

The Quisqueya Diaspora

The Emergence of Latina/o Literature from Hispaniola

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This essay explores aspects of the literary production of Haitian and Dominican writers primarily located in the United States. As these authors belong to a diaspora comprised of two populations of intertwined African and European descents, their combined inclusion here aims at challenging critical traditions in Latino/a studies that have tended to exclude Haitian-American literary production. For, if the much-contested term “Hispanics” refers primarily to a Spanish-speaking population, the more progressive term “Latina/o” should open up the umbrella to include people with a cultural background originating in *all* nations in the Americas whose primary language is derived from Latin, including French, and its own American derivation, Haitian Creole. Yet critical volumes of Latina/o studies have consistently excluded Haitian-Americans, many of whom write in English, seasoned with dashes of French or Haitian Creole. Considering that recent definitions of *latinidad* have expanded the concept to include Portuguese-speaking authors as well as writers who sprinkle their English-based works with indigenous languages, the exclusion of Haitian authors is egregious, especially considering the crucial historical role Haiti took in the independence of Bolivarian nations.¹ Further, as Latino/a literary criticism has expanded to include Dominican-American authors, the exclusion of their

¹ For recent discussions of *latinidad*, see Suzanne Bost and Francis R. Aparicio, eds., *The Routledge Companion to Latino/a Literature*. London; New York: Routledge, 2012; and Frederick Luis Aldama, ed., *The Routledge Concise History of Latino/a Literature*. London; New York: Routledge, 2013. For an exception to this normalized exclusion of Haitian authors, see Ricardo Ortíz’s “Edwidge Danticat’s ‘Latinidad’: *The Farming of Bones* and the Cultivation (of Fields) of Knowledge,” in Marcus Bullock and Peter Y. Paik eds., *Aftermaths: Exile, Migration, and Diaspora Reconsidered*. New Brunswick, New Jersey and London: Rutgers University Press, 2009, pp. 150–72. Although Ortíz does not argue for an inclusion of Haitian-American authors in the Latino/a canon, he sustains that Danticat’s novel challenges overall notions of *latinidad* as it denounces the 1937 massacre of Haitians in the Dominican Republic as well as dominant notions of “Hispanidad” in official discourses of Dominican national identity.

Haitian counterparts prevents offering a larger, more complex perspective on Dominicans as a group. It also misses the potential offered by reading this unique diaspora from a Caribbean island whose multiple names (Quisqueya, Haiti, Saint-Domingue, Santo Domingo, Española, and Hispaniola) stand as residues of its colonial history and of the inextricable relationship of the two peoples that share its geographical space, blurring the line that divides them into the Hispanophone/Dominican, on the one hand, and the French/Creolophone/Haitian on the other. Certainly, few studies of anything Dominican can stand on their own without mention of Haiti and of the relationship between both nations, be it of their “conflict” or the very real collaboration that has permeated their histories for centuries between progressives of both sides and between the reactionaries as well. To be sure, efforts have been made to explore Haitian and Dominican diasporic literary production in tandem, but much remains to be done in comparing the effects of their condition as immigrants or second generation on their works. Except for Lucía Suárez (2006), Silvio Torres-Saillant (2006b), and Manuel A. Victoriano-Martínez (2014), few have offered new insights on how these combined productions reveal the tangled dynamics of the island.²

This essay attempts partially to address these gaps by focusing on the relationship of these diasporic subjectivities to the homeland and to the “other side” of the island. In this sense, I argue that their shared condition as immigrants opens new, potential avenues of understanding between the two nations. I also contend that the diasporic condition of many Dominican writers has been crucial in developing an empathy toward Haitian immigrants that the normalization of anti-Haitian sentiments prevailing in the Dominican Republic would seldom promote. Thus, this essay begins with a brief review of the intertwined history of both nations, the construction of Haiti as the “primitive Other” (Valerio-Holguín, n.d.) in the Dominican

² Critics who have recently examined Haitian and Dominican literary production in tandem include Elissa Lister (2013), who focuses on the literature dealing with the 1937 massacre; Manuel A. Victoriano-Martínez (2014) who explores the concept of the “rayano” or subjectivity standing at the intersection of the Haiti-Dominican Republic border, and includes a discussion of Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones*; and Maria Cristina Fumagalli (2015), who focuses on literary and cultural productions from the island, as well as Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones* (1998) and Junot Díaz’s “Monstro” (2012). The few critics who include various diasporic authors from both sides are Lucía Suárez (2006), who examines works by Danticat, Jean-Robert Cadet, Julia Alvarez, and Loyda Maritza Pérez; and Myriam Chancy (2012), who discusses Caribbean women writers including Alvarez, Pérez, and Danticat, among others. See also the epilogue of Silvio Torres-Saillant’s *An Intellectual History of the Caribbean* (2006) for further discussions of Haitian and Dominican diasporic authors.

national imagination, and the great distance that, especially after the 1937 massacre of tens of thousands of Haitians and Afro-Dominicans, characterized relations between both peoples. To be sure, after the fall of Haitian dictator Jean-Claude “Baby Doc” Duvalier in 1986, a gradual rapprochement emerged, but this culminated in renewed tensions from 2005 onward. Given this context, I borrow a term employed by Haitian writer Marie-Hélène Laforest in her reflection on her own migratory experience, and I expand it to argue that the diasporic condition functions as an “equalizer” on these two collectivities who, largely unknown to each other, share similar experiences as immigrants in the United States. Finally, I maintain that a combined reading of these works suggests that this diasporic condition offers potential for both groups to shed stereotypes about each other in order to develop new perspectives on the island’s tensions.

Indeed, the diasporic condition of Haitian and Dominican immigrants brings them together in sharing a similar predicament. While Haitians and Dominicans living on the island are separated by a linguistic barrier and geopolitical border, there is potential for their respective diasporas to be united by their migratory experience and the use of English, the *lingua franca* of immigrants. As many other immigrants, Haitian and Dominican immigrants also face similar racial discrimination and are confronted with new identity categories. If Haitians saw themselves as Haitians, and Dominicans as Dominicans, as immigrants they learn they are equalized and lumped together with “Blacks,” a category that erases the specificity of their national historical past and ethnicities, and leads them to learn from, adopt, or join forces with others in a heterogeneous African diaspora. Light-skinned Dominicans, too, are lumped together in a larger category – “Hispanics” or “Latino/as” –, which also has an unintended effect of effacing historical and ethnic specificities. As I explain below, they also share a state of precariousness as to the perceived authenticity of their cultural identity and sense of belonging to the homeland.

A brief history of a tormented relationship

As scholars have amply documented, official discourses of national identity in the Dominican Republic have been marred by an anti-Haitian ideology that can be traced to the revolution of Saint-Domingue, when its first outbursts in 1791 prompted French and Spanish ideologues to construct both colonies as the two opposite sides of a binary system easily recognizable in Western epistemology and colonial discourses (Franco Pichardo,

2013; Torres-Saillant, 1999a; 1999b, 2003; Valerio-Holguín, n.d.). Briefly recounted, the history of the two nations begins as follows: shortly after the arrival of the Spaniards on the island they baptized as La Española, Spain prioritized Mexico and Peru in its conquest and colonization agenda, and gradually abandoned Española. The so-called “Devastaciones de Osorio” (1606–1607) prohibited the population from settling the northern coasts of the island as a measure to prevent them from establishing trade exchange with other European nations. As a result, French buccaneers and filibusters gradually populated the deserted lands and, in 1665, requested the French king’s recognition of their territory as a colony. In 1697, France and Spain signed the treaty of Ryswick, which established a first border between the two colonies. A new Treaty of Bale, signed in 1795 between Spain and the French revolutionary regime, ceded the Spanish colony to France, thus making it technically “French”. During the same period, black rebellions that had been taking place in Saint-Domingue since 1791, culminated into a full-fledged revolution that led to the first abolition of slavery in the Americas and the first black republic on the hemisphere. Its first leader, Toussaint Louverture attempted to claim Santo Domingo under the Treaty of Bale, brought his troops and proclaimed the abolition of slavery, but was repelled by the local Spanish-descended, *criolla* elite, who would only accept French authorities to make the Treaty effective. In 1805, Dessalines, too, marched on Santo Domingo in an unsuccessful effort to free the entire island from the French. In 1809, Spanish creoles fought the French but only to restore their colonial status under the Crown of Spain. Then, in 1822, Haiti responded to the call from other, progressive sectors of the Spanish side who wanted to abolish slavery and unified the island under one regime. During this Unification period, which lasted until 1844, Haitian authorities abolished slavery permanently; confiscated lands from the Catholic Church and redistributed them among the peasants; and modernized the legal system by establishing civil marriage and the Napoleon Code. This relationship turned sour when, in 1826, France decided to recognize Haiti as a sovereign nation in exchange for an indemnity for its “losses” and Haitian authorities imposed new taxes on the Spanish side to help pay this debt. Finding this taxation unjust, the Spanish creoles rallied against the Haitian regime, proclaiming the Separation from Haiti and the birth of the Dominican Republic in 1844.³

³ Cassá, 2001. See also Franklyn Franco Pichardo, *Historia del Pueblo Dominicano*. Santo Domingo: Sociedad Editorial Dominicana, 1992, especially p. 185. For details on the

Ever since 1804, slave-owning powers throughout the world and especially in the hemisphere represented Haiti as a nation of primitive, evil, cannibalistic creatures – an image in stark contrast to the one used to define its Spanish neighbors: white, Catholic, civilized and obedient.⁴ Toward the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, conservative elites revived this dichotomy to define their nation in opposition to everything Haiti represented in their eyes. Despite the presence of progressive voices expressing a vision of both peoples as “brothers” as well as an admiration among foundational leaders Juan Pablo Duarte, José María Imbert, and Gregorio Luperón toward Haiti for having resisted and defeated the European colonial power, to this day, a negro-phobic, anti-Haitian ideology has always been available to serve the ruling elite’s political and economic interests, sometimes even justifying extreme violence, such as the 1937 massacre.⁵

Still, despite all this, Haitians and Dominicans have not always lived in a state of “fatal conflict,” as some observers have characterized them.⁶ Certainly, important aspects of the history of the island have been determined by the capitalist interests of the region, leading, in the twentieth century, to the importation of Haitian workers to sugar plantations on Dominican soil, a practice imposed by the United States during its occupation

dynamics between both nations between 1843 and 1865, see Anne Eller, *We Dream Together: Dominican Independence, Haiti, and the Fight for Caribbean Freedom*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

⁴ For details on early European narratives see Ginetta Candelario, *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2007, and Carlos Jáuregui, “El ‘Negro Comegente’: Terror, colonialism y etno-política.” *Afro-Hispanic Review* 28:1 (2009): 45–79. For a study on the construction of Haiti as the “primitive Other,” see Fernando Valerio-Holguín, “Nuestros vecinos, los primitivos.” *Academia.edu*.

⁵ For details on Duarte’s, Luperón’s and Imbert’s views on Haiti, see Quisqueya Lora H., “La construcción de Haití en el imaginario dominicano del siglo XIX,” in “República Dominicana y Haití: El derecho a vivir.” Santo Domingo: Fundación Juan Bosch, 2014, pp. 171–204. For Francisco del Rosario Sánchez’s relationship with Haiti and Haitian president Geffrard, whose help he requested in 1863, see Franco Pichardo, *Historia del pueblo dominicano*, pp. 249–265. For details on how anti-Haitian ideology was used in the aftermath of the 1937 massacre to justify it *ad posteriori*, see Robyn Derby and Richard Turrits, “Historias de terror y los terrores de la historia: la masacre haitiana de 1937 en la República Dominicana,” in *Estudios Sociales*, XXVI: 92 (1993): 65–76.

⁶ See journalist Michele Wucker’s controversial *Why the Cock Fights? Dominicans, Haitians and the Struggle for Hispaniola* (2000), which argues that both nations are stuck in an inevitable, territorial, “fatal conflict,” an argument that has been dismantled by Samuel Martínez (2003) and Manuel A. Victoriano-Martínez (2014), who have condemned the essentialist tenets of such argument, not to mention the reduction of the complex dynamics between these nations to a primitive, animalistic fight.

of both sides of the island between 1916 and 1924.⁷ As infrastructures were built on the Dominican Republic, Haiti became the main source of cheap labor. This economic model continued throughout the U.S.-backed regimes of Trujillo (1930–1961) and Joaquín Balaguer (1966–1978), until it was replaced, in the 1980s, by a model of services and manufacture – tourism, free zones, and telecommunications – that served the interests of multinational corporations and local ruling elites. To be sure, the last two decades are also a period in which the growing presence of Haitians in the Dominican Republic has met great resistance on the part of those who still operate under anti-Haitian ideology. Yet, as sociologists Guy Alexandre (2013) and Rubén Silié (2014) clearly demonstrate, both countries initiated a stage of “rapprochement” due, in part, to these structural changes in the Dominican economy, which led to a diversification of Haitian migrants, who from then on, were not relegated to the plantations but were rather hired to work in the construction and agricultural industries. This rapprochement was also a result of the fall of Duvalier in 1986, a change in political dynamics that corresponded, on the Dominican side, to an era of relative respect for civil liberties. During this period between 1986 and 2005, the media, professional, intellectual, and artistic circles of both sides begin to display mutual interest and respect. Further, as Alexandre has maintained, the embargo imposed on Haiti by the United Nations and the Organization of American States (OAS) to penalize those who had overthrown democratically elected President Jean-Bertrand Aristide provoked an emergence of a commercial relationship between the two nations never seen in the modern history of the island, causing an “explosion” of exports of Dominican products to Haiti (Alexandre, 91–95). This “rapprochement” ended in 2005, as Leonel Fernández’s government began a new wave of neo-nationalistic discourses and discriminatory state practices that culminated, under his successor Danilo Medina’s regime, with court ruling 168–13, effective retroactively to 1929, which, in clear violation of their human rights, deprived hundreds of thousands of Afro-Dominicans and Dominicans of Haitian descent from their citizenship. Against this backdrop, the murder of a Dominican businesswoman in Hatillo Palma, a town in the province of Montecristi near the border with Haiti, was attributed (though never proven) to local Haitian residents, prompting a veritable witch hunt in the area (Alexandre 95; Coupeau, 154; Yacou, 122).

⁷ For a detailed discussion of the imposition of the sugar-cane industry to serve US interests, see Bernardo Vega, *Trujillo y Haití*. Santo Domingo: Fundación Cultural Dominicana, 1988.

Then again, in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, animosities were put aside to give way to massive solidarity toward Haiti, creating perhaps what Lorgja García-Peña (2013) identified as a “rupture” in official anti-Haitian narratives. This rupture, I might add, was short-lived, however, as court ruling 168–13 fueled, again, the fans of anti-Haitianism.

Dominican Diasporic Literary Production

Since until recently much of Dominican literary and cultural production has been in the hands of conservative sectors of the ruling elite, it is not surprising to see references to Haiti or Haitians marred by stereotypes that reproduce earlier vilifications. Rare early dissident voices include those of Ramón Marrero Aristy (1913–1959) and Juan Bosch (1909–2001), who denounced the mistreatment of Haitian workers in the sugar plantations in the novel *Over* (1939) and the short story “Luis Pie” (1946), respectively. Only in the twenty-first century and mostly in the works of writers living abroad does a significant denunciation of this mistreatment emerge in Dominican literary and cultural production.

The presence of Dominican writers in the United States can be traced to the early twentieth century, with the arrival of politicians, scholars, and writers who left the country for political reasons.⁸ However, massive migration of Dominicans to the United States begins in the 1960s, creating the conditions for the emergence of a “diaspora,” that is, a collectivity of immigrants bonded by their common national origin, whose numbers and geographical proximity allow them to develop political awareness of their social and economic impact in both the country of origin and the host country.⁹ Most of these Dominicans relocated primarily to New York, New Jersey, Florida, and Massachusetts. To be sure, this diaspora is not homogeneous. As critic Silvio Torres-Saillant (2012) has noted, its literary production is split between those who, having arrived as adults, write in

⁸ During the first half of the century, most of these writers belonged to the upper class, and included José M. Bernard, Fabio Fiallo Cabral, Manuel Florentino Cestero, Gustavo Bergés Bordas, Angel Rafael Lamarche, Virginia de Peña, and Andrés Francisco Requena (Cocco and Gutiérrez, 2001). Torres-Saillant (2012) classifies these individuals as “before the diaspora” as they wrote from an exilic position, in Spanish, and perceived themselves “away from home,” even when the fantasized return to the Dominican Republic after the end of the Trujillo dictatorship never took place (424–25).

⁹ For a thought-provoking discussion on diasporas’ heterogeneous condition, especially those from the Caribbean, see Jana Evans Braziel, “Diasporic Disciplining of Caliban? Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and Intra-Caribbean Politics,” in *Small Axe* 26, 12: 2 (2008): 149–159.

Spanish, and those who, born or raised in the United States, write in English. The first group includes, among others, Norberto James Rawlings, Marianela Medrano, Yrene Santos, Virginia Moore, Julio Alvarado, Diógenes Abreu, César Sánchez Beras, Raquel Virginia Cabrera, José de la Rosa, Eduardo Lantigua, Dagoberto López, Juan Tineo, Osiris Mosquea, Kianny Antigua, Keiselim Montás, and Rey Andújar. Recently arrived writers belonging to this group include Aurora Arias and Rita Indiana Hernández, both of whom were already established in their careers when they moved to the United States.

Dominican writers who publish in English include Junot Díaz, author of the short story collections *Drown* (1997) and *This is How You Lose Her* (2012), as well as of the acclaimed novel *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2008), winner of the 2008 National Book Critics Circle Award and the 2008 Pulitzer Prize, and Julia Alvarez, author of the novels *How the García Girls Lost Their Accent* (1991), *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), *Yo!* (1997), *In the Name of Salomé* (2000), *Saving the World* (2006), the essay collection *Something to Declare* (1998), the poetry collections *The Other Side/El Otro Lado* (1995), *Homecoming* (1996), and *The Woman I Kept to Myself* (2004), and several children's and young adult books. Alvarez has also received numerous honors and awards, including the 2013 National Medal of the Arts. This category also includes Rhina Espaillat, a recipient of numerous poetry awards and the author of eight poetry collections, including *Lapsing to Grace* (1992), *Where Horizons Go* (1998), *Rehearsing Absence* (2001), *Mundo y Palabra/The World and the Word* (2001), *The Shadow I Dress In* (2004), *The Story-Teller's Hour* (2004), and *Playing at Stillness* (2003), winner of the 2003 National Poetry Book Award. Other writers in this category include Annecy Báez, author of *My Daughter's Eyes and Other Stories* (2007); Angie Cruz, author of the novels *Soledad* (2001) and *Let It Rain Coffee* (2005), a finalist in the 2007 International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award; Ana-Maurine Lara, whose debut novel *Erzulie's Skirt* (2007) was a Lambda Literary Award finalist; Loida Maritza Pérez, author of the novel *Geographies of Home* (2000); Nelly Rosario, author of *Songs of the Water Saints: A Novel* (2002), winner of a 2002 PEN/Open Book Award; and Alan Cambeira, author of *Azúcar: The Story of Sugar* (2001), *Azúcar's Sweet Hope...: Her Story Continues* (2004), and *Tattered Paradise: Azúcar's Trilogy Ends!* (2008), a trilogy denouncing the exploitation of Haitian and Dominican workers in sugar plantations in the Dominican Republic.

A third category of Dominican diasporic authors includes those who alternate between English and Spanish, either by making substantial switches from one language to the other within a text or by writing entire pieces in either language. This category includes Josefina Báez, author of several texts

for performance, including *Dominicanish* (2000), *Comrade Bliss Ain't Playing* (2008), and *Levente no. Yolayorkdominicanyork* (2011); Juan Dicient, author of the collections *Summertime* (2007), *Poeta en Animal Planet* (2007), *My Uncle's First Jeans y otros tíos* (2009), *Winterness* (2012), and *Monday Street* (2013); and Francis Mateo, author of the poetry collection *Ubre Urbe* (2013).

These three groups of diasporic authors most often address themes typical of the migration experience, including loss and separation from the home country, nostalgia, the difficulties of adaptation to the new culture, life in inner-city poverty, fragmentation and dysfunction of families, complicated racial and gendered identities, and feelings of ambivalence toward the home culture. Some writers also explore historical figures or events in the Dominican Republic, including dictator Rafael Trujillo, the Mirabal sisters, Camila and Salomé Ureña, or the 1916–1924 U.S. occupation. While most scholarly attention has been devoted to works by Julia Alvarez, Junot Díaz, and, to a lesser extent, Nelly Rosario, Angie Cruz, Josefina Báez, and Rita Indiana Hernández, much remains to be explored in the production of Rhina Espailat, Alan Cambeira, Ana-Maurine Lara, Juan Dicient, and the numerous authors who publish primarily in Spanish.

Haitian Diasporic Literary Production

The Haitian diaspora is equally diverse and heterogeneous. Although its history can be traced from 1804 onward, two important moments are 1957, when Haitians began to leave the island as political refugees from the Duvalier dictatorship, and the 1990s, as a result of instability provoked by the coup against Aristide.¹⁰ The first wave of exiles included upper- and middle-class French-educated individuals who moved to France, Canada, and French-speaking African countries. The second wave comprised hundreds of thousands of working-class, Creole-speaking Haitians who chose the Dominican Republic, Cuba, and other Caribbean islands, but also major cities in the

¹⁰ For a detailed history of Haitian migration in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see Richard Laguerre, *Diasporic Citizenship: Haitian Americans in Transnational America*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 1998. In addition, for a study on Haitian literary production in the United States between 1940 and 1986, see Jean Jonassaint “Des productions littéraires haïtiennes aux États-Unis (1948–1986).” *Journal of Haitian Studies*, Vol. 5/6 (1999–2000), pp. 4–19. Jonassaint indicates that in the 1940s and 1950s, this migration was small, since Haiti enjoyed a period of relative prosperity and stability. The few Haitian writers who either wrote or published their works, or had them translated into English during this period include Philippe Toby-Marcelin, Marie Vieux Chauvet, and Jacques Roumain.

United States, including New York, Miami, and Boston. Still others relocated to Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington, DC, and New Orleans (Laguette 75–76).

As with Dominican authors, who can be divided by their choice of language, Haitian writers can be split between those who write in French and those who prefer English.¹¹ The first group is located primarily in Canada or France, and includes, among many others, Robert Berrouët-Oriol, Gérard Bloncourt, Louis-Phillipe Dalember, René Depestre, Joel Des Rosiers, Danny Laferriere, Jean Métellus, Rodney Saint-Eloi, and Anthony Phelps. Other French-speaking authors include Paul Laraque, who also writes in Creole, Michèle Voltaire Marcelin, who also writes in Spanish and English, and Jean-Pierre Richard Narcisse.¹² Among those who write in English, the best-known is Edwidge Danticat, author of acclaimed novels and short-story collections *Breath, Eyes, Memory* (1994), *Krik? Krak!* (1996), *The Farming of Bones* (1998), *The Dew Breaker* (2004), *Claire of the Sea Light* (2013), and several young-adult books, essay collections, and edited anthologies. She too has received numerous awards and prizes, including the 2007 National Book Critics Circle Award and the National Book Award for her memoir *Brother, I'm Dying* (2007).

Curiously, except for Danticat's work, literary production in English by Haitian-American writers has escaped scholarly attention, as they are studied neither under the rubric of Francophone Haitian authors nor under that of Caribbean or Latino/a writers. In contrast to the scholarship on diasporic Dominicans, which devotes most of its attention to English-speaking authors, scholars specializing in Haitian literature have ignored the production of Anglophone Haitian diaspora writers. One possible cause for exclusion might be the compartmentalization of literary studies in U.S. academia, where literary productions are often categorized by language and national origin, thus unwittingly reproducing much of the colonial legacy of a fragmented Caribbean. In addition, the role of African-American literature and scholarship might have fallen short, as Haitian critic Jean Jonassaint suggested, to recognize the contributions of Haitian-American production. Further, as Jonassaint pointed out, the type of questions and issues raised by Haitian-American productions may not have been the same as the ones raised in mainstream African-American

¹¹ Although some writers, including Lyonel Trouillot and others, have chosen Haitian Creole as a language of literary expression, most of their works have been published in Haiti, not the United States or other host countries.

¹² Jonassaint, *ibid.*

literary production.¹³ In fact, the much and rightly-deserved attention lavished upon Edwidge Danticat may have had the unintended consequence of keeping the works of other Haitian-American authors in her shadow, despite her own laudable efforts in editing their works into three notable anthologies.¹⁴

In addition to Danticat, English-speaking Haitian-American writers include Roxane Gay, author of the essay collections *Ayiti* (2011) and *Bad Feminist* (2014), and of *An Untamed State* (2014), a remarkable novel about a young Haitian-American woman who is kidnapped as she visits her wealthy family in Haiti; Boston Poet Laureate Danielle Legros Georges, author of *Maroon* (2001); Marilène Phipps-Kettlewell, who published *Crossroads and Unholy Water* (2000), winner of the Grolier Poetry Prize and the Crab Orchard Poetry Prize, and *The Company of Heaven: Stories from Haiti* (2010), winner of the Iowa Short Fiction Award; Marie-Helène Laforest, author of the short-story collection *Foreign Shores* (2002); Myriam Chancy, who has published several scholarly books on Caribbean women writers as well as the novels *Spirit of Haiti* (2003), *The Scorpion's Claw* (2005), and *The Loneliness of Angels* (2010), which won the 2011 Guyana Prize for Literature; Jean-Robert Cadet, author of the memoir *Restavek: From Haitian Slave Child to Middle Class American* (1998), and Lily Dauphin, author of the novel *I will Fly Again: A Restavek* (2007), both of which are haunting accounts of the horrors of child slavery in Haiti; and Joanne Hyppolite, author of the children's books *Seth and Samona* (1995) and *Ola Shakes It Up* (1998). In addition, the work of these authors and others, such as Francie Latour, Jean-Pierre Benoit, Katya Ulysse, Babette Wainwright, and Ibi Zoboi, has also appeared in anthologies of other Anglophone Caribbean, African-American and African diasporic authors.¹⁵ Last but not least, Gina Athena Ulysse, a poet, performance artist, activist, and professor of Anthropology at Wesleyan University has recently drawn international attention for her *Why Haiti Needs New Narratives: A Post-Quake Chronicle* (2015).

¹³ Jonassaint, *ibid.*, p. 12.

¹⁴ Indeed, without these anthologies, it would have been far more difficult to identify these works. See Edwidge Danticat, *The Butterfly's Way, Voices from the Haitian Diaspora in the United States*. New York: Soho Press, 2001; *Haiti Noir*. New York: Akashic Books, 2011; and *Haiti Noir 2*. New York: Akashic Books, 2014.

¹⁵ See Marion Rohrleitner, and Sarah E. Ryan, *Dialogues across Diasporas: Women Writers, Scholars, and Activists of Africana and Latina Descent in Conversation*. Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013.

The Diasporic Condition: An Equalizing Moment

Haitian-American authors address questions similar to those tackled by their Dominican counterparts, including feelings of loss, nostalgia, and ambivalence for the homeland, difficulties of adaptation to and inclusion in the new culture, race and/or class issues, stereotypes, and historical figures and events. For instance, Joanne Hyppolyte's "Dyaspora" (2001) reveals the negotiations an immigrant child must make between the world inside her home, filled with Haitian food, music, and culture, and the world outside, filled with stereotypes about Haitians. Her account and that of Katya Ulysse in "Mashe Petion" (2001) poignantly reflect on the losses migration entails, evoking Julia Alvarez's *How the García Girls Lost Their Accent*, Junot Díaz's *Drown*, Angie Cruz's *Soledad*, and Josefina Baez's *Dominicanish*, all of which deal with the negotiations that children of immigrants must make in the host country. But, as Hyppolite decries, Haitian Americans must also contend with common stereotypes constantly reproduced by pervasive images of Haiti in mainstream media, including images of "boat people" arriving on Florida's shores and narratives linking Haitians to stigmatized diseases such as AIDS, tuberculosis, and, most recently, cholera. Hyppolite's lament echoes those of Francie Latour in "Made Outside" (2001) on how established images of misery and suffering as well as television series or Hollywood movies on zombies have contributed to an overall negative construction of Haiti. They and other Haitian writers rightly argue that poverty, disease, and natural catastrophe are not the only stories Haiti has to offer.

Both Dominican and Haitian authors also contend with questions of race, as they emerge in the homeland and in the new home. For instance, Myriam Chancy notes in "Lazarus Rising: An Open Letter to My Daughter" (2001), "it was in Winnipeg, a prairie city in the middle of the country, that I was to find out categorically what it meant to be black in a country not your own" (226). She also comments on her offended dignity as a Haitian woman, when she discovers how blacks are expected to behave in certain areas of the United States: "How dare a young, brown woman walk down the street and hold up her head high, and smile, and look people in the eye? This is what I did, not knowing I was meant to look down and away, and step aside" (226). In contrast, in "Vini Nou Bèl" (2001), Annie Grégoire refers to the internalized racism she experienced as a Haitian child growing up in Brooklyn, as when she

heard and saw some students being teased about the darkness of their skin, a few still compared the tint of the inner surface of their forearms to determine their true hue . . . I thought about the irony of Haitian history:

the first independent black nation to successfully revolt against oppression and yet, among some of us feelings of inferiority still lurk, keeping Haitians of different classes and skin tones divided. (161)

Grégoire's observation evokes Marie-Hélène Laforest's perception, as when, in "Homelands" (2001), she notes the shock that U.S. racism provoked in her family, who "had not been black before leaving the Caribbean," since, in Haiti, their lighter skin and wealth made them "white" (23). Her remark on how exile in the United States became an "equalizer" in terms of race and class evokes observations made by Silvio Torres-Saillant, who noted the "epistemic shift" many Dominicans experience in racial self-perception when they confront the dominant racial paradigm in the United States (2003). Then again, Laforest and Saillant's remarks echo those made by Frantz Fanon in *Peau noire, masques blancs* (1952), in reference to the Antilleans (from Martinique and other French Caribbean islands) who think of themselves as "Antillais" and are shocked to "discover" their blackness in social interactions in France. Indeed, the often-criticized concerns of Dominicans who obsess with "whitening" the race are similar to Laforest's mother, who "had an obsession with her lower lip and consequently with mine, reminding me all the time to pull it in" (30). Later on, as she comes of age during the civil-rights movement, Laforest realizes her need to identify with the black community, becoming part of the African-American revolution. As she states: "Exile had made me black" (30).

Laforest, who grew up between New York City and San Juan, Puerto Rico, and is currently a professor of postcolonial literature at the University of Naples, Italy, also explores questions of class. In her short story collection *Foreign Shores* (2002), especially "The Wish Book," "Marguerite's Flowers," and "Ma's Household," she addresses the deeply intricate racial and class relations of Haitian society. A similar emphasis on class permeates Marie-Ketsyia Theodore-Pharel in "Haiti: A Cigarette Burning at Both Ends" (2001) and Jean-Robert Cadet, in *Restavek: From Haitian Child Slave to Middle Class American* (1998). Poets of both sides of the island, such as Julia Alvarez and Marilene Phipps-Kettlewell, who, coincidentally, belong to the upper class and received elite educations in the United States, also offer a lens informed by class awareness. Indeed, Alvarez comes from a family able to send her to boarding school in the States, after which she earned a degree in English at Middlebury College, an MFA at Syracuse University, and has been a professor and a writer-in-residence at Middlebury College for the past thirty years. Similarly, Haitian poet, painter, and short-story writer Marilene

Phipps-Kettlewell comes from a middle-class family in Haiti and has lived in France and the United States. She earned a degree in anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, an MFA at the University of Pennsylvania, and has won fellowships from the Guggenheim Foundation and Harvard's W. E. B. DuBois Institute. Many of Alvarez's and Phipps-Kettlewell's stories and poems resemble one another in style and content, as they insert words in French and Creole (Phipps-Kettlewell) or Spanish (Alvarez) into mostly-English poems and also discuss the presence of nannies, cooks, and other staff who populated their childhood.

Haitian and Dominican diasporic writers also address national identity constructs and what can be termed as the anxiety of authenticity, or the need and desire to be accepted or perceived as fully Haitian or Dominican, even when exile or the migratory experience leads them to contest or resist some of the constructs that make up this identity. For instance, in "Made Outside" (2001), Haitian-American Francie Latour reflects on her hyphenated condition and recounts her anxiety about not being "Haitian enough," of not belonging to Haiti, of not being "authentically" Haitian because she was "made outside," which is how those who "abandoned" Haiti to its fate seem to be perceived in Latour's work (131). As she states:

Like many children of immigrants born and raised in the United States, I have skated precariously along the hyphen of my Haitian-American identity. On one side, I bask in the efficiencies of American life: mail-order catalogs, direct-deposit checking, and interoffice envelopes. From the other side, I take the comfort food of Haitian oatmeal and tap into the ongoing debate Haitians love more than any other: politics. It's an endless menu of traits and qualities that I access and draw from, mixing and matching to fit the situation. But I knew that my return to Haiti wouldn't allow me to pick and choose as I pleased. My identity would no longer be defined by me; it would be defined by the Haitians around me. (125)

As Latour adds, the only authentic measure of Haitian-ness derives from having lived and suffered with the population in Haiti. Seen through this lens, suffering becomes synonymous with Haitian identity. As she observes, "for Haitians who have struggled through the poverty and terror of daily life, there is no room for hyphens in a person's identity. Because I have not suffered with them, I can never be of them" (131). The diasporic subject is thus seen either as a "traitor" or as an opportunity for money, food, and water since her credentials as Haitian are insufficient or inadequate (127). "I am still a stranger" (127), she laments, using a term that evokes the French "étranger" (foreigner) and "étrange" (strange).

The anxiety of, and questioning of, this alleged lack or inadequacy also appears in the works of Dominican diasporic writers, especially Julia Alvarez, who, in “With your Permission, Doña Aída,” (1998) defends her right to write in English and still be accepted as Dominican; Josefina Baez, whose *Dominicanish* calls into question dominant constructs of national identity (Maríñez, 2005); and, to a broader extent, Dominican writers and scholars whose works have denounced official constructs that glorify a Hispanic ancestry, a white race, and a Catholic religion at the expense of a vilified African background (Torres-Saillant 1999a, 1999b; Candelario 2007; Díaz 2007; Rodríguez 2003). Some of these scholars and writers have seen their Dominican credentials questioned by conservative sectors that, in the Dominican Republic, attempt to de-authorize their views on the grounds that diasporic authors write in English or live abroad and are thus inadequately prepared to understand or critique social and political dynamics in the homeland (López 2013).

Finally, although friendship and solidarity between both peoples have always existed on the island, the diasporic condition has also allowed a closer relationship between the two groups. As Rubén Silié has noted, in the 1970s and 1980s when both nations were still isolated from each other, it was usually in exile or at foreign universities that Dominican and Haitian professionals met for the first time (2014, 101). And while significant bonds between writers and scholars of both diasporas still need to be nurtured, from the diaspora have emerged some of the most adamant voices condemning the mistreatment of Haitians in the Dominican Republic. This is especially the case in activist forums denouncing terrorizing migratory policies and the nefarious Dominican court ruling 168-13, vigorously protested by the New York-based group *We Are All Dominicans*, and writers Julia Alvarez, Junot Díaz, and Edwidge Danticat, who published a collective letter in *The New York Times* denouncing the ruling (Alvarez et al., 2013). Indeed, of all Haitian and Dominican diasporic writers, Díaz and Danticat have most openly and consistently professed mutual admiration and friendship. In addition to sharing the same literary agent for over twenty years, they have joined efforts many times to condemn Dominican anti-Haitian policies and ideologies.

This activism and ethic of collaboration to condemn divisive policies on the island has also emerged, to varying degrees, in recent writings by Dominican diasporic authors writing in both English and Spanish. Over the past decade, it has appeared in the story “La Sangre de Philippe” (2005) and novel *Candela* (2007), by Rey Andújar; the stories “Eyeless” and “No Excuses” in Juan Dicient’s collection *Poeta en Animal Planet* (2007), and the novel

Nombres y Animales (2013) by Rita Indiana Hernández (Bustamante 2014), Junot Díaz's *The Brief and Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) and Marianela Medrano's poem "El Corte" (2015) also make numerous references to the mistreatment of Haitians and the 1937 massacre. In addition, Alan Cambeira's *Azúcar: The Price of Sugar* (2001) and Ana-Maurine Lara's *Erzulie's Skirt* (2007) are two novels entirely devoted to the plight of Haitian immigrants in the Dominican Republic. On the Haitian side, the most renowned text on this subject is Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998). Although not all diasporic authors have adopted a position of dissent from state-sponsored anti-Haitianism, those who have may have been compelled to do so as a result of their own experience as immigrants, their access to debates on racial discrimination, and an overall autonomy from political strictures imposed on writers and intellectuals in the homeland.

By contrast, as critic Leon-François Hoffman (2008) observed in his study of the presence of Dominicans in Haitian literature, except for the 1937 massacre and the reproduction of stereotypes of Dominican women as prostitutes in Haiti, Dominicans are rarely the focus of attention in Haitian literature. This may be due in part to what Rubén Silié (2014) identified as an indifference that developed as a response to recurrent news about the mistreatment of Haitians (105). The lack of references to, or interest in, Dominican issues other than the mistreatment of Haitians seems to be the case in the works of diasporic writers as well, except for Myriam Chancy, who also claims partial Dominican ancestry and whose scholarship on racial and gender identities in the Caribbean (2012) has included works by Julia Alvarez and Loida Maritza Pérez. She also collaborated with Dominican scholar Ginetta Candelario in producing the first-ever roundtable between two Haitian women writers, Edwidge Danticat and herself, and two Dominican writers, Nelly Rosario and Loida Maritza Pérez, in the journal *Meridians* (2004). As the introduction of this collective interview states, "the authors sought to provide a forum for the productive exchange of imagined and real Dominican/Haitian realities and to celebrate women's voices from the beleaguered island by representing a small but forceful coalition of contemporary women writers from Hispaniola" (69). Their roundtable addresses subjects ranging from the relationship with the homeland to racial and gender issues, history, politics, and the relations between both nations.

Interestingly, the works of Dominican and Haitian authors also appear together, among other diasporic authors, in anthologies such as *The Beacon Best of 1999: Creative Writing by Women and Men of All Colors*, edited by Ntozake Shange, with works by Marilene Phipps, Junot Díaz, and Danielle

Legros Georges; *The Beacon Best of 2001: Great Writing by Women and Men of All Colors and Cultures*, edited by Junot Díaz, with works by Edwidge Danticat, Myriam Chancy, Josefina Baez, and Rhina Espaillat; and *Dialogues across Diasporas: Women Writers, Scholars, and Activists of Africana and Latina Descent in Conversation* (2015), edited by Marion Rohrleitner and Sarah E. Ryan, with works by Myriam Chancy, Angie Cruz, Ana-Maurine Lara, and Nelly Rosario. This joint attention confirms the view that the diasporic condition can eliminate, to a certain extent, the nationalistic barriers that trouble Haitian and Dominican relations on the island.

Indeed, some Dominican diasporic authors have begun to “cross the border,” reaching out to Haiti itself, and getting to know this neighboring country, which Julia Alvarez depicts as that “sister that I hardly knew.” In *A Wedding in Haiti* (2011), Alvarez recounts her experience as she travels to Haiti for the first time to attend the wedding of Piti, a young Haitian man she hired to work in her coffee farm in the Dominican Republic and for whom she developed such affection that she agreed to sponsor the wedding party as “madrina” or godmother. The account evokes her mixed feelings of affection, curiosity, and apprehension as she travels to Haiti, an act that is particularly laudable considering the heavy taboo that crossing to “the other side” has become in the Dominican psyche. It is perhaps due to this strong psychological and political barrier that, despite the abundance of critical and literary works about the presence of Haiti in the Dominican Republic, so few have genuinely attempted to represent Haitian geography and culture, and very few do so without the usual clichés and stereotypes. Alvarez repeated her gesture with the publication of the poem “There are Two Countries” (2013), which rewrites the celebrated poem “Hay un país en el mundo,” by Dominican National Poet Pedro Mir, to inscribe the presence of Haiti as a sibling nation with whom Dominicans share an island home.

Another gesture in this direction is the novel *Marassá y la Nada* (2013) by Berlin-based Alanna Lockward, a Dominican journalist and art curator who was one of the first to venture into Haiti in the 1990s to cover various political and social events, notably the accession of Aristide, the coup that overthrew him, and the presence of Dominican immigrants in Haiti. A recent compilation of these articles titled *Un Haití dominicano* (2014) offers an insider’s perspective on Haitian-Dominican relations devoid of traditional fatalist narratives about Haiti or the relations between the two nations. The significance of *Marassá y la Nada* resides in the importation of the term *Marassá*, the Sacred Twins of the voodoo pantheon. As I have argued elsewhere (Maríñez 2016), the figure of Marassa carries significant

symbolic import by offering an alternative paradigm for modeling a new relation between both nations. Rather than reproducing old cannibalistic constructs of Haiti in the Dominican imagination, Marassa could provide a foundational narrative representing both nations as twins born of the same mother (island), who become empowered when united and in harmony. Within this paradigm, the Dossou or Dossa, the child born after the twins (a possible figure for the diasporic subject), could reinforce the strength of its symbolic siblings.

In sum, the literary production of both diasporic groups potentially opens avenues of understanding between the two nations. Their immigrant status has yielded perspectives that could enrich mutual debate and interest in the sibling nation on their shared island. As Haitian-Dominican studies continue to grow, comparative studies of this diasporic production will also enrich Latina/o literary history. Incorporating the writings of both Haitian and Dominican diasporic authors introduces two new languages—French, Kreyol, and combinations of these with English—into the heterolingualism that Latina/o and African-diasporic literary histories are uniquely positioned to theorize. Careful study of the literary texts from the sibling nations and their diasporas will illuminate future discussions about multilingualism, race, class, and colonialism in scholarly research and literary history.

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