

Expert Submission for UNESCO

Literary Representations of Antillean Memory, Terror and Trauma: Danticat and Díaz in Haiti and The Dominican Republic

Executive Summary

In order to inform UNESCO's international standards of heritage and remembrance practice, this report discursively deconstructs three cultural representations of Haitian and Dominican memory: '1937' and 'Creating Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist At Work' by Edwidge Danticat, and 'The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao' by Junot Díaz. Written within a comparative framework, it analyses how various narratives – namely victimhood, perpetration, resistance, entrapment and escapism – are mediated in different ways through different formats, particularly the fictional/non-fictional distinction. It also applies concepts from memory studies to make connections with wider sociocultural issues in modern-day Haiti and the DR. Overall, this report posits that these cases are highly informative for UNESCO's standards of memory practice, given their core substratum of generic features shared across the boundaries of nations, histories, and media, their additional abundance of distinctive features, and their conceptualisation of memory as a diachronic, contemporary phenomenon.

1. Introduction

At the very heart of the Greater Antillean archipelago lies Hispaniola. Nestled between Cuba, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico in the middle of the Caribbean Sea, this much-overlooked island is split into two starkly distinct yet historically entwined countries: **Haiti** and the **Dominican Republic** (hereafter DR).



Image 1. Hispaniola Island (World Atlas, 2021)

Often pigeonholed by its status as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere (James, 2004), Haiti started life as the first slave colony to win independence in 1804 (Schneider, 2018), enduring centuries of enslavement, French imperialism, American occupation, military coups, economic turbulence, natural disasters, despotic leaders, and ethnically motivated massacres (Hughes et al., 2020a). As Christopher Columbus' first landing spot in 1492, the DR is the oldest colonial settlement in the Americas, also a site of vacillating democracy, austerity, totalitarianism, (Spanish) imperialism, and US occupation (Mahler, 2010). Traditionally wealthier than its neighbour due to geography, lower rates of corruption, and a flourishing tourist industry (Daniels, 2022), the DR ranks higher (88th) on the United Nations Development Programme's (2022a) 189-country human development index, compared to Haiti's ranking at 149th (2022b).



Image 2. Trujillo [left] and Duvalier [right] on the Dominican-Haitian border in December 1958 (Grimaldi, 2008)

The two nations' historical relationship is complicated, tainted, and understudied. Separately, each country has been subjected to extreme levels of political terror and oppression, notably including the autocratic regimes of François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier (1958-71) and Rafael 'El Jefe' Trujillo (1930-61). Adopting Halbwachs' and Coser's (1992) view that individual subjects are the locus in the act of collective remembrance, this report focuses on cultural representations from Edwidge Danticat and Junot Díaz. From a comparative perspective, it examines a short story ('1937') and an essay ('Creating Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work') from Danticat (1995; 2010), and a novel ('The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao') from Díaz (2007), identifying points of commonality and contrast in their narratives of memory.

1.1 Edwidge Danticat and Haiti

Aged twelve, Danticat migrated from her birthplace, Port-au-Prince, to New York in search of a better situation than Duvalierist Haiti (Pulitano, 2011). Danticat's relocation was culturally challenging, but also artistically formative, as she sought to bridge the divide between her original Haitian identity and her adopted America one (ibid.). After graduating, Danticat turned her thesis into 'Breath, Eyes, Memory', her much acclaimed debut novel, before releasing 'Krik? Krak!', a collection of nine short stories (ibid.). While each story is

unique in its themes and characters, ‘Krik? Krak!’ is linked by one central concept: the relationships between Haitian women, their families, and their country (Putnam, 2003). This report focuses on ‘1937’, the second of these short stories, which achronologically explores intergenerational trauma, unjust imprisonment, Haitian Vodou, and gendered experiences of hegemonic resistance (Putnam, 2003).

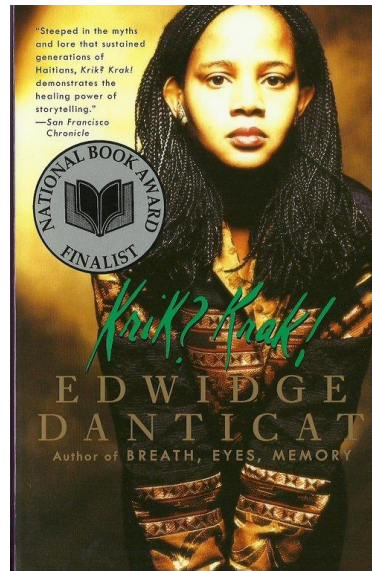


Image 3. ‘Krik? Krak’ (Edwidge Danticat, 2022)

As a National Book Award finalist, ‘Krik? Krak!’ paved the way for Danticat’s later work, namely ‘Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work’, a combination of memoir and essay inspired by Albert Camus’ lecture (Pulitano, 2011). Danticat centres it around political executions in Port-au-Prince in 1964, before philosophically dissecting the challenges, responsibilities, and meaning of being an immigrant artist from a country in crisis (ibid.). While narratives of victimhood, perpetration, and entrapment feature prominently in ‘1937’, ‘Creating Dangerously’ explores discourses of diasporic escapism and resistance in the context of the oppressive Duvalierist regime.

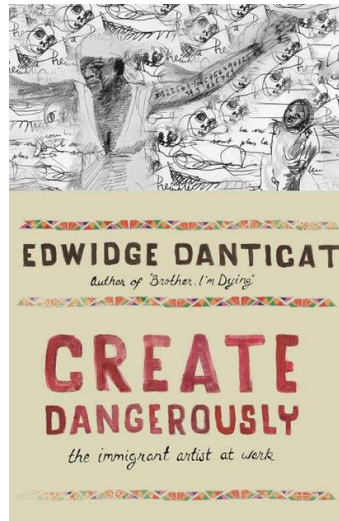


Image 4. 'Creating Dangerously' (Halford, 2011)

1.2 Junot Díaz and The Dominican Republic

These narratives are also central to the third cultural representation analysed in this report: Junot Díaz' (2007) Pulitzer Prize-winning novel, 'The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao'. Through polyvocal narration, Díaz recounts El Trujillato (the dictatorship) from eight distinct focalisations of time and space, ranging from 1944 to 1995; from Baní, DR, to Paterson, New Jersey (Lanzendörfer, 2013). This represents Díaz' upbringing – born in the DR in 1968, but predominantly raised in the US (Céspedes et al., 2000).

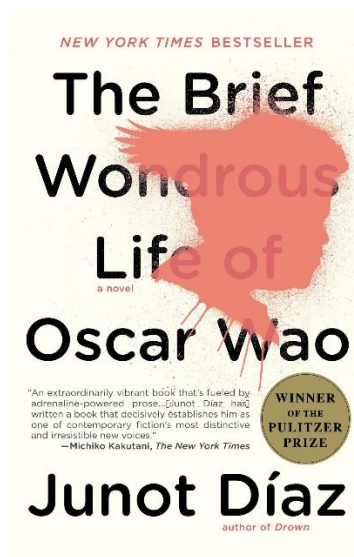


Image 5. 'The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao' (Junot Díaz, 2022)

Described as ‘foundational fiction for the Dominican American diaspora’ (Sáez, 2011, p. 523), ‘Oscar Wao’ is interspersed with neologisms, fantasy references, Spanish dialects, and magical realism elements. While the classic *bildungsroman* presents time as linear and progressive, Díaz (2007) presents it achronologically through the omniscient if biased narration of Yunior, who serves the role of the author’s alter ego (Lanzendörfer, 2013). This report next outlines the essential concepts around memory, terror, and trauma which theoretically underpin its analysis.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1 Collective Memory

As a shaping feature of society, memory is a symbolic representation of the past, fundamentally embedded with moral and political power (Halbwachs and Coser, 1992). All memories are individual and collective; individual subjects are the locus in the act of remembrance, imbued with *cadres*, otherwise defined as frameworks within which a group is societally situated (Halbwachs, 1997). Collective memory integrates individual memories of a certain event or time period into one version – the form of which is manipulated by those with status and power (Margalit, 2002).

On a similarly Halbwachian note, the field of memory studies is influenced by the interpersonal sharing of collective memory, in turn stemming from a spectrum of individual memory which varies from commemorative to traumatic (Halbwachs, 1997). Given Halbwachs’ own death in the Buchenwald concentration camp following his detainment by the Gestapo for protesting against the arrest of his Jewish father-in-law (Friedmann and Mueller, 1946), remembrance studies’ origin is tinged with poignancy. As such, this report constructs itself in a Halbwachian spirit, whilst drawing on other sub-fields and their concepts.

2.2 Representative Memory

One of such concepts is *cultural representations* – the most explicit point of commonality between this report’s selected memory cases. Defined as any medium of memory transmission (such as a book, song, film, or play), cultural representations provide

an account, fictionalised or other, of an event (Hall, 1997). Representations denote a constructionist school of thought (see Figure 1), and always contain techniques with an intended effect on the consumer (ibid.).

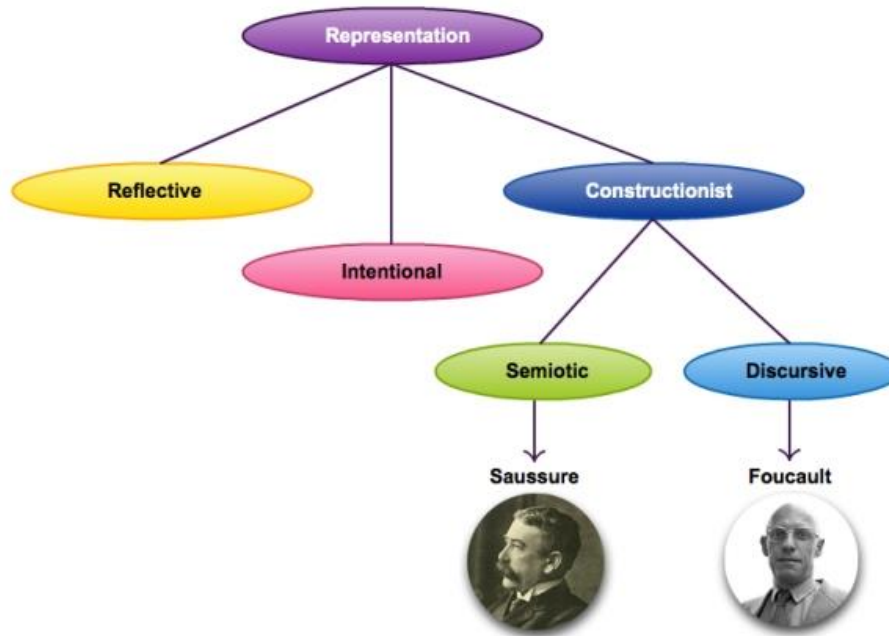


Figure 1. Theories of memory representation (Acosta, 2012)

These discursive and semiotic techniques are usually effective. However, the scope of cultural representations is limited in depicting trauma, which often lies outside the boundaries of narrative sense-making (Jelin and Godoy-Anativia, 2003). Some events are so inhumanely traumatic that the scope of their pain is incommunicable, unmediable, and unnarratable (Avelar, 1999), such as the Holocaust, seen in Adorno’s (1951) famous proclamation that ‘to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric’. This leads cogently into the theory of *memorialisation* (Section 2.3), which places emphasis on the symbolic relationship between an event (like the Holocaust) and a site of memory (like Auschwitz).

2.3 Memorialisation

Prominently informed by the work of Pierre Nora (1989), memorialisation revolves around the idea that memories become detached from the past over time, and therefore groups select certain dates, events, people, and places to commemorate. It invents traditions and customs while intentionally eliminating others, a process known as *collective amnesia*

(ibid.). Memorialisation is a compelling yet imperfect theory due to its centralised assumption that memory requires someone to ‘deliberately create archives, maintain anniversaries, organize celebrations, pronounce eulogies, and notarize bills, because such activities no longer occur naturally’ (ibid., p. 12).



Image 6. Schoolchildren outside the Memorial Museum of Dominican Resistance in Santo Domingo (Colonial Zone, 2022)

Although not this report’s main focus, it identifies the power of memorialisation pertaining to its chosen cases, such as Fort Dimanche (Image 7), the ‘Massacre River’ (Image 9), and the Museum of Dominican Resistance (Image 6), which educates younger generations of Dominicans about the oppressive violence of El Trujillato through governmental archives, exhibitions of torture sessions, and even a hologram of the Mirabal sisters, whose murder for dissidence (1960) incited international opposition against Trujillo (Archibold, 2011).

Unlike the Jewish Museum in Berlin – which has largely been welcomed – the Museum of Dominican Resistance may yet face competition from the Museo Generalísimo Trujillo (Archibold, 2011). Inaugurated by the dictator’s grandson, this counter-museum honours Trujillo and disputes parts of his historical record as conflated (ibid.), an example of a legitimacy struggle regarding who ‘owns’ memory, and how it is interpreted. Having outlined memorialisation, this report now transitions to its main theoretical framework: *diachronic memory*.

2.4 Diachronic Memory

Juxtaposed to the popular misconception that memory deals exclusively with the past, there is an emerging body of literature built around the notion that memory is *diachronic* – it evolves over time (Jelin and Godoy-Anativia, 2003). Where synchronic memory focuses on the study of remembrance at any given point in time, diachronic scholars – the so-called ‘third phase’ of memory studies (Feindt et al., 2014) – perceive memory as a complex amalgamation of ever-shifting practices by which the past invents the present (Terdiman, 2018). This conceptualisation is seen in the posthumous ramifications of Duvalier’s and Trujillo’s dictatorships on present-day Haitian and Dominican societies, outlined in Section 4.

By locating memory in artefacts, sites, social practices, *and* cultural representations, diachronic memory subsumes other sub-fields of remembrance studies (Confino and Fritzche, 2002). While the memorialisation of sites is a beneficial practice in tangibility and concreteness (Nora, 1989), this report identifies on a greater level with literature on collective memory (Halbwachs and Coser, 1992), representative memory (Hall, 1997), and, above all, diachronic memory (Jelin and Godoy-Anativia, 2003). With its theoretical underpinnings established, this report now shifts to its analysis, sub-divided into narratives of victimhood, perpetration, resistance, entrapment, and escapism. Represented by Danticat (1995; 2010) and Díaz (2007), these narratives are explored from a contrastive perspective, while identifying generic and distinctive features of memory practice.

3. Analysis

3.1 Victimhood

As a generic discourse in representations of terror and trauma, victimhood allows memory actors to convey a sense of physical and psychological harm. Both Duvalier’s and Trujillo’s regimes were infamous for the scope of terror they inflicted, primarily in the form of disappearances, beatings, torture, and murders (Drumhiller and Skvorc, 2018; Betances and Spalding, 2018). In ‘Oscar Wao’, Díaz encapsulates this corporeally from the perspective of Beli, mother of the eponymous hero Oscar, who is beaten ‘like she was a slave’ (2007, p. 147) for having romantic affiliations with ‘The Gangster’, husband to Trujillo’s sister. Díaz passes over the act of violence and instead depicts the damage itself: ‘her clavicle, chicken-

boned; her right humerus, a triple fracture ... five ribs, broken; her left kidney, bruised; liver, bruised; right lung, collapsed; front teeth, blown out' (ibid.). Physical representations of victimhood are fairly generic across transnational forms of memory practice (Margalit, 2002). Nonetheless, this fragmented imagery implicitly resembles the psychological disintegration of the body from the mind (Goldsmith and Satterlee, 2004). Díaz progresses this by synopsising Beli's beating as 'the end of language, the end of hope' (2007, p. 147), using parallelism to emphasise the dissociative, numb emotional state of a victim suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (Goldsmith and Satterlee, 2004).

Danticat (1995) primarily explores psychological detachment through Josephine, the first-person narrator in '1937'. After seeing her mother, Manman, beaten by a mob, imprisoned by soldiers, and eventually die of malnourishment, Josephine exhibits severe dissociation ('I sat motionless' – ibid., p. 33), to the extent that she is no longer able to verbally communicate ('I was afraid that one day, like me, she [Manman] would not be able to say anything at all' – ibid., p. 37). Equally significant is the setting – the notorious Fort Dimanche, built by US Marines occupying Port-au-Prince, and repurposed by Duvalier as an interrogation centre for political prisoners (Drumhiller and Skvorc, 2018). Imbued with subsidiary narratives of victimhood, it points to the long-term consequences of foreign intervention. Duvalier and his infamous militia (the Tonton Macoute) may have been the direct perpetrators, but the US provided the infrastructure, as well as millions in 'aid' money each year to keep Haiti from the communist clutches of Fidel Castro in neighbouring Cuba (Jelin, 2010). Geopolitical victimhood is an ongoing if understated narrative in Haitian and Dominican memory, and across many Latin American countries, from Mexico, to Nicaragua, to Cuba (ibid.; Mahler, 2010).

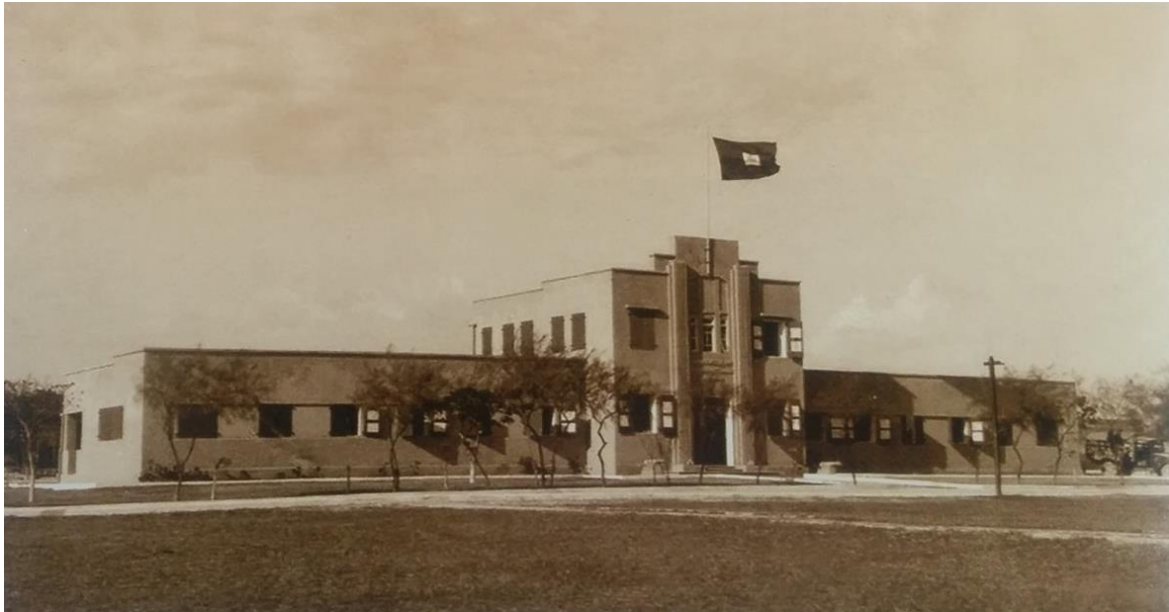


Image 7. Fort Dimanche (CIPDH, 2022)

In ‘1937’, the mother-daughter aspect allows Danticat to communicate the depth of intergenerational trauma inflicted under Trujillismo and Duvalierism (Mayes and Jayaram, 2018). Josephine is ‘born on the night that El Generalissimo, Dios [God] Trujillo, the honourable chief of state, had ordered the massacre of all Haitians living there’ – the same night that Manman had witnessed ‘the soldiers chopping up her mother’s body [Josephine’s grandmother] and throwing it into the river’ (Danticat, 1995, p. 33). This portrays the inescapability of autocratic regimes, and compounds their impact transgenerationally, a generic feature of most long-lasting dictatorships which is not always memorially represented. Danticat (1995) examines victimhood from an exclusively feminine perspective, whereas Díaz (2007) contextualises Oscar’s tragedy amid the wider masculinist culture perpetuated by Trujillismo. In interviews, Díaz has expounded on this cultivation of hyper-sexualised, hyper-aggressive masculinity from his own military father (Céspedes et al., 2000), which he condemns by framing Oscar’s death as ultimately caused by his desperate desire to sexually prove himself as a ‘Dominican man’.

‘Creating Dangerously’ (Danticat, 2010) offers an alternative, entirely nonfictional representation of victimhood. In recounting the executions of Marcel Numa and Louis Drouin, metarepresentational of ‘Jeune Haiti’, a group of New York-based Haitian exiles active in the 1960s (Schneider, 2018), victimhood is presented factually and descriptively: ‘Numa and Drouin’s heads slump sideways at the same time, showing that the shots have hit

home' (Danticat, 2010, p. 4). Danticat avoids emotive language, but uses unmitigatedly sanguineous imagery ('Blood spills out of Numa's mouth. Drouin's glasses fall to the ground, pieces of blood and grey matter clouding the cracked lenses' [ibid., pp. 4–5]), aiding the reader's internalisation of Duvalierist violence, death, and suffering.



Image 8. The execution of Numa and Drouin (Deibert, 2015)

Danticat's distinctive, quasi-journalistic descriptions denote the media's role in constructing and reflecting collective memory (Halbwachs, 1997), and the need to use unconventional techniques to reflect Duvalier's unconventional rule. A common feature of oppressive, militarised regimes is the covert 'disappearance' of dissidents, seen in the cases of Argentina and Chile (Jelin, 2010), but Duvalier welcomed publicity of Numa's and Drouin's executions ('Radio, print, and television journalists are summoned', 'government pamphlets circulating in Port-au-Prince last week left little to the imagination' – Danticat, 2010, pp. 3–5). This could signify Duvalier's narcissistic desire to parade his omnipotence (Drumhiller and Skvorc, 2018), which he bolstered further by manipulating Haitian religion. As a fundamental element of Haitian culture and history (James, 2004), religious beliefs are depicted as a coping mechanism for trauma, evidenced by the extended motif of the Madonna statue in '1937'. Depended on by Manman (and Josephine) as an externalising source of non-verbal emotional catharsis (Goldsmith and Satterlee, 2004), the statue represents the wider religious tradition that permeates both Haitian Vodou, and narratives of victimhood. However, when exploited as a justification for repressive violence, religious tradition also underpins narratives of perpetration, explored in Section 3.2.

3.2 Perpetration

In '1937', perpetration through tradition is manifested through the prison guards, who symbolise and enforce Duvalierist control, obliging the inmates (women believed to be witches or 'lougarou', a mythical Haitian monster) to throw cups of water at one another 'so that their bodies would not be able to muster up enough heat to grow those wings made of flames' and 'fly away in the middle of the night' (Danticat, 1995, p. 37). This simultaneously emblematises the integral nature of Vodou to Haitian culture, and its exploitation by Duvalier to exert his egotistical creed of *noirism* – by which he claimed that Africa, rather than Europe, was the 'authentic source of Haiti's racial, cultural, and religious identity', therefore justifying the replacement of the 'mulatto elite' with a 'new black elite' (Khan, 2010, p. 118). Duvalier exploited Haitian Vodou tradition, styling his clothes and persona after 'Baron Samedi, the Vodou guardian spirit of the cemetery' (Danticat, 2010, p. 16). Drawing on his atypical background (medical, rather than military or political), Duvalier cured prevalent skin diseases with penicillin in the 1940s, elevating his cult of personality to a near-godlike status, and perpetrating Haitian people, beliefs and ethos (Hughes et al., 2020a). Regarding future standards of memory and heritage, care must be taken to accurately represent mass cultural manipulation, while avoiding simplistic classifications of such cultures as 'superstitious' or 'backward'.

From the prologue, Díaz (2007) foregrounds perpetration through tradition as a core theme in Trujillo's DR. 'Fukú', defined as 'a curse or doom of some kind' (ibid., p. 1) is initially associated with external perpetration, long before Trujillo, namely slaveowners ('it came first from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved') and colonialists ('the arrival of Europeans on Hispaniola unleashed the fukú on the world' – ibid.). Much like Duvalier's manipulation of Vodou, Trujillo recognised fukú's potential to propagate and mythologise his pre-eminence: 'It was believed, even in educated circles, that anyone who plotted against Trujillo would incur a fukú most powerful, down to the seventh generation and beyond' (ibid., p. 3). 'Fukú' is even associated with the assassination of JFK (who denounced Trujillismo), and the subsequent 'Curse of the Kennedys' (ibid., p. 4). Danticat and Díaz diverge from this overarching point of commonality through their specific representations of perpetration and tradition: Danticat's are implicit, through motifs of Adam and Eve (2010) or

the Madonna statue (1995), whereas Díaz (2007) constructs his entire narrative around the transgenerationally destructive force of fukú.

Another narrative of perpetration stems from Haiti and the DR's history of racial antagonisation. Trujillo, known for whitening his skin, often drew on anti-Haitian sentiments to consolidate Dominican nationalism (Derby, 1994), denying the DR's inextricable ties with Haiti: 'Leticia, just off the boat, half Haitian half Dominican, that special blend the Dominican government swears *no existe*' (Díaz, 2007, p. 26). As a characteristic feature in representing authoritarian systems, ideologies of ethnic superiority seep into the zeitgeist of entire nations, even to a genocidal extent. In contrast to Duvalier's 'intellectualised and symbolic promotion of noirism' in the 1950s and 60s (Khan, 2010, p. 118), Trujillo's order of the 1937 Perijil Massacre asserted his dominance not just in the DR, but throughout Hispaniola (Turits, 2002). After forcing Haitian Creole- or French-speaking Haitians to (mis)pronounce the word 'perijil' ('parsley' in Spanish), Trujillo's soldiers systematically exterminated 20,000 to 35,000 Haitians living along the fluid Dominican-Haitian border (ibid.). Bodies were chopped up and thrown into the 'Massacre River', fictionally including that of Josephine's grandmother in '1937'. Danticat (1995, p. 40) centralises the massacre as a defining feature of many Haitian families' heritage ('When I was five years old, we went on a pilgrimage to the Massacre River, which I expected to be still crimson with blood').



Image 9. The Massacre River (Bishop and Fernandez, 2017)

Along with numerous other events, the memorialised representation of this genocide is an ever-lasting source of tension, with some Trujillistas still downplaying the number of Haitians murdered (Archibold, 2011). Diachronically, lingering anti-Haitianism in Hispaniola – from the annual deportation of 47,000 migrant Haitian workers from the DR (Carter, 2015) to the lynching of a Haitian man in Santiago, DR (Brodzinsky, 2015) – deepens this controversy. Opposition to such discrimination (exemplified in Image 10) reflects the crucial role of resistant narratives of memory, dissected in Section 3.3.



Image 10. Edwidge Danticat [left] and Junot Díaz [right] speaking against the deportation of Haitian migrants from the DR at a protest in Miami (Carter, 2015)

3.3 Resistance

Across the three selected cultural representations, these discourses sub-divide into *direct resistance* and *symbolic resistance*. Interestingly, neither Danticat nor Díaz revolve their representations around direct resistance, which appears in the aforementioned executions of Numa and Drouin (Danticat, 2010, pp. 1–5), and in a brief description that Beli’s generation ‘would launch the revolution’ (Díaz, 2007, p. 81), referencing Trujillo’s eventual assassination in 1961 (Betances and Spalding, 2018), but never as a main theme. Both writers prioritise depicting injustices, using their literary representations as a repository to remember the forgotten, rather than to commemorate the applauded – an oftentimes overemphasised feature of memory practice.

Herein lies the symbolic power of these pieces themselves. Despite not having been written contemporaneously to the events they recount, they embody (and even detail a micro-

history of) their predecessorial heritage of symbolic resisters (Mayes and Jayaram, 2018). With Díaz (2007, p. 97), this implicitly features as a footnote to the murder of Jesús de Galíndez, writer of a critical doctoral dissertation on ‘The Era of Trujillo’. Contrastingly, Danticat (2010, p. 10) alludes to Duvalier’s suppression of literature, from René Depestre to Graham Greene, before espousing the view that ‘no matter how trivial your words may seem, someday, somewhere, someone may risk his or her life to read them’. Within the wider analytical scope permitted by a non-fictional medium of memory construction, Danticat explicitly frames the creative arts as an ideological act of resistance to oppression – a powerful vessel in preserving the truth amid a regime which stifles free speech (Pulitano, 2011). This narrative is worth examining in more detail across other cases of diachronic memory which place greater emphasis on resistance.

3.4 Entrapment & Escapism

More prominent across the selected texts is the dual narrative of entrapment and escapism. Diaspora, as a primary conduit of the latter, predominantly occurs from Haiti to New York (Ortíz, 2009), and the DR to New Jersey (Heredia, 2010). Danticat (1995, pp. 45–48) represents entrapment and escapism through the themes of restricted movement (‘human beings trapped in cages’) and freedom, symbolised by flying (‘all things that soar’). Extending this to the wider population, isolationism – taken to the extreme of preventing Haitians from leaving the Duvalierist state – is accentuated as a tactic of political terror (Hughes et al., 2022b).

Likewise, Díaz (2007) portrays physical entrapment as fundamental to Trujillo’s DR. Described as the ‘Alcatraz of the Antilles’ (ibid., p. 80), El Trujillato was similarly constructed around isolationist nationalism, a near-universal feature of totalitarian regimes, under which the figurehead has limitless dominion over their citizens’ freedoms (Betances and Spalding, 2018). Distinctive to Díaz’s representation of Trujillo’s oppression is its underpinning by the localised Latin American concept of the ‘*caudillo*’ (2007, p. 3). As a personalist leader with political and military power, the *caudillo* is inescapable in their omnipresence (‘Pico Duarte became Pico Trujillo, ‘Santo Domingo de Guzman...became Ciudad Trujillo’ – Díaz, 2007, p. 2) and omnipotence (‘one of the wealthiest men on the planet...one of the largest militaries in the hemisphere’ – ibid., p. 3). Like Peron in Argentina, Noriega in Panama, or (currently) Ortega in Nicaragua, Trujillo embodied the

‘prototypical Latin American caudillo’ (ibid., p. 2). The strongman archetype also applies to non-Hispanophone memory, from Mao Zedong in twentieth-century China, to Recep Erdoğan in contemporary Turkey (Bergmann, 2020), making this generic feature of Spanish-speaking dictatorial memory important to consider when determining international standards of practice (Jelin, 2010).

Both writers address the dichotomous yearning for escape as a response to repressive entrapment. Díaz (2007) approaches escapism literarily through fiction, namely *Lord of the Rings*, the ‘primary fantasy intertext’ which enables Oscar to concurrently understand and distance himself from his ‘Dominicanness’ (Lanzendörfer, 2013, p. 127). Diasporic identity – itself a form of physical and ideological escape – has the capacity to defy dictatorial entrapment, but with a heavy personal cost. As put by Danticat, the ‘immigrant artist’ knows ‘what it is to live at the edge of towns that cannot bear our company, hamlets that need our labor but want our children banned from their schools, villages that want our sick shut out from their hospitals, big cities that want our elderly, after a lifetime of impossible labor, to pack up and go off somewhere else to die’ (2010, p. 17). Those who flee regimes like Duvalier’s and Trujillo’s regain a degree of autonomy, but feel permanently torn between their original and adopted identities, especially when their presence in the country which constructs the latter is tinged with xenophobic animosity (Heredia, 2010).

Contrastingly, Díaz (2007) uses linguistic techniques to reflect the non-binariness of diasporic identity. Through code-switching, Spanish remains a normative language, interjected without quotations or italics into the predominantly English text: ‘Forget that hijo de la porra, that comehuevo’ (ibid., p. 113). By refusing to privilege one code over another, Díaz reminds readers of the mutability of languages (Mahler, 2010). Linguistic choices, as a component of identity, reflect that diasporic subjects are neither ‘nobody’ nor ‘a nation’, but rather participate in a more fluid, transnational community which eschews the restrictive identity politics of the nation-state (Sáez, 2011, p. 524). Representing this nuanced, pluralistic identity should be a crucial cornerstone of globalised memory standards (ibid.).

4. Conclusion

These cases elucidate the ongoing implications of memory practice. Following Trujillo’s (1961) and Duvalier’s (1971) deaths, their sons – Ramfis and Jean-Claude – hereditarily assumed governance. Despite Ramfis only remaining in power for six months,

compared to ‘Baby Doc’s’ fifteen-year reign, the legacy of the Trujillo and Duvalier dynasties is directly traceable to the modern day (Lanzendörfer, 2013; Hughes et al., 2020c). The Trujillo name still loiters on the fringes of Dominican politics, with Rafael Trujillo’s grandson running (unsuccessfully) for presidency in 2020, and campaigning for the construction of a Trumpian wall along the Haiti-DR border, intensifying geopolitical relations and anti-Haitianism in Hispaniola (Daniels, 2022).

Ideologically, Duvalierism still perpetuates Haiti’s political landscape, seen by (former Tonton Macoute) President Michel Martelly’s corrupt kleptocracy (2011-2016), which plundered Haitian resources for high-ranking government officials (Hughes et al., 2020c). The most recent President, Jovenel Moïse, was assassinated last year, and a 7.2-magnitude earthquake ravaged Haiti’s rural south, which lacked the infrastructure to cope (Daniels, 2022). Both nations continue to endure, despite volatility, oppressive political heritage, and traumatic memory.

By analysing Danticat’s and Díaz’s cultural representations of terror, trauma, and memory through a comparative framework, this report outlines key points relating to forthcoming memory practice. Supported by a small but growing body of literature on Haitian and Dominican memory, it overarchingly recommends that:

- 1) trauma is depicted physically *and* psychologically;
- 2) terror is recollected by victims, perpetrators, *and* bystanders;
- 3) narratives of resistance honour the celebrated *and* the forgotten;
- 4) identity is conceptualised fluidly and pluralistically;
- 5) memory constitutes cultural nuance, historical accuracy, and diachronicity.

Accordingly, this report posits that the cases of Haiti and the DR offer multi-factorial recommendations regarding UNESCO’s international standards of memory and heritage practice relating to literary cultural representations. Future research might address non-literary forms of cultural representations, or physical sites of memory practice, both within Hispaniola and without.

Word Count: 4394

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