)” (Díaz 2007:3) The no face man, a member of the secret police, signifies the permanent and often hidden control over everybody.

The author initiates the story by describing Ysrael’s morning routine which includes physical exercise. Ysrael first appears like a very vulnerable person, all caused by his huge ugly injury. Yet “No Face” suggests a new

perception of his character. His physical condition is on an acceptable level. He longs to be well trained so he could escape the people who would try to torment him. Secondly, it gives him the feeling like he is one of the comic book figures he likes to read about. His good physical condition contrasts with his mental state. All his suffering originates from rejection, mockery and harm, this daily uneasiness he has had to deal with throughout his life which has had negative effects on his mental state. Therefore he proves to himself that there is a strong part within. Probably the stronger he feels physically, the more resistance he can muster mentally. The people of his neighborhood call him “No Face” but he does not pay any attention to it. Similar verbal abuse can not hurt him.

Ysrael is not really disabled, for the cosmetic injury originates in his physical appearance and how the society of that time receives his anomaly. If it had not been for the awful accident, he would have been likely an average boy. This aspect of the physical body shifts him to an outsider status in the society. Yet he still manages to advance his own life. Díaz highlights the truly miserably living people, the alcoholics who sleep after drunk in their urine and vomit. Ysrael sneaks around them and looks for the coins they lost and have no idea about. For those people who know him and do not accept him for who he is, Ysrael is supposed to be the total outsider. Instead he uses their bad conditions to make his days more viable by buying sweets or a bottle of soda with the coins he finds. “He holds the coins tightly in his hands and under his mask he smiles” (Díaz 1996:154). Now he is a winner. It shows that his situation is not out of his control and that there are still people who are not able to arrange his life. These alcoholics are not even able to move now, lying there like mere animals; Ysrael contrasts every essence of them, portrayed like a lively and energetic happy person.

Ysrael faces daily hostility. Wherever he goes, the people are screaming at him and trying to offend him. He seems to be quite resistant to it after some years pass. Díaz stresses the numerous insults. Almost on every corner he hears

the same words. Not even in his could he feel any kind of safety. His only asylum from the hateful surroundings is the Catholic Church where a priest is the only person who takes care of him and holds a positive attitude towards him. His manner of coping with all the intolerant behavior and daily rejection is to find in him something special which other people do not have. "He has his power of INVISIBILITY and no one can touch him" (Díaz 1996:155). If he wants to maintain his life he must find some kind of special ability and a way to deal with it. "In order to survive his own displacement, Ysrael creates a fantasy universe, in which he combats injustice of the world and is able to escape the difficult reality he confronts day to day" (Connor 2002:153).

Since almost everybody has an aversion to him and he is aware of it, he wishes he could be invisible. The dogs which are sniffing around while he attempts to prove to himself his desirable ability confirm only the reality; that he will always be the center of attention, and it is not the only case when his desired abilities partially fail. Four boys harass him while he is planning to buy johnnycake. "(...) the coins jump out of his hand like grasshoppers" (Díaz 1996:156). At this section of the sentence Díaz highlights his vulnerability and the story turns around here. In the beginning, Ysrael's character is illustrated with a certain type of strength. Unfortunately he is attacked again and all of his notions about being strong are lost.

Ysrael has a little brother named Pesao. It is obvious that even for his brother Ysrael is a reason for jeering. "Pesao looks at his face, giggles and flings another pebble at the hens (...)" (Díaz 1996:160). Pesao asks him about what Ysrael did and he answered: "I've been fighting evil" (Díaz 1996:160). Pesao is pretty excited about that but Ysrael explains to him that there is nothing to be excited about. Ysrael has been fighting evil everyday of his life and his little brother more likely imagines something that Ysrael would prefer, too, like a scene from the comic book but it is fairly far away from what he really has on his mind by saying he has been fighting evil.

Furthermore, no one ever cares what his personality may be. Everybody judges him according to his appearance. Most of them do not know what his face really looks like under his mask. They believe only what they have heard, yet the majority treats him with abuse. In contrast, Ysrael does not hesitate to offer help whether an animal or a person needs some help. At the point when he wants to bring a cat across the street, he is automatically suspicious of doing something wrong. “Hey No Face! a motor driver yells. What the hell are you doing? You haven’t started eating cats, have you?” “Leave the cat alone, it’s not yours” (Díaz 1996:155). Without any other thinking through, they feel compelled to yell at him. In addition, the people are still reminding him the story as if he may have forgotten what had happened to him.

As a result of his daily confrontation with inhumane behavior all around him, Ysrael suffers from nightmares of the accident again. Between the part when Ysrael has the nightmare and when he wakes up, Díaz incorporates one section commenting on his cosmetic operation in Canada (which is also mentioned in the first story). Ysrael and the priest both think that Ysrael may get a chance to undergo an operation in Canada. The question is if the operation is also only a part of a dream and if it can really change his life. “When are you sending me away? The doctor smiles and makes him remove his mask and then massages his face with his thumbs” (Díaz 1996:158). The answer does not need to be said. The operation in Canada signifies hope for him but the probability that it comes true is very low if not at all.

The final part of the story says a lot about his family. His brother and his mother never say any kind words to him. As Connor also mentions, he does not stay in his parent’s house but prefers to sleep in the smokehouse. He is a part of his almost utterly unsociable world. “The accident with the pigs has erased his own identity as a member of the family” (Connor 2002:151). There is also a connection, similar to the story “Ysrael,” between Ysrael and Yunior. The mother advises him to leave before his father sees him. The father represents a

person who bears a feature of strictness and a motive for the younger children to be scared; regarding Yuniór's father portrayed the most in "Fiesta, 1980."

In conclusion, at the forefront of these stories Díaz proceeds, as many critics suggest, the theme of masking and unmasking. Ysrael portrays it firstly more clearly from the physical point of view: he must cover his face with a cloth mask. In both cases, Ysrael in the Dominican Republic and Yuniór in the U.S., they have chosen to live as the conditions allow. With respect to the world that surrounds them, they cannot unveil their true faces. While living in the U.S., Yuniór must hide the emotional, intellectual and "nerdy" part of his personality. Ysrael must overcome his fear and the fact that he is easily beaten in a fight out on the streets. Paravisini-Gebert comments on this element as follows: "(...) to the point that maintaining the mask assumes the certainty of life and experience—a protection against life and living." (Paravisini-Gebert 2000:170). Díaz actually confirms this statement at the very end of "No Face." Ysrael's mother tells him to put his mask on and when he does so he sets up running for another day. "He runs, down towards town, never slipping or stumbling. Nobody's faster" (Díaz 1996:160).

11 Negocios

The last story of the *Drown* collection, “Negocios,” is the most explicative narration of the whole book. Díaz proceeds to point back to the beginnings of this family history. The author finally uncovers the details about Ramón’s departure from the Dominican Republic. Díaz puts at the forefront Ramón’s de las Casas miserable first experience in the U. S. At that time, the family situation was not very serene because his wife barely talked to him while he was said to be having an affair with another woman. He hoped his forthcoming departure would calm down the atmosphere but nothing of that happened. His first months in Miami and subsequently in New York did not change his personal tranquility.

As for the reasons why he decided to leave his home, one theory would be how closely connected he was with his own family. He begs his father-in-law for the money which would allow him to buy the flight-ticket to Miami and help to survive the first days there. He was ensuring his father-in-law he wanted the best for his daughter and for their children. This explanation would be completely acceptable if he had not had an affair with another woman and had only thought what got him out of the bed, where he was sleeping with her, was an image of the promised money moving away from him. Most probably he did not place any importance to this affair and it was one of the many he had had in the past, more were to come in the future.

The feature of machismo creating a man’s personality is evident throughout the story collection, especially in “Fiesta, 1980” as well as the story not included in the *Drown* collection “The Short Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao.” In “Negocios” in the first paragraph the author deals with the family situation before Ramón left. Yunior narrates his mother’s behavior who could not bear the fact that Ramón had cheated on her and she showed it with all her power and emotions. Virtudes is portrayed as a strong woman who would never let her husband take total control over her. Yunior’s mother Virtudes

pretended she did not consider her husband's departure as a serious event in her life. She still displayed great hostility toward Ramón. This behavior may be contrasted with her position she has in the family after they are finally all relocated in the U.S. where it gets even worse, yet she becomes a completely different person. Assumably the five-year long alienation and everyday fighting for survival with her two children into another day made her soften her initial strong feelings of indifference. Additionally, she was brought with the two boys into an utterly unknown environment, culture and language. The only stable aspect in her new life was her family. Clearly, she gained better life conditions, but on the other hand she lost her own status and position in the family.

Ramón's first experience in the U.S., and the whole complicated way up to his second marriage occurs. When he was only twenty-four years old and he had to go through very tough periods of encountering with everyday difficulties. He had never been outside his country when he arrived to Miami, so he did not speak a word of English. Yet on the second day he was able to get a job and find a place to live. After he learned something about life in the U.S., he became determined to move on to New York. Yuniór, the narrator, comments on Ramón's excellent physical condition. He walked from Virginia to New York so that he could save some money. His aim was pretty clear from the night of his arrival that he longed to earn the money. "He didn't dream about his familia and wouldn't for many years. He dreamed instead of gold coins, (...)" (Díaz 1996:169). On the other hand, he must have really missed them but he did not want to admit that to himself. "He abstained from thoughts of home, from thoughts of his two bellicose sons and the wife he had nicknamed Melao²⁰" (Díaz 1996:173).

In the first months and during the first time spent in New York, he barely managed to send some money to his family as Yuniór explains: "(...) these

²⁰ Translation: literal: mU.S.kmelon
metaphorical : darling

were arbitrary sums that often left him broke and borrowing until the next payday” (Díaz 1996:177). Yet as time passed, he saved a certain amount of money and started to consider getting his citizenship through a marriage to a U.S. citizen. The first attempt for which he paid a lot of money was unsuccessful and left him broke. As a result, he lost his job and found out his flatmates were swindlers, so he set out for his journey to New York. Soon after he arrived in New York, by a coincidence he met a well-secured Latino woman. It took only a little bit of Ramón’s persistence before they got married. The process of getting married to secure one’s citizenship is a common business and a way to step up higher with regard to one’s living condition. “The routine was well practiced and expensive (...)” (Díaz 1996:178). Normally, they would get married and then divorce. Indeed, Ramón did not say anything to Nilda about his family in the Dominican Republic but both, Nilda and his first wife got to know about Ramón’s bigamy. Furthermore, the year he got married in the U.S. was probably the most prosperous period for him, yet he did not send his true family any money. It was as if he had totally forgotten them. The time in the U.S. after all started to be at least a little bit enjoyable for him but he completely omitted the part of his life back in the Dominican Republic. The family, as described in “Aguantando,” was suffering from poverty and insufficient income for their basic living expenses. They were living on a very thin edge compatible with the lowest level of economical conditions. It was in fact one of his colleagues who reminded him of the family. Unfortunately, it had no effect on him. “These harangues must not have bothered his conscience much because that year he sent no money” (Díaz 1996: 187).

Even though he knew everything about his first family because Virtudes did not stop writing him letters, it still did not produce to any positive response. What moved his feelings was encountering with his friend’s family, whereby his friend Jo-Jo must have brought the idea and opened Ramón’s mind to finally getting his family from the Dominican Republic over to New York. At

that time Ramón had two complete families; Nilda had given a birth to their son. Bringing his Dominican family, from which he had been separated for such a long time, would cause a definitive rupture in his relationship with his second wife Nilda, yet it appeared to be no problem with him as he re-evaluated his priorities.

Nilda brought up the idea that she wanted to visit her relatives in the Dominican Republic and suggested Ramón go as well. When he consented to go, Nilda knew why he had agreed on going with her. Long before Nilda could sense Ramón's disquiet and she perceived the true origins of this uneasiness. In general, their relationship was never based on an honest love. Although the marriage had not proceeded like he would have firstly intended with another woman, for only getting him the American citizenship throughout the marriage, their coexistence between Nilda and Ramón did not really function like a proper partnership. Ramón took an advantage of Nilda's stable financial background. He was literally living off her income. Nevertheless, they went together on holiday to their home country. Nilda knew that the actual reason why he was there was to see his first family.

The theme of coming home is the focus in the story called "The Sun, the Moon, the Stars" published in *The New Yorker* in 2009. Inevitably, he includes some of the main arguments to "Negocios" as well. Díaz emphasizes Ramón's confused feelings. The shock he experienced when he arrived to Miami he now he experiences again coming back to his home country. "Seeing the country he'd been born in, seeing his people in charge of everything, he was unprepared for it" (Díaz 1996:197). Five years ago he must have gotten used to the distinct climate in the U.S. and at this moment his body was not acclimated to the air in the Dominican Republic. The impact on Ramón's physical perception of the heat, also metaphorically refers to his mental state. "The poverty—the unwashed children pointing sullenly at his new shoes, the familias slouching in hovel—was familiar and stifling" (Díaz 1996:198). The same way that the dry air was hurting his throat, seeing again for himself the

well-known poverty of the country shocked him. After the five years in the U.S. he was used to a certain level of living which were now far way better than what he encountered when he returned back to Santo Domingo.

According to the Yuniór's narration, Ramón intended to visit his family but failed. Despite being back, the cost of the flight, he did not take the chance to visit them. If he headed down to the district where his family was living, he did not go to their home and did not try to contact them. Yuniór claims that his father's absence was the ordinary circumstance of his early life and if his father had come to him he would probably not have even recognized him. There are several reasons why Ramón was not successful in visiting his family. Firstly, he may have been afraid of the reactions, not only his own response to the re-encounter, but also how the rest of the family would react to him. Secondly, he was not prepared enough to bring them with him to the U.S. and he certainly did not favor the idea of staying in Santo Domingo. Ramón was already working on the business of transporting his family but most probably the image of visiting them and explaining to them that he was there but could not take them with him did not permit him to make the final approach. Additionally, he was suddenly aware of the fact that he had been neglecting them and he was likely undergoing an inner fight with his conscience.

In the period when Ramón and Nilda returned back from Santo Domingo to the U.S., Ramón had injured his spine at work. He could not move at all for a couple of days and Nilda and her daughter took the part of his carers.

Mi hija, he said. I feel like I'm dying. You won't die, she said. And if I do? Then Mama will be alone. He closed his eyes and prayed that she would be gone when he opened them, she was and Nilda was coming in through the door with another remedy, steaming on a battered tray. (Díaz 1996:201-202)

Obviously Ramón suffered from really intense pain and his plan of earning and saving as much money as he could was falling apart. At his work no one really considered his health problem as a serious issue. He was afraid of

losing his job so he finally decided to see the company doctor, and he received a only three-week medical leave. Ramón was speculating about suing the company and call it as a work-related accident. He dreamt of getting worker's compensation but almost everybody warned him not to do that because he had no chance to succeed.

In the short paragraph above Ramón's current aim was to abandon Nilda almost with the same cold feelings that he had treated his first family for a couple of years. The exclamation of Nilda's daughter made him realize what he was going to do it for the second time in his life. He also noticed that he was an important part of other people's lives. He knew that Nilda respected him for everything that she was acquainted with about him. She supported him, so their marriage was the basis for being where he was at that time. No matter how numb his emotion may be, he became conscious of the pain he had caused to his first wife and what his future was regarding his relationship to Nilda. His way to deal with these feelings was to blame it all on Nilda so that he could get rid of his own feelings of guilt.

The whole story "Negocios" is narrated by Yunior. Eventually, he gets to know many details about his father, his life in the U.S. while they were waiting for him in the Dominican Republic and all about Ramón's second family history; ultimately, he met Nilda. Yunior's mother could not handle the situation without any strong feelings of disgust. After their father had left them again, Yunior decided to see Nilda. He did not feel comfortable and it was an awkward situation for both of them. They both shared in a way the same anger though none of them were the true cause of it. "We sat and drank and finally talked, two strangers reliving an event—a whirlwind, a comet, a war—we'd seen but from different faraway angles" (Díaz 1996:207). Yunior operated from the point of view of the poor family barely surviving from one day to next, as well as the pain his mother was bearing because of the father's absence. On the other side was Nilda with their son named Ramón. She was aware of the fact that later in their relationship she was only the across-step to

fulfill Ramón's wish and that he left her for his first family. While both families thought they did not really know each other, they actually had quite a lot in common.

In summary, Díaz places the most condensed story at the conclusion of the whole collection of *Drown*. As a result, the end with all the possible reasons of Ramón's behavior, his personal fights and very difficult life-exam he experienced are reenumerated. The theme of abandonment accompanies the whole collection but "Negocios" in particular carries the sense of leaving somebody on his own. *Negocios* means *business* in Spanish. Although Ramón's friend mentions and offers Ramón a couple of possibilities to open his business which Ramón always turns down, the title of this story refers more to Ramón's final plan to move the family to the U.S.

12 Nilda

Nilda is a teenage girl with many sexual experiences. She is seeking for ways of integrating herself into the society of adults and putting aside her family life. Unfortunately she does so in inappropriate ways. The second thematic topic of this story, more serious but less talked about, is a loss of one of the family members.

An enormous part of this story deals with description of Nilda, her physical appearance as well as her personality. Díaz pictures, like in other stories, a typical Dominican woman with all her merits. Interestingly in other words in the rest of the story, he presents her as a senseless person. “(...) she’d always been one of those quiet, semiretarded girls who you couldn’t talk to without being dragged into a whirlpool of dumb stories” (Díaz 2000:90). By this statement only a small amount of the negative labels can be noted.

Nilda is a character who acts like a faithful yet hungry dog. She always comes back and waits for her love, whereas in contrast Rafa does not feel like fulfilling her wishes every time they meet each other. Since she understandably does not long for being at home, she is forced to look for the feeling of safety through random opportunities. Regrettably, she is led by mistaken choices. As a teenage girl living in a non-productive neighborhood, she approaches the closest person and represented possibilities. One of the limited chances she has is having relationships with one, or better, more men and subsequently having sex with them. Her relationship with the older man, whom she is definitely proud of and cares for, is a clear sign of one particular need. “*I want you to respect my man*” (Díaz 2000:90). Nilda writes to Rafa’s brother. This older man may become without any doubt a stable financial and hopefully kind of social background for her; of course he turns not to remain so as he disappears after a short time.

She thinks she is a winner, a queen because of her partnerships and a rich sexual life. Indeed, Nilda is sort of bigheaded, taking into account her opinion about her own body, she knows she is pretty and claims that she is desired by men. Probably all these considerations can be a source of her inner hopelessness. Nilda's life and destiny is pretty much irrefutable; she will not be any exception to the majority of women characters portrayed in Díaz's stories. She will fall into the company of men who care less than Rafa or may even harm her, not only mentally, and her job will be selling drugs.

Logically, there is someone who really loves her and truly cares for her. It is Rafa's little brother. He stands literally in the background of all of the scenes happening in this story. He is able to detect how badly Rafa treats Nilda, and sometimes, he even feels ashamed of him. Paradoxically, Rafa's brother seems to be the only one who would be the most reliable person, even though at the time she is dating Rafa he is only a fourteen-year old boy. She does not mind spending time with him but, of course, only as a friend. It takes some time until she realizes that the company of Rafa's brother may be needed. She does not hesitate to ask him for help.

Rafa's younger brother Yunior contrasts many of the main features of this story. "Nilda" is written with strong sexually implicit meaning and Yunior is a part of it. On the other hand, Díaz highlights, like in many other stories, Yunior's intelligence. "I was fourteen and reading "Dhalgren" for the second time; I had an IQ that would have broken you in two (...)" (Díaz 2000:90). Yunior's general knowledge is extended but this "nerdy" part of his personality can not be revealed or developed in the surroundings he lives in so better than showing of what he knows, he learns to hide it.

The story "Nilda" directly reflects Díaz's own life experience with death. The fact that his older brother died of leukemia in his youth enriches the story in a slight yet truly significant manner. This event works here as a waking-up

factor; it should change the readers' awareness to the topic of natural death through cancer of a youth and compels the reader to think of the story as complex in a different way. The younger brother is again standing a short way off, watching his brother getting weaker. Rafa is unable to even get up from his bed. He surely did not know exactly what was going on. It certainly gives the feeling of helplessness and despair of not being able to help. Supposedly, the strong emotions produced by the constant hope that things will get better are present as well. These feeling must be sunk into Díaz memory very deeply and hence are mentioned not only in this short story.

Through the loss of Rafa the family suffered a lot. Rafa was the head of the family and brought in money. "He had us all, the way only a pretty nigger can" (Díaz 2000:90). As usual, he had to maintain the status of an unbeatable guy and does not want to admit to the outside world that he is dying. The moment Nilda is dreamily talking about the future must have really beset him. Still, he had to stay cool.

Another remarkable aspect is emphasized in "Nilda." "She was from Trinidad, a coco pañyol²¹, 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" (Díaz 2000:95). Apparently especially in these teenage years it was very important to merge into the mainstream society and culture of a host country. The necessity of embodying themselves into the community in the U.S. may be caused by the desire of being invisible and being accepted as someone who has been living in the U.S. since birth. Most likely, the older they grew, the less need was for this kind. As they are in another stage of their lives, they tend to be fond of their roots; their mother tongue and country.

²¹ Coco pañyol is a term having origin in Trinidad & Tobago meaning someone who is of mixed race.

To sum this story up, “Nilda” projects inevitable consequences of growing-up fast, on the one side, and on the other side the negative effects of death. Upon the main topics the story also comprises great deal of sexual scenes which act as a counterpoint to the missing innocence of a young girl.

13 The Sun, The Moon, The Stars

“The Sun, The Moon, The Stars” is a story published in 1999 and written after the collection *Drown* was published. It focuses on the relationship between two young people. A Dominican boy who is desperately optimistic about their relationship hopes that the connection between them will be taken to another level. On the other side there is a girl, who after one affair, takes a stand of rejecting her disloyal boyfriend and showing almost no more interest in him.

“I am not a bad guy” (Díaz 1999:15), this says the narrating character Yuniór. Perhaps he does not directly refer only to his personal characteristics but his intention may be of setting himself aside from the Dominican men’s stereotype. Yet in a very short moment in the story he admits he was cheating on her. “She considers me a typical Dominican man: a *sucio*²², an asshole” (Díaz 1999:15). “All of Magda’s friends say I cheated because I was Dominican, that all us Dominican men are dogs and can’t be trusted” (Díaz 1999:24). However, he does not forget to make a poor excuse, claiming that everybody makes mistakes. He was cheating on Magda, his girlfriend, who became unexpectedly acquainted with this fact. The tension and conflict develops more or less the whole plot.

After a two-week breakup, they are again together. Yet no matter how hard he tries, their positions in this relationship as well as in Magda’s family are completely changed. Díaz demonstrates the unification between two ethnically similar families, yet of different origins since Magda’s family was from Cuba, an easy acceptance by Magda’s father which normally would not be common. The truth that these two families immigrated to the United States and speak the same mother tongue facilitates the tolerance. On the other hand

²² Translation: literal: dirty
metaphorical: A man who does not behave appropriately.

when things go wrong, it may cause the strongest change of attitude. “Her father who used to treat me like his *hijo*²³, calls me an asshole (...)” (Díaz 1999:16). “You no deserve I speak to you in Spanish” (Díaz 1999:16).

His friends later do not show any understanding for his being so madly in love with Magda and inviting her for a vacation to his home country. “Even my boys were like, “Nigger, sounds like you’re wasting a whole lot of loot on some bullshit, but I really thought it would be good for us” (Díaz 1999:18). He is supposed to be a tough boy, so he should not be vulnerable, especially in the field of feelings. On the contrary, right in the beginning he is able to confess that he is weak. As usual at that time when he only could notice the positive characteristics on Magda, he was unaware of Magda’s ignorance. At least later on when he narrates the story with retrospective, he realizes what he had not captured in the past. Some of the circumstances he recalls must be really surprising for him. “About a month later, she started making the sort of changes that would alarm a paranoid nigger” (Díaz 1999:17).

According to the second part of the story when Magda and Yunior are on holiday in the Dominican Republic, Díaz clearly expresses in a positive connotation and the narrator’s relation to his home country. Yet, of course some of the contrasts between two or more cultures are arise as well.

Let me confess: I love Santo Domingo. I love coming home to the guys in blazers trying to push little cups of Brugal into my hands. Love the plane landing, everybody clapping when the wheels kiss the runway. Love the fact that I’m the only nigger on board without a Cuban link or a flapjack of makeup on my face. (Díaz 1999:18)

The fact that Yunior and his girlfriend are in the Dominican Republic on holiday and spend time in some of the most expensive hotel resorts on the island contrasts with the features of dire poverty presented throughout the collection *Drown*. Yunior must remember the conditions they lived in when he was little.

²³ Translation: son

Now he comes back as a tourist, yet he clearly states that this country is where he feels at home and he also comes with totally different status. Magda understandably does not share the same enthusiasm. She may be jealous that it is Yuniór who is at home now and she would like to experience the same passion but for her home country. Yuniór explains her rejecting behavior by possible problems in their relationship.

“Obviously, there will be aspects of their ethnic heritage and of the position they occupy in the host society (...)” (Ibarrola-Armendariz 2010:216). Firstly, Díaz mentions one of the most expensive branches of cars and then describes the grandfather’s house with the latrine back in the Dominican Republic. By this mean he points out the disparity of the different life conditions of one family; of those who have left for living in the U.S. and those who have stayed, the old generation. Secondly, it is a problem of having relationships with someone who has her origin in another country. “I feel like you are rejecting my whole country, Magda” (Díaz 1999:22). Every misunderstanding and argument may be understood as a consequence of not having being born in the same country.

In addition, Yuniór, instead of being conceited about the fact that he does not live in the Dominican Republic any more and he does not belong to the Dominican collective identity, apart from the detail they are spending holiday where a very low percentage of Dominican citizens would do, he would like to immerse himself more into the authentic aspects of the Dominican Republic life. As mentioned above, the two diverse lines of several intercultural elements which are carried inside one person are here foreshadowed.

“By the end of day 3 of our All-Quisqueya Redemption Tour we were in an air-conditioned bungalow watching HBO. Exactly where I want to be when I’m in Santo Domingo. In a fucking resort“ (Díaz 1999:21). This couple of sentences implicitly illustrates the respect for Díaz’s country of origin as well

as the possible need to discover the roots and return to them. Besides, the author does not have to necessarily remember all the details and true images of his early years spent over there, although many of the elements are succinctly depicted. “The landscapes were superfly – even though there was a drought and the whole *campo*²⁴, even the houses, was covered in that red dust” (Díaz 1999:19). There also may be a hidden wish to get to know the island better.

In conclusion, the story fully contributes to the set of representations regarding the desire for reciprocal love. Furthermore, “The Sun, The Moon, The Stars” brings to light the consequences of one common human mistake which in this case can not be taken back and as a result of stubbornness on one of the sides, has its consequences which have to be paid.

²⁴ Translation: fields

14 The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

The focus, likewise the title of this story shares the same name as author's Pulitzer winning novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, is brought on the life of a boy who is thrown into two cultures and together with his desire for a woman and true love his existence is led to the end.

When Oscar was a little boy he was a sweetheart of the family and everything pointed to the conclusion that he was going to be a prototypical Dominican man. "You should have seen him, his mother sighed. He was our little Porfirio Rubirosa" (Díaz 2000:1). He was in the favor of girls and the relation was reciprocal until the day when he had to decide which of his two girlfriends was going to be the one he wanted to be in a more serious relationship with. More likely he did not choose the right girl because she turned him down the next day. This event meant the complete break down regarding any further contact with women.

According to the characters in the story, a true Dominican male should lead an active life, regarding the sexual relationships with women, whether the relations are serious or not. It is enough that the women serve as a kind of entertainment. Women are a very important factor among the Hispanic masculine society, unfortunately not always in the positive type of sense. They should not be missing but from time to time when it is necessary, Dominican men treat their women as if they were a lower species to mess around with. Many of these fixed dogmas originate in the past Hispanic culture of machismo and may have been exaggerated during the dictatorship of Trujillo.

Actually, Oscar somehow develops totally into un-dominican type. He neither really looks nor behaves like if he was from the Dominican Republic. First of all he is unable to establish any kind of meaningful contact with a girl. The only female whom he talks to is his sister or mother. Not only does his sister Lola give him advice, she does not try to push him towards the more

appropriate way of living, but there are also other relatives who do not agree with his attitudes. Cut the hair, lose the glasses, exercise.” “Oscar, Lola warned repeatedly, you are going to die a virgin” (Díaz 2000:4). These are the milder kind of words Oscar hears from his sister. Besides this sentence there are other exclamations which he is exposed to and worry him. Apart from his physical appearance and the allusion other girls make to it, in a way, the good-intended advice are the seeds of his frustration. His uncle Rudolfo is a figure who bears the usual features of this Dominican masculinity and expresses himself more explicitly. ”You have grab a muchacha²⁵ y méteselo²⁶” (Díaz 2000:4)! Yet not only is here Oscar’s point of view and his desperation of the endless no-girl epoch, but on the other side is his family, his full Dominican family with a kid who still in his age does not have any girlfriend and lacks sexual experience. If they thought by that time there was something they might be ashamed of, they did not expect there might occur something even worse, namely Oscar falling in love with a prostitute, which was really a very embarrassing factor for the family.

Certainly, Oscar is fully aware of it and perceives it all together as a hopeless situation. The curious piece of evidence is also the moment when he is examining himself and realizes the conditions of his life throughout one comic making comparison to one of the comic science fiction characters. ”Jesus Christ, he whispered. I’m a Morlock” (Díaz 2000:5). As soon as both of his friends are getting involved in the world of dates and relationships they do not really count with Oscar and, from that time any their friendship was transformed into a more distant one. All over again Oscar has to face the loneliness and heads back towards his nerdy science fiction books and computer games. This betray from his friends and absolutely no support, when he attempted to change, made him become utterly conscious of his hopeless.

²⁵ Translation: girl

²⁶ Translation: literal: to put it somewhere
metaphorical: to have sexual intercourse with a girl

One may suppose that on one side the immigration in his early years and on the second side being still in the connection with the culture of the Dominican Republic brought him to the condition he finds himself. In the United States he was given the possibility of being a nerd; the kind of weird boy who loves reading science fiction and is obsessed with comics. All immigrants are aliens in their host country but apart from this sort of alienation, Oscar is put into second type of concurrent estrangement. Evidently, his intelligence and hobbies are the causes of the feeling of multiple alienation. “(...) he used a lot of huge-sounding nerd words like “indefatigable” and “ubiquitous” when talking to niggers who would barely graduate from high school” (Díaz 2000:3). The result of these manifestations of his intelligence made him double isolated. The first cause originates in the reality mentioned above: he left his home country, and the second one, his intelligence and hobbies turned him into a foreigner even among his own people coming from Latin America. In other words, for Hispanics living in the same neighborhood, he was a nerd and for the American society he was an immigrant. He could not expect any proximity or familiarity from the fellow Hispanic immigrants, additionally, whose interests, rather than books are drugs and their distribution, as well as women and promiscuity.

Here again, Díaz raises the question where Oscar belongs to. He still possesses strong connections to the traditions of the Dominican Republic through his family but on the other hand the intentions of getting assimilated with culture and everything related to it are evident in the U.S. In a similar way to other immigrants, Oscar is socio-culturally divided into two spheres. Valerio-Holguin calls this doubleness a “hybrid space” (1). Indeed, many of the immigrants are able to manage their existence in the host country and to take advantage of this third space. Unfortunately for Oscar, it did not work that way and everything seemed to function the other way around. Regarding the Oscar’s situation he finds himself constantly between the two different worlds

and so the third space is causing him more problems than bringing any advantage. His family strongly reminds him of his origins and traditions he should keep up with. Oscar is the one person who is most aware of the fact that now they live in a completely distinct culture. Both of these civilizations impose pressure upon him.

All in all, in this story Díaz frequently comments on the doubleness. Another example of the doubleness is when Oscar is really close to his death. His family expected him to act like a Dominican and because he knew there was something important missing, he endeavors to complete the absent element. Surely, his intention to find a girlfriend is not only the effort to fit in and be full Dominican; it is also a question of a natural desire of almost every human being. This case the traditional family makes the sensation of Dominican imperfectness very mighty. At the same time, while trying to save his life, he exclaims he is a U.S. citizen. Officially meant he is a U.S. citizen and in the critical moment he does not hesitate to make use of it. However, this unplanned cry does not portray any signs of emotional affiliation to either the United States nor the Dominican Republic. According to the narrator of the story, Oscar's roommate Yuniór, the Dominican Republic was no home for Oscar; he had left as a child and was gone for too long to know how to be correctly involved in the everyday life on the island. "(...) he refused to succumb to that whisper that all long-term immigrants carry inside themselves, the whisper that says You Do Not Belong (...)" (Díaz 2000:14). Although, interestingly, when it comes to the necessity Oscar admits he has two homes. Still, it probably does not bear any deeper significance for him and he operates with his U.S. citizenship only as a means to calm down the woman he is in love with.

In this story Díaz highlights the converted expectation; usually the solutions of all to the problems and hopes for better life lie in the U.S. In particular, Oscar regards the Dominican Republic as the right place for new

opportunities for a girlfriend. Oscar was in his essence very pessimistic about the fact that the hostility of the surrounding world may be substituted for something more optimistic. Oscar was determined to lay the foundation of a partnership in his home country. It can hardly be argued that he made a bad choice, falling madly in love with an aged prostitute.

Oscar was not that kind of emotionally numb person, as but actually, Oscar is very sensitive and inside the feeling of passion and love is nothing unusual. In fact, he is driven to women but he simply does not know how to establish any kind of contact and conversation between him and them. When he finally able to manage to get in touch with a girl, their relation got stuck at the level of friendship. His sister is probably more excited than him when he goes, for something like a date, to the cinema. Unsuccessfully, this date turned out to be only going out with a friend again. Later on he became a part of very peculiar triangle formed by him, his friend Ana and her freshly returned criminal boyfriend Manny. Oscar could accept the situation if Ana paid him a visit only when she needed to complain about the fact that Manny was beating her up, but he could not continue like that forever. He decided to end this relationship. This second and more serious attempt to get his state of Dominican masculinity fulfilled terminated his life. The affair with Yvón was an irrational excess but he did not capture any of the absurdity. Indubitably his family did not support Oscar's passion for Yvón; moreover they were not only shocked but embarrassed in front of other people. Obviously, repeatedly, the love was not equivalently shared on both sides. On top of that, Yvón call him "mi amor"²⁷ but if only with very low portion of significance in it if not ironically. The narrator of the story stresses this piece of information, too. "Maybe she did love him a little bit" (Díaz 2000:22).

²⁷ Translation: my love

Similarly to Ana, Yvón was controlled by her boyfriend as well; he constituted a real threat for Oscar. He assumed what these men and their violent and aggressive personalities were capable of but in the case of Yvón he did not care at all. Oscar was familiar with the consequences of return back to the island and chasing Yvón. In a way, by returning to he D.R. he committed suicide. Surprisingly, frustrated for years he did not attempt tany other comparable deed before.

15 Conclusion

The collection *Drown* and the three stories added capture the authentically the Dominican immigrant experience. Díaz allows the readers to explore every detail of life as an immigrant. The cardinal narrator is Yunior, the younger son of de las Casas family. The character Yunior grows older throughout the whole collection. Díaz decided to employ Yunior for this fragmented narration, a little boy and later a teenager, as a narrator who constructs a very viable image of each story. Through the eyes of a nine-year old boy, Díaz establishes an honest reliable voice in the stories. Díaz thereby mediates his own experience using vernacular language without any formal restrictions, confusing the readers by switching the codes of Standard American English and street English and slang Spanish.

Díaz illustrates the family crises that had been caused by immigration. The circumstances connected with total impoverishment, the absent husband and father's role determines the very essence of family disintegration and dysfunction. Kevane comments on this reality as "how the sacrifices of immigration damage the family" (Kevane 2003:72). A husband and a father proceeds to leave his family, promising to send money and so he can accomplish the aspired "better life" not only for him but for the whole family. Instead, they start losing each other, physically, emotionally as well as materially (in the form of increasing poverty). Every one of them is accordingly forced to face the consequence of the separation. The wife deals with challenging emotional situation and extreme poverty, and the sons, especially the younger Yunior, are seeking replacement in lieu of the lack of fatherly love. Although the condition after a few years changes and the family lives together again, it does not remedy the already embedded family alienation. The father's strict position is performed by Ramón particularly in "Fiesta, 1980" but it does not compensate for the missing parental love.

Moreover, the family members are isolated and not only does the father experience the alienation in the U.S., for the rest of the family still living in the Dominican Republic undergoes a very similar situation in the sense of being left on their own.

Likewise the father has to confront his encounter without adjustment to a new culture, language and the processes in the U.S. which is all together totally unknown for him in the first weeks of his stay. The same shock-adjustments occur to the remaining members of the family after they are brought to the U.S. It is not a matter of a couple of weeks nor months until they get accustomed to the new environment. It is a never-ending daily affair, even after many years. If they decide to remain in the U.S. they will live in a multicultural environment for the rest of their lives. The fact that they were born in the Dominican Republic, their mother tongue is Spanish and their physical appearance is Hispanic will never change. Their Dominican origins will always contrast with the majority living in American surroundings they live in now. Díaz recently admitted that even after so many years living in the U.S., the matter of being an immigrant is never resolved. Díaz says “he has never stopped feeling like an immigrant” (Ratner-Arias 2013).

The question whether they still belong to the Dominican collective society or whether the American affiliation prevails is still present, especially for the younger members of the family. They possess some memories of their home country but in the meantime they are definitely more involved in the common life in the U.S. Presumably, the process of assimilation is faster for the younger immigrants. In general, children adapt easier to the new environment and in the case of immigration to the new language and culture as well. For people who immigrated at an older age, the assimilation is more complicated because their lives are more established in the Dominican Republic and language acquisition is more difficult.

Focusing on the traditions, parents try hard to maintain them. In the low-income urban neighborhoods Díaz describes in his short stories called *Washington Heights*, emerges as an utterly Hispanic district with every element of their culture. The Dominican culture is remarkably evident. The families often meet and make the traditional “fiesta” where logically the typical home food and music is not missing. As children they attend each of these “fiestas” and Dominican customs are still existent in their daily life. Ibarrola-Armendariz gives it a term of ‘cultural baggage’ “ (...) that they have brought over from their country of origin” (Ibarrola-Armendariz 2010:216). However, according to the representation of the main protagonists, the traditions by the teenage immigrants are the last thing they would be occupied with, yet they are keenly aware of them.

The critics and Díaz himself often refer to a process of “being colonized” in the U.S. The schools and other systems have considerable impact on erasing their Dominican culture. “It is significant that, rather than dramatizing the post-colonial status that Dominicans experienced in the country of his birth, Díaz instead points to becoming colonized by America only after he has immigrated to New Jersey” (Koy 2012:73) The Dominican culture especially by the younger immigrants disappears under the inevitable pressure of the American structures.

Remarkably original in the stories “Drown,” “Boyfriend” and “How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie” Díaz stresses the subject of racism. In these cases he explicitly clarifies the problematic of belonging to another ethnicity. Even though the motif of racism does not show up very often throughout the collection, with these three stories Díaz unfolds clearly the immigrant’s sensation. The author emphasizes the unwritten laws of the Hispanic ghetto, for instance the rule that the races within one ghetto should not be combined or united. In the last story of the collection “Negocios,” Ramón experiences for sure the action of racism while looking for a job or later

while working for Americans. The characters often struggle to hide their own identity in order to fit into the society.

Indeed, barely do these stories only argue for ethnicity or hiding one's true identity, but they do cover the topic of being a member of the Hispanic ghetto. The critics of Latino-American literature as well as postcolonial literature call this motif of "masking and un-masking." Díaz brings "masking" primarily in the stories "Ysrael" and "No Face." He shows consequences for behaving like they really are. Yunior has a great level of intelligence but for his sake rather than showing it, later he finds out that it is better to camouflage his knowledge. Exposing his knowledge to others would make Yunior a double-outsider. Furthermore, and specifically with men, they suppress any sensitive emotions. Díaz frequently refers to machismo. The way Ramón treats her wife when they live together again in the U.S. and subsequently his older son does exactly the same when he is in any touch with women. By their behavior Díaz draws a clear picture of an exaggerated sense of masculinity.

The characters are habitually represented with the attitude of having no meaningful future, living their lives in desolate streets and depressed neighborhoods. The author mentions how easily they drop the classes and their intelligence does not take any significant part in it. The boy protagonists are engaged into selling and taking drugs, stealing and destroying other people's properties. Apart from that, their common free time activity is watching TV, hanging out in the shopping malls or leading sexually-active life. They spend their time only by purposeless hanging around in the community. They dream of being rich and having their own huge houses. However, even if they manage to have a job, these protagonists never reach this aim. They carry in their lives the burden once brought with the first immigrant of the family, the "American dream." Many, such as the little character in "Aurora" are destined to incardination and/or drug-addiction.

If all of these pointed out representations originate truly in immigration or if they transpire anyway, this is the question that can not be relevantly answered in reading this short fiction by Díaz. Kevane claims that immigration is a risk, it permanently damages the family and that their culture is lost in the process of assimilation. Nevertheless, personal characteristics and how they deal with the new life opportunity are aspects which have considerable importance, too.

16 Resumé

Cílem této diplomové práce je analyzovat sbírku povídek od americko-dominikánského autora Junota Díaze. Tato práce obsahuje detailní analýzu života Dominikánských imigrantů ve Spojených státech amerických a to především ve státě New Jersey.

Díky tomu, že sám autor už jako šestiletý chlapec emigroval do Spojených států amerických, je jeho dílo založeno na autentickém vyprávění popisující život dominikánských imigrantů na východním pobřeží Spojených států. Hlavním vypravěčem těchto povídek je Yunior, mladý chlapec, který v průběhu celé sbírky dospívá v teenagera. Díaz se rozhodl použít postavu Yuniora jako hlavního vypravěče. Tato skutečnost vytváří věrohodnou atmosféru každé z analyzovaných povídek. Náhled na dané příběhy, které jsou vyobrazeny v podobě vyprávění z počátku devítiletého chlapce, nastoluje upřímný tón celé sbírky. Díaz zprostředkovává své vlastní zkušenosti slangovým jazykem bez jakéhokoliv formálního omezení.

Ze všeho nejdříve Díaz poukazuje na rodinné problémy, které byly způsobeny právě imigrací do Spojených států amerických. Dysfunkce a rozpad rodiny jsou úzce spjaty s chybějící rolí manžela a otce, který jako první člen rodiny opouští Dominikánskou republiku. Jeho záměrem je zajistit lepší podmínky nejen pro život svůj, ale pro celou jeho rodinu. Přesně v tomto daném okamžiku se rodina začíná rozpadat a postupně dochází k odcizení jednotlivých členů rodiny. Manželka, matka Yuniora, bojuje s extrémní chudobou a její synové stále hledají chybějící otcovskou lásku. Ačkoliv se rodina po několika letech odloučení setkává a její členy čeká opět společné soužití, tento fakt už nic nezmění na již pevně zakořeněném psychickém odcizení. Otec se snaží nastolit pevný řád, vyobrazený především v povídce „Fiesta, 1980,“ a získat si tím autoritu v rodině. Tento náhle přísný postoj jejich otce ovšem už nic nezmění a pochopitelně nevyhradí chybějící

rodičovskou lásku. Členové rodiny jsou od sebe navzájem izolovaní. Otec, který se rozhodl opustit Dominikánskou republiku, prožívá silné pocity osamocení. S podobnými pocity se taktéž setkávají ostatní členové rodiny, kteří zůstali v Dominikánské republice.

Stejně tak, jako otec rodiny se nyní v nové zemi setkává denně s novou kulturou, jazykem a postupy, které jsou pro něj absolutně neznámé, tím samým si rovněž musí projít jeho rodina poté, co celá emigruje do Spojených států. Setkání s novým prostředím, jeho poznávání a snaha o adaptování není otázkou několika týdnů či měsíců, je to ve své podstatě nikdy neukončený proces. Celá rodina nyní žije ve Spojených státech, a pokud se rozhodnou, že jejich životy budou pokračovat právě v této zemi, vždy budou obklopeni multikulturním prostředím. Narodili se v Dominikánské republice, jejich mateřským jazykem je španělština a jejich fyzický vzhled je jasně hispánský. Tyto skutečnosti se nikdy nezmění a jejich původ bude vždy kontrastovat americké prostředí, ve kterém momentálně žijí. Sám autor nedávno přiznal, že dokonce i po tolika letech, kdy žije ve Spojených státech, se nepřestal cítit jako imigrant.

V jejich životech je neustále přítomna otázka náležitosti. Patří více k dominikánské společnosti, nebo převažuje-li případně v jejich životech spíše americká náležitost. Všichni, i děti, vlastní vzpomínky na svou rodnou zemi. Mohlo by se předpokládat, že pro mladší imigranty je proces adaptace k novému prostředí rychlejší. Všeobecně chápáno, většina dětí je schopna se rychleji naučit např. nový jazyk, stejně tak je tomu i při asimilaci k novému prostředí. Naproti tomu lidé ve vyšším věku mají častěji problém s přizpůsobením se. Větší část svého dosavadního života strávili v tomto případě v Dominikánské republice, kde jsou pochopitelně jejich životy více zakořeněny. Problém náležitosti k jedné či druhé kultuře zůstává často nevyřešený.

Jsou-li zmíněny tradice, rodiče jsou ti členové rodiny, kteří lpí na jejich dodržování. Ve čtvrtích v New Jersey, které Junot Díaz v povídkách popisuje, jsou vytvořena čistě hispánská sousedství. Členové rodin se setkávají a účastní se na tradičních hispánských oslav. Jako děti protagonisté povídek nechybí na těchto sešlostech. Dominikánské zvyklosti jsou přítomny v jejich životech, ale v pokročilejším věku jsou tradice tím posledním, co by pro ně mělo větší význam. Jejich původní kultura se začíná vytrácet z jejich životů.

Díaz zdůrazňuje téma rasismu především v povídkách „Dorwn“, „Boyfriend“ a „How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl or Halfie.“ V těchto zmíněných povídkách autor explicitně otevírá problematiku jiné národnosti náležitosti. Ačkoliv téma rasismu se nevyskytuje tak často v Díazově sbírce povídek, v těchto třech povídkách Díaz objasňuje, jak imigranti vnímají skutečnost, že jsou těmi „jinými.“ Autor také zdůrazňuje fakt, že každé z hispánských ghett má svoje nikde nepsaná pravidla, která však jejich obyvatelé velmi dobře znají. Jako příklad je uveden zákon, kdy by se rasy mezi sebou neměly míchat. Proto by žádný hispánek neměl mít vztah s někým, kdo je jiného původu. Protagonisté těchto povídek se často snaží o to, aby jejich pravé identity byly schovány.

Otázka identity není spojována pouze s rasou. I mezi členy hispánského ghetta se objevuje touha skrývat opravdové pocity, nebo své vědomosti a inteligenci. Autoři zabývající se literaturou autorů hispánského původu, nazývají tento problém „schováváním a odkrýváním“ své pravé identity. Autor zahrnuje toto téma především v povídkách „Ysrael“ a „No Face.“ Díaz se zabývá otázkou, zda-li se imigranti chovají tak, kým opravdu jsou. Yuniór je poměrně inteligentní, ale pro své vlastní dobro se rozhodne jeho vědomosti nedávat najevo. Kdyby ukázal, co opravdu ví, stal by se z něj dvojitý outsider. Členové ghetta se snaží vyčlenit z jejich života jakékoliv emoce, nikdo z nich nechce, aby byla ukázána slabost v podobně silnějších emocí. Díaz také tímto často poukazuje na problém machisma. Manželé staví své ženy do pozic, kdy

jsou pro ně jen určitým typem zábavy, stejně tak se pak chovají jejich synové ke svým partnerkám.

Protagonisté jsou znázorňováni jako by je nečekala žádná smysluplná budoucnost. Autor komentuje fakt, jak lehce zanechají školní docházky. Většina teenagerů je zasvěcena do obchodu s drogami, které nejen prodávají, ale samozřejmě je také užívají. Dále se denně podílí na vandalismu. Jejich častou volnočasovou aktivitou je sledování televize, trávení času v nákupních centrech a velkým zájmem je také aktivní sexuální život. Bezvýznamně tráví svůj čas poplakováním se. Sní o tom, že jednou budou bohatí a budou vlastnit velký dům. I když se některým z nich podaří udržet si práci, tento cíl je pro ně těžko dosažitelný. Ve svých životech si nesou nevyplněný americký sen, se kterým do Spojených států emigrovali jejich rodiče.

Jestli tyto všechny zmíněné representace mají opravdu původ v emigraci, nebo by se taktéž začaly projevovat v určitých etapách života v jejich původní zemi, zůstává ne zcela odpovězenou otázkou. Kevane tvrdí, že imigrace je risk a nenávratně ničí rodinu, kdy zároveň mizí jejich kultura v průběhu asimilace s kulturou novou, americkou. Nicméně, jejich vlastnosti a charakter jsou nedílnou součástí toho, jak se vypořádají s možností nového života.

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