Abstract

The Dominican Republic has a long history of oppression and colonization beginning with the arrival of Christopher Columbus in 1492, and arguably ending with the assassination of Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo in 1961. Though the systematic colonization has ostensibly come to an end for the Dominican Republic, the social trauma is still present and manifests itself in the cultural tendencies and behaviors of the island's inhabitants, as well as its immigrants. This essay serves to document one of the many traumas of the Dominican Republic's history of colonial violence. Dominican-American author and immigrant Junot Diaz moved his country's writings from the margin of the American literary canon to the center with his 2007 novel, The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao, which won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 2008. This novel is the middle book in a series of three, the most recent of which, This Is How You Lose Her (2012) represents a marked shift in focus and representation from that of the first book, a collection of short stories entitled Drown (1996). Drown can be said to document the various economic factors that affect the lives of Dominican immigrants and their decisions to immigrate to the United States. Yet, his most recent two books emphasize the characters' searches for romantic love against their own Dominican histories of oppression and violence. I understand and interpret Diaz's thematic shift to be a renouncement of the traditionally accepted and economically predicated American dream, and a reorientation of that dream toward an aspiration centered on what Diaz terms "decolonial love."

Thus, this essay will illuminate the particulars of Diaz's devaluation of an economically predicated national dream, and his re-orientation away from such a dream toward one based on a distinctly decolonized affective love. I will first examine the history of colonial oppression that characterizes the Dominican Republic, which will necessarily involve Diaz's protagonists Oscar and Yunior and the ways in which their own personal histories of colonization and oppression are specifically manifested and influence their relationships, and, ultimately, their search for decolonial love. Then, the final portion of this essay will examine the economic struggles of Dominican immigrants in contrast with Diaz's emphasis in his books on romantic love. I will discuss how decolonial love specifically frees characters like Yunior and Oscar from the colonial structures of hyper-masculinity and sexual domination in ways that economic outcomes cannot. As well, I will briefly discuss how Diaz might suggest Yunior and Oscar purge themselves of these colonial structures through writing as testimony.

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