



LUND UNIVERSITY
Humanities and Theology

**Across Borders: Migrancy, Bilingualism, and
the Reconfiguration of Postcolonialism in Junot Díaz's Fiction**

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LIVR07 Literature, Culture, Media: Master's Thesis

Spring 2015

English Studies

The Centre for Languages and Literature

Lund University

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Abstract

Equipped with Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) and his collections of short stories *Drown* (1996) and *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012), this thesis interprets the fundamentals of migrant literature, studies Díaz's tools of migrant depiction, and examines contemporary postcolonial and migrant discourse. This is performed in three integral segments of study. First, the unstable terminology surrounding migration and hybrid self-fashioning is discussed with identity theory from theorists such as Homi K. Bhabha and Elleke Boehmer. This experience of hybrid identity is related to Yunior de las Casas, the primary narrator of all three texts. Later, accompanied by language theory from Doris Sommer and Lourdes Torres, bilingualism is revealed as the authoritative device to depict migrant lifestyles. This code-switching is exemplified by Yunior's seamless transitions between English and Spanish. Finally, the narrator's historical footnotes are discussed as a reconfiguration of postcolonial discourse that explores the link between postcolonial, diasporic, and migrant literature while arguing that the overlap between these does not make the genres interchangeable. The ambition is to explain the criteria for *migrant* literature and to use Díaz's texts to explain the interpretations, tools, and effects of migrant literature.

Dedicated to the memory of my supportive grandfather, Marvin Fennell.

May 25, 1924 – May 26, 2015

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1. Introduction

All too often is migrant literature thoughtlessly distributed into the ranks of postcolonial literature and more often, it is organized by the author's country of origin or current residence. These hasty groupings have detrimental effects for the genre of migrant literature, which champions the possibility of hybridity and duality in all aspects of life and art – including literature. The consistently mobile discourse of this literature reflects the migrant conundrum of space. Migrant vernacular is laden with unstable descriptors such as *in-between* or *shifting*, and it is often referred to as a *mobile*, *moving*, or *rootless* genre. As will be examined, migrant authors and critics do not perceive these modifiers as negative attributions but more so as essential to their existence, especially in the literary sphere. The duality of migrants is reflected in the commonsensical binary requirements for literature to be called migrant – the author must be a migrant and the text must directly or indirectly reference migration. It is important to establish criteria in order to differentiate migrant literature from its peer of postcolonial literature and to distinguish it as a fundamental genre within the world literature sphere and not only as a national literary phenomenon where it is often pigeonholed. The contemporary author Junot Díaz actively resists these classifications in order to create an honest literature that reflects his bifurcated life.

My ambition with this study is to define migrant literature or at minimum, propose what it is not, to analyze the specific devices of migrant literature which separate the genre from its associates in world literature, and lastly, to examine its constant overlap with postcolonialism and if and how it differentiates from postcolonial literature. In analyzing the works of Junot Díaz, this essay will exemplify one migrant experience in its most candid form while defying the genre and linguistic expectations of hyphenated authors. Dominican-American Junot Díaz personifies the Latin American migrant experience in the United States without deviating from fiction. He draws around the veracity of migration with a uniquely blunt narration. The most frequent narrator in all three of Díaz's texts, *Drown* (1996), *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), and *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012), is Yunior de las Casas. Though fictional, his life does mirror the author's in that he was born in the Dominican Republic and moved to industrial New Jersey as a child. His intention of enlightening the narratee might resemble Díaz's attempt to enlighten Anglo-Americans of the migrant struggle, but Yunior's brazen voice separates him from the author. It is Yunior's frankness in discussing the pitfalls of migration and assimilation to American culture that guards Díaz's works from national and postcolonial

generalizations. Focusing on Yunió's unique narrative brand, I intend to shine light on often overlooked techniques of migrant authors, the effects of these techniques, and furthermore, demonstrate that Junot Díaz is an influential practitioner of migrant literature of the twenty-first century. In the following essay, I trace the narration of Yunió who elaborates on his own migrant experience and that of his diverse peers in order to define and explore the space of migrant literature, study the tools with which migrant writers combat expectations, stereotypes and genre confinement, and emphasize migrant literature's unparalleled and distinct traits. The study is broken into three chapters, all of which include all three of the primary texts. These chapters address the interpretations, tools, and effects of migrant literature.

The first chapter elaborates on the current perception of migrant literature, attempts to give it a useful definition that will be utilized throughout the essay, and explains how Díaz's texts alone are sufficient to answer these inquiries. I claim that Yunió poses many of the questions of migration such as cultural assimilation, patronage, and a dual existence. Despite the usefulness of his texts on their own, this essay draws from identity and cultural theory as well as studies of diaspora and exile from critical theorist Homi K. Bhabha, identity theorist Stuart Hall, and Caribbean studies expert Carine Mardorossian.

The second chapter identifies the fundamental tool that writers use to depict the migrant circumstance – language. Migrants have a kind of syndicate of true bilingualism and often it is used as a method to depict their circumstance. Utilizing the studies of bilingual specialists Eugenia Casielles-Suárez and Lourdes Torres, I study the functions of Díaz's Spanish insertions in his English text and his unique "Díaz Dialect." Furthermore, the expansive collection of essays in *Bilingual Games*, edited by professor of language studies Doris Sommer, will be employed to study Díaz's devices and the reactions they provoke. In all three of Díaz's texts, Yunió seamlessly toggles between English and Spanish without any translations or italics to demarcate a language shift. I break down the effects of this unique brand of bilingualism.

Lastly, the final chapter will inspect the effects of the discourse surrounding migrant literature. More importantly, this chapter tracks the influence colonialism has on migration and the latter's reconfiguration of the former. I primarily utilize *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* and its historically accurate footnotes that recount the dictatorial rule of the Dominican Republic, the American military intervention, and the Caribbean country's eventual independence. Despite the presence of postcolonialism, I continue to emphasize the distinction

between migrant literature and postcolonial literature but concede to an important overlap of the two. In order to perform this portion of the study, the essay will again apply the work of Stuart Hall and Elleke Boehmer and their studies of independence and resistance in the postcolonial world.

1.1 Junot Díaz and his fiction

Writer and professor Junot Díaz was born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic in 1968. Seven years before his birth, the oppressor of the Dominican Republic, the dictator Rafael Trujillo was assassinated after more than three decades of tyranny. Díaz's community suffered much as a result of Trujillo's genocides, rampages, and economic neglect of the nation. From 1965-1966, the United States military occupied the Dominican Republic under the pretense of mitigating the civil unrest as a result of botched elections after Trujillo's downfall. In light of the country's instability, Díaz's father moved to the United States in an attempt to make a better life for his family. When he was six-years-old, Díaz, his mother, and his four siblings were reunited with their father in Parlin, New Jersey in the very un-Dominican American East Coast winter.

In 1995, Díaz was first published in *The New Yorker* magazine with "How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie," which would later be published in his first collection of short stories, *Drown* (1996). His short stories continued to appear in several literary magazines with very positive reception. Critics doted on his unique voice and bilingual, urban, slang and yet somehow academic dialect. In the NPR interview "Junot Díaz on 'Becoming American,'" Díaz spoke critically about American immigration policy and described his initial years in the United States and the inspiration to become a writer. Díaz told host Steve Inskeep:

I mean, the solitude of being an immigrant, the solitude of having to learn a language and a culture from scrap, led me to the need for some sort of explanation, the need for answers, the need for something that would give me – that would in some ways shelter me, led me to books, man [...]. I was trying to answer the question, first of all, what is the United States, and how do I get along in this culture, this strange place, better? And also, who am I and how did I get here? And the way I was doing it was through books, man [...]. Books became the map with which I navigated this new world (Díaz 2008).

Díaz is a member of various Dominican migrant social organizations championing immigrant and migrant worker rights.

Though many of his short stories have appeared in newspapers and magazines prior to the aforementioned collections, each complete collection possesses an individual theme. However,

all of his texts centralize on the overarching theme of the life of Dominican immigrants living in the United States. He also writes about immigrants who return to their homeland, Dominicans unable or unwilling to migrate to the United States, and second generation Dominican-Americans with no personal ties to their parents' native country. The red thread connecting nearly every story is the narration or presence of Yuniór de las Casas. Dominican-born and living in New Jersey, Yuniór personifies many elements of the migrant life portrayed throughout the texts. His intrusive narration, bilingual dialect, and second person voice unite the texts stylistically. Yuniór's presence in the text is always in the fiction's contemporary. He narrates from his early to late twenties but he recounts tales from his childhood and teenage years as well. It is revealed as the collections progress that Yuniór becomes an author, which further convolutes the borders between author and narrator, reader and narratee, and truth and fiction.

Díaz's earliest collection, *Drown* (1996), contains ten stories related to Yuniór's absent father, Ramón. In the first story, "Ysrael," Yuniór depicts his childhood in the Dominican Republic after Ramón leaves for the United States. He and his brother, Rafa, work all summer in the fields, or campo, as their mother, Virta, must work long hours and therefore cannot supervise them. In the following story, "Fiesta, 1980," Yuniór is a young boy in New Jersey and he and his family are reunited with Ramón. The de las Casas family attends a green card party for one of Yuniór's aunts who has finally gained residency in the United States. Though Ramón has worked hard to bring his family to the United States, his treatment of Yuniór leaves much to be desired and the narration is overtaken by Yuniór's own qualms with his father and the discovery that Ramón is unfaithful to Yuniór's mother. The narration moves on to Yuniór's post-high school years as he sells marijuana out of abandoned tenement buildings in the rough parts of New Jersey in the story "Aurora." Later, Yuniór is a bit older and works as a manual laborer in the story "Edison, New Jersey." This employment makes him most aware of the mistreatment of Latino/as in the United States. However, true to Yuniór's chaotic narration, the stories of *Drown* do not conform to chronology and the narration returns to the Dominican Republic and the years just before Yuniór's father returned to him. Despite the lack of chronological conformity, the stories do progress to a very disturbing realization – despite Yuniór's struggle with his geographically or emotionally absent father, he slowly begins to exude Ramón's character qualities, particularly his habit of objectifying women. In one of the collection's last stories,

“How to Date a Browngirl, Blackgirl, Whitegirl, or Halfie,” the reader is exposed to an older, more cynical Yunion with casual sex at the forefront of his mind.

The misogynist Yunion exposed in *Drown* returns full force in Díaz’s second collection of short stories, *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012). The nine stories of this collection concentrate on Yunion’s failed relationships. However, the theme of migration is ever present. The opening story, “The Sun, The Moon, The Stars” follows the final months of Yunion’s relationship with Magdalena. She learns of his serial infidelity and almost leaves him until Yunion makes belated efforts to salvage the relationship. His final solution is to take her on a vacation to his home country – the Dominican Republic. The trip is too much for Yunion; not only does Magdalena end the relationship there, but he witnesses the negative effects of excessive Anglophone tourism on the Island and the post-Trujillo social corruption in the surrounding areas. In “Alma,” another scorned lover dumps Yunion – this time in public in order to humiliate him. However, not every story is simply a breakup tale. “Invierno” describes the months just after Yunion’s family reunites with his father in New Jersey. Yunion shares the hardships of learning English when he is not yet enrolled in a school, his father’s long hours at the factory, and his mother’s housebound existence and subsequent depression. The final story, “The Cheater’s Guide to Love,” spans five years and traces Yunion’s breakup with his fiancé and the love of his life and the painful years that follow like a miniature memoir.

The award-winning book *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) is Díaz’s only published novel to date and it does not deviate far from the well-known style of his short stories. The novel follows the life of Oscar de León. His nickname, Oscar Wao, is the Latino pronunciation of the writer, or as Yunion remarks, the “fat homo” Oscar Wilde, who Oscar de León resembles (*Oscar Wao* 180). Oscar, born in New Jersey, is Dominican-American and anything but the stereotypical smooth Dominican man. He is obsessed with science fiction, comics, fantasy, and is a hopeless romantic. He focuses in school and develops an extremely advanced vocabulary for his age, which only solidifies his uncool reputation. His time studying keeps him from physical activity and his severely overweight figure is a constant reminder of this. In this story, Yunion is now a writer and narrates Oscar’s short life for his own novel. The first chapter describes Oscar’s youth but pauses before arriving at the present. The second chapter details the youth of Oscar’s sister, Lola. Unsurprisingly, Lola is Yunion’s ex-girlfriend and his connection to the family. Her bad behavior prompts her mother to send her to live with

her grandmother, La Inca, in the Dominican Republic and the narration follows her there. The third chapter recounts the life of Oscar and Lola's mother, Belicia Cabral, and her upbringing in the Dominican Republic. As a teenager, she falls in love with a gangster who, unbeknownst to Belicia, is married to the sister of the dictator Trujillo. When the gangster's wife learns of Belicia's pregnancy, Trujillo's men beat Belicia nearly to death prompting her stand-in mother, La Inca, to send her to live in the United States for her safety. The subsequent chapters reach back even further and describe the life of Belicia's father and his unwilling relationship to Trujillo.

In the novel's second part, the reader is reintroduced to Oscar in the present. He studies at university and lives with Yuniór in an apartment off campus. Yuniór looks out for Oscar while Lola studies abroad in Spain. Oscar battles with severe depression. After a suicide attempt, Oscar's mother sends him to the Dominican Republic much like she had done to his sister. He improves as he writes his epic novel and, in true Oscar fashion, falls in love with an unattainable older woman named Ybón. She lives across the street from his grandmother and works as a prostitute almost exclusively for a captain of the Dominican Party – the political party of the late Trujillo. She is kind to Oscar but she, as well as the town, warn him of her involvement with the captain. He ends up severely beaten by some of the thug's friends, much like his mother's beating. Oscar returns to New Jersey heartbroken but somewhat recovered, only to return to the Dominican Republic to once again try and win over Ybón. He is found out and killed by the captain's men. Yuniór ends the novel with the fate of all of the remaining Cabrals: Belicia dies of cancer not long after Oscar's death. Lola, who has finally had enough of Yuniór's cheating leaves him only to shortly after marry and have a child. Yuniór confides to the reader that whenever he runs into Lola, they only talk about Oscar.

2. The migrant mode

Problematic is the discourse of migration and more problematic still is the discourse of migrant literature. Discussion of migration relies on ambiguous terminology making it difficult to define. The word “migrant” includes immigrants, emigrants, exiles, and refugees. While the queries of migration demand fixed answers to questions of residency, immigration, emigration, and hybridity, migrant literature responds with even more questions, unstable personal examples, and expanding ideas of belonging. However, there are two commonsensical criteria for texts to be deemed “migrant literature” and they are authorial and referential. First, a migrant of any kind must author the text. This includes transmigrants, refugees, and migrant workers. Secondly, the text must include a direct or indirect reference to the migrant experience. However, it is not required that this experience be that of the author. For example, in Díaz’s case, his text tells the tale of the fictional Yunió and his peers’ migrations. In the following chapter, I utilize Díaz’s texts to explain my choice of the term “migrant” over similar terminology, analyze the space of migration in literature, and address the emphasis of movement, becoming, and ongoing self-fashioning in migrant literature.

Throughout the week of the minority and Native-American criticized American holiday of Thanksgiving, Steve Inskeep of NPR asked Díaz and two other migrant authors to share their experience of coming to the United States. Inskeep asked Díaz what it means to be American in the interview titled “Junot Díaz on ‘Becoming American.’” Díaz replied:

I think it means many, many things simultaneously. [...] it is a question that, as individuals and as a country, we wrestle with every day. It’s the wrestling with that question that defines us. It’s not any of the answers. For me being an American is, in a large part, you now, dealing with these multiple Americas [...] (Díaz 2008).

Both an immigrant and American himself, Díaz struggles to give a singular response to the complicated question. Similarly, questions of migration render comparable responses and Díaz explains that since his youth, he has used literature to “navigate this new world.” He continues to navigate and seek solutions to questions of space and identity but instead of reading literature in search of a solution, he writes it. More accurately, he writes Yunió who narrates the life of a migrant. Furthermore, the reader observes Yunió’s own quest for identity and craving for space amidst hybridity and not Díaz’s own self-study. It is Yunió who studies what it means to be *both* and with his harsh second person voice, he demands that the reader examine these questions and

enigmas with him. I will attempt to elucidate some of these questions by first explaining my election of the term “migrant.”

2.1 Selecting the “migrant mode”

Theorists have much terminology for migrant literature and it is often repeated and uniquely thematic. In fact, one of the only constants in defining migrant literature is the claim that there is no fixation in the term; the idea is an ongoing perception marked by movement and change. Descriptions of migrant literature are those of movement or a pulsing existence between two stations. Díaz himself believes that the “wrestling” with the question of identity is the act of defining the term. Migrant herself and postcolonial writer-critic Elleke Boehmer refers to this writing as “not quite” and “in-between” and that with this writing’s “cultural affiliations [it] became more divided, displaced, and uncertain” (225). Postcolonial and Caribbean studies critic Carine Mardorossian calls migrant literature an active “shift” emphasized by “movement” and “rootlessness” (16). Migrant and theorist Stuart Hall asserts that a sense of unstable “becoming” and “being” pervades in migrant literature (225). The discourse is varied but follows a red thread of mobility and interstitial hovering. Bearing this in mind, an obvious benefit of referring to Díaz’s texts as migrant literature is the umbra of the word “migrant.” The root word includes Díaz’s own experience both as emigrant and immigrant and these very separate experiences are integral to his questions of identity – you cannot be one without also being the other. These questions and the grappling that follows them pervade his literature.

Though many characters of all three texts reveal a different level of hybridity, Díaz’s primary narrator, Yunió de las Casas, embodies this dichotomy of movement. The tales of Yunió, his friends, and family constitute the many variations of the migrant experience. Yunió himself migrates from the Dominican Republic to the United States as a child. Half of his friends experience a similar migration, whereas the other half was born in the United States to immigrant parents. Yunió often returns to the Dominican Republic freely, as he is neither an exile nor refugee, but his friend Oscar’s mother is a Dominican refugee. As Belicia ages, she is more free to return to her home country without being harassed by her Trujillo-following abusers but she chooses to avoid the Island and the memories that haunt her there. Belicia’s daughter Lola experiences a transmigrant life in the story with the Dominican Republic serving as a phase between her home country of the States and her next move to Spain. All of these stories qualify

as migrant literature.

Based on cultural and postcolonial theorist Homi K. Bhabha's postulation, these stories would also qualify as falling under his famed "Third Space" in his book *The Location of Culture*. Yunior's mixing of cultures, languages, and nationalities both exist within and are explained by the Third Space. Migration and hybridity find a space in which to self-form in Bhabha's idea. He suggests that in order to find meaning when two people or two cultures interact, one must mobilize the two existing places and define them through a Third Space. This ambivalent area is more apt to contain an ongoing definition of the combination of cultures. The Third Space is a result of cultural "interstices" and "in-between" spaces when two differences collide (Bhabha 3). Bhabha strategically refers to this area as a "space" and not a "place" to offer more mobility and fewer fixations to the term. I agree that movement and ongoing strategic self-fashioning characterizes the Third Space, however, in its application to migration, the terminology would benefit from a name change, as even the book in which Bhabha describes the mobile action of self-fashioning has a title that suggests a fixity that is untrue of migration: *The Location of Culture*.

I suggest an alternative condition called the "migrant mode" where cultural self-fashioning is afforded the right to move and evolve at will. Reacting against suggestions such as Bhabha's Third Space, the editors of *Writing Across Worlds: Literature and Migration*, Russell King, John Connell, and Paul White state in the book's preface that, "migration is not a mere interval between fixed points of departure and arrival, but a *mode*¹ of being in the world—'migrancy'" (xv). The concept of migrant literature cannot exist in a stationary location or between locations. The entire notion of migrant literature is founded in development, shift, and processes. The migrant mode is therefore founded on its ability to change and expand.

The stories of Yunior and his friends exist in this mode where he self-identifies within the fluctuation between English and Spanish, Dominican and American, and immigrant and emigrant. This constant toggling is exemplified in the narrator Yunior, who ignores the traditional chronology of storytelling and jumps between past and present as well as distant and intrusive narrations in his first, third, and even direct second person voices. In telling his own story and the story of surrounding migrants, he does not commit to a singular mode of self-forming and identifying; instead he chooses the migrant mode to encapsulate the many variables

¹ My italics. Unless otherwise noted, italics belong to the quoted reference.

of his existence. Yuniór observes a similar collision of identities in Oscar in Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Dominican though American-born Oscar is a Latino conundrum for his peers. He is brown-skinned and dark haired, speaks both Spanish and English, and unlike the stereotypes of Latino men, Oscar is terribly overweight and bookish. Oscar returns to a place of ridicule – his old high school – as a teacher. Yuniór describes Oscar's hybrid and strained existence:

Every day he watched the 'cool' kids torture the crap out of the fat, the ugly, the smart, the poor, the dark, the black, the unpopular, the African, the Indian, the Arab, the immigrant, the strange, the feminino, the gay—and in every one of these clashes he saw himself (*Oscar Wao* 264).

Oscar empathizes with each of these minorities and suffers with all of them simultaneously. He exists in Bhabha's "interstices" of cultural and social groups. These moments of overlap are distinct to the othered and particularly migrant experience. Yuniór aptly refers to these moments as "clashes" wherein Oscar feels only strain and not the facilitation of the cultural understanding and enlightenment found in Bhabha's Third Space. The concept of Bhabha's "location of culture" within the Third Space is ideal but the characters of Díaz's texts never experience it. For them, the migrant mode is always a moving station of conflict. Oscar feels it in his youth and adulthood in New Jersey where he stands out in white society as a dark-skinned immigrant despite his American citizenship, and he feels it in Latino culture as an overweight "nerd"² with no allure.

Unfortunately, the dark skin that segregates him in the United States does not protect him in the Dominican Republic. In the chapter satirically titled "Oscar Goes Native," Yuniór describes Oscar's adjustment to the Island life in a three-page run-on sentence. Each clause describes an interstitial moment in which Oscar feels strained not by only his dueling heritage but also by his own unique tastes that separate him from the majority in both nations. The sentence begins:

After his initial homecoming week, after he'd been taken to a bunch of sites by his cousins, after he'd gotten somewhat used to [...] being called Huáscar by everybody (that was his Dominican name, something else he'd forgotten), after he refused to succumb to that whisper that all long-term immigrants carry inside themselves, the whisper that says *You do not belong*, after he'd gone to about fifty clubs because he couldn't dance salsa, merengue, or bachata had sat and drunk Presidentes while Lola and his cousins burned holes in the floor [...] (*Oscar Wao* 276).

² Yuniór's own word used repeatedly in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (6, 19, 20, 22, 23, 28, 29, 41, 50, etc.).

“Huáscar” is not the Dominican *version* of his name, but simply “his Dominican name.” Even his double name marks his mode of existence. His lack of athleticism and coordination keeps him from blending in even in the darkly lit clubs of the Island. However, most notable is his own self-criticism and fear of cultural clashing. Yuniór describes Oscar as a “long-term immigrant.” Since Oscar’s time on the Island is limited, it is safe to assume that the long-term presence references his living in the States. Despite his being born there, Yuniór believes him to still be like an immigrant in the States. However, he resides there long enough to be a foreigner in the Dominican Republic. His movement between places is not fluid and his residency in both countries is characterized by uncertainty, echoed by the inner voice whispering, “*You do not belong*” (*Oscar Wao* 276). He cannot settle in either land and thus remains unable to settle even in the migrant mode.

In *This Is How You Lose Her*, Yuniór shares his own experience of when he first moves to the United States. The story “Invierno” exhibits a very young and uncertain Yuniór who does not resemble the acerbic narrator the reader knows so well. Not yet enrolled in school, Yuniór and his brother do not speak a word of English and bear the harsh East Coast winter isolated in their family’s meager apartment. Though safely tucked away in their flat, Yuniór feels the resistance of the new culture that surrounds him. He desires to adjust and sneaks out to play in the snow and observe the neighbor children. A Caucasian girl his age reaches out to him but their language barrier only allows them to exchange names. Yuniór describes the cultural hindrance: “We sat there for a while, my head aching with my desire to communicate [...]” (*This Is How* 137). Yuniór goes on to describe a friendly snowball fight between himself and the girl’s brother and offers the reader some hope that the innocence of children will finally allow for cultural understanding in the migrant mode. Suddenly, Yuniór reveals the truth: “In less than a year they would be gone. All the white people would be. All that would be left would be us colored folks” (*This Is How* 137-8). He references the urban shift in New Jersey in which cultural segregation began in full force and neighborhoods were separated by race – the ultimate foil for the Third Space.

These moments of clash for migrants and second-generation migrants like Oscar are not geographically limited to the United States. In fact, some of the starkest contrasts of Díaz’s texts take place between people of shared Dominican heritage, but differing residencies. Oscar’s sister

Lola moves to the Dominican Republic in her teens when her mother attempts to punish her and improve her morals. Lola is what Yunior would call an “alterna-latina” (*Oscar Wao* 265). She listens to a blend of Dominican music as well as alternative Anglophone bands like Siouxsie and the Banshees. In some ways, she feels a cultural clash much like her brother especially as she butts heads with her deeply traditional and Dominican mother. Unlike Oscar, Lola is beautiful and athletic and can fit into any crowd despite her alternative tastes. Apart from her strained relationship with her mother, Lola fares well in New Jersey. She does not personally experience a cultural divide, yet men flock to her for her exotic looks. Despite this lack of cultural strain, she still embraces her Dominican heritage and demonstrates this cultural pride by joining a Latina sorority and becomes head of the S.A.L.S.A. club. According to Yunior, Lola speaks “perfect stuck-up Spanish” (*Oscar Wao* 168). She never encounters the clashes her brother experiences every day. That is, until her move to the Dominican Republic. Her Spanish is acceptable, but even she acknowledges the schools on the Island will greatly improve her grammar. She becomes the star of the track team, but her beauty and athletic prowess does not protect her from the Dominican-born girls who see through her brown skin to her American core. They call Lola a “gringa”³ (*Oscar Wao* 74) and when they do not mock her, they ignore her. On the Island, she is clearly not wholly Dominican and her peers observe this in her dialect, the way she dresses and ultimately, in the fact that she has a choice to leave the Dominican Republic as she wills. She exists in the migrant mode in both nations.

2.2 Literature of exile and other migrant facets

Lola’s distinct choice to migrate as she chooses brings up a fallacy of migrant literature. The term itself once connoted images of refugees or political exiles but this is simply not the only case. In fact, much of migrant literature in the United States elaborates on a chosen life of migration. However, when discussing a literature that exists through movement, one must proceed with caution when attempting to explain it in a limited genre or strict terms. It is with this caution that professor of postcolonial and Caribbean studies Carine Mardorossian defines the shift from diasporic to migrant literature in her essay “From Literature of Exile to Migrant Literature” (2002). Mardorossian claims that not only does the recent umbra of migrant literature

³ The term “gringo,” or the feminized “gringa,” is “a contemptuous name for an Englishman or an Anglo-American” (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

as a genre change the discourse of exile literature, but it forces a reexamination of how to represent both situations. In the first place, the discourse of migrant literature has changed, and I argue that it improves with its emphasis on mobility and its inability to be pinned down. Existing in the migrant mode can be a positive experience, not only a challenging transition from nationalism to hybridity. In the same essay, Mardorossian describes the transition from singular genres such as diasporic literature or national literature to migrant literature as an act which, “challenge[s] this binary logic by emphasizing movement, rootlessness, and the mixing of cultures, races and languages” (16). Again, the difficulty in defining and making a place for migrant literature is its resistance to traditional genre or the “binary logic” of the literary sphere. It might be simpler to say what migrant literature is *not*. As Mardorossian would say, it is not limited to exile or diasporic themes. Bhabha might say that it does not emphasize decided points of culture, but rather ongoing hybridity and the dueling self. It is not a facet of postcolonial literature but rather it imbricates with postcolonial literature and enhances it with the composite lives and varied experiences in its wake. Furthermore, not all migrant literature is set in a postcolonial region making the genre’s relation to postcolonialism more of an overlap than an espousal.

Despite the genre’s resistance against sweeping generalizations such as diasporic and postcolonial literature, Díaz represents elements of migrant literature’s many categories, including that of exile. The majority of Díaz’s subjects migrate of their own volition. In fact, the story of Belicia Cabral in *Oscar Wao* is the only situation in which a character migrates from the Dominican Republic to the United States for reasons far beyond economic hardship and personal opposition to the dictatorial state. Before Belicia even meets the man who destroys her chance at a life on the Island, Yunior alludes to her forced removal. Teenage Belicia works at a restaurant owned by Chinese immigrants who give her many odd tasks, “Like how to hammer nails, fix electrical outlets, cook chow fun and drive a car, all would come in good use when she became the Empress of Diaspora” (*Oscar Wao* 106). Soon after she is hired at the restaurant, she meets the Gangster. When Yunior describes the moment in which Belicia first meets him, he reveals that he will be the cause of Belicia’s inevitable exile. Yunior describes the Gangster as “the essence of relaxed cool. Here he is, the future generation of de Leóns and Cabrals: the man who stole your Founding Mother’s heart, who catapulted her and hers into Diaspora” (*Oscar Wao* 115). Yunior goes on to describe their affair, her pregnancy, and her subsequent beating ordered

by the Gangster's wife (who is also Trujillo's sister). Her only living relative (her father's favorite cousin) and stand-in mother, La Inca, sends her off to the States to save her life and afford her a chance to start over free from the shadow of Trujillo's regime. After this explanation and much later in the novel, Yuniór passively titles Belicia again, this time as "the Queen of Diaspora" (*Oscar Wao* 261). The titles of royalty with which Yuniór dubs Belicia might be traced to his incessant sarcasm or they could be his acknowledgment that she is the champion of exile and migration. Her own family suffered immensely at the hands of Trujillo and they were executed in their own homeland. She is the first of the Cabral's to escape and she affords her future children – Oscar and Lola – with the opportunity to migrate between nations as they please.

Díaz's subjects are varied and not exclusively subjects of diaspora or exile. His stories elaborate upon the result of colonization, the cause of exile or migration, and the aftermath of migration. The migrant subject is immense and his linked network of short stories attempts to capture the varied experiences of migration. Mardorossian asserts that emphasizing the variation of the migrant experience versus the exclusivity of exile opens doors for the pigeonholed genre of exile. She says:

This paradigmatic shift from exile to migrant literature has important implications for the representational politics of contemporary postcolonial writings insofar as it forces us to re-examine the relationship between the experience of exile and the process of representing it (Mardorossian 15).

This forced reexamination or perhaps better put, *encouraged* reexamination is a key activity of migrant literature in general.⁴ The act of reexamining is telltale of the constantly developing definition of migrant literature. The shift of representation has positive implications for both exile and migrant literature.

2.3 Migrant literature as self-fashioning

The mobile nature of migrant literature has two types of beneficiaries. In chapters 3 and 4, I will address one such beneficiary – the multiple readerships of Díaz's migrant texts. Now, I would like to discuss the other – the migrants who write the texts. Díaz wrote Yuniór to tell the story of migration without simply telling his own story. Yuniór might be an extension of Díaz in many

⁴ The idea of reexamination or education in migrant literature will be addressed in greater detail in chapter 4.

ways; they both moved to the United States from the Island under the age of ten, they both grew up in industrial New Jersey, both have strained relationships with their fathers, and perhaps most importantly, they are both writers. Despite the similarities, Yuniors is fictional which gives Díaz the freedom to study and project the pitfalls of migration as he chooses. Just as Díaz looked to literature to answer his own questions of his place in society, other migrant writers practice self-fashioning and self-defining with the production of migrant texts.

In his essay “Cultural Identity and Diaspora,” cultural theorist Stuart Hall speculates that his move from his home country of Jamaica to England, or to “the belly of the beast” of black diaspora, might have initially compromised but now enhances his writing (223). He asserts that the action of identifying is just that – an action or “production” and not simply “an already accomplished fact” (223). In this sense, migrant literature actively gives form to a misunderstood group with the ongoing process of self-identifying within representation. Fredrick Douglass felt deeply compelled to write his autobiography – not just for the white audience that desperately required to know the truth of slavery – but for himself to create his own identity. Douglass expert John Stauffer notes in the foreword to *My Bondage and My Freedom*, that Douglass required this mode of self-fashioning in order to maintain his own humanity. Though Díaz extends fictional Yuniors as the vessel for a study of migration, it is Yuniors who resembles Douglass in that he grapples with understanding and molding his own identity as a Dominican child growing up in the United States. Literature became a tool with which Díaz first studied identity and then, as an adult, wrote it. Like Hall suggests, Díaz actively produces his identity, rather than passively describes it.

Yuniors’s narration is notoriously nonlinear. There is very little chronology between the stories and chapters of the three collections and furthermore, Díaz never demarcates dialogue with quotations, which makes Yuniors’s narration comparable to a stream of consciousness. Particularly in the collections *This Is How You Lose Her* and *Drown*, Yuniors seems to work through his memories, forming an instant memoir as he writes and self-fashioning as he describes his past. Yuniors describes one such instance of self-forming with the tale of his brother Rafa’s high school girlfriend, Nilda in her namesake chapter in *This Is How You Lose Her*. As a young boy, he fixates on Nilda who is “Dominican, from here,” and has transformed from young girl to a sexual woman seemingly overnight (*This Is How* 29).

The narration then jumps from Nilda and Rafa’s break-up to the end of Yuniors’s high

school career. He speculates: “I guess two years passed” (*This Is How* 39). This vague timestamp reinforces the notion that Yuniór is self-fashioning while he recounts his youth. He continues:

My brother was gone by then, and I was on my way to becoming a nut. I was out of school most of the time and had no friends and I sat inside and watched Univision or walked down to the dump and smoke the mota I should have been selling until I couldn’t see (*This Is How* 39).

It is not until this moment that Nilda is revealed as the device with which Yuniór tells the story of his brother’s early death by cancer. Yuniór loses his primary confidante. For him, Rafa was the only person who understood his difficult transition from a hot island to the freezing slum of New Jersey. He related to the isolation of being the only child in a classroom of foreign-tongued white faces. He survived their father’s abandonment and supported their mother and her protracted attachment to the Dominican Republic. Losing the person who best understood his hybrid existence is a turning point for Yuniór and he becomes the unfaithful, male chauvinist who resorts to divulging stories about the women in his life as a disguise for his own self-fashioning.

The process of self-fashioning is dictated by a number of factors: origin, current residence, and time spent between to name the basics. Hall believes that “positioning” is perhaps the most critical of these. This includes “positions from which we speak or right – positions of *enunciation*” (Hall 222). There are two primary positions, both of which are enunciated by Yuniór in his process of self-fashioning. The first is a position of shared culture or oneness. Throughout all three texts, Yuniór continually refers to the Dominican Republic as “our” home or as “our Island” while narrating from the United States (*Oscar Wao* 246). His birth in the Dominican Republic makes his narration accessible to Dominicans. He does not tell the story of his country but “our” country. When he describes the Island’s history fraught with dictatorial rule, he refers to Trujillo as “our Sauron [...] our Once and Future Dictator” (*Oscar Wao* 2). However, he was a child when he moved to the United States and can thus claim being raised as an American to also share a cultural identity with the Dominican-Americans and Latinos in the United States. His position of championing a shared cultural identity is highlighted by his second-person voice that he uses to lecture non-migrant, Anglo readers. For example, Yuniór separates his audiences by referring to Trujillo as “our” dictator for his fellow Dominicans and tells this story for Anglos otherwise known as “those of *you* who missed your mandatory two

seconds of Dominican history” (*Oscar Wao* 2).⁵ In this way, he attempts to liken his migrant experience with that of his fellow Dominicans (both in the United States and on the Island) while underscoring the duality of his narratee and Díaz’s readership, which is Latino/migrant/Dominican or simply *not*.

He emphasizes what the recent history of his homeland has made him become. The dictatorship and subsequent American military intervention left scars on his mother’s back and provoked his father to leave the Island for a safer life. Despite Yuniór’s roots, the fact that he was raised abroad for the most part makes him distinct from his peers and family still on the Island. This distinction relates to the second of Hall’s cultural positions. He believes that it is impossible to “speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity’” without explaining or at the very least, accepting the uniqueness of the Caribbean (Hall 225). In fact, Hall prefers this second positioning as it offers a means of truly understanding the magnitude and varied results of the colonialism in the area. Self-fashioning from this second position offers a freedom to acknowledge the transformative nature of identity. Yuniór’s nonlinear account and his mixing between first, second, and third person narration reveal that understanding his own identity is an ongoing work. According to Hall, this is an attribute of the second position: “Cultural identity, in this second sense, is a matter of ‘becoming’ as well as ‘being.’ It belongs to the future as much as to the past” (225). Therefore, Yuniór’s stories – and by extension, Díaz’s texts – are exemplary of the always developing notions of migration. Not only are the texts exemplary of the migrant lifestyle and migrant process of self-fashioning, but they also assist the process of identification by describing the past while attempting to define and become. Hall believes that “the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture” are understood differently depending on whether the writer or narrator takes a position of communal or differentiating identification (226). Yuniór’s use of both affords the texts a unique understanding of his own “sutures” of his bifurcated identity.

In the following chapters, I will explain the methods of the migrant mode including language choice and postcolonial genre crossover and how these methods are unique to migrant literature and particularly to Díaz’s own brand of the genre.

⁵ My italics.

3. Tactical Bilingualism

In 28 short pages, one of Díaz's stories poignantly captures the essence of the linguistic crossing that Dominican migrants make upon entering the United States. In "Invierno" of *This Is How You Lose Her*, Yunió has just moved to the United States from the Dominican Republic. He is a young boy and observes the way his parents and brother adjust to their new nation. The New Jersey winter is harsher than they ever imagined and forces them indoors for their first months in America. The boys' father is the only one with an income – a factory job that keeps him busy for long periods of time and offers him rudimentary English skills. The boys are not yet enrolled in school so their mother ushers them to the living room daily in an attempt to teach them English with American television. Yunió says: "Each [English] word my brother and I learned we passed between ourselves, repeating over and over, and when Mami asked us to show her how to say it, we shook our heads and said, Don't worry about it" (*This Is How* 124). Their mother is intent upon their assimilation but her children have no level of appreciation for this. During dinner, she once again attempts to practice English, this time with her husband: "How do you expect me to learn?" she asks. He responds tritely in Spanish: "You don't have to learn, he said. Besides, the average woman can't learn English" (*This Is How* 124). Yunió reveals the effect of his mother's post-migratory struggle: "Mami, who had been our authority on the Island, was dwindling" (*This Is How* 131).

Díaz created a way to communicate several migrant experiences, which differ greatly with age, gender, class, and nationality but he does not attempt to overreach and encompass migrant story staples from each societal ring. Instead, he dramatizes Yunió's migrant experience by way of language. His stories, hybrid in context, are written in a compound of languages and slangs. Toggling between English and Spanish, highbrow lexicon and urban slang, Díaz sheds light on the hybrid life of migrants with a uniquely amalgamated text. Both witty and startling, the language and tone of Díaz's writing is an often discussed topic among critics. The satirical yet inviting "Díaz Dialect" plays with intrusive narration, dialectal nuances, and his intentional non-translations of Spanish words to create a language all his own for which the term "Spanglish" is lacking.⁶ Spanglish is often employed as a term to imply insecurity in one language or the

⁶ For more information on the author's famed "Díaz Dialect," please refer to Leah Hager Cohen's discussion of the "Díaz Dialect" in her article "Love Stories 'This Is How You Lose Her,' by Junot Díaz." *New York Times* 20 Sept. 2012.

other, but Díaz and the narrator are certainly fluent in both. The intrusive narration and toggling between languages is indicative of the hybridity of cultures represented in Yuniór de las Casas. Even the narrator's name implies a dual existence – Yuniór “of the houses.” The plurality of his name serves as a mnemonic badge of his existence between two worlds in the migrant mode, and his bilingual, intrusive narrative style reaffirms this duality. Utilizing a combination of theories predominantly from Doris Sommer and Lourdes Torres, I have established a term to describe the various language devices employed by Díaz. I claim that Díaz wields several forms of “tactical bilingualism” in his texts in order to truthfully depict the reality of hybridity. It is important to note the elasticity of the term “bilingualism” in that it not only represents his ability to speak and write in two languages, but also the ability to seamlessly integrate one language into another, to imbricate the two simultaneously, as well as to invent a dialect all his own.

In an epigraph preceding the first chapter of his collection, *Drown*, Díaz quotes fellow writer, scholar and migrant Gustavo Pérez Firmat:

The fact that I
am writing to you
in English
already falsifies what I
wanted to tell you.
My subject:
how to explain to you that I
don't belong to English
though I belong nowhere else⁷

To force any text or thought into translation can compromise or “falsify” it, and for the sake of accurately depicting hybridity, migrant writers must allow passages to remain in their native tongue. In order to discuss linguistic intention, I devised the term “tactical bilingualism” to discuss Díaz's and other migrants' sophisticated intentions regarding language choice. Tactical bilingualism denotes strategic instances of discomfort or challenge for monolinguals but may also present moments of pause for some bilinguals. For example, a person born and raised in Spanish Harlem of New York City might be fluent in both Spanish and English, but their distance from their parents' home country can hinder their colloquial Spanish knowledge or their level of bilingual morphology, thus giving migrants a linguistic advantage over them. These

<[http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/23/books/review/this-is-how-you-lose-her-by-junot-diaz.html?pagewanted=>](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/23/books/review/this-is-how-you-lose-her-by-junot-diaz.html?pagewanted=)

⁷ The epigraph of *Drown* does not have pagination.

textual instances of tactical bilingualism are remarkably natural and simple for specifically migrant bilinguals who have experience with living in both countries and both linguistic spaces. Much like Díaz's own duality of culture existing across and between spaces, the linguistic nuances of his texts exist within and across the collection and the reader must attempt to live this to appreciate it. Therefore, this textual – and tactical – mirroring of existing across can be a very illuminating tool and Torres believes that “The language of the text captures the author’s bicultural reality and his/her transnational experiences living in an ‘in between’ place” (89). Arguably, this “in between” place is less a sanctioned place and more of a state of being for those in his position, namely, the migrant mode. The transcription of these experiences are examples of what happens when culture comes before tongue; in this sense Díaz translates culture primarily and language secondarily in that he attempts to portray an experience more so than the state of being bilingual. He wants to share a community with fellow bilingual readers and demonstrate language isolation, which many Latinos have experienced in the United States, within the monolingual and Anglo culture. It is not an attempt at teaching a language so much as it is showing culture. His exercises of tactical bilingualism are critical to the text, but support the foundation of criticizing culture.

Before a study of the works’ cultural duality is conducted, Díaz’s choice of writing in English must be examined. One of the more striking elements of Díaz’s works is that they are written in the dominant language of the United States and yet they criticize American interference on Dominican life; they reference the past with the United States’ military occupation of the Dominican Republic from 1965-1966, as well as the current cultural pressures and interference on American soil. Yet Díaz strategically chooses to write in the language of the colonizer, revealing his own tactical bilingualism. Certainly, Díaz appeals to a wider audience in this way by writing in the dominant language of the United States as well as affording the text more opportunities of translation from a dominant to peripheral and semi-peripheral languages.⁸ Furthermore, it comments on the sanctity of his native tongue and his unwillingness (or perhaps inability) to stifle his first language. His use of Spanish enhances tones and manipulates the message to confront issues of duality and problems of cultural ignorance. Author and professor

⁸ To read more about the divisions between peripheral and semi-peripheral languages, please refer to Johan Heilbron’s essay “Towards a Sociology of Translation: Book Translations as a Cultural World-System” (*European Journal of Social Theory*, 1992) pp. 429-44.

of Latino Studies Lourdes Torres notes that the point on which critics such as “Keller, Lipski, and Aparicio agree [is] that code-switching is an artistic choice with political ramifications” (76). It is critical that the text be written predominantly in English to enhance the power of the Spanish throughout the text for monolingual readers to remind them of the legitimacy of mixing codes in vernacular speech (Torres 76). Díaz uses English to target a specific monolingual audience within the United States, but he also notes that Spanish is not a minority language in the western hemisphere.⁹ Díaz never identifies Spanish insertion with footnotes or italics; in this sense, the two languages are never divorced. In fact, he only uses italics for emphasis when writing in English, as if to say the English language is not as capable as Spanish to depict emphasis or heightened emotion. By choosing to target a monolingual audience, without segregating the Spanish language throughout, he strategically confronts a common one-sidedness to hybridity; contrary to literary habits of the past, it is not necessary to cater exclusively to monolingual speakers throughout a text. Torres elaborates on this:

In the United States, the presence of large and small Latino/a communities across the country, increasing numbers of Latino/a immigrants, and the US/Mexican border means that code-switching in literature is not only metaphorical, but represents a reality where segments of the population are living between cultures and languages; literary language actualizes the discourse of the border and bilingual/bicultural communicates (76).

Díaz rouses monolingual readers by recreating the migrant situation in reverse; just as many Spanish speakers enter the United States with little or no knowledge of English, he submerses the English-speaking reader in his text and offers them no translation of his sudden and frequent Spanish insertions. That being said, it is the monolingual English speakers who understand least the struggles of migration and biculturalism and who will benefit from Díaz’s honest depictions of migrant life.

Díaz’s refusal to omit or identify Spanish with grammatical markers is a special kind of code-switching addressed by Eugenia Casielles-Suárez, who argues that Díaz’s insertion of

⁹ Díaz has explained his grammatical choices as such: “For me allowing the Spanish to exist in my text without the benefit of italics or quotations marks a very important political move. Spanish is not a minority language. Not in this hemisphere, not in the United States, not in the world inside my head. So why treat it like one? Why ‘other’ it? Why de-normalize it? By keeping Spanish as normative in a predominantly English text, I wanted to remind readers of the mutability of languages. And to mark how steadily English is transforming Spanish and Spanish is transforming English.” Junot Díaz to Evelyn Nien-Ming Ch’ien, *Weird English* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. 2004) p. 204.

Spanish “goes beyond [Torres’ category of] gratifying the bilingual reader and approaches radical bilingualism” and she coins this act of going beyond as “radical hybridism” (477). Casielles-Suárez then applies sociolinguist Torres’ system of categorizing strategies of Latino/a writers’ usage of Spanish within English text. All of her strategic categories are enveloped by the technique of tactical bilingualism. Torres works in an ascending order of accessibility for monolingual English speakers. Her categories include “Easily Accessed, Transparent, or Cushioned Spanish,” “Gratifying the Bilingual Reader,” and “Radical Bilingualism” (Torres 75-96). I will examine examples of all three levels found in *Drown* and *This Is How You Lose Her*, as Casielles-Suárez exclusively studies *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

3.1 Lourdes Torres’ bilingual strategies

Torres’ first strategic category, “Easily Accessed Spanish,” refers to a usage of Spanish that might feel comfortable and read seamlessly for monolingual English-speaking readers. It is a trick of luring in monolingual readers with exoticism, without isolating them by total immersion. Examples of this in *This Is How You Lose Her* include: “abuelo” (10), “campo” (10), “hispanos” (63), “por favor” (102), and “ojos” (156).¹⁰ Nearly every monolingual English speaker in the United States understands these words. This kind of “Easily Accessed” Spanish affects the external reader but also casts a mood upon the characters within the stories’ narrations. In the short story “The Sun, the Moon, the Stars” of *This Is How You Lose Her*, Yunior cheats on his girlfriend and her entire social circle loses respect for him. When Yunior tries to call Magda at home, her father answers and is none too pleased to make contact with the man who betrayed his daughter: “Her father, who used to treat me like his hijo,¹¹ calls me an asshole on the phone, sounds like he’s strangling himself with the cord. You no deserve I speak to you in Spanish, he says” (*This Is How* 4). The singular use of Spanish in this passage is laden with familial ties. Yunior once felt like a son – un hijo – to her father. But when wronged, Magda’s father cuts off familial and colloquial ties. Yunior’s memory of this better time is precious and thus his respected previous position is expressed in Spanish. But as soon as Magda’s father loses respect

¹⁰ Since Díaz does not demarcate Spanish with italics within his text, I will not identify Spanish text in italics to accurately represent his style and the tactics that accompany it.

¹¹ “Hijo” is another clear-cut example of Torres’ “Easily accessed, transparent, or cushioned Spanish.” “In the Contact Zone,” p. 79.

for Yuniór, he refuses to acknowledge Yuniór's duality as a fellow Latino-American¹² and reverts to broken English. It is like a slap in the face to Yuniór. Out of all of Torres' levels of Spanish, these instances of "Easily Accessed" Spanish occur most frequently throughout all three texts.

The second strategy Torres examines is "Gratifying the Bilingual Reader" which refers to a tactic that is more difficult for monolingual readers and more enjoyable for a bilingual reader. She also notes that neither italics nor quotation demarcate the insertion of Spanish that gratifies bilinguals. It is important to bear in mind that Díaz never uses any kind of grammatical markings to identify Spanish, therefore in this case, "Gratifying the Bilingual Reader" alludes only to the usage of Spanish words that are lesser known to English speakers. These are not words or phrases taught in an entry-level Spanish course or found on package labels in the "ethnic" aisles of American grocery stores. Some examples of this tactic in *Drown* include: "pinga" (12), "maricón" (202), "aguantando" (67); and in *This Is How You Lose Her*: "no jamás" (5) and "mata dictador" (61). Words such as "pinga"¹³ and "maricón"¹⁴ are translatable but do not possess the exact same meaning once translated to English. Many of these Dominican or Latin American colloquial terms would alter the meaning of the passage if uttered in English. Furthermore, the lack of italics or footnote translations may cause inconvenience or vexation for a monolingual reader. It is a method of culturally jarring the reader or alerting him of heightened emotion or importance for the speaker, which will be further discussed in chapter 3.3. Though Torres encompasses this and other language strategies under the category called "Gratifying the Bilingual Reader," I prefer the term "Engaging the Monolingual Reader." I argue that these acts are less gratifying and more the norm for bilingual speakers. The response they intend to evoke is one of satisfaction or a sense of community and therefore indicates another strategy of tactical bilingualism. Though concise, Torres' terminology does not address the most tactical element of the category – the engagement with the monolingual reader. For monolingual English speakers, these insertions involve action in order to be understood; they might search for the word themselves or create their own interpretation based on context and will either adequately understand the message or create their own reading of the text. For Díaz, this intermingling of

¹² I use the umbrella term Latino-American and not Dominican, as her father is Cuban.

¹³ Translation: "penis." Often small children use this slang word. The word is considered inappropriate but not vulgar.

¹⁴ Translation: "homosexual," or a slightly tamer slang for "faggot."

two languages is natural, thus texts written this way are not surprising or particularly radical for him or other bilinguals. Therefore, they tactically act as a tool of engagement to offer monolingual readers the experience that millions of Spanish-speaking migrants experience in the United States upon arrival. Culturally speaking, this strategy will gratify the bilinguals living as migrants in that monolinguals will better comprehend the migrant experience. Therefore, the gratification is twofold – satisfying upon an initial reading and gratifying in its ideal and tactically produced social consequence. But the remainder, lacking translation, can be read or experienced as exotic. Therein lies a danger of leaving things untranslated. Writers do run the risk of submitting their texts to readings that offer the reader an opportunity to exoticize the text. Writer and social activist for minorities Bell Hooks¹⁵ fears exoticizing the text “commodifies” the other, in whatever form the other may appear. In her essay “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance” she says: “When race and ethnicity become commodified as resources for pleasure, the cultures of specific groups [...] can be seen as constituting an alternate playground where members of dominating races [...] affirm their power-over in intimate relations with the Other” (193). The reader, then, is responsible for understanding that the choice to include other languages is not a deviation from the basic text (or original text) but another kind of hybridity. It is the author’s freedom to write a challenging text, or a tactically bilingual text. This category, in the context of Díaz writing, is less about “gratifying” the bilingual and more about educating and offering the monolingual a view into hybridity for the monolingual reader.

The third and final of Torres’ strategies of Latino/a writers’ language usage is known as “Radical bilingualism.” If the previous category was gratifying to bilinguals and engaging for monolinguals, the last is written entirely *for* bilinguals and *against* monolinguals. The first two categories created a comfortable yet ethnic text in which monolingual English-speaking readers could remain in “the comfortable realm of his/her own complacent monolingualism” (Torres 78). Torres exemplifies “radical bilingualism” in Roberto Fernández’s *La vida es un especial \$.75* (1981) as it depicts the linguistically and culturally hybrid life of working-class Cubans in Miami (87). The code-switching between Spanish and English is abrupt and lacking demarcation or smooth transitions. The dialectal nuances of Cuban Spanish and Cuban-American Spanish are difficult for monolingual readers of both English and Spanish. Though Díaz’s texts are inarguably written in English, there are many examples of “Radical bilingualism” including: “Yo

¹⁵ Stylized “bell hooks.”

quiero que mi Borinquén sea libre y soberana” (*Drown* 115), “deguabinao” (*This Is How* 101) and “estribao” (*This Is How* 101). The first phrase is a complicated sentence and it champions the freedom of the island called “Borinquén” – the landmass on which Puerto Rico is situated. Furthermore, it would be difficult to find a monolingual or even certain kinds of bilingual readers who understand the words “deguabinao” and “estribao.”

Colloquial words like found in *This Is How You Lose Her* like “vaina”¹⁶ (144), and the aforementioned “deguabinao”¹⁷ (101), and “estribao”¹⁸ (101) lead to what may yet be a fourth strategy overlooked by Torres’ and her three categories. Díaz’s colloquial Spanish is most transparent to Dominican readers specifically. A suggested additional strategy could be called “Culturally-laden bilingualism” because it indicates insertion of Spanish that is highly specialized either regionally or culturally, in this case, to the Dominican Republic or Caribbean island nations. In essence, each of Torres’ categories becomes more and more specialized to a specific reader. They grow upward in complication like a pyramid with the majority reader at the base, understanding both the bulk and the most palatable portions of the text. The tip of the pyramid possesses the most specialized reader who understands all portions of the text – both pleasant and alarming. A particularly interesting example of tactical bilingualism, which falls under this fourth category, is found in *This Is How You Lose Her* when Yunior feels sorry for himself and describes himself as, “un parigüayo sin suerte” (22). Translated to English, he says he feels like “a parigüayo without luck.” This use of bilingualism is particularly tactical. As is the case with Díaz, there are no grammatical markers for the differing language, nor does he offer a translation of the phrase. As a Spanish speaker, I was still befuddled by “parigüayo.” However, in an earlier Díaz novel, the narrator provides an endnote for the term. According to Yunior and his always politically-laden footnotes in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the word is a colloquially Dominican word and is a commentary on American occupation of the Dominican Republic:

The pejorative *parigüayo*¹⁹ [...] is a corruption of the English neologism “party watcher.” The word came into common usage during the First American Occupation of the DR,

¹⁶ Translation: colloquial Dominican slang for “stuff,” i.e. “crap” or “junk.”

¹⁷ Translation: colloquial Dominican Spanish for “exhausted” or the slang alternative, “spent.”

¹⁸ Translation: colloquial Dominican Spanish for “rich” or the slang alternative, “loaded.”

¹⁹ This is the only instance in which Díaz italicizes a Spanish word and he does so in an effort to educate readers about the cultural and social implications of the word, not in order to reveal more about the Spanish language.

which ran from 1916-1924. (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.) During the First Occupation it was reported that members of the American Occupying Forces would often attend Dominican parties but instead of joining in the fun the Outlanders would simply stand at the edge of dances and *watch* (19).

Not only is this word deeply Dominican at its core, but the reader must have read all of Díaz's published works in order of their publication to quickly comprehend and appreciate that term as it exists without endnotes in his most recent novel *This Is How You Lose Her*. Furthermore, untranslated references to food in *Drown* such as "tostones" (34), "pastelitos" (34), "sancocho" (36), and "pernil" (36) are so Dominican-specific that they beg a cultural knowledge or an active investigation leading to cultural awareness. Though these instances match Torres' third category in that they are radical in technique, they are not gratifying or written for *all* bilinguals, but rather those with specifically Dominican or Caribbean Spanish ability and cultural understanding. These dialectically specific Spanish insertions are geared toward praising heritage and raising cross-cultural understanding. Though they serve as another example of tactical bilingualism, others would argue for their playfulness as a kind of bilingual game.

3.2 Language games and performative bilingualism

Just as there is no fixation upon one language or one culture in Díaz's collections, there are no fixed cultural identities in the modern world; thus, bilingualism is never a deviation from a dominant language but more so a magnification of the reality. This magnification can function as criticism or an examination of current and past cultural depictions – it can even read as a political act. Torres believes that this political act exemplifies the reality of the market and readership: "In the context of Latino/a texts published by mainstream presses, the reader is largely imagined as a monolingual English speaker [...] choosing English as their literary language reflects the reality of their intellectual education and of the market place" (77). Effectively, the magnifying glass of criticism is handed to the monolingual English-speaking reader in an effort to depict the "other" reality of the United States – that of the Latino/a. In chapter 4, the elements of postcolonialism addressed in Díaz's very modern texts and his attempt to educate as a political act will be discussed. Now, I will examine the use of bilingualism as a means of revealing the current social dialogue of Latino/as living in the United States and the criticism of their contemporary treatment by monolingual English-speaking Americans.

The unforgiving narrator Yuniors toys with his narratee, his peers, and his subjects with his specialized dialect. He wonders what Belicia, the mother of Oscar Wao, knew about the United States before her affair with one of Trujillo’s generals forced her to flee: “What did you know about states and diasporas? What did you know about Nueva Yol or unheated ‘old law’ tenements or children whose self-hate short-circuited their minds? What did you know, madame, about *immigration*?” (*Oscar Wao* 160). Dominican-born Yuniors, though fluent in English, chooses to pronounce “New York” in the Caribbean migrant dialect “Nueva Yol.”²⁰ Why does the narrator retain the cultural pronunciation of this singular word? Author and professor of ethnic, Latino, and bilingual aesthetics Doris Sommer would argue that he is intentionally toying with the expected monolingual English-speaking reader. In *Bilingual Games*, Sommer assembles many critics including Ana Celia Zentella, Michael Holquist, Sylvia Molloy, and Julio Ortega who believe that traditional philosophy’s presumptions of the purpose, abilities, and limitations of language are limited to monolinguals. Sommer herself says: “The only way to solve philosophy’s problems is therefore to take a fresh look to see the almost endless variety of existing ‘language games’ instead of perpetuating tired assumptions about ideal functions [of language]” (Sommer 1). Assuming that Yuniors is playing a kind of game (consciously or subconsciously in this case), there may be many conclusions as to why that particular term – “Nueva Yol” – was chosen. The pronunciation could be geared toward the subject Belicia in an attempt to familiarize the exotic and frightening land of “diaspora” into which she migrates. It could be a touch of irony in an already critical statement about the United States to emphasize the existence of a huge Latino/a population in New York to monolingual English-speaking readers and their own pronunciation or possession of an American city.²¹ Perhaps it serves as a method of marking off New York as a place for Latino/as migrating to the United States. Though the imagined reader might be a monolingual English speaker in need of cultural enlightenment, Sommer reminds us that the purpose instead could be to exclude or confuse the reader (2). It could also be directed at migrant readers who can appreciate both the struggle of immigration as

²⁰ The official translation of “New York” in Spanish is “Nueva York” but Dominican Spanish often hardens the labiodental fricative letter *v* to the bilabial plosive *b* in “Nueva” and the alveolar approximate *r* of “York” is lateralized to an *l* as in “Yol.”

²¹ According to the 2010 U.S. Census Bureau, 28% of New York City is populated by residents of Hispanic origins. *NYC Planning: Department of City Planning City of New York*. U.S. Census Bureau, May 2011.

<http://www.nyc.gov/html/dcp/pdf/census/census2010/t_pl_p2a_nyc.pdf>.

well as the comic relief in referring to the American cultural hub as “Nueba Yol.” In any case, the purpose is to encourage a pause in the reader’s train of thought and produce active contemplation of a culturally othered situation that might or might not be like the reader’s own.

Works by migrant writers like Díaz are celebrations of movement. Placing migrant writers at the forefront of examples of modern world literature places a high value on “the loose ends of identity as lifelines for negotiating democracy,” as Sommer puts it, and this can be executed through appreciation of bilingual artistry, coexistence between codes and *lingua franca* and emphasis on vernaculars, all of which can take the form of language games (3). Utilizing the essays found in Sommer’s book, I will elaborate upon several bilingual games performed by Díaz including code-switching, the selectivity of Spanish insertion such as expletives or explosive speech as intention or instinct, and lastly as a means of cultural enrichment and revelation in readership.

Casielles-Suárez notes that there is much intersentential and intrasentential code-switching in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, most examples of which portray tactical bilingualism. The fluidity of intersentential and intrasentential bilingualism falls under Torres’ second category of bilingual gratification, but might be more effective with engaging monolinguals. One example of intersentential code-switching is: “His cousin Pedro Pablo sucked his teeth with exaggerated disdain. Esto aquí es un maldito infierno²²” (*Oscar Wao* 275). More complicated are examples of intrasentential code-switching. Take for example: “Nothing sacas²³ nothing” (*This Is How* 181), “You ven aca²⁴” (*Oscar Wao* 80), and “Hijo de la gran puta, would you stop jodiéndome!²⁵” (*Oscar Wao* 130). The tactical bilingualism of intrasentential and intersentential code-switching attempts to catch the naturally occurring linguistic and cultural hybridity of migrants and retains the integrity of migrant characters. It also encapsulates the conundrum of migrant writers. The idea of diglossia does not apply to many migrants in the United States who live in the migrant mode, which exists *between* and *among* multiple cultures making an easily demarcated switch between English and, for example, Spanish impossible. Sommer explains that this code-switching is an instinct of hybridity as a result of double-consciousness: “To switch codes is to enter or leave one nation for another by merely releasing a

²² Translation: “This right here is fucking hell.”

²³ Translation: “Nothing *removes* nothing.”

²⁴ Translation: “You *come here*.”

²⁵ Translation: “*Son of a huge bitch, would you stop fucking with me!*”

foreign sound, a word, a grammar tic, slipping into an always borrowed and precarious language. Migrants aren't home even when at home. The word means somewhere else" (7). Code-switching is so instantaneous that it results in the speaker existing between worlds more often than existing exclusively in one.

An immigrant and product of the migrant lifestyle, Yuniór exemplifies the effortless code-switcher. Ana Celia Zentella, an essayist of *Bilingual Games*, would qualify Yuniór as the result of the "mixing" of Latin American patronage and greater New York area residency (Zentella 56). She believes that code-switching is so the norm for children raised in this particular environment that they are rarely aware of the phenomenon. However, if they do realize they speak differently from their monolingual peers, they casually refer to their habits as "talking both" (Zentella 56). In the story "Fiesta, 1980" of *Drown*, a young Yuniór often comments with insertions of Spanish words when observing his elders who do not effortlessly "talk both" the way he and his brother Rafa can. The elders in the family are often newer to the United States than he is which might give him the natural inclination to revert to his mother tongue. It is when he transcribes dialogues with his mother that the most Spanish phrases and words remain, particularly when she comforts him. Yuniór suffers from carsickness and his new home state of New Jersey is known for its fast and winding freeways. His cold father, Ramón, fears for the upholstery of his car more than the wellbeing of his youngest son. Knowing all too well the dangerous combination of her son's illness and her husband's obsessive cleanliness, Yuniór's mother prepares him before an hour-long drive to his uncle's home for a party: "We said, in turn, Bendición, Mami, and she poked us in our five cardinal spots while saying, Que Dios te bendiga" (*Drown* 27).

Though Spanish is reserved for the elders, Yuniór's strict father is almost always translated fully to English. Only occasionally, Yuniór allows an expletive uttered by his father to remain in Spanish. He fears his father, who is forever disappointed in him, but loses respect for him when he discovers his father's mistress or "sucia" (*Drown* 43). In fact, it becomes clear that his nausea did not begin until he began driving with his father to the mistress's house, which attributes the nausea to a deeper anxiety about his father and his forcing Yuniór to participate in the lie. Naturally, Yuniór can't help but reserve the cold neutrality of English over his familial tongue when thinking of his father. "¿Cómo te sientes?" his mother asks how he is feeling after the turnpike. "Toma," she says and hands him some mints for the nausea. Shortly after, his father

refuses to acknowledge him and asks his wife, “How’s he feeling?” (27-8). The likelihood is that his father asked his mother in Spanish, as she is more comfortable with the language. However, Yuniór transcribes it in English. Before this page, there have been many more complicated insertions of Spanish in the text that might slow or halt non-bilingual readers. A simple “¿Cómo se sienta?” left untranslated would not have been unreasonable. Yuniór inevitably gets sick in the car and his father forbids him (in English) to eat any of the long-awaited Dominican food made by his newly migrated aunts and uncles at the party in order to prevent a similar incident on the drive home. However, once Ramón sees his brother Miguel, it’s back to nativity: “Coño, compa’i, ¿cómo va todo? they said to each other” (31). It is clear in these instances that Díaz not only code-switches to depict the reality of the situation but also to convey Yuniór’s emotion without explicitly stating Yuniór’s inability to relate to or impress his father.

In other cases within the texts, Spanish is used in attempt to make speech more casual, particularly with younger Dominican-Americans. The use of Spanish is a tactical effort to soften the blow of the dark reality for many young migrants in the United States. In “Aurora” of *Drown*, Yuniór is just out of high school and living with a roommate in a rundown tenement building. He sells marijuana for cash and, in doing so, attracts many interesting friends, one of whom is the ex-juvenile delinquent Aurora. She is homeless and seeks Yuniór’s company on Fridays when she knows he has refilled his stash of marijuana. She is pretty but very thin and sickly due to her vagrant lifestyle. Yuniór asks her in English where she has been the last few weeks. She replies: “You know me yo ando más que un perro” (49).²⁶ It is clear this young woman has seen hard times and suffers from hunger and addiction but she shrugs off the pain by tossing in a Spanish idiom. The insertion of Spanish strategically veils her pain from the monolingual or Anglo reader. She suddenly switches to her second language and asks him in English slang if he wants to sleep with her: “Do you want to jig?” (50). Her casual attitude about sex – written in English and easily understood for monolinguals – almost distracts the readers from the fact that she is an underweight, drug-addicted minor.

In “Negocios” of *Drown*, Yuniór shares the story of his father’s immigration to the United States. During one of his more desperate moments, a friend suggests that Ramón meet with a man known as “el General” in order to acquire American citizenship quickly. The General asks for fifty dollars to arrange a meeting with Ramón and an American woman who *might*

²⁶ Translation: Directly, “I walk more than a dog.” Colloquially, “I’m just a dog.”

marry him for naturalization. He hesitates and his friend attempts to ease the tension of the awkward situation between Ramón and the powerful and deceptive the General: “Don’t be a pendejo, hombre. Give fulano his money and that’s it. Maybe you make good, maybe you don’t. That’s the way it is. They built these barrios out of bad luck and you get used to that” (179). Much like Aurora’s dismissal of her harsh situation, Ramón’s friend attempts to lessen the seriousness with Spanish insertion. He calls Ramón a “pendejo,” a familiar and gentler word for the English pejorative “asshole” and he refers to the General as a “fulano,” or “John Doe” or “so-and-so.” Michael Holquist, essayist of *Bilingual Games*, ventures that all of these examples of Spanish attempting to make a scene more casual or familiar might accumulate to one central and contemporary reality: “The condition of being in at least two languages appears increasingly to be the natural condition of having any language at all. More precisely, the concept that a human being might be confined to only one language appears increasingly to be a fiction” (21). Although for many, one language pervades as the dominant, it is naïve to think that that the influence of other languages does not affect everyone.

3.3 Intentional versus instinctive code-switching

Though living between languages offers the speaker the choice to code-switch, there are occasions where language is either a choice based on situation or purely an instinctive utterance. Sylvia Molloy of *Bilingual Games* comments on the former and asserts that each language does indeed have its own territory and “its appropriate time, its rank” and she goes on to describe various “Bilingual Scenes,” to quote the essay’s title, from her youth as an international student in Argentina and a speaker of English, Spanish, and French (290). Just as one may censor speech or word choice depending on the setting and listeners, one can censor or conceal languages. Similarly, one can insert territory-inappropriate language as a means to provoke or identify difference. However, language insertion is also a matter of instinct as well as an act of intention. Expletives or explosive speech can be found all over the spectrum between intention and instinct in Díaz’s texts. Author Díaz writes with intention to depict the migrant reality, whereas the fictional character Yunior might slip into expletives out of instinct and as the dominant narrator of all three texts, Yunior familiarizes the reader with expletives in both Spanish and English. Though he narrates throughout the course of his life, the majority of his stories are told as a twenty-something living in urban New Jersey where the vernacular is anything but highfalutin

(and anything but monolingual).

Another element of the tactical bilingualism in the three texts is in the ability to simultaneously shelter and shock monolingual readers. The tactic to insert Spanish expletives in an English text is multilayered and dependent on the reader. Monolingual English readers may have some understanding of the popularized Spanish curse words like “pendejo” or “puta” but there are some who have none. If the reader is the latter, the choice to write diatribes in Spanish may be an attempt to isolate the reader. They could even be markers for particularly emotional scenes that the speaker wants to associate with the Spanish language and/or his culture. Of course, they could be as simple as a depiction of the natural fluidity of native language insertion in second language speech, particularly with explosive language. Assuming it is not so simple, I will tease out instances of tactical bilingualism and what they reveal about hybridity in moments of expletive or explosive speech in Spanish.

In *Drown*, the reader is exposed to Yunior’s first experience with migration. When Yunior was four years old, his father, Ramón, left the family under the pretense of beginning a life to eventually bring them to in the United States. Present-day Yunior believes he simply abandoned them, though this may not have been Ramón’s original intention, it certainly seems that way as he quickly stops writing and stops sending money home to the Dominican Republic. In the story “Aguantando,” which appropriately translates to “Enduring,” Yunior reflects upon his six-year-old self, exactly two years after his father left his family. Ramón writes and says that he will visit the Dominican Republic and Yunior’s mother, Virta, innocently believes him. When he does not show, Virta nearly loses her mind and her pain is not assuaged by Yunior’s constant inquiry as to when he will see his father or follow him to the United States. Yunior’s mother flees without warning for five weeks to Ocoa to clear her mind and work with her brothers. Yunior’s grandfather shows his grandson no mercy or pity when Yunior panics at his mother’s abandonment coupled with the thought of never meeting his father again. His grandfather tells him, “She’s gone [...]. So cry all you want, malcriado” (*Drown* 84). Until this point in the story, there has been little to no Spanish insertion. The occasional and easily understood “señora” or “abeulo” is all that pervades. It is important to remember that Díaz’s insertion of Spanish is intentional whereas Yunior’s insertion of Spanish is instinctive or at least it reveals his own cultural and linguistic double consciousness. This impulsive insertion relates to Yunior’s active attempt to study his own identity and the identity of migrants around him. He self-fashions with

his honest and bilingual language. Just as the instinctive Spanish language was reserved for his mother's dialogue and the formality of English for his father in "Fiesta, 1980," the sting of being called ill-mannered or ungrateful ("malcriado") is made more lasting by writing it in the original language. The lasting effects of this pejorative are severe and he cannot detach it from his mother tongue, even while remembering and addressing the pain in his narration. Yunior does not behave outlandishly for a six-year-old who barely remembers his father and is told he will see him again only to be disappointed. The emotional effect of Ramón's migration and abandonment provokes this Spanish insertion.

As with all three of Díaz's collections, time is not sequential. Five stories after "Aguantando" comes "Negocios," by far the longest story of the collection. "Negocios" follows the migration of Ramón de las Casas to the United States. Often a mysteriously omniscient narrator, Yunior recounts details of his father's journey that only Ramón would know. He describes his father's first day in Miami on the hunt for employment. He spends time in a cheap hotel room, flattening the wrinkles in his interview clothes with his hands. Yunior observes: "Dressed as he was, trim and serious, Papi looked foreign but not mojado" (*Drown* 170). Colloquially, "mojado" means "wetback," which is a derogatory term for "an illegal immigrant who crossed the Rio Grande from Mexico to the U.S." (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Therefore, the term is typically reserved for Mexican immigrants or Central American immigrants who have crossed through Mexico over the Rio Grande. To Yunior, this is worse than simply looking "foreign." The use of "mojado" in this context implies a hierarchy of migrants entering the United States, however, Yunior's choice (or instinct) to write this word in Spanish is twofold: first, it reminds readers of this fluent English-speaking narrator's own Island roots and thus his own self-placement in this social hierarchy. Secondly, the fact that "wetback" has a direct translation in Spanish makes the word more accessible to Spanish-speaking migrants to also utilize as a derogatory term for one another – it is not just a word white monolingual Americans use to shame immigrants. This depicts the complicated depth of the social discrimination of migrants in the United States.

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao tackles many questions of migration including the concept of returning to the homeland, dividing time between nations, and the different struggles between several generations of Dominican migrants. Yunior narrates in reverse, starting with the youngest Cabral, Oscar. The text then moves to Oscar's older sister, Lola. In this chapter, Lola

narrates her own story and her fractured relationship with her mother Belicia. At a point of exhaustion, Belicia sends her back to the Dominican Republic to live with her grandmother, La Inca. Beautiful, athletic and very Americanized, Lola thinks her immersion in a Dominican high school won't be a challenge until she experiences the severe segregation by her peers. She makes one female friend who dresses her up like a "real Dominican girl," which attracts the attention of her first love on the Island (*Oscar Wao* 71). Her romance distracts her from her running career and she begins to lose races at school, something the athletic Lola has never done before. Her competitors mock the American: "You ain't so great, are you, gringa" (*Oscar Wao* 74). In this context, "gringa" is exceptionally harsh, as Lola is Dominican by heritage on both sides but born in the United States, once again isolating on the basis of migration (unbeknownst to Lola or her peers, her mother's migration was forced).

Travelling further back in time, Yuniór omnisciently narrates Lola's mother's life in the Dominican Republic as well as her subsequent migration to the United States. At sixteen, Belicia begins a turbulent affair with a much older man known around the Island as the Gangster. Belicia does not question where his money comes from, but she and anyone who has met him knows that his methods are not strictly legal. He promises her a mansion in Miami while they sleep in the filthy, cheap love motels of her town. She believes she will marry the Gangster and they can finally escape the poverty of the Island, still run by the violent dictator Trujillo. Yuniór describes her confidence despite the town's disgust:

Talk about a poor winner: now that she'd vaulted into a higher order of privilege, she strutted around the neighborhood, exulting and heaping steaming piles of contempt on everybody and everything that wasn't the Gangster. Dismissing her barrio as an 'infierno' and her neighbors as 'brutos' and 'cochinos,' she bragged about how she would be living in Miami soon and wouldn't have to put with this un-country much longer (*Oscar Wao* 127-8).

Yuniór could have translated the Spanish words of Belicia's diatribes into English, but they serve as little indicators of Belicia's own Dominican-ness and her own roots in the "un-country" that she so desperately wants to leave. Belicia does in fact leave, but only after she becomes pregnant to the Gangster's disappointment. His wife (whose existence was unknown to Belicia) is the dictator Trujillo's sister and she is none too pleased with his extramarital affair and subsequent illegitimate pregnancy. Two henchmen of Trujillo's sister attack Belicia and beat her to the brink of death but she miraculously survives. This is the final straw and her adoptive mother, La Inca,

sends her to the United States in order to save her life.

Any time Belicia curses or raises her voice at her rebellious daughter Lola throughout the novel, Yunior recounts her voice in Spanish. Even Lola reflects on her mother's harshest words in Spanish. Lola tells the reader that her mother calls her a "Muchacha del Diablo!" (*Oscar Wao* 67). Lola admits that, "fea's become my new nickname" (*Oscar Wao* 54). Molloy of *Bilingual Games* might chalk this up to the performativity of bilingualism in Díaz's texts. She experienced this performativity of bilingualism in her childhood when her monolingual Spanish-speaking cousins begged her to say things in English. Reluctantly, she would but then refuse them a Spanish translation. To her cousins, bilingualism was a party trick. Molloy states: "Oddly enough, at school, even during the English period, we resorted to Spanish in order to say *malas palabras*, tell dirty jokes, or refer to unmentionable *partes*" (292). Though Molloy was trilingual from birth, Belicia spoke only Spanish until her late teens. However, Molloy's anecdote speaks for the same instinctiveness of native language insertion both for Belicia and the narrator Yunior who might unconsciously switch to Spanish for "malas palabras."

3.4 Opposing with language – castilianizing English

A less frequently occurring though very discernible example of cultural hybridity in language is the act of merging languages or the "castilianization" or "hispanisation" of words. Julio Ortega talks about "castilianizing" languages in his essay "Mixture's Speech" in *Bilingual Games*. Though Ortega primarily studies the influence of Spanish upon native Quechua, the theory can be applied to the castilianization of English words as well, and the Spanish language's possession of words in other languages:

A parallel phenomenon occurs in the contact between two languages, not simply the linguistic borrowings to be expected from agglutinating indigenous languages imbricated by a discrete Spanish. Thus, several native languages increased their registers by appropriating new units or including their declensions in Spanish words. Bilingualism thus develops as an articulating attribute of the indigenous world: Quechua puts Spanish to the service of its own register. Conversely, Spanish practices an intense digestion of other languages into its own linguistic system, "castilianizing" names and expressions (236).

Just as the migrant mode is reserved for those who cannot simply adhere to a definitive biculturalism, the act of castilianizing offers possession of two languages at the speaker's own choosing. It is also an act of opposing second language pressures or owning a second language

by allowing the mother tongue to brand it with castilianization.

The Caribbean dialectal pronunciation of New York as “Nueba Yol,” has already been studied in chapter 3.2 but there are several other examples of the “digestion of other languages” by Spanish speakers. Casielles-Suárez addresses “Nueba Yol” but also another example found in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Oscar turns to his friend when the credits roll on a film they watch together and says, “Yunior, the movie is finis,” a common Latin-American pronunciation of “finished” (*Oscar Wao* 171). Oscar, the eloquent, well-read “nerd” (as described by Yunior time and again) slips into this Spanish pronunciation when he is tired and the film runs late into the night. Though raised speaking English, this instance captures Oscar’s existence with one foot in the United States and the other lightly hovering over the Dominican Republic, no matter how Americanized he has become. This castilianization falls under tactical bilingualism in that it changes the narratee and reader’s perception of the supposedly very Americanized Oscar and reveals a more culturally divided Oscar.

The concept of castilianization employed by Díaz is tactical, but Yunior’s recreation of castilianization is a tool with even more precision. Returning to Yunior’s post-high school years of drug-dealing in urban New Jersey as described in “Aurora” of *Drown*, Yunior recreates a conversation with his drug distributor: “The Peruvian dude who hooks us up gave us a sampler of his superweed (Jewel luv it, he said)” (*Drown* 47). Some native Spanish speakers pronounce the letter *y* as a palatal approximate as in *j* in “jewel.” Thus turning “you will” or “you’ll” to “jewel.” “Love” is likely spelled as “luv” in this case, as the length of the vocalic in “love” is unfamiliar to Spanish speakers and therefore truncated, indicated by “luv.” Obviously, the Peruvian man is capable of speaking Spanish with Yunior but chooses to communicate in English. This might speak for the separation of the two within the “migrant hierarchy,” discussed in chapter 3.3. The Peruvian man might be newer to the United States and chooses to speak English with Yunior, who is very much Americanized and perfectly fluent in English at this point. In either case, there is a desire to speak the language of the country, but a dialectical marker of migration between the two – one that Yunior felt was significant enough to recreate. As always, he has narrative authority to recreate scenes in either language or dialect so this could be Yunior’s own method of mocking the Peruvian’s attempt at Americanization. That being said, the conversation could have occurred totally in Spanish. No matter the truth of Yunior’s constant intrusive narration, the castilianization of the Peruvian’s speech marks him as “other” even to an already othered Yunior.

The primary element of castilianization, and also by tactical bilingualism as a whole, is an intention to reveal something misunderstood or not discussed about bilingual and particularly migrant lifestyles by way of performance, rather than a lecture. Ana Celia Zentella, contributor of *Bilingual Games* with her essay “‘José, can you see?’ Latin@ Responses to Racist Discourse,” puts it best when she states that: “Latin@s are not passive receivers or observers of racializing discourses. To begin with, they communicate in bilingual and multidialectal ways that resist hegemonic and racist notions of language” (Zentella 55). This opposition is a revelation for many. For many migrants, embracing bilingualism and “multidialectal ways” is less about slowly acclimating to the United States but more about retaining a sense of patronage and cultural heritage to their homeland. At its core, it is a choice to actively embrace both. Migration and the bilingualism that results from it is not un-American but deeply American in that the United States was founded upon movement and immigration. The secondary element of tactical bilingualism is that it performs this revelation in a compelling or provocative way by subverting the racist practice of segregating Spanish as something un-American or “disorderly,” as Zentella says (54). She explains that Latino/a migrants cannot succumb to hegemonic and racist discourse with conformity:

If we try to resist by not apologizing for—or not trying to change—our accents, or refuse to restrict our use of Spanish, or eliminate the other ways of speaking that the dominant society judges as disorderly, we end up entrenching damaging evaluations of us as dangerous and in need of control. On the other hand, the more we force ourselves to function within the limited linguistic space allotted to us—no accent, no switching [...]—the more we confirm the notion that linguistic purity and compartmentalization are valid objectives and achievable goals, if only we Latin@s tried hard enough (Zentella 54).

Therefore, by embracing elements of tactical bilingualism, migrants can embrace their dual culture and express to monolinguals the need to facilitate and accept both in the United States.

Tactical bilingualism is thus a combination of Torres’ unambiguous strategies of code-switching and Sommer’s observations of bilingual games, filling in where the two might have missed the mark and highlighting the best of their theories. In addressing the varied migrant experiences in all three of Díaz’s texts, many different tactics of bilingualism have surfaced. The alternation between English and Spanish serves to highlight the hybridity of the migrant experience without defining migration in strict terms. Lourdes Torres’ categories of linguistic accessibility assist in qualifying Díaz’s various techniques of Spanish insertion throughout the texts, and all of the examples discussed fall under the intent of tactical bilingualism. Furthermore,

the ever performative bilingualism of the text and its language games accentuates the futility of claiming a monolingual existence, the importance of linking specific languages with emotion, memory, and family, and the impossibility of language to be possessed by any one person as depicted in castilianization. Not only does the language of all three texts harness the reality of the migrant experience and the market, as Torres would say, but the words culminate as a speech act as a means of demanding change. I will now analyze the political cause and effects of these examples of migrant literature by examining language, context, and plot.

4. Reconfiguring postcolonial discourse

In defining tactical bilingualism, I have explained its effects as a vessel for hybridity, its ability to adequately depict and express migrant lifestyles, and immerse both the bilingual and monolingual in the process. But tactical bilingualism has yet another purpose; it serves as a textual reminder of the result of colonization and the postcolonial effects today. In Díaz's case, it shines light on these effects as they exist for migrants in both the Dominican Republic and the United States today. Just as elements of tactical bilingualism serve to educate the monolingual reader about the life of a migrant, it also offers a course in the historical truths of the Island's shift from a native population to a colony, from colonized to independent, and more recent relations to the geographically nearest super power – the United States. I will first briefly examine the methods by which Díaz reconfigures the truths of postcolonialism and current perpetuations of colonialism with tactical bilingualism, followed by a deeper study of Yunió's intrusive narration as he educates the narratee (and thus, the reader) with various devices including specialized dialects and footnotes, and lastly, analyze how the three texts rewrite history while providing migrant authors with a space to self-fashion.

The effects of using tactical bilingualism in texts addressing postcolonialism cannot be overstated. Elleke Boehmer reasserts the effect of language in *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* and states: "The crux of post-colonial debates about cultural authenticity, hybridity, and resistance is most prominently drawn at the point of language choice. This, alongside the recovery of history, was one of the issues of greatest significance in the nationalist writing of independence [...]" (197). Though Díaz may not write for independence as his migrant Dominican predecessors have, he does write tactically in an attempt to highlight misunderstood history and migrant culture. As his tactical bilingualism begs the reader to immerse him or herself in the migrant lifestyle, it also intends to show rather than simply tell the history of the migrant's homeland. Bilingualism expresses the longtime hybridity of the nation. It is relatively well known that the Dominican Republic as it exists today is the result of the Spanish colonization of native Taino people's island. Yunió and many of his Dominican family and friends believe the Europeans brought more than tragedy – they brought a terrible and permanent wave of bad luck. Yunió explains in the prologue of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*:

They say it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the

death of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. *Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially, fukú—generally a curse or a doom of some kind; specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World (*Oscar Wao* 1).

The effects of European and more modern American invasions are more easily understood by the characters of *Oscar Wao* as simply “fukú” and not as “colonization” or “postcolonialism.” In fact, the word “postcolonialism” never appears anywhere in Díaz’s texts despite their direct and pedagogical style of addressing the situation and utilizing other terms such as “diaspora” and “third world.” Addressed in the first page of the novel’s prologue, and thus emphasizing its importance, fukú is a tool with which Yúnior shows the aftermath of colonization without explicitly stating it with classic terms. Its folkloric and fanciful implication allows the narration to read more as a tale than as a historical or cultural lesson. Fukú is comprised of all the elements of bad luck and suffering that native people experience. Yúnior uses fukú to make literary the Europeans’ invasion and their ethnic cleansing of Taino natives by the Spanish *encomienda* system, infectious foreign diseases, and general diaspora. Later, amidst the warring of European nations for control of the land, the mestizo struggle for independence from the Spanish crown succeeded in 1821 only to be followed by a second wave of Spanish interference, and more recently, civil unrest under dictatorial rule. The Dominican Republic is not afforded with a singular, profound date of independence like the United States can boast. In fact, the Dominican Republic has felt effects of colonialism by the United States itself with the unwanted military intervention in 1965.

But how can this complex history and nuanced colonialism be expressed in fictional texts? It must not only be explained, but also shown. However, this method is not a very popular one. Sommer believes that, “Political theory has been slow to pursue the advantages of bilingual effects” and she speculates that these effects of bilingualism are “stuck in the anxiety aroused by migrant workers who strain or interrupt national arrangements” (Sommer 9). Stereotypes of bilingualism hinder its ability repair the cultural divide of the colonized and the colonizer, the third and the first world, and the national and the migrant. She explains the past of bilingualism and its political effects:

Until now, a politics of language has polarized regional autonomists and centralists. In either case it assumes that people choose between languages rather than live with both. Most have never lived with only one. And it’s a good thing. The borders between regional and national, home and host languages map onto people as well as territories

[...] (Sommer 9-10).

In this sense, the borders are explained by language. Therefore, choice of language or languages is an extremely tactical practice. Díaz's choice of English peppered with calculated Spanish flips the notion of borders on its head. Tactical bilingualism convolutes borders as well as hierarchies. Many Dominican migrants and their children living in the United States resist hegemonic ideas of the superiority of English by their choice of language or mixing of languages. Yunió resists in a similar linguistic manner with the emphasis of mystical fukú in lieu of postcolonial jargon.

A particularly interesting example of tactical bilingualism's ability to rewrite history in favor of the other is Yunió's recounting of a historical event during which bilingualism could have saved lives. In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Yunió describes the passivity of Oscar's late grandfather, Abelard, a country-renown doctor who was even respected by the dictator himself. In order to protect his wives and daughters, he never questioned or confronted the Trujillo. Yunió exemplifies Abelard's head-down attitude:

In 1937, for example, while the Friends of the Dominican Republic were perejiling Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans and Haitian-looking Dominicans to death, while genocide was, in fact, in the making, Abelard kept his head, eyes and nose safely tucked into his books (let his wife take care of hiding his servants, didn't ask her nothing about it) and when survivors staggered into his surgery with unspeakable machete wounds, he fixed them up as best as he could without making any comments as to the ghastliness of their wounds. Acted like it was any other day (*Oscar Wao* 215).

Yunió refers to the Parsley Massacre of 1937, also known as El Corte (The Cutting). Critic and historian Mónica G. Ayuso states in her essay "How Lucky for You That Your Tongue Can Taste the 'r' in 'Parsley'" that: "Historians argue that Trujillo's attempt to ensure his country's integrity justified the killing of thousands. For Trujillo, the problem of illegal immigration constituted a military threat" (51). In order to identify the Haitians from the Dominicans near the countries' shared border, Trujillo's men held a handful of parsley and asked residents and farmers to pronounce the herb. Dominicans, familiar with the Spanish trill of the letter 'r' referred to the herb as "perejil" and were (usually) spared. However, French and Creole-speaking Haitians have difficulty with the trill 'r' and pronounce it as a uvular approximate. They were massacred with machetes, as Trujillo did not want any ammunition to link to the Dominican government while his men "perejiled" Haitians. After Yunió recounts several stories of difficult or even failed emigration – some as refugees – from the Dominican Republic to the United States,

the reader might detect a hint of irony in Yunior's tone. Trujillo's fixation on immigration and the purification of a country founded on hybridity mirrors the irony activities of the United States – a nation founded on immigration and cultural blending – currently closing its borders to many Latino migrants.

Yunior does more than drag the results of fukú to the present, but he demonstrates how fukú knows no geographical borders. In the prologue of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, Yunior explains that Trujillo was an extension of fukú:

For what Kennedy's intelligence experts failed to tell him was that every single Dominican, from the richest jabao in Mao to the poorest güey en El Buey, from the oldest anciano sanmacorisano to the littlest carajito in San Francisco, knew; that whoever killed Trujillo, their family would suffer a fukú so dreadful it would make the one that attached itself to the Admiral jojote in comparison [...]. Who killed JFK? [...] It wasn't Lee Harvey [...]. It was Trujillo; it was the fukú (*Oscar Wao* 3-4).

According to Yunior, the world super power's loss to a third world nation during the Vietnam War was also a result of fukú. The curse knows no borders when it manifests. Though the Dominicans have suffered much at the hands of fukú, the term's rich Taino connotations emphasize that even globally, the suffering of the Taino, mestizo, and Dominican people is not to be taken lightly. The application of past suffering on present suffering illustrates the importance of remembrance and prevention of colonial activity.

Apart from moments of tactical bilingualism such as those in the above American application of fukú, Yunior recounts historical events of dictatorial regime and American military intervention almost exclusively in English, making the text most understandable for the monolingual reader. Unlike other portions of the text, he limits the Spanish slang to a bare minimum and expresses himself in English. This effort of educating the monolingual reader, though entirely in English, reflects the efforts if not the practice of Torres' second category – “Gratifying the Bilingual Reader,” or my own “Engaging the Monolingual Reader.” In *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the first mention of the dictator Trujillo is accompanied by a footnote:

For those of you who missed your mandatory two seconds of Dominican history: Trujillo, one of the twentieth century's most infamous dictators, ruled the Dominican Republic between 1930 and 1961 with an implacable ruthless brutality. 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).

The footnote continues for another full page and details Trujillo's fondness for young girls, his habit of adding the Trujillo name to every landmark, his distaste for Haitians and darker-skinned people, and the fact that part of his criminal rule was supported by the United States military. Despite the haunting darkness of these facts, each sentence bears the mark of Yunior's casual but distinctly brazen voice.

4.1 Díaz informs, Yunior lectures

The success of these texts and their literary lecturing cannot exist without Yunior as the main vessel for enlightenment and as a result, Díaz as author is slightly freed from Yunior's narration. During and after his college years, Yunior writes fiction for a living. Though Yunior's voice is sarcastic and snarky even during his formative years, it is clear he hones in on this style later during his literary career. At the end of *This Is How You Lose Her*, he begins to compile the stories of his failed romantic conquests. He turns a new leaf and documents his sins in order to improve his treatment of women. This documentation becomes his first novel and retains his urban voice, laden with slang and profanity but deeply truthful to Yunior's essence of candor. It is the same with *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, in which Yunior recounts three generations of the Cabral family and their victimization at the hands of Trujillo. He tells horrific tales of abuse and flight from the homeland. He even shares the modern struggle of Dominicans and Dominican-Americans living in the United States – all while retaining his own smooth yet fiendish vernacular. The point is that Yunior is neither a snob, nor claims to be cerebral in any way. His appearance in the text is that of the subject's neighbor, college roommate, or friend's boyfriend. But he is intelligent and he does observe, making him a complex narrator and a successful writer. He lays out all of his faults and truths in the opening line of *This Is How You Lose Her*: "I'm not a bad guy. I know how that sounds—defensive, unscrupulous—but it's true. I'm like everybody else: weak, full of mistakes, but basically good. Magdalena disagrees though. She considers me a typical Dominican man: a sucio, an asshole" (3). It is Yunior's candor and his relatable voice that draws in the narratee. Despite his intrusive narration, one can read his anecdotes as untold moments from history, missing from popular textbooks.

When Yuniór begins to write fiction for a living, he muddles the boundaries between his own reality and fictional works, as he never verifies when he is writing for a novel or revealing his internal narration. He writes Oscar's story as a novel but his deep involvement with the characters' lives takes his intrusive narration to another level. For example, he tells the tale of Oscar's mother, Belicia, just before her romance with the Gangster in the Dominican Republic. He describes her break from innocence when she sneaks out to her first night club called "El Hollywood" (*Oscar Wao* 114). A footnote follows the club's name and leads to the following: "A favorite hangout of Trujillo's, my mother tells me when the manuscript is almost complete" (*Oscar Wao* 115). Though Yuniór and his family have lived in the United States for nearly fifteen years and Belicia's experience at the nightclub took place some thirty years ago, Yuniór is still attached to the narrative by way of his own mother. There are many connections between the Cabral family and Yuniór's own because almost every Dominican alive today, survived or has family who survived the Trujillo's tyranny. He cannot separate himself from the story, even when he describes events that took place before he was born or in cities of the Dominican Republic in which he has never set foot. This footnote also reveals an uncertainty of the story itself. If Yuniór's mother made the connection that the nightclub was marked by Trujillo himself it begs the question of what other elements of the tale are tainted by Trujillo – by the curse of fukú?

Attached to Yuniór's intrusive style is his trademark second-person narration, which is indicative of his snarky tone as a writer as well as the brutal honesty of his internal memoirs. Is the reader seeing what the narratee sees or does the reader omnisciently see Yuniór's internal monologue or both? The existence of a changing narratee between all three texts and Yuniór's own fiction raises the question of who is the actual educator of migrant lifestyles? Even characters within Yuniór's life and his stories force a migrant dialogue upon other characters. Yuniór reveals the meta-levels of his own hybridity to other characters, narratees, as well the reader. However, Díaz draws the largest loop around this spiraling diagram of educating on migration. Without Díaz, none of the characters and actors of change would exist so it is not only Yuniór who educates the ever-changing narratee, but also Díaz who satirically educates the reader. It is critical to acknowledge the various forms and layers of narration that are only further complicated by the lesser used second person voice of all three texts.

In all three of Díaz's texts, Yuniór provides a comparative glance at the Dominican

Republic and the United States. This comparison reveals such similarities as the enslavement of natives by Western European colonizers, the swift alteration of moral values to religious values (and as in many island nation cases, a blend of both the religious and the ancient spirits), the more modern American military intervention of the Dominican Republic, and the contrary images of affluent white culture and poverty stricken darker-skinned peoples. Yuniór depicts these instances separately with stories and anecdotes. For example, in *This Is How You Lose Her*, Yuniór returns to his home country and regularly comments on the problem of the hotel resort; they are crawling with “Eurofucks” (*This Is How* 15). Hotel maids in “Aunt Jemima costumes”²⁷ serve him (*This Is How* 14). In these resort cities, the only Dominicans who roam the resorts and do not work at them are strapped with cash, high on cocaine, or are tormentors themselves. Yuniór notes: “This is where the Garcías and the Colóns come to relax after a long month of oppressing the masses [...]” (*This Is How* 14). He sees the United States as a double-edged sword – it is opportunity meets enemy. The United States now experiences a kind of reverse colonization of Dominicans like Yuniór (and other Latino/as) thriving in the States.²⁸ Migrant writers can capture the hypocrisy of historical colonization as well as the irony of modern tourism from the same country that invaded the Dominican Republic twice in the first half of the twentieth century and continues to close its borders to thousands of Latino/a migrants every year.

Though distinctly separate from migrant literature, postcolonialism is, admittedly, a part of this narrative. Most nations as they exist today have a deep history of colonialism (whether as actors, unwilling receivers, or both) but national literature does not highlight the existing connections between first and third world as migrant literature does. This is not to say that the reminder of colonialism and oppression should rear its head in every piece of national literature, but it is a concept often overlooked in many national canons. The migrant writer becomes, in a

²⁷ Aunt Jemima is a maple syrup brand in the United States that has faced much criticism for the logo and shape of the plastic bottle that depicts a Black woman in a traditional colonial housekeeper uniform. The term “aunt” is less implicative of her relational status and more of her nanny position to affluent white children of the antebellum South.

²⁸ For more information regarding the concept of “reverse colonialism,” please refer to Robert J.C. Young’s essay “World Literature and Postcolonialism,” in which he states: “Given that most countries in the world have at some point been colonized, or at least semi-colonized, and that those colonizing countries not recently colonized, such as Great Britain, have nevertheless themselves been transformed in the second half of the century by immigration (‘reverse colonization’) from their former colonies” (*The Routledge Companion to World Literature*, 2012) p. 215.

way, responsible for a comparative and hybrid analysis. Narrator Yuniór becomes responsible for the education of his narratee.

4.2 A plurality of readers begs for many genres

In her aptly titled book, *Against World Literature: On the Politics of Untranslatability*, Emily Apter warns that world literature can be read as “a hosting ground to literary postcolonialism” (12). It cannot be emphasized enough that Díaz’s works, worldly in concept, cannot be limited to the genre of postcolonial fiction. In order to prevent this generalization, Díaz and Yuniór explain to their respective readers in the prologue the cause and effect of fukú instead of hegemony. This reference to the fantastic or myth relieves the text from being read simply as postcolonial fiction and proves the multifaceted style and subjects of migration.

The central motivator for tactical bilingualism in Díaz’s works is the readership’s plurality. Likewise, the fusion of genres is formed to reach many readers. Much like each of Torres’ strategic categories are geared to a specific reader of varying language capacity, the multitude of genres deliver the message of postcolonialism without always explicitly stating it. The plurality of Díaz’s readership emphasizes more than just linguistic competences. The “Díaz Dialect” reaches beyond linguistics and accents and into a place of slang, historical fact, and quite frequently, popular culture. All of these facets culminate to a hybrid dialect that can open itself up to a new niche of readers, or isolate another audience. The cultural vernacular of all three texts is an intricate fusion of slang, language, castilianization, cursing, and folklore, but *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* further complicates this blend. The subject, Oscar, obsesses over the fantastic stories of *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and the like. Each of these fictional worlds boasts languages and vernaculars all their own, in which Oscar and the narrator Yuniór are fluent. For example, Yuniór spins a tale of dictatorial rule with a fantasy reference. One of the dictator’s lackeys is considered evil, but perhaps not the worst of the worst. Yuniór compares his wickedness to J.R.R. Tolkien’s creatures and says, “Don’t misunderstand: our boy wasn’t no ringwraith, but he wasn’t no orc either” (*Oscar Wao* 119). Later, in the same novel, Yuniór postulates that the strained relationship between dictators and authors is comparable to various comic book villains: “Since before the infamous Caesar-Ovid war they’ve had beef. Like the Fantastic Four and Galactus, like the X-Men and the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, like the Teen Titans and Death-stoke [...]” and so on (*Oscar Wao* 97). Oscar’s first heartbreak was the result

of his elementary school girlfriend dumping him for the “butt ugly Nelson Pardo” and Yuniór says the home wrecker “looked like Chaka from the *Land of the Lost!*” (*Oscar Wao* 16). Naturally, without having seen the 1970s television series, one wouldn’t know that Chaka is essentially a Neanderthal. Sometimes Yuniór’s nods to fiction and pop culture are less referential and more general. He describes Oscar’s sister, Lola, as having “wide manga-eyes” conjuring an image of Japanese comics (*Oscar Wao* 35).

This bookish vernacular isolates readers who relate more to the Dominican-American stereotype that Oscar opposes. The woman-chasing misogynist Yuniór of other dimensions could never decipher the sci-fi comparisons and anecdotes used to describe everything from characters to hybridity and colonization. Similarly, the “nerd” vernacular can isolate or speak to a special niche of readers much like the texts’ tactical bilingualism. There are thus majority audiences with sub-readerships within them – Anglophone versus Latino/a readers, monolingual versus bilingual readers, as well as readers with genre preferences ranging from fiction to fantasy to comics. Though the message may be received through different means, it is received by an extreme plurality of readers that often mirrors the varying characters throughout the texts as well as the variety of styles found in migrant literature – a genre not to be limited by postcolonial fiction and discourse.

4.3 The footnotes of postcolonialism

The overlapping of author, narrator, narratee, and reader are only more complicated by stylistic choices in *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Yuniór narrates all but the shortest chapter of the novel. The second chapter, “Wildwood,” is reserved for Oscar’s sister Lola who is Yuniór’s primary connection to Belicia de León’s family (née Cabral).²⁹ When he narrates stories of the contemporary Cabrals he interjects more with first person references. Some of these events he witnesses himself and thus acts as narrator and participant. He dates Lola during their freshmen year of university but they quickly break up. Though he remains his typically Yuniór-self and hops from casual affair to casual affair, it is clear he loves Lola and regrets the break-up. Her unattainability might be the reason her story cannot be narrated by Yuniór and instead remains as

²⁹ Though Oscar and Lola bear the name of their absent father, de León, I will refer to them as the Cabrals to emphasize the three generations and their stories told in the *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*.

a separate account within the narrative. In any case, the two remain friends and he continues to look out for Lola's socially inept brother while she studies abroad in Spain. Just before Oscar begins his sophomore year at Rutgers University, his depression becomes apparent. Yunior offers to be his roommate in a combination of housing requirements and his desire to keep in touch with Lola. At this point, Yunior's actual involvement with the narration allows him to interject freely with asides such as: "It started with me. The year before Oscar fell, I suffered some nuttiness of my own" (*Oscar Wao* 167), and: "It's not like [Oscar] was a complete stranger—I mean, he *was* the brother of the girl I'd shadow-fucked [...]. To say I'd never in my life met a Dominican like him would be to put it mildly" (*Oscar Wao* 171). Yunior also compares his own Dominican heritage with that of Oscar's:

Dude used to say he was cursed [...] and if I'd really been old-school Dominican I would have (a) listened to the idiot, and then (b) run the other way. My family are sureños, from Azua, and if we sureños from Azua know anything it's about fucking curses (*Oscar Wao* 171).

The narration is convoluted with Yunior's first-person perspective as well as moments of continued omniscient narration.

However, when Yunior's narration travels back in time to tell the early life of the Cabral's of generations past, he becomes an omniscient narrator with a second-person voice addressing the narratee, but he ceases to refer to himself. For example, when he recounts the story of Oscar's grandfather Abelard Luis Cabral, he begins: "When the family talks about it at all—which is like never—they always begin in the same place: with Abelard and the Bad Thing he said about Trujillo" (*Oscar Wao* 211). Statements like this one reveal a bit about the narratee. In the narration's contemporary, Yunior writes to an audience unfamiliar with the Cabral's. He attempts to establish some sincerity when he implies he has interviewed (formally or informally) the subjects of the story. Are we to assume *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* is Yunior's own novel? If so, is Lola's chapter a part of that? Perhaps it is an insertion or maybe it does not exist as part of Yunior's text. The footnotes of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* may shine some light on these inquiries. Immediately following the word "Trujillo" in the previous passage is a marker, guiding the reader – and perhaps the narratee – to footnotes. In this case, the footnote reads:

There are other beginnings certainly, better ones, to be sure—if you ask me I would have started when the Spaniards "discovered" the New World—or when the U.S. invaded

Santo Domingo in 1916—but if this was the opening that the de Leóns chose for themselves, then who am I to question their historiography? (*Oscar Wao* 211).

It is clear that the footnotes are not Díaz inserting historical facts or expansions of ideas, but rather Yunió finding a way to interject without completely compromising the omniscience of his primary text. Yunió comments and interjects; he cannot help himself. Despite the first-person aside and the second-person lecture, the main objective of the footnotes is to recount history or expand upon mentions of Dominican culture. The first footnote provides a make-up course for those who missed their “mandatory two seconds of Dominican history” and they continue to educate throughout (*Oscar Wao* 2). The acknowledgment that Yunió writes the footnotes supports the argument that the entire text is Yunió’s own novel, which would pinpoint the narratee to Yunió’s own readership.

These realizations piece together a solution for the earlier question of: who is the actual educator of migrant lifestyles? The fact that Yunió and his narratee cannot exist without Díaz remains true. As the writer and artist, Junot Díaz controls the many layers of the text; this is inarguable. However, the fact that there are layers of narration and the simple existence of a relatable and casual narrator – who is not just an extension of the author – facilitates a place for enlightening discourse. The conversational second-person style of Yunió’s tone blurs the line between lecturer and storyteller, making the pill of postcolonial discourse easier to swallow. Yunió’s sarcastic, brazen vernacular lures the narratee and reader into the beautiful and tragic story of the Cabral’s, which is infused with politically laden footnotes. In the previous footnote describing the beginning of the Cabral’s story, Yunió manages to touch upon both the initial colonization of the Island as well as the more recent American military intervention that pushed the nation deeper into its violent regime-state. Though the Cabral’s of the novel did not have a part in the initial colonization of the Island, Yunió argues that the fact that the Dominican Republic as it exists today is the result of European colonization is a contributing factor to the current state of the nation and therefore deeply affects the Cabral’s. Until the end of Trujillo’s regime in 1961, the nation was amidst a battle for independence and a cultural flux largely due to the government-induced purge and disdain of Haitians and darker-skinned Dominicans. Yunió argues that this is where trouble began for the Cabral’s, however, for the integrity of the narration, he allows their story to begin where they think it begins – when Oscar’s grandfather Abelard allegedly insults the dictator. In reality Abelard lies to protect his daughters and wife who is

unknowingly pregnant with Belicia Cabral – Oscar’s mother. In any case, Yuniór has made clear from the start that the origin of fukú is ever present for the islanders and their tale of bad luck begins hundreds of years before Abelard’s alleged mistake.

All of the footnotes follow this pattern of expanding upon historical and political allusion within the plot. Yuniór wants his novel to remain as such without warding away his readers (i.e. the narratee) with too much history or socio-political commentary. Instead, he swaps terminology and calls the result of European and modern first world intervention “fukú” and re-writes history in a footnote. While living and attending schools in the United States, Yuniór believes that Dominican and minority history is always a footnote in the history classrooms of the United States. He knows that his American friends have little awareness of the Island and they certainly have no knowledge of their own country’s military invasion of the Dominican Republic. Instead of jarring the narratee with the harsh truths of his homeland’s past, he eases them in with snarky footnote commentary, laden with historical facts. When looking at Díaz’s novel as a whole, the majority of the blatant political commentary lies in those footnotes – in Yuniór’s footnotes. Therefore, in the actual novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, the postcolonial discourse is removed from the story, but forms the literal foundation of the text, as its presence rests at the bottom of the pages throughout the narrator’s story. This can also be read as an unflappable mirroring of migrant texts’ place in literature – a footnote to a footnote – or a yet another facet of postcolonial discourse, as it is often compartmentalized into sub-categories of the genre. This technique is much more acerbic than passive, as evidenced by instances like the sharp-tongued footnote that explains the term “parigüayo” and elaborates on the history of the American military intervention of the Dominican Republic from 1916 to 1924 (*Oscar Wao* 19).³⁰

At the start of the Abelard’s chapter “The Famous Doctor,” Yuniór describes the Cabral home. The Cabral name was very established in La Vega since 1791. Abelard’s father built an enormous house called “Casa Hatüey.” At the mention of the abode’s name, a footnote is placed:

Hatüey, in case you’ve forgotten, was the Taino Ho Chi Minh. When the Spaniards were committing First Genocide in the Dominican Republic, Hatüey left the Island and canoed to Cuba, looking for reinforcements [...]. Casa Hatüey was named Hatüey because in Times Past it supposedly had been owned by a descendant of the priest who tried to baptize Hatüey right before the Spaniards burned him at the stake. (What Hatüey said on

³⁰ Please refer back to chapter 3.1 to re-read the full quotation and discussion.

that pyre is a legend in itself: Are there white people in Heaven? Then I'd rather go to hell.) History, however, has not been kind to Hatüey. Unless something changes ASAP he will go out like his camarada Crazy Horse. Coffled to a beer, in a country not his own (*Oscar Wao* 212).

To elaborate, Hatüey was a Taino chief from Hispaniola who rebelled against Spanish rule. He is heralded as the first fighter of colonialism. A monument stands for him in Baracoa, Cuba with the inscription: “Primer rebelde de America inmolada Yara en Baracoa” (“First rebel of America slain in battle in Yara, Baracoa”). As usual, Yuniór takes it upon himself to educate the narratee with his second-person voice but he never fully spells out atrocities for the reader. He slyly states “First Genocide” without elaborating on implied subsequent genocides and subtly encourages the narratee (and reader) to investigate other instances of massacre. He attempts to make the event more tangible for modern readers by referencing Ho Chi Minh and his own independence movement. He then ironizes the history lesson with his parenthetical aside about Hatüey’s final words, paraphrased in Yuniór’s voice and not the direct and more eloquent quote from Hatüey.³¹ He softens the harshness of reality and once again brings the past to the present with a more popularized example for American readers – that of Crazy Horse, the defender of the Lakota people. A once popular beer was named after the chief (later changed to Crazy Stallion), raising many accusations of racism and defamation. Yuniór fears that soon the name will be only associated with the beverage of the colonizer and Hatüey might soon face a similar fate. Yuniór and Díaz bring the horror of the past to the present for his contemporaries with cynicism and popular culture.

Casa Hatüey is reminiscent of more tragedy than its memorial name implies. Haitian migrants tended the home and its residents. Before Abelard’s great mistake, his daughter Jacquelyn was blind to the threat that was Trujillo and the regime. She focused on studying medicine in hopes of attending university in France like her father. In order to prepare herself, “she would practice French with both her father and with their servant Esteban El Gallo, who’d been born in Haiti and still spoke a pretty good frog” (*Oscar Wao* 218). The sentence is marked and leads to the following footnote:

³¹ According to Bartolomé de Las Casas’s historical account, this was the scene just before Hatüey’s murder: “[Hatüey], thinking a little, asked the religious man if Spaniards went to heaven. The religious man answered yes... The chief then said without further thought that he did not want to go there but to hell so as not to be where they were and where he would not see such cruel people” (Rivera & Rivera 260).

After Trujillo launched the 1937 genocide of Haitian and Haitian-Dominicans, you didn't see that many Haitian types working in the DR. Not until at least the late fifties. Esteban was the exception because (a) he looked so damn Dominican, and (b) during the genocide, Socorro had hidden him inside her daughter Astrid's dollhouse. Spent four days in there, cramped up like a brown-skinned Alice (*Oscar Wao* 218).

Of course, the genocide referenced is the same "perejiling" of Haitians mentioned previously. Abelard's wife, Socorro, risked her life by concealing Esteban, but this act of humanity acts as a reminder of the origins of many waves of migration – to seek shelter and solace. Tactically chosen by Díaz, the name of Esteban's savior, "Socorro," means relief, aid, or rescue in English depending on the context. Yuniór touches specifically on the genocide several times – more than any other particular historical instance of Trujillo's cruelty. The slaughter of thousands of migrant workers was fueled less by supposed undocumented work status, but more by the tone of their skin and the accents of their speech. They were targeted for looking and dialectically speaking as "other." Yuniór experiences this superficial "othering" in present-day America as well. Though Yuniór and Oscar's family are light-skinned enough to be seen as Dominican and not Haitian, they are dark-skinned in comparison to many lighter-skinned New Jersey residents. Since his move to the United States, Yuniór uses the word "nigger" interchangeably to reference himself, Oscar, Dominicans, non-Dominican Latinos, and African-Americans in all three of Díaz's texts. For example, Yuniór shows pride that Oscar has followed through with his fitness regimen and he says, "The nigger stuck with it and lost close on twenty pounds!" (*Oscar Wao* 270-1). It is a casual utterance for Yuniór and indicates that for many Dominican migrants, there is no difference in heritage beyond being un-white; one is Anglo or not, American or foreign. The repetitive references to the genocide are tragic in a way that many migrants in the United States cannot grasp, but they are reflective of a segregated situation nonetheless.

Yuniór is very selective with which historical events he chooses to highlight, both in the body text as well as the footnotes. The Parsley Massacre is addressed several times whereas other events are mentioned once or not at all. Naturally, he cannot include a detailed account of Dominican history from colonization to present, nor can he do so even for the duration of Trujillo's rule. However, his selectiveness sends a very specific and circular message. Yuniór most fears history, or *fukú*, repeating itself. He lectures the reader on the "*first* American

Occupation of the DR”³² to emphasize the repetition of external intervention (*Oscar Wao* 19). He repeatedly describes the Parsley Massacre to suggest the innocent cause and unjustified fear of migration even in the present day. He worries that the reputation of Chief Hatüey will follow the tragedy of Crazy Horse’s memory “coffled to a beer, in a country not his own” (*Oscar Wao* 212). The effects of colonialism are cyclical and cause a trickle-down effect that makes up postcolonialism and its discourse. Yunior knows that independence was a five hundred year struggle for the Dominican Republic and each time they seemed to grasp it, it was taken away shortly after – by Spain, Haiti, the United States, and Trujillo.

This struggle for freedom is footnoted by Belicia’s first high school boyfriend, Jack Pujols, who one day “would throw his lot in with the Demon Balaguer” (*Oscar Wao* 90). Joaquín Balaguer was president of the Dominican Republic and a puppet for Trujillo. The footnote following “Demon Balguer” reads as follows:

Although not essential to our tale, per se, Balaguer is essential to the Dominican one, so therefore we must mention him, even though I’d rather piss in his face. The elders say, *Anything uttered for the first time summons a demon*, and when twentieth-century Dominicans first uttered the word *freedom* en masse the demon they summoned was Balaguer. (Known as the Election Thief—see the 1966 election in the DR—and the Homunculus.) In the days of the Trujillato, Balaguer was just one of El Jefe’s more efficient ringwraiths [...] (*Oscar Wao* 90).

Yunior admits that the aside might not be critical to the story, but it is clearly an essential for Díaz who uses Yunior’s snide footnote as a pulpit to readdress history. The story of the Cabrals is the story of the Dominican Republic’s ongoing wrestle with fukú. Much like the nation of generations past, this family has come eye to eye with freedom only to have it tragically snatched away. Abelard becomes a successful doctor, only to have his reputation and eventually his life ruined by the dictator’s arrogance and greed. Pregnant Belicia believes she is days away from escaping to Miami with her Gangster boyfriend, only to be beaten nearly to death by his henchman and lose her unborn child. She escapes to the United States to raise a new family only to be diagnosed with lung cancer and see her unstable son’s life unravel and end before her eyes. Freedom, whether followed by the elders’ supposed demons, fukú, or the effects of postcolonialism, has faded away as quickly as it appeared for both the nation and the Cabrals.

³² My italics

4.4 Rewriting history: controlling, self-making, and form-giving

Yunior's footnoted account of the Dominican Republic's harrowing political history mirrors the current state of the nation's history as an afterthought in American history classrooms. Yunior places the most violent historical facts within the footnotes, as if to say the history of the natives as well as this century's victims of dictatorial rule and modern colonization has been footnoted in the textbooks of the Anglo world. Yunior's strategic placement of historical fact as well as the narration of the life of the Cabrals is his attempt to rewrite history for the othered subjects as well as an attempt to write the migrant story. As stated earlier, Díaz's exercises of tactical bilingualism and genre variation (such as the insertion of science fiction, comics, and pop cultural references) serve to rewrite long misunderstood or unaddressed truths of the colonized Island and its native and mestizo people. Furthermore, the factual footnotes act as strategic vignettes that recreate the censored scenes of a haunted past and rewrite history in the same manner. Stuart Hall considers this an act of writing *against* that which is already published and discussed. In his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," he explains the role of migration in his rewriting of discourse and the rediscovery of his identity, which resembles Díaz's migrant life: "[I] spent my childhood and adolescence in a lower-middle class family in Jamaica. I have lived all my adult life in England, in the shadow of the black diaspora – 'in the belly of the beast.' I write against the background of a lifetime's work in cultural studies" (223). Hall's own "lifetime" of work is an understatement, as the majority of texts – not just his own but within the literary scene in general – lean toward nationalism and it has been this way for centuries. A devotee of Frantz Fanon and a practitioner of his theories, Hall applies his own quest for identity to his rewriting of existing discourses. He comes to understand the present life of the other by examining an othered past. Hall explains:

In post-colonial studies, the rediscovery of this identity is often the object of what Frantz Fanon called a 'passionate research [...] directed by the secret hope of discovering beyond the misery of today, beyond self-contempt, resignation and abjuration, some very beautiful and splendid era whose existence rehabilitates us both in regard to ourselves and in regard to others' (223).

Yunior's own "passionate research" of the Cabral family does indeed intend to reach "beyond the misery" of the current Cabrals and their most contemporary pain – the loss of Oscar. Yunior's study concludes that the past and its rebellious fukú (née "colonization" or "European imperialism") that afflicts his home country has trickled down and exists in the modern day

Cabrals.

It is not only the tactical and factual footnotes but also the fictional body text that performs as a rewritten history. Though not based on actual events, the tales of the Cabrals as well as the characters of *This Is How You Lose Her* and *Drown* serve to fill in the blank pages of migrant history and lifestyle. Yuniór's footnotes might fill in small gaps of Caribbean history for uninformed readers but his own story and the story of his peers are a reality for many migrants in the States. It is very strategic that Yuniór lives the life of a young hustler, as told in *Drown*, as well as a successful author, told in both in *This Is How You Lose Her* and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. Perhaps more strategic is the fact that Yuniór is the same character throughout all texts despite his different means of employment and evolving character qualities. Yuniór is responsible to show as well as tell the migrant lifestyle within this migrant mode.

The blank pages of history are those that cannot be written because they have been erased via dictatorial censorship or because a long “othered” witness could never write them. Boehmer references Neil Bissoondath's cynical belief that the colonized Caribbean “amounts to no more than a ‘big, black hole’” (188). For Boehmer and Bissoondath, the crux of rewriting Caribbean history is lodged in the fact that not only is the islands' history censored or poorly recorded, but in many cases, it is erased completely. As a reaction to this lack of literary and historical texts, Yuniór addresses these narrative gaps as he gathers accounts from the Cabrals for his novel. He says of Belicia and her dangerous Trujillo-shadowed fling in the Dominican Republic:

How much Beli knew about the Gangster we will never know [...]. Due partially to Beli's silence on the matter and other folks' lingering unease when it comes to talking about the regime, info on the Gangster is fragmented; I'll give you what I've managed to unearth and the rest will have to wait for the day the páginas en blanco finally speak (*Oscar Wao* 119).

Belicia's knowledge of the Gangster is indeed very limited in the story – at least it is recorded as such. Yuniór knows that writing about the recent history is a double-edged sword. Due to the fairly recent nature of the events, it should be simple to gather factual accounts, but the victims' wounds are still fresh and for many, the fear is still very real. He hopes the blank pages or the “páginas en blanco” will one day be revealed.

The developing history of the Dominican Republic, as recent as the twentieth century, mimics the fluctuating process of depicting migration in its most honest state. As Mardorossian explains it, migrant history and the migrant present both endure a “process” of representation

“emphasizing movement” (15-16). Hall agrees with Mardorossian’s concept of an ongoing identification and he adds that “we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’ which is never complete, always in process” (222). The evolving or migratory nature of fictional Yuniór and his fellow migrants’ past grows with the actual spread of migrant literature and increasing volume of migrant voices. Just as the migrant life and migrant literature is not stagnant, neither should the study of migration and diaspora be stationary.

Once more, Yuniór mentions the blank pages of the Cabral history. The Gangster’s subordinates have just severely beaten Belicia when Yuniór interjects: “And now we arrive at the strangest part of our tale. Whether what follows was a figment of Beli’s wracked imagination or something else altogether I cannot say. Even your Watcher³³ has his silences, his páginas en blanco” (*Oscar Wao* 149). He then describes the scene in which a mongoose places its paws on Belicia’s chest and encourages her to rise despite her near-death state. The image of the mongoose is very precious to Taino culture as well as Dominicans. Yuniór explains that the mongoose arrived in the Caribbean islands from Africa, and before that, it came from beyond this world arriving to serve as an “ally of Man [...] but no evidence of such a migration has been unearthed” (*Oscar Wao* 151). Just as no evidence has surfaced to prove mongoose folklore, little evidence has surfaced for the truth of Belicia’s survival. The blank pages are inevitable, but Yuniór attempts to remedy the bulk of them with his novel.

Why does Yuniór base his novel on the story of the Cabrals? Is it the convenience of his relationship with Lola? Could it be the result of guilt at Oscar’s untimely death and aptly titled “brief wondrous life”? Is he purely interested in the complicated tale? As always, Yuniór is evasive. Elleke Boehmer’s perspective might solve this speculation. In the chapter “Independence” of her book *Colonial & Postcolonial Literature*, Boehmer emphasizes the role and responsibility the migrant writer has to not only rewrite his or her national history but also claim their freedom by rediscovering or embracing their identity and whatever hybrid existence that may entail. She exemplifies the works of Mulk Raj Anand and Ngugi wa Thiong’o as integral to a migrant or exile canon but acknowledges that they were only treated as such once a

³³ According to [Marvel.com](http://marvel.com), Watchers appear in various Marvel comics as extraterrestrial characters that “possess advanced technology existing billions of years before most other species [...] They also possess technology to observe alternate realities.”
<<http://marvel.com/universe/Watchers>>

“tidal shift” took place during the anti-colonial and postcolonial argument (Boehmer 173). Migrant texts are often results of movements of resistance but the texts might be more than the result of independence and self-fashioning, but also the cause. In the same chapter, she explains the cause or inspiration of the texts as they grew into an act of self-definition by referencing Ngugi wa Thiong’o’s *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (1991):

To mend the obfuscating and self-cancelling disjunction between language and lived reality, colonized writers had to begin to imagine the world from their own point of view. It was the writer’s task, Ngugi remarks, to assert ‘the right [of the once-colonized]³⁴ to name the world for ourselves’ (Boehmer 181).

Similarly, Díaz mends the disconnection between modern discourse and his own reality by imagining the world of Yuniór from his own point of view. Though entirely fictional, the story of migration and hybridity does eerily mirror the life of Díaz. Though Díaz did not experience colonization the way that Ngugi has, his texts make it clear that the effects of colonization have seeped into the lives of Cabral and into the life of Yuniór. The story “Edison, New Jersey” of *Drown* reacts to postcolonial classism that still pervades the contemporary life of Yuniór. Before he became a writer, Yuniór worked as a billiard table deliveryman and installer. He is keenly aware of the classist and often racial contrasts between his colleagues and his customers. He interjects to the narratee:

You should see our customers. Doctors, diplomats, surgeons, presidents of universities, ladies in slacks and silk tops who sport thin watches you could trade in for a car, who wear comfortable leather shoes. Most of them prepare for us by laying down a path of yesterday’s *Washington Post* from the front door to the game room. I make them pick it all up. I say: Carajo, what if we slip? Do you know what two hundred pounds of slate could do to a floor? The threat of property damage puts the chop-chop in their step (*Drown* 122).

As usual, the anecdote begins with Yuniór directly addressing the narratee. He is still in disbelief of the extremes between himself and his wealthy clients. These clients continue to emphasize the separation by laying down newspaper to protect their property from the presumed filthy boots of the deliverymen. The paper is not for the workers’ convenience and Yuniór poignantly indicates this to the customer who only complies when their own property – *not* the safety of the workers – is at stake. Yuniór later mentions that the customer usually never even makes eye contact with the workers until it is time to pay the bill, but they do follow Yuniór and his partner as often as

³⁴ Boehmer’s brackets.

they can, wary that the two will steal. The owners of luxurious houses – “diplomats” and “presidents of universities” – are writing history. Yuniór is thus responsible for the alternative view and the reaction.

Boehmer’s belief that it is the migrant writer’s task to represent the postcolonial situation is followed by a categorical execution of his or her responsibility. Similar to Torres’ categorized linguistic strategies of migrant writers, Boehmer asserts that historical fiction can be organized into the following three categories: “control, self-making or selving, and form-giving” (187). “Control” entails reworking, redefining, and rewriting the migrant’s or the colonized native or national’s history, which has been out of his or her control until now. Díaz’s insertion of historical facts falls neatly into this category. Yuniór’s historically driven footnotes and asides are his own efforts to control his definition and history, long commanded by the colonizers or descendants of colonizers. Furthermore, Yuniór’s body text reaches for control. In *Drown*, Yuniór shares the most iconic image of his absent father: “When I thought of Papi I thought of one shot specifically. Taken days before the U.S. invasion: 1965” (*Drown* 69). At the age he describes, Yuniór has no memory of his father beyond the few photos his mother carefully guards in a tin can. When Yuniór was just a toddler, his father left in search for a better life in the United States. The obvious irony rests in the fact that the same country that invaded his homeland in a matter of days after the photo was taken is the very same nation to which he would one day flee. In a glaring attempt to tie his own biography with historical fact, Yuniór places a colon before the date of invasion, emphasizing the sad truth of the situation. Similarly in the expanded narrative of all three texts, Díaz ties the purely fictional stories with historical fact, thus “assuming control” of his migrant narrative, as Boehmer would say (187).

The second style of rewriting history as suggested by Boehmer is “the process of nationalist *self-making* or *self-imagining*.” This includes “rekindling memories,” creating a “communal wholeness,” and “providing role models” (188). This rekindling resembles Yuniór’s active self-fashioning, as discussed in chapter 2.3, by revisiting memories of his transition to the United States. All of Yuniór’s passing references to the underrepresented twentieth century Dominican history rekindle memories for his own narratee and for a variety of readers, particularly during his assumption of “control” as exemplified in the footnotes of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*. In studying the history of the Cabrals and their Island past, Yuniór even rekindles his own memories of his childhood and time in the “campo” as he has shared this

in greater detail in Díaz's preceding collection *Drown*. His sharp-tongued championing of Dominican and Taino heroes like Hatüey – who preferred to burn in hell than rest in heaven with the colonizers – encourages a sense of heroism in the Dominican community. Hatüey, and even fictional heroes such as the Chinese servers of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* who save Belicia from Trujillo's sister's first attempt at her life, act as role models for resistance and regaining control of one's history and society place. A particularly interesting and complicated role model is found in the many scorned women of *This Is How You Lose Her*. One of Yuniór's ex-girlfriends is Alma, or in English, "Soul." Yuniór describes Alma as his proud Dominican-American girlfriend: "She says she does it for you: *I'm reclaiming my Dominican heritage* (which ain't a complete lie—she's even taking Spanish to better minister to your moms)" (*This Is How* 46). Yuniór's own betrayal of these women, who are described as having a Latina appearance and, whether they want to or not, represent Latina and Caribbean culture, is a subtle mirroring of the colonizers' betrayal of the native Caribbean islanders. The female characters are strong and proudly embrace their heritage, but are deceived and hurt by Yuniór nonetheless. Despite their pain, they represent strong role models of cultural retention for Dominican-Americans who are unsure of their own cultural place and hybridity.

Lastly, Boehmer maintains that "form-giving" is an essential element of taking responsibility for one's own history with fiction writing. To give form to migrant and postcolonial history with a fictional narrative is to restructure the migrant discourse in general and can be considered showing rather than telling history and societal truths. In solving the blank pages of history, it acts as "the initial emergence of political self-consciousness, say, or the explosion of resistance" (Boehmer 189). Díaz's primary effort to give form to the migrant and colonized person's narrative is the writing of his three fictional texts, but it is critical to acknowledge the penultimate "form" of his effort to rewrite history and that form is Yuniór de las Casas. Both as narrator and as protagonist, Yuniór is a composite character representing the most complicated elements of migrant culture, as it exists in the land of the colonizer. He expresses a longing for heritage and historical understanding as he writes the story of the Cabral's and their part in the darker and faded pages of Dominican history. He exercises control in his second-person voice and commands the reader's attention to the often-overlooked details of migrant life in the United States such as stereotyping, economical disparity, and bi-cultural strain. He actively toggles between languages with tactical bilingualism to not only *tell* but also *show*

his hyphenated nationality. Díaz gives form to the discourse with Yunion and Yunion does the same with his own novel. In this sense, Díaz shows while Yunion tells, mirroring Mardorossian's assertion that active development by way of "movement" and "process" represents migrant discourse and migrant history. Therefore the form given to postcolonial/migrant discourse cannot be stationary. What better way to create an evolving representation of migrants than with the ever-expanding Yunion? His narration develops with each of Díaz's publications and his involvement is always complicated and integral to the story. He is the thriving "form" given to migrant and postcolonial subjects.

Though perhaps more immediately tangible in the footnotes of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, all three of Díaz's texts subvert traditional and limited impressions of Dominican history and the social place of Dominican-Americans by reconfiguring postcolonial discourse as a whole. Díaz's fiction opposes the texts controlled by colonization that hold hybridity and the colonized in an unwanted niche or within the blank pages of history. According to Fanon, these controlled texts not only censor but also alter the past. They "turn to the past of oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (Hall 224). Though extremely distinct in style, mood, and content, *Drown*, *This Is How You Lose Her*, and *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* act as a critical foundation for the rewriting of Caribbean minority history and modern discourse. The stories not only rediscover identity but also produce it with the underrepresented migrant experience. All three texts utilize this experience, particularly as existing in the nation of the colonizer, to revisit the distorted or blank pages of postcolonialism. In many ways, migrant literature depicts the contemporary effects of colonialism, diaspora, and exile better than the postcolonial genre. It is a new manner of re-telling the past, and just as its migrant subject exists within movement, the genre has room for growth and development which singularly national literature cannot always claim. Furthermore, it seeks to alert multiple audiences in need of enlightenment. The plurality of Díaz's readership – in language, nationality, and culture – speaks volumes for the benefits of migrant texts that improve the vector of minority literature as a whole. His informative and enlightening fiction contends that migrant literature in effect usurps traditional postcolonial texts.

5. Conclusion

The habit of placing migrant literature in an unwanted niche and the attempt to cast it simply as a facet of postcolonial literature must be criticized. It is clear that migrant literature neither benefits from being compartmentalized within the sweeping genre of postcolonialism, nor is it adequately represented when sorted into a single national canon. Rather, the mobile and very dual genre is most effective when acknowledged as its own kind. The ramifications of pigeonholing migrant literature into one nation's literary canon reflect the social situation of migrants, particularly those physically situated *outside* of their home countries and culturally situated *between* origin and destination. Junot Díaz knows this struggle well. His literature exemplifies the migrant experience founded in hybridity, which actively refuses notions of singular placement. His literature rebels against the genre grouping with its fusion of fiction and history and its alternation between English and Spanish. Díaz created Yunió as the primary actor for his cause. Yunió separates the author's agenda from the art produced, thus making the work more effective in its political message while reaching to a number of different readers.

The discussion began with the perception and modern discourse surrounding migrant literature. When tracking the continuity of the vernacular of migrant literature, it was revealed that it is remarkably similar between experts, authors, and critics. The central theme emphasizes movement, an ongoing search for identity, mobility, active self-fashioning, and becoming a personal identity. I pulled from a variation of phrases used by Bhabha, Boehmer, and Mardorossian to emphasize that there is not a stationary space for migrants or migrant literature. Though Bhabha's Third Space philosophy is applicable, the terminology is a bit wishful and benefits from Mardorossian's conceptualization that migrants and the genre exist in a *mode*, which provides a theoretical residence for migrant literature, but also offers room for expansion in duality. The migrant mode is as space reserved for actions like self-fashioning and self-identification. In all three of Díaz's texts, Yunió is the narrator of the migrant mode. A Dominican migrant himself, he is frank to the point of audacity with the truth of the migrant experience in the United States and the lack of acknowledgment of the migrant mode.

Díaz created Yunió in order to resist the undermining of migrant literature as its own genre but the narrator was armed with his own tools to raise awareness of the migrant situation. In a study of the primary tool used by migrant authors, I exemplified language as a crucial element of migration, taking Díaz's unique dialect and its manifestation in the voice of Yunió as

an example. His language wields bilingualism as a weapon to combat the issue of placement in migrant literature. He and his narrator Yunió write in English – the language of the colonizer – but they both resist the limitations of being called “American.” I assembled the term “tactical bilingualism” to define the profound intention of language choice to reveal the dual culture of migrant literature and lifestyles. Utilizing Torres’s three strategies of bilingualism, I furthered this study and broke down categories of tactical bilingualism to reveal the intricacy of the texts’ word choice in catering to or isolating different readers. Often, his word choice is less angled toward the reader and more toward creating a mood within the text. Sommer’s collection *Bilingual Games* and the essayists’ study of language shined light on Díaz’s playfulness and intention with words.

Finally, after examining the interpretations of migrant literature and the actions it takes to reveal the migrant situation, I differentiated it from its mistaken keeper – postcolonial literature. Naturally, there is an overlap between the two fields, however, in observing Yunió’s asides and particularly the footnotes of *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, it was demonstrated that the migrant situation has been a kind of footnote in the studies of colonialism, postcolonialism, and independence. Yunió’s toggling between first, second, and third person narrations is integral to Díaz’s migrant message, which reconfigures postcolonial discourse. As an example, Yunió spoke in second person in every footnote in an effort to condemn the lack of native, Dominican, and even Latino history taught in global classrooms. He reaches beyond his narratee and to the reader to emphasize the detriment of the lost genre.

The acknowledgment of a moving yet distinct space for migrant literature, the recognition of the effective tools to champion hybridity such as language, and the promotion of migrant literature’s requirement for growth by liberating it from limiting national canons and postcolonialism will not only shine light on its unparalleled style but also on the situation for millions of migrants living *outside* of their home countries and *between* cultural spaces.

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