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Caribbean writers in the U.S.

New writings of immigration in Junot Díaz's *Brief and Wondrous life of Oscar Wao*, Edwidge Danticat's *Dew Breaker* and Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*

Photo: Céline Matthey

par

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Yo no soy mexicano. Yo no soy gringo. Yo no soy chicano. No soy gringo en USA y mexicano en Mexico. Soy chicano en todas partes. No tengo que asimilarme a nada. Tengo mi propria historia.

- Carlos Fuentes

Table of contents

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Introduction

The question of immigration is one of the major issues of the 21st century: be it about the setting of immigration quotas or the umpteenth rescue of a boat off the coast of Lampedusa, there is hardly a day without a migration-related topic in the media. In the past decades, due to the speed of globalization, migrant's profiles have changed in conjunction with new push and pull factors interconnecting all four corners of the world. In the United States, where the mix of people and cultures has always been high, immigration is an issue that is regularly discussed in public discourse, particularly in the political domain. As such, immigration has changed the face of the American people and landscape, and has also had a deep impact on literature. Many writers have tried to convey in their texts the hybridity that makes up the United States: “American literature […] has been shaped by its encounter with the immigrant” (Toni Morrison, qtd. in Gray, 129). Immigrants, too, have applied themselves to putting this experience of displacement and relocation into words, as a way to record their past and seek integration in their new country. However, recently, writers have shown new ways of expressing their migrant past and multiple origins and appear to have different objectives than previous literature of migration. Indeed, our discussion will show that immigration takes on a very specific literary expression in its form and language, an expression that is informed by history and influenced by the violent political situation in the country of origin. I will argue that, through their writings of the immigrant experience, the writers create a literature that, reflecting their migrant identities, acknowledges the validity of hybrid, plural voices in the American literary canon.

The discussion will thus focus on three texts written by Caribbean writers who have immigrated to the United States: *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2008), by Dominican-American writer Junot Díaz; *The Dew Breaker* (2004), by Edwidge Danticat, who is from Haiti; and finally *Dreaming in Cuban* (1992), a novel by Cristina García, from Cuba. These writers have a particular way of writing about migration, a way that is influenced both by the political history of their country of origin and by their situation in the U.S. today. Indeed, Díaz, Danticat and García have the peculiarity of coming from different Caribbean islands that have had (or still have) traumatic histories as well as ambiguous relations with the United States. As such, they are emblematic of a certain shift in the literature of migration, shedding a new light on the experience of immigration and its writing. Immigrant fictions of the last decades indeed differ from traditional migrant literature as they no longer paint a melancholic yearning for an idealized “past/there,” as opposed to an unsympathetic “present/here”; neither is there any wish to return definitely back “home,” nor to be assimilated to one's new surroundings. Instead, writers of recent immigrant fictions claim for a definite “Otherness” - in their identity as well as in their writing -, a plural and highly mixed literary identity that is to be recognized as such.

We shall first discuss how Díaz, Danticat and García inscribe their migrant identity in the History of their homelands, and how they advocate in their texts a position that, through counter-discourses to official narratives, is able to confront the horrors of History and give voice to the diasporic community. These immigrant fictions indeed claim for their versions of history – the ones of the people, of those who have actually lived it – to be acknowledged. Through their use of fragmented narratives, multiple voices, different kinds of realisms and even spirituality, the writers manage to give another texture to history, renegotiating it at the same time as their identity.

In the second part of this work, the discussion will then focus on the place and role of politics in the novels. It will appear that, even more than the authors' rewriting of History, politics in the texts reveal a position that is resolutely critical of the nations' past, yet at once extremely conscious of the part played by the United States, the writers' country of adoption, and of their own situation as migrants in the contemporary American society. We will see that Díaz, Danticat and García's displaying of politics in their novels, their deliberate use of Spanish, Creole or other dialects, as well as their reliance on highly mixed genres and literary traditions allow them to promote the plurality of their belongings as well as the validity of their position as “in-betweeners.”

Before that, we shall nevertheless start by establishing a theoretical framework to our discussion, reviewing such influential works as Gloría Anzaldúa's or Homi K. Bhabha's, and defining important notions that will be used throughout this study. We will pay particular attention to the concept of identity and its evolution in the United States and in migratory flows, as it will help us understand that hybrid identity the writers claim in their texts. It will also allow us to determine the shift in recent migrant literature, as one of the aims of this work will be to show how Díaz, Danticat and García propose new perspectives on immigration. Right now however, contextual information on the writers, their work and their country, are necessary to the understanding of the issues at stakes in this study.

Contextualizing the novels

In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (from now on referred to as *Oscar Wao*), Junot Díaz tells the tale of “ghetto nerd” Oscar and his family, before and after having moved to the U.S. to flee the Dominican dictatorship of the Trujillo area. Díaz was born in Santo Domingo, the Dominican capital, and left for New Jersey when he was six. He did not go back “home” until his mid-twenties (“Blame it on certain 'irregularities' in paperwork, blame it on my threadbare finances, blame it on me” Díaz, *The New Yorker*, 2004) yet kept going back after that, until “most people [would] at least concede that [he had] some Dominican in [him].” For Díaz, going back to his home country was part of the repossession of his Dominican identity, a process similar to the one Cristina García went through when first going back to Cuba: “Going back to Cuba was instrumental in the resurgence of my own Cuban identity, which really didn't take hold until I began writing fiction” (García, *The Agüero Sisters* 306). García was born in Cuba, just before the Revolution, and she and her family were among the first to leave the country after Castro's rise to power for New York City, where she grew up. Just like Díaz, García went back to Cuba twenty years after leaving it, and it was only after this first return home that she became aware of the importance of her Cuban identity: “The Cuban aspect of my identity has, to my surprise, become my wellspring. It is now an indelible, strong, and very visceral part of my identity” (306). The search for one's origin and belonging is part of García's first novel, *Dreaming in Cuban,* which moves between Cuba and the U.S., and between the different women and generations of one family divided by politics and the Cuban Revolution. In contrast, Edwidge Danticat left Haiti later than Díaz and García, joining her parents in New York when she was twelve. Despite this, she has always felt a strong sense of belonging tying her to Haiti: “I go to Haiti as much as I can. I still have a lot of family there. I have always lived in Haitian communities in the United States, so while I have left Haiti, it's never left me” (Danticat, “Up Close and Personal” 345). In the same way, like *Dreaming in Cuban* and *Oscar Wao*, Danticat's *Dew Breaker* navigates between the writer's homelands as each short story tells the reader about different Haitian immigrants in the U.S., all linked in their past by their traumatic encounter with the Dew Breaker, one of the infamous *Tonton Macoutes*.

The three writers thus deal with their migrant identities and inscribe their very experience of displacement in their novels, as they go back over the origin of their communities' diasporas. The historical and political contexts of the texts play an important role: as we just saw, Danticat's main character, the Dew Breaker, refers directly to the Tonton Macoutes, the rural militia created by the dictator François Duvalier. Named after the Haitian folklore tale of the Tonton Macoute, “a bogeyman who abducted naughty children at night and put them in his knapsack” (Danticat, *The Dew Breaker* 216), the Macoutes established a real reign of terror, killing, raping, and committing the worst forms of violence towards those who would oppose Duvalier's regime. The Haitian dictators are a lingering presence in Danticat's novel: François “Papa Doc” Duvalier and his son Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier, who both ruled Haiti for several decades up until 1986, caused the exile of a good share of the novel's characters. Published in early 2004, only a few days after the departure into forced exile of president Jean-Bertrand Aristide, *The Dew Breaker* also deals with post-1994 Haiti as it bears witness to the continuing violence that pervades both Haiti and the United States, and to the resurgence of ghosts from the Duvalier area (Braziel, 219).

If the Haitian dictators are influential actors in Danticat's novel, their Dominican counterpart is as much a character as Oscar in Díaz's text. Rafael Trujillo was a general of the Dominican army before seizing power during a military revolt against the former president. He ruled the country for more than thirty years, assuring his power by placing family members in the government and having his political opponents murdered.[1] He is the shadow that lingers behind the de León family's fate, and is portrayed as the Dominican "Sauron, our Arawn, our Darkseid, our One and Future Dictator" (Díaz, 2). In *Oscar Wao*, Trujillo is at the origin of the de León's *fuk*ú (curse), but also of the Dominican diaspora: "My paternal abuelo believes that diaspora was Trujillo's payback to the pueblo that betrayed him. Fukú" (Díaz, 5).

As for García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, the Revolution, Fidel Castro's regime (which still lasts today under his brother Raúl Castro) and the hardships they imposed on the people for the sake of communism are a bone of contention between the women of the novel and shape the events of their lives. Studies have suggested "the Cuban diasporic experience to be exceptionally conditioned by politics at the people-to-people as well as state level" (Eckstein, 236). Indeed, like García's family, Lourdes immigrated to the United States after Castro seized power in Cuba, a voluntary departure that marked her opposition to the island's political changes, as most of the Cuban exiles of that area (Eckstein, 34). The novel also alludes to the second wave of mass immigration, called the "Mariel boatlift," in 1980, which followed a severe economic downturn in Cuba, and at which point Castro declared to his people (as García's Lourdes witnesses it): "You are free to emigrate to whatever country will accept you" (García, 237). Finally, one has to take into account the fact that García's novel was published in 1992, in the wake of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The fall of the USSR in 1991 had a traumatic impact on Cubans: "At the time, the Cuban economy was so dependent on the superpower for aid and trade that in its absence Cuba

1 http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/607139/Rafael-Trujillo, accessed on 16/03/2014

experienced an economic depression from which it took about a decade and a half to recover" (Eckstein, 10). A "Special Period" followed the dissolution, during which the country underwent near-famine, and this lead to a third wave of immigration known as the 1994 Balseros Crisis. *Dreaming in Cuban*, just like Díaz and Danticat's texts, is thus intimately tied to the political and diasporic history of the writers' homeland.

If the historical and political context that underlies the texts is of importance, Díaz, Danticat and García's situation in the U.S. today is of no less influence to their writing. All three writers operate in the U.S. as well-established American citizens: they work, among other occupations, as creative writing professors in different universities (MIT, New York, Las Vegas, etc.); they have worked in diverse organizations and published critical essays on Haitian-Dominican, for example, or on their countries' recent politics (Díaz regularly writes essays in *The New Yorker* and other newspapers, and Danticat has published several essay collections). Their works have gained recognition and are acclaimed not only by the academic community, but also by a wider audience: the three of them have won numerous awards and honors, including a Pulitzer Price for Díaz in 2008. The recognition of Díaz, Danticat and García's works show that their voices are being heard in contemporary American literature, voices that are in constant dialogue with the writers' home countries, with their past as well as their present histories. This dialectic between the writers' multiple belongings makes up the peculiar plural and shifting identities they advocate in their texts, a conception of identity that has been developing during these last few decades.

Shifting identities

The notion of identity has become a very shifting, plural concept, especially on the American territory. Indeed, the history of the U.S. is paved with multicultural presence: since the establishment of the very first colonies in what are now the United States, and their encounter with native communities, there has not been a time when only one language was spoken, only one community was living, or only one culture was evolving (Field, 3). However, around the beginning of the twentieth century there emerged the notion of *Americanization,* the process of acculturation to Anglo-Saxon cultural norms, as a reaction to growing waves of immigration (Field, 159). The goal for immigrants and new settlers was assimilation into American society, an ideology that claimed that "all ethnic groups could be incorporated in a new American national identity, with specific shared beliefs and values, and that this would take preference over any previously held system of traditions" (Campbell and Kean, 50). This push for assimilation was based on the notion of a "true Americanness," and there was thus no recognition of ethnic difference and cultural practices other than American.

Yet, with the growth of globalization and the intermingling of populations, there has been increasing resistance to the idea of assimilation in favor of a search for a new definition of cultural identity based on "the recognition of difference" (Campbell and Kean, 40). This resistance stemmed from the recent perception of the United States as what some have called a "contact zone," a "border territory in which different cultures meet, collide, and in some instances collude with each other" (Gray, 135). This idea of the border as a space characterized by its ambiguous, ever-changing nature, a shifting place of hybridity in which antithetical elements mix, is at the core of the work of queer Chicana activist Gloría Anzaldúa. In her seminal text, *Borderlands/La Frontera: the New Mestiza* (1987), Anzaldúa develops the notion of a "mestiza consciousness," the ability to live within contradictions, to live between two worlds, two cultures and languages; to see both as home and as foreign at the same time; to have a multiple, mixed identity that allows one to develop a "tolerance for contradictions, a tolerance for ambiguity" (Anzaldúa, 101). Through Borderlands theory and the concept of mestiza consciousness, Anzaldúa proposes the notion of a plural and transgressive identity that offers the possibility to go beyond preconceived categories ("Mexican," "American," "queer" etc.) and binary conceptions ("either/or," "them/us"). Anzaldúa's conception of identity and mestiza consciousness will be key concepts in the study of Díaz, Danticat and García's texts and of the notion of a hybrid migrant identity.

Other important concepts that will be of use in the discussion of the writing of immigration are the ones formulated by postcolonial critique Homi K. Bhabha in his work *The Location of culture* (1994). Responding to the multicultural awareness that emerged in the early 1990s, his theory of cultural hybridity has deeply influenced the understanding of such notions as 'hybridity' or 'cultural difference.' His concept of hybridity, “a difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality” (Bhabha, 13), which arises out of the “culturally internalized interactions between 'colonizers' and 'the colonized'” (Yazdiha, 31), will serve in our discussion as a conceptual tool to deconstruct such labels as race, language and nation. Bhabha's cultural hybridity lies in the “interstitial passage between fixed identifications” (Bhabha, 4), in the “in-between” space within and among individuals and cultures, which do not hold a static position, but form identities in a shifting, on-going process. Finally, we shall draw on his conception of the migrant's liminal position, at the margins of the “imagined community,” which will allow us to understand Díaz, Danticat and García's texts as “counter-narratives of the nation that continually evoke and erase its totalizing boundaries – both actual and conceptual” (Bhabha, 149) – and disturb ideologies of essentialist identities.

This discourse of hybridity and cultural diversity is central to the Caribbean's political culture. The people of the archipelago have been called “the perennial travelers” (Rodriguez, 13), as the history of migration in the Caribbean stretches back to the forced migration of the slave trade from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century, to the major historical changes (like the Haitian revolution, 1791-1804) that took place in the islands, and to the history of intra-Caribbean migrant labour (Ferguson, 6). As a result, the Caribbean has been characterized by “its cultural heterogeneity, syncretism, and instability” (Dash, 5) that allow it to serve as “an island bridge connecting, in 'another way', North and South America” (Benítez-Rojo, 2). We shall keep in mind this context when discussing the writers' identities, as the Caribbean's plural nature is part and parcel of the writers' heritage: “According to the silly labels that we use in the United States, Danticat is a Haitian-American; in fact, her identity is in the hyphen, that is, in neither place: Danticat is a Caribbean writer" (Benítez-Rojo, 60). The notion of identity that we will use in this work is thus the one that lies "in the hyphen": identity is not predetermined and static any more, it is "something which is fluid, varied and multiple, and determined by social behavior" (Fuller, 32). According to Bhabha's concept of hybridity, migrants' multiple allegiances are combined to create new, hybrid identities.

Migrant literature today

If this conception of identity as a construction, of "becoming and not being," seems to predominate in the works of migrant writers of the last decades, it is nevertheless a relatively new concept. Even the understanding of migrant writers[2] as "writers who have belonged or who continue to belong to more than one nation, region, or state and who now participate in a literary system that is different from the system in which they were born, educated, or first published" (Walkowitz, 533) marks a turn from nation-based models of migrations to global ones. Indeed, critics have noted an important shift in traditional literature of migration at the end of the twentieth century, a shift that affected important aspects of this literature, like the notion of identity itself.

In the early decades of the last century, as we have seen, the dominant ideology was one of Americanization and assimilation to American values: arriving as economic, political or religious refugees, immigrants were "grateful to the US for asylum and opportunities for selfbetterment" (Mukherjee, 681). The ultimate goal for them was assimilation, and deliberate erasure of their "earlier self," their country's history and language. Saul Bellow's *Adventures of Augie March* (1953) is a good example of this desire of assimilation, as the immigrant narrator declares in the famous opening lines: "I'm an American, Chicago-born—that somber city." This is a significant declaration, as both the author and narrator were immigrants. Moreover, the new literature of migration is also distinct from

2 In this work, the terms "immigrant" and "migrant" will often be used interchangeably to designate people who left their homes to settle in a new country, here the United States. "Migrant" will also be taken as a more general term for all people moving between countries.

exile literature, as exiles, in their strong resistance to assimilation, tend to remain immured in their home culture and language. The Russian novelist Alexander Solzhenitsyn, for example, claimed to “write only for [his] homeland” (qtd. in Ha Jin, 5) and considered his eighteen years of exile in the United States as “just a long wait” (Jin, 6). In the distinction between exile and migrant literature, we can also differentiate various causes of migration: “'exile' commonly suggested an unwilled expulsion from a nation, such that no return is possible […] while 'migrant' suggested a relatively voluntary departure with possibility of return” (Mardorossian, 18). Times have changed, and we have passed from an epoch of “revolutionary nationalism and militant anticommunism” to one of “capitalist triumphalism” (Mardorossian, 17) which allows new kinds of transnational travels and migrations. One of the aims of our discussion will be to show how the works of Díaz, Danticat and García move away from the assimilationist goal as well as the literature of exile to foster texts that establish their plural ethnic identities in the contemporary global world.

The specificity and novelty of novels such as *Oscar Wao, The Dew Breaker* and *Dreaming in Cuban* will indeed become apparent as they break with the narrative tradition of American immigrant literature. The “Literature of New Arrival,” as Bharati Mukherjee calls it, presents a world that is not longer conceptualized as “here” and “there,” as it was in the work of V.S. Naipaul, for example, but redefines it as a “global space of ongoing travel and transcontinental connection” (Walkowitz, 533). The very notion of “home,” as we shall see, is then redefined, as the emphasis is now put on movement, rootlessness, and hybridity. The discussion on Díaz, Danticat and García's novels will analyze how these works are part of a “new stage in the history of the novel” (Saldivar, 3) which display new relationships between the experience of migration and the process of representing it. Fragmented narratives, overcrowded casts, hybrid languages or blending of genres and codes are some of the characteristics this “Literature of New Arrival” deals with, in an attempt to transcribe the “fierce urgency of obscure history” (Mukherjee, 683). As we shall now see, recent immigrant fiction is indeed immersed in history: immigration is not about erasing homeland history to embrace one's new American identity any more, but about asking “how do we live with the past? How do we tailor it so we can go about living our daily lives?” (García, *The Agüero Sisters* 305).

Part I: the writing of History

The aim of this first part will be to discuss the way Díaz, Danticat and García deal with the question of history in their novels. History is indeed a constant presence in our three texts, be it in Yunior's footnotes, in Celia's letters or in *The Dew Breaker*'s underlying allusions: "History is very present in Haiti. We're always talking about the past because the present is either a recycling of the past or an echo of it or is too painful itself to discuss […]. The past is always with us. History is, after all, just another story" (Danticat, "Up Close and Personal" 352). This makes of Díaz, Danticat and García writers "whose literary identity is determined by history" (Alvarez-Borland, 43): unlike early migrant literature, which disregarded history and the past to embrace the migrant's present, the writers attempt to find the best way to recapture and represent in their novels a past that is still weighing on their present, and to write their nation's History in a way that acknowledges the diasporic experience of their communities and their own position as migrant writers.

To better understand what kind of writing of History the authors propose in their novels, we will discuss the traumatic histories of the Dominican Republic, Haiti and Cuba, and the influence they had on the very form of the narration. We will then address the literary devices brought into play by the authors to confront the gaps left by trauma, such as magic realism, polyvocality or the mix of facts and fiction. These tools allow the writers to approach a certain "Caribbean mode of understanding and of representing History" (Hanna, 509) that is an integrated part of the authors' identity and expression. We will then analyze how, from their position of "outsiders within," migrant writers can approach "the modern Western nation from the perspective of the nation's margin and the migrant's exile" Bhabha, 139), and offer alternatives to official narratives, thus giving voice to the "nameless lives" of Diaspora.

Past traumas

Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic are nations that have been devastated by merciless dictatorships, massacres and repressions in the course of their history. Writing their countries' history is thus a way for the writers to narrate their nations' violent and traumatic past and, by that, to give voice to the people who experienced these events. Yet, as we will see, Díaz, Danticat and García's texts are characterized by a fragmented, hybrid form of which silence is one aspect. This fractured nature of the novels testifies to the difficulty of translating trauma into words, of fully expressing it, as its "determining feature […] is that it is unsayable (Gray, 136) and that it can only be "narrated elusively" (K. C. Davis, 253). If traumatic events escape language and leave *páginas en blanco* in the nation and the characters' history, their writing is yet a necessary one, as the "first step toward recovery is testimony" (Gray, 130).

Fragmented narratives

Díaz, Danticat and García's novels indeed display a form and structure that are influenced by the countries' traumatic pasts and echo the immigrant movement: they are not fluid and smooth, but fractured, disrupted and characterized by displacement.

Firstly, on a chronological perspective, time is anything but linear, as our three books jump in time, be it forward or backward. In *Oscar Wao*, the narrative starts – after a brief preface by the narrator – with Oscar's childhood, from 1974 to 1987, which follows the sense, given by the title, that we are going to read about the life of a character named Oscar. Yet, the second part of this first chapter takes a few steps back and covers the years 1982 to 1985. This jump in time reflects the change of character: the section focuses on Lola, Oscar's sister. The entire book follows this to and fro movement between the characters and time periods, sometimes backtracking from several decades in order to retrace Oscar's grandparents' history, yet always coming back to Oscar. Indeed, after Lola's part we land in 1955, when Beli was a child living with La Inca, before finally bringing the first chapter to a conclusion with Oscar, between 1988 and 1992. The second chapter, after a preface by Lola, starts in 1944, when Abelard, Oscar and Lola's grandfather, casts the *fukú* on the family. Here again, the chapter ends with Oscar, in 1992-1995. Finally, the last chapter stands out from the rest of the book as there are no exact dates given, and it is devoted to Oscar and what happens after his death. When the narrator loses himself in past times and in the story of other characters – or even of the Dominican Republic – Oscar thus seems to be the line of the book and his *fukú* fate the end towards which all things lead. Except from this non linear structure, the narrative also seems at times to return to the "present", or time of writing, and refers to either the situation of the characters in the present, or to the book being written: "Even now as I write these words [...]" (Díaz, 7). As we shall later see, these moments of self-referentiality are common in Díaz's novel, and contribute to bringing the narrator, Yunior, closer to the figure of the author-writer and to lay bare his flaws as a historian of the de Leóns.

This chaotic chronology is echoed in García's and Danticat's novels. Indeed, *Dreaming in Cuban* seems at first sight a clearly structured book, containing a table of contents and a genealogical tree at the opening of the text, which makes the links between the characters clear while presenting the novel from the start as a familial one. However, this rigid frame does not prevent the text from getting quite entangled. One can notice that the chronology gets less and less linear, especially in the second chapter, frequently overlapping or retrograding a year or two as we go from 1974-1976, to 1975-1976, and from 1978 to 1977-1978, and so on. Furthermore, the text is regularly punctuated with Celia's letters. These letters are inserted in the narration without any chronological – or logical – link with the co-text: the first letters date from 1942, whereas the book starts in 1972, with the death of Celia's husband. If the narrative ends in 1980, with Celia's probable death, the book closes on her last letter, which is dated symbolically from 1959, the year of both the Cuban Revolution and Pilar's birth. It is important to note that the narrative ends with Pilar's birth, since she is the one who will remember, as Celia often asserts, and who will record the story of her family.

Not only do the dates overlap, but García's text is also repeatedly interrupted by the characters' memories, mixing up past and present. For example, in “A Grove of Lemons,” Lourdes is on her way home from the bakery and thinks she can detect the smell of her father. This impression then starts a series of memories from her childhood: “Lourdes thinks she detects the scent of her father's cigar, but when she turns there's only a businessman hailing a taxi. […] When Lourdes was a child in Cuba, she used to wait anxiously for her father […]” (García, 68). This will bring back other memories to Lourdes, like the one of her arrival in the United States, or the memory of her rape by two revolutionary soldiers. The link between the characters' life and memories in García, between past and present, echoes the operating mode of dreams, progressing by associations: Jorge's scent reminds Lourdes of waiting for her father to return from his trips, and of the baseball games they watched together when he was home, which reminds her of the games they watched on the hospital TV, years later in New York, which then reminds her of her very move to the U.S. The chronological "chaos" in *Dreaming in Cuban*, as the title suggests, thus reflects the time haziness of dreams, which is not necessarily linear but often jumps backwards or forwards.

Edwidge Danticat's *Dew Breaker* also shows a complex chronological link between its different stories. As s/he reads the novel, the reader is forced to reevaluate and change his/her presumptions about the story as s/he discovers that, despite the apparent autonomy of each of the different stories, they are all linked to each other and are part of the same encompassing story. If the first story is taken to happen in the present of narration, then one can try to relate the rest of the collection from that first point of departure: for example, the fourth short story ("The Book of Miracles") necessarily takes place before the first one, as Ka does not know about her father's past yet. The seventh one ("Monkey Tails") is one of the only stories to have a specific date: “07.02.1986 – 07.02.2004,” and thus consists in a retrospective of a past event in the life of Michel, which he recounts to his future child in what seems to correspond to the present of narration. The eighth story ("The Funeral Singer") this time clearly happens in the past, in all likelihood in the seventies, at the time of the Duvalier dictatorship. The last short story ("The Dew Breaker") also starts with the mention of a date: "Circa 1967" (Danticat, 183), and thus seems to be either contemporaneous to the eighth story, or even older. Recounting the last mission of the Dew Breaker, the narrative nevertheless catches up with the first story in its last section, and comes back in a cyclical move to Anne, just after the events of "The Book of the Dead": "When her daughter called from Lakeland after her husband's confession to ask, 'Manman, how do you love him?' she was sitting at the kitchen table, eating a piece of pie" (Danticat, 239). Time is not specified in the other stories of the collection, although one can tell that they take place in the present, more or less at the same time as the first story. The reader has thus to read Danticat's text actively: s/he is the one who has to untangle the chronological link between the stories in order to find out what really happened all those years ago.

These remarks on the chronology of Díaz, García and Danticat's novels can easily be repeated when considering the notion of space in the texts. Indeed, one of the reasons migration literature is said to be characterized by movement (Mardorossian, 16) is that the narration constantly shifts from a story happening in the United States to one taking place in the characters' homeland. Danticat's short stories are rather well divided between those taking place in Haiti (only three out of the nine stories) and those happening in the U.S. In *Dreaming in Cuban*, the novel starts in Cuba (which is mentioned at the end of the very first sentence, testifying to the importance of the country in the text), but switches to the U.S. when the narrative centers on Lourdes and her family in New York. The setting changes every time the focus goes from the del Pinos to the Puentes, yet it never gets tangled up: "[…] the geographic transition from Cuba to the United States is often imperceptible, because that is the way the characters experience the transition" (R. G. Davis, 62). The movement between the countries and the characters is thus not radical, and they all gather in Cuba in the final chapter ("The Languages Lost").

Unlike Danticat and García's texts, *Oscar Wao* is more entangled: the novel starts in the U.S., at the time of Oscar and Lola's childhood, but the setting quickly moves to the Dominican Republic, when Lola is sent to La Inca after an umpteenth fight with her mother, Beli. The narrative then goes on in the Dominican Republic, with the story of the young years of Beli, up until the time she moved to the U.S., where the next section takes place. These shifts between the U.S. and the Dominican Republic go on throughout the book and, here as in García and Danticat's novels, show that there is a constant dialogue between the different settings, and that the destiny of the characters is profoundly tied to the different countries. If trauma can only be told "aslant, […] almost by stealth" (Gray, 136) and thus creates fragmented narratives, the act of writing and, as we will now see, recounting the past is a way to fill the gap between the "here/there" dichotomy. The characters go to and fro between the countries, and there are no clear boundaries between the different times and settings in the novels as "the world inhabited by the characters is no longer conceptualized as 'here' and 'there'" (Mardorossian, 16) or "now" and "then," but as an inclusive continuum.

Giving voice to silence

Another aspect of the writing of History that contributes to the complexity of the texts is that the issue of violence and trauma eventually prevents events from being fully reconstructed, as some parts of the characters' story, but also of their countries' history, are silenced. Díaz's Yunior tells about a "lingering unease when it comes to talking about the regime" (Díaz, 119): the traumatic events are too recent to be dealt with and people are still afraid to talk about them. However, the effects of trauma are offset by a certain "emergency of present-day history" that one can feel, for example, in Haiti, where "the fall of the dictatorship, in 1986, generated the need to tell, before it was too late, these thirty years of silence" (Parisot, 122, my translation). A need to tell, we will see, that tries to overcome the muting power of trauma.

In García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, the Revolution has worked as a form of trauma, as it left Cuba in a sort of limbo (Machado Sáez, "The Global Baggage" 142), and laid bare the political rifts between the women of the del Pino family, leading Lourdes to immigrate to the U.S.: "I was sitting on my grandmother's lap

[…] when my mother told her we were leaving the country. Abuela Celia called her a traitor to the revolution" (García, 26). The members of the family are torn as they do not understand each other, they do not accept other political views than their own, and the different generations are often not on the same line: "[Felicia] makes pronouncements that Ivanito doesn't understand" (85). This failure of communication is frequent in the novel, as the characters often do not understand each other ("'Jorge, I couldn't hear you. I couldn't hear you'" 5), their words do not make sense ("Not until later […] did Lourdes try to read what he had carved. But it was illegible" 72) or find themselves unable to speak: "[Felicia] opens her mouth but her thoughts erase themselves before she can speak. Something is wrong with her tongue. It forms broken trails of words, words sealed and resistant as stones" (83). This dialogue of the deaf continues until the end of the novel, when silence comes upon Celia, who steps into "the black sea that awaits [her] voice" (243), and declares in her last letter – her correspondence is itself a one-sided conversation as she never sends any of her letters to Gustavo – that she will no longer write to her Spanish lover. The women of the family will need Pilar, who represents the new generation of migrants, to "remember everything" (245), to reconstruct their story, to put together their fractured narrative and split family. Pilar "Puente" (bridge) is the one who will reunite their discourses, if not their points of view.

The effect of trauma on people's narratives can also be sensed in Danticat's novel, which is governed by a speech and silence dynamic. Indeed, from the start, we are told to "read it... quietly, quietly" (Osip Mandelstam in Danticat, epigraph): what is contained is not to be told out loud, but rather whispered. Silence is everywhere in the book, everywhere the Dew Breaker went, leaving his victims without speech, without the possibility to either tell their story, nor forget it: "He hadn't been a famous 'dew breaker,' or torturer, anyway, just one of hundreds who had done their jobs so well that their victims were never able to speak of them again" (Danticat, 77). This dialectic between speech and silence is perhaps best shown in the third story ("Water Child"), in which Nadine, a nurse working with "post-op patients" (55) who cannot speak after their operation, finds herself incapable of calling her parents in Haiti, or her lover in the United States. Her patients, like Ms Hind, have lost the ability to speak and must learn to communicate by writing what they want to say. Yet, other people come to her with their “electively mute, newly arrived immigrant children […] even though there [is] nothing wrong with their vocal cords” (56). There is here the idea that immigration, like trauma, imposes a silence upon people, who must go through stages of silence and code-switching before adopting a new language. Danticat's novel moreover ends on a silence, a miscommunication between Anne and her daughter, Ka. Indeed, in the first story, we witness Ka hanging up on her mother after hearing the latter confirm what Ka's father has told her. Yet, in the last story, Anne, not noticing that her daughter is no longer on the line, goes on and explains the last part of the story, after her husband's reconversion: “In the middle of all this incoherent muttering, she realized that her daughter had hung up the phone. […] There was now a strange mechanical voice on the line telling her to 'hang up and try again'” (241). Ka did not hear her mother's explanation about her father's reconversion, and is thus unable to grasp the link between the prison guard and the father she knows.

Silence thus eventually triumphs in Danticat's novel. Just like in *Dreaming in Cuban*, communication between the characters keeps failing, and silence more than often has the last word: in “Water Child”, when Nadine finally calls her parents it is only to exchange trite remarks and quickly hang up; when she feels ready to hear Eric's voice and calls him, she discovers that he has changed his number; and if she has succeeded in comforting Ms. Hinds, Nadine knows that the “relief she must be feeling now would only last for a while, the dread of being voiceless hitting her anew each day as though it had just happened” (66). In “Night Talkers,” Dany never gets to tell his aunt what he came to tell her, as he is either interrupted by Old Zo or by his aunt sudden death. And if he manages to tell her everything in his dreams, her aunt has not heard what he needed to tell her in reality: “Dany woke himself with the sound of his own voice reciting his story. […] 'Da, were you dreaming about your parents? […] You were calling their names'” (108).

There is moreover no escaping from their past, as the characters cannot forget what the Dew Breaker did to them: "'You never look at anyone the way you do someone like this. [...] No one will ever have that much of your attention. No matter how much he'd changed, I would know him anywhere'" (132). In "The Bridal Seamstress," Beatrice ends up irrevocably talking about her encounter with the Dew Breaker whilst interviewed on her career: "'What are you going to do after you retire?' Aline asked, trying to complete the interview. 'Move, again.' […] 'Why?' Aline asked. […] 'We called them choukèt lawoze […]. He was one of them, the guard'" (131). The characters are haunted by their past, and feel the need to tell their stories, even if this means going all the way to Haiti, as Dany does, or recording it on a tape, like Michel in "Monkey Tails." In the first short story, the Dew Breaker himself needs to confess to his daughter: "I am not sure I want to know anything more […] but it is clear to me that he needs to tell me, has been trying to for a long time" (21). The characters and the Dew Breaker himself are marked by their past, bear all kinds of scars – Beatrice's devastated feet (131) or, of course, the Dew Breaker's large facial scar – as witnesses of past traumas and their inescapable weight on the present.

Besides the fact that the characters' "tremendous agonies [fill] every blank space in their lives" (137) and that silence overrides speech, the novel's ending is not entirely pessimistic. Indeed, the text shows that there is a possibility for redemption as the Dew Breaker and his wife, but also Claude in "Night Talkers," are allowed a second chance when they managed to confess their crimes and create a new life and identity. Like Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuban*, Ka is the one who will allow speech to be reborn between her parents, and who will guide them toward redemption: "In the early years, there had been more silence than words between them. But when their daughter was born, they were forced to talk to and about her. […] She was like an orator at a pantomime. She was their Ka, their good angel" (Danticat 241). Here again, the second-generation migrants enable discourse to form around the traumas of the diaspora.

Díaz's *Oscar Wao*, in turn, acknowledges the persistence of certain *páginas en blanco* (that in some cases are today "still blanca" 90) as people refuse, or are unable, to talk about their traumas: "Of those nine years (and of the Burning) Beli did not speak. […] It says a lot about Beli that for *forty years* she never leaked word one about that period of her life" (258). Yunior, who tries to reconstruct Oscar and his family's story, is limited by the information he can collect, but also by the willingness of his sources to talk about their pasts:

> We are trawling in silences here. Trujillo and Company didn't leave a paper trail […]. The remaining Cabrals ain't much help either; on all matters related to Abelard's imprisonment and to the subsequent destruction of the clan there is within the family a silence that stands monument to the generations, that sphinxes all attempts at narrative reconstruction. A whisper here and there but nothing more (243).

The violence and unspeakable events of the dictatorship can only be narrated elusively as they left "páginas en blanco" in the lives of the Dominicans and in their memories. The fact that the traumatic events escape narration furthermore testifies to the "limits of representation and of the storytelling process" (K. C. Davis, 253), and to the need to find a way around these blank pages, through imagination, creation and literature, to reconstruct one's story. This last aspect of the writing of History will be discussed in the next section.

The different aspects that are part of the novels' fragmentation are thus a way to account for the reality of migration, as "the texts' form requires the reader to enter into the position of the immigrant" (Hanna, 514). There is indeed a parallel between the fragmented form of the texts and the immigrant's experience: the discontinuities in time and space allow the authors to emphasize "movement, rootlessness, and the mixing of cultures, races, and languages" (Mardorossian, 16); and the dialectic between silence and speech, echoed in the very experience of the immigrant ("So much of our experience as Caribbean Diasporic peoples, so much of it, exists in silence" says Díaz, "Junot Díaz" 92), testifies to this abrupt transition from Third to First World, as Díaz would put it, which cannot be fully grasped, yet needs to be put into words.

Realisms and fictions

The writing of History has to deal with traumatic stories, in which fragmentation and silence dominate. When trying to approach and rewrite their countries' histories, the writers have to confront these gaps left by past traumas through writing, imagination and, thus, fiction. The narratives they create are realistic fictions, yet they also make space for alternative worlds through the mix of reality and fiction, history and imagination, thus creating counter-discourses able to grasp the Caribbean texture of reality.

Spirituality and magic realism

Spirituality and magic realism are two literary devices that one can find in our novels, as they are important aspects of the realities of the writers' homelands. Here, they represent the best tools to grasp the nature and the understanding of truth and reality in the Caribbean.

In Díaz's *Oscar Wao*, the supernatural and the every day life are brought closer: besides the novel's running theme of the *fukú* and the writer's use of the comic book genre and its discourse of heroism - of which we will talk more later - Trujillo himself is portrayed as a supernatural being: "Shit was so tight that many people actually believed that Trujillo had supernatural powers! It was whispered that he [...] could see, smell, feel events hundreds of miles away, that he was protected by the most evil fukú on the Island" (226). Making people believe he had superpowers was part of Trujillo's propaganda, as it allowed him to create an image of himself as a God-like figure ("the national slogan was 'Dios y Trujillo'" 3) through a special aura of power and fascination that inspired fear and respect. Haiti's 'Papa Doc' Duvalier used the same strategy, as he would dress every day like Baron Samedi, the spirit that guarded cemeteries in Haiti: "People thought he roamed the streets at night personally looking for them. When he died, my mother said, a strong wind swept down around the earth, probably a protest in hell" (Danticat in Díaz, "Junot Díaz" 94). The same strategy lies behind the National

Security militia's use of the folkloric tale of the Tonton Macoute, or Rosalie's female force called Fillette Lalo, “after a rhyme most of the country grew up singing, a parable about a woman who eats children” (Danticat, *Dew Breaker* 217). Magical realism, the mingling of realistic events or characters with surreal ones, is thus part of the countries' realities. It was used in their very politics and histories by the dictators, but it is also used as a way to help people understand what happened: “And believing Trujillo to be a super-being can be a narrative of consolation for a pueblo, but it can also be a useful metaphor to understand what we're really dealing with” (Díaz, “Junot Díaz” 94).

Another supernatural element in Díaz's *Oscar Wao* is the appearance of the Mongoose, who always arrives just in time to save the characters as they are about to commit suicide or get beaten down for falling in love with the wrong person: “So as Beli was flitting in and out of life, there appeared at her side a creature that would have been an amiable mongoose if not for its golden lion eyes and the absolute black of its pelt” (149). Each time, the narrator underlines the surreal nature of this appearance, linking it with the alternative reality of science fiction (“[...] there was something straight out of Ursula Le Guin standing by his side” 190) or with the Caribbean's liking for what is supernatural: “But no matter what the truth, remember: Dominicans are Caribbean and therefore have an extraordinary tolerance for extreme phenomena” (149). According to Yunior, the supernatural is part of the Caribbean's way of understanding life, of its mindset.

This Caribbean's tendency toward things unearthly can also be sensed in García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, in which several ghosts appear. Celia's husband, Jorge del Pino, first visits her on the night of his death: “At the far end of the sky, where daylight begins, a dense radiance like a shooting star breaks forth. It weakens as it advances, as its outline takes shape in the ether. Her husband emerges from the light and comes toward her” (5). Jorge will later also appear to his favorite daughter, Lourdes, in the streets of New York: “'Lourdes, I'm back,' Jorge del Pino greets his daughter forty days after she buried him” (64). It is hard to determine whether the women are disturbed by Jorge's ghost, as they both seem to accept his appearance as a rather natural thing, showing no real surprise and not questioning it *per se.* Nevertheless, they still express a certain uneasiness: Felicia tells her friend Herminia that her father "show[ed] up at [her] mother's house and nearly scare[d] her half to death" as she "dove in the ocean after him" (12); and Lourdes has to ask her husband to reassure her as she thinks "she has exhausted reality": "Things are wrong, Rufino, very wrong" (65). Felicia, who has a "true vocation to the supernatural" (186), is the only one who does not seem scared or surprised at all when she hears of her father's appearance: "'Your father, he came to say good-bye.' […] 'You mean he was in the neighborhood and didn't even stop by?'" (9). Ghosts thus seem to be part of reality for the del Pino women and an important tool to make sense of their pasts and – almost – reach peace with it, as Jorge del Pino explains to Lourdes why her mother would "not remember her name" (74).

In García's novel, Pilar is the one with supernatural powers: since she was born, she has had "*bruja* ways," scaring off her nannies who in turn accused her to be "bewitched" (24). Besides this predisposition, Pilar can talk to her grandmother through the ocean, and see her dreams: "I know what my grandmother dreams. Of massacres in distant countries, pregnant women dismembered in the squares" (218). After being attacked in the park, her abilities are multiplied as she can now predict the future and hear other people's thoughts: "Since that day in Morningside Park, I can hear fragments of people's thoughts, glimpse scraps of the future. It's nothing I can control" (216). Violence and suffering thus seem to be triggers for the introduction of surreal elements in the characters' reality. Despite Pilar's doubts and hesitations about her origins, these supernatural powers of hers inscribe her in a Caribbean lineage as the true heir of the del Pino family.

The women of García's novel are also spiritual women, although each in their own way. Celia and Lourdes are rather rational, down-to-earth women and do not approve of Felicia's involvement in the *Santería*, a widespread African derived religion in Cuba. Felicia is fascinated by its rites and ceremonies, which appear several times in the novel, and the religion takes up an increasingly central role in her life. Indeed, she is first reticent to offer a goat in sacrifice to be at peace with her father ("'We'll have an emergency session tonight.' 'I don't know, Herminia.' Felicia believes in the gods' benevolent powers, she just can't stand the blood" 12), yet, at the end of the novel, she gives herself completely to the *Santería* and undertakes the final initiation, the *asiento*: "She wanted to prove to the *orishas* that she was a true believer, serious and worthy of serving them, so she continued her rituals" (189). Celia will try, in vain, to discourage her daughter from this religion and will hold it responsible for Felicia's disappearance and eventual death. Celia's faith is uniquely directed toward El Líder, who she revers and devotes her life to after her husband's death. Her children even suspect something perverse in her devotion to Castro: "How her mother worships him! She keeps a framed photograph of him by her bed, where her husband's picture used to be. […] In fact, Felicia can't help feeling that there is something unnatural in her mother's attraction to him, something sexual" (110). Lourdes, too, does not approve of her mother's adoration for El Líder: "'Can you believe this *mierda*?' My mother snatches the picture of El Líder off Abuela's night table" (219). For their part, Lourdes and her father are conventional, fervent Christians: Jorge spends his last days in a Christian hospital ("Sisters of Charity Hospital") and Lourdes immediately thinks her father's supernatural death is a resurrection (10). The fact that Jorge appears to his daughter forty days after his death also contributes to link him to Christian traditions. The three del Pino women present a panorama of different Cuban faiths, yet none of these are presented as superior to any other. Indeed, on occasion, all three are depicted in a comical way (one can think about the first *Santería* ritual told in the novel, 14-15, about Lourdes and the nun's interpretation of Jorge's death, 19-20, or Felicia's brief time with the guerilla in "The Meaning of Shells") and are thus not endorsed by the narrator.

Spirituality is thus important for García's women, just as it is for Díaz and Danticat's characters. For example, the Mongoose is not the only power at work during Beli and Oscar's episodes in the cane fields: indeed, La Inca, soon joined by several women, unleashes the power of faith and prayer: "Let me tell you, True Believers: in the annals of Dominican piety there has never been prayer like this. […] Through the numinous power of prayer La Inca saved the girl's life, laid an A-plus zafa on the Cabral family fukú" (Díaz, 144; 155). Díaz intertwines spirituality with the surreal Mongoose, a mix of genres that stay true to the narrative strategy at work in the novel. As for Danticat's *Dew Breaker*, the whole text is studded with the Christian notions of forgiveness and redemption. Anne's faith saved both her and her husband and allowed them to embrace a new life. In "The Book of Miracles," Anne's piety is linked to her liking for miracles, examples of which she tells on the way to the Christmas Eve Mass. Anne's daughter makes at that moment an interesting remark: "'How come these people are all foreigners?' […] 'People here are more practical, maybe,' the daughter said, 'but there, in Haiti or the Philippines, that's where people see everything, even things they're not supposed to see" (73). Here again, the belief in "extreme phenomena" is labeled as something foreign, not American, and contributes to binding the characters to an Otherness, an origin that is outside the U.S.

Díaz, Danticat and García thus give in their work another texture to reality and history by mixing them with spirituality and the surrealism of magic realism. The latter, which designates the juxtaposition of reliable, realistic reportage and extravagant fantasy,[3] is seen as a device that is able to capture the nature of Latin American or Caribbean reality:

> In countries previously ruled despotically as colonies and subsequently negotiating independence with no long-established institutions or freedoms, the fact that information can easily be manipulated or even commandeered by power groups makes truth a far more provisional, relative entity. […] Indeed, the genre's further assumption […] is that truth is best viewed as a communal, collaborative construct […].[4]

Magic realism, and the alternative reality or worldview it proposes, is thus presented as a Caribbean mode of understanding and representing history. Moreover, its form suits well the "state of diaspora […] as it is by definition an encounter between two different worldviews" (Hanna, 512), between different approaches to reality and different versions of history and truth, as we shall see at present.

3 Oxford Reference Online, accessed on 04/11/2014.
4 *Idem.*

Multiple histories, multiple truths

Díaz, Danticat and García's novels indeed attest that truth and history can be relative and plural, and that there can be different versions to a same story. The novels' main subjects are constantly interrupted, not only by other characters' stories, but also by the story of the writers' homeland. This allows the texts to present several perspectives and different points of view to the narration. By offering multiple versions of the same events, the texts show that there is neither only one side to a story, nor only one way to tell it, and that the reader should be aware of the fluidity of truth and history as s/he has to choose which story s/he wants to read and believe.

Crowded texts

The assumption that “truth is best viewed as a communal, collaborative construct” is endorsed by the writers, as their texts stage multiple characters and multiple scraps of life entangled in the “bigger picture” of the main characters' stories. In this way they present plural, collective truths made up of all the different realities of the characters.

If the titles of Díaz, Danticat and García's novels seem to announce the character on which the story will center (namely Oscar, the Dew Breaker and Celia), the reader soon realizes that the texts also encompass the stories of the family members, friends, or complete strangers evolving around the main characters. In Danticat's collection, we encounter numerous characters over the different short stories. These characters can sometimes be very close to the Dew Breaker (Anne and Ka, his wife and daughter), but they can also have nothing to do with him, like Nadine, in the third story (“Water Child”), or the group of girls in “The Funeral Singer.” We actually encounter the main character in his absence: Ka's father is mysteriously missing in the first story, and we follow no more than his shadow in the next short stories, discovering a ghost that ruined the other characters' life, referred to only as “the prison guard” or “the fat man” (128; 210).

We learn about the Dew Breaker, about what he did and the consequences of his actions, from the perspective of his victims. The only time we have access to his point of view is at the very end of the collection, in the last section ("The Dew Breaker”). His story, that we began to catch a glimpse of in the first chapter, seems to be interrupted by the ones of his victims. Yet, one realizes over the text that they are in fact intimately involved with one another: if the characters' slices of life interrupt the Dew Breaker's conversation with his daughter, their lives were also interrupted by what he did to them. For example, Alice's interview in the “The Bridal Seamstress” was supposed to be about Beatrice, the bridal seamstress of the title, yet they end up speaking about the Haitian prison guard living down the road; in “Night Talkers,” it is to talk about his parents' murderer that Dany undertakes the journey to his aunt's village in Haiti; and Anne cannot stop thinking about her life with her husband, her search for forgiveness, for her and for him in “The Book of Miracles” and “The Dew Breaker”: “'Okay, Manman, please, tell us about another miracle.' *A long time ago [...] in Haiti, your father worked in a prison. Now look at him.* […] That was the miracle Anne wanted to share with her daughter” (72).

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, the strong structure holds its role: the different sections alternate between the two groups of characters (the del Pinos in Cuba on one side, the Puentes in New York on the other), and are clearly divided, each section starting with the full name of its main character. In García's novel too we do not only follow Celia's story, but also the one of her children and grandchildren (Felicia, Lourdes, Pilar, Luz y Milagro, and Ivanito) which, in the end, are all closely related. In addition, if Celia's letters give rhythm to the text, they also interrupt the flow of the story as they talk about another time, another part of the life of the characters. For example, the letters from 1956 to 1958 talk about Lourdes and Rufino's wedding (205-209), when, on the previous page, we were witnessing Pilar being attacked in New York, and deciding to go back to Cuba (202-203). Finally, in Díaz's book, we saw that the narration regularly jumps in time and space, but also from character to character: Oscar's supposedly “Brief and Wondrous Life” is constantly interrupted by the tale of the members of his family's past (Lola, Beli, Abelard) and especially by the narrator, Yunior.

Díaz, Danticat and García's novels encompass the stories of multiple different characters that build up the collective narration of their community. In doing so, the writers show that there is not a unique story, a unique truth, but a plurality of stories, a collective understanding of truth and, as we shall see, of versions of history.

A polyvocal texture

Multiple characters thus evolve in these texts, interrupting the main story, and sometimes overshadowing the characters we thought we were going to read about, and the voice we had identified as being the narrator's. These multiple characters give a polyvocal texture to the three novels as we constantly change narrators, points of view and versions of (His-)stories.

In Díaz's *Oscar Wao*, we gradually understand the identity of the narrator: the "I" first presents himself as an anonymous and omniscient persona in the beginning of the book, up until the point where we can identify him as "Yunior," Lola's boyfriend when she was in college and, eventually, Oscar's roommate. Yunior's name appears with the beginning of his love story with Lola, and with his failed attempt at taking Oscar's life in charge: "Two days later Lola calls from Spain, five o'clock in the morning. What the fuck is your *problem*, Yunior? Tired of the whole thing. I said, without thinking, Oh, fuck off, Lola" (179). From this point, Yunior becomes more and more present in the story, often shifting the focus of the text to his story and state of mind. But Yunior's is not the only voice we hear in *Oscar Wao*: Lola tells her story in the first person singular in the second section of the first chapter: "A punk chick. That's what I became" (54). If Beli's story is told by Yunior-narrator in the third person, some first-person interjections are inserted in the narration, as if Beli was interrupting Yunior when he is writing the story: "It felt unbelievably good to Beli, shook her to her core. (*For the first time I actually felt like I owned my skin, like it was me and I was it*)" (127). In the sixth section, Oscar's last trip to the Dominican Republic, Yunior assumes the narration of the story, but some parts are supposedly told by other characters, as if they were testifying: “LA INCA SPEAKS / He didn't meet her on the street like he told you. […] YBÓN, AS RECORDED BY OSCAR / I never wanted to come back to Santo Domingo” (289). Díaz's text is thus crossed by several voices, each of them trying to tell their own story or their own version of what happened, adding to the illusion of objectivity and veracity the narrator wants to give his text.

In *Dreaming in Cuba*, too, we have multiple characters and multiple voices telling the story of the del Pino family. The narration is told in third person, although several characters use the “I” pronoun: Pilar, who will turn out to be the main narrator, but also Luz and Herminia. In “The Meaning of Shells,” Luz seems to be writing in a diary, or a letter, from the twins' boarding school: “We're back at boarding school now” (125). As for Herminia, we understand later that her section (“God's Will”) is what came out during her talk with Pilar, who directly transcribes it as it is in the text: “Afterward, Pilar pulls me aside and asks me to take her to Herminia Delgado's house. […] We listen to stories about my mother as a child […]” (231). Ivanito's sections are also in first person, except for the first one he appears in (“The Fire Between Them”), when a five-year-old Ivanito watches his mother dance, and might be too young to remember this scene and to be the one telling it. Celia's letters, of course, are written in the first person, as they are inserted as such in the novel. Cristina García's text thus contains multiple voices, each trying to tell his/her story, his/her version, as the voices criss-cross, clash, but also join in a sort of canon.

However, if *Oscar Wao* and *Dreaming in Cuba* seem to stage a multiplicity of voices and of different characters telling their stories, the reader notices little by little that these texts are not truly polyvocal. Indeed, the two novels both only actually have one narrator: in *Oscar Wao*, Yunior is the one recounting Oscar's story, collecting the testimonies of the de León family and the letters and diaries he found after Oscar's death from different sources. He filters the other characters' voices through his own, regardless of whether they are in first, second, or third person. A few allusions are made throughout the book of what Oscar left behind:

“I'll take [Isis] down to my basement and open the four refrigerators where I store [Lola's] brother's books, his games, his manuscript, his comic books, his papers – refrigerators the best poof against fire, against earthquake, against almost anything” (330).

In García's novel as well we understand, almost at the end, that the story we are reading is told from the voice of a single narrator: Pilar. From the start, we learn that Pilar is the one who “records everything” and remembers “even word-for-word conversations” from when she was two years old (7; 26). There is a special connection between Celia and her granddaughter all along the book, as they communicate in thoughts through the ocean: “Abuela Celia and I write to each other sometimes, but mostly I hear her speaking to me at night just before I fall asleep” (29). After this connection suddenly breaks (119), the actual handing over of the family history, of Celia's memories, takes place: “Abuela gives me a box of letters she wrote to her onetime lover in Spain, but never sent. […] She also gives me a book of poems she's had since 1930, when she heard García Lorca read at the Principal de la Comedia Theater” (235). This transfer had actually already started on the day Pilar was born, as it tallies with Celia's last letter to Gustavo: “My granddaughter, Pilar Puente del Pino, was born today. […] I will no longer write to you, *mi amor*. She will remember everything” (245). Celia already knows that Pilar will be the one who will record and tell the family's story, just as she used to do in her letters. To do that, Pilar collects the testimonies of other characters: “I talk and talk to my cousin Pilar late at night on the beach. […] Pilar has tried to talk to the twins, but they answer her in monosyllables” (228-229). This would explain why Herminia, Pilar and her cousins' parts are the only ones in first person. Pilar is then a more reliable narrator than Díaz's Yunior as she faithfully renders Celia's letters or people's testimonies in her narration. Unlike Yunior, Pilar never interferes with the other characters' stories, enabling them to be freely heard. In spite of the apparent polyphony of the novels, Pilar and Yunior are thus the architects behind the multiple stories they try to reassemble.

The Dew Breaker, in turn, presents the particularity of embodying a series of short stories, each told by a different character with a separate point of view. As such, it is maybe the only one of our novels to be truly polyvocal. If the majority of the stories are told from a third person, objective perspective, three of them are narrated in the first person. For example, the first one ("The Book of the Dead") is told by Ka, even though it is not her own story she wants to tell: "I'm more of an obsessive wood-carver with a single subject thus far – my father. […] I have lost my subject, the prisoner father loved as well as pitied" (4; 31). The other two are "Monkey Tails," in which Michel talks in a cassette destined to his future son, and "The Funeral Singer." The remaining short stories are told in an omniscient, neutral third person which renders each different story free from influence from one or another point of view. This is maybe what Danticat's novel tries to do overall: to tell the different sides of one story, that of a Macoute who has destroyed so many lives, but who is still a loving father and husband trying to reconstruct his life. If we learn little by little what he did to the different characters of the novel, we also hear the voices of his wife and daughter, and have access to the different versions of the Dew Breaker's story.

The polyvocal texture of our novels – even if only in appearance – thus allow the writers to give voice to the multiplicity that forms the diaspora and to help reconstruct the whole picture of the nations' past by displaying its different versions. As we will discuss later, this polyvocality of the texts moreover prevents them from pretending that the experience of a single character would be representative of the whole diaspora.

Versions of histories

Through her novel's multiple voices and characters, Danticat thus offers several different points of view on the Dew Breaker. If we first encounter an old, clumsy but loving father in "The Book of the Dead," we then read the tales of some of his victims, which sheds a new light on the old prison guard. Tellingly, the different ways he is named or described throughout the novel change according to the point of view: Anne and Ka only talk about their "husband" or "father," and when Ka has to describe her father to the police officers, she gives a matter-of-fact description, which nevertheless alleviates his physical harshness: “'Sixty-five, five feet eight inches, one hundred and eighty pounds, with a widow's peak, thinning salt-and-pepper hair, and velvet-brown eyes'” (4). In the other short stories, however, the Dew Breaker is called “the Haitian prison guard” (131), “the man who killed Papa and Manman” (97) or “the fat man” (210), and is described as “a large man with a face like a soccer ball and a widow's peak dipping into the middle of his forehead” (105). We have two versions, two pictures of the same man, thereby showing that there is more than one side to a person. Indeed, torturers like the Dew Breaker can themselves be victims: “'What did they do to *you*?' she asked. […] 'I'm free,' he said. 'I finally escaped'” (237), which puts his past as a Macoute into perspective.

Danticat's novel thus foregrounds a certain complexity and indeterminacy as it refuses the “either/or” dichotomy of “hunter and prey”: “every story can be told from more than one perspective; every truth is relative; even torturers may be loving fathers and were once vulnerable children” (Scott, 30). The novel is open-ended, as Ka has the two sides of her father's story. Yet, she hangs up on her mother before hearing how the fat man that enjoyed playing with his victims before killing them became her mother's husband. She misses the hyphen, the link that allowed her father's conversion, and we do not know how she will reassemble his opposite sides. Only the reader has access to the complete story, and is left to interpret and draw conclusions.

In Díaz's *Oscar Wao,* Yunior gives several versions of Abelard's fall: “But there's another, less-known, variant of the Abelard vs. Trujillo narrative. A secret history that claims that Abelard didn't get in trouble because of his daughter's culo or because of an imprudent joke” (245). Despite the “official” narrative, Yunior lends an ear to the alternative versions by also relaying the rumors about a mysterious book Abelard would have written on Trujillo's supernatural powers. If Yunior takes care of distancing himself from these rumors (“(so the story goes)”; “if we are to believe the whispers” 245), admitting that this version asks for a stretch of the imagination, he nonetheless relates it and lets the reader choose if s/he wants to believe in it or not: “The only answer I can give you is the least satisfying: you'll have to decide for yourself" (243). Yet, the reader is left without the full story, as Yunior struggles to put an end to his narration. Indeed, he proposes multiple endings, given that Oscar's last book, the one supposedly containing his last thoughts and the conclusions he had drawn from his life, goes missing: "Told [Lola] to watch out for a second package. This contains everything I've written on this journey. [...] You'll understand when you read my conclusions. [...] Only problem was, the fucking thing never arrived!" (333-4). There is thus no clear-cut ending, no advocating of one version or the other, no definite truth.

In García's *Dreaming in Cuban* we also have several versions of the same episode. Yet, while Yunior was only recounting the rumors and gossips of others, García presents multiple versions directly through her characters' point of view. For example, Lourdes asserts that "Pilar ran away in the Miami airport […]. Lourdes heard her daughter's name announced over the loudspeaker. She couldn't speak when she found Pilar, sitting on the lap of a pilot and licking a lime lollipop" (69). Yet, later on in the novel, Pilar remembers the same event differently: "To this day, my mother insists that I ran away from her at the Miami airport […]. But it was *she* who turned and ran when she thought she heard my father's voice. I wandered around lost until a pilot took me to his airline's office and gave me a lollipop" (176). Different perspectives can give different meanings to the same episode. Pilar then wonders on the notion of truth, and on the role of imagination in reality: "Maybe in the end the facts are not as important as the underlying truth [Lourdes] wants to convey. Telling her own truth is *the* truth to her, even if it's at the expense of chipping away our past" (177). Again, truth is here perceived as relative, fluid, and subjective, as each character has his/her own truth or version of events. *Dreaming in Cuban* also opens to the reader's interpretation of events, as the multiple characters and their perspectives are each given the same weight, the same credit in the novel: "The resultant unfinalizability of the text parallels its refusal to invoke the closure of a single truth about the Cuban revolution or the Cuban experience of exile in the United States" (McCracken, 23). As is the case for the characters' different faiths, no version is said to be the definite truth here, no point of view is presented as the "good" one or the one endorsed by the author.

The three novels' open ends then allow for complexity and refuse to advocate one version or the other, one truth or the other: the point of the writers in their rewriting of History is not to condemn their countries' pasts and former political regimes, but to propose "counter-histories" (Parisot, 110) that are able to record a certain perception of truth that is, like the experience of immigration, multiple. These alternatives to traditional histories give voice to the nameless lives of those who endured the events of their nations' bloody histories and let the last word go to the reader and to a future, hopefully wiser, generation like Isis, Lola's daughter, able to distance itself from these events and finally put an end to these nations' *fukú*.

History and fiction

The writing of History, be it in official narratives or works of fiction, has to do precisely with history, memory, but also with reconstruction and thus, fiction. The version of events we have in history books is just one perspective, one side of History and, if there is no advocating of one version, there is still a necessary choice of which stories will appear in official narratives as well as in our novels. This act of choosing what one will retain as History points to the constructed nature of narratives in general, and to their necessary part of fiction and imagination. In Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, Pilar wonders on this act of shaping and choosing what will be part of a country's History: "'Why don't we read about this in history books?' […] If it were up to me, I'd record other things. […] Why don't I know anything about them? Who chooses what we should know or what's important?" and later: "I resent the hell out of the politicians and the generals who force events on us that structure our lives, that dictate the memories we'll have when we're old" (28 and 138).

García's characters deplore that history books retain only the versions of the winners of battles, of the majority group, putting aside the history of marginalized minority groups like women or black people: "The war that killed my grandfather and great-uncles and thousands of other blacks is only a footnote in our history books. Why, then, should I trust anything I read?" (185). As Herminia implies in this last quote, historical narratives are not more reliable than fictions: since history is only available through discourse, be it historical records or literature, it gets irrevocably away from reality and closer to fiction (K. C. Davis, 243). Moreover, historical narratives leave a gap between the discursive reconstruction of events and reality itself: they are unable to record a complete reality as they have to leave some parts – more often than not the ones concerning minority, marginalized communities – aside. Historical narratives present a version of History that is biased as they imply a choice, a shaping and ordering of reality and, thus, a construction.

By choosing to record one version and not the other, historians dictate and shape the collective memory of their nations. Writers, too, propose their own version, their own vision of a story, to which they have given a form and an order, an act that testifies to the dictating power structures that underlie the act of telling (Hanna, 501): "Historiography and fiction are seen as sharing the same act of reconfiguration, of reshaping our experience of time through plot configurations; they are complementary activities" (Hutcheon, 100). This points to the subjective aspect of recording History, but it also testifies to the constructed nature of these narratives. In Díaz's *Oscar Wao*, Yunior appears as a narrator plagued with doubts, who admits to the impossibility of recovering the full story he is telling. In front of these fragmentary sources, he is forced to use "his art and creativity to cohere those shards and give a new shape to the vase of Dominican diasporic art and history" (Hanna, 498). More than once, Yunior brings to the reader's attention the fact that his narration is scattered with half-truths, anachronisms or elements that he invented altogether:

> I know what Negroes are going to say. Look, he's writing Suburban Tropical now. A puta and she's not an underage snort-addicted mess? Not believable. Should I go down to the Feria and pick me up a more representative model? […] But then I'd be lying. I know I've thrown a lot of fantasy and sci-fi in the mix but this is supposed to be a *true* account of the Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao. Can't we believe that an Ybón can exist […]? (Díaz, 285)

The authenticity of Ybón's character is questioned as she does not meet the criterion of a representative Dominican prostitute. Yunior, who for the first time here explicitly declares himself as the author of the book we are reading ("A Note from Your Author"), is conscious that his story asks the reader for a stretch of the imagination and defends what appears to be a "writerly choice" (Machado Saez, "Dictating Desire" 539), a certain version of Oscar's story, again linked to a relative truth. The narrator then proposes a kind of pact to the reader: "This is your chance. If blue pill, continue. If red pill, return to the Matrix" (Díaz, 285). The reader can either choose to return to the Matrix of illusion and false reality, or go on with Oscar's story by accepting that the text's reality contains a necessary part of fiction, of magic, or maybe of that Caribbean supernatural texture since, after all, "what more sci-fi than the Santo Domingo? What more fantasy than the Antilles?" (6).

Yunior thus understands history as a construction, as it needs fiction and narrative choices for "aesthetic reasons" (Hanna, 508). The writer then offers another kind of historical narrative, one written in a specific language, as we shall see, and displaying a mix of codes and genres such as conventional historiography and genre fiction, presenting real-life protagonists as comic book superheroes or sci-fi villains and relating historical events as if they were part of a Western or Kung-fu movie: "The rest is, of course, history, and if this were a movie you'd have to film it in John Woo slow motion" (Díaz, 155 – the whole scene of Trujillo's death would be worthy of a Hollywood blockbuster). Inspired by the work of Martinican writer Patrick Chamoiseau, the footnotes in Díaz's text give insights on Dominican history and politics. Yet, as the last quote shows, the details given in the footnotes are not the kind of information one would find in official narratives, as Yunior uses mixed genres as a narrative strategy to relate the de León's story as well as historical events.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, the writer also incorporates historical figures like Fidel Castro to the intimate, feminine, dream-like texture of the text when Celia fantasies over her political hero, or as Felicia wonders on his sexual conquests:

> She has heard of women offering themselves to El Líder […] and it is

> said he has fathered many children on the island. […] They say his first wife, his one great love, betrayed him while he was imprisoned […]. There's been another woman in his life since […], but everyone knows she's only a companion – a mother, a sister, not a true lover. […] Still, Felicia muses, what would he be like in bed? Would he remove his cap and boots? (110).

Rumors and gossips about historical events are integrated to the narration as they are romanticized and mixed to the novel's characters' lives. Díaz and García thus both propose an alternative way to understand and write History by incorporating it to their fragmented and plural narrations and their supernatural realities. Danticat, in turn, also integrates allusions to the Haitian dictatorships and historical protagonists to her narration, as Jean-Claude Duvalier makes an appearance in "Monkey Tails" ("The president had gone on television to deny the rumors, saying he was as 'unyielding as a monkey's tail'" 163) and as the writer takes as her main character one of the Tonton Macoutes, the dictator's militia. Danticat's text presents itself as a historical record of the victims of the Duvalier regime as it shows a willingness to leave a mark – a theme that not only comes out in the Dew Breaker's scar, but throughout the collection of stories as all the characters are marked, either physically of psychologically, by the country's violences and political abuses – for the nameless lives of those erased by the dictatorships (Scott, 47). The writers freely incorporate historical facts or protagonists to their hybrid fictions, and our three texts thus present a continuum between fiction and facts, a characteristic of Caribbean contemporary narratives, which "cannot be understood without the imbrication of individual memory and collective memory" (Parisot, 117), an aspect that we will discuss in the next section.

Individual lives in collective narratives

In their rewriting of History, Díaz, García and Danticat account for the people who have lived the events recorded in history books, yet who themselves do not figure in those books, as they have been pushed aside and cast in the namelessness of collective history. As such, our three novels mingle the individual story of their characters with the collective one of their countries, giving back to those nameless lives their place in historical records.

This notion of "namelessness" appears right from the start in *Oscar Wao*, in the two epigraphs of the novel: "Of what import are brief, nameless lives... to **Galactus**??" and at the end of the second one: "either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation." The first epigraph, taken from Stan Lee and Jack Kirby's comic book *Fantastic Four*, hints to the fact that the narrator recounts the story of the "nameless lives" that are usually not accounted for in official historical narratives of the nation and proposes, as we have discussed, his own version of the Dominican history under the Trujillo regime. In the second epigraph, taken from West Indian poet Derek Walcott's "The Schooner Flight," the speaker presents himself as a spokesman and representative figure of the nation. Just like the *Fantastic Four* quote, Walcott's poem questions the relationship between the individual and the collective. Yet, while the two aspects seem to stand in opposition in the comic book, the poem "suggests the intimate relationship between official history and the experiences of a nation's citizens" (Hanna, 500). These two epigraphs frame the text and announce a trend that will run through the novel, as the text recounts not only the lives of multiple characters, but also the story of their community and nation.

The reader expects to read about this one life of Oscar, that has immediately "been claimed from namelessness" (Danticat in Díaz, "Junot Díaz" 89) in the book's title, yet s/he soon discovers that Oscar's supposedly "Brief and Wondrous Life" is constantly interrupted by heavy footnotes that can sometimes take the most part of the page (as is the case on pages 22, 97 and 155). As we have seen, these footnotes give information on Dominican history or politics, with a special focus on Trujillo's regime: "Trujillo, one of the twentieth century's most infamous dictators, ruled the Dominican Republic between 1930 and 1961 with an implacable ruthless brutality" (Díaz, *Oscar Wao* 2). Not only does the narrator largely expound on Dominican history rather than on Oscar's life in the footnotes, but he also constantly mingles familial events with historical ones: "when [Beli] finally awoke for good, […] a grade of grief […] was being uncoiled, […] like a funeral song for the entire planet. […] Mamá, is that for me? Am I dying? […] It's Trujillo. Gunned down, she whispered, the night Beli had been kidnapped" (154). This is indicative of an important element of the writing of History in *Oscar Wao*: the emphasis on the quotidian and lived experiences over what are traditionally considered historical events, thus providing a popular view to counter the official one (Hanna, 502).

Political events and individual stories are more smoothly entwined in Danticat's novel. In *The Dew Breaker,* only allusions to the dictatorship and to Haitian history pierce the narration*,* as for example in "Monkey Tails," when Michel remembers the election of the radical activist Aristide, and the feeling of freedom of the population: "There was a different feel to our neighborhood for sure. […] Others were […] stopping occasionally to yell slogans or phrases they had held too long in their chests: 'We are free' or 'We will never be prisoners again'" (148). These allusions allow the reader to reconnect the fictional stories to the official history that underlies them. The form chosen by the writer for her novel also lends itself well to the displaying of multiple lives: the collection of stories is indeed able to encompass several narratives of those that were forgotten yet marked by history. In her interview with Junot Díaz, Danticat admits being deeply interested in those forgotten lives: "You know I am obsessed with the notion of namelessness and the idea of brief lives and how individuals and nations disrupt and end lives" (Danticat in Díaz, "Junot Díaz" 89). One notices then that, in *The Dew Breaker*, all the characters are named except from the Dew Breaker himself, and the Duvaliers, father and son, the times they briefly appear in the narration: "'The father?' I asked dumbly. I knew she meant the dictator father of the dictator son" (Danticat, 162). In a reverse move to official narratives, Danticat attests to the existence of those individual lives, most of them victims of History, and pushes those who usually dictates the course of events to the unnamed margins.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, the Revolution and the historical events of the fifties to the early eighties are very present in the narrative. From the very first paragraph we get a sense of a military menace on the sea, and the text mentions a famous historical event: "Square by square, she searches the night skies for adversaries then scrutinizes the ocean. […] From her porch, Celia could spot another Bay of Pigs invasion before it happened" (3). Just as in *Oscar Wao*, familial events are often directly equated with historical ones: "Hugo married Felicia at city hall the week of the Cuban missile crisis" (García, 81). However, historical or political events do not interrupt the narrative here, but are rather fully part of it as the characters – Celia and Lourdes among all – are deeply involved in politics, as we shall discuss in the second part of this work. Not only are the historical events viewed from the characters' eyes, but real political figures, like Fidel Castro, appear in the novel: "The Jeep pulls up to the embassy and a barrel-chested man steps out. He's wearing an olive cap and army fatigues […]. He looks much older than [Celia]'s photograph" (236). García demonstrates here that the history of the nation is made of the one of its people by showing that the public and the private spheres are inseparable (McCraken, 74).

Díaz, Danticat and García's novels thus do not recount the unique story of a single character. On the contrary, they encompass whole families and nations, showing that immigration is a matter that affects not only the individual, but the people around them, their families and countries: "I was preparing to read about this one life […]. But I ended up reading about a nation" (Danticat in Díaz, "Junot Díaz" 89). The mingling of personal and collective is taken a step further in the novels as the narrators themselves occupy a position that allows them to speak to their community as representative diasporic figures.

Narrators: between stereotypes and spokesmen

The narrator of a novel is indeed often taken as a representative voice of the community staged in the text. Yet, in Díaz, Danticat and García's novels, narrators occupy a more nuanced position, as they allow a certain critique of immigrant stereotypes and of preconceived categories thanks to their liminal space "in the finitude of the nation" (Bhabha, 170). As such, the narrators of the novels shoulder a position that is characteristic of migrants, that is, of being at once insiders and outsiders, outsiders within the stories.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Pilar has access to the two “clans” of the family thanks to her abnormal abilities: she witnesses what happens in New York with the Puentes, but she also knows, through her grandmother, what is going on in Cuba with the del Pinos. Moreover, she is both part of the story, as a character, and outside of it, as the main narrator. She is thus able to gather together “evocations tinged with the suffering of those who remain and the nostalgia of those who left and wish to return” (R. G. Davis, 66). Yet, Pilar is also the victim of “that whisper that all long-term immigrants carry inside themselves, the whisper that says *You do not belong*” (Díaz, 276) as she does not feel she belongs either in the United States or in Cuba (García, 58). Like most of the characters in the three texts, Pilar occupies an ambivalent position towards her split origins.

At first sight in Diaz's novel, Oscar appears to play the role of the main protagonist and, thus, to be representative of the diaspora depicted in the narrative. Yet, in his interview with Edwidge Danticat, Díaz declared that he wanted to subvert stereotypes on Dominicans by choosing as his hero one of these “kinds of people that no one wants to build the image of a nation around. Even if these people are in fact the nation itself” (Díaz, “Junot Díaz” 90). Because Oscar is a fat, Dominican-American nerd, and above all a virgin, he fails to meet the expectations of a true Dominican identity:

> In the Dominican culture that I know, a character like Oscar was not going to be anyone's notion of the ideal Dominican boy. In the Dominican culture I know, someone like Oscar would not be labeled Dominican, no matter what his actual background was. (90)

This is precisely what happens to Oscar, as several characters in the novel deny him his Dominican identity: “Harold would say, Tú no eres nada de dominicano, but Oscar would insist unhappily, I am Dominican, I am. It didn't matter what he said. Who the hell, I ask you, had ever met a Domo like him?” (Díaz, *Oscar Wao* 180). Oscar's failure at being a “true Dominican” prevents him from embodying the Dominican diaspora in a novel that deals with issues of immigration and identity. Putting Oscar, instead of a more representative figure, at the center of his novel is a conscious choice of the author, as we see in Díaz's conversation with

Danticat. By choosing as his hero a marginal character that is part of a minority, Díaz demonstrates that nerdy, virgin Dominicans also exist, and also have their place in the narratives of the Dominican diaspora. One should note though that, if Oscar seems to subvert the stereotype of the typical Dominican man, he is himself his own kind of cliché, fitting to today's popular geek character.

In Oscar's stead, Yunior has a certain dual perspective in the story he narrates: like Pilar in *Dreaming in Cuban,* Yunior is both character and narrator, both part of Oscar's life but not a de León. Moreover, he has been raised in New Jersey yet corresponds to the stereotype of the Dominican man, being the embodiment of a "normative Dominican diasporic identity" (Machado Sáez, "Dictating Desire" 526). As such, Yunior and Pilar are representatives of the figure of the migrant: they correspond to the perception of the migrant as "in-betweener," as having an ambivalent position between two opposite origins, a position from where they are able to approach the experience of immigration: "From the place of the 'meanwhile' [...] there emerges a more instantaneous and subaltern voice of the people, minority discourses that speak betwixt and between times and places" (Bhabha, 158). This is the case in Díaz and García's texts, but also in *The Dew Breaker*, in which the characters are all caught between countries, languages and time. Just like Gloría Anzaldúa's mestiza consciousness, the figures of the migrant depicted in the three texts have a double perspective that allow them to address both sides of the ocean and different versions of their stories. Yet the mestiza consciousness is not just a double or multiple consciousness, it is a "new consciousness," which points to the relatively recent turn in migrant literature that we discussed in the introduction.

There is in Díaz, Danticat and García's novels the creation of a peculiar kind of historiography, one that Ramón Saldívar calls "historical fantasy" or "speculative realism" (Saldívar, 1). This other way to write history is a way to go beyond the pervading silence left by traumatic pasts and to give voice to alternative histories that are able, through the displaying of multiple versions and the "hybrid amalgam of realism, magical realisms, metafiction and genre fictions" (Saldívar, 13), to grasp that Caribbean texture of reality and to reconstruct the fragmented narratives of those nameless lives that totalitarian regimes and their official accounts have crushed and pushed aside. In Homi K. Bhabha's words, it is precisely the power and potential of migrants to “disrupt homogenized national narratives through their 'liminality'. The ambiguous space of the migrant becomes a space for minority counter-discourse to challenge the nation” (Bhabha, 140). From their marginalized, in-between place, migrants can access the other side of official narratives and approach History and reality from a different perspective.

Part II : the politics of migration

Díaz, Danticat and García's novels are informed by History, as it is with their nations' past that the writers are dealing through their writing. Another aspect that influences the writing of migration is the political situation of the migrant's homeland, as many of the texts' characters, like Lourdes, Beli or Anne and her husband, fled their country's dictatorships and the climate of permanent violence the latter fostered. The second part of this work will aim to show that the displaying of politics in the texts allows the writers to claim a specific, migrant identity, and to posit the recognition of the plurality of their belongings as well as the validity of their position as "in-betweeners."

We will thus discuss the place and role of politics in the novels, the political aspect of writing and the likeness of writers and dictators, that Díaz, Danticat and García try to counter in aid of the multiple voices that make up the diasporic community. We will see that the relation between the U.S., where the writers live today, and their home countries is an intricate one which has a deep influence on the novels. This complex relation between the writers' plural belongings will lead us to question the identity they put forward in their texts. Through the displaying of different political opinions, the mix of genres and the specificity of the texts' languages, we will see that Díaz, Danticat and García renegotiate their identity, their sense of what makes them migrant writers and of where their home lies.

Politics and the novels

Our three novels are politically committed as they display positions on such topics as migration, the writers' countries' political and historical past, or life in the U.S. Unlike early immigrant fictions, which portrayed migrants as "neutral observers" (Mardorossian, 16), Díaz, Danticat and García are able, through their texts, to approach their subject from a critical perspective, denounce the situation both in their nations and in the United States, and claim a specific position as migrants.

Writers and dictators

Politics manifest themselves in our novels first of all in the fact that writing is itself a political act: even if the writer him-/herself is not politically committed, the role of literature is to make the reader questions him-/herself or the world around him/her. Writing is thus a certain means of power: it is a way to impose one's vision of the world and propagate one's ideas, as the writer is the only one to have the floor in the text, and the reader is pushed to a passive, silent position. As such, writers are close to the figure of the dictator, an important figure in Díaz, Danticat and García's novels, be it as explicit characters like in Díaz and García or only recognizable through allusions in *The Dew Breaker*.

The similarity between writers and dictators has been stressed for quite some time now, and they are said to have always been in conflict. Salman Rushdie, in his *Imaginary Homelands*, states: “Writers and politicians are natural rivals. Both group try to make the world in their own images; they fight for the same territory” (14). Díaz also ponders this conflicted relationship in one of *Oscar Wao*'s long footnotes:

> What is it with Dictators and Writers, anyway? Since before the infamous Caesar-Ovid war they've had beef. […] they seem destined to be eternally linked in the Halls of Battle. Rushdie claims that tyrants and scribblers are natural antagonists, but I think that's too simple; it lets writers off pretty easy. Dictators, in my opinion, just know competition when they see it. Same with writers. *Like, after all, recognizes like.* (97)

As an example, Oscar's grandfather, a doctor-historian writing a book about Trujillo's superpowers, was arrested by the regime and had all of his papers destroyed (“You got to fear a motherfucker or what he's writing to do something like that” 246). In their conversation for BOMB magazine, Danticat and Díaz discuss the link between writers and dictators as they remember that Duvalier and Trujillo, like many dictators in the world, wrote novels and considered themselves to be writers. They come to the conclusion that dictators, to establish their power, need to be the only voices heard in their countries (Díaz, “Junot Díaz” 93). One of the reasons why writers and dictators are antagonists is because they are alike:

they both want to write their own versions of the history of their country, to be the ones remembered and to influence the future generations.

Despite this affiliation between writers and dictators, Díaz, Danticat and García try to go against this dictatorial aspect of writing with narrative strategies such as the use of fractured, multiple perspectives, as we have seen, but also thanks to the figure of the author they display in their novels through their narrators. From their central position, we saw that the narrators of our texts act as spokesmen to their nations and their diaspora while weaving the strings of the stories together and relating the history of their families and countries. Yunior, as the sole narrator of *Oscar Wao*, first appears as an unnamed objective witness to the Dominican History and the de Leóns' fate, backing up this impression of objectivity by bombarding the text with heavy footnotes on historical events or figures. Calling himself our "humble Watcher" (4), after Kirby's *Fantastic Four* character, an alien who comes to earth to help humanity and keep an eye on the Fantastic Four – that some critics have identified with the characters of our novel (Hannah, 514-515) – Yunior thus places himself as a trustworthy, all-knowing outsider to the story.

Yet, as soon as he reveals his identity, Yunior turns out to be a very subjective source, and not as omniscient as he first seemed. He becomes a self-conscious narrator: he is very present in the story, constantly referring to himself and the book he is writing: "Even now as I write these words I wonder if this book ain't a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell" (Díaz, 7). Yunior also admits that he does not know the whole story of the de Leóns: "So which was it? you ask. An accident, a conspiracy, or a fukú? The only answer I can give you is the least satisfying: you'll have to decide for yourself. […] Which is to say if you're looking for a full story, I don't have it" (243). Moreover, Yunior signals several times to the constructed nature of his story: "17. In my first draft, Samaná was actually Jarabacoa, but then my girl Leonie […] pointed out that there are no beaches in Jarabacoa. […] but that was one detail I couldn't change, just liked the image too much" (132). The narrator here explicitly admits that he does not hesitate to bend the reality to his tastes, a point that is reminiscent of our discussion on the necessary constructed and fictitious aspects of history and its writing. Yunior as narrator becomes less and less reliable from the moment we know who he is and what kind of relations he has with the other characters.[5] He appears here to be very similar to the figure of the dictator, shaping his story according to his will, and positioning himself as sole holder of the truth, thus enacting a kind of "narrative dictatorship" (Machado Sáez, "Dictating Desire" 544).

Yet, the fact that Yunior is the only narrator is unusual in Díaz's work. In his first collection of short stories, *Drown* (1996), the writer used different narrators to tell his stories, although most of them were called "Yunior." The same is true for his last book, *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012), again a collection of short stories, again each told by a narrator named "Yunior." If this narrator cannot be explicitly identified as being each time the same person, these "Yuniors" all share a couples of characteristics, besides their name: they always have a brother called Rafa, who eventually dies of cancer, and all have some issues sleeping with only one girl at a time. The fact that Díaz uses a singular Yunior in *Oscar Wao* is thus significant: instead of a multiplicity of voices and migrant experiences, which as a whole could be taken as a representation of Dominican diaspora, Díaz shifts to "a novel with a sole narrator that exposes the dangers involved in making one experience representative of all Dominican diasporic identity and history" (Machado Sáez, "Dictating Desire" 532). If the characters can sometimes be taken as representative figures of their country's diaspora, the novels yet nuance and offset the narrators' role as spokesmen through the openness of their ends and the multiplicity – of voices, of versions and of histories – the texts are made of.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, Pilar also eventually appears to be the sole narrator of García's novel: she is the one who collects, but also selects, her family's history and gives it an order. Yet, trying to order the past is a necessarily subjective act, as one shapes it according to one's version of it. This would link Pilar to the dictatorial side of narrating a story. However, Pilar is very different from Yunior:

5 All these features of Yunior as narrator bring him closer to Salman Rushdie's narrator in *Midnight Children,* Salem. With their questioning of the relation between writers and dictators, this is another of many similarities between Díaz and Rushdie's novels.

she is less intrusive, never interferes with other people's stories but instead, directly inserts Celia's letters or other people's accounts (like Herminia's) into her narration. If Yunior is constantly commenting on the story he is telling, frequently expressing his doubts ("Whether what follows was a figment of Beli's wracked imagination or something else altogether I cannot say" Díaz, 149) and referring to the book he is writing, Pilar appears on the contrary to be a much more neutral and reliable narrator, who manages to let other voices be heard through her own. Although Pilar is both at the centre of the novel and the architect behind its structure, even becoming "coterminous with the author in a moment of self-referentiality near the end of the novel" (McCracken, 23),[6] this very structure and its multiple narrative perspectives prevent her from monologizing the text. This is similar to Danticat's narrative strategy in *The Dew Breaker*, in which she uses multiple points of view and narrators to avoid imposing her view, her version – or the one of a unique character-narrator – and thus works against the dictatorial aspect of writing.

In their project of writing on and against the totalitarian regimes that ruled – or still rules – their homelands, the writers thus attempt to not reproduce these dictatorships in their novels by using flawed, porous narrators or multiple perspectives altogether that allow the "nameless lives" to be heard. In doing that, they undermine the figure of the narrator as spokesman and express a more nuanced wish to "move beyond these tropes of speaking *to* and *for*" (Danticat, "*Claire of the Sea Light*") in order to be able to approach their subject – immigration – from an intimate, personal perspective as their texts are only one whisper among the innumerable voices of diaspora.

Political opinions

If the writers work against their affiliation with dictators, politics do play a role in migration and in the lives of the writers today. Political opinions indeed pervade and structure our three novels, as they allow the writers to attest to the weight of

6 "Nothing can record this, I think. Not words, not paintings, not photographs" (García, 241).

their nations' political past on their present life, to express alternative opinions to the dictatorships and expose the different mindsets of the successive generations of migrants.

In *The Dew Breaker,* Haiti's political events seem at first to be pushed into the background as something not essential to the story. Yet, on closer look, one realizes that the short stories all bear the marks left by the dictatorships on Haiti's history and its people. Indeed, the different stories have in common a complex relationship with Haiti and its past and the notion of exile, be it a voluntary one, like Anne and her husband's, or a forced one, like the women in "The Funeral Singer": "I have been expelled from my country. That's why I'm in this class at twenty-two years old" (167). One furthermore notices that the whole book is structured on key events for Haiti, as the only three dates that give rhythm to the novel's chronology mark important points in Haiti's history: 1967 ("The Dew Breaker"), when dictator François Duvalier radicalized his regime and Peter Glenville's movie *The Comedians,* from a novel written by Graham Greene, was released. Greene's book was the first explicit critique of the Duvalier regime to come out, and corresponds to the Dew Breaker's turn against the regime in the last chapter of Danticat's novel. In this same chapter, the line "Impossible to deepen that night" (186) is besides taken from Green's book. The second date to appear is 1986 ("Monkey Tails"), year of the fall of Jean-Claude Duvalier and of the beginning of his exile and, thus, of the start of Haiti's struggle for democracy. Finally, 2004 ("Monkey Tails"), which is not only the year Danticat's novel was first published, but it also marked the hasty departure of president Jean-Bertrand Aristide into exile as well as the two hundredth anniversary of Haiti's independence (Parisot, 109). The novel's cyclical thrust is thus a way for the writer, in the wake of the coup d'état against Aristide, to make sense of this present-day history, of what keeps occurring, while dealing with "that past that does not pass"[7] and that keeps haunting its victims, be them hunters or preys.

7 The "passé qui ne passe pas" has become a common expression in french literature these last decades and alludes to the literary movement that deals with the traumatic past of the last century, such as the World Wars, in a willingness to record, remember and make sense of it. See Viart D.,Vercier B. *La littérature française au présent.* Paris: Brodas, 2008 (2[sd] ed.).

In "Monkey Tails," Michel records for his future son his memories of the dictator's flight, while another president is being forced into exile at the very moment he is speaking. The two Februaries of 1986 and 2004 echo each other and attest to this cyclical aspect of Haitian history and to the importance of the past in present-day history. In their conversation for BOMB Magazine, Díaz asks Danticat about her ability to "write about something so soon after it's happened": "What's to be gained by writing about something […] when the moment is close?" The Haitian writer explains that there is two reasons for that, the first one being that she is afraid of forgetting, of things escaping memory, and the second one lies in the explicative power of writing: "Writing is also the way I process things and when I am done with a piece I feel a lot closer to understanding the subject" (Danticat and Díaz, "Junot Díaz" 89). This emergency of writing the present-day history attests to the need to remember, record – as is shown in "Monkey Tails" – and, especially, to make sense of that past that keeps coming back.

If Danticat expresses the need to remember and confront the horrors of the past in order to not repeat the same mistakes, Díaz seems to take a step further in reclaiming his nation's history by integrating it to his novel's aesthetic and political agendas. Politics are indeed very present in *Oscar Wao* as the writer addresses Dominican history in a critical tone, language and form: invading the text in persistent footnotes, directly intertwined with the characters' lives or incorporated to the novel's play with genres and codes, historical events and political figures are, from the start, appropriated through Yunior's popular lens on history: "They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, […] that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles" (Díaz, 1). The epic tone of the first lines of the text hints to the author's willingness to reclaim his country's past in the whole book: as a response to the dictatorship's appropriation of the nation's history and the people's lives and voices, the writer's attempt at rewriting his country's past contribute to give it back to its people.

Cristina García, in turn, shows that politics are part and parcel of nations' histories and people's lives as politics pervade her novel: it is a political conflict that lead to the family's displacement to the U.S. or to Czechoslovakia, and the del Pino family's relationships are polarized by politics as García uses her characters to display several political opinions. Indeed, the different generations of women in *Dreaming in Cuban* are torn by their points of view on the politics of their country. Celia and Lourdes stand at opposite extremes: if Celia gives herself completely to Castro's revolution and his reshaping of the country, her daughter thinks she can "fight Communism from behind her bakery counter" (García, 136), convinced as she is of the benefits of U.S. capitalism: "Lourdes sends [Celia] snapshots of pastries from her bakery in Brooklyn. Each glistening éclair is a grenade aimed at Celia's political beliefs, each strawberry shortcake proof [...] of Lourdes's success in America, and a reminder of the ongoing shortages in Cuba" (117). Lourdes strongly believes in the "American dream" and adheres entirely to the American ideology of subtractive assimilation, an ideology that "acknowledge[s] that language is part of an intricate cultural system," and which goal is to turn migrants "into fully-fledged members of the US mainstream culture" (Fuller, 136). Lourdes gladly embraces the ideology of her adopted country, and rejects everything that comes from Cuba: "She wants no part of Cuba, [...] no part of Cuba at all, which Lourdes claims never possessed her" (García, 73). In her extreme political position, Lourdes condemns anyone who would think different form her, or who would not be as radical as her: "She decides she has no patience for dreamers, for people who live between black and white" (129).

This black and white view is shared by Celia, who "grieves for her husband['s] […] mixed-up allegiances" (6), and holds migration as a betrayal to one's origins (240). For Celia as for Lourdes, there are no possible concessions, no mitigated opinions, and indifference is worst of all: "Even now, Pilar is not afraid of pain or of losing anything. It's this indifference that is most maddening" (128). If Lourdes stands on one extreme, Celia and her adoration for Fidel Castro and his ideas stand on the other one. She watches the shores in case "*gusano* traitors" (3) would come, and is deeply involved in the political activities of her country, be it by helping out in the cane fields or as a civilian judge: “Celia is pleased. What she decides makes a difference in others' lives, and she feels part of a great historical unfolding” (111). Celia gives of herself for “the greater good” of her community with hard work and abnegation, thus following the socialist precepts, while Lourdes only thinks about being more productive and making more money, using people she thinks are below her and then discarding them: “She hires the real down-and-outs, immigrants from Russia or Pakistan [...], figuring she can get them cheap. Mom thinks they're all out to steal from her so she rifles through their coats” (31). Celia and Lourdes's worldviews collide, and the mother and daughter are, from the very start, incompatible, as Celia's words upon Lourdes's birth testify: “I will not remember her name” (43). The link between them is severed, and memory will not pass from the mother to her daughter. The relationships between the mothers and their first child are all problematic in the novel: Celia and Lourdes, but also Felicia and her twin daughters, Luz and Milagro, who think their mother is insane and distance themselves more and more from her; and, of course, Lourdes and Pilar's explosive relationship, with a possessive, stubborn mother on the one side and a daughter eager for freedom and in search of her identity on the other.

Pilar thus rebels against her mother but, if she appears very close to her grandmother, she does not altogether endorse Celia's ideas. Defining herself as punk before it became mainstream, denouncing the illusions that are the concepts of freedom and the American dream in her paintings, Pilar nonetheless realizes, when she sees Ivanito in front of the Peruvian embassy, that his chance at a better future can only be out of Cuba: “I can feel my cousin's heart through his back. I can feel a rapid uncoiling inside us both. 'I couldn't find him,' I lie to Abuela” (242). Standing somewhere in-between capitalism and socialism, Pilar is the one who reassembles the two extreme mindsets of her mother and her grandmother, and shows the possible cohabitation of different worldviews while keeping a critical mind on both of them, as she realizes that she belongs “more” to the United States than to Cuba, but not “instead” of it (236). Pilar's identity and belongings are thus made of an addition, and not a contradiction, of inclusion rather than exclusion.

Be it in the chronology, the very form and language or even through the characters of the novels, politics and political opinions pervade and structure these immigrant fictions. What is more, politics have a central position in the texts because of their role in border issues and migration: “I'm grateful for one thing: that the tides rearrange the borders. […] To be locked within boundaries plotted by priests and politicians would be the only thing more intolerable. Don't you see how they're carving up the world, Gustavo?” (García, 99). Oblivious of Castro's role in Cuba's isolation, Celia here denounces the “unnatural boundar[ies]” (Anzaldúa, 25) imposed by the great world powers and their effects on the people. Yet, if there is in Díaz, Danticat and García's novels a need to remember, to confront the darkest parts of the countries' past and the regimes that ruled them, there is also a need to recognize one's responsibility in these pasts. As such, the writers apply themselves to reminding the United States' role in their country's History and its continuing influence on it.

U.S. - homeland relations

It is on their country of origin and the one they adopted that the authors write, on their relationship to these countries as well as the link between the countries themselves. In each of our novels, the United States, country of adoption of our writers as well as most of their characters, occupies an important, if not central, position. The Dominican Republic, Haiti and Cuba were all three occupied several times by the United States in the course of history, and they still endure its influence today. Yet, Dominicans, Haitians and Cubans have immigrated en masse to the United States, forming some of the most important diasporas in the country (Eckstein, 11). Díaz, Danticat and García are part of these diasporas and, as such, their texts are heavily influenced by their home countries' relations with their adopted nation.

In García's *Dreaming in Cuban,* the relationship between the United States and Cuba echoes the fractured line between the del Pinos and the Puentes. Indeed, Celia strongly believes in Castro's socialist ideals and shares his paranoid fears of an American invasion, as she sees Americans as “adversaries,” “traitors,” and enemies to the revolution: “The *yanquis*, rumors go, have ringed the island with nuclear poison, hoping to starve the people and incite a counterrevolution. […] Celia studies the coconut palms lining the beach. Could they be blinking signals to an invisible enemy?” (García, 3). Whereas to Lourdes, the United States is a refuge from the Cuban Revolution and its ideals, that she and her husband do not share. For Lourdes, her adopted country represent progress, plentifulness (of food, of goods), opportunities and a place where a future is possible, in opposition to Cuba, which degradation, poverty and deprivation she blames on El Líder: “*Socialismo es muerte*, she'd write over and over again until the people believed it, until they rose up and reclaimed their country from that tyrant” (223).

The American influence on Cuba, on its present situation as well as on its people's every-day life, is alluded to several times in the novel, yet still from different perspectives. When Pilar and Lourdes arrive in Cuba after Felicia's death, the daughter notes the similitude between the two countries (“I feel like we're back in time, in a kind of Cuban version of an earlier America” 220) as the mother points to the superiority of the few American items that remain in Cuba: “Look at those old American cars. They're held together with rubber bands and paper clips and *still* work better than the new Russian ones” (221). On the other side, Celia holds the United States responsible for maintaining the dictatorship that reigned before the revolution as she testifies to its role and power in Cuba's politics: “That bastard Batista stole the country from us just when it seemed things could finally change. The U.S. wants him in the palace” (162). The American practice to help placing U.S.-friendly leaders at the head of countries in which they have an interest is not limited to the case of Cuba: “if we Latin types are skillful at anything it's tolerating U.S.-backed dictators” (Díaz, *Oscar Wao* 3). What is special about Cuba is that the revolution succeeded in overthrowing the U.S.-backed dictator, Batista, and that Castro later declared himself – and his country – strongly opposed to the United States, blaming it precisely for its role in Batista's failed repression of the revolution (Eckstein, 10), an hostility that still lasts today.

Juniot Díaz also denounces in his text the role of the United States in the history and politics of the Dominican Republic, calling the Trujillo area “one of the longest, most damaging U.S.-backed dictatorship in the Western Hemisphere” (Díaz, 3). In his rewriting of the Dominican history, the writer lays bare the intricate relations between the United States and the Dominican Republic and shows how the histories and fates of the two countries are intertwined and how they influence each other:

> It might interest you that just as the U.S. was ramping up its involvement in Vietnam, LBJ launched an illegal invasion of the Dominican Republic (April 28, 1965). (Santo Domingo was Iraq before Iraq was Iraq.) A smashing military success for the U.S., and many of the same units and intelligence teams that took part in the 'democratization' of Santo Domingo were immediately shipped off to Saigon. (4)

The two countries are linked to one another since, if the United States exerts a certain power on the Dominican Republic, the fukú unleashed with the U.S. invasion of the Dominican Republic is, according to Yunior, the cause of the American defeat in Vietnam. In his conversation with David Shook and Armando Celayo, Díaz ponders on the shadow cast by the Dominican Republic on the United States, and on how one country shaped the entire destiny of the other: “You can't talk about the United States unless your first words are 'Santo Domingo.' That's just the way it works, and yet you wouldn't know that in either country” (Díaz, “In Darkness We Meet” 16). This last sentence attests to the fact that the mutual influence both countries have on each other is unknown from people on both sides of the ocean, but that it is the way history works, erasing memories and allowing oblivion to do its cathartic work: “You didn't know we were occupied twice in the twentieth century? Don't worry, when you have kids they won't know the U.S. occupied Iraq either” (Díaz, *Oscar Wao* 19). What the author tries to accomplish in *Oscar Wao* is thus to make sure his reader, who is from the start assumed to be ignorant on all things Dominican (“For those of you who missed your mandatory two seconds of Dominican history [...]” 2), recognizes the role each country had in the history of the other, and becomes aware of the intricate relations between the United States and the Dominican Republic.

If the relations between their homelands and their adopted country is an important issue in our novels, the way the writers depict these countries in their texts also speaks volumes to their conception of the place of the migrant regarding his/her countries. Indeed, the horrors and hardships that the writers' nations went through during the different dictatorships are very present in the texts: Cuba's poverty and decay are laid bare in front of Pilar's eyes, and the footnotes in *Oscar Wao* keeps reminding of how many were killed or what evil deeds were committed by the regime. Danticat, in turn, records the atrocities of the dictatorship by relating scenes of torture from the point of view of her main character, the Dew Breaker: “It was becoming like any other job. He liked questioning the prisoners, teaching them to play zo and bezik, stapling clothespins to their ears as they lost and removing them as he let them win, convincing them that their false victories would save their lives” (Danticat, 198). Through the Dew Breaker's eyes, these scenes are described in the everyday tones of one who has become bored of his job and dreams of a new life, which “only intensifies the horror of the tortures” (Scott, 35). Under the regime of the Duvaliers and their militia, tortures, violence and killings were part of the everyday life of Haiti, as this comment by Michel in “Monkey Tails” attests: “It was a new day, I thought. The number of people marching through the alleys when it wasn't carnival or Rara season without being shot down by the macoutes had confirmed it” (Danticat, 146). Haiti under the Duvaliers is thus depicted in the novel as a place were death and violence had become the norms.

If the writers' countries of origin are the sites of dictatorships that destroyed everything on their way, pushing their people to exile, their adopted country, the United States, is not even so depicted as the flawless haven for political refugees. In *The Dew Breaker*, maybe more than in Díaz and García's texts, Danticat testifies to the difficult situation of migrants in the United States, to the conditions they live in, the pervading racism and violence that is part of their everyday life: “In the old days, they had often gone dancing at the Rendez Vous, […]. But they hadn't gone much since the place had become famous – a Haitian man named Abner Louima was arrested there, then beaten and sodomized at a nearby police station" (38). Several times in the novel, allusions are made to such acts against Haitian-Americans in the U.S., which is all the more disturbing since these acts are often described as being committed by policemen: "She switched to a station with a talk show and sat up to listen as some callers talked about a Haitian American man named Patrick Dorismond who'd been killed. He had been shot by a policeman in a place called Manhattan" (45). Racism and violence against foreigners or immigrants are depicted as institutionalized, as they are legitimized by law representatives, and thus by the American society. Moreover, the United States does not appear as the place where one can easily build a new life: for example, the girls in "The Funeral Singer" drown in alcohol their failure at establishing themselves in their new country as they must face the lack of any desirable future in the United States: "We drink too much and stay too long at the restaurant. Mariselle and I have grown used to the idea that we may never get diplomas out of the class" (174).

Neither the writers' homelands nor the United States are idealized in the novels. The darkness of the everyday reality of migrants in the U.S. as shown in the texts offsets the depiction of the horrible deeds that have been committed under the dictatorships. As we have seen, on the contrary to traditional migrant literature, there is no romanticized "there/then" opposed to an alienating "here/now" in Díaz, Danticat and García's texts. There is instead an acknowledgement of the relation between the "here/now" and the "there/then" and of their mutual influence, as we shall now see that the place of the migrant lies in this link between the two.

Political identities

The space of the migrant is in the hyphen between Dominican-, Haitian- or Cuban-American, in the "shazam!," "that lightning which transforms, that runs back and forth between them and holds them together" (Díaz, "In Darkness We

Meet" 17). This dialectical space made of inclusion is at the core of the political identity the writers express in their texts. As we shall see, this claim for a specific identity is conveyed in the novels through a play with forms and the use of this particular mix of genres and languages we have alluded to several times.

Mixed genres for mixed belongings

One of the specificities of Díaz, Danticat and García's novels is indeed their displaying of multiple genres, as the texts draw on several literary traditions to better subvert them and make them reflect the diversity of their subject: immigration. This literary strategy has also been used in Gloría Anzaldúa's *Borderlands/La Frontera*, in which we witness a multiple and fluctuating text, a real "mestizaje" of genres, from historical essays, autobiography, to a collection of poems. A hybrid structure that echoes Anzaldúa's conception of the queer/mestiza identity and the hybridity of the Borderlands and of their inhabitants: "Borderlands resists genre boundaries as well as geopolitical borders" (Saldivar-Hull, 70).

Our three texts show the same desire to inscribe themselves in multiple traditions and categories. They first display their mixed belongings in the epigraphs used to frame the texts. *The Dew Breaker* opens on a quote from the Russian poet Osip Mandelstam: "Maybe this is the beginning of madness... Forgive me for what I am saying. Read it... quietly, quietly." In her collection of essays, *Create Dangerously: the immigrant artist at work* (2010), Danticat often refers back to this need to read "quietly, quietly," when both the writing and the reading of a book can cause a person's death:

> There are many possible interpretations of what it means to create dangerously, and Albert Camus, like the poet Osip Mandelstam, suggests that it is creating as a revolt against silence, creating when both the creation and the reception, the writing and the reading, are dangerous undertakings, disobedience to a directive. (11)

Arrested by the Stalin government for his counter-revolutionary activities, Mandelstam was sent into exile with his wife, and eventually died in a work camp.[8] Positioned even before the table of contents, Mandelstam's quote places Danticat's novel in the tradition of exiled writers and victims of totalitarian governments. As one goes over the short stories, one realizes that almost all the main characters are indeed exiled from Haiti, and cannot go back to their country. In most cases, they had to leave because of the political situation, like the Haitian students in “The Funeral Singer”: “Mariselle left because her husband, a painter, had painted an unflattering portrait of the president […]. He was shot leaving the show. I was asked to leave the country by my mother because I wouldn't accept an invitation to sing at the national palace” (Danticat, 172).

Dreaming in Cuban opens with a quote from Wallace Stevens: “These casual exfoliations are / Of the tropic of resemblances...” Considered as one of the major American poets of the twentieth century, Stevens was deeply interested in the fusion in poetry of “the creative imagination and objective reality.”[9] From the start, the reader is then warned that a subtle mix of realism and the poetic surreal power of dreams will take hold of the text. Moreover, this epigraph by an American poet counters the idea, that one can infer from the book's title and cover, that the novel is going to be exclusively about Cuba. Instead, the text balances between Cuba and the U.S, between dream and reality.

Junot Díaz is the only one to insert more than one epigraph in his novel. The text starts with a quote from Stan Lee and Jack Kirby comic book the *Fantastic Four*: “Of what import are brief, nameless lives... to **Galactus**??” This quote points to the role of comics, which pervade the novel, and the relevance of the genre to the story. Indeed, the novel is “loosely organized around four characters modeled after the Fantastic Four” (Hanna, 514), the “brief, nameless lives” of the de León family, scattered by the god-like figure of Trujillo-Galactus. Díaz's second epigraph comes from a very different source, “The Schooner Flight,” a poem by Derek Walcott. In an expansive tone and a language particular to the nation's history (Hanna, 499), the poem's speaker presents himself as a representative figure of the nation: “I'm just a red nigger who love the sea, / I had

8 http://www.poets.org/poet.php/prmPID/698, accessed on 02/25/2014.

9 http://www.poetryfoundation.org/bio/wallace-stevens, accessed on 02/25/2014.

a sound colonial education, / I have Dutch, nigger, and English in me, / and either I'm nobody, or I'm a nation." The coupling of these two epigraphs as narrative frames of the novel is indicative of its different sources, drawing on the apparently distinct traditions of the American pop culture as well as contemporary Caribbean poetry. The same occurs with the third epigraph, at the start of the second part of the novel: "Men are not indispensable. But Trujillo is irreplaceable. For Trujillo is not a man. He is … a cosmic force. […] He belongs to … the category of those born to a special destiny" (Díaz, 204). From what seems to be a newspaper named *La Nación* (several Spanish-speaking newspapers are called *La Nación*, including one in Cuba, but there is no other precision in Díaz's text), the excerpt, supposedly historical but close to the epic tone of comic books, links Trujillo to a super-hero figure, again opposing the unknown "ordinary contemporaries" to the official one "born to a special destiny."

These epigraphs echo the way in which our three books are constructed, namely, borrowing from different genres and literary traditions. For example, the novels include several traditional folk songs, that are translated and integrated to the story, as in Danticat's eighth story "The Funeral Singer": "I'd begin by asking everyone to pretend they were rowing with me, and I'd sing, *Brother Timonie, row well, my friend. Don't you see we're in trouble? Brother Timonie, the wind's blowing hard. And we must make it back to land*" (Danticat, 166). In *Dreaming in Cuban*, however, the folkloric songs interrupt the narration as they are indented in the text and remain untranslated: "*Quieres regresar, pero es imposible / Ya mi corazón se encuentra rebelde / Vuélvete otra vez / Que no te amaré jamás"* (García, 39). This Beny Moré song, by one of the greatest Cuban popular singers, is the only one of the several songs or poems one can find in García's novel that comes from a Cuban source. The other songs are either very famous mexican theme songs ("*Ese lunar que tienes, cielito lindo, / junto a la boca … / No se lo des a nadie, cielito lindo, / que a mí me toca,*" 36) or poetry from the Spanish activist and poet Federico García Lorca: "*El campo / de olivos / se abre y se cierra / como un abanico*" (94). This last poem appears first in Spanish, but is then translated at the very end of the book: "*The field / of olives / opens and* *shuts / like a fan*" (243). Both times Celia is looking at the ocean, waiting for a sign from her Spanish lover, longing for him to come back or, in the second occurrence, to go and join him.

The three novels are full of folkloric songs, but also of letters. Indeed, letters seem to be the privileged mode of communication between families that are separated across countries, a way to keep in touch with family and friends back home or to send photographs to loved ones who went "ahead": "In the afternoon, she wrote letters home. She wrote of the meals she made, of the pictures of her on the wall, of the songs and protest chants on the radio. She wrote to family members, and to childhood girlfriends […]" (Danticat, 47). These letters are sometimes only mentioned, as in this last excerpt from "Seven," but they can also be entirely transcribed in the text, as in "Water Child," in which we have the entirety of the letter sent by Nadine's parents (53). In the speech-silence dynamic of Danticat's novel, the very act of writing is of importance, since putting down into words one's story, one's life, is often presented in the text as the only way to go past the pervasive silence left by the Dew Breaker, or by immigration, as we discussed in the first part of this work.

In Cristina García's *Dreaming in Cuban*, the importance of Celia's letters cannot be questioned. If the first letter she sends to Gustavo is directly embedded in the text (37), the rest are inserted in blocks of different periods in specific sections, in the middle and at the end of every chapter of the book. They are thus not really integrated to the text, as they are neither introduced nor directly linked to the plot of the story, but rather disrupt the narration. They nonetheless serve as the "underlying structure and voice of the novel" (Machado Sáez, "The Global Baggage" 140) as they describe a pre-revolutionary Cuba that is at the time of the narration lost to the characters and, in particular, to Pilar. Blending historical events with personal ones, Celia's letters are also a means of reporting the progress of the Revolution and have a glimpse of the del Pinos' past.

Díaz also uses the device of the letter in his novel, yet less obviously. We can only suggest that a kind of correspondence remains between Yunior and Lola at the time of writing, since parts of the family's story are told from Lola's perspective. In the second part of the first chapter, “Wildwood,” one can suggest from the italics that the first paragraphs are taken from a letter or from Lola's diary. The rest of the section also seems to be a kind of letter that Lola wrote when she was in Santo Domingo: “And that is how I ended up in Santo Domingo. […] I'm into my sixth month here and these days I'm just trying to be philosophical about the whole thing” (70). The same happens at the start of the second chapter, in which Lola more specifically addresses Yunior, but this time from what seems to be the present of writing: “Now that I'm a mother myself I realize that she could not have been any different. […] It was only when I got on the plane that I started crying. I know this sounds ridiculous but I don't think I really stopped until I met *you*” (208-210, my italics).

Díaz is not interested only in letters and songs in his text, but presents what is easily the most eclectic of our three novels. As his two different epigraphs announced, his text draws on Caribbean as well as purely American sources, and quotes from Edouard Glissant, the famous Martinican thinker (92), or from the Cuban anthropologist Fernando Ortíz (213), go alongside references to sci-fi, fantasy and comic books: “My shout-out to Jack Kirby aside, it's hard as a Third Worlder not to feel a certain amount of affinity for Uatu the Watcher; he resides in the hidden Blue Area of the Moon and we DarkZoners reside (to quote Glissant) on '*la face cachée de la Terre*'” (92). Science fiction and comics are two very American forms, yet they stand at the narrative margins of canonical literature and, like Díaz's characters, are “completely marginalized” (Díaz, “In Darkness We Meet” 15). This association of conventional historical narrations, historiographic or ethnographic studies, and what Yunior calls “genres,” allows the writer to tie the histories of the two countries, the Dominican Republic and the United States, together. To do so, Díaz not only uses narrative forms from the two countries, but also throws in his text references to historical events of both countries: “Where in coñazo do you think the so-called Curse of the Kennedys comes from? […] Just a little gift from my people to America, a small repayment for an unjust war. That's right, folks. Fukú” (Díaz, *Oscar Wao* 4).

Yet, one can wonder why the writer chose to use so heavily the sci-fi and comic books narrative forms, two genres that are critically marginalized and often poorly considered in the literary world. In his interview with David Shook and Armando Celayo, Junot Díaz declares that science fiction helped him put his immigrant experience into words:

> So I was thinking about how in the world to describe the extreme experience of being an immigrant in the United States, the extreme experience of coming from the Third World and suddenly appearing in New Jersey. […] But science fiction, fantasy, and comic books are meant to do this kind of stupid stuff, they're meant to talk about these extreme, ludicrous transformations, and so I really wanted to use them. (15)

In *Oscar Wao,* the narrator uses very similar words to try to figure out where Oscar's love for genres came from: “It might have been a consequence of […] living in the DR for the first couple of years of his life and then abruptly wrenchingly relocating to New Jersey. […] After a transition like that I'm guessing only the most extreme scenarios could have satisfied” (Díaz, 21). Thanks to their flexible form as well as their capacity to depart from reality and explore alternative worlds (Hanna, 514), science fiction and genre fiction in general are thus the most adequate devices to describe the reality of the migrant experience. According to Díaz, both this experience and the act of reading science fiction “require the learning of new codes” (qtd. in Hanna, 514) to approach reality. This mix of genre fiction and Caribbean sources is thus a very effective way of conveying the migrant experience and that kind of outlandish space travel through time and from one country to the other.

The link between the form of the novels and the very experience of migration can also be sensed in Danticat's text. Her short stories collection resembles the form of an anthology, which would gather together stories on the same subject, that is exile and migration. The form of the anthology also allows to enclose the characters, at first glance all characterized by exclusion as most of them are exiled from Haiti, into a new community. It is furthermore useful to think of Danticat's novel as an anthology as this form “offers an unlikely fit for the discontinuities of migration and […] articulates at the level of form the problems of order, inclusion, and comparison that migration narratives articulate at the level of content" (Walkowitz, 537). This would explain why so many migrant writers choose the form of the short story collection (one can think of Ha Jin's *Good Fall*, Sandra Cisneros's *House on Mango Street* or Alaa Al Aswany's *Chicago*, to name but a few).

Just as Gloría Anzaldúa was trying to fight against the categories and binarisms created by the dominant patriarchal systems of power which would put heterosexual and homosexual, Americans and Chicanos each in a specific category, Díaz, Danticat and García promote a hybridity of literary belongings by their use of multiple genres and literary traditions, of which the epigraphs, the use of songs or letters and Díaz's play with codes were but a few examples. This hybridity is then a powerful tool to "deconstruct boundaries within race, language, and nation" and to "empower marginalized collectives" (Yazdiha, 36). Refusing to choose one genre or literary tradition in particular is to refuse to be put - and locked up - oneself in a category, and to claim a plural literary identity.

The languages of migration

If migration has thus a specific literary form, it also seems to use particular languages. Mixing languages and registers, immigrant fictions indeed present a kind of "hybrid" English – or, as Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch'ien calls it, "weird English" – that is part of their literary goal. If our three novels are primarily in English, the use of standard English, Spanish, creole or dialects denotes a strategical literary choice: while it can allow the writers to emphasize the gap between the different generations of migrants, or between those who left their countries and those who stayed, we will see that language choice also points to one's displaying of one's identity, as well as to the kind of audience one is speaking to.

Multilingual texts

The main specificity of our three novels is the mix of languages they use in their narrative. They all mix several other languages to the standard English in which they write: Spanish, French, Creole, Dominican or Cuban Spanish, street English, Spanglish, but also certain kinds of dialects or slangs. The use of these different languages in texts that are mainly addressed to an English, monolingual readership, is a significant and strategical device to depict the bilingual and bicultural world in which the writers evolve and to express their plural identities.

In García's *Dreaming in Cuban,* language, words and communication in general have an important place in the story: words can be artful ("Pretty words. Meaningless words that […] kept us prisoners in her alphabet world" 121), they can deceive, they can amaze ("Celia is astonished by the words, by the disquieting ardor of her husband's last letters" 5), but they can also fail, and are indeed often useless in the text, as many of the characters find themselves incapable of understanding one another: "What is he saying? Each word is a code she must decipher, a foreign language, a streak of gunshot. She cannot hear and see him simultaneously" (81). As such, the use of other languages is significant: for example, Pilar only starts dreaming in Spanish when she gets to Cuba and embraces her plural heritage (235). Of course, names of places, countries, or streets are in their original language in the text (for example, Santa Teresa del Mar), yet other types of words are directly inserted in Spanish in the text: songs or poems are in their original versions, the only translated one, as we have seen, being Lorca's last poem ("*The field / of olives...*" 243); names of family members ("Mami", "Papi", "Abuela", "hija"); affectionate names ("mi corazón", "mi cielo", "mi querido"); words with political implications ("yanquis", "El Líder" or "compañeros"); names of typical food or drinks ("guayabita del pinar") or words linked to spiritual beliefs or practices ("santería", "santera/o", "asiento"). This last aspect is also the one in which another language than English or Spanish is used: "*Kosí ikú, kosí arun, kosí araye*" (15). This is a Niger-Congo language called Yoruba, which is used as the liturgical language of the Santería religion, very common in Cuba.[10]

Díaz and Danticat also use other languages than English in the same instances as García (family names, food and drinks, liturgical etc.), yet the three writers do not have the same strategy for integrating these languages. Indeed, in García's text, Spanish or Yoruba words are inserted in the English text but are, except from the family names like “Mami” or “Papi,” always marked with italics, and left untranslated. However, most of the Spanish words used in the narrative are common Spanish words like “por dios” or “bienvenida, hija” (García, 13), and thus easily understandable by non Spanish speakers. As Pilar expresses it, translation is seen as a loss, as interfering with the real meaning of the words: “Painting is its own language, I wanted to tell him. Translations just confuse it, dilute it like words going from Spanish to English” (59).

In Danticat's *Dew Breaker*, however, words in Creole or in French are neither tagged with italics nor quotation marks, but are almost always immediately translated: “Yon ti koze, a little chat” (13). The only folkloric song appearing in the novel is even directly given in its English translation: “*Little Bird, where are you going? I am going to Fillette Lalo's*” (217). Finally, in Díaz's *Oscar Wao*, Spanish is neither marked as different in the text, nor is it ever translated, as the Spanish words are very often directly integrated in the English sentences: “he was still the passionate enamorao who fell in love easily and deeply” (23). As the writer uses mainly common Spanish, non Spanish speakers can usually draw the meaning of the words from the context. Yet, at times Díaz uses entire sentences in Spanish, and still does not provide any translation: “Pedro snorts: Ese ladrón no va' pa' ningún la'o” (112). Those instances seem to deny monolinguals access to the text and privilege a bilingual readership at once. One can note as well that Díaz not only uses different languages in his text, but also switches between registers, using standard English or Spanish as well as slangs like street or nerd English or Dominican Spanish. This is something that we do not necessarily encounter in García or Danticat's novels, but that is similar to Gloría Anzaldúa's work with languages in *Borderlands/La Frontera*: “The switching of

10 http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/523208/Santeria, accessed on 03/22/2014

'codes' in this book […] reflects my language, a new language – the language of the Borderlands" (Anzaldúa, 29). Díaz thus partakes Anzaldúa's project to posit the validity of the migrant's multiple languages in the face of English hegemony in the U.S., as we shall later see.

The writers use different strategies to integrate these other languages into their English texts and to "portray [the] bilingual and bicultural world" that is theirs (Torres, 77). The first and most widespread strategy is the use of code-switching, that is the natural switch, in one sentence, from one language to the other, without any break in the grammar or the internal coherence of the sentence: "A little banbòch to celebrate Ms. Hinds' discharge tomorrow" (Danticat, 59). This is Díaz's privileged method, and his text abounds in sentences that start in one language and end up in another: "Hypatía Belicia Cabral, ven acá! You ven acá, Beli muttered under her breath. You" (Díaz, 80). In *Oscar Wao*, code-switching is part of the aesthetic aim of the author's writing, as Díaz often uses it as a device to play on the musicality of words.

With code-switching, another very common strategy in our texts is to use foreign words whose meaning is easily accessible from the context or from their familiarity, as we have seen before. This is the case for culturally marked items like places ("Santo Domingo" in Díaz), food and drinks ("arroz con pollo" in García) or family members' names ("Manman" and "Papa", in Danticat). Using these kinds of recognizable Spanish or Creole words is a way to "ethnicize" the texts and make them identifiable to the monolingual reader as Latino or Creole. This is similar to the speech of some of Danticat's characters, who speak perfect English but like to throw in Creole words from time to time just to show off their origins: "She's so upset and sezi that Doctor Vega had to give her a sedative. […] *'Alo, allo, hello,'* he stammered, creating his own odd pauses between Creole, French and English […]. 'Just saying hello to you.' He *chose* heavily accented English" (Danticat, 55-56, my italics).

When consisting of only one word, the foreign item can be not integrated to the English text, meaning that each word stays in its own language, as for example in García's text, after Felicia's last initiation: "A group of *babalawos* tried a *panaldo*, an exorcism" (García, 190). Yet, borrowings from other languages can also be integrated to the English text, as the foreign item is adapted into English: "The regime would have been the world's first culocracy (and maybe, in fact, it was)" (Díaz, 217). Here we have indeed a neologism, created by the writer, using the Spanish word "culo" ("bottom"), a degrading word referring to the women the Dominican dictator has slept with, and the English suffix "-cracy", from the Greek word meaning "rule," "government," "governing body".[11] Another example of integrated borrowings in Díaz's text is the word "parigüayo" which, besides being a marker of Dominican Spanish, is actually "a corruption of the English neologism 'party watcher'" (Díaz, 19). This time, then, an English word is adapted in Spanish, and then integrated into an English text.

One last strategy to integrate words from another language into an English text is called "calques", which are "creative English renditions of Spanish words and phrases translated literally or figuratively. In this case, Spanish is indirectly, or covertly, present in the English language text" (Torres, 78). Calques are not very common in our novels, but we can find some examples in Díaz's text: "Wake up, girl! You're going to burn the pan de agua!" (Díaz, 87). This last sentence is derived from the Dominican expression "Que vas a quemar el pan de agua", which is used when talking about the negative consequences of not being realistic and refers here to Beli's self-absorption (Arrieta, 112). The use of calques is not easily decipherable for monolingual readers, even more when they are drawn from local expressions, as is the case here. The irony and the meaning of the sentence in those cases is thus only graspable for Dominican Spanish speakers.

Language choice and identity

Choosing to integrate another language to one's text is part of the writers' literary devices and, as such, goes to show on the one hand a certain aesthetic as well as political aim, and on the other the plural, multilingual identity of these writers and their characters: "I am my language" (Anzaldúa, 81). There is often an amalgam

11 http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/-cracy, accessed on 03/22/2014

between a language and its speakers (Fuller, 6): for example, in the United States, Spanish is generally considered as “easy,” unsophisticated and inferior to English. Because of this iconic relation between a language and its speakers, Spanish speakers are then perceived as a simple, rural and uneducated people: “Iconicity means that a language comes to be not only an index of a certain group, but an icon for the group [...] a representation of that group, sharing characteristics with it” (Fuller, 7). On the contrary, speaking English, and only English in the United States is part of the very essence of what it means to be American: “In the U.S., not just English but English monolingualism is an icon of American belonging” (Fuller, 10). Language is thus an important symbol of national belonging.

Yet, just like Díaz, Danticat and García, the majority of the characters of our novels are immigrants and, as such, bilinguals. If language is an integral part of a person's identity, language choice then reflects the decision to present one's identity in a certain way, the expression of one's belonging to a certain community. There are a few different instances in our texts in which the characters' language, or language choice, bears witness to their immigrant, plural identities.

Language gaps

First of all, the language one uses makes apparent the gap between the different generations of migrants. It has been shown that migrants' first language tends to decline over the generations: if first- and second-generation migrants usually maintain their first language while learning English, third-generation migrants are often not fluent speakers of their parents or grandparents' mother tongue (Fought, 87). As such, different generations may construct their identities in different ways: “The immigrant generation may see their ethnicity as a straightforwardly 'Mexican', for example, while the second-generation speakers see their ethnicity as a combination of their Mexican descent and the US culture” (Fought, 87). A way for second-generations to express their different identity is to use a different language than the first generation.

This gap between the generations is present in Danticat's *Dew Breaker*, in which Ka, the Dew Breaker's daughter, refuses to speak Creole with her father: “'Fine,' I reply defiantly in English. 'Ka,' he continues in Creole, 'when I first saw your statue, I wanted to be buried with it, to take it with me into the other world.' 'Like the Ancient Egyptians,' I continue in English” (17). Here, Ka chooses to speak English to show that she is angry with her father, and that she refuses to enter in his stories: “'Okay,' I interrupt him with a quick wave of my hands. 'I've got it.'” In the same way, a few pages later, Ka's mother deplores the way Ka talks in shortcuts, deeming it childish and inconsiderate: “Anne was thinking of scolding her daughter, of telling her she should talk to them like a woman now, weigh her words carefully so that, even though she was an 'artiste,' they might take her seriously...” (69). If we do not have a switch of languages here, the different registers echo the generational gap between Ka and her mother's old-fashioned mindset: to be taken seriously, one has to talk correctly, all the more when one is working as an artist.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, the differences between the generations are also very present as the novel encompasses the lives of three generations of women. As previously noted, the communication between the characters is difficult, often interrupted, or fails altogether most of the time. Yet, the characters are sensible to the gap between them: “Javier writes that he has a Czech wife now and a baby girl. Celia wonders how she will speak to this granddaughter, show her how to catch crickets and avoid the beak of the tortoise” (10). Words are important for Celia, as is the passing down of stories from generation to generation, which she eventually achieves with Pilar. However, Celia laments that her granddaughter has forgotten her Spanish and that she now speaks it as a foreigner: “Pilar, her first grandchild, writes to her from Brooklyn in a Spanish that is no longer hers. She speaks the hard-edged lexicon of bygone tourists itchy to throw dice on green felt or asphalt” (7). The gap between those who left, who immigrated to other countries, and those who stayed is thus apparent in their languages, and contributes to alienate a bit more immigrants from their country of origin. Yet, Lourdes claims herself happy with this alienation: “Lourdes considers herself lucky. Immigration has redefined her, and she is grateful. Unlike her husband, she welcomes her adopted language, its possibilities for reinvention" (73). In her assimilationist thrust, Lourdes happily drops her mother tongue to embrace her new country's language to express her disagreement with her home country (its politics, its mindset, its economy, etc.) and her wish to start over in a country that she admires. As a result, people in Cuba will be incapable of understanding her when she tries to open their eyes to their plight: "I pull my mother from the growing crowd. The language she speaks is lost to them. It's another idiom entirely" (221). Even if Lourdes speaks Spanish, what she says is marked with American ideology, and does not make any sense to Cuban people.

In the same way, in Danticat's fifth short story ("Night Talkers"), Dany, who comes back to Haiti to visit his aunt, has to remind himself of his country's custom: "'Bonjou, cousins,' he said, remembering the childhood greeting his aunt had taught him" (Danticat, 89). The distance between Dany and the people he encounters in his aunt's village is flagrant: he is self-conscious of the difference between Haitian and American greeting practices as the former are not natural to him but learned. This distance is later illustrated with Claude, a criminal that has been sent back from the U.S. to Haiti: "'We have a few boys here in the village who have been sent back. Many don't even speak Creole anymore. They come here because this is the only place they have any family. There's one boy not far from here. [...] You can speak to him, one American to another'" (96). The gap between those who left and those who stayed is clear, as the former are grouped together, separated from the others by their languages. The emphasis is here even greater, as his aunt calls Dany an American, and not a Haitian. As we have seen, a person's language is an icon of his/her identity and points to the community s/he belongs to: here, Dany and Claude's ability to speak English classifies them as Americans to the eyes of the Haitian community.

However, if migrants' speech is marked in their home country, it is also of course deeply tagged as foreign in the United States. According to this notion of language iconicity that we mentioned, and to the conservative English-only current that dominates the American society at present (Fuller, 10), speaking a language other than English in the United States means that one is “less” American than monolinguals and is automatically categorized as foreign, as “Other”. This gap between migrants and Americans is visible in Danticat's novel, in which frequent allusions are made to the migrants' bad English, or lack of it: “She's a young Cuban woman who is overly polite, making up for her lack of English with deferential gestures […] all to avoid being forced into a conversation, knowing she couldn't hold up her end very well” (Danticat, 8-9). In order to find work in the United States, migrants have to learn English, else they will have to stay in the Latino community: the Cuban woman of the last quote is a maid and usually does not talk to clients, Ka's parents have almost only Haitian clients (76), and in “Seven,” the narrator warns his wife “that because she didn't speak English, she might have to start as a cook in a Haitian restaurant” (46).

This necessity to learn English in order to “make it,” to come through, is echoed in *Dreaming in Cuban*, in which we see Ivanito striving to learn English, even though normally only Russian is taught at school: “I started learning English from Abuelo Jorge's grammar textbooks. I found them in Abuela Celia's closet” (García, 145). Later, he receives a radio that allows him to learn more English which, after he manages to escape and leave Cuba, will allow him to fulfill his dream: “I want to be like the Wolfman and talk to a million people at once” (191). As for Lourdes, the irony lies in the fact that even if she happily embraces English and sees herself as the one who “made it” out of Cuba, her foreignness is constantly recalled as her accent keeps being underlined: “'We use only real butter,' she says in her accented English”; “I hear her boast, trilling her 'r''s […] as if her accent were partly responsible for the painting” or later, “And her English, her immigrant English, has a touch of otherness that makes it unintentionally precise.” (66;144;176) In every case, a person's language, and his/her use of it, is representative of his/her identity and of the community s/he belongs to.

Literary audiences

Language choice in our three novels, as in most immigrant fictions, is also deeply influenced by the literary audience to which a text is addressed. Indeed, the choice of the language in which the authors write and their ways of integrating foreign languages in their texts depends on the reader they have in mind.

García and Danticat both seem to be addressing their novels to a monolingual English reader. As we have seen, they both use Spanish or Creole in their texts in a way that makes them accessible to non speakers of these languages: the foreign words they use are either common words that a non speaker familiar with the languages will know, or the context will make the meaning of the foreign word clear. Moreover, especially in Danticat's *Dew Breaker*, Spanish or Creole words are often immediately translated. Another characteristic of García and Danticat is that we hardly ever get the "original versions" of what the characters say, as their speech is directly translated into English: "'She'll never be acquitted,' Tío Arturo says in Spanish" (García, 61) or in Danticat: "'I know she called you,' he says to her in Creole" (Danticat, 14).

In *Oscar Wao*, Díaz first seems to be also addressing his text to monolingual English speakers: his novel is mainly in English, the "you" invoked by Yunior is assumed to not know anything about the Dominican Republic, and the narrator keeps on referring to the American influence in Dominican history, as we discussed earlier. However, Díaz puts more value on bilingual readers than Danticat or García do, as his way of mixing Spanish to his English text – freely code-switching, sometimes for entire sentences, neither marking Spanish as "other" nor providing any translation, and sometimes using expressions accessible only to Dominican Spanish speakers – makes certain aspects of it only available to bilinguals. "Multilingual texts work differently for different audiences" says Torres (91): a bilingual reader will not read the text in the same way than a monolingual, who will have to make more efforts to get what is going on, and will thus better understand the "asymmetrical power relationships and cultural dissimilarity" (Torres, 91) in a reader's social and cultural background that will influence the reading of the text. Maybe more than Danticat or García, the multiple discourses used in Díaz's text allow for a “heterogeneous reading audience” (Machado Sáez, “Dictating Desire” 551) and even, I would argue, for a plural, hybrid multilingual reader, a reader that Díaz recognizes as being representative of the true American society.

When considering the audience and the choice of a text's language, one has to take into account the context in which these books are written and published. As we have seen, Díaz, Danticat and García all three immigrated to the United States when they were quite young, and all three pursued their education and made their first steps as writers in the U.S., which would explain why their texts are primarily in English. As for writing in the United States, the authors also have to answer to the market laws if they want to be published : “Choosing English as their literary language reflects the reality of their intellectual education and of the market place” (Torres, 78). Yet, while writing in their adopted language, we have seen that the writers have found a way to address both the readers in the U.S. and their communities, to find a place in the American literary tradition while still writing about their home countries.

“Weird-Englishes”

Yet why, besides matters of audiences and market places, do our writers choose to write in English, while still integrating other languages in their texts? The Chinese-American writer Ha Jin, who only writes in English, says in his collection of essays, *The Writer as Migrant*, that

> the ultimate betrayal is to choose to write in another language. No matter how the writer attempts to rationalize and justify adopting a foreign language, it is an act of betrayal that alienates him from his mother tongue and directs his creative energy to another language. This linguistic betrayal is the ultimate step the migrant writer dare to take; after this, any other act of estrangement amounts to a trifle. (31)

If Ha Jin argues that writing in a foreign language alienates the writer from his/her community, our three writers do not seem to share this view, and use multiple languages in a sometimes aesthetic and realistic perspective, but at times towards subversive and political aims as well.

There are instances when the integration of other languages in the texts simply serves as an index of an “exotic,” non-U.S. setting, as a reminder to the reader that the story takes place in a non English or multilingual context, and that the characters are non English or bilingual speakers. This is the case for the familiar Spanish or Creole words that one finds in the novels: the “Mami” and “Papi” of Díaz and García's texts; the allusions to typical food or drinks (“the table fell and the sancocho spilled all over the floor” Díaz, 63), or affective names like “chérie” (Danticat, 64), etc. These words represent the reality of the characters, the authenticity of their setting and dialogues and “have a special power to signify a culture and identity” (Torres, 83) that is “foreign” in the English text.

However, in other instances, the use of other languages than English can be subversive and even a political act. In his conversation with Armando Celayo and David Shook, Junot Díaz talks about what he tried to do with language in his text: “I was trying to see how far I could push English to the edge of disintegration, but still be, for the large part, entirely coherent” (Díaz, “In Darkness We Meet” 14). There is in Díaz's work a play on languages, forms and genres, but also a certain worry of accessibility, of touching an audience that would not be limited to Dominican immigrants in the U.S. This is very similar to what happens in Gloría Anzaldúa's text, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, which would at first look like a chaotic collage of different topics, languages or genres, but the fragmented structure of which still manages to convey her conception of the queer/mestiza identity: “I have to struggle between how many of these rules I can break and how I still can have readers read the book without getting frustrated” (Anzaldúa, 272).

Díaz is thus not just displaying his bilingual aptitudes and pointing to the Dominican-American setting of his novel when he switches between languages, but he is also trying to make a “political move”: “For me allowing the Spanish to exist in my text without the benefit of italics or quotations marks a very important political move. Spanish is not a minority language. Not in this hemisphere, not in the United States, not in the world inside my head” (qtd. in Ch'ien, 204). By not marking Spanish as different in his text, Díaz gives it the same status - "Spanish is not a minority language" – as English and puts the two languages on a par. This runs counter to the language policies of the last decades in the United States, which have advocated the hegemony of English over other minority languages as well as the ideology of a normative monolingualism: "monolingualism is presented as the ideal state for social and political entities, […] this ideal is naturalized and does not usually require justification. […] if an individual is bilingual, the two languages must be kept strictly separate" (Fuller, 10). This ideology follows the notion that to one nation correspond one people, one territory and thus, one language. Speakers of languages other than English are belittled and must assimilate to the dominant language and culture (Fuller, 10).

By placing Spanish on the same level as English, Díaz gives them equal status: "Weirding deprives English of its dominance and allows other languages to enjoy the same status" (Ch'ien, 11). This is an important move in the United States, as English is held high above other languages and is perceived as the language of professional and economic success, of education and mobility (Fuller, 4). On the other hand, Spanish, the most widely spoken language after English in the United States, draws very negative attitudes as it is perceived as an immigrant language. Spanish and English words are side by side in Díaz's text, and are both considered as languages spoken by the designated American audience, thus expressing the "bilingual reality of a great part of the North-American population" (Arrieta, 121, my translation): "Díaz reforms the idea of what constitutes American language by asserting that his Dominican and homogenized Spanish is American" (Ch'ien, 204).

Mixing other languages with English highlights the desire of our three writers – although on different levels – to create a language that would represent their communities and express their hybrid, multilingual identity and "perform their bicultural, borderland experiences" (Torres, 87). Yet this experience is not unique - "There is no one Cuban exile" (García, *The Agüero Sisters* 305) - as the strategies to make Spanish or Creole part of the English text are numerous, and help the writers build their identities and negotiate "their relationships to homelands, languages, and transnational identifications” (Torres, 75). The writers' use of different languages is moreover an act of resistance: in taking ownership of the hegemonic language, English, and changing the way that it is used, the boundaries of language as a symbol of nation and as belonging to a specific place and race are dissolved. Switching constantly from one language to the other can then be a means to “re-negotiate the boundaries between languages and between the social groups associated with them” (Fuller, 39), and to establish a complex bilingual and bicultural identity.

What is “home”?

Claiming for a plural, in-between identity nevertheless entails a redefinition of the very notion of home and of what this concept means to the writers. If they defend, through their texts' forms and languages as well as the politics put forward through their characters, an identity that lies in the link, in the “shazam!” between the country from which they come and the one in which they now live, they also show that one's sense of “home” is not an easy notion to conceptualize and, as such, is an integral part of the migrant's construction of a specific identity.

One of the reason for this complex definition of home lies in the fact that, as Salman Rushdie discusses in his *Imaginary Homelands*, one cannot return to the same place as the same person, and the place one left is not the same place one finds upon one's return:

> But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, Indias of the mind. (10)

The home one left behind does not exist but in the mind, in the imagination of the migrant. What does “home” means, then, if the place one is talking about no longer exists? Ha Jin, in his collection of essays *The Writer as Migrant*, takes the example of Odysseus' return to his former home Ithaka, after the Trojan War, to represent the impossibility of recovering one's home exactly as one left it and to discuss the notion of home itself: “By definition, the word 'homeland' has two meanings – one meaning refers to one's native land, and the other to the land where one's home is at present. [...] In our time, however, the two meanings tend to form a dichotomy” (Ha Jin, 65). In that understanding, home has become a plural and shifting concept, and this is maybe why it tends to be an issue for the characters of our novels.

In *Dreaming in Cuban*, which very title suggests a “rhetoric of belonging” (R. G. Davis, 66), Pilar wonders on where she belongs and where her home is, as she searches for her identity: “Even though I've been living in Brooklyn all my life, it doesn't feel like home to me. I'm not sure Cuba is, but I want to find out. If I could only see Abuela Celia again, I'd know where I belonged” (García, 58). As the United States cannot be identified as a home for Pilar, she nostalgically takes an idealistic notion of her grandmother and Cuba as the space that will make her understand her definition of home and of where she belongs. Yet, Pilar's character evolves throughout the novel, until she realizes that she is “only twenty-one years old” and cannot “be nostalgic for [her] youth” (García, 138), for a pre-Revolutionary Cuba that she can never reach. In García's novel, Cuba appears indeed as a “peculiar exile,” that one can reach “by a thirty-minute charter flight from Miami, yet never reach it all” (García, 219) since the country is isolated geographically, as an island, from the rest of the world, but also economically because of the American embargo and Castro's repressive politics. When Pilar does go to Cuba and faces her home country and her “abuela,” she realizes that something has changed in her, as well as in her conception of where she belongs: “I wake up feeling different, like something inside me is changing, something chemical and irreversible. [...] But sooner or later I'd have to return to New York. I know now it's where I belong – not *instead* of here, but *more* than here” (236). As she now dreams in Spanish, Pilar becomes embedded in a “process of translation” (R. G. Davis, 66) that allows her to understand the shifting boundaries between languages and belongings and accept her plural, bilingual identity.

Ka, in *The Dew Breaker*, also wonders on her conception of home, as she longs, just like Pilar, for an idealized homeland which her parents have taken and alienated from her. When asked by a policeman where she is from, Ka ponders on what to answers: “I was born and raised in East Flatbush, Brooklyn, and have never even been to my parents' birthplace. Still, I answer 'Haiti' because it is one more thing I've always longed to have in common with my parents” (Danticat, 4). The answer to such a question as “where are you from?” is a complex one: it brings into play the notion of one's own identity, obviously, but it also bears witness to the affiliation one chooses to put forward, which itself often depends on the situation or the received perception of this affiliation by the surrounding society. Like Pilar, Ka wishes to be part of her parents' home community even if she knows, after hearing her father's confession, that she is different from them: “Like all parents, they were a society of two, sharing […] a past that even if I'd been born in the country of their birth, I still wouldn't have known, couldn't have known, thoroughly. I was a part of them. Some might say I belonged to them. But I wasn't them” (25). Likewise, when Anne wants to end her confession to her daughter on “'Your are mine and I love you'” (242), Ka has already hung up on her and does not hear her mother's claim of belonging. In Danticat's novel, the link between Ka and her origins, her parents and her homeland is thus severed by the revelation of her parents' past. Claiming Haiti as her origin, Ka understands that this also means that she has to deal with the dark parts of its history.

If the home one left behind is no longer the same, and the one where one lives at present does not feel quite like home, migrants have had to redefine their conception of home as one taking into account not just their past, but their present and future just as much: “In other words, homeland is no longer a place that exists in one's past but a place also relevant to one's present and future” (Ha Jin, 65). Going against categorization and preconceptions on each side of the border, migrants claim a plural identity made of multiple belongings, just like Oscar tells his Dominican lover, Ybón: “Please, Oscar [...] Go home. [...] This is my home. Your real home, mi amor. A person can't have two?” (Díaz, 319). As a Haitian-American writer, Danticat also speaks up for the validity of this plurality of belongings: “Haiti is and will always be one of the two places, the United States being the other, that I call home. Haiti is where I was born and Haiti was my first home. I am like most Haitians living with my feet in both worlds. [...] while I have left Haiti, it's never left me" (Danticat, "Up Close and Personal" 345).

In this second part, we have therefore come to understand that the rewriting of History and the fostering of counter-discourses to official narratives is done in a critical, political way in Díaz, Danticat and García's texts. Indeed, the writers go against the dictatorial aspect of writing and lay bare the influence of politics in the process of migration, as people have left their native countries to escape violent political systems, or to mark their disagreement with these very systems, as the Puente family did. Yet, politics have also deep effects on migrants' present: they often encounter institutionalized hostility directed towards them in the United States, and the political history of the writers' homelands is still an issue today, as is shown in Danticat's novel. The analysis of this intricate relations between the United States and the writers' home country has then helped us bring out the reliance of each nations upon the other, and to show that Díaz, Danticat and García's texts offer "a means by which the dominated can reclaim shared ownership of a culture that relies upon them for meaning" (Yazdiha, 32). If they rehabilitate the space of migrants in the American society and culture, the writers nonetheless inscribe their origins in the very form and language of their texts, drawing on multiple literary traditions, freely mixing codes and using as much Spanish or Creole as they can. Just like we saw in the writers' demythologization of the notion of "home," identity, language and belonging are claimed as fundamentally plural and shifting in today's literature of migration.

Conclusion

The study of the writing of immigration, through the analysis of form and language as well as history and politics in the novels of Junot Díaz, Edwidge Danticat and Cristina García has thus help us draw the new direction that recent immigrant fictions have undertaken, and to shed light on the effects of globalization on new literary and cultural trends in the U.S. In a move away from such traditional aspects of early migrant literature as the search for assimilation, the impossibility of return, the dual conceptualization of the world as "here" vs. "there," or the notion of identity as static and predetermined, we have seen that new ways of thinking about space and identity have emerged in immigrant fictions of these last decades.

First, we have understood that an important shift in migrant literature was the return of the role of History: if immigration means to "cut oneself off from history and to condemn oneself to a world of ghosts and memories" (Mukherjee, 689), a primordial feature of new immigrant fictions is to reclaim this history, and confront it through fundamentally fractured and plural narratives. We have therefore seen that the novels fostered the importance for migrants to remember where they come from ("Remember who you are. You are the third and final daughter of the Family Cabral. You are the daughter of a doctor and a nurse" Díaz, 163) or why they left their country in the first place (like Lourdes, who cannot forgive Cuba or her mother because she cannot forget what the soldiers did to her: "What she fears most is this: that her rape, her baby's death were absorbed quietly by the earth, that they are ultimately no more meaningful than falling leaves on an autumn day" García, 227), as these questions weigh heavily on their present. In its attempt at recording the multiple voices of the nameless lives of diaspora, the literature of migration now approaches immigration from the margins, from the perspective of the migrant him-/herself, and allows for the establishment of a collective history, one made of hybridized realisms and global truths that can capture the Caribbean texture of reality.

Then, we came to the conclusion that this marginal perspective of the migrant was a deeply critical one, as the authors write politically committed texts that allowed them to restore the dialogue between their country of origin and the one of destination, formerly taken as contradictory parts of the “here/there” dichotomy. Finally, we have seen that the notion of identity itself has evolved, as the free mix of genres, traditions, codes and languages shattered previous essentialist conceptions of identity in favor of a plural, shifting one. Immigrant fictions of these last decades thus seem to be advocating a new transnational aesthetics, one that constantly moves to and fro between the countries, one that is able to “deconstruct borders and relate to collectives across cultural boundaries” (Yazdiha, 34).

Eventually, the success of this new generation of ethnic writers who explore migrant identity has to do mainly with the way they represent exile and migration itself within their novels. If Díaz, Danticat and García's characters sometimes feel locked within these “island-prison[s]” (García, 173), they also bear a profound “disregard for boundaries” (176) that allows them to conceive the world not nationally but globally. Moreover, despite their play with forms and languages, their use of less conventional literary genres or their often comical tone, the writers attest in their texts to the reality of migration, to the very experience of dislocation and relocation in different worlds. There is nothing to laugh about immigration, are we reminded by our “humble Watcher,” as Beli believes she has already seen the worst after the episode in the cane fields: “You have to leave *the country*. They'll kill you if you don't. Beli laughed. […] Don't laugh, mi negrita, for you world is about to be changed” (Díaz, 160). In this brief reflexive comment, Yunior – or is it Díaz? – gives a glimpse of Beli's future as an immigrant in the U.S., of the hardships that await her, of what leaving her country means: “What did you know about states or diasporas? What did you know about Nueba Yol or unheated 'old law' tenements or children whose self-hate short-circuited their minds? What did you know, madame, about *immigration*?” (Díaz, 160). Immigration is not a light thing to undertake in these texts, as leaving one's homeland is repeatedly painted as a traumatic experience (one can think about

Lola's tears in the plane that takes her back to the U.S., or Nadine's temporarily "mute, newly arrived immigrant children" in Danticat's third short story).

The novels thus attest to the difficulty of leaving one's country and settling in a new one, but they also bear witness to the failed migrations, the ones that never made it to the "New World" but ended in the deep seas:

> Four fresh bodies are floating in the Straits of Florida. It's a family from Cardenas. They stole a boat from a fisherman. It collapsed in the current early this morning. A boatload of Haitians will leave Gonaïves next Thursday. They will carry the phone numbers of friends in Miami and the life savings of relatives. They will sail to the Tropic of Cancer and sink into the sea. (García 216)

In this abrupt, dream-like vision of Pilar, we get a sense of the constant flow of migrations towards the U.S., of the melting pot of migrants that makes up the multiple histories of our novels, the multiple voices of diaspora. The sea that surrounds the islands of Cuba and Hispaniola, with which this work first opened, is an image of hope, of the possibility of a better future, but it can also represent the harsh realities of migration, as a natural boundary that "exists now so we can call and wave from opposite shores" (García, 240). Recording these migrations, failed or successful ones, is then for the writers a way to attest to the reality of migrants, and to the legitimacy of their reality.

What is ultimately acknowledged in these novels of the intimacy of immigration is the creative productivity of the space of the migrant: there is no notion of a "lamentable 'in-betweenness'" (Hanna, 517) that needs to be denied, no sense of being "out of place" or any existential anguish about being "neither here nor there" any more, but the sense of an "empowering means to achieve a *productive* plural identity" (Campbell and Kean, 50, my italics) that allows migrant writers to explore this multiplicity of affiliations. As such, Díaz, Danticat and García offer skillful texts that are "at the same time speaking to no one and everyone" (Danticat, "*Claire of the Sea Light*") and claim the recognition of a migrant identity that lies not *only* 'in-between' their homelands and the United States, but that is an integrated part of *both* worlds at once.

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