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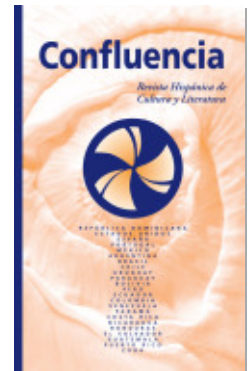
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Dos rayanos-americanos Rewrite Hispaniola: Julia Alvarez and Junot Díaz

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*Mientras no se escarmiente a los traidores
como se debe, los buenos y verdaderos
dominicanos serán siempre víctimas de sus
maquinaciones.¹*

—Juan Pablo Duarte

Juan Pablo Duarte, revered as a founding father of the Dominican Republic,² recently found his nationalist message featured in a video on YouTube titled “ex Dominican@os que juraron por la bandera de Haiti,” or “ex-Dominicans who swore on Haiti’s flag.” The short clip, about seven minutes in total, features a slideshow containing photos and names of Dominicans who, according to the nationalist, anti-Haitian producers of the video, have “betrayed their Dominican citizenship,” as the title slide suggests, and sworn allegiance to Haiti.³ What sparked the production of this video? The answer is muddled by centuries of negrophobia and anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic; beginning with colonization; early border disputes; occupation in the nineteenth century; and Rafael Trujillo’s thirty-one-year reign (1930–1961). The Dominican Republic’s notorious dictator is responsible for the institutionalization of anti-Haitian ideology and it is during this time that the ideology entered the Dominican school curriculum, serving as only one example of the policy’s firm grip on Dominican society. Trujillo’s plan for the nation, based on Eurocentric and Catholic values, did not end with his assassination, but found a new place within Dominican intellectual thought of the late twentieth century. The dictator’s right-hand man, Joaquín Balaguer, in his 1947 publication, retitled in 1983 *La isla al revés*, equated Haitians to backwardness and labeled them as savages, deeming the Haitian nationals threats to the “non-black” Dominican nation. Although the conjunctures of the political, economic, social, and cultural destinies of the two sister-countries, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, are marked by a long list of misunderstandings, disputes and crises, for the purpose of this paper I will primarily consider two influential events involving Dominican-Haitian relations: the Haitian Massacre of 1937 and the Tribunal Court Ruling (0168–13) of September 2013.

October 1937 marks the date of the Haitian Massacre, also known as The Parsley Massacre or *El Corte*.⁴ Over the three-day course of this race-charged genocide an estimated 20,000 Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent were killed. Seventy-five years later in September 2013, just a few days before the Massacre's somber anniversary, the Dominican Tribunal Court stripped the citizenship of Haitian-Dominicans registered legally in the country. The *sentencia* revokes the citizenship of all Dominicans born to undocumented parents after 1929. Unfortunately, as the average life span is 73 in the Dominican Republic compared to 49 in Haiti, the sentence does not grandfather out many individuals, if any at all. Thus, an estimated 200,000 Dominicans of Haitian descent are rendered stateless by the Ruling. The institutionalized racism inherent in Ruling 0168–13 is an eerie reminder of the troubled history between the two countries. It is also a reminder of a similar decision of the Dominican government carried out almost exactly 75 years prior: the Haitian Massacre. The Massacre has formed a permanent shadow over the Haitian community; perhaps unsurprisingly, it represents a recurring topic in Haitian literature. One of the best-known fictional recreations of *Kout a'* is *Compère Général Soleil* (1955) by Haitian Jacques Stephen Alexis. Accompanying Stephen Alexis' somber masterpiece are *Massacre River* (2008) by René Philoctète and *The Farming of the Bones* (1999) by Edwidge Danticat, both Haitian-American women writing in English. Writers with roots on the eastern side of Hispaniola, however, have more reluctantly broached the subject and the horrific event is notably less prevalent in Dominican literature. Although Freddy Prestol Castillo's *El Massacre se pasa a pie* (1961) provides a vivid account of the Parsley Massacre, most Dominican novelists have opted for a subtle "brush over" of the historical event, mentioning the bloodbath in passing, if at all.

Instead Dominican-American writers, those writing from the United States and primarily in English, have revisited Haiti from a unique diasporic lens. Such writers, grouped among the growing number of Latino/a writers in the United States, have elected to rewrite Haiti by revering the country and its people as integral parts of Dominican culture, community, and history. In respect to the Massacre of 1937, both Julia Alvarez and Junot Díaz have elected to challenge Hispaniola's tragic past. Alvarez gives life to Haitian characters affected by the Massacre in her 1991 novel *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and delves completely, on both a personal and literary level, into Haiti in her recent memoir *A Wedding in Haiti* (2012). Díaz's *The Brief Wonderous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), for which the author became the second Latino/a to win the Pulitzer Prize, exhibits a non-traditional reading of the Massacre via historical and vehemently opinionated footnotes, while both his short story collections *Drown* (1997) and *This Is How You Lose Her* (2013) provide a raw understanding of how Dominicans, from the perspective of a male narrator, view Haitians.

Beyond the literary, both Alvarez and Díaz have publicly denounced Ruling 0168–13, a response that has received backlash and criticism from Dominican nationals who question the authors' *dominicanidad*, or Dominicanness. I propose that the two Dominican-Americans, due to their rewriting of Haiti on a literary and personal, as well as public, level are two modern-day *rayanos*. The term *rayano* traditionally refers to an individual of mixed Dominican and Haitian descent, defined by Prestol Castillo as "híbridos sin patria" (9). A *rayano* for Balaguer is likewise defined as a "subject of doubtful

nationality” (qtd. in Matibag 198). The term does not refer to an adopted identity, but instead attempts to define and categorize border inhabitants often excluded from both Haitian and Dominican communities. Although the term *rayano* is not an elective one, it is appropriately applied to describe authors Alvarez and Díaz in the sense their statuses as Dominicans in the United States allow them to have a different understanding of Haitians from Dominicans on the island. Members of the US diaspora, in fact, often internalize “new” ideas of race that interact with the island’s “prevalent understanding of race” (Simmons 65). Furthermore, as Ramón Antonio Victoriano-Martínez asserts, it is these hybrid Dominicans that validate the “dominicanyork” refrain in respect to life in the United States: “nosotros somos los haitianos de aquí” (222). Due to their position in the Dominican diaspora and newfound racial consciousness, Dominican-Americans straddle a different, imaginary line than does the islander *rayano* Prestol Castillo and Balaguer attempt to define. The Dominican-American *rayano* of the twenty-first century, as modeled by Alvarez and Díaz, does not shy away from Hispaniola’s troubled past while at the same time uncovers the positive elements in the contiguous coexistence between the two countries sharing the same island.

This study seeks to illuminate both Alvarez’s and Díaz’s hybridization of Dominican-Haitian relations that attacks the mistakes of the past and, furthermore, debunks the cock-fight metaphor proposed by Michele Wucker in *Why the Cock’s Fight: Dominicans, Haitians and the Struggle for Hispaniola* (2000) by creating, in a literary sense, a contrapuntal, shared space where both Dominicans and Haitians co-exist. I will first consider selected novels of both Alvarez and Díaz that best exemplify the authors’ response to the 1937 Haitian Massacre while at the same time attempt to establish an alternative stance regarding Dominican-Haitian relations. Alvarez’s *How the García Girls Lost Their Accents* and *A Wedding in Haiti* will be considered, as well as Díaz’s *The Brief Wonderful Life of Oscar Wao*, (paying special attention to the importance of the historical footnotes), and *Drown*. Following the literary analysis, the focus of the essay will shift to the two authors’ more recent and public response to the Ruling 0168–13 of the Tribunal Court. The Dominicanness of the two Dominican-Americans will be considered as a response to those who have critiqued both authors for being “traitors” to one side, or both, of their dual-identity or nationality.

How the García Girls Lost Their Accents is often approached as a text attempting to grapple with traumatic memories. Critics such as Natalie Carter and Jennifer Bess focus on the role of traumatic memory in the novel and mark the trauma as not only personal, but historical and national. I argue that the trauma in Alvarez’s work is also *transnational*, as it reaches to the western limits of the Dominican border and expands beyond them, intertwining Haiti’s tragic past with the Dominican Republic’s. Carter attributes the root of the trauma in Alvarez’s *García Girls* to the tyrannical twentieth-century dictator: “Fifty years after his assassination, the pain and trauma that Trujillo inflicted upon virtually anyone associated with the Dominican Republic during this era is still heartbreakingly apparent, and perhaps nowhere is that trauma more thoroughly illustrated than in the literature of Dominican born-authors like Julia Alvarez” (320). “Dominican-born” however, cannot be read as synonymous with “born in the Dominican Republic.” Although a daughter of Dominican parents, Alvarez was in fact born in the United States, a point she clarifies on

the “About Me” page of her website: “I guess the first thing I should say is that I was *not* born in the Dominican Republic. The flap bio on *García Girls* mentioned I was raised in the D.R., and a lot of bios after that changed *raised* to *born*, and soon I was getting calls from my mother. I was born in New York City during my parents’ first and failed stay in the United States” (“Julia Alvarez” N.p.).⁶ On the other hand, Alvarez’s linkage of the Dominican national trauma to Trujillo, as Carter alludes, is undeniable. Alan Cambeira suggests that the tyranny of the era of Trujillo perhaps encompasses the most “heinous record of reprehensible human rights atrocities” in the Caribbean (12). Alvarez, through her writing, wrestles with such atrocities and forces her readers to confront them as well. It is no secret, especially in *García Girls*, that Trujillo himself, despite the fact his maternal grandmother was Haitian, was the brainchild of the 1937 Massacre.⁷

The protagonist of *García Girls* is Yolanda, whose nickname is “Yo.” For Alvarez, Yo is a purposeful nickname (“Yo” is the English pronoun “I” in Spanish), linking the character to the author herself. Yolanda/Julia’s⁸ family subtly resists the dictatorship and refuses to turn their eyes or hearts from the slaughter of Haitian nationals by taking in a Haitian fleeing the Massacre. This Haitian is Chucha, the family’s maid, whose inclusion allows for the novel to transform into, in Alvarez’s words, a “revolution of truth-telling and self-invention” (Alvarez, *Something* 109).⁹

Chucha serves the family for thirty-two years and it is in the chapter “The Blood of the Conquistadores” that her character, by barely escaping death, comes to life. It is Yolanda/Julia’s sister, Fifi, who shares her “neighbor’s” story:

There was this old lady, Chucha, who had worked in Mami’s family forever and who had this face like someone had wrung it out after washing it to try and get some of the black out. I mean, Chucha was super wrinkled and Haitian blue-black, not Dominican *café-con-leche* black. She was real Haitian too and that’s why she couldn’t say certain words like the word for parsley or anyone’s name that had a *j* in it...She was always in a bad mood—but you couldn’t get her to crack a smile or cry or anything. It was like all her emotions were spent, on account of everything she went through in her young years. Way back before Mami was even born, Chucha had just appeared at my grandfather’s doorstep one night, begging to be taken in. Turns out it was the night of the massacre when Trujillo had decreed that all blacks Haitians on our side of the island would be executed by dawn. There’s a river the bodies were finally thrown into that supposedly still runs red to this day, fifty years later. Chucha had escaped from some canepicker’s camp and was asking for asylum. Papito took her in, poor skinny little thing. (218)

Chucha’s story warrants the construction of a crossroads between traumas as “the fate of Chucha and that of the García’s tell of *national tragedies*” (Bess 97, my emphasis). These are national tragedies, however, that transform into transnational ones, suffered by those on both sides of the island. William Luis reads these tragedies in *García Girls* as political and containing an over-arching Caribbean character. Luis remarks, “The displacement of Caribbean people from their islands to the United States for political or economic

reasons has produced a tension between the culture of the country of origin and that of the adopted homeland” (266). The danger the García family escapes toward the end of Trujillo’s reign by successfully arriving to New York City emphasizes the multilayered history of the Dominican Republic, Hispaniola, and the Caribbean at large, in this way shining light on Édouard Glissant’s understanding of the collective or shared reality unique to those whose histories have been erased by colonialism. In the opening chapter of his foundational text, *Poetics of Relation*, Glissant revisits the experience of deportation to the Americas and remarks, “Although you are alone in this suffering, you share in the unknown with others whom you have yet to know” (6). Alvarez, by attempting to write a new Dominican (American) history and thus filling historical voids, also presents a history that forms part of the greater Caribbean history—an all-encompassing, shared history that accommodates the diaspora and its subjects.

One can unravel a historic Caribbean parallel that spans generations upon considering the García family and their loyal maid, Chucha. The García’s history and Chucha’s history are, in a sense, one in the same: A decade or so after the slaughtering of approximately 20,000 Haitians by Trujillo’s henchmen, Yolanda/Julia’s grandfather is incarcerated for taking part in an underground movement against the dictator. As a direct result, the SIM cars, Trujillo’s “secret service,” keep a nightly watch on her father’s comings and goings (Alvarez’s father was also involved in plots against the dictator), monitoring his activities (Alvarez, *Something* 6). Alvarez elects to write Chucha into *García Girls* to serve as a window into the shared history of the two countries of Hispaniola, and also to create a universal Quisqueyan subject. Just like the Haitian Kreyòl speakers who stutter as they pronounce the *j* in *perejil*, Yolanda/Julia experiences a similar sensation. As she begins to recite poetry on stage, “Her tongue feels as if it has been stuffed into her mouth to keep her quiet” (19–20). Although the author’s alter ego in *García Girls* might appear tongue tied, Alvarez does not hesitate when her pen hits the paper, and it is in this way that she gives voice to the forgotten and/or suffocated stories like Chucha’s. It is due to Alvarez that Chucha and her story of survival reigns eternal and critics such as Bess who conclude that Chucha “will be the one left to suffer true powerlessness while the wealthy lighter-skinned García’s escape to safety” (97) are proven wrong. Instead, both female characters—Yolanda/Julia and Chucha—transgress time, history, and geography.

Just as *García Girls* can be read as autobiographical fiction, a unique merging of genres, *A Wedding in Haiti* moves beyond the one-sided generic definition of memoir and instead classifies, as Alvarez herself confirms, as an “us-moir” (Myers 171). This playful term provides an alternative to the self-centered, introspective reading of a typical memoir, or “me-moir,” and instead focuses on the “we” or the Spanish, *nosotros*, present in the text. The “us” in “us-moir” in *A Wedding in Haiti* lends itself to a multitude of interpretations. One might read the plural “we” in the text as Alvarez and her husband Bill Eichner, or Alvarez and her Haitian friend and “godchild,” Piti. The plural here, however, is not limited to people; it can also be understood as two geographical spaces: the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

A Wedding in Haiti represents Alvarez’s most recent work and her only publication set primarily in Haiti. It speaks to atrocities of the past and the poverty, destitution, and resilience of the present while also anticipating Dominican governmental actions dealing

with Dominican-Haiti relations in the future. Alvarez writes movingly about entering Haiti from the Dominican Republic: “The soldier nods, the gates part, and just like that, we’re in Haiti, and free to proceed. No red tape, no need to wheedle our way in. Haiti will take us without blinking an eye or checking our documents” (31). Contrastingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the reverse border crossing (from Haiti back into the Dominican Republic) is not as simple with three Haitians in tow. Alvarez makes use of the popular Dominican saying *El que tiene boca llega a Roma* (If you have a mouth you can get into Rome) to conclude, “If you are Haitian, getting into the DR is another story” (114).

Returning to Alvarez’s uncomplicated entrance into Haiti, it is valuable to pore over Haiti as she sees it. With the Dominican border far from view, it is a different Haiti—one not depicted in the media—that unfolds in front of Alvarez. Although Haiti bears scars of the past, both part one and two of the memoir (the first trip to Haiti to attend a wedding and the second to travel back to the country after the catastrophic 2010 earthquake) shows a country that is filled with hope, resilience, and determination. The relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti is a contrapuntal one, leading Alvarez to a subtle re-write of José Martí’s quote about Cuba and Puerto Rico as “two wings of a bird that can’t fly unless they work together.” Alvarez instead remarks, “Haiti and the Dominican Republic are the two wings of a bird that can’t fly unless they work together” (177). Other Dominican writers and literary critics have emphasized the important interplay of unity and difference between the two countries that together form Hispaniola, including Eugenio Matibag in his 2003 work *Haitian-Dominican Counterpoint: Nation, Race and State on Hispaniola*. This two-parts-one-piece metaphor, however, is problematized as Alvarez reflects on the countries’ past, remembering Haiti’s “race-driven history, and not just during colonial times, and not just whites against blacks, but internally down the generations” (107) and the 1937 Massacre (123). Despite the, at times, heavyhearted and somber character of the memoir, the suffering on the Haitian side of the border is rendered palpable and tractable by the talented Alvarez. It becomes clear Haiti, time and time again, for historical, political, racial, and even natural reasons has had a target on its back—but when Haiti falls, as Alvarez attempts to support, it gets back up. *A Wedding in Haiti* is a work of self-writing that wrote itself. Alvarez was urged to see and write Haiti by her own impulse to “be by Haiti’s side” (148)—a side that she remains near in a spatial sense, as she, a Dominican-American, is a citizen of Haiti’s neighbor country, and also in a personal and spiritual sense, unable and unwilling to brush aside Haiti’s call for help and will to be “seen.”

Junot Díaz, too, is a Dominican-American author who willfully, and openly, aligns himself with Haiti. He, like Alvarez, imagines the Dominican nation as a fictional narrative, “a ‘text’ that is both written upon by legal, political, and cultural authority, while at the same time writing upon individual and collective identities by virtue of selective memory and historical erasure” (Prezioso 1). This “national text” is one that Haiti cannot be written out of as it represents an integral piece of the Dominican Republic’s historical puzzle. As *Oscar Wao* confronts the interstices of the *Trujillato* and its paternalistic authoritative discourse—one that associated blackness with Haitians—the novel lends itself to re-visioning the intersecting histories of the two countries. Díaz masterfully negotiates the filling of this historical void by introducing *fukú* into the novel. *Fukú* refers

to an ancestral curse that arrived to the island when the European's first encountered the land and intensified with the brutal dictatorship of Trujillo. To this day, if you say the name Cristobal Colón, (Christopher Columbus to North Americans), the belief is that the *fukú* will claim you as well. According to the folklore, one must then cry out "Zafa" to deactivate the malediction; the mere name of the "great discoverer" invokes the ancient, ancestral curse.¹⁰ For Díaz, however, Trujillo reigns supreme as the center of the Dominican *fukú*. Rita De Maeseneer clarifies, "From the first mention of Trujillo, the dictator is positioned within a context of wrongdoings and uncontrollable power. *Fukú* represents a power uncontrollable by reason" (109, my translation).

The novel's preface, centered on none other than the Dominican-born *fukú*, begets from the very beginning an ample historical scope. The first sentence reads, "They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles" (1). These early references to the first encounters between Africans, Tainos, and Europeans clarify that the novel is no *Enriquillo*, referring to Manuel de Jesús Galván's nineteenth-century "foundational" Dominican novel that erases all African ties on the island. Such references also set the stage for the introduction of the Cabral de León family (to which Oscar Wao belongs), a family that over three generations has dealt with more than enough of their fair share of *fukú*. Oscar Wao is an "overweight 'ghetto nerd' from New Jersey" (Hanna 498), but Yunior, the novel's mysterious narrator and Oscar's almost-friend, is the one who responds to the silences in the history of the Dominican Republic and attempts to fill the gaps. While the introductory chapter links Trujillo to the *fukú*, it also gifts to the history-challenged reader a "mandatory two seconds of Dominican history" (2). This history consists of an abnormally lengthy footnote, mentioning the 1937 Massacre twice. The first mention of the Massacre appears among an elongated list of Trujillo's tactics that gave way to his "umbrella of control" and accompanies a lively description of *el generalísimo*:

A portly, sadistic, pig-eyed mulato who bleached his skin, wore platform shoes, and had a fondness for Napoleon-era haberdashery, Trujillo (also known as El Jefe, the Failed Cattle Thief, and Fuckface) came to control nearly every aspect of the DR's political, cultural, social and economic life through a potent (and familiar) mixture of violence, intimidation, massacre, rape, co-optation, and terror; treated the country like it was a plantation and he was the master. (2)

In the very same footnote, the Massacre is listed as one of the "outstanding accomplishments" of El Jefe, this time deemed "the 1937 genocide against the Haitian and Haitian-Dominican community" (3). Later, on page 225, after mentioning in the main text that Trujillo "killed whomever he wanted to kill," Yunior describes, again in a footnote, the aspirations of the tyrant "to become an architect of history, and through a horrifying ritual of silence and blood, machete and perejil, darkness and denial, inflicted a true border on the countries, a border that exists beyond maps, that is carved directly into the histories and imaginaries of a people" (225).

If one reads Trujillo as an architect of Dominican history, he is one whose principal tools include violence and fear, one who paints his country an unmistakable blood red. As critic Monica Hanna states, “In the case of the Dominican Republic, the founding is bathed in blood as Yunior notes that it is completed through the reinforcement of the border that abuts the Haitian half of the island, along with the genocide of Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans within the borders of the nation” (503). This strong and palpable, albeit relatively fleeting, mention of the 1937 Massacre in *Oscar Wao* distinguishes itself from the brief mention of the Massacre and other Haitian-Dominican charged events in novels by Dominicans, written in the Dominican Republic and in Spanish, as the reality of the horrifying event pervades the writing itself, constantly meriting mention in both footnotes and the body-text. The Massacre is mentioned, in total, in three consecutive footnotes (24, 25, and 26) and is frequently alluded to in the text. Such references are read by Díaz as “blank pages,” or rather, as attempts to fill in historical gaps (*Oscar Wao* 119). De Maeseneer expands on the notion of such historical black holes or voids and offers a quote from an interview with Díaz on the topic: “If the novel was able to say the things that it does not, at the heart of the novel the reader would immediately encounter the genocide of the twentieth century against the Haitians and Haitians of Dominican descent, but on the surface level the reader can also find in the novel the genocide of the Dominican Republic, the Caribbean, and of the New World. The book [*Oscar Wao*] approaches this theme indirectly, because the New World approaches it indirectly” (117, my translation).

Another indirect refutation of and response to the Massacre in *Oscar Wao* takes the form of a recurring mention of a faceless figure. This “man without a face” haunts the novel, taking part in evil acts. When Oscar is dragged to the cane fields outside Santo Domingo by two Dominican men who want him dead, or at the least severely injured, he sees this mysterious figure: “They had guns! He [Oscar] stared into the night, hoping that maybe there would be some U.S. Marines out for a stroll, but there was only a lone man sitting in his rocking chair out in front of his ruined house and for a moment Oscar could have sworn the dude had no face, but then the killers got back into the car and drove” (298). This allusion serves as a harrowing reminder of the anonymous victims of Trujillo. It can also be read as a subtle reference to the 1937 Massacre as laborers, both Haitian and Haitian-Dominican, were brutally killed with machetes. Many reports mentioned the disfigurement of victims’ faces and bodies.¹¹

Díaz plays with the notion of Haitianness in his two collections of short stories, *Drown* (1996) and *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012) as well. His first publication, *Drown*, toys with the classification “Haitian” as a racial marker for both Haitians and Dominicans. The narrator of the first story in *Drown*, “Ysrael,” mentions the way his older brother mocked him: “he had about five hundred routines he liked to lay on me. Most of them had to do with my complexion, my hair, the size of my lips. It’s the Haitian, he’d say to his buddies. Hey Señor Haitian, Mami found you on the border and only took you in because she felt sorry for *you*” (5). This same *tíguere* of an older brother, however, does not hesitate to engage in sexual relations with Haitian girls. The narrator notes, “There was a girl he’d gone to see half-Haitian, but he ended up with her sister” (6). Both these quotes prove how close the link is between Dominicans and Haitians. The term the narrator’s brother, Rafa,

uses—"Señor Haitain"—points to the fusion between both sides of the border and the description of the narrator's Haitian-like features illuminates the African blood running through the Dominican veins. Even the fact Rafa boasts to his brother about his sexual escapades with a "half-Haitian" is significant, as it exemplifies the continued intermixing of the two sister-nationalities, including in the diaspora.

While it is clear Alvarez and Díaz both carve a space for Haiti in their literary revisions and rewritings of the Dominican Republic, brief histories of the 1937 Parsley Massacre and inclusions of Haitian characters often times do not speak loudly enough. For one, the national and racial inclusivity of Haiti and its people in narrative form are often misinterpreted. Various critics have concluded that Alvarez idealizes and racially marks her Haitian characters, molding them into a perfect Haitian stereotype (Bess, Williams, Mitchell). Díaz, too, has been confronted with criticism, many calling him racist and misogynist, an author who enforces the Dominican stereotypes instilled by Trujillo—a golden trio of racism, violence, and misogyny. The two Dominican-American authors have both dealt with criticism on a more public stage as well, outfacing the negative commentary of not only scholars and literary critics, but politicians, fellow authors and, more recently, Dominican nationals and intellectuals. The authors, however, affirm their Dominicaness, *and* their Dominican-Americanness, while refusing to succumb to the Dominican Republic's racist ideology, a country in which blacks and mulattoes makes up nearly ninety percent of the population while still harboring a notable "reticence of Dominicans to brandish their black identity" (Torres-Saillant 6). As Silvio Torres-Saillant professes, "No other country in the hemisphere exhibits greater indeterminacy regarding the population's sense of racial identity" (4). This racial confusion and resistance is in large part what lead to Ruling 0168 and similar race-charged political decisions.

It is the Ruling, as well, that has more recently shifted both Alvarez and Díaz under the public eye on the island. Both Alvarez and Díaz, along with Haitian American Edwidge Danticat, recently published a response to the Editor in *The New York Times*. An article originally run on October 24, 2013 in the *Times* titled "Dominicans of Haitian Descent Cast Into Legal Limbo by Court" garnered a defensive and judgmental response from Aníbal de Castro, Ambassador of the Dominican Republic. This response, supporting the Ruling, titled "Two Versions of a Dominican Tale" led only to a third "version," the final word in *The New York Times* going to Hispaniola-born, (or Hispaniola-raised), writers of the diaspora. The response begins by stating that in the Dominican Republic "the highest court in the country has taken a huge step backward with Ruling 0168-13" and continues by linking the sentence to a "continuation of a history of constant abuse, including the infamous Dominican massacre, under the dictator Rafael Trujillo, of an estimated 20,000 Haitians in five days in October 1937." The final words are haunting. They position the Ruling in a harrowing global context, the writers asking, "How should the world react? Haven't we learned after Germany, the Balkans and South Africa that we cannot accept institutionalized racism?" This public response provides a more tangible link between the two Dominican-American authors outside of their commiserative and positive representation of Haiti in the selected fictional works linking the two from a critical standpoint. It is helpful to consider both Alvarez and Díaz individually under the public eye that views the writers, to borrow and slightly tweak the words of Gustavo Pérez-

Firmat, as *dominicaNOs* and also *americaNOs*—they are both and they are neither at the same time.¹²

The hybrid Latino/a author's unique and problematized position within the US diaspora gives way to the complicated media structures surrounding this specific population in the United States. It is increasingly problematic, for example, to use the term "Latino/a" and not pay respect to the increasingly diverse population this group represents in the United States. Arlene Dávila in *Latino Spin: Public Image and the White Washing of Race* points to a contemporary United States discourse that too often over-ethnicizes or de-ethnicizes Latinos/as "whether by presenting them as a threat or as contributors to the 'national community;' by highlighting their growing purchasing power and intrinsic 'values;' or because of their coming of age or eagerness to assimilate" (4–5). Alvarez grapples with the wealth of conflicting Latino/a characterizations in the media and she does so by writing in English—a language representing a common denominator among Latino/a writers in the United States. Luis categorizes Latinos/as writing in English in the following way: "Writers who were born or raised in the United States and for who for the most part write in English... They compose a literature that searches for their own identity and origins in the United States" (xi). Spanish, however, is still considered one of the primary points of contact between Latinos/as. This linguistic duality has proven to be a source of criticism leveled against Alvarez, who elects to write solely in English. A chapter of Alvarez's autobiography titled "Doña Aída, with Your Permission," responds to an incident of linguistic criticism at a Caribbean Studies Association conference in Santo Domingo. Alvarez, a keynote speaker alongside Dominican Aída Cartagena Portalatín, read in English, while Portalatín, unsurprisingly, presented in Spanish. As the two women met on stage, however, as Alvarez remembers it, "Doña Aída embraced me, but then in front of the mikes, she reamed me out. 'Eso parece mentira que una dominicana se ponga a escribir en inglés. Vuelve a tu país, vuelve a tu idioma. Tú eres dominicana.'" (171). Alvarez's thoughtful response to Doña Aída, also deliberately sarcastic, proves the author's hyphenated status; she is *not* a Dominican writer, but she also notes, "You're right, Doña Aída, I'm also not una norteamericana" (173). Despite favoring English to Spanish, Alvarez remains active in non-profit and humanitarian movements in the Dominican Republic. Aside from serving on the board of the Mariposa Foundation,¹³ Alvarez is the founder and an ongoing supporter of Border of Lights, a collective dedicated to commemorating the legacy of sisterhood and justice between the two countries of Hispaniola by hosting a weekend-long service and memorial event on the Haitian-Dominican border each year. The weekend Border of Lights takes place, in early October, marks the anniversary of the 1937 Massacre. Although Alvarez has a presence on the island paying homage to the legacy of hope and justice of the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the author, now in her sixties, self-defines as a "digital immigrant" of sorts.¹⁴ Alvarez noted in an interview conducted in October 2012, "I have been reluctantly dragged into the new technology, kicking and screaming, because my generation really didn't grow up with it... You have to stay true to what works for you, but you also can't be a dinosaur... this hyper-connectivity is changing the nature of publishing, and how books are marketed" (Myers 174). While Alvarez wrote a weeklong blog for Powell's Books prior to the release of *A Wedding in Haiti* and regularly updates her website, her digital footprint is not nearly as marked as Díaz's.¹⁵

Díaz has over 50,000 followers on his personal Facebook page. The author constantly blasts controversial news articles and, recently, opinion pieces on the 0168 Ruling. A mere two months after the October Ruling, Díaz posted a link from the Dominican website *hoy.com.do* titled “Mis traidores favoritos” or “My favorite traitors.” These traitors, however, are only regarded as “traitors” by some; they are heroes in the eyes of those working against the Tribunal Court decisions. In Díaz’s original post of the article he highlights the words of the beloved Dominican poet and politician, Juan Bosch: “How is it possible to love your own nation and look down on foreigners, how is it possible to love your children and at the same time hate your neighbor’s children, only because they are not your own children. I believe that you have not considered the rights of every human being, Haitian or Chinese, to live with the minimum comfort necessary so that life is not simply an impossible weight on ones shoulders, you view Haitians as little less than animals” (N.p., my translation). The article itself, written by Dominican historian Bernardo Vega, responds to the sentence and also to the right-winged nationalists who shortly after the ruling began to publicly accuse Dominicans speaking out against Ruling 1068, calling such individuals “traitors.”¹⁶ This is the same extremist group that produced the YouTube video mentioned previously, a group that has also openly questioned and denied Díaz’s “Dominicanness.”

This group of Dominican intellectuals on the island, known as “Intelectuales por la República Dominicana,” represent those behind the name-calling and public incrimination. The cohort includes Dominican writers such as Eduardo Gautreau de Windt, Pura Emeterio Rondón, and Efriam Castillo. As Néstor E. Rodríguez notes in his critical study *Escrituras de desencuentro en la República Dominicana*, other scholars, such as Manuel Núñez, had prior to 2013 and the Ruling warned that the “Dominican-york” community could be dangerous to intellectuals of the island, referring to this rowdy diasporic community of Dominicans as “a culture of fleeing” (55, my translation). “Intelectuales por la República Dominicana” recently published an article online, on a Dominican-run site called *7 Días*, openly insulting Díaz and calling his “interest in the country of his birth ‘feigned,’ ‘unnecessary,’ and ‘offensive’” (Planas N.p.). The article further accused the Dominican-American author of not being informed on the content of the Ruling, a Ruling that according to the article’s authors aims solely to “organize the situation of immigrants and their descendants” (Planas N.p.). These accusations, in large part, were directed at Díaz for repeatedly stating publicly that the Ruling is racist, a belief included in *The New York Times* response. His classification of the Ruling as racist also garnered a harsh response from the Executive Director for the Dominican Presidency’s International Commission on Science and Technology, José Santana. Santana deemed Díaz a “fake and overrated pseudo intellectual” who “should learn better to speak Spanish before coming to this country to talk nonsense” (Planas N.p.) Díaz took his rebuttal to Facebook, posting the following in early December 2013, “All these attacks are bullshit attempts to distract from the real crime—the *sentencia* itself which has been condemned widely. All of us who are believers need to keep fighting against the *sentencia* and what it represents and we need to keep organizing and we need to show those clowns in power in the DR that there is another Dominican tradition—based on social justice and human dignity and a true respect for the awesome contributions that our immigrants make everywhere” (King N.p.).

Both Díaz and Alvarez, then, have at times needed to defend their Dominicaness; Alvarez defending her decision and her right to publish solely in English and Díaz proving his own *dominicanidad* by promoting “another Dominican tradition.” This alternative “tradition” carves a space for Dominicans, including Díaz and Alvarez, who self-identify as Dominican-Americans and members of the Latino/a community. Both Dominican-American authors have proven themselves worthy of the *rayanos-americanos* classification—not only through their rewriting of Hispaniola’s history and commiserative and positive vision of Haiti in their works, but also through fostering a public image that further bolsters what is present in their narratives. For Díaz and Alvarez, Haiti and the Dominican Republic are kindred sisters, two countries that have suffered and prospered together and apart—to quote both Martí and Alvarez once again, they are two birds of the same wing. What is clear, however, is that although both authors can affirm and defend their Dominicaness, they do not reject their Americanness. It is in this sense that the two Latinos represent a new form of *rayano*. They are not Balaguer’s “subjects of doubtful nationalities,” but rather individuals who identify with *two* nationalities, subjects straddling an imaginary boundary line that often leaves them stuck somewhere in the middle. It is from this unique perspective that the two authors are able to see both countries, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, through a different lens and thus re-write Haiti within not only a Dominican context, but also a diasporic, universal one. Renowned Dominican poet Manuel Rueda, who understood the concept of the *rayano* as the most authentic representation of Dominican national identity, wrote in his “Song of the Rayano:” “The world was once whole, and now behold, it opened up in two halves, / Sunk in the expanse of the sea and of the skies that are / Falling down” (qtd. in Matibag 163). Both Julia Alvarez and Junot Díaz speak to the idea of not just an island, but an individual “split into two halves.” The authors, however, do not allow this fragmentation or splitting of the halves to end in a “falling down” or a failure, but instead an uprising, a speaking out, a union of the two parts—a constant and necessary reminder that it takes two to make a whole.

Notes

¹ The following constitutes my English translation of Duarte’s quote: “While traitors are not punished as they should be, the good and authentic Dominicans will always be victims of their devices.”

² Juan Pablo Duarte is most well known for being the leader of a secret group, “La Trinitaria,” that organized Dominican resistance against the Haitian Occupation (1822–1844). Although Duarte indeed fought for independence from Haitian rule, he did so without recurring to racial othering. (See Moya Pons 138 and Torres-Saillant 2).

³ The short film posted on YouTube (see <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Dj6shOwoCSk>) titled “Ex Dominican@os que juraron por la bandera de Haití” publically insults over fifteen Dominicans, including Minou Tavarés Mirabal, Juan Bolívar Díaz, and Marino Zapete. The message at the end of the video reads as a “warning” to other Dominicans claiming “estos son quienes traicionaron y pisotean nuestro país siendo cómplices muy active de fuerzas extranjeras que lo unico que buscan es destruir nuestra dignidad, nuestra soberanía nacional, nuestras leyes y nuestro orgullo Patrio”.

⁴ The term “Parsley Massacre” is a result of the test Dominican soldiers forced upon Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans to determine their fate. They would hold up a sprig of parsley and ask what it was. Parsley in Spanish, *perejil*, is difficult for Haitians to pronounce as Kreyòl pronounces the letter “r” differently. Those who could not roll the r were killed. For this reason, those who could not pronounce “perejil” were killed with a tool turned weapon to which all had access: machete (See Frank Moya Pons 369).

⁵ “Kout a” refers to the popular Kreyòl name for the Massacre of 1937. It literally means “the knife.”

- ⁶ Numerous critics have incorrectly cited Alvarez's birth in the Dominican Republic including Carter (325).
- ⁷ Trujillo hinted at the massacre during the weeks before the orders were given as an ultimate way to deal with the border disputes and to reinforce his plan for "Dominicanization," with a primary goal of cleansing the borderlands of the Dominican Republic of dark-skinned Haitians and increasing white, European immigration to the country.
- ⁸ From this point on in the study, I will refer to the Yolanda character in *García Girls* as Yolanda/Julia to emphasize the binary connotation and its importance in the novel, a work of historical fiction.
- ⁹ In an autobiographical essay titled "A White Woman of Color," Alvarez speaks of her family's maids in the Dominican Republic. One maid, Misiá, is not only Haitian but she had been "spared from the machetes of the 1937 massacre when she was taken in and hidden from the prowling *guardias* by the family" (143). The fictional Chucha in *García Girls* shares a biography with Misiá.
- ¹⁰ *Fukú* is also known as "the curse of the new world" since its origin is Columbus' arrival in 1492. The grandiose monument to Columbus in the Dominican capital of Santo Domingo is "el faro Colon," (inaugurated in 1992), it is considered to this day a cursed lighthouse.
- ¹¹ This man with no face, this time in the form of a boy, also appears in "Ysrael," the first story in Díaz's 1996 *Drown*. The older brother, Rafa, goes after a teenager in the Dominican Republic who wears a facemask to hide his disfigured face. The narrator describes what he sees when the mask is ripped off: "His left ear was a nub and you could see the thick veined slab of his tongue though a hole in his cheek. He had no lips" (18–19).
- ¹² Pérez Firmat, in his 1994 book *Life on the Hyphen: The Cuban-American Way*, centers his focus on the Cuban-American, of the so-called 1.5 generation of Rubén Rumbaut, that is a marginal subject in both spaces (United States and Cuba). He notes, "Having two cultures, you belong wholly to neither one. You are both, you are neither: *cuba-nol/american-no*" (7).
- ¹³ The Mariposa DR Foundation educates and empowers young women to create community-based solutions to end poverty. Founded in 2009, the Mariposa Foundation's hub is located in Cabarete, Dominican Republic.
- ¹⁴ The term "digital immigrant" is from a 2001 article by Scott Prensky in the field of Second Language Acquisition. The term is meant as a direct contrast to "digital native," referring to those comfortable with technology born after the 1980s.
- ¹⁵ Alvarez's blog for Powell's Books in 2012 is available here: <http://www.powells.com/blog/author/julia-alvarez/>. It is also worth mentioning here that although Díaz is not one of the founders or organizers of Border of Lights, he has supported the event every year since 2011 with a personal monetary donation as well as book donations.
- ¹⁶ Vega's article can be found: <http://hoy.com.do/mis-traidores-favoritos/>

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