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Will to Remember: Counter-Archives in the Work of Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz

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**WILL TO REMEMBER: COUNTER-ARCHIVES IN THE WORK OF
ALVAREZ, DANTICAT, AND DÍAZ**

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the
Louisiana State University and
Agricultural and Mechanical College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

in

The Department of English

by

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For Auden and Eric

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Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	iii
Abstract.....	vii
Introduction. Will to Remember: Counter-Archives in the Work of Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz.....	1
Chapter 1. A Silence that Stands Monument to the Generations: Familial Quiet and the Imagination.....	31
Chapter 2. Counter-Archives of Shared Histories: <i>Testimonio</i> , the Repertoire, and Transnational Voices.....	70
Chapter 3. Statelessness and “Fast Media”: Precarious Citizenship and the Digital Counter-Narrative.....	111
Conclusion. Creating Dangerously: Counter-Archives in the Diaspora/Dyaspóra.....	155
References.....	162
Vita.....	168

Abstract

This dissertation argues the essays, fiction, non-fiction, and non-profit work of authors Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat, and Junot Díaz produce counter-narratives that when assembled, create a counter-archive of the Rafael Leonidas Trujillo dictatorship and its lasting effects. To support this claim, I analyze the various genres and medias they employ throughout the late 20th and early 21st centuries as redressing not only the “official” state history of the dictatorship, but also the overarching construction of history with a capital “H”. Through a close reading of form and the thematic concerns present in their work, I demonstrate how they challenge fundamental understandings of historical recording, notions about where historical artifacts and ephemeral materials remain, and, finally, the strategic inclusion/occlusion of certain voices as representative of “official” history. In doing so, I highlight how their counter-narratives provide examples of alternate voices and accounts of history through familial silences, *testimonio*, the imagination, and fast media. Finally, I offer the concluding argument that their larger counter-archival project creates the space for readers to imagine the implications of historical moments, and history in a broader context, across generations and national borders.

Introduction. Will to Remember: Counter-Archives in the Work of Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz

In “Will to Remember: Counter-Archives in the Work of Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz,” I explore the literature and political activism of these three writers in order to understand the relationships they draw between history, memory, silence, and the present moment. I read the various forms of counter-archival materials (fiction, non-fiction, op- editorials, and fast media) they produce as offering historical information about the Rafael Leonidas Trujillo regime. I argue these materials, when read together, create a counter-archive to the “official” state narrative, one that provides a relatively composite picture of the alternative histories, lives, and narratives of people from the DR/Haiti and the diaspora. Their individual counter-narratives, and collective counter-archive, redress not only the “official” state history of the dictatorship, but also the overarching construction of history with a capital “H”. Through a close reading of form and the thematic concerns present in their work, I demonstrate how they challenge fundamental understandings of historical recording, notions about where historical artifacts and ephemeral materials remain, and, finally, the inclusion/occlusion of certain voices as representative of “official” history. In doing so, I highlight how their counter-narratives provide examples of alternate voices and accounts of history through familial silences, *testimonio*, the imagination, and fast media. Finally, I offer the concluding argument that their larger counter-archival project creates the space for readers to imagine the implications of historical moments, and history in a broader context, across generations and national borders.

Throughout this project, I use the term counter-archive to describe how the collective work of Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz creates an archive of counter-narratives that contend with the “official” archive. Not only do these materials counter the “official” state archive, but they preference histories produced from the ephemeral and the imaginary. Told from the perspective of the diasporic writer, these counter-narratives, and the counter-archive itself, capture transnational and transgenerational experiences, memories, and traumas of the dictatorship and its lasting effects. I read their fiction, non-fiction, and political activism as not only critiquing the “official” history, but offering a revisionist account of the history itself, one that draws a clear relationship between the past and the present moment. To be clear, I’m not suggesting they are re-writing a concise history of the regime. Instead, their work offers accounts and versions of events withheld from the “official” narrative. In doing so, they counter the memories and silences produced by the state through their inclusion of cultural, familial, societal memories and unearthed silences that speak back to “a politics of erasure” and governmental ghosting (Brozgal 38).

Archival and historiographical studies found in Caribbean and transnational literatures have done extensive work in terms of making sense of the minimal presence or altogether absence of archives and what Glissant has called “nonhistory.” A history, relevant to particular locales that is full of violence “shock, contraction, painful negation, and explosive forces, [leading to] dislocation of the continuum, and the inability of the collective consciousness to absorb it all” caused by colonial, imperial, and neocolonial control and intervention (Glissant 62). While the work of these three authors addresses issues relevant to the aforementioned fields of study, their specific focus begins

by addressing the “nonhistory” ascribed to a particular region, point in time, and distinct dictatorship. To be clear, a great deal of their project builds upon this previous work. However, their particular intervention, as I see it, involves the creation of a counter-archive from familial silences, *testimonio*, transnational accounts, and fast media in order to engage in a transformative telling of history’s impact on both the past and the present moment. Their work offers not only a critical investigation of the “official” archive, but a set of tools through which communities can work collectively to address this “void of memory” (Chivallon 71).

Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz’s fiction, non-fiction, and political activism challenges readers to consider the regime’s impact transgenerationally and transnationally. In doing so, their work calls attention to the relationship between Trujillo’s reign and contemporaneous influences on identity, national affiliation, and community that have led to contentious present day relationships. For each of the three authors, the counter-archive documents the lasting effects of history and, as in the work of their organization Border of Lights, “commemorate[s], collaborate[s], and continue[s] the legacy of hope and justice” (Border of Lights).¹ As I’ve already suggested, their work builds on previous intellectual and emotional lineages. However, my understanding of the counter-archive as a collective act countering, speaking, and acting in opposition to the state’s “official” account is an altogether new intervention. While earlier scholarship has asserted similar arguments, it hasn’t delved into the relationship between the three authors and their non-profit work. Nor has it considered the political and transformative possibilities of a counter-archive. For example, Erica Johnson’s article “Building the Neo-Archive: Dionne Brand’s *A Map to the Door of No Return*” focuses on the way in which

postcolonial writers like Dionne Brand “set the record straight, to tell the stories lost to the violence of colonial historiography. . . to bring any and all artistic expression to bear on history” (150). Additionally, Jennifer Harford Vargas’s article “Novel Testimony: Alternative Archives in Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones*” argues the novel itself functions as a testimonial archive that “serves as a rich archival site for counter-hegemonic testimonies” that leads to the creation of an alternative archive (1163).

While I see their work as important and applicable to my own project, I want to highlight the differences in our approach. More specifically, Johnson’s work attends to Brand’s ability to draw clear relationships between personal lives and history, but her analysis doesn’t extend this consideration to the communal effects of history.

Additionally, I don’t see “setting the record straight” as the sole intention of this particular counter-archival work. In the case of Harford Vargas’s article, the author associates only one novel with creating an alternative account of the Parsley Massacre. While Vargas’s scholarship is helpful, it does not consider the interconnection between the work done in Danticat’s fiction and other novels.

Overall, what sets my dissertation apart from this prior work is my emphasis on the collective nature of the counter-archival project.² More specifically, I examine the fiction, non-fiction, and political work of multiple authors over a sustained period of time as producing a series of counter-narratives that lead to a larger counter-archive.

Additionally, my emphasis on countering “official” archives, versus writing an alternate version is important. While the word choice may seem subtle, its action has profound implications on how “official” histories are attended to. For example, when their op-editorials directly counter fictitious statements made by government officials, they are not

writing an alternate version of history. Rather, they are demonstrating the need for fact checking and a rhetoric of proof when it comes to state responses.

As in previous scholarship, my dissertation critiques the “concept of History with a capital H” (Chivallon 74). In doing so, I address the “presences and absences embodied in sources . . . [that] are neither neutral or natural,” in particular, the elisions found in the “official” archive (Trouillot 48). Here, I’m hesitant to use the terms “historic,” “historical,” and “historicity” due to their troublesome relationship to assumptions about recorded events—when in fact much still remains unknown. I use quotes to highlight this hesitancy and indicate concerns regarding the historicizing of events, which often precludes any understanding of the continued impact of history. Central to this project is the understanding that the past plays an important role in the present moment as Trouillot elaborates: “To be sure, injustices made to previous generations should be redressed: they affect the descendants of the victims. But the focus on The Past often diverts us from the present injustices for which previous generations only set the foundations” (Trouillot 150). Here, “Will to Remember” works to draw clear connections between the Trujillo regime and present day rulings like the 2013 Dominican constitutional ruling, *La Sentencia* and U.S. immigration practices. In doing so, I address the way in which counter-archives that focus only on the failure of the “official” archive bypass a deeper understanding of the dictatorship’s continuous impact.

Finally, a clear understanding of what is and is not counter-archival is important, as is a clear definition of the differing agendas and intentions between counter-archives and counter-narratives. To be clear, this project defines the counter-archive only in relationship to the Trujillo regime. More specifically, I’m suggesting all of the materials

produced by these three authors provide counter-narratives and a larger counter-archive of this specific dictatorship. That being said, the counter-archive these authors produce operates as a collection of materials housed across multiple genres and medias that critique the “official” archive that exists about the dictatorship and its lasting effects. Some of the unique features of their counter-archive include the incorporation of the narratives most often silenced by historical accounts, the inclusion of archivable and ephemeral materials, and the encompassing of multiple genres and medias. A central agenda of their counter-archival project is the creation of a revisionist history of the dictatorship that includes experiences across nations and borders. Counter-narratives, then, are the narratives, *testimonios*, oral storytelling practices, and border projects each author produces that, in turn, make up the counter-archive. The rhetorical aim of counter-narratives is to produce a more accurate historical account of the dictatorship both past and present. Additionally, counter-narratives challenge the assumption of truth ascribed to “official” accounts. In fact, each of the author’s counter-narratives, across genre and media, actively debunk traditional notions of the archive as unmediated, factual documentation. Instead, the counter-narratives Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz produce directly challenge the fictitious nature, whether real-time or past tense, of “official” documents about the regime. In doing, they offer a collective project that contends with historical production, while offering new strategies for engaging in and compiling histories in the future.

a). The Legacy of the Trujillo Regime

In his article “Indeterminacy and the Subversive in Representations of the Trujillato,” Adam Lifshey describes “the mid-twentieth century dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo established [as] one of the most hermetically tyrannical states in the history of Latin America” (435). Between 1930-1961, Rafael Leónidas Molina, also known as El Jefe, reigned over the Dominican Republic.³ Under his “totalitarian” rule, he “expanded the military fifteen-fold . . . with an ideology of developmentalism and national progress; [with] the implicit logic that Trujillo represented the very body of the nation” (Derby 2-3). The intensity of his authoritarian control matched the theatricality of enforced veneration that required Dominicans to pay respect through a variety of acts, including: icons of Trujillo in the home, “a tribute, a tax, a dummy vote, [an] occasional parade” (*Something to Declare* 106). Alongside the state contrived celebrations were acts of unspeakable cruelty which generated public fear and reaffirmed Trujillo’s position of power. Not only panoptical, but violent: “his brutal repression of opposition resulted in innumerable deaths, whether through direct killing or torture, so that it was believed that there was not a family in the Dominican Republic that did not lose at least one person to Trujillo’s regime” (Farid 40).

Trujillo’s threats of violence became all the more real by incidents like the 1937 Parsley Massacre and the 1960 murders of the Mirabal sisters. In October of 1937, just seven years into his dictatorship, Trujillo ordered the “Dominican military [to conduct] a genocidal campaign to remove all Haitians from the Dominican Republic; thousands of Haitians were killed” (Paulino 266).⁴ The massacre itself has gone un-recognized by state officials until this day. The incident gave rise to the racial ideology Trujillo is most

known for, *antihaitianismo*.⁵ As Paulino illustrates, “this event marked the modernization of anti-Haitianism: the state sponsored institutional and ideological campaign to turn Haitians into the official enemy of the Dominican state” (266). In 1960, Trujillo ordered the assassination of “the Hermanas Mirabal” (Robinson 172).⁶ An event that would register as a catalyst of Trujillo’s own death: “their deaths . . . constituted the beginning of the end of the Trujillo dictatorship because public outrage against him was so intense” (Robinson 173). On May 30, 1961, Trujillo’s was murdered.

A history of the Trujillo regime would be remiss without mentioning the role of U.S. intervention and the Good Neighbor Policy in supporting the dictatorship. Trujillo’s rise to power didn’t occur in a vacuum. Rather, his political ascension received support from the 1916-1924 U.S. intervention.⁷ Raymond Pulley claims that “when the United States withdrew in 1924, the Dominicans were left with a national army commanded by Trujillo” (22). Pulley goes on to argue not only was Trujillo trained by U.S. military, but initially supported as a “stable regime [that] protect[ed] foreign interests, and follow[ed] general lines of policy set forth in Washington” (27). President Franklin D. Roosevelt’s Good Neighbor Policy (1933-1945) intent on ensuring “inter-American relations . . . conducted in an atmosphere of close understanding and cooperation” gave Trujillo the green light as long as he understood the “mutual obligations and responsibilities” between the Dominican Republic and the United States” (23).

One of the most ominous facts about the dictatorship is its continued legacy, which is why counter-narratives continue to serve important roles in the present moment. While Trujillo’s death gave initial hope of an end to his brutal reign, the regime was quickly reestablished through Joaquín Balaguer’s rise to leadership.⁸ Balaguer, “one of

Trujillo's closest aids," previously charged with the task of creating propaganda narratives circulating during the dictatorship, moved into power as a subtle extension of the regime (Farid 48). The assassination of Trujillo, known as the "*ajusticiamiento*, a bringing of justice," failed to bring a conclusive end to the regime (*Something to Declare* 107). Rather, as Cox argues:

The Trujillato becomes a force neither temporally contained in the thirty-one years of Trujillo's rule, nor bound by the geographic limitations of the Haitian-Dominican border and the Caribbean Sea. Instead, the spectral dictator is an omnipresent malevolence that marks Dominicano/as, even those who were born after Trujillo's assassination on continents thousands of miles removed from the island. (Cox 108)

As Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz insist, the impact of the Trujillo dictatorship extends beyond generations and national borders. It continues to inform understandings of Dominican affiliation, community, and nationalism, as well as "official" discourse and judicial practices. Nowhere is the extension of Trujillian discourse more evident than in the 2013 Dominican Constitutional Court Ruling, *La Sentencia*.⁹ The 2013 ruling "retroactively stripped the Dominican citizenship from children of undocumented immigrants all the way back to 1929, effectively rendering thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent stateless" (Román and Sagás 1388). In doing so, the country "enshrined in law. . . anti-immigration policies" that would have grave consequences on Dominicans of Haitian descent (Román and Sagás 1387).

While Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz are certainly not the only Dominican- and Haitian-American writers who've addressed Trujillo's lasting impact, their work has received national and international acclaim. My interest in their work stems less from their literary stardom and has more to do with the similar nature of their literary work, which demonstrates a continued analysis of homogenous genres and themes over a

sustained period of time. More specifically, I find their concern with Trujillo and the state's machinations present in the great majority of their works. Additionally, I'm interested in the rapidity at which their positionality as the diasporic darlings of the Dominican Republic and Haiti changed the moment they began criticizing the state. More specifically, I'm interested in the ways in which speaking up against *La Sentencia* has pitted them as antagonizers of the state.¹⁰ I suggest the state's knee-jerk reaction to their counter-archival work speaks volumes to the potential the counter-archive presents as a tool for social change.

The fiction, non-fiction, and political activism of all three authors has been profoundly shaped by their direct and indirect experiences and postmemories of dictatorship.¹¹ As a result of the dictatorships of Raphael Leonidas Trujillo, François 'Papa Doc' Duvalier and son, Jean Claude 'Baby Doc' Duvalier, each of their families were forced into exile. These compulsory migrations to the United States have defined not only their personal experiences but have framed pertinent issues at the forefront of their work. More specifically, their fiction and non-fiction writing addresses not only the effects of diaspora, but the continued impact of dictatorial legacies as experienced outside of the nation itself. Alvarez, Danticat, and Diaz's work elides with the larger dictator genre found within postcolonial studies and the dictator novel within Latin American literature. Both the dictator genre and the dictator novel examine the relationship between dictatorial power, language, and history while critiquing forms of despotism across multiple genres. What I find most unique about Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz's collective work is their strategic use of a variety of genres including fast media, op-editorials, and

non-profit activism with Border of Lights that shifts in form and theme across time and space.

For Julia Alvarez and Junot Diaz's parents, living "under the absolute rule of Generalísimo Rafael Leonidas Trujillo" life in the Dominican Republic was a precarious balance between "obedient" nationalism and silent resistance (*Something to Declare* 104). The same *antihaitianismo* propagated by the Trujillo regime framed life experiences for Edwidge Danticat and her family members who've crossed into the Dominican Republic to cut cane and never return. These experiences and the dictatorship's legacy have served as a point of departure for their fiction and non-fiction projects. For example, Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies*, Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*, and Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* are all novels that "offer chronicles of Dominican history between 1930-1961" (Farid 40). This, however, is just a starting point, as each of the three authors published several titles addressing the necessity for creating counter-hegemonic and inclusive historiographies of the many voices producing transnational kinship through activism.

Additionally, their work creates a ". . . transnational dialogue between homeland and diaspora that has begun to reframe Dominican identity, thus bespeaking its unstable, mutable nature" (Guyton Acosta 58). In particular, they challenge criticisms of authorial autonomy and intent that arise when diasporic writers address "national" issues. Here, their non-fiction, fiction, and political activism calls attention to the negotiations required when attempting to navigate one's personal and political situated-ness as a transnational, or diaspora/dyaspóra. A central concern of their corpus aims at highlighting the multiple meanings and lived experiences of being a member of the Dominican- and Haitian-

American diaspora. This particular labor requires drawing attention to the way in which “diasporas, like nations, are fractured, polyvocal sites of belonging, participation, disenfranchisement, identification, or disidentifications” (Brazier 158). Building on the theoretical work within the field of diaspora studies and in particular Afro- and Latina/o-Caribbean diaspora studies, their work offers particular insight into the mediations required of individuals who actively negotiate the issues of “disidentification,” and belonging in both national, transnational, and local communities (Brazier 158). In doing so, they offer new ways to consider not only how one negotiates transnational identities, but also engages politically with “national” concerns.

These negotiations are an essential component of not only their personal lives, but also their work. As each author addresses concerns in their fiction, non-fiction, and interviews over whether or not they have the authority to engage in this work, they indirectly build upon the very arguments present in the work itself. More specifically, they demonstrate the transgenerational and transnational nature of these events and longer legacies. For example, the state’s response to Junot Díaz’s counter-narrative to the citizenship ruling demonstrates the alacrity with which Dominican officials are willing to challenge not only his ability to speak on the issue, but his nationality. The state’s action reveals not only the negotiations required of diasporic writers, but the state’s continued practice of squashing any and all oppositional rhetoric, a practice deeply reminiscent of the state control prevalent during the Trujillo regime.

Through their creation of counter-archival materials, each author addresses the issues diasporic writers encounter as they engage in “national politics”. In doing so, they highlight the complications that arise when diasporic writers speak up. While recognizing

their political situated-ness as transnationals, they highlight the specific negotiations required when one attempts to counter-archive “history.” Even further, they demonstrate what happens when individuals re-imagine history while simultaneously attempting to process their own experiences. Overall, I find their work immensely important in terms of its ability to create a roadmap for how diasporic writers not only participate in national politics, but extend conversations into transnational contexts.

b). The “Official” Archive of the Trujillato

Thus, we should begin to see all documentation as intervention, and all archiving as part of some sort of collective project. Rather than being the tomb of the trace, the archive is more frequently the product of the anticipation of collective memory. . . . the material site of the collective will to remember.

–Arjun Appadurai, “Archive and Aspiration”

In his article “Archive and Aspiration,” Appadurai builds upon prior definitions of the archive. Instead of focusing solely on the “panoptical functions” of the archive and the nation-state, Appadurai highlights the archive’s potential as a collective project with the capacity for intervention at the behest of intentional communities (1). For Appadurai, attention should turn to the possibilities the archive presents – the aspirations.

Appadurai’s optimistic reading positions the archive as “the material site of the collective will to remember”. For Appadurai, archives become an “everyday tool . . . for conscious sites of debate” (1). Appadurai’s focus on the archive as an intervention, further mediated by “intentional communities,” creates a space for collective participation in the archival process (1). Accordingly, intentional communities, including those members most marginalized by and from state and “official” archives, have the opportunity to contribute. Appadurai’s re-reading of the archive is essential to the overarching aims of

this project. More specifically, this project examines the way in which the counter-archival history of Alvarez, Danticat, Díaz produce reframes notions of the archive and its function. Further, I suggest the fiction, non-fiction and political activism of these three authors establishes a counter-archive that functions as an “everyday tool. . . for conscious sites of debate” (1). Their expressed will to remember acts as an intervention in which they attend to the historical occlusions found within “official” archives. In doing so, their acts of remembering create revisionist historiographies that emphasize the relationship between the past and the present moment and the transgenerational and transnational impact of this particular dictatorial history. Additionally, their work offers a new mode with which to think through the collection of future histories, including the use of digital and interactive publics and practices.

For Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz the act of remembering demonstrates an overarching understanding that there are untold experiences and memories of the regime that offer a more nuanced, and in many cases, a more viscerally accurate account of the dictatorship. The will to remember as a conscious practice requires a confrontation with the fictitious nature, inaccuracies, and occlusions contained within the “official” archive. Their project begins with the recognition that the “official” archive of the regime is a scant compilation of artifacts that have shaped state and populist discourses. Nonetheless, such documents have deeply informed the cultural, familial, and societal memories of the dictatorship and its violent history, including the murder of the Mirabal sisters and the Parsley Massacre. Joan M. Schwartz and Terry Cook draw a clear relationship between memory and the “archive,” suggesting “memory, like history, is rooted in archives. Without archives, memory falters . . . archives counter these losses. Archives contain the

evidence of what went before. This is particularly germane in the modern world” (18). Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz’s work directly addresses and attempts to counter the “official” archive of Trujillo based on constructed information and the absolute control of public and state rhetoric.

The will to remember for these three authors is not just about intention, rather, it is an active response, a call to counter the “official” narrative.¹ A counter-archival project wherein they challenge the historiography of the national, “official” archive in order to offer a more nuanced account of this particular history. Their counter-archival practice incorporates remembering through the imagination, the uncovering of silences and *testimonio*, and a speaking out across various mediums as a resistant act that extends notions of the archive. The will to remember, then, becomes a collective practice that positions an altogether different memory at the forefront of the history itself. This project identifies the most salient contributions Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz offer in regards to counter-archival work. Through a close analysis of their fiction, non-fiction, and political activism, this dissertation identifies how each author defines the counter-archive and its uses. In addition, through an examination of the processes each author applies when counter-archiving, the project teases out the importance of their collective work. In doing so, the project attends to not only the complications that arise when creating counter-archives, but highlights the way in which Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz’s particular project extends previous understandings of the archive and the recollection of history itself. Finally, each chapter demonstrates the possibilities their counter-archive offers as an interventionist tool for those communities left out of “official” histories.

In “Theorizing Shiny Things: Archival Labors,” Kathy Ferguson offers the astute analysis that the “general archive is complex, dense, multiple, energetic, and impossible to summarize” (3). Firstly, the debates surrounding the definition of the archive, let alone the “archival turn,” abound in the fields of Caribbean, Hemispheric, Postcolonial, and Transnational Feminist studies. Secondly, the “established” definitions are full of contentions and paradoxes. To simplify terms, Ferguson situates overarching concepts between two schools of thought, those who describe the archive as dangerous: “ ‘fever, trouble, patriarchy, violence, even radical evil’ ” and, in contrast, those who depict the archive as “ ‘a place of dreams’ ” and “ ‘important vehicles for building the capacity to aspire among those groups who need it most’ ” (Ferguson 1). While positioning archival concepts into this binary is initially helpful for synthesizing definitions, it attenuates the contentions within each side. More specifically, it undermines a consideration of how scholars have positioned definitions of the archive as plus/and rather than and/or. For example, Derrida’s reading of the archive as both “revolutionary and conservative,” and Carolyn Steedman’s suggestion that the archive “ ‘is not and never has been the repository of official documents alone’ ” are examples of this (Ferguson 5). I find these particular paradoxes the best place to not only initiate an overview of archival theories, but they also create a space through which to produce a definition of the counter-archive.

An overview of the archive would be incomplete without mentioning the work of Jacques Derrida’s *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (1995) and Michel Foucault’s *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1997). In particular, their foregrounding theories on the role of the archive and constructions of the state are essential to the larger field of study. Their collective commentary on the substantive role of the archive in state formation informs

the concept of the materiality of the archive. As Helen Freshwater contends, “this interaction of the state, writing, and the archive not only demonstrates the importance of textual traces for the construction of identity and collective national memory, it also indicates the state’s methods of maintain control of its subjects” (733). Achille Mbembe confirms the inseparable relationship between the state and the archive as he offers up the argument of the “inescapable materiality of the archive” (Hamilton, et al 19).

The term ‘archives’ first refers to a building, a symbol of a public institution, which is one of the organs of a constituted state. However, by ‘archives’ it is also understood as a collection of documents –normally written documents- kept in this building. There cannot therefore be a definition of ‘archives’ that does not encompass both the building itself and the documents stored there. (Hamilton, et al 19)

Mbembe foregrounds his understanding of the archive within the architectural space that holds the collection. Like Derrida and Foucault, Mbembe draws a relationship between the building as one of the “organs of the state” along with the documents contained inside (Hamilton, et al 19). In Mike Featherstone’s article “Archive,” he restates Mbembe’s argument regarding the notion of the archive as place. Featherstone further suggests the relationship between document, space, and national memory, arguing: “the archive was part of the apparatus of social rule and regulation . . . the archive was also a crucial site for national memory” (Featherstone 591- 592).

This initial definition of the archive and its direct relationship to the state is essential to this project. As Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz all draw a clear relationship between the “official” archive and national and populist memory. In particular, they illustrate the various relationships between the “archive” and methods of state control. However, the notion of the “materiality of the archive” is more of a stretch in the case of the Trujillo regime (Hamilton, et al 19). Here, Mbembe’s understanding of the spatial

relationship of the “archive” is complicated by the fact that “official” documents about Trujillo weren’t housed in a particular site. Rather, the “official” archive of Trujillo was what circulated in public domains, including newspaper articles and the publications of writers like Peña Batlle, Joaquín Balaguer, Incháustegui Cabral, and Max Henríquez Ureña, authors charged with the task of spreading Trujillian ideologies.¹² The housing of archival materials didn’t occur until Dedé Mirabal opened the *Museo de la Hermanas Mirabal* (Museum of the Mirabal sisters) in 1994 and the Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana (Memorial Museum of Dominican Resistance) was founded in 2011.¹³

One of the main motivations behind Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz’s counter-archival work is calling attention to the complicated nature of the “official” archive about Trujillo. While the “archive” was not physically housed in one location, the discourse framing it was everywhere. The “official” archive of the regime was disseminated through documents and public outlets that deeply informed national memories of the dictatorship. As Díaz aptly states, “I don’t think there’s a Dominican writer ... who’s matched the awful narrative puissance that Trujillo marshalled; his ‘work’ deformed, captured, organized us as Dominicans in was we can barely understand” (“Junot Diaz and Edwidge Danticat”). While Mbembe’s understanding of the definitive relationship between the archive and the official building site housing the archive doesn’t readily apply to the archive of the Trujillo dictatorship, his understanding of the archive as a national apparatus infused with power does.

Schwartz and Cook concur with the prior assertions of Derrida, Foucault, and Mbembe regarding the relationship between the archive and power. In their historical

overview of various archives, they conclude: “Archives have always been about power, whether it is the power of the state, the church, the corporation, the family, the public, or the individual. Archives have the power to privilege and to marginalize” (Schwartz and Cook 13). Their summary of the archive in its various forms, connects archival construction to power via its ability to privilege and withhold accounts. A point echoed in Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (1995), wherein Trouillot describes the power ascribed to the process of archive making. Here, Trouillot suggests:

The making of archives involves a number of selective operations: selection of producers, selection of evidence, selection of themes, selection of procedures—which means, at best the differential ranking and, at worst, the exclusion of some producers, some evidence, some themes, some procedures. (Trouillot 53)

This selective process is blatantly evident within the “official” discourse of the Trujillo regime. As the counter-archival project of Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz illustrates, the “official” archive of Trujillo has long circumscribed any and all opposition to the state, precluding narratives that offer an altogether different account of history.

While it is clear that “official” archives and the histories they construct connect to machinations of the state, there are altogether different archival functions. To return back to the paradoxes surrounding the definition of the archive as referenced in the work of Derrida and Steedman, archives can and do operate outside of these constraints. As Schwartz and Cook explain, while archives “can be a tool of hegemon; they can [also] be a tool of resistance” (Schwartz and Cook 13). Here is where Appadurai’s “Archive Aspirations” and Diana Taylor’s *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (2003) come in handy in terms of freeing up steadfast definitions of the archive that connect them only to the state. Reading their work together

is important in that they not only resituate notions of the “materiality” of the archive but they also extend the conversation around what is deemed “archivable.”

Central to Appadurai’s definition of the archive is an understanding that it’s actionable. The archive is a “deliberate project. . . based on intervention” (1). This definition is important in that it challenges the long-held notion that archives are unmediated. Even further, Appadurai unsettles what Diana Taylor describes as “the myths attending the archive, including its “unmediated” nature and the notion that “archives resist change, corruptibility, and political manipulation” (19). While this point reinforces prior statements about control, power, and the archive, as well as how the archive is constructed, it also creates an opening to read interventions differently depending on who the archivist is. Appadurai resituates our understanding of “the” archivist by challenging the reader to consider not just the state as “official” creators and keepers of the archive, but also individuals and communities (1).¹⁴ Even further, Appadurai’s definition of archives as sites of intervention that operate differently based on their intended purpose and the “intentional community” is essential to this project’s analysis of counter-archival work (1). In particular, I read the three authors collective work as both interventionist and a larger social project, an active project that requires the use of the imagination due to the lack of “evidence.” Finally, rather than offering a top-down accounting of the dictatorship these authors re-position the archivist to instead speak back to the state and its master narrative.

Appadurai’s reconceptualization of the archive is extremely helpful in terms of reframing who can archive and in what ways. Alas, it still doesn’t fully address which materials are seen as “archivable”. Here, Diana Taylor’s work is seminal in its

challenging of essentialist notions around what “valid forms of knowledge [are] deemed archivable” (Taylor 18). In her historical overview of the archive, Taylor highlights the way in which “writing came at the expense of embodied practices as a way of knowing and making claims” (Taylor 18). In her analysis of the archive and the repertoire, Taylor highlights the hierarchal positioning of the archive and in doing so draws attention to the:

Rift between the *archive* of supposedly enduring materials (i.e., texts, documents, buildings, and bones) and the so-called ephemeral *repertoire* of embodied practice/knowledge (i.e., spoken language, dance, sports, ritual). ‘Archival’ memory exists as documents, maps, literary texts, archaeological remains. . . all those items supposedly resistant to change. The repertoire, on the other hand, enacts embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing— in short, all of those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge. (Taylor 19-20)

Similar to Appadurai’s work in moving definitions of the archive away from the “inescapable materiality,” Taylor challenges long-held assumptions about the materiality of the items deemed “archivable.” Taylor contends with the notion that the only “things” capable of narrating history and the past are material documents. Taylor’s argument is critical to the field of archival studies as it expands rigid concepts regarding what truly counts in the archive. Additionally, her work, alongside that of Appadurai’s, function as the starting point for my own concept of the counter-archive. To illustrate, Appadurai’s reading of the archive as a collective intervention and Taylor’s understanding of the necessity of including embodied memories firmly situates the work of Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz within this newly revisioned archival and history-making process. The counter-archives these three authors create incorporate both “enduring materials . . . [and the] ephemeral” in their revisionist historiography of the Trujillo regime.

Chapter Overview

In the first chapter, “A Silence that Stands Monument to the Generations: Familial Quiet and the Imagination,” I examine the way in which Alvarez’s essays and Díaz’s novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) critique the way in which society interprets historical moments as vestiges of the past. Instead, I propose their work explores the ever-present effects of history on the present moment while staking the claim that this particular history is both transgenerational and transnational. I argue Alvarez’s essay collection *Something to Declare* (1999) and Díaz’s novel highlight the need for contemporary counter-archives that historicize the present moment. Through an investigation of familial silences, their work comments on the minimal archival materials in existence and the fictionalized nature of such. For Alvarez and Díaz, the counter-archive is a multi-genre testament to the untold histories that do exist. Both the essay collection and the novel cobble together histories including the familial “whisper[s] here and there” with re-imagined narratives (Díaz 243). While not purporting to produce “official” histories, their projects instead address the limitations found within the “official” archive, while directly challenging the underlying dictatorial nationalisms framing those histories. In doing so, they address critical questions regarding what “archivable” items belong within a counter-archive and who has the authority and “authenticity” to document them.

Moreover, both authors establish a set of literary features of the counter-archive, including the use of the imagination, an attending to the constructed and fictitious nature of the “official” history, the deconstructing the popular notion of Trujillo as “mythic” figure, and finally, drawing clear relationships between history and the present moment.

While both projects present a strong case for the necessity of creating counter-archives, neither is without complications. Here, I examine the contentions that arise when each diasporic author takes on this recuperative process. For Alvarez, creating a counter-archive becomes a compulsion to tell driven by the silences maintained in her own family. In her urgency to reclaim the “imagination of many Dominicans,” Alvarez silences the voices of those with firsthand experience (*Something to Declare* 110). In Díaz’s novel, the author challenges the heroic notion that one person can recover the history and imagination of an entire population. Instead, the novel poses the argument that a historical recovery of the Trujillo regime requires a multitude of genres and languages to not only make sense of the horrific nature of the regime, but ensure that all voices are accounted for. In the process, the novel reveals the complications surrounding silence itself. For Díaz, silences are complex and implicate everyone involved. While Díaz works to flesh out this notion of culpability, the reader is left to wonder whether or not fiction can be considered “archivable.” Finally, both writers struggle with notions of authenticity and authorial autonomy as diasporic writers, wherein they are both asked to negotiate the question of who has the right to document what has long been deemed “national” history.

In the second chapter, “Writing Counter-Archives of Shared Histories: *Testimonio*, the Repertoire, and Transnational Voices,” I explore the way in which Julia Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) and Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones* (1998) contribute to this larger counter-archival project. I argue Alvarez’s and Danticat’s novels and their nonprofit work with the organization Border of Lights establish counter-archives that bring national and transnational attention to the murder of the Mirabal

sisters and the Parsley Massacre. In a similar manner to the texts discussed in the first chapter, both the novels and the nonprofit aim to counter the “official” archive, or lack thereof. This includes extending definitions of the transnational and “history” to address the emotive, traumatic impact of historical events. The counter-archives the novels and the organization produce once again highlight not only the failure of “official” narratives to record such events, but they also examine the way in which state narratives have erased crucial details. Through the use of the imagination, *testimonio*, the duality of listening and speaking, and oral storytelling, both authors use the ephemeral repertoire as a means of building a counter-archive that records state-sponsored violence. Additionally, this chapter addresses the diversity of form in regards to counter-archival materials in the late 20th and 21st centuries. More specifically, I examine the shift in counter-archival genres from fiction to non-fiction, digital media and non-profit activism. Chapter two concludes with a conversation about the organization Border of Lights, an organization and/or “movement seeking to bear witness to the 1937 Haitian Massacre, remembering its victims while also bearing witness to the Massacre’s legacies of exclusion while strengthening the cross-border solidarity between Haitians and Dominicans” (Border of Lights). The work of the organization centers on creating a counter-archive of the history that not only recounts and memorializes the event, but can be used as a means of mending the rifts that exist between the border communities on both side of the Massacre river.

In the third chapter, “Statelessness and ‘Fast Media:’ Precarious Citizenship and the Immediacy of the Digital Counter-Narrative,” I argue the op-editorials, letters to the Editor, and *The New Yorker* articles written by Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat, and

Junot Díaz produce a counter-narrative, circulated via fast media, to both historical discourse and the contemporary political conversations regarding *La Sentencia*. I suggest each author employs fast media, also known as digital media, as a platform to not only historicize the present moment but also present arguments critiquing state officials in real-time. Fast media allows each author the opportunity to present a counter-narrative to the “official” state narratives circulating about the history of *antihaitianismo* in the Dominican Republic. Even further, these counter-narratives expose and situate the factitious rhetoric utilized by state representatives as part and parcel of a longer history. Through the immediacy of fast media, each author is able to draw a clear connection between present day structural inequalities and particular ideologies of the “past,” while simultaneously creating a participatory and potentially activated readership. The use of fast media becomes essential to each author as they take on the issue of statelessness. Not only do they use the platform to address the inhumanity of expulsions and mass deportations, but they work to connect these “contemporary” actions to a history dating back to the Trujillo regime. More specifically, each author points to the failure of the nation-states of the Dominican Republic and Haiti to protect ethnic Haitians. By drawing attention to the “official” ghosting of the past, each author draws a connection between the historic civic and physical deaths of this particular population and the present moment.¹⁵

I’m suggesting these articles function as a counter-narrative that when combined become a component of their larger counter-archival project. To be more specific, I’m using the term counter-narrative to emphasize the role fast media plays in allowing authors to produce narratives that are in direct conversation with the state’s “official”

narratives. The immediate nature of fast media allows for an in-the-moment critique of the state that shares similarities to their prior counter-archival projects. The state's "official" response to these fast media articles exemplifies this point. Rather than having to negotiate critical questions of authorial autonomy and their recuperative work as diasporic writers, the state takes the issue to task for them in a public arena. Not only have Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz been publically discredited for their work, but national awards have been rescinded. For example, in 2015, New York's Dominican Consul General revoked Díaz's Order of Merit, while calling him anti-Dominican for speaking out against the ruling. Additionally, and most telling, their Dominican and Haitian identity has been criticized, and in the case of Junot Díaz, denied altogether. The states willingness to not only discredit, but de-nationalize a prominent public figure leaves one to wonder how easily such a decision could be made for members of populations who've been historically treated as disposable.

In my concluding chapter, "*Create Dangerously: Counter-Archives in the Diaspora*," I explore the overarching impact of counter-archival work. Here, I move away from discussions about the negotiations required of Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz when writing "national" histories to fully consider the social influence of counter-archives in the Dominican Republic and the United States. I conclude my overarching analysis of the role of counter-archives in redressing the "official" archive of Trujillo by citing the importance of this work in relationship to present day conflicts. More specifically, I draw a relationship between the role counter-archival work plays in addressing the dangers of *La Sentencia* in hopes of preventing contemporary "genocidal violence in the Dominican

Republic” (Paulino 265). In doing so, I answer larger questions regarding the way in which counter-archival work lends to a formal and informal adjudication of history.

In addition, I shift attention to the counter-archival and counter-narrative work each author engages in that addresses particular U.S. attitudes and practices toward countries such as the Dominican Republic and Haiti. For example, when President Donald Trump decried immigrants arriving to the U.S. from “shithole countries” like Haiti and Africa, Danticat took to social media to denounce his statement as “completely racist” (Goodman 1). In her 2018 interview on *Democracy Now*, Danticat states:

My response to President Trump is total condemnation. It was a very racist remark, which shed light on earlier decisions that he had—that have been made by the administration—for example, about temporary protected status being eliminated for Haitians and Salvadorans, and his remark, as reported by *The New York Times*, about all Haitians having AIDS. It seems like, once again, Haiti is being used as a foil. (Goodman 1)

While Danticat’s condemnation is an essential public counter-narrative, so too is her emphasis on the relationship between Trump’s attitude, histories of imperialism, and contemporary U.S. political decisions and treatment of immigrant populations from countries like Haiti. In particular, her digital counter-narrative calls attention to historic U.S. attitudes about Haitians. In this conclusion, I attend to the critical gaze each author turns towards U.S. issues, including: U.S. foreign policies, contemporary immigration policies, and racist antics that mirror the *antihaitinismo* found in the Dominican Republic to belabor the point that their counter-archival work extends beyond redressing the Trujillo regime. Rather, through a close analysis of their fast media and non-fiction, I will examine the way in which historicizing the present moment is a practice that demonstrates the problematic transnational politics that exist between these three countries.

The counter-archival project I examine in this dissertation attends to the larger issues that arise when a nation-state institutes a “brutal amnesia . . . contrive[d] to erase its own atrocities” (McClintock 820). Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz not only attend to this neglect in terms of the Trujillo dictatorship, but they address its widespread reach across generations and national borders. Alas, to pose the argument that state practices of pernicious omission start and end with the Trujillo dictatorship would fail to consider the impact of U.S. colonial, neo-colonial, and imperial practices affecting countries like the Dominican Republic and Haiti. For Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz the counter-archive becomes a tool to confront the fictitious, the inaccurate, and the omissions contained within any “official” archive.

Notes

¹ Border of Lights is a nonprofit founded by Julia Alvarez that works to commemorate the Parsley Massacre while bridging relationships across borders between the Dominican Republic and Haiti.

² See Enrique Buenaventura’s article “Actor, creación colectiva y dramaturgia nacional” for a more nuanced understanding of the collective nature of the counter-archival work.

³ See Lauren Derby’s *The Dictator’s Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo*, Michael Hall’s *Sugar and Power in the Dominican Republic: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Trujillos*, Lorgia García- Peña’s *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction*, and Edward Paulino’s *Dividing Hispaniola: The Dominican Republic’s Border Campaign against Haiti, 1930-1961* for historical information regarding Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina’s thirty-year reign over the Dominican Republic.

⁴ For a broad historical overview of the October 1937, Parsley Massacre see Paulino and García’s article, “Bearing Witness to Genocide: The 1937 Haitian Massacre and Border of Lights;” Johnson’s article “Both sides of the Massacre River: collective memory and narrative on Hispaniola; and, Turtis’s piece “A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed: The 1937 Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic.

⁵ While Trujillo use of *antihaitianismo* is well documented, he wasn’t the first to establish the ideology. Edward Paulino’s “Anti-Haitianism, Historical Memory, and the Potential for Genocidal Violence in the Dominican Republic” argues *antihatianismo* “has its

historical roots in early 1800s” (266). However, Trujillo and his “intellectuals would, in unprecedented fashion, crystallize a historic but diffuse anti-Haitian sentiment into official government discourse” (266).

⁶ In 1960, Trujillo ordered the assassination of the Mirabal Sisters. Their murders later became the foundation of the November 25th International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women. For a historical accounting of their deaths in relationship to the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention of Violence Against Women, see Nancy P. Robinson’s article, “Origins of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women: The Caribbean Contribution.”

⁷ See Bruce Calder’s *Impact of Intervention: The Dominican Republic During the U.S. Occupation of 1916-1924*, Eric Thomas Chester’s *Rag-tags, scum, riff-raff, and commies: the U.S. intervention in the Dominican Republic, 1965-1966*, Eric Paul Roorda’s *The Dictator Next Door: The Good Neighbor Policy and the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1930-1945* and Ellen Tillman’s *Dollar Diplomacy by Force: Nation-Building and Resistance in the Dominican Republic* for more information on the historical connection between Trujillo’s rise to power and U.S. interventions.

⁸ Joaquín Balaguer was president of the Dominican Republic for three non-consecutive terms (1960-1962), (1966-1978) and (1986-1996).

⁹ In the article, “Birthright Citizenship Under Attack” authors Román and Sagás describe *La Sentencia* as the definitive Dominican ruling on citizenship issues regarding Ethnic Haitians.

¹⁰ The moment Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz begin to address the Dominican citizenship ruling they lose their status as diasporic representatives of the Dominican Republic and become “antagonizers of the state.” This is most evident in the case of Junot Díaz wherein his reputation is tarnished by Dominican intellectuals and state officials challenge his authentic “Dominicanness” and his legitimacy to speak on issues in the Dominican Republic.

¹¹ The term “postmemories” comes from Marianne Hirsch’s article “The Generation of Postmemory.” Hirsch defines postmemory as “the *structure* of inter- and trans-generational transmission of traumatic knowledge and experience” (3). I use the term in this dissertation to describe the way in which individuals and communities experience the trauma of the dictatorship after the fact.

¹² Peña Batlle, Secretary of State for the Interior and Police; Joaquín Balaguer, Vice President/President of the Dominican Republic; Incháustegui Cabral, Trujillo’s Ambassador; and Max Henríquez Ureña, Secretary of Foreign Affairs, all served the Trujillo regime in governmental roles. Additionally, they were responsible for penning the nationalist ideologies that circulated during the dictatorship. See Eugenio Matibag’s *Haitian-Dominican Counterpoint: Nation, State, and Race on Hispaniola* for a detailed overview of their individual roles in the dictatorship.

¹³ The *Museo de la Hermanas Mirabal* (Museum of the Mirabal sisters) and the Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana (Memorial Museum of Dominican Resistance) are both archival and historical sites that contain counter-archival artifacts and documents that directly contest the “official” rhetoric of the Trujillo regime. Dedé Mirabal opened the *Museo* in 2004 in the Mirabal family ancestral home with the intent of telling the full story of the life and deaths of the Mirabal sisters. The *Museo Memorial de la Resistencia Dominicana* contains artifacts and testimonies aimed at memorializing the victims of state violence during the Trujillo regime.

¹⁴ Appadurai’s notion of the diasporic public archive pays particular attention to the modes through which “migrants, especially the poorer migrants of the world” find means to create public archives (3).

¹⁵ Ghosting, is a concept found in Anne McClintock’s “Imperial Ghosting and National Tragedy.” McClintock uses the terms to describe the “connection between imperial violence and . . . the administration of forgetting (the calculated and often brutal amnesias by which a state contrives to erase its own atrocities)” (820).

Chapter 1. A Silence that Stands Monument to the Generations: Familial Quiet and the Imagination

All their lives my parents, along with a nation of Dominicans, had learned the habits of repression, censorship, and terror. Those habits would not disappear with a few bullets and a national liberation proclamation. They would not disappear on a plane ride north that put hundreds of miles distance between the island and our apartment in New York.

—Julia Alvarez (*Something to Declare*)

Julia Alvarez's non-fiction collection of essays *Something to Declare* (1999) and Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) address the life-long "learned" habits of "repression, censorship, [and] terror" Dominicans experienced during and after the Trujillo dictatorship (107). These habits, passed down generationally and across national borders, have resulted in a legacy outlasting Trujillo's reign. In their fiction and non-fiction work, Alvarez and Díaz develop counter-archives addressing the historic monumentality embedded in the "official" and "unofficial" histories of the Trujillato. Instead, they offer up a counter-archive that challenges Trujillo's legacy. In doing so, they begin the work of not only piecing together a more accurate national and transnational history, but they create a record of the impact of Trujillo on ordinary people. Developing this counter-archive requires an extrapolation of the histories embedded within the very silences maintained in both the "official" accounts and within personal families. From this point of origin, they use the imagination as a means of filling in the gaps while revealing the constructed nature of the "official" history. In doing so, they work to deconstruct the accounts that have long positioned Trujillo as a mythic figure. Finally, in arriving at a more comprehensive telling of the dictatorship and its contemporary manifestations their work examines the effect of history across generations and nations.

I employ the term transgenerational to reference the passing of silences, traumas, and accompanying historic experiences from one generation to another. More specifically, I suggest Alvarez and Díaz examine familial silences as a means of demonstrating the transgenerational and transnational nature of the history. In particular, their fiction and non-fiction work confirms the impact of the dictatorship on both the generation living under Trujillo and those that followed. Their work investigates Trujillo's impact on Dominican identity, as well as understandings of nation and community. In doing so, they take to task the "industry of Trujillo" that circulates in both "official" accounts and populist discourse. To be more specific, the populist discourse I'm referencing are the contemporary accounts of Trujillo that circulate as popular history in the Dominican Republic. More specifically, while researching his novel *The Brief Life*, Junot Díaz describes populist discourse as the street corner versions of Trujillian history that continue to situate the dictator as mythic figure. These histories appear to be a combination of "official" state rhetoric and narratives spun out of a culture of silence and fear. In response to these varying discourses, Alvarez and Díaz create a counter-archive that challenges the "official" and populist histories of Trujillo's reign and lasting impact.

In particular, they shed light on the continuation of Trujillian discourse at the cost of all others. Additionally, as diasporic writers, they challenge notions of national "authenticity" that police who can speak for and/or counter history. Each writer poses the argument that "as someone who had inherited the legacy of a [not so] distant and incomprehensible past," their work requires an unearthing of silences that highlight the relationship between history and the present moment (Hirsch 13). In doing so, they stake the claim that those in the Dominican diaspora are also intimately connected to these

histories, regardless of their positionality. Even further, they pose the argument that transgenerational and transnational silences contain rich histories that not only counter the “official” archive, but nuance the history itself.

This chapter examines how Alvarez’s and Díaz’s exploration of the “monumental silences” surrounding Trujillo speak resoundingly to the need for historiographies inclusive of transnational and transgenerational accounts because these particular narratives fill in the “silences, gaps, and páginas en blanco (blank pages) about Trujillo and the regimes lasting impact (Díaz 149). For both writers, familial silences, multiple accounts, and languages become starting points with which they delve further into the history and emotional experiences of the Trujillo regime. Their work of uncovering transgenerational silences leads to the creation of a counter-archive that directly challenges the existing “official” histories about Trujillo. This counter-archive is necessary for the generation that survived Trujillo, as well as those born after, as it denounces the atrocities committed by the dictatorship while drawing a clear relationship between the past and present moment.

While their counter-archives are not physically housed in an official location, they still operate as digital and physical repositories. This, of course, depends on the materials used to produce the counter-archive itself. To be clear, their collective works create counter-narratives of the Trujillo regime as each of the ephemeral and physical sources they produce counter the “official” and populist discourse orchestrated by the state. These counter-narratives assemble a counter-archive that directly challenges “official” historical accounts. I read these varied materials as tools used to address the limitation of the archive in the context of Trujillo and the state. I argue their body of texts challenge and

critique the ways in which the “official” history and populist rhetoric surrounding Trujillo has functioned “as records [wielding] power over the shape and direction of historical scholarship, collective memory, and national identity” (Schwartz and Cook 2). The work these authors engage in is part and parcel of larger counter-archival practices found within the fields of Caribbean and Postcolonial studies, fields that have long worked to compile materials and narratives that aim to reconstruct “. . . the creation of a historical consciousness, one that often stands in opposition to forms of state [colonial, neo-colonial and imperial] memory” (Thomas 28). Here, I’m suggesting their work adds to these counter-archival efforts by honing its focus on compiling a very specific counter-archive that traces the lineage of the Trujillo regime into the present moment. More specifically, while they may trace larger legacies of colonialism, imperialism, and neo-colonialism, their principal focus centers on producing counter-narratives and a larger counter-archive about the Trujillo dictatorship.

For Alvarez and Díaz, counter-archives challenge the failure of the Dominican national archives to record non-official accounts— let alone those that reflect the gendered, transnational, and transgenerational experiences and lasting impact of Trujillo’s legacy.² Through the inherited familial silences, gendered accounts, and postmemories of the dictatorship, Alvarez and Díaz construct counter-archives that challenge traditional historiographies. In particular, their use of the imagination problematizes the parameters defining what counts as appropriate narratives capable of recording historic events. Rather, as Appadurai suggests “. . . archives are not only about memory (and the trace or record) but about the work of the imagination, about some sort of social project” (5). For these authors, the imagination functions as an essential tool for

piecing together memories, for prying narratives from silence, and directly responding to the fictions that have circulated as “official” history. The imagination is a collective device used to counter what is missing and/or no longer exists. In addition to the use of the imagination, their counter-archives require a recognition of the constructed and fictitious nature of the “official” history. Here, their work strives to “make public memory, publicly” ... an act that makes “visible the extent to which national identities [national histories] are founded on archival elisions, distortions, and secrets” (Burton 2). A large component of this revelatory work requires the deconstruction of populist and “official” accounts that have mythologized Trujillo. Finally, as mentioned before, their project examines the transgenerational and transnational impact of the dictatorship on individuals and the present moment. Through the construction of a counter-archive, Alvarez and Díaz analyze the “magnitude of events as they happened and their relevance for the generations that inherit them through history” (Trouillot 16). This entire process begins with a hard examination of “how history works... through the production of specific narratives... that make some narratives possible and silences others” (Trouillot 25). More specifically, their counter-archive directly challenges the notion that the “official” history of Trujillo lacks mediation. Instead, their work exposes the very fictitious nature behind the history itself. In the process, their work attempts to record “cultural memory... [which requires] an act of imagination and interconnection” (Taylor 82).

To understand the omissions in the “official” archive, it is necessary to connect Trujillo’s legacy with the group of writers charged with shaping it. More specifically, one must look at the work of writers: Peña Batlle, Joaquín Balaguer, Incháustegui Cabral, and

Max Henríquez Ureña who, during and after the Trujillo regime, constructed the “official” archive. Further, Lorgia García- Peña’s *The Borders of Dominicanidad* (2016) calls attention to the aforementioned writers’ manipulation of “official” archives. In particular, she examines the role state figures such as Joaquín Balaguer played in creating a false narrative about historical events including the Parsley Massacre (1937)— a state-sponsored massacre bearing “no memorial sites, official commemorations, or state-sponsored efforts for peace and reconciliation of the victims and survivors” (García- Peña 14). Alvarez and Díaz are not the only writers who’ve engaged in the work of creating a counter-archive of the history about Trujillo regime.³ For example, historical and fiction texts have addressed the Trujillato, including those written during what López-Calvo termed “the Trujillo cycle,” a body of creative literature in Spanish that dealt with the Trujillo dictatorship.⁴ Additionally, the series of Dominican- and Haitian-American diasporic novels published between the late 1990s- early 2000s addressed the impact of Trujillo’s reign across diasporas.⁵

Writing from a transgenerational perspective allows Alvarez and Díaz the opportunity to recover accounts of those living during the regime, as well as the generation that came after. For example, both of their narratives attend to the accounts of family members forced to maintain quiet while living in a culture of state-enforced silence, the generation in which “historical withholding” was necessary for personal safety and survival (Hirsch 90). While silence was also used as a strategy of resistance for individuals like Juan Bosch and the Mirabal Sisters, those actively organizing against the Trujillo regime, Alvarez and Díaz demonstrate a concern with the overarching culture of silence Dominicans were forced to negotiation at home and in the diaspora. In nuancing

the complexity of silences, Alvarez and Díaz create a counter-archive that emphasizes the inter-generational affects and effects of Trujillo, while directly challenging notions of “authenticity” around who can recollect “official” histories. Their preoccupation with silence, as evidenced in Alvarez’s essays, stems from personal understandings of the narratives contained within the quiet as well as a direct awareness of the maneuvering required by families to keep silences in place. Additionally, their inquiries are motivated by a desire to know not only Dominican history, but the details behind the historic events that prompted migration out of the country.

Something to Declare

Perhaps because I was spared, at ten, from the dictatorship my parents endured most of their lives, I often imagine what it must have been like for them growing up under the absolute rule of Generalísimo Rafael Leonidas Trujillo.

—Julia Alvarez (*Something to Declare*)

Alvarez opens the essay “A Genetics of Justice” (1999) with the claim that she was “spared” from the Trujillo dictatorship, a deliberately ironic assertion considering she spends the remainder of the essay revealing the dictatorial trappings her entire family experienced pre- and post-diaspora. Instead, Alvarez’s collection of essays describes how her childhood in the Dominican Republic and adulthood in the United States was indelibly marked by the very dictatorship that forced her family to flee their country of origin. She also addresses the enforced public and private censorship that arose during Trujillo’s reign in order to draw a clear relationship between the silences in both the national archives and those kept at home. In doing so, Alvarez reveals the varied histories underlying the “official” and un-official *páginas en blanco* (blank pages) about the Trujillo regime.

Alvarez's essay collection, *Something to Declare* (1999) stakes a claim for the necessary creation of a counter-archival history of the Trujillo regime because encounters with this particular history span across generations, diasporas, and national boundaries. Her essays advocate for the inclusion of transgenerational and transnational accounts of the dictatorship arguing these narratives belong to the history itself. For Alvarez, uncovering familial silences, particularly women's accounts, leads to the documentation of a fuller national and transnational history about the Trujillato. A history inclusive of those voices most marginalized and deeply impacted by the culture of patriarchal violence part and parcel of the regime. Additionally, *Something to Declare* not only declares the need for a counter-archive, but functions as one itself. In pieces like "The Genetics of Justice," Alvarez constructs a counter-archive about this particular history that includes using the imagination to fill in missing accounts, revealing the "constructed" nature of the "official" history of Trujillo, deconstructing historic accounts that positioned Trujillo as a mythic figure, and, finally, examining the transgenerational and transnational impact of the regime's aftermath.

As Alvarez merges her mother's narrative with her own authorial imaginings, she illuminates the erasures in "official" histories regarding women's experiences of the dictatorship. In doing so, Alvarez points out the particular crimes women experienced, the relevant fears associated with those offenses, and the way in which anxieties about such illegalities transferred to the next generation. Alvarez's overall analysis of gendered experiences of the dictatorship leads to a larger understanding of the relationship between silence and Trujillo's legacy. More specifically, Alvarez's work draws a connection between the way in which silences, and silencing within the family, inadvertently led to

the reinforcement of the dictator's legacy across multiple generations. Finally, *Something to Declare* calls into question "official" histories that exclude transgenerational and transnational accounts. In particular, Alvarez's work criticizes questions over who has the "right" to author "national" histories. Here, her work is two-fold. First, she directly challenges the notion that the history of Trujillo is easily contained within national borders. Secondly, while insisting on the need for diasporic accounts of the regime, she furthers the argument that transgenerational and transnational voices are essential to the counter-archive. Alvarez's essays and Díaz's novel both suggest that the majority of those untold and/or "silenced" accounts are those contained within the diaspora. Thus, uncovering these particular silences will lead to a more nuanced account of the Trujillo dictatorship, as both authors assert that transgenerational and transnational diasporic authorship has the capacity to reveal both the erasure of certain voices as well as some of the evident links between the past and the present moment.

Alvarez's essays address the complicated nature of silences and *páginas en blanco* (blank pages). Silences are both state imposed and reinforced at home and in the diaspora. During the regime, silences protected families from direct violence. After Trujillo's death, silences inadvertently lead to a preservation of information about the dictatorship that obfuscates truth for mythical construction. The fear families feel, ascribed to the traumas experienced during the Trujillo reign, leads to emotional withholding and the silencing of their own children. Nonetheless, these silences are not just a legacy of the dictatorship, but they contain their own histories. For Alvarez, extricating histories from her family's silences proves a difficult task as her compulsion to tell often complicates her relationship to the narratives and her relationship with her

mother. For both Alvarez and Díaz, the work of uncovering and counter-archiving starts with the inclusion of gendered descriptions of the dictatorship. Women's narratives, in particular, ground the argument that the "silenced" accounts excised from "official" history offer a more complex understanding of historic actions and their present-day ramifications. These particular narratives provide a snapshot of familial relationships while revealing the generational impact of the regime. For Alvarez, uncovering these narratives requires a careful examination of the ways in which the Trujillo dictatorship had an effect on her childhood in the Dominican Republic and adulthood in the United States.

One of the first essays in the collection, "A Genetics of Justice", attends to the silences Alvarez's mother kept. Through the singular analysis of her mother's life, Alvarez highlights the manner in which silences, and the trauma associated with it become a longer legacy of the dictatorship. For Alvarez, examining the genesis of her mother's silence is a starting point for uncovering not only her family's, but her own history. In order to trace this lineage, she begins with an overview of her mother's lived experiences during and after the dictatorship. Here, Alvarez demonstrates how silences kept in the familial home often left her own mother unaware of Trujillo's impact:

My mother must have been intrigued. She knew nothing of the horrid crimes of the dictatorship, for her parents were afraid to say anything— even to their own children— against the regime. So, as a young girl, my mother must have thought of El Jefe as a kind of movie star. She must have wanted to meet the great man. (103-104)

The "intrigue" Alvarez imagines her mother feeling, similar to her own experience in the U.S., has everything to do with her grandparents' refusal to speak about the dictatorship. These silences indirectly reinforced the image upheld by the "official" archive and

populist discourse circulating at the time, imagery situating El Jefe as a monumental figure while obscuring the dictator's violent practices.

To be fair, the silences present in the homes of those living during Trujillo's reign was a direct result of the fear of the police state under which Dominican families lived. Wherein, families remained quiet about Trujillo as a means of protecting the young and ensuring the safety of the family at large. Unfortunately, actions intended to shield and ensure physical safety backfired in unforeseeable ways. In the case of Alvarez's mother, they contributed to a general curiosity and larger mythologizing of Trujillo:

Images of the dictator hung in every house next to the crucifix and la Virgencita with the declaration beneath: *In this house Trujillo is Chief*. The pale face of a young military man wearing a plumed bicorne hat and a gold-braided uniform looked down beneficently at my mother as she read her romantic novelas and dreamed of meeting the great love of her life. Sometimes in her daydreams, her great love wore the handsome young dictator's face. Never having seen him, my mother could not know the portrait was heavily retouched (104).

This mandated veneration of Trujillo situates him as both chief and celestial being. In this context, Trujillo is not only head of Dominican socio-political and religious realms, but also the master of Alvarez's mother's imagination. Trujillo, the heavily decorated, "young military man" becomes material for her mother's daydreams. The silence in the familial home reinforced this image, as it confined Trujillo's narrative to the portrait on the wall and the particular acts of enforced veneration. Documenting these silences becomes the crux of Alvarez's argument regarding the ways in which silences pass across generations and diasporas. In particular, Alvarez belabors the point that the traumas resulting from these mandated silences travel across generations and into the diaspora. These silences then led to practices that, at times, reinforced Trujillian discourse. In

particular, Alvarez highlights the ways in which the silences mandated in the diaspora enforced the policing of behavior.

Balancing a criticism of state-imposed silences alongside her family's own, Alvarez demonstrates the means by which the silences she experienced didn't just exist around historic events. Rather, she highlights how similar silences operated within the diaspora. From her recollection of the narrative of her family's escape to Trujillo's death or "*ajusticiamiento*, a bringing of justice," Alvarez documents the manner in which her parents "were still living in the dictatorship inside their own heads" at home in the United States (107). Recalling the mandate that "silence about anything 'political' was the rule in our house," Alvarez recalls her parents' residual fears when discussing Trujillo's reign before and after his death (Alvarez 108). Here, Alvarez pays particular attention to the physical and emotional legacy of Trujillo by highlighting the palpable fear individuals experienced, even while living miles away in the diaspora:

My mother, especially, lived in terror of the consequences of living as free citizens in New York City, before Trujillo was killed, Dominican exiles gathered around the young revolutionary Juan Bosch planning an invasion of the Island. Every time my father attended these meetings, my mother would get hysterical. If the SIM found out about my father's activities, family members remaining behind were likely to be in danger. Even our own family in New York could suffer consequences. (Alvarez 108-109)

Alvarez's mother's concern for her family's wellbeing, both in the United States and the Dominican Republic was not unfounded. For example, publications such as Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat* (2002) and Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life* (2007) speak in detail about Trujillo's involvement in the disappearance and presumed death of individuals like Jesús de Galíndez Suárez.⁶ However, as Alvarez indicates, living in a state of "terror of the consequences of living as free citizens" takes an emotional toll on

the entire family, both those living inside and outside of the Dominican Republic (Alvarez 108). For Alvarez, growing up, like her mother, meant knowing “very little about what was actually going on in the Dominican Republic. Whenever la situación (the situation) on the island came up, my parents spoke in hushed voices” (Alvarez 109). If it wasn’t hushed voices, Alvarez’s parents spoke in Spanish or in proverbs as additional ways of quieting what was happening. These strategies were used in order to ensure that the children couldn’t fully understand the meaning behind what was being said. For Alvarez, this meant her family used a language and history both foreign to her, as tools with which to obscure the dictatorship and its legacy. This silence, imposed linguistically and through adages, lead to a lack of clarity around her family’s own history as well as larger misunderstandings of national history. These absences in information provided the impetus for Alvarez’s creation of counter-narratives as her desire to know, propelled her to create a larger counter-archival project unpacking silence in order to reveal historical information.

When Alvarez finds the *Time* magazine containing information about the murder of the Mirabal sisters, her parents respond with the proverb: ““En boca cerrado no entran moscas,”” (No flies fly into a closed mouth (Alvarez 109). At the time, Alvarez’s parents’ proverbial response is untranslatable for Alvarez on multiple levels. At this age, Alvarez doesn’t understand the Spanish language enough to translate the saying. It isn’t until much later while researching for her novel *In the Time of the Butterflies*, that Alvarez discovers that “this very saying had been scratched on the lintel of the entrance of one of the SIM’s torture centers at La Cuarenta” (Alvarez 109). For Alvarez, Spanish functions as a coded and indecipherable language that her parents use in order to maintain silence

and any inquiries about the history itself. It is a language, like the history, that Alvarez must learn to decipher. The act of uncovering this particular history does not come without warning, as her parents' share the cryptic threat of what happens when one not only asks questions, but speaks up. Their response to her interest comes with the same threat of death the Trujillo regime used during the dictatorship. Here, Alvarez illuminates the manner in which her parents reinforce the fear and silence they experienced during the dictatorship, going as far as using the very language the dictator used to intimidate their children into silence.

Alvarez's struggle highlights the fundamental question Marianne Hirsch poses in her article "The Generation of Postmemory," "how can we best carry their stories forward without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves" (104). For Hirsch, this question applies to anyone doing the recovery work of speaking up as a member of the generation that came after a traumatic event, whether individuals who were born after the Holocaust, or "the decedents of survivors (of victims as well as perpetrators) of massive traumatic events" (Hirsch 105). For Hirsch, telling requires a navigation of one's own intergenerational experience of trauma with that of the experiences of the generation the author is speaking of and for. Hirsch's term "postmemory" encompasses an explanation of Alvarez's experience, while hinting at the difficulties involved when balancing the act of telling one's own story alongside others:

Postmemory describes the relationship that the generation after those who have witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experience of those who came before, experiences that they 'remember' only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. (Hirsch 106)

Alvarez's relationship to the historical cultural and collective trauma her parents experienced comes from these familial and national silences. Therefore, remembering her own history requires that she imagine a history based on what remains within those silences, in addition to her own postmemories. Furthermore, Alvarez must do this work while being mindful that her own experiences do not overshadow her mothers. For Alvarez's mother, the traumas she experienced frame her existence. Her traumas are intimate and create a set of parameters for how she navigates the world, as a child and a grown woman living in the diaspora.

Alvarez's counter-archive centers on telling women's narratives as these versions offer a particularly nuanced account of the dictatorship. Specifically, narratives like Alvarez's mother's call attention to "the patriarchal Trujillo regime and the nationalism it perpetrated" and the resulting sexual violence enacted on female bodies (Ink 790). For Alvarez, it is impossible to imagine her mother's life without considering the impact of Trujillo and the regimes predatory threat to women: "Respectable families such as hers kept their daughters out of the public eye, for Trujillo was known to have an appetite for pretty girls, and once his eye was caught, there was no refusing him" (Alvarez 103). While her novel *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) provides a fictionalized gendered account of a Mirabal sister during Trujillo's reign, her essay "A Genetics of Justice" points to the way in which "ordinary" women, like her mother, were vulnerable to the sexual violence perpetrated during the regime.

Piecing together a narrative from the information her mother shared with her, alongside her own imagination, Alvarez creates a counter-archive of familial and national history that speaks back to a historic event in which citizens, women in particular, had to

pay tribute to Trujillo. In doing so, Alvarez not only create a counter-narrative of the event, but she also reveals the manner in which the “official” history of Trujillo continues to circulate.

Periodically, Trujillo would demand a tribute, and they would acquiesce. A tax, a dummy vote, a portrait on the wall. To my father and the other men in the country, the most humiliating of these tributes was the occasional parade in which women were made to march and turn their heads and acknowledge the great man as they passed the review stand. (Alvarez 106)

Alvarez’s reimagined moment highlights the different ways dictatorial and state oppression manifested vis-à-vis gender, as the female body was the ultimate token of forced homage paid to the nation. Alvarez highlights how the state and Trujillo’s own rhetoric constructed and policed norms of gender, nation, and heteronormativity. More specifically, the tribute demanded a forced veneration by women. This act not only robbed women of their own agency, but positioned their bodies as an object of/for the state. Simultaneously, this enforced veneration exemplified assumptions about heteronormativity and the institution of the family. Here, Alvarez illustrates the ways in which this act humiliated “my father and the other men in the country,” she draws attention to the objectification of women’s’ bodies in which they were not only used as an offering, but positioned as the possession of their fathers, husbands, and the state (106).

Alvarez combines the minute details her mother shared with her own imagined counter-narrative of the historic event. She depicts her mother’s physical exhaustion from being in the hot sun, “my mother was sure she was going to faint. Her feet were swollen and hurting. The back of her white dress was damp with sweat” (106). As her mother trudges toward the grandstand she envisions “a clutter of dress uniforms [and] a vague

figure on the podium” (106). Alvarez’s mother’s envisioned description of Trujillo as a “vague figure” is essential to a critical re-reading and counter-narrative that directly challenges the mythological status the dictator constructed and actively maintained. Reading Trujillo’s figure as “vague,” or indistinct from the rest of the men in uniforms is an important moment, as this is the first time her mother truly sees the man who has dominated her imagination since childhood. In this instance, Trujillo is no longer the flawless image hanging on the wall. Rather, his “real” image counters all of the romanticized versions of the dictator her mother had been force-fed since childhood. Offering this detail is no small act, for it symbolizes a break from her mother’s overall silence about the dictatorship. Her description of Trujillo as a vague figure directly counters all of the state discourse and ideology that positioned the dictator as mythic.

Taking her mother’s imagined account further, Alvarez adds in a scene in which she builds upon her mother’s statements:

My mother walks into El Jefe’s line of vision, the parade stops... Under her breath, my mother is cursing this monster who drags thousands of women out on the hot streets to venerate him. She looks up at him, and what she sees makes it all worthwhile, somehow. (Alvarez 106-107)

In this reimagined version of history, two important things happen. First, as Lynn Chun Ink suggests, Alvarez “[invalidates] the erasure of women’s national agency in history” (793). Instead, Alvarez includes her mother’s own commentary within this counter-narrative. In this moment, Alvarez’s mother actively resists the required national allegiance of turning a blind eye to the real Trujillo. Instead, she curses him, under her breath, for the absurdity of his forced veneration. Secondly, when she looks up at Trujillo, she sees the man for who he is. For the first time, she is able to see beyond the

national narrative and populist discourse that has positioned him as a mythological giant. Here, Trujillo is no longer the icon on the wall in the family home. Rather, Alvarez's mother witnesses the truth of Trujillo in real-time. Decked out in his regalia, hiding his short stature with platform shoes and his Haitian ethnicity with pancake makeup, Trujillo stands before Alvarez's mother as a man, no longer a myth. Moreover, he is a man "coming undone," gripping onto the last remnants of his reign as dictator (Alvarez 107). Alvarez concludes this retelling with the following statement, "It was the one and only time that my mother saw, up close, the man who had ruled her imagination most of her life" (Alvarez 107).

While the counter-narrative Alvarez constructs is extremely important, it is not without complications. The excerpt above is a clear instance where Alvarez struggles with the limitations of postmemory. While, on the one hand, she drafts a counter-narrative that inserts her mother's account into history, she simultaneously struggles to find a balance between writing this version and maintaining an empathic understanding of the difficulties her mother experienced. Her compulsion to produce a counter-archive of the history often overshadows concerns for her family's well-being. In particular, her desire for her mother to "see" the dictator is not only forceful but potentially a re-traumatizing action for anyone whose spent their entire life living under dictatorial rule. Similarly, going ahead and publishing the novel and this collection of essays forced her mother to read the truth of a history she has spent her life trying to avoid. These actions beg the question of how much agency Alvarez's mother really has within Alvarez's counter-narrative? Even further, this excerpt clarifies Alvarez's struggle to construct a collective counter-archive that is mindful of individual agency and emotional reactions.

For Alvarez, writing down her mother's narrative becomes a starting point for building a counter-archive that offers a more nuanced account of the regime. While adding to her mother's account, Alvarez addresses the constructed nature of the "official" history and deconstructs the notion of Trujillo as mythic. Additionally, Alvarez uses this counter-narrative to tease out the way in which Trujillo's legacy impacts her own life. While Alvarez fundamentally understands the importance of creating a counter-archive, she struggles in finding a balance between sharing familial stories alongside her own. This balancing act requires her own self-awareness of the fact that she is far enough removed in the diaspora, and the contemporary moment, to not feel the direct threat of the actual dictatorship. The difficulty Alvarez faces has to do with navigating her family and her own emotional terrain, a task complicated by the fact that her compulsion to engage in this recuperative work directly impacts not only her family, but the nation and beyond. This work poses an extremely challenging problem for Alvarez considering the only other option is to continue "trawling in silences" (Díaz 243).

Ultimately, Alvarez's parents' response to her work is indicative of the need for transgenerational accounts, counter-narratives and a counter-archive, as their own familial silence elides the gaps between personal and national history. Again, to be fair, the silence they operated in was one of sheer necessity as a means of survival. Unfortunately, as Alvarez's non-fiction highlights, this tactic follows her parents into the diaspora which inadvertently enforces silence upon the subsequent generations. Alvarez's mother's account creates an entry point for the author to engage in the work of counter-archive building.

When reading Junot Díaz's novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* in tandem with Alvarez's essays, it is clear that Díaz is also interested in building a counter-archival history of the Trujillo dictatorship. In interviews discussing the novel, Díaz talks about the importance of uncovering familial silences as a method for revealing a larger history of the Trujillato. Like Alvarez, Díaz frames this discovery process through the narrative of a fictional mother, tracing her experiences of the dictatorship across generation and the diaspora. Additionally, Díaz explores post-memory and the accompanying traumas as a direct result of the gendered experience of the dictatorship. Finally, like Alvarez, he highlights the manner in which silences transfer, while examining the mythologizing of Trujillo in relationship to current narratives about the dictatorship.

Although Alvarez and Díaz share similar concerns and motivations for scripting counter-narratives, the genre of fiction affords Díaz the space to engage in this work without some of the challenges Alvarez faces. Namely, he is able to script counter-narratives without the complications that arise when including intimate, personal narratives about one's family. To be fair, I'm not suggesting Díaz is personally removed from the traumas or postmemories Alvarez articulates, rather fiction creates a safeguard wherein Díaz can engage in similar work. Throughout the novel, Díaz avoids the pitfalls involved when counter-archiving postmemories and traumas across generations and diasporas, via the "real" family. Through fiction, Díaz initiates counter-archival work sans the concerns and fears of actual family members.

While both authors apply similar approaches and themes when creating counter-narratives and arrive at similar conclusions regarding the necessity for doing counter-

archival work, Díaz's novel offers some important counterpoints. For example, Díaz highlights the requirement of using various languages and dialects in order to piece together a history that is characteristically unimaginable. In doing so, he teases out the relationship between vernacular language and engagement. His emphasis on the inclusion of multiple languages bolsters the larger argument that many stories remain to be told. Additionally, he directly challenges the heroic notion that one person can "reclaim" the Dominican imaginary, an impulse Alvarez struggles with in her non-fiction essays. Finally, in filling in the *páginas en blanco*, (blank pages) of history, he takes on the unthinkable task of calling out the ways in which ordinary citizens were not only compliant with the dictator's crimes, but collusive. His criticism of the Chivato "rat or snitch" nation spawned by the Trujillo's regime is something he bookends in *The Brief Wondrous Life*, when Lola's character arrives at the conclusion that "Ten million Trujillos is all we are" (Díaz 324).

The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao

I think it's the job of a writer to enter into those silences. So, when I entered into the silences of my family, what I found was that in every silence there was the stain of Trujillo.

— Junot Díaz (Obejas 44)

In his interview with Cuban-American writer Achy Obejas, "A Conversation with Junot Díaz," (2009) Díaz discusses the genesis for his novel *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2008). He outlines the novel's thematic concern with the silences surrounding the Rafael Leonidas Trujillo dictatorship. As a Dominican-American writer living in the United States after the "thirty-one years under Trujillo's ironclad rule," Díaz

defines silence as a starting point for both the novel and a transnational analysis of Trujillo's legacy (*The Brief Wondrous Life* 80). When asked about his choice to write about the Trujillato in Obejas's interview, Díaz responds:

Although I didn't live through the Trujillo dictatorship, the trauma of that dictatorship survived Mr. Trujillo. . . being Dominican, from that generation, means that that history, more or less forgotten, remains alive. It's in the air, its alive under those silences . . . You become aware that there are certain silences in the family, that there's a silence at the cultural and social level . . . you realize under everything there is a very powerful history that still has an impact. (Obejas 44-45)

Like Alvarez's essay collection, Díaz's novel echoes similar sentiments about the imposition of silence during the dictatorship. Additionally, Díaz raises concern with the fact that these silences carryover into the diaspora. Further still, as the novel reveals, the reticence to speak about this particular history continues to leave a deep impression on current generations. In the novel, exposing silences in the family and at the cultural and social level becomes the means through which Díaz connects historic events with personal histories. For Díaz, creating a fictional counter-archive, like Alvarez's non-fiction, begins by examining the silences in the family.

In his novel, the first step in counter-archiving involves culling together any and all accounts embedded in the cultural, familial, and societal silences he references. These narratives include multiple dialects and languages. Here, Spanish and Spanglish feature prominently throughout the novel and play an enormous role in piecing together a counter-archive. Instead of a language used to obfuscate truth, as in Alvarez's family home, Spanish becomes one of many languages used to create counter-narratives about Trujillo. Spanish, in addition to the other vernacular languages operating in the novel, represent the multiple experiences of the dictatorship, and function as tools with which

communities critiqued, challenged, and spoke about the dictatorship. Maria Lauret suggests that in order for Díaz to tell the entire Cabral story he must use a “translingual mix of sci-fi, Spanish, Elvish, and English” (495). Lauret describes Yuniór’s voice as polyphonic “translingual, *transnational*” (Emphasis in original, 495). Language, for Díaz, whether invented, hybridized, or vernacular requires decoding on behalf of all readers—a decoding that ultimately gives voice to meaning. Rachel Norman argues Díaz’s “linguistic assemblage [creates]. . . moments of unintelligibility. . . for nearly all readers” (34). Díaz’s use of language creates an analogy between language and the silences he and Alvarez address. Creating a counter-archive that focuses on “translingualism” furthers the overall argument regarding Trujillo’s transgenerational and transnational impact. More specifically, Díaz’s fictional account is pieced together through multiple linguistic accounts and registers. And, rather than offering a single narrative of history, his novel highlights the necessity for including multiple accounts in order to capture a fuller history. Here, Díaz challenges the sentiment present in Alvarez’s non-fiction essays that one person can legitimately reclaim the Dominican imaginary. Instead, he pushes forth the argument that it is a history of many, one that requires multiple imaginings in order to compile a comprehensive account.

In addition to calling attention to the necessary inclusion of multilingual and multi-perspective accounts, Díaz speaks to the incomprehensible nature of the history of the Trujillo dictatorship itself. More specifically, he points to the unimaginable atrocities committed, and suggests that recovery requires multiple languages to not only decipher the silences, but to attempt to make sense of the overall history. For example, when introducing the reader to the Fukú, “the Curse and the Doom of the New World”—i.e.,

colonization and the Transatlantic slave trade—Díaz employs multiple languages: Spanglish, Spanish and “Science Fiction” to describe the history that spawned the dictatorship (1). For Díaz a counter-archive of this magnitude recovers silences through an inclusion of multiple-accounts, languages, and registers that require the reader to feel some of the pandemonium of the actual history. In addition to language, Díaz pushes against form to incorporate footnotes that employ a traditional mode of recording history in order to further his counter-archival efforts.

In direct contrast to the “official” archive, Díaz’s *The Brief Life of Oscar Wao* is anything but silent. Whether calling out figures like Joaquín Balaguer and Johnny Abbes García, head of Trujillo’s SIM (secret police), or taking on the mythological representation of Trujillo, the novel deconstructs contemporary histories about the regime. Through the main character, Oscar de León, and the narrator Yunior, Díaz outlines the process involved in challenging national history from the vantage point of familial stories in the diaspora. In doing so, he illustrates the means by which the past continues to impact the present, particularly through the unworked traumas that undergird individuals’ experiences of history.

Like Alvarez’s non-fiction, Díaz’s novel hones in on gendered narratives as a means of fleshing out a counter-archival history of the Trujillato. More specifically, the main character’s fate relates directly to his mother’s past transgressions and the historic traumas she’s experienced at the hand of the dictatorship. In order to fundamentally understand his mother, and the trauma she carries into the diaspora, Oscar travels to the Dominican Republic to recover and document his mother’s personal history in order to make sense of his own. As Oscar discovers his mother’s traumatic past, it becomes clear

to the reader that her inability to work through the monumental silences of her past impacts her relationships with her son and daughter. Moreover, her traumas and their continued impact affect Oscar to the extent that they define his own fate as his deep search for love —something his mother is unable to give him— sends him to die in the same cane field in which his mother was abandoned a decade earlier.

Oscar as narrator/writer and archivist attempts to make sense of his own history by piecing together what he can of his family's. Wading through his mother's silences he:

Struggles and experiments with *how* best to accomplish his task because in the process of his research, as he attempts to uncover both the story of the family and the history of the nation, he is continuously confronted with silences, gaps, and 'páginas en blanco' left by the Trujillo regime. (Hanna 498)

The blank pages Oscar references and the silences he encounters at every turn, highlight how not only the historic archives omitted vital information about Trujillo, but also the degree to which personal, familial histories about the dictator are missing. Oscar quickly realizes that he can't always uncover what history and individuals refuse to speak about, so, like Díaz himself, Oscar must use his imagination to write his counter-archive. In the process, he encounters Trujillo's lasting political and discursive legacies alive and well in the contemporary moment. For even while residing in the diaspora, Oscar finds it extremely difficult, if not impossible, to get a clear understanding of his mother's personal history and its relationship to the national history surrounding the dictator. Moreover, his character struggles with the inability to reconcile these two histories as his own, a conflict throughout the novel that in many ways leads to his own demise.

The novel, marked with generational and transgenerational silences, simultaneously pieces together several counter-narratives: the Cabral family history, the

“official discourse on Trujillo”, the history of the fukú, i.e., the colonial and neo-colonial history of the Caribbean. Each account includes examples that indicate the destructive impact of silence across generations. Additionally, the novel’s use of marginalia and footnotes intertwine fictionalized “formal” history with personal histories that directly challenge the mythologies about Trujillo and the populist discourse surrounding him. Overall, the novel critiques the failing of nationalist, historic constructions to consider the full expanse of history across borders and national affiliations, while simultaneously calling for an awareness of the contemporary impact of the history itself.

To frame his critique of the “official” archive, Díaz begins the novel with a prologue in which Yunió explores a history full of erasures, the transatlantic slave trade and subsequent colonization and neo-colonization of the Caribbean. Díaz frames his own counter-archive of the Trujillo dictatorship on the understanding that Trujillo’s history is directly related to the transgenerational and transnational history of the fukú. Díaz uses the term “*Fukú americanus*, or more colloquially, fukú, [as] a curse or a doom of some kind, specifically the Curse and the Doom of the New World” as the framing motif of the entire novel (Díaz 1). The fukú is the central thread connecting the novel as it illustrates the relationship between colonization, neo-colonization, the Trujillo dictatorship, and the de León-Cabral family in the Dominican Republic and the United States. In many ways, the imagined *fukú americanus* is the paramount counter-archive, as it draws a continuous relationship between the colonization of the Americas, the transatlantic slave trade, the Trujillo dictatorship, and the present moment. As a counter-archive, the fukú circulates as a larger counter-narrative to the imperial histories about this particular region and the Caribbean as a whole:

They say it came from Africa, carried in the screams of the enslaved; that it was the death bane of the Tainos, uttered just as one world perished and another began; that it was a demon drawn into Creation through the nightmare door that was cracked open in the Antilles. Also called the fukú of the Admiral because the Admiral was both its midwife and one of its great European victims. (Díaz 1)

For Yunior, the fukú is both “a curse or a doom of some kind” and a counter-archive used to describe these histories (Díaz 1). Highlighting the screams and cries on the slave ships that traversed the Middle Passage, Yunior transcribes a historic narrative that documents the nightmarish atrocities that came alongside Christopher Columbus’s “discovery” of the New World—including, the decimation of native Taínos and the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. For the novel, the fukú functions as the throughline connecting historic legacies to the present moment. Simultaneously, the fukú is the referent for how individuals and communities make sense of the aftermath of inconceivable histories that continue to inform the present day. Finally, when translated as the vernacular “fuck you, America,” it reads as an act of resistance calling out national and transnational histories that refute the connection between these larger systemic histories and the present moment.

But the fukú ain’t just ancient history, a ghost from the past with no power to scare. In my parents’ day the fukú was real as shit, something your everyday person could believe in. Everybody knew someone who’d been eaten by a fukú... Our then dictator-for-life Rafael Leónidas Trujillo Molina. No one knows whether Trujillo was the Curse’s servant or its master, its agent or its principal, but it was clear he and it had an understanding, that them two was tight. (Díaz 2-3)

Connecting the past history of colonial legacies to the present moment is simple for the narrator of the prologue, as historicity starts and ends with the Trujillato. While the fukú may take on multiple manifestations, it is clear that the most significant curse in the novel is the dictator-for-life Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina. While Trujillo’s reign is a result of European colonization and the various U.S. interventions on the island, the novel

concerns itself with Trujillo's current legacy. As a member of the generation after Trujillo, all Oscar knows is this legacy. He experiences it in his mother's silence, the relational dynamic between her and her children, and in the act of making sense of his own life. Similar to Julia Alvarez's non-fictional experiences of familial silences, Oscar's fictional life is heavily informed by his mother's direct experiences and his own postmemories of the dictatorship.

In the article, "Coding the Immigrant Experience," Fremio Sepulveda suggests the fukú curse illustrates how the people of the Caribbean have used folk stories and legends in order to construe and explicate the[se] history [ies]" (22). Thus, the fukú, passed generationally through folk stories and legends becomes a vernacular code through which each character not only makes sense of their life in relationship to history, but it frames the language with which people speak about the actual events. Jennifer Harford Vargas suggests the fukú is the "local folk hermeneutic for reading relations of domination in the Americas" (9-10). Here, I add that the fukú becomes the mode through which people not only interpreted historic relationships, but, most importantly, *talk(ed)* about them. While I agree with critics like Fremio Sepulveda and Monica Hanna who suggest the central concerns of the novel include: "criticiz[ing] accepted histories, reconceptualiz[ing] history, [and] break[ing] the cycle of tyranny by reinserting memory against historical forgetting," I'm suggesting the novel engages in such work by investigating the silences that surround these particular histories in order to create a counter-archive (Hanna 516). More specifically, for both Alvarez and Díaz, much of the act of "reconceptualizing... [and] breaking the cycle of [the] tyranny [of the dictator and that of silence]" starts with an investigation of those very silences through the reimagining of events in order to offer

a fuller account of history (Hanna 516). Thus, the *fukú* in the novel functions as a frame for the larger argument I make regarding the transgenerational need to offer historic accounts, including those coded in silence, spoken in Spanish, or passed along in memories to the next generation.

The *fukú* functions as an origin story of colonization that carries through to the current day. As Jennifer Harford Vargas suggests:

Tracing the *fukú americanus* through the de León-Cabral family, the novel's structure suggests that understanding Oscar's life requires a transgenerational family story and a trans-American story, just as understanding Trujillo's reign requires remembering the colonial past and recognizing contemporary dictatorial relations. (Vargas 15)

The *fukú americanus* is not only the "Ground Zero of the New World" but the ground zero for how one begins to make sense of the relationship between history, nation, state, diaspora, and self (1). The *fukú* is a "folk hermeneutic" that allows individuals the opportunity to make sense of and speak to previously unspeakable histories (Vargas 15). It is the counter-archive to the "official" history of colonization.

Once Díaz establishes the lineage between the *fukú*, Trujillo, and the de León-Cabral family, he delves into a closer analysis of the individual lives impacted by this larger history. Here, Díaz introduces the reader to the latest generation of the de León-Cabral family, Oscar, and Lola. The two Dominican-American children of Beli Cabral, whom initially appear twice removed from the generation that directly experienced the Trujillato. At first glance, the characters read as two Dominican-American teenagers from New Jersey trying to make sense of themselves and their mother's illness. In the beginning of the novel they are unaware of the way in which their personal narratives

connect to their mother's traumas. Alas, like the fukú, their entire lives are shaped by the Trujillo regime:

Before there was an American Story, before Paterson spread before Oscar and Lola like a dream, or the trumpets from the Island of our eviction had even sounded, there was their mother, Hypatía Belicia Cabral. (77)

Prior to even telling Hypatía, or Beli's story, Díaz sets the reader up to understand the ways in which Oscar and Lola's mother's story fundamentally informs their own. In fact, their own stories are inseparable from Beli's history. In Díaz's novel, there is a fundamental respect for the importance and necessity of Beli's story— one that appears to be lacking, at various moments, in Alvarez's essay collection. While both genres share the general understanding of the importance of collecting and counter-archiving these particular accounts, Díaz's novel lacks the incredulous tone present in Alvarez's essay. This is an additional example wherein writing a counter-archive through fiction creates a situational remove in which Díaz is speaking about a fictional family, not his own.

Beli's parents, rumored to have been killed by Trujillo for transgressing, "saying a bad thing" about El Jefe, abandons her to a series of abusive foster families. She became an "orphaned girl [left in the hands of a family of] monstrous people if the rumors are to be believed, a dark period of her life neither she nor her madre ever referenced" (78). The police state surrounding the Trujillo regime ruins Beli's early life. As she matures, Beli's body becomes the territory on which the dictatorship enforces racist and sexist rhetoric and violence. Like Alvarez's mother and the forced tribute to Trujillo, Beli's body also serves as the space upon which state and national ideologies become scripted.

Rescued by extended family, Beli's life becomes tranquil for a short period of time. Until her teen years, when she is full of the restless desire to escape her past and

present, “Beli had the inchoate longings of nearly every adolescent escapist, of an entire generation” to escape the island (80). Unfortunately, as the narrator suggests, the desire to escape was dangerous, as “no amount of wishful thinking was changing the cold hard fact that she was a teenage girl living in the Dominican Republic of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo Molina, the Dictatingest Dictator who ever Dictated. This was a country, a society, that had been designed to be virtually escape-proof. Alcatraz of the Antilles” (80). For Belí, like the rest of her generation, there appears to be no escape from the dictatorship. More specifically, there is no respite from the impending gendered violence she faces as a woman.

In an attempt to save Belí, after an affair with one of Trujillo’s henchmen results in “. . . the sort of beating that breaks people, breaks them utterly,” La Inca ships her off to the United States (147). Unfortunately, Belí’s inability to come to terms with the extreme traumas she experienced, compounded by her migration to the U.S. at a young age, frame her incapacity to provide her children with the emotional support they need. When Lola and Oscar finally learn of their mother’s story, it is too late. Belí is on her deathbed and Lola is alone with the loss and silence that remains. Lola’s character does not understand her mother’s losses to the same extent as Oscar because she doesn’t know the full story. Instead, Lola must deal without any explanation of her mother’s silences. For the narrator, understanding Belí’s story is paramount to comprehending the present moment. For it is only through the recollection of Belí’s narrative that the reader may begin to understand Oscar’s compulsion to write her history and that of the family.

Alongside the familial history, the novel reconstructs a counter-archive of the Trujillato embedded within the margins. More specifically, Díaz uses the marginalia in

the novel to create a counter-archive of the “official,” national narrative. In the space of the margins, Díaz articulates a revised history of Trujillo that directly connects the family and the present moment to the legacy of the dictatorship. The footnotes in the novel become the location in which the national archive is supplanted with a narrative that grapples with the absurdity and silence surrounding the “official” history. Additionally, marginalia in the novel becomes the means through which Díaz fills in the national history relative to each character’s life: “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 1930-1961 with an implacable ruthless brutality” (Díaz 2). For Díaz, it’s not enough to just restate the ruthless brutality accompanying Trujillo’s reign, rather he makes it a point to connect that violence to peoples’ individual lives. More specifically, he makes a clear argument about the ways in which the Trujillo’s dictatorship didn’t stop at the borders of the Dominican Republic, nor within his own generation. Díaz’s counter-archive doesn’t stop with the basic facts about the dictatorship either. Rather, the footnotes become the place for him to articulate a critique of the history while revealing its co-relationship to the various silences kept, both in the family and in the national archive.

Díaz deconstructs the mythic narrative promulgated about Trujillo— during and after his reign. Instead of the usual pomp and circumstance ascribed to Trujillo’s legacy, Díaz reveals the dictator as the:

Portly, sadistic, pig-eyed mulatto 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. (Díaz 2)

Díaz's depiction of Trujillo directly challenges state constructions and myths surrounding the dictator. Instead, his account exposes Trujillo's image as a social construction, revealing the cruel dictator as part of a larger system. Díaz's counter-archive highlights "a personaje (character) so outlandish, so perverse, so dreadful that not even a sci-fi writer could have made his ass up" (Díaz 2). While satire is often at play in the novel and the footnotes, Díaz argues that the unimaginable history surrounding Trujillo was real, and that he, in fact, did exist in all of his brutality.

Similar to the excerpt in Alvarez's essay in which she imagines her mother seeing Trujillo for the first time, Díaz also engages in the act of uncovering Trujillo, both the man and the myth. This trope of revealing the truth about the dictator plays an important role in deconstructing the mythologized version of Trujillo so readily a part of the "official" archive. Additionally, as Díaz suggests in his interview with Achy Obejas, this constructed myth of the dictator still exists in the present day. Díaz lists the items Trujillo was responsible for, "outstanding accomplishments include: the 1937 genocide against the Haitian and Haitian-Dominican community; one of the longest, most damaging U.S. backed dictatorships in the Western Hemisphere" (Díaz 3). In his accounting of Trujillo's actions, Díaz calls attention to all of the national and transnational structures that not only supported Trujillo, but kept his dictatorship in place. However, the ultimate legacy Díaz's counter-archive attempts to connect is the relationship between Trujillo and the generations of people impacted in the present moment.

In some ways living in Santo Domingo during the Trujillato was a lot like being in the famous *Twilight Zone* episode that Oscar loved so much. . . Between 1930 (when the Failed Cattle Thief seized power) and 1961 (the year he got blazed) . . .

it would be hard to exaggerate the power Trujillo exerted over the Dominican people and the shadow of fear he cast throughout the region; not only did he lock the country away from the rest of the world, isolate it behind the Plátano Curtain, he acted like it was his very own plantation; he had a Secret Police that out-Stasi'd the Stasi, that kept watch on everyone, even those everyones who lived in the States. (224)

Díaz uses Oscar's narrative as a means of highlighting the connection between the past and the present. For Oscar, without any prior knowledge of his mother's story the Trujillato would understandably appear like an episode out of the *Twilight Zone*. Without Beli's story, Oscar has no context to truly understand the power of suppression, silence, and fear at work during, and, as in Alvarez's family's case, after Trujillo's reign. While Oscar has his own postmemories, he needs his mother's story to fully flesh out the fundamental madness underlying the history itself. The relationship Díaz draws between the *Twilight Zone* and the dictatorship is only one point of reference he employs. He simultaneously illustrates the connection between Trujillo's reign and a slave plantation in order to illuminate the connection between the fukú and the dictator. The Plátano Curtain under Trujillo's rule, mimicked systems of the past like the transatlantic slave trade, Columbus's colonization of the Caribbean, and the United States' multiple imperial interventions in the D.R. The point Díaz emphasizes is the need to move away from narratives of Trujillo as an incomprehensible individual, to consider the longer legacy to which he belongs.

Díaz's critical analysis doesn't stop with Trujillo. He also points out the collusion of the state via Trujillo's henchmen, the Secret Police who did his biddings.

It wasn't just Mr. Friday the Thirteenth you had to worry about, either, it was the whole Chivato Nation he helped spawn, for like every Dark Lord worth his Shadow he had his devotion of people. It was widely believed that at any one time

between forty-two and eighty-seven percent of the Dominican population was on the Secret Police's payroll (Díaz 224-226).

Here, Díaz does the work of calling out the collusion of state institutions and the everyday people living under the Trujillo regime. After highlighting the role of the state and the Secret Police, Díaz narrows his retelling on what he calls the “devotion of people” who assisted Trujillo's efforts (Díaz 225). Díaz intimates not only the role of silence in continuing the work of Trujillo, but that of speaking on or about one (snitching or ratting) another as a measure of maintaining good standing with the dictatorship. More specifically, Díaz illustrates the role surveillance of self and other played in assuring the nation's alignment with Trujillo. He also suggests this type of supervision functioned in the diaspora as well. A self-supervision that mirrors what Alvarez discussed in her essays about not only the silence surrounding political discussions, but the use of Trujillian discourse “ ‘En boca cerrado no entran moscas,’ ” (No flies fly into a closed mouth) to silence questions (Alvarez 109).

Díaz's counter-archive of Trujillo doesn't just address the “official” history, or lack thereof, and the embellishments the state circulated about the dictator. Instead, his novel works to piece together the transgenerational relationship between historic actions and events that culminate in the rise and maintenance of Trujillian culture. For Díaz this requires investigating the silences in the family because they tie directly back to not only the dictator himself, but all of the collusive forces at play that allowed for his rise to power.

What's certain is that nothing's certain. We are trawling in silence here. Trujillo and Company didn't leave a paper trail— they didn't share their German contemporaries' lust for documentation. And it's not like the fukú itself would leave a memoir or anything. (Díaz 243)

Yunior sums up the power of such silences in his concluding statement that “we are trawling in silences here” (243). More specifically, without counter-narratives and the larger project of the counter-archive, there is nothing.

The counter-archive Díaz constructs in the novel engages in work similar to Julia Alvarez’s non-fiction essays. More specifically, there is a clear relationship between Alvarez and Díaz works to build a counter-archive documenting the role of historic relationships in the present moment. From the fukú through the Trujillo dictatorship, Díaz illustrates the relationship between familial history and “official” narratives that circulate in the state and nation. He raises similar concerns including the impact of the collusive efforts of families maintaining silence in the diaspora. Here, both authors highlight the role of the surveillance of self and other, in the family, and the nation and diaspora as mechanisms during and after the dictatorship. Regardless of the intent, enforcing these silences had disastrous consequences for those who experienced traumas firsthand and through postmemory. The fictional counter-archive Díaz creates calls attention to the impact of such actions. Like Alvarez, he examines both the silences in official narratives as well as those found in the family.

Díaz’s use of fiction provides him some leeway, as his critique takes aim at fictional characters instead of his own family. Unlike Alvarez’s non-fiction, Díaz’s criticism is more insistent, especially when it comes to the notion of complicity. In many ways, the genre of fiction creates the space for Díaz to abstract the notion of personal accountability, due to the fact that he is referencing fictional characters. Nonetheless, his novel emphasizes the importance of such critical work as necessary to the creation of a counter-archive. Additionally, his use of satire in the novel becomes a means through

which Díaz deconstructs the myth of Trujillo while pointing out the sheer absurdities within the “official” history itself.

Central to both Julia Alvarez’s collection of essays and Junot Díaz’s *The Brief Life* is the concern with creating counter-narratives that challenge and reconstruct the history of the Trujillo regime. Namely, through unpacking the transgenerational silences inherited in the diaspora, they each raise the point that a counter-archive to the “official” archive about Trujillo must necessarily be inclusive of transnational, transgenerational accounts, due to the far-reaching impact of the regime. In an interview with Edwidge Danticat, Junot Díaz succinctly sums up the dictator’s influence:

I don’t think there’s a Dominican writer, past or present, who’s matched the awful narrative puissance that Trujillo marshalled; his ‘work’ deformed, captured, organized us as Dominicans in ways we can barely understand, and his ‘work’ has certainly outlasted his physical existence. (Danticat “Junot Díaz”)

Reading Alvarez’s non-fiction essays, *Something to Declare* and Díaz’s novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life* together demonstrates the necessary inclusion of both genres when building counter-archives about this particular history. While each genre has its own merits and complications, both are necessary tools used to locate the histories contained within silences. Analyzing both texts together affords the opportunity to examine the advantages/disadvantages of writing a counter-archive through different genres. In Alvarez’s essays, there are clear moments where her commitment to documenting “silenced” accounts is complicated by the fact that her case study is her own family. For example, when re-imagining her mother’s account as a means of counter-archiving a historic moment, Alvarez falls into the trap of speaking up for her mother in haphazard ways. Further, interpreting Díaz’s novel as counter-archival poses the larger

question of whether or not fiction is an “appropriate” archival document. This question poses an interesting quandary, considering the “official” history of the Trujillato has relied heavily, if not entirely, on fictitious information. What is most important about both texts is the counter-archival work they do “in producing a new form of archive, one that slips the bounds of state control, abetted by a very different type of archon” (Brozgal 35).

In the following chapter, “Counter-Archives of Shared Histories: *Testimonio*, the Repertoire, and Transnational Voices,” I will extend Alvarez and Díaz’s examination of the histories contained within familial silences to look at the role of *testimonio* in recording counter-archives. Here, I will build upon the argument that the history surrounding the Trujillo regime, in particular the 1937 Parsley Massacre, is a transnational and transgenerational history. Through a close reading of Julia Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies* and Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones*, I will draw a clear relationship between the Trujillo regime, the Parsley Massacre, and contemporary state politics, i.e., the 2013 citizenship ruling. Finally, I will examine their collective political work with the organization Border of Lights as a part of their larger efforts towards building a counter-archive that addresses the relationships between history and the present moment.

Notes

¹ The Dominican national archive about the Trujillo dictatorship consists of newspaper publications of the time that were largely state controlled. While international outlets like *Time Magazine* covered the dictatorship in relationship to the Mirabal murders, the larger history itself came together after Trujillo’s death in works of fiction and non-fiction. Non-fictional sources include the scholarship of Juan Bosch, Lauren Derby, Michael Hall, Edward Paulino, Ana S.Q. Liberato, Ellen D. Tillman and Allen Wells, Additionally, and local organizations like Border of Lights and the Memorial Museum of Dominican Resistance founded to compile a history of the dictatorship.

² Peña Battle's article, "History of the Dominican-Haitian Frontier Question" is cited as the formative article defining the conflict between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. Additionally, the writings of Joaquín Balaguer, known as "Dictator Rafael L. Trujillo's political heir... [worked as] continuator, enforcer, and enabler of authoritarian politics [before and] after the fall of the Trujillo regime," have circulated as the state "official" discourse of events during the regime (García-Peña 1).

³ Ignacio López-Calvo coined the term "Trujillo Cycle" in his article "A Postmodern Plátano's Trujillo: Junot Díaz's *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao*, more Macondo than McOndo" to describe historical texts and novels written in Spanish during Trujillo's reign.

⁴ Contemporary works addressing the impact of Trujillo's reign include: Julia Alvarez's *Before We Were Free*, Angie Cruz's *Let it Rain Coffee*, Loida Maritza Pérez's *Geographies of Home*, Nelly Rosario's *Song of the Water Saints*, Virato Sención's *They Forged the Signature of God*, and Mario Vargas Llosa's *The Feast of the Goat*.

⁵ Jesús de Galíndez Suárez was a Columbia University lecturer who criticized the Trujillo dictatorship in his doctoral dissertation, he was later kidnapped from New York and murdered in the Dominican Republic.

Chapter 2. Counter-Archives of Shared Histories: *Testimonio*, the Repertoire, and Transnational Voices

Julia Alvarez's *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) and Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* (1998) contribute to a legacy of counter-archive building found within Caribbean and postcolonial fiction. Their novels establish "archives- or, more accurately, counterarchives in order to make claims about . . . the significance of the region to the global processes that have shaped it over the past five centuries" (Thomas 27). I use the term counter-archive to describe how Alvarez's and Danticat's fiction, non-fiction, and political activism produce counter-narratives that contend with the "official" archive of historic events and/or lack thereof. I read their stories and work with the non-profit organization, Border of Lights, an arts-based organization working to bring national and transnational attention to the Parsley Massacre, as creating counter-narratives that when compiled together produce a counter-archive, that critiques the "official" state history as one muddled with fabrications and omissions. I suggest their fiction, non-fiction, and political work questions the veracity of "official" accounts while creating textual, real-time examples of a counter-archive inclusive of ephemeral practices, including: *testimonio*, the duality of listening and speaking, and oral storytelling.

In doing so, their counter-archive documents alternative trajectories that trace multiple experiences of community engagement with history and historic events. As I continue to trace the way in which their fiction and non-fiction projects from late 20th and early 20th century create counter-archives about the Trujillo regime, I highlight the ability of each genre and its accompanying form to offer a more composite picture of the impact of the dictatorship on the histories, lives, narratives, and archives of peoples from the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and the affiliated diasporas. Their fiction and non-fiction

work creates a history that holds space for diasporic writers to engage in counter-archiving that extends across multiple genres.

In this chapter, I analyze the ways in which both novels and the authors' work with *Border of Lights* create a counter-archive about two particular events in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, the murder of the Mirabal sisters (November 20, 1960) and the Parsley Massacre (October 1937). Here, I suggest Alvarez and Danticat address the interrelated histories as historic moments shared across both nation-states, in order to highlight the way in which historic events traverse transnational borders within the nation-state itself and the diaspora. Diana Taylor's hemispheric perspective of archives in the Americas is absolutely essential to this project. More specifically, her insistence on challenging the "disciplinary and national boundaries and by focusing on embodied behaviors" has created a space to think through the enmeshed histories shared between and across Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the United States (2). This project analyzes the way in which the counter-archives created nationally and transnationally, offer an altogether different rendering of history. A history that resides outside of the "official" archive, replete with local and transnational vernacular accounts and ephemeral practices. For example, their counter-archive prefaces practices like oral storytelling and testimonio as forms of recollection that produce a template for narrating activism (fiction, non-fiction, and within the nonprofit) and a counter-narrative response to history, that ultimately builds a remembering that re-defines what "archives" do.

Their counter-archival work demonstrates how historic moments function as constitutive forces in the lives of members of national and transnational communities. More specifically, they illustrate how individuals' lives are not only informed by these

specific moments, but fundamentally altered. Both Alvarez's and Danticat's novels take critical aim at singular discourses that situate history solely within a national context. Further, their work addresses the failure of "official" archives to consider the importance of transnational accounts. As such, their counter-narratives speak to the emotional, often traumatic, impacts of history that extend beyond national borders. Finally, their work pays close attention to the contemporary affective legacies histories have on the present moment.¹ More specifically, both authors highlight the relationship between these particular historical moments and current legislation that creates definitive boundaries around citizenship based on racialized categories steeped in the histories mentioned above.

Contemporary scholarship and historiography on the Mirabal Sisters and the Parsley Massacre continues to grapple with the question of "how [one even begins to] write the history of such seemingly mad state violence" (Turits 625). Alvarez and Danticat's novels push this line of questioning further, by opening up a discussion of what actually makes up a legitimate and credible narrative about these events. And, in doing so, they challenge the assertion that these events are solely national and thus recordable only as part of a national archive. Further, Alvarez and Danticat attend to the underlying concern with whose voices "belong" within counter-archived histories.

Jennifer Vargas sums up this larger concern over authorial autonomy with the question of whether the "diaspora writer [has the] ability to re-write a national archive "ex post facto [or, as a] subject who has not directly experienced state violence" (1163). Alvarez and Danticat's resounding response to this question, in both their fiction and non-fiction, demonstrates the way in which these particular acts of state violence have

affected and continue to impact diasporic populations. They provide multiple unheard accounts of the Trujillo regime as a means of countering the notion that only direct experiences of the dictatorship count. Instead, they emphasize the impact of the regime across time and space as a means of highlighting the fact that accounts not only exist, but require documentation. Thus, continuing “in a long tradition of [fiction] in the Americas that plea to ‘always remember,’” Alvarez and Danticat use the medium of fiction and the novelization of memory to testify against state violence while offering a nuanced perspective of the affective impact of history on individuals and communities across national and transnational lines (Vargas 1162). Their fiction, non-fiction, and political activism draw attention to Trujillo’s colossal impact. Additionally, their focus on the ephemeral, micro-practices, and the daily rituals of individual lives reframe what has been deemed archivable.

In her pivotal work *From Sugar to Revolution: Women’s Visions of Haiti, Cuba, and the Dominican Republic* (2012), Myriam J.A. Chancy points out the difficulty involved in reconstructing the histories Alvarez and Danticat attempt to counter-archive. In her companion readings of *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *The Farming of Bones*, Chancy argues both novels “struggled with interstices in time, gaps in knowledge that they were valiantly seeking [concluding that] the *histories* that they sought to flesh out still lay incomplete” (ix). While Chancy suggests that “fiction [in and of itself does not need to] serve as a stand-in for historical archives,” she appears to hold both novels to that expectation (x). Even though Chancy articulates an understanding of the reasons behind the gaps in memory that exist around these shared events, she still maintains the critique that the “lacunae in both novels” is striking (x).

I read her concluding comments about both novels as more of a starting point to consider an altogether different reading. I'm suggesting that rather than create a definitive history of the Mirabal sisters' murders and the Parsley Massacre, their projects are more concerned with posing questions around the contemporary impact of these histories. More specifically, dates and times are not as important to Alvarez and Danticat, as is an overarching understanding of the shared, affective legacies of these histories across both national and transnational borders. When I use the term "affective legacies," I'm referencing the social-emotional impact of the dictatorship across generations and national borders. For example, the traumas surrounding forced deportations in the D.R. and the United States. These affective legacies transmit experiences of their own, and when combined with *testimonio* and storytelling practices document an altogether different experiential history of the regime. In chapter one, I spoke at length about the firsthand silences and traumas resulting from the regime's national stronghold as well as its transgenerational and transnational impact. In this chapter, I will extend this examination further to look at the ways in which people make sense of and survive state atrocities through *testimonio* and ephemeral practices.

To do this work, Alvarez and Danticat are reliant on the role of the imagination and/or the "creative approach" in the development of their own counter-archival fiction (Glissant 61). Here, Glissant suggests "creative approaches" are not only necessary to fill in the blank pages of history, but open up a space for the multitude to actively participate in the recovery of history itself. The use of fiction and imagination is necessary for both writers as they work to fill in the gaps in accounts that "official" archives have erased from "public memory and from the history books" (Vargas 1162). Both Alvarez and

Danticat must re-imagine specific events leading up to the murder of the Mirabal sisters and the Parsley Massacre, due to the lack of existing archival information. Imaginative fiction for each author then becomes “an important medium through which [they] engage in the testimonial project, especially when contesting state-sponsored violence and social death” (Vargas 1163). The argument over whether or not the counter-archive created out of these imaginative, “creative approaches” count as “history,” glosses over the larger issue of historic erasure.

Besides the imagination, both authors rely on the repertoire as a means of accounting. Diana Taylor’s work in *The Archive and the Repertoire* (2003) is foundational to understanding the necessity of including the “repertoire, [or] a range of non-scriptural practices, varying from oral stories and gestures to dance, cooking, and ritual prayer” into the “official archive” or the “archive of supposedly enduring materials” (Taylor 19-20). Taylor asserts that these forms of “ephemeral repertoire,” particularly oral storytelling and *testimonio* are “artifacts” that lend to the construction of an archive that calls attention to “state-sponsored violence” (63). In the case of the Mirabal sisters and the Parsley Massacre, the ephemeral is the only remaining evidence. The “remains” that counter the “official” narrative are the re-imagined bodies piled up at the Massacre river and the testimonies of Dedé Mirabal, Amabelle, and the local community.

I read both their novels and their work with *Border of Lights* as not only contributing to this Caribbean legacy of creating counter-archives, but piecing together an altogether different history, one that defers to the vernacular experience and engagement with history. Their fiction and non-fiction work creates a history that holds space for

diasporic writers to engage in counter-archiving that extends across multiple genres. I argue both Alvarez and Danticat incorporate a re-writing of “official” histories that includes *testimonio*, the duality of listening and speaking, the repertoire, and oral storytelling to build a counter-archive that not only challenges the state narrative, but extends notions of what a historical archive can do. Finally, their novels and political activism draw clearer connections between national and transnational communities, as well as contemporary relationships between history and the present moment, i.e., the relationship between the antihaitianismo, white supremacy, instilled during Trujillo’s regime and the contemporary racial discourses undergirding the D.R.’s 2013 citizenship ruling.

In the Time of the Butterflies

Julia Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies* reimagines the lives of the Mirabal sisters, four siblings known as political dissidents of El Jefe.² While alive, the Mirabal sisters engaged in a series of political movements in attempt to overthrow Rafael Leonidas Trujillo. The “official” archival materials documenting the sisters’ assassination was not only sparse, but full of fabrications.³ According to Gabrielle Lorne in the article “Helping Dominicans Recover their Memory,” it wasn’t until the early 1990s when Dominican “official” narratives began to speak truth about the history of the Trujillo regime, including accounting for the “crimes committed. . . list[ing] the dead, identify[ing] all those who disappeared, and record[ing] all the forms of torture that were used” (46).⁴ Before the creation of the Memorial Museum of Dominican Resistance and the *Ruta del Chivo* (Route of the Goat), a historical/cultural tour in the D.R. of the places visited by Trujillo during his reign, the only archival material detailing the Mirabals’

lives and deaths included the fictional biography *Media Isla: Las Mirabal* (1982) by Ramón Alberto Ferreras and the work of the sole surviving sister, Dedé Mirabal. Dedé Mirabal preserved the memory of her sisters' through the museum, *Museo de la Hermanas Mirabal* (Museum of the Mirabal Sisters) (1981) and her book *Vivas en su Jardín* (Live in your Garden) (2009).⁵

Building upon this previous work, Julia Alvarez's novel fictionalizes the Mirabals' stories in an attempt to institute a framework and hold space for the voices of contemporary Dominican-American writers to address incidents like the sisters' murders and the Trujillo regime. Speaking out about Trujillo's legacy of violence, with a keen eye on patriarchal and sexualized/gendered violence towards women, the novel imagines the events leading up to the sisters' murders to address the lack of archival information about the actual incident. Through an imagined social interaction between Dedé Mirabal and the *gringa dominicana*, (the only name given to the Dominican-American character interviewing the fictionalized Dedé), Alvarez challenges assumptions around who can recollect events, while teasing out a deeper understanding of shared histories across national borders. Further, she navigates the challenges that arise when a diasporic writer addresses their own relationship to "national" history.

In the Time of the Butterflies employs oral storytelling and *testimonio* to call attention to the lack of both "factual" and local information within the national archive. Alvarez connects her novel to a long history in Latin America where *testimonio* ensures that, as Kimberly Nance suggests, "speaking subjects narrate their own lives as part of an explicitly social and political project, crossing between life world and textual world in an attempt to invoke obligations and evoke actions on the part of readers" (571). *Testimonio*

has operated within a long tradition of Latin America resistance to dictatorial regimes.⁶ In particular, *testimonios* have created the space for the voices of those most marginalized to speak out against totalitarian politics.⁷ In the book *The Struggle of Memory in Latin America: Recent History and Political Violence*, editors Allier- Montaña and Crenzel highlight the intrinsic role *testimonio* has played in calling attention to and holding accountable the dictatorial violence perpetrated throughout Latin America.

In the novel, Alvarez re-imagines what a *testimonio* by Dedé looks and sounds like in the essential scene where she opens her home for the community to share their accounts (301). For Alvarez, oral storytelling and *testimonio* work together to argue for the necessary inclusion of multiple accounts of the Mirabal sisters' deaths. While the novel itself reveals the omissions in the "official" archive as well as the reliance of Dedé's own account on the recollections of members of the community. Alvarez poses the argument that a counter-archive of the Mirabal sisters requires collective accounts including those that transcend local and national borders in order to stress the problems that arise when history affords one, singular account of historic events— whether "official" or *testimonio*. Through the conversations between the *gringa dominicana* and Dedé Mirabal, Alvarez challenges the assumption that Dedé is the only person left to bear witness to the "real" account, while pointing to the absolute failure of "official" archives to document anything other than Trujillo's propaganda. Simultaneously, Alvarez uses the *gringa dominicana's* struggles to make sense of her own relationship to the history. To create a clearer picture of what shared, collective history looks like, Alvarez must illustrate the role politics play in the personal lives of individuals like Dedé Mirabal, the imagined *gringa dominicana*, and in her own life. Further, Alvarez demonstrates the

individual and communal relationships to history while challenging national parameters placed around Dominican national affiliation, even in the *testimonios* themselves, that exclude the accounts of members of the diaspora. For example, the *gringa dominicana*'s testimonio is never included in the exchange between the two women. Moreover, the only time the reader is privy to the *testimonio* of someone from the diaspora is in Alvarez's own post-script at the end of the novel.

Alvarez's use of *testimonio* focuses more on demonstrating what's involved when building a counter-archive, rather than parsing out finite historical details. *Testimonio*, becomes an exercise of introspection as the two women attempt to navigate a collective history. The acts of listening and speaking function as useful strategies through which Dedé Mirabal and the *gringa dominicana* negotiate their relationship to one another and the history at hand. Dedé Mirabal's account of her sisters' lives is essential to Alvarez's larger initiative, as Alvarez uses Dedé's character to challenge the notion that she is the only voice left to account for the Mirabals and the violence perpetrated by Trujillo. Without denying the fact that Dedé has crucial information about the sisters' personal and political lives, Alvarez demonstrates the need for additional narratives when compiling a counter-archive of the regime.

The narrative structure of *In the Time of the Butterflies* is set up as a *testimonio*, or a testament, as John Beverly describes in his seminal article "The Margin at the Center: On *Testimonio*" "to bear truthful witness [to the events the narrator] has lived in his or her person or indirectly through the experiences of friends, family, neighbors, or significant others" (Beverly 3). This type of *testimonio* sets a precedent for the inclusion of individual and communal experiences of history, both national and transnational. The

argument Alvarez poses is that the death of the Mirabal sisters was experienced collectively, directly, and “indirectly” (Beverly 3). Their murders were a seminal moment in the Trujillo dictatorship and their deaths were felt inside and outside of the country. For families like Alvarez’s, a point she makes clear in her postscript, their murders confirmed her own family’s decision to leave the country.

Testimonio, for Alvarez, includes the emotional responses to lived history as traumas in order to illustrate the lasting impact of events across national borders. Dedé’s conflict in the novel pivots on whether or not she can identify herself as something other than “the only one left to tell their story” (10). Here, Dedé’s internal conflict is essential not only to the plot of the novel, but to Alvarez’s negotiation of the inclusion of multiple voices when creating counter-narratives. Alvarez utilizes these moments in order to respectfully question Dedé’s assertion that she is the only one left. To be clear, Alvarez is fully aware that Dedé is literally the only surviving sibling. Instead, Alvarez argues there are several accounts of the sisters’ murders that require documentation. Alvarez demonstrates this resounding response to Dedé’s internal conflict when she challenges Dedé’s assumed state of testimonial isolation. For example, Alvarez illuminates the ways in which the Mirabal’s history connects to the narratives of many members of the community, suggesting the community played an integral role in the sisters’ awakening political consciousness and recording of their deaths.

The penultimate example of her argument on the collective nature of this history, is the moment in which Dedé opens her home and begins listening to the *testimonio* of others. In the process, what she discovers is a need for listening to others accounts as a means of healing and telling. More specifically, in order for Dedé to understand what

happened to her sisters' in their final moments, she must listen to the community who witnessed the events:

They would come with their stories of that afternoon- the little soldier with the bad teeth, cracking his knuckles, who had ridden in the car with them over the mountain; the bowing attending from El Gallo who had sold them some purses and tried to warn them not to go; the big-shouldered truck driver with the hushed voice who had witnessed the ambush on the road. They all wanted to give me something of the girls' last moments. Each visitor would break my heart all over again, but I would sit on this very rocker and listen for as long as they had something to say. It was the least I could do, being the one saved. (301)

The series of testimonies the community offers provide Dedé with details to create a richer rendering of the last moments of her sisters' lives. Before she can begin to grieve, heal, and initiate the process of compiling these additional narratives, Dedé must shift from testifier to listener. More specifically, before Dedé can share her own account or open up the museum, she must first start by listening to others' stories as a means of gathering a clearer understanding of what happened. The act of listening for Dedé, and the *gringa dominicana*, is about transmitting and recording a history with the intention of resisting silence while simultaneously coming to terms with the understanding that this history is collective.

The archivist must recognize the necessity of incorporating multiple accounts in order to make sense of their own emotional relationship to the history. For Dedé, listening is as much about piecing together details as it is an act of working through her own feelings of guilt being the only sister to survive. Dedé's statement about listening as "the least [she] could do" demonstrates the weight of the survivor's guilt she experiences for having lived (Alvarez 301). Through listening, Dedé begins to realize the extent of the communal, emotional pain and loss. As community members come to share their stories

they not only give her access to more details, “they all wanted to give me something of the girls’ last moments,” but also partake in an act of bereavement with her (Alvarez 301).

The genesis of the development of Dedé’s counter-archive begins the moment she starts to listen as a means of coming to terms with her own traumatic experience, and as a method with which to begin collecting testimonies to create a cohesive narrative. Before collating these accounts into archival memory, through the house, museum, and accompanying historical books, Dedé first navigates the “embodied memory” through her own testimony and those recollected by the community (Taylor 19-20). The types of repertoire demonstrated in her testimony, and in the community, are essential components to the counter-archive the novel creates. Even though the details provided are imagined and contextualized within the genre of historical fiction, they offer a counter-hegemonic accounting of history. Dedé’s act of reconstruction “stands in opposition to the state memory” that has chronicled the event solely through the lens of patriotism circulating during the Trujillo regime (Thomas 28). As Dedé’s awareness of the importance of others’ accounts increases, she begins to consider the historical politics connecting her to the *gringa dominicana* and the Dominican-American diaspora.⁸ The relationship between the two women creates a space to consider whether or not there is a place for transnational narratives within counter-archives, while also demonstrating a practice through which members of the Dominican-American diaspora can begin to engage in conversations about their own relationship to “national” history.

Divisions between Dedé and the *gringa dominicana* are immediately noticeable. Before building a political affinity, they must each come to terms with their positions via

the histories that connect them. Their complex relationship highlights the necessity for both women to recognize the diaspora that separates them. The vexed contact between the two has everything to do with Dedé's overall fatigue with the yearly fanfare over the anniversary of her sisters' death. The fact that the *gringa dominicana* contacts her at a time usually reserved for herself is highly irritating for Dedé, "but this is March, ¡*Maria Santísima!* Doesn't she have seven more months of anonymity?" (3). Additionally, the fact that the woman is foreign, and in particular, an "Americanized" Dominican, is all the more frustrating. Dedé immediately positions the woman as another one of "those" individuals curious about the Mirabal sisters, but whose everyday life appears far removed from the actual history.

For Dedé, the *gringa dominicana* is an individual foreign to her own culture, history, and language. She is an American, who has lost the majority of the cultural signifiers of her own Dominican-ness. Her subject position is marked with contradictions, as she can neither be Dominican, nor can she be fully American. From this initial perspective, the *gringa dominicana* doesn't appear to have any direct relationship to the history she so desperately seeks to recover. The novel opens with the national distinctions drawn between the two women:

Could the woman please come over and talk to Dedé about the Mirabal sisters? She is originally from here but has lived many years in the States, for which she is sorry since her Spanish is not so good. The Mirabal sisters are not known there, for which she is also sorry for it is a crime that they should be forgotten, these unsung heroines of the underground, et cetera. (3)

The character of the *gringa dominicana* is an interesting, imaginative choice on Alvarez's part. While the *gringa dominicana* is an important character for the narrative dynamic of testimonial exchange, she also highlights the relational complications that arise between

the two women. The *gringa dominicana* illustrates the difficulties that arise when creating counter-archives across national and transnational lines as she physically represents how “national” political issues are, in fact, transnational. In order to begin unpacking this difficulty, and/or tenuous relationship, she is required to prove her own connection to the history.

In this scene, the *gringa dominicana*'s tone is apologetic for living so far away for so long, an absence that has caused her to lose the linguistic and cultural signifiers of being Dominican. Additionally, she takes on the “diasporic responsibility” of telling the Mirabal sisters story while decrying the problematic historical erasure and silence in the diaspora. Alvarez's illustration of Dedé's response, the “et cetera” that bookends the passage operates on a very fixed notion of who has a connection with this history. In questioning the *gringa dominicana*'s interest, Dedé highlights the tenuous relationship between members of the diaspora and their Dominican identity. In Dedé's mind, the *gringa dominicana* becomes just another person in a series of many, who “want to hear the story firsthand” (3). For Dedé, the *gringa dominicana* is situationally removed from the history and Dedé aligns her with all those who've come before her, including the Belgian moviemaker and the Chilean writer, who “impose” their own interests onto the Mirabal sisters.

When the *gringa dominicana* asks for directions to Dedé's house, Dedé scoffs: “the woman will never find the old house behind the hedge of towering hibiscus at the bend of the dirt road. Not a *gringa dominicana* in a rented car with a road map asking for street names!” (3). For Dedé, the *gringa dominicana* is a woman who has no frame of reference for the mapping of Dominican communities culturally, linguistically, and

spatially. Rather, she is an “American,” or foreign Dominican, who operates on the assumption that streets are clearly labeled with names, an expectation that is oblivious to the fact that, as Dedé suggests, “most of the campesinos around here can’t read, so it wouldn’t do us any good to put names on the roads” (4). Instead of arguing with Dedé about her subject position, the *gringa dominicana* agrees with the assigned identifiers of otherness. However, the one relationship she refuses to dissociate from is her commitment to the Mirabal sisters’ and their history. The *gringa dominicana*’s expressed need to tell the sisters’ history is important as it creates an initial break in the discordance between the two women. Here, the *gringa dominicana* as transnational citizen, stakes a claim for not only her investment in Dominican history, but also its relationship to her own life. Unifying herself with the history of the Mirabal sisters becomes a poignant moment for the *gringa dominicana*, as she positions herself in direct relationship to Dominican history as a shared history, one that she also has a responsibility to counter-narrate.

Destined to reveal little more than the narrative sold in the gift shop, Dedé chooses to present a version of the Mirabal’s story that she would with any onlooker: “she walks the woman quickly through the house [using the] fixed, monolithic language around the interviewers and mythologizers of her sisters” (5-7). This detail suggests even Dedé alters the retelling of the counter-archive based on who is listening. When the *gringa dominicana* stops before the portraits of each of the family members, Dedé presumes she will ask questions like, “which one was which or how old they were when these were taken, facts Dedé has at the ready having delivered them so many times” (6). Here, Dedé demonstrates how counter-archives, like “official” archives, also maintain

omissions. Specifically, Dedé's willingness to pick and choose which version of history she shares with the *gringa dominicana* speaks to Michel-Rolph Trouillot's argument in *Silencing the Past* (1995). Trouillot proposes the argument that there are silences within every stage of historical construction. Here, the reader witnesses Dedé maintaining silence around "the moment of fact assembly (the making of *archives*) [and] the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*)" (Trouillot 26). Focusing on Dedé's selected omissions offers a space to consider the power ascribed to her as the only one in charge of producing a counter-archive.

When questioning Dedé about her personal life, the *gringa dominicana* pushes for more details. This line of questioning shifts the conversation from the formulaic to the personal. A change in the norm that throws Dedé off kilter, as she is not used to inquiries about her own life. The *gringa dominicana*'s inquisitiveness disturbs Dedé to the point of her feeling the need to challenge the *gringa dominicana*'s intentions: "What is it you want to know?" (7). Honing the focus of the conversation from "archival memory to embodied memory" is of absolute importance here because it draws the clear connection between history as archive and lived history. The embodied memory surrounding the sisters' deaths, as well as the additional crimes committed by the Trujillo regime, are incidents that are essential to the counter-archive (Taylor 19-20). Here, I'm borrowing Taylor's argument regarding the way in which people embody memories of the sisters' deaths simply by being there, embedded in these experiential accounts is an understanding of and formal participation with the history itself. As Taylor suggests, "people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there,' being a part of the transmission" (Taylor 20). For example, the *gringa dominicana*

specifically seeks out Dedé's *testimonio*. Rather than asking a detail about one of the sisters or to see another artifact she pointedly asks: "How do you keep such a tragedy from taking you under?" (7). This particular question distinguishes the *gringa dominicana* from being just another onlooker, to someone who fundamentally understands, to some degree, the emotional impact of this collective history. Her demonstrated investment in Dedé's story precipitates a change in conversation from the formulaic version sold in gift shops, to a more personalized testimonial account that illustrates the emotional relationship the two women share with the history.

This relational shift between the two women alters their relationship and testimonial sharing. At this point in the story, Dedé warms to the idea that the *gringa dominicana* has some kind of stake in the counter-archive. Listening is then an essential act to the construction of counter-archives, as it marks an activation of engagement for both characters, albeit in slightly different ways. For Dedé, listening becomes a means to process the traumatic loss and the survivor's guilt she carries, it also operates as a means for her to negotiate her own standing with the *gringa dominicana*. Dedé's initial act of listening allowed her the opportunity of hearing others' accounts as a reminder that she is not alone in her need to share this event. This earlier moment in the novel illustrates Dedé's need to realize that her own *testimonio* is supported by the recollections of members of neighboring communities, whom also had essential information about the events leading up to her sisters' deaths. Furthermore, Dedé listens to their *testimonio* as a means of compiling a counter-archive that not only adds to her own narrative, but also creates a more nuanced account of the history itself (Alvarez 301).

When the role of listener and speaker shifts from Dedé to the *gringa dominicana*, the individual recording the *testimonio* becomes the *gringa dominicana*: A woman who is trying to find a way to make sense of her own feelings and diasporic relationship to the history itself. The *gringa dominicana*'s question to Dedé regarding her ability to survive the trauma establishes a shift in Dedé's recollecting. More specifically, Dedé begins to share a more comprehensive history. This question unifies the women around the trauma associated with the event—whether direct or indirect. In the case of the *gringa dominicana* this is the transgenerational trauma she has inherited in the diaspora. For the *gringa dominicana* listening functions as a means of bridging the diasporic differences that exist between these two women, as active and engaged listening creates a space for the *gringa dominicana* to express her own emotional connection with this event. In addition to the potential transgenerational traumas experienced, the *gringa dominicana*, like Dedé, feels a sense of guilt. As a member of the Dominican-American diaspora, the *gringa dominicana* carries the weight of having “escaped” this violent history. While the reader never learns the details behind the *gringa dominicana*'s emigration, one can infer that it was a result of the Trujillo dictatorship. The notion of being somehow “spared” from the direct violence, to differing degrees, is something that unites the two women as does the guilt associated with the state of being “unharmed.” While both women technically survived the dictatorship, what they don't recognize is the reality that each of their lives have been fundamentally altered by this history. These shared experiences of history have the potential to unite them across multiple lines of difference.

In the concluding conversation between the two women, the mending of a more symbolic suture occurs. More specifically, while Alvarez uses the relationship between

the two to illustrate the difficulties involved when identifying mutual relationships with shared histories, she concludes their conversation with a slight breakthrough. Dedé's response to the question of why she waited to become politically involved, "back in those days, we women followed our husbands" is met with the *gringa dominicana's* understanding. Here, the *gringa dominicana* shares, as a way of "protecting Dedé from her own doubts, that 'it's still true in the States. I mean, most women I know, their husband gets a job in Texas, say, well, Texas it's going to be.'" (172). This is the only moment throughout their interaction that the women pause to share mutual experiences of gender constructs. In this moment, the *gringa dominicana* takes the one thing Dedé feels the most guilt about, her survival due to her "lack" of immediate political engagement, and contextualizes and/or normalizes it. This rhetorical move not only assuages the sense of guilt Dedé feels, but unites both women in their "mutual" cause. This breakthrough between the two, allows the reader to see a way in which these two women share not only mutual experiences of history, but a relevant desire to absolve some of the guilt they both feel.

In order for Alvarez to show the connection of historical events across local, national, and transnational borders, she asserts the importance of forging these relationships (Alvarez 3). In doing so, she offers a method with which to write counter-narratives that consider both local and transnational accounts, starting with paying attention to the relational experiences of events across national borders. The novel suggests that the most central act that leads to the formation of such collectivity is the exchange of listening and being listened to, as demonstrated between Dedé and the *gringa dominicana*.

Alvarez concludes the novel with a postscript in which she shares her family's story of migration at the tail end of the Trujillo regime. In the postscript, Alvarez frames her own authorial and personal interest in the Mirabal's history while articulating her overarching motivation for telling the story. Sharing her personal account allows her to shore up the assertions she makes in the novel that insist on the mutual and shared experience of history across borders. More specifically, her postscript offers a clearer connection between her diasporic positionality and the transgenerational traumas and experiences associated with the history of the Mirabal sisters and the Trujillo dictatorship:

On August 6, 1960, my family arrived in New York City, exiles from the tyranny of Trujillo [. . .] when as a young girl I heard about the 'accident,' I could not get the Mirabals out of my mind. On my frequent trips back to the Dominican Republic, I sought out whatever information I could about these brave and beautiful sisters who had done what few men- and only a handful of women- had been willing to do. (323)

The postscript illuminates not only Alvarez's interest in the Mirabals, but also functions as her own personal account of her indirect, transgenerational experiences with the Trujillo regime. In such, the postscript highlights how her family's migration out of the Dominican Republic, was a direct result of the Trujillato. Similar to her imagined *gringa dominicana*, Alvarez draws the connection between her own biography of trauma and migration, with a compulsion towards finding out as much information about the Mirabal's as possible. This ultimately makes the reader wonder whether or not Alvarez sees herself as a *gringa dominicana* of some sorts. The postscript would seem to confirm this connection, as Alvarez, like the *gringa dominicana* articulates her interest in researching and writing the novel as based upon her personal relationship to the history.

Alvarez goes on to define the work of the novel as a sort of in-debtedness: “my three sisters and I had made it. Three of those four sisters had not. I knew I had a debt to pay” (330). This statement parallels the relationship between Dedé and the *gringa dominicana* in the novel and in Alvarez’s own work as the author. Julia Alvarez appears committed, like the character of Dedé and the real-life Dedé Mirabal, to doing this work due to the fact that this history plays a constitutive role in her own life. Further, she researches the Mirabal sisters because she sees their story as interconnected to her own.

In the Time of the Butterflies functions as an example of the ways in which diasporic writers begin to engage with historical issues. Alvarez’s use of *testimonio* and the practice of listening allow her to create a counter-archive, while engendering an entryway for diasporic engagement. The process starts with the act of listening, which not only enables the production of counter-archives, but also creates an opportunity to mediate the differences that separate national and transnational communities.

The Farming of Bones

Edwidge Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones* also produces a counter-archive about the Trujillo regime. More specifically, Danticat’s fiction emphasizes the importance of national and transnational historiographies. Focusing closely on the Trujillo dictatorship, the novel captures a historic moment that continues to strain present-day relationships between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. The Parsley Massacre, “known in Spanish as *el corte* (the cutting), in Kreyòl as *kout-kout-a* (the stabbing)” is an incidence of great significance (Vargas 1164). As Michelle Wucker asserts, “the memory of what happened at the Massacre River in 1937 is still vivid in the minds of the islanders. Even now, it is nearly impossible for Dominicans and Haitians to think of each other without some trace

of the tragedy of their mutual history that took place that year” (44). Official records of the massacre are scarce and the archival information that does exist is either “[. . .] missing documents, contradictory, and even invented” (Suárez 151). What does remain are some of the gruesome details of a genocide that continues to shape relations between the two countries. Over the course of five days, between October 2-8th, 1937, *antihaitianismo* was manifested in a government-sponsored mass genocide.⁹ Wherein, Dominican President, Rafael Trujillo, ordered the slaughter of thousands of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent.

Trujillo’s soldiers determined who “officially” counted as Haitian. Those “spared” were individuals who appeared “white” or “lighter skinned” and who could pronounce the Spanish *perejil*. Linguistic and racial demarcations such as ones’ ability to trill the “r,” signified Dominican nationality.¹⁰ The majority of the murdered Haitians were those who crossed the border to cut and harvest sugar cane in Dominican fields and those Dominican citizens either mistaken as Haitian, or Haitians of Dominican descent.¹¹ Those who managed to escape fled by crossing the Massacre River back into the border towns of Haiti.

The Farming of Bones, like Alvarez’s novel, raises critical awareness about the Parsley Massacre and the transnational impact of the Trujillo regime. Additionally, the book highlights the need to rewrite the historical archive of this event, while addressing the necessity for building solidarity between national and transnational communities that addresses the racism undergirding citizenship policies and practices in both nations. Whereas, Alvarez’s novel focused on building a burgeoning relationship between local Dominicans and members of the Dominican-American diaspora, Danticat addresses the

transnationalisms that exist within the countries themselves. Here, Danticat's understanding of transnationalism incorporates diasporic communities on all sides of the border between the Dominican Republic and Haiti. In such, she encompasses inter-migrations or local transnationalisms into her understanding of a transnational counter-archive. Furthermore, she highlights how shared histories of colonialism, imperialism, and economic need construct relationships. For Danticat, building a counter-archive requires an understanding of the geographic and political borders, based on race and nationality, that have and continue to muddle the potential for alliance building between both nations. Danticat's emphasis on the transnational nature of the history, and the incident itself, draws a clear connection between national and diasporic (local and global) investment in counter-archiving the history.

Like Alvarez, Danticat employs *testimonio* as a method for processing the main character's personal trauma in relationship to history and to create a counter-archive. More specifically, Amabelle Desir, like Dedé Mirabal, survives a series of traumatic events that frame the novel. *In the Farming of Bones*, *testimonio* functions as the main strategy in which Amabelle can come to terms with her individual experiences while narrating an account of the historic event. In offering her version, she not only shares a personalized history of the Parsley Massacre, but also points to its lasting effects. Through Amabelle's character, Danticat highlights the importance of *testimonio* for both individual and collective healing, wherein an individual's shared account becomes a means toward personal and communal recovery. Additionally, Danticat uses Amabelle's character to highlight concerns with the creation of a counter-archive that incorporates transnational voices— as Amabelle is by every measure diasporic and transnational.

Amabelle is an ethnic-Haitian who lives in the Dominican Republic. She is a member of the class of stateless citizens who travels into the Dominican Republic for work.

Amabelle's character is intrinsic to the creation of a counter-narrative that fully considers the population Trujillo targeted, while also lending to an understanding of current day immigration policies facing the same populations decades later.¹²

The reader is first introduced to Amabelle through her accounting of personal suffering. Amabelle, who works as a domestic servant in the Dominican Republic, has a personal history full of loss. The foremost trauma she experiences, the drowning of her family in the Massacre river, foreshadows the impending Parsley Massacre, while setting up the frame for how internal and external *testimonio* functions in the novel. For the first half of the novel, Amabelle's character is mired in grief. Her day-to-day life becomes a state of liminality between “[. . .] either a nightmare or nowhere at all [floating] inside these remembrances, grieving for who I was, and even more for what I've become” (2). Like the character of Dedé Mirabal, Amabelle is stuck in her own grief. In order for her to begin the process of connecting to any community outside of herself, she must share her own account. For Amabelle, sharing her *testimonio* is not only about quelling the loss inside of her, but it's an act of remembrance for her family—ethnic Haitians in-transit, erased from state record. Amabelle vocalizes and later testifies to her loss in community with her lover Sebastien Onus. Sebastien, like Amabelle, is transnational and stateless living and working in the Dominican Republic. Prior to the Parsley Massacre, *testimonio* for the two of them functions as a means of not only dealing with earlier traumas, but really recognizing each other as a part of the history of diffused transnational communities laboring in the Dominican Republic. Moreover, their shared testimonies

form the basis for Danticat's archive of the experiences of stateless individuals living and working in the Dominican Republic before the Parsley Massacre. Inserting the *testimonio* between Amabelle and Sebastien not only creates the initial framework for how Danticat develops this fictional counter-archive about the Parsley Massacre, but also harkens to the need to document the lives of those most vulnerable to archival erasure. This intentional move on Danticat's behalf allows her to comment on both the historic and present-day concerns facing this population on all sides of the border.

Sebastien comes to Amabelle in the dead of night. His body is permanently marked by "cane stalks [that] have ripped apart most of the skin on his shiny black face, leaving him with crisscrossed trails of furrowed scars [and the palms of hands that] have lost their life-lines to the machetes that cut the cane" (1). He visits Amabelle in order to remember who they are, to be known to someone, to be in community. Here, the description of Sebastien's life-lines worn from his hands, due to the labor of cutting cane, is symbolic of the absolute need for his *testimonio*. Sebastien's work as a cane cutter defines his statelessness, thus erasing his citizenship and national identity. Sebastien prompts Amabelle to speak, like the relationship between Dedé and the *gringa dominicana*, to share her story in order to heal and be remembered. Sebastien asks Amabelle questions like, "what [her] parents were like when they were alive [and] what was it [she] admired most about [her] mother?" (13). Sebastien encourages Amabelle to recount the story of her parents' lives as a means of both assisting her in the healing process and archiving their stories.

These moments of testimonial acts before the Parsley Massacre frame the purpose and meaning of *testimonio* for both individuals and their respective communities. They

highlight the erasure of certain individuals' accounts within state history, while creating a type of archive. As Sebastien and Amabelle exchange accounts of themselves and their families, they begin to create a lineage that reconnects them to their Haitian identities. These interactions form the basis through which Danticat uses *testimonio* and the ephemeral as a means of building a counter-archive. Like Alvarez, Danticat's framing of *testimonio* distinguishes listening as an essential component of counter-archives, and a mode for mediating difference. For Danticat, Amabelle and Sebastien's *testimonio* connects them to their transnational identities.

As the political turmoil between Haitian cane cutters, domestic servants, and the Trujillo regime reaches a breaking point, Amabelle flees the Dominican Republic for her own survival. Upon witnessing the brutal murders of several cane cutters, Amabelle and a small group escape through the cane fields. In flight for their lives, the mixed group clings together, finding safety in numbers. At this point in the novel, Danticat records how violence levels difference across race and gender. More specifically, she renders transparent the fact that mutual experiences of violence, across national identities, have the potential to unite communities. For it is during these moments of psychological distress and physical displacement, that the stark nationalist ideologies that divide Dominicans from Haitians blur. When Amabelle's group encounter "the straggling members of a vast family [who] might be Dominicans- or a mix of Haitian and Dominican" prior divisions of race and nationality are leveled by their mutual experiences of racial and xenophobic violence (173). As each individual in the newly configured group takes a turn sharing their account, they collectively recognize how shared experiences of violence temporarily unite them.

In this moment of *testimonio*, they each share their accounts with great detail. These instances of historical engagement occur repeatedly in the novel. Tibon's character explains how upon returning from collecting charcoal he is thrown "on a truck full of people [taken] out to a high cliff over rough seas" and forced to jump, while at the base of the water "there are peasants waiting with their machetes for us to come out of the water" (173-175). Dolores and Doloritas, the two Dominican women, share their account of Doloritas husband, a Haitian man, taken in the middle of the night. Their testimonial accounts are important in that they further the argument Danticat makes about the problematic nature of one's national affiliation in this moment. Like Doloritas Haitian husband, the twin sisters are now fleeing for their own lives.

Left with no other choice but to keep moving, the group travels to Dajabón, only a river crossing away from Haiti. The group is assaulted, forced to eat fistfuls of parsley, and left for dead. Amabelle manages to cross the Massacre River into Haiti and is discovered by a priest and a young doctor, where they take her to a makeshift hospital for treatment. It is here that Amabelle witnesses the severity of Trujillo's violence engulfed in the cries and moans of "lines of people with burns that had destroyed most of their skin, men and women charred into awkward poses, arms and legs frozen in mid-air, like tree trunks long separated from their branches" (206). At this moment, Amabelle witnesses the corporeal impact of the Parsley Massacre, and while healing in the hospital, she listens as fellow patients share their *testimonio* with one another:

People gathered in a group to talk. Taking turns, they exchanged tales quickly, the haste in their voices sometimes blurring the words, for greater than their desire to be heard was the hunger to tell. One could hear it in the fervor of their declarations, the obscenities shouted when something could not be remembered fast enough, when a stutter allowed another speaker to race into his own account without the stutterer having completed his. (209)

The compulsion to share one's account, in this moment, appears to be more a matter of speaking than listening. As stories spew out, words and narratives merge. While Vargas suggests "the testimonial space is initially not collaborative but competitive: as one's voice and narrative space come at the cost of another's," I read this act of *testimonio* as demonstrating how closely these accounts converge with one another (Vargas 1170). The similarity of the grotesque violence these individuals endured blends both the polyvocal and the singularity of shared experiences. At this moment, it is clear to the reader that this historic event is both collective and transnational. The violence encountered, regardless of one's national affiliation, is mutually shared across multiple borders. These fictional counter-narratives of the state's "official" narrative offer an altogether different take on the history itself.

While listening to the horrific accounts of other victims, Amabelle has a visceral response. She experiences a physical reaction similar to the feelings she had while witnessing her parents' deaths. Once Amabelle recovers from her own feverish dream states and partial consciousness, she awakens to recite her own story, including that of her parents'. After functioning as the active listener, like Dedé Mirabal and the *gringa dominicana*, Amabelle's experience shifts to that of the speaker. This emotional turn highlights what Cathy Caruth articulates as the "theory [that] individual trauma contains within it the core of the trauma of a larger history" (71). Amabelle's individual trauma is intrinsically related to those around her. Her ability to express her own traumas begins the moment she listens to others, as listening allows her to connect to the community. Furthermore, Amabelle is only able to heal from the physical and emotional experiences

of the Parsley Massacre through the arduous process of making sense of her own experiences in relationship to others.

Amabelle begins the healing process only after she understands the importance of collective *testimonio* as both a method of healing and an act of creation. This collective *testimonio* stands in direct opposition to the “official” national archive of the Parsley Massacre that circulates in the story. When Amabelle hears from fellow survivors that “official” *testimonio* was being recorded at the capital, she goes in search of information about Sebastien and his sister.

Officials of the state [and] justices of the peace [were present] to listen to those who survived the slaughter and write their stories down [they came sharing the message that even though] the Generalissimo had not said that he caused the killing, he agreed to give money to affected persons. (231)

Danticat positions the “official archive” as the national accounting of the atrocity—recorded, filed away, and monetized. Implicating both the governments of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, she argues the national narrative at the time was itself, orchestrated by the Trujillo regime.

When Amabelle arrives, she is one of thousands who wait at the police building to tell their story. Lined up in order of the stories their bodies told “[. . .] the most mangled victims, the ones whose wounds had still not healed, were let in as soon as they arrived” (232). This scene stands in direct opposition to that of the hospital. Rather than allowing everyone the opportunity to speak and be heard, individuals are prioritized based on the *testimonios* their physical bodies speak. Additionally, the promises made by the officials of the state and justices of the peace turn out to be hollow. The crowd learns the truth of this pretense when they approach the final woman “allowed” to offer her *testimonio*:

“No, he did not give me money,” she said, watching the soldiers for approval. “You see the book he had with him?” She glanced at the guards once more, then turned her face back to the crowd. “He writes your name in the book and says he will take your story to President Stenio Vincent so you can get your money.” She kept her eyes on the crowd, no longer watching the soldiers for approval. “Then he lets you talk and lets you cry and he asks if you have papers to show that all those people died.” (233-234)

For Danticat, the imagined “official archive” or the national accounting of the Parsley Massacre is problematic on multiple levels. Based on this passage, it is clear that the *testimonio* that was “included” in the national narrative was only validated with what Diana Taylor terms the “enduring materials” which includes written documentation (19). This detail is important for several reasons. The first, being the fact that any and all evidence about the massacre was “ephemeral.” The repertoire of people’s experiences included their *testimonio* and oral storytelling about the event, alongside their physical bodies. Secondly, the very individuals who survived the attack were predominantly stateless transnationals, so they had no papers to begin with. Therefore, their accounts weren’t considered relevant to the national, “official archive.” For Danticat, in order for history of the Parsley Massacre to exist, a counter-archive must be constructed as the “official archive” has failed to record the only evidence that does exist. Central to this counter-archive is the understanding that evidence does exist. It is contained in the vernacular “production and reproduction of knowledge” of embodied experiences, rituals, and remembering (Taylor 20). For example, Danticat’s emphasis on Amabelle’s sewing after the Parsley Massacre documents the knowledge held in the ritual of the act. For, in each and every one of Amabelle’s stitches, there is a testimonial accounting, a narrative thread connecting her life experiences to the regime. For Amabelle, each stitch contains a history.

When reading *In the Time of the Butterflies* and *The Farming of Bones* in relationship to one another, it is clear that each author employs similar methods to arrive at the overarching argument for the necessity of creating counter-archives that include transnational voices, even as their use of transnationalism asks us to question how we define the term. Both Alvarez and Danticat use *testimonio* to document atrocities, while demonstrating the potential for solidarities to emerge from the relational experiences of history as shared across transnational communities. Although each author incorporates subtle differences within their own fiction, both Alvarez and Danticat present the counter-archival process as a roadmap for real-time political activism that draws concrete connections between counter-archives and future histories. Their non-fiction work will go on to employ similar methods to that of their fiction, including the use of *testimonio* and additional arts-based activities that utilize the duality of listening and speaking as a means of healing and re-developing transnational solidarities. In doing such, these counter-narrative practices contribute to the building of a counter-archive that records the engagement of community members on all sides of the border. Additionally, these practices produce a counter-archive that challenges the limitations of a “traditional” archive.

Border of Lights

Alvarez and Danticat’s novels directly inform their political activism. More specifically, their insistence on using *testimonio* to create a counter-archive mirrors their political work with the organization Border of Lights. The non-profit founded by Julia Alvarez in 2011, functions as a “movement seeking to bear witness to the genocidal 1937 Haitian massacre, remembering its victims [while] also bear[ing] witness to the

Massacre's legacies of exclusion while strengthening the cross-border solidarity between Haitians and Dominicans" (Paulino and García 111) Similar to both of their novels, the organization attempts to capture accounts of the massacre through *testimonio*. Working with "local residents [to engage] in conversations about the Massacre," the organization attempts to create a counter-archive while mending the rift between border communities (Paulino and García 114). In order to encourage this dialogue, Border of Lights has installed public art pieces, conducted ethnographic research projects and storytelling initiatives, all centered on the act of engendering the collaborative healing of this shared history.

During the month of October, the anniversary month of the Parsley Massacre, Border of Lights hosts numerous memorial projects to "commemorate the anniversary, amplify the rich histories of border collaboration between the DR and Haiti, and connect the legacy of the past to the current push for justice" (*Border of Lights*). The methods with which the organization chooses to engage locals and transnationals in conversation, while commemorating history and providing a space for healing are significant. Interestingly, each component of the organization's three-tiered initiative is mirrored in both of the novels. Like Danticat's and Alvarez's fiction, the organization asserts the importance of dialogue between local and transnational communities due to the fact that the history is transnational. Speaking to the relational history of the massacre engages community conversations. Here, listening, talking and providing *testimonio* function not only as a mode for healing, but also a means for the organization to create a real-time counter-archive. Through the organizations ethnographic research projects and storytelling initiatives, Border of Lights generates a counter-archive that encompasses

similar evidence of the ephemeral and the repertoire as situated in the novels (Danticat 233-234).

Building on the fictional template Alvarez and Danticat construct in their novels, the organization uses commemorative moments to rewrite traumatic histories like those imagined in Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*. More specifically, during the 2012 commemoration vigil, Border of Lights organized ceremonies of remembrance on both sides of the Massacre River. In the communities of Dajabón, Dominican Republic and Quanamithe, Haiti, vigils commemorated the lives lost during the Parsley Massacre. In this moment of living history, people united across the border, connecting two nations and their affiliated diasporas, to create a counterpoint to Danticat's fictional scene in which Amabelle is physically assaulted before crossing the Massacre River into Haiti.

After attending mass in Dajabón where the Jesuit priest remembered the victims of the 1937 Massacre before a crowded church, Border of Lights organizers handed a flower and candle to each congregant [. . .] What followed was an informal procession [. . .] The group in the hundreds, walked [. . .] from the church to the bridge [. . . A brief prayer] was followed by songs and poems written by Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat, and Chiqui Vicioso. At the same time, Haitians on the other side of the river [. . .] were holding their lit candles to the sky, singing, praying, and remembering [. . .] It marked the first-time thousands of victims who perished during the Massacre were remembered in such a public, transnational act of solidarity- on Haitian *and* Dominican territory. (Paulino and García)

Word for word, this non-fiction account of the 2012 commemorative ceremony is a restorative re-imagining of the fictionalized traumatic event— if not a re-writing of history itself. As the passage suggests, up until this point in history no memorialization ceremony of this magnitude had occurred. More specifically, the vigil literally offers a counter-history to the imagined scene in *The Farming of Bones*. In this version, the crowd of unified members, across national and transnational communities, are actually present

outside of the church and bordering the river reciting prayers, songs, and remembrances over the dead. This event highlights the need for the counter-archive to represent a counter-narrative in a non-fictional form. In this moment, details are recorded as part of the organization's intent of displacing "official" narratives with the actions of the non-profit organization. This need to represent authorial and organizational action is a direct response to the continued necessity for healing— especially in light of current rulings in the Dominican Republic and the United States.

This curative act of recuperation connects the fictional and political work of Alvarez and Danticat in important ways. The vigil allows Alvarez and Danticat the opportunity to extend their fictional efforts into the real world in a way that lends to the re-writing of the history of the Parsley Massacre. Moreover, recognizing this interconnection between their political and fictional work is important as it speaks to their counter-archival efforts across genres and political engagement. Identifying the ways in which the organization uses similar methods as those employed in their fiction to commemorate loss, recuperate history, and build communal solidarity, allows for a further understanding of the way in which their literary texts are related to their own political activism. What is apparent here, is the fact that all of the imaginative work employed in their literature has served as an actual roadmap through which these writers have collectively built a political organization actively engaged in rebuilding the community and transnational solidarities they envision in their fiction.

While Alvarez and Danticat's novels initiate the process of imagining what transnational engagement might include, their political organization creates a platform through which they may offer their own *testimonio* as a means of processing where

transnational voices fit in. In addition to offering a virtual community, informing people from all over the world about the history of the Parsley Massacre, users have the opportunity to become politically engaged in some manner. Finally, the website creates the space for archiving the *testimonio* of members of the diaspora. While most of these accounts are in English and from members of the Dominican- and Haitian-American diaspora, each writer makes it a point to highlight the transnational nature of the history. The testimonials appear to follow a similar format, in which individuals recollect what they know about the Parsley Massacre by calling attention to the specific moment in their lives when they became aware of the event. The description of their temporal consciousness of the event is then followed by a personal narrative that relates the history of the Massacre to present-day political events.

For example, Julia Alvarez's "Massacre Testimonio" begins with the self-awareness that while she can't recall the specific date in which she became cognizant of the Parsley Massacre, she does recollect how events "like the murder of the Mirabal sisters [were something her] family always brought up whenever they spoke of the dictatorship" (Border of Lights). For Alvarez, her *testimonio* of these events reveals her understanding of the interconnected relationship between the incident and her own life. In addition, she acknowledges these events as something of common conversation at home. Alvarez continues her *testimonio* by calling attention to the certain measure of culpability on behalf of all Dominicans-even those members within the diaspora. Alvarez asserts: "dictatorships succeed by planting a little dictator inside each of us. Although many Dominicans did not participate in the massacre, it was made possible because of a deep-seated antagonism toward our Haitian neighbors" (Border of Lights). While Julia

Alvarez's novel establishes a template for addressing the impact of the Trujillo regime, her non-fiction *testimonio* with *Border of Lights* confirms the relevance of her previous work in relationship to her political activism. Here, Alvarez no longer negotiates whether the transnational voice has a place in this history. In her *testimonio*, Alvarez demonstrates the way in which her experiences of these events, both direct and indirect, are part and parcel of her own history.

Like Alvarez's "Massacre Testimonio," Edwidge Danticat's "Nature has no memory" begins with the testament that she "remember[s] hearing about the 1937 Massacre quite a bit [as] a girl in Haiti" (*Border of Lights*). Danticat suggests, like Alvarez, the accounting of this history was common knowledge often circulated in conversations amongst family members and the community. Danticat goes on to describe how having had "family who had gone to the Dominican Republic to work in the sugar cane fields and had never returned," and having had met survivors of the massacre, she feels tasked with the challenge "to reunite the stories of the lost cane workers of my childhood with the survival tale" (*Border of Lights*). This desire to piece together these narratives led her on a trek to the northern Haitian-Dominican border in 1994. Here she was confounded by the fact that "there was no plaque or marker anywhere to show that thousands of people had died not far from where [I] was sitting" (*Border of Lights*).

While Danticat recognizes the fact that even though no "archival" markers exist to memorialize the event, a host of ephemeral repertoire remains in peoples' memories and stories:

[They] had inherited their parents and grandparents' stories of the screams that filled the night for days, of the river risen to new heights on blood alone. But their present was also agonizing, too agonizing at times to allow them to linger too long on their past. (*Border of Lights*)

As in her novel *The Farming of Bones*, Danticat again highlights the failure of any “official archive” to commemorate the Parsley Massacre. More specifically, archives only hold traces of the past, the remnants of what actually happened. The counter-archive, on the other hand, the fiction, non-fiction, and commemorative actions of the non-profit organization provide a space for the engagement with the history. An engagement that includes recuperating lost narratives, commemorating past events, building solidarities across national and transnational communities, and strategizing in response to contemporary legislation.

Danticat references the essential importance of the ephemeral and the repertoire in writing counter-narratives about these events, as these stories and familial testimonies contain the only tangible evidence of the history of the Parsley Massacre. When Danticat asks “an old Haitian man- on the border- why he thought [there were no placards, he suggested] the best way to commemorate the horrors of the past, is to stop the injustices of the present” (*Border of Lights*). Here, Danticat’s *testimonio* confirms what both she and Julia Alvarez suggest in their fiction, the necessity of not only collecting these histories into a counter-archive, but closely examining their contemporary resonances. The critical commentary offered to Danticat foretells the impending 2013 D.R. Citizenship Ruling which carries the larger narratives and state actions behind the history of the Parsley Massacre and the Mirabal murders into “the injustices of the present” (*Border of Lights*).

In their testimonies, both Julia Alvarez and Edwidge Danticat illuminate the arguments posited in their fiction. Namely, the fact that atrocities like the murder of the

Mirabal sisters' and the Parsley Massacre are events that connect communities conceptually and relationally across time and space. The constitutive components of these histories have the potential to build solidarities across various localities that can directly lead to both imagined and real-time political activism. These relationships are of utmost importance when attempting to create counter-archives that answer questions around how one begins to reconstruct traumatic histories, as well as who is in the position to do the reconstructing. For Alvarez and Danticat, building a counter-archive begins with the creation of inclusive accounts that take into consideration the expansive nature of these events. Finally, at the heart of this work, both fiction and non-fiction, lies the awareness that the ideologies that undergirded these moments of violence continue to resonate in contemporary politics.

Including transnational *testimonios* in English aligns with the larger intentions of the organization of creating “a collective coming together to commemorate, collaborate and continue the legacy of hope and justice” (Border of Lights). However, when thirteen of the fourteen personal stories featured on the website are entirely in English, the mission becomes too insular. While one could readily pose an argument about the issues of literacy and the lack of access to technology between local communities in the Dominican Republic and Haiti, it has more to do with pushing the argument regarding the mutual relationships between the history shared across local, national, and transnational communities. The problem is that only including English accounts turns a recuperative act into one that overlooks the voices of local communities for the sake of the larger transnational argument.

In the previous chapter, I examined the fictional and non-fictional counter-archives authors Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat, and Junot Díaz have created in order to address the silences that accompanied the “official” discourse surrounding the Parsley Massacre, the murder of the Mirabal sisters, and the Trujillo dictatorship. In each of their selected works, I’ve examined the foundational argument each author poses regarding the necessity of creating counter-archives that record the history and address how these events are experienced transnationally and transgenerationally. In addition, I’ve highlighted how their work exposes the contemporary impact these histories pose across space and time. In chapter three, I will explore Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz’s digital approach via fast media, to create counter-narratives about the current manifestations of *antihaitianismo*. I will examine their efforts compiling counter-narratives to call attention to the precarious citizenship of individuals affected by the Dominican Republic’s tribunal ruling, *La Sentencia*.

Notes

¹ Julia Alvarez and Edwidge Danticat’s counter-archival work on the Trujillo dictatorship (The Parsley Massacre and murder of the Mirabal sisters) builds upon the non-fictional scholarship of Lauren Derby’s *The Dictator’s Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo*, Michael Hall’s *Sugar and Power in the Dominican Republic: Eisenhower, Kennedy, and the Trujillos*, Lorgia García- Peña’s *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction*, and Edward Paulino’s *Dividing Hispaniola: The Dominican Republic’s Border Campaign against Haiti, 1930-1961*.

² El Jefe is a Spanish term meaning “the Chief” or “the boss” and was used as a nickname for Rafael Leonidas Trujillo.

³ The Dominican newspaper *El Caribe*, who originally broke the news of the Mirabals’ murders, described the cause of their deaths as an automobile accident.

⁴ In December of 1999, the murder of the Mirabals “came to the attention of the world [as] the United Nations General Assembly voted to designate 25 November as International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women” (Lorne 47). Gabrielle

Lorne's article, "Helping Dominicans recover their memory" provides details regarding the response of the "official" archive, at the time of the murders, as well as the larger international outcry.

⁵ The Museo de la Hermanas Mirabal (Museum of the Mirabal Sisters) is a museum in Salcedo, Dominican Republic that was run by Dedé Mirabal until her death in February of 2014. Dedé Mirabal's memoir *Vivas en su Jardín* (Live in your Garden) published in 2009 detailed the lives and murders of the Mirabal sisters.

⁶ Rigoberta Menchú's, *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* is a principal account of state violence written in the genre of *testimonio*. It is often positioned as the definitive text of the genre.

⁷ I'm interpreting *testimonio* as "the genre that arose out of Caribbean and Central American social and political movements as a way to foreground the voices of the oppressed" (Shemak 83). See April Shemak's "Re-membering Hispaniola: Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones*" for a more detailed definition.

⁸ *Gringa Dominicana* is the name Alvarez uses for the Dominican-American character in the novel who interviews Dedé Mirabal. In Spanish it translates into Dominican Gringa. Gringa is a slang term for a foreign female in Latin America. Alvarez's use of the term is interesting because it implies that the woman is a foreign to both the Dominican Republic and the United States.

⁹ Anti-Haitianismo is the term used for the anti-Haitian action and discourse circulating during the time of the Trujillo Dictatorship through present day.

¹⁰ See Edward Paulino "Bearing Witness to Genocide: The 1937 Haitian Massacre and Border of Lights" and Richard Lee Turits "A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed: The 1937 Haitian Massacre in the Dominican Republic" for a more detailed history of the Parsley Massacre.

¹¹ Dominicans of Haitian-descent is the term used to describe Haitians living in the Dominican Republic whom are citizens or non-citizen immigrants.

¹² The 2013 Dominican Constitutional Court ruling, colloquially known as *La Sentencia*, changed the parameters in which individuals are identified as Dominican nationals. The Amnesty International Report, "Without Paper, I am No one" provides a thorough definition of the ruling, its proceedings, and the widespread impact it has had on multiple generations of Dominicans of Haitian-descent dating back to 1929.

Chapter 3. Statelessness and “Fast Media”: Precarious Citizenship and the Digital Counter-Narrative

On November 20th, 1999, Edwidge Danticat and Junot Díaz co-authored the *New York Times* op-editorial “The Dominican Republic’s War on Haitian Workers.” This piece, like others published in *The New Yorker*, *The New Yorker* podcasts, *The Miami Herald*, on Facebook and Twitter, “highlight[s] the expulsions of thousands of Haitians who’ve been living in the Dominican Republic... [specifically] Dominicans of Haitian descent” (1). In addition to addressing the practices of expulsion, the essay calls attention to the inhumane living conditions in *bateyes*.⁷ The op-ed speaks, at length, to the way in which those deported “were given no opportunity to prove legal status . . . or return to their homes to collect belongings, notify their families, and make arrangements for their children” (Danticat and Díaz 2). Publishing this op-ed fourteen years before the official 2013 Dominican Constitutional Court ruling, Danticat and Díaz use the genre of the op-editorial, via the venue of fast media, as a platform to connect the deportations of certain populations to a longer history of precarious citizenship.⁸ More specifically, through op-editorials, letters to the editor, and articles in the News Desk section of *The New Yorker*, authors such as Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat, Junot Díaz, and Deisy Toussaint draw connections between the rhetoric surrounding the deportations in 1999, or the problem of the “Haitian question,” to Dominican political commentary dating back to the Trujillo regime. Their op-eds assert the argument that the very language the Dominican Republic utilizes in 2013 “echos the oratory of the dictator Rafael Trujillo” who used similar language to incite the Parsley Massacre along the very same borders in 1937 (Danticat and Díaz 2).

“The Dominican Republic’s War on Haitian Workers” is the first of several op-editorials written by Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat, and Junot Díaz, either collectively or individually, wherein the authors’ call international attention to the deportation crisis. At the time of its publication, it is clear that Danticat and Díaz are trying to make sense of an upsurge in deportations that have no clear, causal factors. However, their op-ed emphasizes the point that the “racially tinged language” must be contextualized as a remnant of the “official” Dominican national discourse that emerged during the Trujillo dictatorship. Nationalist discourse that has, as Milagros Ricourt argues, continued through various politicians post-Trujillo:

President Joaquin Balaguer (1966-1978/1986-1994) exhibited internationally his loyalty to Spain and his preoccupation of Haitian blackness infiltrating the white Dominican Republic. Contemporary Dominican Republic presidents such as Leonel Fernández and Danilo Medina have enacted laws that violate the human rights of hundreds of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian ancestry. (Ricourt 15)

Together, their single and collective-authored op-editorials, published in various fast media outlets, have added to their fictional counter-archive by producing non-fiction counter-narratives that call attention to the history of *antihaitianismo* in the Dominican Republic. These counter-narrative pieces expose the factitious rhetoric circulating on behalf of state representatives, “official” accounts that attempt to justify the court’s ruling as simply a matter of “regulariz[ing] people and clarify[ing] citizenship rules” (Archibold 5). Further, their collective and individual fast media articles construct point-counterpoint responses to state arguments, that expose fabrications and governmental ghosting in order to reveal the material reality. Finally, while calling attention to “official” narratives, they cite the failure of both nation-states, the D.R. and Haiti, to protect citizens of Haitian descent. A negligence that dates back to the Trujillo regime. Collectively, their op-

editorials shine a light on the fact that the state-imposed precarious citizenship of particular populations is not a new practice. Further, their literary work, fiction and non-fiction, engages in what Deborah Thomas calls an act of “historiciz[ing] the present moment” (Thomas 35).⁹

For these authors, historicizing the present serves the function of drawing clear connections between contemporary structural inequalities and particular ideologies and political practices of the past. More specifically, the digital counter-narrative they employ challenge both “well-intentioned” media that refers to the “sudden” statelessness as something recent, while simultaneously calling critical attention to state and cultural nationalisms that actively deny the impact of the citizenship ruling on Haitians of Dominican descent. These digital counter-narratives are essential to the creation of a space for public discourse on the topic. In this chapter, I argue that the digital counter-narratives Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz construct via fast media including op-editorials, letters to the editor, and news reports allows them to critique the 2013 citizenship ruling with an attention on immediacy. Rather than a novel or short story, these short pieces have the potential to address large audiences in the present moment while also providing a space for readers to virtually engage with the crisis at hand. Predicated on the need for immediate attention, the issue and the state rhetoric surrounding it requires direct response. I suggest this digital collection of essays and editorials adds to the larger counter-archive they’ve constructed with their fiction and nonprofit work with Border of Lights. A counter-archive that attempts to make visible the struggle of populations silenced by national histories and “official” state accounts.

For these three authors, the op-editorials and additional online materials function as an entryway into what Gina Athena Ulysse terms “the world of fast media” (Ulysse xx). Ulysse describes fast media as a genre that requires the “sensibilities to creatively unpack cultural complexities [. . . while] introduc[ing] readers to potentially alternative views” (xx-xxi). The op-editorial addresses the issues present in their fiction through a more immediate platform that is conducive to transnational dialogue. Even though each of the aforementioned media outlets publish and circulate in the United States, their accessibility via the internet, affords the genre a status of readability that differs from the novel or short story. The genre’s form and stylistic requirements of writing within “limited space [while gaining] a reader’s attention quickly, often in just the first sentence” aligns with the immediacy of the subject matter itself” (Ulysse xx). The human rights violations via the forced deportations before and after the ruling, require immediate national and transnational attention. Moreover, the statelessness that Haitians of Dominican descent experience requires contextualization within a larger history of exploitation.

In this chapter, I apply Ulysse’s notion of fast media as a digital venue for Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz’s op-editorials (42). My particular interest in these digital venues has to do with the authors’ use of the space as a means of producing what I call counter-narratives to the “official” state narrative about citizenship issues in the Dominican Republic. Here, I see these authors using the digital op-editorial as a means of reaching out to varying audiences and constituents. Fast media, then, serves as the platform through which counter-narratives circulate in real-time.

Through the digital op-editorial these authors produce what I'm calling a counter-narrative responsible for two things. Firstly, their op-editorials challenge the veracity of the "official" accounting of historical events as a means of producing a more accurate account. Through a compilation of in the moment point-counterpoint argumentation, references to human rights reports, and photographs, their op-editorials rely on a rhetoric of proof that critiques the state's failings. More specifically, the counter-narratives produced center on a language of truth and evidence that counters the nations refusal to admit fault, take responsibility, and reconcile these historic events. Secondly, their work holds the government's accountable for ghosting the past. Here, they produce a narrative of accountability around the roles the Dominican Republic and Haiti have played in historic events that pose very real consequences in the present moment. This is not the first time the genre of the op-editorial has been used to write political commentary. Rather, as Steven M. Hallock's, *Editorial and Opinion: The Dwindling Marketplace of Ideas in Today's News* (2007) suggests, using the op-editorial as a space for political commentary dates back to the Pre- Civil War era in the United States. However, for these authors and the particular issues they address, the combination of fast media and the digital op-editorial becomes a critical tool for producing a counter-narrative that builds upon their larger counter-archival project. In previous chapters, I've defined their counter-archival project as the sum of their work directly addressing the Trujillo regime and its lasting effects. The particular op-editorials I discuss in this chapter, are part and parcel of their larger counter-archival project.

La Sentencia: The Precarious Position of Statelessness

With the stroke of a pen, authorities in the Dominican Republic have effectively wiped four generations of Dominicans off the map.

— Erika Guevara-Rosas (Amnesty International)

The 2013 Dominican Constitutional Court ruling, colloquially known as *La Sentencia*, has received criticism by some, as an “‘ethnic purging,’ [that has placed] the fate of hundreds of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent into limbo” (Goodman 1). Former Haitian President, Michel Martelly, has denounced it as a “civil genocide,” and Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz liken it to a similar lesson to that of the Holocaust, that being the “first step to genocide is [stripping] a people of their right to citizenship” (Goodman 2). Historically, the ruling itself isn’t the Dominican Republic’s first attempt to remove Haitians from the country, as highlighted in the 2015 Amnesty International Report “‘Without Papers I Am No One:’ Stateless People in the Dominican Republic”:

Since the early 1990s Dominican-born children of Haitian migrants have been the target of a number of administrative, legislative and judicial decisions aimed at restricting their access to Dominican identity documents and ultimately to Dominican nationality. With no automatic access to Haitian nationality, many have been left stateless, not recognized as nationals by either the Dominican Republic or Haiti. (5)

What makes the citizenship ruling so dangerous is the fact that it is the first-time deportations have and will be conducted, as Edwidge Danticat argues, with “a law behind them... [a] law that gives the Dominican government the power to deport mass amounts of people, [while also creating a dangerous] civil environment” (Goodman 3). While this “legislated” form of state violence is new, there is a century long history of rhetorical and political violence between the two countries that is rooted in colonization, U.S. imperialism, institutionalized racism, and dictatorial legacies. The contemporary

economic and political relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti demonstrates one country's dependency for cheap, disposable labor.¹⁰ Thus, people of Haitian descent have crossed the border into the Dominican Republic in search of jobs for multiple generations. As *New York Times* article, "Dominicans of Haitian Descent Cast into Legal Limbo by Court" illustrates,

For generations, people of Haitian descent have been an inextricable part of life here, often looked at with suspicion and dismay, but largely relied on all the same to clean rooms, build things cheaply and provide the backbreaking labor needed on the country's vast sugar plantations. (1)

The precarious citizenship status of Dominicans of Haitian descent has been something the DR has both benefitted from and rallied for during political elections. In return, the Haitian government itself has been heavily criticized for its complicity, ignoring human rights violations in the Dominican Republic and doing "little to receive" Dominicans of Haitian descent left stateless by the ruling (De Greff 3). While one may question how much power the Haitian government truly has in these matters, it's equally important to consider the historical collusion between the two governments during events such as the Parsley Massacre.

Since the ruling has gone into effect, settlement camps have sprung up along Haiti's borders for the thousands rendered stateless. In the 2015 *Miami New Times* article "Author Edwidge Danticat on the Dominican Republic: 'Government is Trying to Erase a Whole Segment of History'" Danticat describes this statelessness as:

A horrible situation in which people are in the most terrible sort of limbo you can imagine. The Dominican Republic says that many of the people in the camps have voluntarily returned, but if you talk to them they say that the law has empowered their neighbors to threaten them. Others were picked up by the police and were dropped at the border. (2)

The *Miami New Times* is one of several Miami newspapers, with a weekly distribution of 40,000 (as of 2017) and unlimited fast media circulation. This article offers a direct counter-narrative to the state denial of deportations, while also calling attention to the historic erasure of this particular population dating back to the Trujillo regime.

When drawing attention to the enforced statelessness this recent legislation has imposed, all three authors make it a point to clearly illustrate how the legal and social disenfranchisement Dominicans of Haitian descent are currently experiencing is not something new. Rather, the 1937 Parsley Massacre preceded the ghosting of tens of thousands of citizens through denationalization, described by Díaz as, “a 1937 extermination of anyone in the country who couldn’t roll the R in *perejil*, the Spanish word for parsley” (Pierre 3). *The Nation* article “The Ghosts of 1937 Are Warning Us” (2015) also highlights the relationship between the citizenship ruling and the not so distant past. Anne McClintock’s use of the term “ghosting” to describe a nation’s inability to confront and account for its past (for example: the United States and its history of slavery) is useful here. Applied in the context of this current crises, “ghosting” accounts for not only the way in which the Dominican Republic and Haiti deny the past (Trujillo regime) that influences this ruling, but also the historic connections to the civic and physical deaths of large populations of Dominicans of Haitian descent via mass deportations. The counter-narratives these three authors produce actively work against this governmental ghosting by calling attention to historic government propaganda that has both falsified details about events and/or omitted them altogether. Additionally, Alvarez, Danticat and Díaz call out the active denial of events espoused within the state’s “official” narrative.

Danticat and Díaz's first op-editorial "The Dominican Republic's War on Haitian Workers" (1999) creates a counter-narrative highlighting the human rights violations of Dominicans of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic. The first in a series of collaborative efforts between Danticat and Díaz (and later Alvarez), the op-ed calls attention to the normalcy of human rights violations on behalf of state politics and the (state-run) sugar cane industry in the D.R. While attending to these issues, the piece roots these particular violations within a longer history of labor exploitation and racial discrimination, stemming from Anti-Haitian sentiment disseminated during the Trujillo regime. As the op-ed attempts to historicize the present moment, it picks up on the up-tick in deportations wherein a sizeable shift in expulsions is occurring. In calling out the gross malfeasance of the state and its industry amongst national and international audiences, the op-ed not only sheds light on the Dominican Republic's immigration practices, but it altogether reframes the discussion.

During the time of its publication there was little to no media coverage on the issue, aside from the reports of human rights organizations. Yet, conversations across national and transnational publics were happening. This op-ed then, was in many ways responsible for drawing international attention to the issue, as two published authors from the Dominican Republic and Haiti (the diasporic darlings of each country) kindled worldwide outcry, while rousing an "official" state response to their claims. The article itself resolute in its rhetoric and literary strategies offers a counter-narrative to the state's silence and later denial. Beginning with the title itself, the strategic use of the word "war" anchors the op-editorial's critique of the Dominican Republic's relationship to its neighbor in a historical analysis of the violence of *antihaitianismo*. Danticat and Díaz's

purposeful deployment of militaristic language directly challenges the rhetoric that situates Haitians as cultural and economic invaders of the Dominican Republic. From their particular choice of language to the imagined deportation scene that opens the op-editorial, the article intentionally reframes the conflict between the two nations, beginning with a direct critique of the D.R.'s silence and later "official" rebuttals.

Aside from strong word choice, an essential component of any op-editorial due to the word limitation of the genre, the authors' employ a call to the imagination that appeals to the readers' emotional sensibility while implicating U.S. policies for similar abuses. Through the censure of the D.R.'s human rights abuses, the op-eds attempt to provoke international attention and action. Starting with the opening scene in the op-editorial, the authors' call attention to the extreme measures the Dominican government uses to expel the very workers the country has "recruited for half a century" to work in the sugar industry (Danticat and Díaz). Here, the use of the imagination works to impress upon the reader the imminent dangers facing workers. More specifically, both writers urge the reader to use an empathetic imaginary that requires them to place themselves in the position of a worker in order to make sense of the terror:

Imagine you are at work, or simply walking down the street. Suddenly a group of soldiers arrives. You are ordered at gunpoint to board a truck, already crowded with dozens of others. You are driven for hours to an isolated spot on a border between a country where you have lived most of your life and an ancestral land, to which you have not returned for years. You are ordered off the truck. If you hesitate or resist, the soldiers shoot into the air, and you must run into the savannas, into a land that you no longer know. (Danticat and Díaz 1)

The authors invite readers to situate themselves in the position of a deportee engaged in everyday, lawful activities, who are then grabbed by military forces and forcibly removed from home, family, and national identity, by threat of physical violence. Readers must

imagine themselves ensnared in this violent expulsion. Danticat and Díaz's use of the second person indeterminate "you" is an important rhetorical move as it appeals to the reader's emotions by situating the reader as one of the nameless individuals forcibly expelled. Through the use of the imagination, the reader is asked to experience the terror of displacement and civic death. While the op-editorial emphasizes the alarming nature of the expulsions in which individuals have "no time to return to their homes to collect their belongings, notify their families and make arrangements for their children," it simultaneously points to the unnerving precedent these deportations set (Danticat and Díaz 1). In particular, the op-ed foreshadows a concern of what is to come when a country not only violates human rights, but its own laws around citizenship.

This scene not only highlights the use of the Dominican military to enforce expulsion, but harkens back to an "imagined" scene in Danticat's novel *The Farming of Bones* (1998). In particular, this scene in the op-editorial is remarkably similar to the turning point in the novel where soldiers load up "cane workers [into] trucks" who are then slaughtered at the onset of the Parsley Massacre (Danticat 153). Connecting this present day "actual event" to one "imagined" in fiction is an important rhetorical move, as it situates the modern-day expulsion of workers within the context of a historical moment of utmost importance to both countries- the Parsley Massacre.⁵ Decades after the historic event, fictionalized or not, the op-editorial speaks resoundingly to a similar sense of terror experienced via forced deportation. Unlike the Parsley Massacre, where archival evidence of abuse remained hidden, "news reports and several Haitian nongovernmental agencies" verify these incidents (Danticat and Díaz 1). The op-

editorial, mirroring Danticat's fictional re-telling, illustrates the thin line that exists between physical and civic violence at the hands of the Dominican state.

The objective of this particular op-editorial is to provide an overview of the presumed causal factors behind the deportations, starting with a historical cataloging of Dominican expulsions to emphasize the differences between past and present deportation practices (guessing work at this point, due to silence and denial on behalf of the Dominican state). Wherein government expulsions have gone from removing:

A few hundred Haitian seasonal workers who have overstayed their welcome... to thousands of people, including many Haitians who have been living in the Dominican Republic for years and even some Dominicans of Haitian descent. (Danticat and Díaz 1)

Untangling the larger issue requires a historic examination of the various waves of deportation and denial of citizenship in order to fully understand the “systemic violence against Haitians on the part of the Dominican state” (Derby 51). The op-editorial analyzes the issue by focusing on three proposed motivating factors for deportation, including the privatization of the Dominican sugar industry, the Dominican state response to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights Report (1999), and the impending election season. The clear understanding of the relationship between contemporary state practices and those of the past is ever present in this analysis. In particular, the op-editorial highlights the calculated use of anti-Haitian sentiment as a strategy of political and economic scapegoating.

The Dominican sugar industry lies at the root of the conflict between the two nations. More specifically, Haitian presence in the *bateyes* of Dominican sugar plantations led to the creation of sugar production sites monitored by Dominican military and government alike. The industry formally arose in the Dominican Republic in the

early twentieth century, during the U.S. occupation and “[became a] contract-labor relationship between the Dominican and Haitian governments. It was then formulized under the regimes of strongmen François Duvalier and Rafael Trujillo,” mimicking slave labor from the colonial era and replicating indenture, the system put into place post the abolition of slavery in the Caribbean (Derby 53).¹¹ In 1999, the concern over the industry had to do with the slow process of privatization and its potential to eliminate the need for Haitian *braceros* or laborers. The fear, at the time of the op-editorial’s publication, is as the “harvesting [becomes] more mechanized [it] reduces the need” for Haitian workers (Danticat and Díaz 1). Such mechanization would create the conditions for heavy deportations to “clear the bateyes out of fear that those people who have lived and worked for decades will spill into general Dominican population” (Danticat and Díaz 1).

Whether or not the state privatizes the industry isn’t the point. Rather, the concern over racial mixing is. Danticat and Díaz address the way in which the treatment of Haitian sugarcane workers historically wavers depending on the state of Dominican economics and its accompanying political and racial rhetoric. More specifically, the xenophobic fear of intermixing between Haitians and the “general Dominican population” and the increased fear of such as *bateyes* become more mechanized is always at the forefront of the issue (Danticat and Díaz 1). This xenophobic fear, known as the “Haitian” problem, has long accompanied a rhetoric associated with one strand of Dominican “conservative nationalist thought, anti-Haitianism, codified and officialized during the Trujillo regime” (Derby 54). The contemporaneous fear of intermixing is rooted in the same rhetoric used to justify the 1937 Parsley Massacre, which described

Haitian cane workers “as a polluting poison seeping across the border and contaminating the Dominican nation” (Derby 54).

Here, the op-editorial further suggests that in addition to the feared privatization of the *bateyes*, the deportations were also in response to the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights report. Published in 1999 by the Organization of American States, an organization that “constitutes the main political, judicial, and societal governmental forum” in the hemisphere, the report calls into question both Dominican recruitment practices and the abusive treatment within the *bateyes* (The Organization of American States). The report critically questioned the historic denouncement on behalf of the Dominican state that:

Haitian workers who cross the border to work in the sugarcane harvest in the Dominican Republic have been the victims of a whole array of abuses by the authorities, from assassinations, abusive treatment, massive expulsions, exploitation, deplorable living conditions, and the failure to recognize their labor rights. (The Organization of American States 317)

Instead, citing the results of multiple on-site visits and the documentation gathered from human rights groups, the report provides verification of the abuses. Additionally, the report substantiated the claims posed in the op-editorial outlining the forced deportation of individuals that disallows them the opportunity to inform family members of their expulsion. The organization goes on to suggest further abuses, as deportees are then detained in “establishments in which they receive little or no food during their confinement, and in some cases [are] beaten by the Dominican authorities” (The Organization of American States 328).

While the op-editorial concerns itself specifically with the expulsions, it hints at the imminent concern around the connection between human rights abuses and the status

of permanent illegality. This op-editorial's concern with the precedence this round of expulsions set ultimately foreshadows what is to come in terms of denationalization and the 2013 citizenship ruling. More specifically, the op-editorial points to the glaring contradiction in which the Dominican Republic violates its own civil code, "which grants citizenship to all those born on Dominican soil, most children of Haitian parents are denied Dominican citizenship" (Danticat and Díaz 1). Here "The Dominican Republic's War on Haitian Workers" asks the reader to take heed to the fact that the country itself will go as far as denying its own civil codes and laws to prevent Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent from garnering citizenship status. A decision which directly breaches,

Article 11 of the constitution of the Dominican Republic which enshrines the principles of *jus soli*, and which indicates: Dominicans are all persons born in the territory of the Republic with the exception of the legitimate children of foreigners' resident in the country in diplomatic representation or in transit.¹² (The Organization of American States 353)

This particular op-editorial doesn't elaborate on the importance of the *jus soli* clause and the Dominican government's manipulation of said principle over time. However, it does draw a clear connection between the collaborative workings of state law and military force when it comes to citizenship rulings and deportations.

For example, the op-editorial draws a correlation between the spring 1999 presidential elections and the rise in deportations. In particular, it highlights the past and present use of the "Haitian question" in Dominican political rhetoric. The "Haitian question" repeatedly takes center stage as an election platform. Here, the article demonstrates how "anti-Haitianism [as] an ethnicized nationalist discourse [is] frequently deployed as political currency to discredit political rivals," in this case, the failed campaign of Jose Francisco Pena Gomez (Derby 54). The op-editorial illustrates the way

in which the particular forms of *antihaitianismo* trumped up during election season, where “Dominicans [are urged] to take to the streets to protest the ‘Haitian invasion’ . . . echoes the oratory of the dictator Rafael Trujillo” (Danticat and Díaz 2).

Throughout the op-ed, the authors address the egregious actions of the D.R., wherein Danticat and Díaz take to task both the rhetorical sentiment behind the deportations and the similar politics/practices in the United States. For example, the op-ed condemns the “official” silences and denial of the anti-Haitian prejudice, all the while pointing to the sheer fact that these expulsions “. . . are violations of the workers’ human rights and of the country’s own laws” (2). Here, they not only expose the falsity of the D.R.’s denial, but also chide the country’s fatuous decision to violate its own laws as a means to discriminate. In return, the op-ed offers a very clear counter-narrative to the populist and “official” discourses that have surrounded the “Haitian” problem. More specifically, Danticat and Díaz challenge the dominant narratives describing Haitian migration, and instead normalize the action of migratory movement as one of economic necessity:

Haitians do not want to invade the Dominican Republic, culturally or otherwise. Most have gone there seeking a better life, much like the nearly one million Dominicans who have emigrated to the United States. (Danticat and Díaz 2)

In the first line, the authors challenge the language of “invasion” that criminalizes Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic. Instead, they situate the drive to migrate on a basic need for economic stability. They go on to compare Haitian migration to the D.R. to that of Dominican emigration to the United States, which in turn normalizes the need to migrate as a means of bettering oneself. In doing so, it neutralizes the criminality so readily ascribed to Haitian migration, and instead contextualizes such movement in the

larger frames of transnationalism. Finally, it challenges underlying discourses that make certain migrations acceptable while denouncing others as criminal.

In the op-eds concluding call to action, Danticat and Díaz outline a series of action steps for their readers:

Haitians, Dominicans, and Americans should protest the deportations, as well as the racially tinged political rhetoric that has given too many Dominicans the false perception that all their problems will disappear if only the Haitians will go away. (Danticat and Díaz 2)

Here, the authors are no longer asking the reader to imagine the circumstances surrounding the issue. Rather, their conclusion calls readers to action through the recognition of the human rights violations taking place, including an awareness of the racialized political rhetoric at play. Danticat and Díaz's closing exhorts readers to protest both issues and, in doing so, answers the age-old question of what a reader does with this sort of information. The authors' critique the ways in which racialized rhetoric influences the larger political rhetoric in the Dominican Republic, while highlighting the "false perceptions" that arise from such discourse (Danticat and Díaz 2). More specifically, their analysis addresses the discourses and the actions such rhetoric provokes. This, in turn, creates the erroneous impression that "all [Dominican] problems will disappear if only the Haitians will go away" (Danticat and Díaz 2). Including this point is extremely important because it echoes similar political rhetoric circulating in the U.S. during the time of the op-eds publication. Here, I'm referencing the United States Illegal Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act of 1996, which gave the U.S. government the authority to continue construction of the wall between the U.S.-Mexico border. Additionally, any immigrants caught in the United States unlawfully faced

expulsion from the country for three years unless they obtained a pardon. This law invented U.S. immigration legislation and enforcement policies as we now know it and, in many ways, echoed the sentiment and false perceptions surrounding the conflict in the D.R. While the initial call to the reader to protest the situation in the Dominican Republic may seem unduly hopeful, resituating the discussion to focus on the U.S. and its own racial discourse around immigration politics is a strategic move.

As an op-editorial circulated via fast media, “The Dominican Republic’s War on Haitian Workers” employs the standard strategies Ulysse describes, including setting up the “sensibilities to creatively unpack cultural complexities [. . . while] introduc[ing] readers to potentially alternative views” (xx-xxi). Unlike their fiction where they have more time to elaborate on the larger historical complications tied to these issues, fast media requires concision when providing an overview of the history. Additionally, as a counter-narrative, the piece must demonstrate the clear relationship between history and politics in the present moment because, in many ways, it is one of few publications calling out the D.R.’s “official” silence and denial of the issue. Finally, the call to the readers’ imagination is an essential rhetorical move, as it both appeals to emotions while turning the issue on its head, asking the reader to recognize similar violations in the United States. More specifically, the call to action reframes the issue in order to draw a connection between racial, political rhetoric in the Dominican Republic and the United States. In doing so, readers are introduced to an “alternative view” inviting them to consider similar human rights violations in the United States (Ulysse xxi).

Several of the rhetorical and literary strategies present in their joint op-ed share similarities to each author’s fictional projects. As I’ve argued in previous chapters, both

Danticat and Díaz have addressed the need for counter-narratives of the “official” Dominican discourse. Even further, as this larger project suggests, their work, when compiled, creates a counter-archive documenting historic incidents like the Parsley Massacre and its direct tie to present day conflicts. In order to do such work, the imagination is key. Similar to their use of the imagination in the op-ed, Danticat’s *The Farming of Bones* (1998) and Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) rely heavily on the imagination to piece together histories that counter the “official” narrative. One significant difference between their op-editorials and fictional projects is this clear call to action. While I’m not suggesting this doesn’t exist in either of the novels, the op-ed creates a very clear, hardline insistence on change. The uncompromising nature of this call has to do with the genre of the piece, wherein most op-editorials are designed around direct language and conclude with a call to respond. Additionally, fast media allows them to address the issues immediately through digital circulation.

Their initial op-ed is essential to the larger conversation, as it is responsible for shedding light on the issue while also creating a template for additional commentary. Further, it serves as archival evidence establishing a link between the D.R.’s historic treatment of Haitian laborers and the imminent 2013 citizenship ruling that expands human rights violations to additional communities. Between Danticat and Díaz’s publication of “The Dominican Republic’s War on Haitian Workers” in 1999 and the 2013 “To the Editor,” the deportation crises reaches a climax with the 2013 Dominican Constitutional Tribunal ruling, 168-13:

The September 23, 2013, by the Dominican Constitutional Tribunal’s ruling, 168-13, negated the Dominican nationality of hundreds of thousands of Dominicans with Haitian ancestries. This ruling stated that all children of undocumented

Haitians parents born since 1929, and their descendants, would be stripped of Dominican citizenship. (Ricourt 38)

While their first op-editorial “The Dominican Republic’s War on Haitian Workers” illustrates the impact of denationalization on Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent in 1999, their follow-up letter to the editor explains the totality of the situation, fourteen years later. Their second collective piece, by comparison, articulates the relationship between denationalization and deportations via the 2013 ruling.

On October 24th of 2013, Randal C. Archibold published the online article “Dominicans of Haitian Descent Cast into Legal Limbo by Court” in *The New York Times*. Archibold’s article overviews the Dominican high court ruling while summing up the significance of the court’s decision through testimonies of those directly impacted, and quotes from the Dominican historian, Edward Paulino. The article’s analysis of the ruling, and its preceding history, is quite thorough, and shares similarities to Danticat and Díaz’s earlier op-ed. In particular, it highlights the history of racial tensions between the Dominican Republic and Haiti and the historic court rulings that have attempted to address the “Haitian” problem. While highlighting the U.N. and CARICOM’s audible condemnation of the ruling, the article also echoes the commentary of those in support of the decision including the immigrant commissioner (at that time) and the archbishop of Santo Domingo, Cardinal Nicolás de Jesús López Rodríguez. Both officials were cited as supporting the ruling as a tool to “help the government regularize people and clarify the citizenship rules” (Archibold 5). While the archbishop went a step further declaring the ruling to be “just [while nodding] to a sentiment among some Dominicans that international organizations were meddling in their affairs” (Archibold 5).

Archibold's article ignited a series of responses. For example, four days later, on October 28, 2013, the Ambassador of the Dominican Republic, Anibal De Castro penned the op-ed "Two Versions of a Dominican Tale." One day later, Mark Kurlansky, Junot Díaz, Edwidge Danticat and Julia Alvarez responded directly to De Castro's op-ed with their own letter to the editor. Unlike their novels, fast media creates a space for immediate response. This is of utmost importance considering Kurlansky et al. are scripting a real-time counter-narrative to the "official" discourse of the Ambassador of the state. In this moment, they have the opportunity to offer up a line by line counter-narrative to the series of denials and rhetorical spin offered up as an "official" response. Even further, their letter provides solid proof of the need for counter-narratives and counter-archives, as the De Castro's response actively denies any and all allegations within Archibold's article.

In response to Archibold's reporting, De Castro's op-editorial reads as a point-counterpoint argument. The title itself, "Two Versions of a Dominican Tale," challenges Archibold's article with the implication that while there may be two versions to this "tale," only one is "official." Here, De Castro's op-editorial is representative of one version of a Dominican tale, an "official" nationalist discourse that defends the court's decision, while simultaneously denying the full extent of the impact the ruling has those denationalized. Instead, De Castro takes on those "outsiders" including the U.S., and members of the diaspora, who speak out against the ruling as imposing forces that have no say in the matter. De Castro's op-editorial goes on to describe the way in which the Dominican government is conscious of the "plight of the children of illegal Haitian immigrants" and in response, has implemented a "key component ... [that mandated the

provision of] temporary residence permits until a regularization plan is in place” (1). In other words, the Dominican government would ensure that people were allowed to “remain and work in the country” (1). De Castro concludes with the final argument that the “speculation about mass deportations [was] baseless” and that the citizenship ruling has to do with both Haiti and the Dominican Republic engaging in “the hard task of finding joint solutions to common challenges” (2). While it is clear the two countries have a fractious history, what is less readily apparent are the series of historic negotiations made between governing authorities in each country around citizenship decisions.

Kurlansky et. al’s editorial response to De Castro offers a scathing critique of not only the ruling itself, but the Ambassador’s assertion that deportations are simply gossip. Opening with the statement, “For any who thought that there was a new Dominican Republic, a modern state leaving behind the abuse and racism of the past, the highest court has taken a huge step backward with Ruling 0168-13,” their letter rejects any notion that this decision is solely about regulating immigration (1). Instead, the authors’ call out the country for its present actions and the relationship between the ruling and historic abuses: “Such appalling racism is a continuation of a history of constant abuse, including the infamous Dominican Massacre, under the dictator Rafael Trujillo” (2). They go on to compare the ruling to the acts of genocide committed during the Holocaust—acts that began by stripping people of their citizenship rights. Similar to the argument present in “The Dominican Republic’s War on Haitian Workers,” the letter to the editor draws a clear connection between current legislation and historic practices of *antihaitianismo*; a connection that directly refutes the argumentation in De Castro’s op-editorial. Their letter

operates as a counter-narrative, while resoundingly demonstrating the need for a larger counter-archive challenging “official” narratives of denial. When the Ambassador of the Dominican Republic argues that these litigations are simply a matter of “improving compliance... [and] regulating immigration” and that the massive deportations are mere conjecture, it is a blatant reminder of the state’s manipulation of fact to justify its own actions. A practice all too reminiscent of the past, as illustrated in Joaquín Balaguer’s *La Realidad Dominicana* (The Dominican Reality) (1941) and *La isla al revés: Haití y el destino dominicano* (The Upside-Down Island: Haiti and the Dominican Destination) (1983) two of a series of books known for justifying Trujillo’s actions as well as that of the state during the Parsley Massacre.¹³

The structure of the letter to the editor mimics De Castro’s op-ed. Specifically, the writers use the same point-counterpoint argument structure to challenge the Ambassador’s assertions. This is a strategic rhetorical move in that it illustrates the fact that the other, “unofficial” “tale” can just as easily deconstruct an “official” argument. In the 240-word letter, the authors’ directly challenge the Ambassador’s national rhetoric which attempts to neutralize both the actions that accompany the ruling and the violence that undergirds it. Instead, they dispute the institutionalized racism embedded in both the rhetoric and ensuing actions. Drawing a clear relationship between the ruling and the Parsley Massacre allows them to not only cite a historical lineage, but draw attention to the ways in which the national rhetoric works to subdue the impact of current and historic events. Through a clever use of word choice, the authors heighten the prominence with which the Parsley Massacre is known internationally, situating it as “the infamous Dominican massacre” (Kurlansky et al. 1). While they reference the “Dominican

Massacre [as] infamous” their fiction has argued otherwise. Their novels *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994), *The Farming of Bones* (1998), and *The Brief Wondrous Life* (2007) have critiqued the role of national archives in silencing the truth about the event. Instead, their fictional work has called for and created a counter-archive that document the role of the state and the national narrative in perpetuating Trujillo’s account. The decision to situate this event as “infamous” is an important move. Firstly, it positions a little-known state-sponsored genocide alongside the most well-known international events of human atrocity. In doing so, it makes a strong argument about the history of the Parsley Massacre itself, while increasing the weight of concern regarding the similar politics currently enacted.

The aforementioned rhetorical move connects to the aim of the overall letter. Here, the authors illustrate how easily and routinely “official” narratives craft a fictitious national account and/or response that either denies altogether, or fails to fully acknowledge the history. Thus, their letter demonstrates the way in which De Castro refuses to consider the overarching impact of the ruling, let alone address what the experience of statelessness actually means for those who are currently stateless. To clarify this point, they outline what statelessness actually looks like. In return, they parry the Ambassador’s statement regarding the D.R.’s consideration and implantation of regulations that will allow individuals the opportunity to stay and work in the country. Instead, they argue statelessness will:

Make it challenging for them to study; to work in the formal sector of the economy; to get insurance; to pay into their pension fund; to get married legally; to open bank accounts; and even leave the country that now rejects them if they cannot obtain or renew their passport. (Kurlansky et al. 2)

In closing, the authors' strategically outline the actual conditions of statelessness, highlighting how the result of the Dominican governments decree of certain citizens as "in-transit" has fundamentally shifted the outcomes for individuals and families. As the Amnesty International Report "'Ghost Citizens' in The Dominican Republic" verifies further, the denial of basic human rights since the 2013 ruling strips nationality and turns those "without papers... into 'ghosts,' unable to access basic services such as education and health, and without the possibility to earn a decent living" (1-2). Finally, their letter restates the larger argument regarding the D.R.'s human rights violations as grounded in "abuse and racism of the past" that the Dominican Republic continues to enforce (1). Instead of a call to action, their letter concludes with following question: "How should the world react? Haven't we learned after Germany, the Balkans and South Africa that we cannot accept institutionalized racism?" (Kurlansky et al. 2). While this question may appear drastic to some readers, and all too real for others, it is an essential query summarizing their fundamental argument. First and foremost, it connects the recent court ruling to a past of state-sanctioned violence, i.e., the Parsley Massacre. Additionally, it highlights the need to counter the narratives produced by a contemporary "shadow bureaucracy" that contorts current events in order to construct a narrative that directly shapes public opinion (Derby 314).¹⁴

The letter's call for a counter-narrative is not new in terms of each writer's work. Rather, as I've argued in previous chapters, each author attends to this concern in at least one of their novels. Danticat's, *The Farming of Bones* contests the state archiving of the Parsley Massacre as spurious. In the novel, Dantiat offers two contrasting scenes that illustrate the differences between a state "official" archive collecting individuals accounts

and a counter-archive created by the folks who directly experienced the massacre. Here, Danticat demonstrates the way in which the state “official” archive offered individuals money for their accounts. Wherein, individuals had to prove, through legitimate paperwork, not only what had happened to them, but to murdered love ones. The counter-archive created by victims of the massacre allowed the space for people to share their truth. In a harrowing scene, victims share out brutal accounts of the violence perpetuated against them. Díaz’s *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007) presents a revised historiography in the footnotes of the novel itself. As the novel attempts to draw a relationship between primary and secondary traumas affiliated with the Trujillo regime, it records the process of building a counter-narrative in the body of the text that includes a collection of footnotes that function as a counter-archive. Finally, Alvarez’s *In the Time of the Butterflies* (1994) uses the interview between the two main characters, Dedé Mirabal and the *gringa dominicana*, to demonstrate the construction of a counter-archive. Additionally, the novel offers up María Teresa Mirabal’s fictional diary as both counter-narrative and a counter-archival document capturing the details of the sisters’ ongoing participation in underground movements and a recounting of the incidents that occurred during their incarceration.

Their letter to the editor not only builds on their prior fictional work, but illustrates the advantageous uses of digital media. Here, they engage in similar counter-narrative efforts in real-time. While the media requires writers constrict their arguments to several paragraphs, it challenges them to consolidate arguments using the most concise language and rhetorical strategies possible. In return, it offers immediacy and the opportunity to engage in a public dialogue that demonstrates first-hand, the nature and importance of

counter-narratives and counter-archives. For Kurlansky et al., concise and direct phrases that emphasize the relationship between the ruling and the “abuse and racism of the past,” directly challenge the fallacious parlance of the Ambassador of the Dominican Republic (Kurlansky et al. 1). Additionally, the likening of the Parsley Massacre to the Holocaust is a heavy-handed strategy, that nevertheless effectively illustrates the considerable significance of not only the massacre, but the ruling itself. Finally, concluding with a question as a call to consciousness propels the critique into a larger dialogue about the state’s role in accepting and provoking “institutionalized racism” (Kurlansky et al. 2).

The 2013 letter to the editor builds on the previous argument presented in Danticat and Díaz’s op-editorial “The Dominican Republic’s War on Haitian Workers.” The initial counter-narrative that draws an explicit relationship between the historical treatment of Haitian workers and the contemporaneous deportations. The letter is also adamant in its criticism of not only the continued violations of rights, but the maintenance of a national narrative that continues to articulate *antihaitianismo* sentiment while understating the impact of the ruling and its accompanying deportations. What is most interesting about the letter as a piece of fast media, is the immediacy of its response, and the fact that it verifies publically, in real-time, the need for counter-narratives. It functions as archival evidence of the need for both counter-narratives and a counter-archive of the history and actions, that would dispute the “official” narratives coming from the state and endorsed by the church.

In December of 2015, Julia Alvarez followed up the collective letter to the editor with an op-editorial in the *Miami Herald* entitled “Heal the wounds of Hispaniola.” Alvarez’s message in her op-ed was slightly different, in that she begins with a harsh

critique of the United States, for its lack of focus on citizenship issues impacting Hispaniola. She initiates the essay criticizing Secretary of State Kerry's focus on issues in the divided island of Cyprus as evidence of neglect, when, "just two hours south of Florida, the island of Hispaniola could use some mediation as well... [where] the plight of people who desperately need a place to call home [exists] in our own hemispheric neighborhood" (1). While mindful of what she terms "the refugee crisis" taking place in the Middle East and in Europe, she draws attention to the simple fact that one would arguably assume such incidents would make U.S. audiences more "acutely sensitive and accountable" when happening "in our own hemispheric neighborhood" (1). As a rhetorical phrase read on its own, "in our own hemispheric neighborhood" is problematic as it is an expression often employed to lambaste U.S. embroilment in foreign policies when there are troublesome problems "at home" (1). In order for the reader to understand how she's utilizing the phrase, they must unpack what Alvarez means by the terms "acutely sensitive" and "accountable." Here, Alvarez's use of these particular terms is strategic in that it urges the reader to do a little research on the role of the U.S. in these matters. More specifically, selecting words like "acutely sensitive" and "accountable" indicates some responsibility on behalf of the U.S. (1).¹⁵ The phrase itself and choice of words, act as a wholesale critique of the fact that two years after the 2013 ruling, the U.S. has done little to nothing regarding the issue.

Alvarez's op-editorial goes on to provide a brief history of the citizenship ruling and its initial impact. She turns her focus specifically on the detail that the court's decision has rescinded citizenship "from children born in the country to undocumented immigrants, retroactive to 1929" (2). Alvarez juxtaposes this arbitrary decision over the

date with the additional confusion that has arisen when birthright Dominicans become grouped with undocumented Haitians, who are actually Haitian citizens. Noting the specific fact that, regardless of their Haitian citizenship the “humanitarian crises in deportation camps affects” both populations (2). While mindful of the complications that arise regarding immigration challenges “many nations are facing,” she hones her focus on the numerous examples of the D.R.’s mismanagement when reinforcing the ruling through the “regulation program” created alongside of it:

Bureaucratic mazes, lack of consistency and accountability from those executing the program, unaffordable and insurmountable requirements, confusion about the particular categories of prior documentation and shifting deadlines give the impression that the official attempt is mere appeasement of the international outcry raised by this humanitarian crisis. (Alvarez 2)

Here, as in the Kurlansky et al. letter, Alvarez offers a counter-narrative to the state’s “official” rhetoric about the ruling and accompanying “regulation program”. Rather than reinforcing the “official” spin on the program that situates it as needing to work out some kinks, Alvarez drafts an outline of the state’s various failings. Alvarez chastises the arbitrary practices enforced by the ruling and the complications surrounding the regulation. Her critical commentary is made most visible when she highlights the way in which the state has reinforced its position by harshly castigating individuals and organizations who’ve publically associated the citizenship ruling with human rights violations. Alvarez describes the way in which those who have spoken out about the issue, whether ambassadors or diasporic writers, have been not only ridiculed, but their national identity has been called into question.

Those who have spoken out often have been denounced, harassed and threatened, most prominently authors Edwidge Danticat and Junot Díaz, who, in a Kafkaesque turn, was de-awarded an earlier award by the Dominican Republic for

his writing. The U.S. ambassador to the Dominican Republic, James Brewster, who is gay, was chided by the nation's cardinal for calling attention to human-rights abuses and corruption and told to go back to his embassy and focus on housework, since 'he is the wife of a man.' (Alvarez 2)

Calling attention to the absolute absurdity of the state's "official" response is an important rhetorical move. First and foremost, it highlights the ease with which the state is willing to denounce citizenship. Additionally, it calls attention to the discriminatory rhetoric employed in order to besmirch anyone speaking out against the ruling, including the country's own ambassador. Alvarez's choice to include the "ridiculous extremes" the crises has reached is an important move, in that it questions the credibility of the reasoning of both church and state (Alvarez 2).

In May of 2008, the Dominican *cámara de diputados* (Chamber of Deputies) officially named Díaz "cultural ambassador of the Dominican Republic in the world" and he was also acknowledged by the *Secretaría de Estado de Cultura* (Secretary of State for Culture) during Santo Domingo's International Book Fair. As Díaz began vocalizing opposition to the ruling, he "was accused of being 'antidominicano' by the Dominican Republic's consul in New York, Eduardo Selman. Díaz has also been stripped of the Order of Merit awarded to him by the Dominican Republic in 2009" (Kellogg 1). Additionally, "Díaz's 'outspokenness drew remarks from government officials and a group of Dominican-nationals, who opted to personally attack the author [writing] a letter that questioned Díaz's Dominican-ness; nam[ing] his interest in the Dominican Republic as 'unnecessary' and 'offensive'" (Thompson 3). In response to claims by state officials, Díaz has offered the following commentary: "Those of us who are critics of the sentencia are being told 'we don't understand,' that 'we didn't read the sentencia,' that we are 'traitors,' that we 'hate the Dominican Republic' and that our supposed 'lack of

Dominicanidad' disqualifies us from being able to say anything" (Thompson 2). This information reveals the ease with which government officials and Dominican-nationals denounce any criticism of the ruling as well as individuals' citizenship. It adds to the larger argument regarding the arbitrary nature of the ruling, by highlighting the way in which individuals' relationship to the Dominican Republic, and their "lack of Dominicanidad," is immediately called into question. If this is how the government responds to outside criticism, via members of the diaspora and the ambassadors to the Dominican Republic, such a response causes one to consider the type of climate this creates inside the D.R. In particular, it conjures up memories of the culture of silence most prevalent during the Trujillo regime while proving, once again, the need for a counter-narratives. Here, the "official" response Alvarez cites is reminiscent of politics and practices during the regime. Wherein the denouncing of state decisions was responded to with threats of physical violence and the direct challenge of individuals' national identity; a practice which continues what Derby calls a "culture of fear [accompanied] with a quotidian experience of terror" ("In the Shadow of the State" 302).

The point Alvarez's op-ed makes clear is that human rights groups and organizations, diasporic writers including Edwidge Danticat and Junot Díaz, and the statements by both Ambassador Brewster and Navarro "are increasing their efforts to address the situation with more transparency and urgency" (2). However, their efforts are met with the "official" nationalist narrative of figures like José Tomás Pérez, Dominican Ambassador to the United States, and Aníbal De Castro, Ambassador of the Dominican Republic, who have both made "assurances that no indiscriminate deportations have occurred and that no one born on Dominican soil will be expelled or deported" (2).

Alvarez directly counters these “official” public narratives in order to ensure the multiple publics local, national, and transnational, have a clear understanding of what is actually happening in the Dominican Republic. For Alvarez, this requires an assertion of the fact that, in spite of the pronouncements of state officials, people are being deported:

Thousands have been deported, among them undocumented Haitians, but also birthright Dominicans, who suddenly found themselves in a country where they have never lived and whose language they do not speak. Others have self-deported, victims of violence, house burnings, vandalism, and xenophobic threats, with limited recourse for protection from local authorities. (Alvarez 2)

Comparable to the arguments made in the aforementioned op-editorials by Danticat and Díaz, as well as Kurlansky et al., Alvarez finds it necessary to assert that individuals are being deported. In fact, she highlights how thousands are being either forcibly removed, or “encouraged” by mob actions that bare resemblance to those during the days leading up to the Parsley Massacre. Including such details is pivotal to the entire argument of the op-editorial, as it further emphasizes the need for a counter-narrative of “official” accounts.

Alvarez’s overall approach to the conflict is couched in the metaphor of healing wounds, as framed in the title: “Heal the wounds of Hispaniola.” She applies the metaphor of a wound, and/or being wounded, as a means of illustrating the injurious relationship between the two countries and the United States. For Alvarez, these wounds are plural and ongoing. Furthermore, without her having named an actual actor directly responsible for doing the work of healing, her op-ed implicates everyone. She reinforces this assertion with the use of the pronouns “we” and “us” in her concluding call to action: “we must do more to help by encouraging Dominican and Haitian authorities to regularize the status of all their citizens and by providing humanitarian assistance to those

who find themselves destitute, stateless and bereft of hope” (2). The use of “we” brings the argument full circle, reminding readers that this is a concern relevant to the United States. For U.S. readers, Alvarez bookends her concern with the issue by connecting the ways in which the U.S. has played a significant role in this current situation. While Alvarez seconds Secretary Kerry’s suggestion that “the world could use an island of peace, harmony and prosperity anywhere right now, she critically urges that and “island of peace” close to home might be the place to start” (2). For Alvarez, the U.S. has a responsibility to pay attention to issues “close to home,” due to the country’s direct involvement in past issues that continue to inform contemporary events.

As a digital publication, Alvarez’s op-ed follows in the footsteps of the Kurlansky et al. piece in demonstrating the necessity of a counter-narrative. Alvarez emphasizes the way in which “official” narratives either dismiss, or altogether silence any counter-argument opposing the ruling. Her choice to set up “official” narratives alongside the counter-narratives of authors, ambassadors, and human rights reports challenges the credibility of the state. Additionally, the op-ed creates an archival document that once again verifies the need for not only counter-narratives but counter-archival materials that shed light on the humanitarian crisis. Finally, as a piece of fast media the op-ed includes a photograph that offers visual documentation of the experience of statelessness. The image, entitled “Dominican woman of Haitian descent lives in a camp at the border,” was shot by documentary photographer, Amy S. Martin.



Photograph by Amy S. Martin

The foreground of the photograph features an elderly woman staring directly at the camera's gaze. Her face is weather-worn with age and she holds a cautious, half-smile. In the background, she is surrounded by the draping of tents and makeshift wood framing, the required building materials of tent camps. This woman stands as further evidence of statelessness and deportation, she is a testament to the reality and experience of forced expulsion and the absolute arbitrary nature of the laws. Her age is alarming to the viewer in that she looks too old to have to experience the instability and terror of statelessness. Alvarez's strategic choice to include the photograph with the op-editorial adds an additional piece of archival evidence substantiating the claims of her larger counter-narrative. And if one image isn't enough, she references Amy Martin's website, a resource that contains dozens of images bearing witness to the deportations. Martin's

image illustrates the truth that these are the very individuals the Dominican Republic is shoring up its border against.

The final article in the series of op-editorials this chapter examines, is Edwidge Danticat's "Fear of Deportation in the Dominican Republic" published in *The New Yorker* in July 2015. While it isn't an op-editorial per se, it follows a similar format to the rest of the collection. Published in the news section of *The New Yorker*, comprised of reports and analyses on Washington and the world, the article itself reads like an op-editorial concluding with a call to action. Danticat builds on the form of the op-editorial in order to make her argument. Further, she uses platforms like the *New York Times* and the *New Yorker* as circuits with which to present rhetoric a of proof to U.S. and transnational audiences.

While Danticat is reporting on the deadline for deportations after the September 13th high court ruling, she offers an overview of the ruling, outlines who it will impact (including a case study of writer Deisy Toussaint currently facing deportation), addresses the *antihaitianismo* underlying the decision, and finally counters the "official" word of Daniel Suppice, Haitian Ambassador to the Dominican Republic. Danticat's article stands out in the way that it calls attention to Haiti's involvement in repatriation. In particular, she highlights Haiti's additional denial of deportation as another example of the need for counter-narratives to the "official" narratives coming out of both countries.

Danticat opens her article with the mutual concern for populations on both the eastern and western sides of the island of Hispaniola, on the day when an "estimated two hundred and ten thousand Dominicans of Haitian descent will become stateless" (1). Regardless of the fact that they were born and raised in the Dominican Republic, speak

Spanish, and have no direct ties to Haiti, they face expulsion from “their country” (1). Danticat overviews the September 13 ruling, highlighting the particular decision that people born after 1929 “could only be granted citizenship if they had at least one “Dominican parent” citing the court order to review the D.R.’s civil registry and birth records to “determine how many people were eligible for expulsion” (1). Here, Danticat references *la sentencia*’s mandatory audit “of all civil registry books from the past eighty-five years and [the] transfer of all the names of individuals whose parents were undocumented at the time of birth to ‘The Book of Foreigners’” (Shoaff 68).



Photograph by Erika Santelices/AFP/Getty

Danticat’s description of the ruling is foregrounded in the leading photograph in the article’s heading. The sizeable image features the faces of twelve or more individuals crowded together holding up their *cedula* (identification card). The photograph is followed with the ominous caption “beginning this week, hundreds of thousands of

immigrants in the Dominican Republic may face expulsion” (Danticat 1). The foreground of the photograph contains three women of varying ages, from a young pregnant woman to an elderly woman. Alongside the three women is a wizened man, a look of despair and uncertainty hangs on all of their faces. The other prominent image in the photograph are the multiple *cedulas* held up in the air with a sense of absolution. There are so many images of *cedulas* in the foreground that they block others’ faces. All the more threatening is the follow-up description Danticat offers of the way in which the Dominican government has not only historically denied paperwork to individuals with “Haitian” names, but that this practice has now become an official policy.

Here, her article details the genesis of the constitutional ruling when Dominican-born, Juliana Deguis Pierre, “who had been denied identity papers by local authorities because she had a Haitian name” took her case to the Constitutional Court (1). While this practice of Dominican officials denying papers to individuals with “Haitian names” is not new, Danticat’s fear resides around the fact that it has now been turned into policy. A similar concern, both she and Junot Díaz raised in the first op-editorial “The Dominican Republic’s War on Haitian Workers,” wherein common discriminatory practices became institutionalized via state legislation. Danticat goes on to mention the way in which the Dominican constitution’s notion of *jus soli* has been altered over time to define in-transit as encompassing “all of those who have immigrated within the past eighty-five years” (2). Including this photograph alongside the description is essential to the argument Danticat makes. Firstly, it serves as the counter-narrative and counter-archival documentation to the state discourse reaffirming the legitimacy of the ruling. It not only puts a face to the legislation, but calls attention to the sheer criminality of enforcing

stipulations and then neglecting to validate them. The photograph requires the reader to look into the sea of faces holding up their evidence whilst proving their nationality, now aware of the fact that the Dominican government can and potentially will deny the validity of the documentation. Similar to Alvarez's op-ed, Danticat employs the image as evidence, and as a call to her readers to fully consider the abuse of human rights currently happening.

In addition to challenging the role of the Haitian government in all of this, Danticat contests the understanding that the ruling affects only those working in *bateyes*, by citing the case study and testimony of Deisy Toussaint, novelist and essayist. The inclusion of Toussaint's testimony, like the photograph, documents additional counter-archival evidence directly confronting the notion previously touted by the state, that the ruling was simply a matter of helping the "government regularize people and clarify citizenship rules" (Archibold 5). Toussaint's mother is a Haitian immigrant and her father is Dominican. Not realizing the ruling could affect her until she was "denied a passport because of her Haitian name" (2). In order to verify her citizenship:

It took Toussaint two and a half years to get her passport, and she only received it after her father, who was living outside of the country, returned to the Dominican Republic to vouch for her. Toussaint has written for many Dominican publications and has even worked for the government, but she remains fearful that she may not be able to stay in her country. Because of her writings against the ruling, she has been accused (as have I) of being part of an international conspiracy to discredit the Dominican Republic. (2)

Toussaint's situation, to quote Alvarez's phrase, highlights the "ridiculous extremes" individuals face when attempting to prove their citizenship ("Heal the Wounds of Hispaniola" 2). Including Toussaint's narrative is necessary, in that it highlights the racism and sexism at play. More explicitly, her mother, a Haitian immigrant, is not a

credible enough source to verify her own daughter's record of birth, rather the Dominican government requires her father a "naturalized" Dominican return to the country to vouch for his adult child. Toussaint is no longer the nameless individual the reader is asked to "imagine," in Danticat and Díaz's initial op-ed, "The Dominican War on Haitian Workers." Rather, she is an educated individual of some measure of economic stability. Sharing Toussaint's experiences is a strategic move on Danticat's part, as it transitions the conversation away from its prior focus on Dominican workers, to attend to the ruling's impact on the middle class.

Including Deisy Toussaint's own critical response, "*A ver si lo entiendo*" ("Let Me Get This Straight") to the ruling, in addition to her direct experience, ensures that she is not censured in this particular medial outlet. It creates the space for a Dominican writer to share her experiences, and as a gesture between one writer to another, it emphasizes the need for Dominicans of Haitian descent to speak for themselves. Here, Toussaint outlines all of the tasks required of her to continue living in the Dominican Republic:

First, I have to find an academy to learn Creole. Second, go to Haiti, but since I have no passport I would need to hire a guide to secretly smuggle me across the mountains. (Crossing by river might be fatal as I do not swim.) Third, tell the Haitian authorities that they must give me a Haitian passport based on my ancestry. Fourth, as I presume that the process will not be quick, I must find a job in Haiti since I would have lost mine in Santo Domingo. Fifth, upon my return to the Dominican Republic, as a foreign legal entry, immediately apply for a residence permit to live in my own house. (Toussaint 1).

Toussaint's long laundry list of action steps reads identical to the account provided in the Kurlansky et al. piece. More specifically, both pieces point out the outrageous consequences of the ruling and the impossible requirements stipulated to prove citizenship. To the reader, these required tasks appear incredible, leaving one to ask

whether or not this is even possible. Here, the point Toussaint makes, echoing Danticat's, is that these tasks are not possible. The citizenship ruling, and its required stipulations, make it implausible for a middle-class woman to achieve. Which, in return, makes establishing citizenship an utterly impossible task for the very individuals the reader is asked to "imagine" in Danticat's initial op-ed.

Not only have writers like Julia Alvarez, Edwidge Danticat, Junot Díaz, and Deisy Toussaint been publicly discredited for their criticism of the ruling, but the fervor to censure their critical voices works in tandem with violent populist actions that have led to an "increased number of public beatings, burnings, lynchings, and other acts of violence by vigilantes who have taken it upon themselves to forcibly remove Haitian immigrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent" (2). Danticat argues the ruling itself "legitimizes not only these actions but also the centuries-old *antihaitianismo*, or anti-Haitian prejudice, in the Dominican Republic [making it extremely] more difficult even for those Dominicans of Haitian descent and Haitian immigrants ... allowed to stay" (2). While the Dominican government has responded to the international outcry with a "regularization' plan for foreigners," it leaves much to be desired (2). Similar to Alvarez's critique of the bureaucratic maze the regularization process has created, Danticat cites the fact that while "two hundred and fifty thousand people have started the process, only about ten thousand have been able to meet all its requirements" (2).

As in the preceding op-editorials, Danticat draws attention to the falsities that exist in the "official" narratives about the citizenship ruling and accompanying deportations. This time, however, she takes to task Haitian "official" narrative via her email exchange with Daniel Suplice, the Haitian Ambassador to the Dominican

Republic. Danticat starts by citing Supplice's assertion that "there will not be any massive deportations, [rather] there will be programmed repatriation of Haitians with illegal migratory status" (3). Whether one calls it deportation or repatriation, Danticat highlights the way in which these actions are one in the same. And, in doing so, she calls attention, once again, to the need for counter-narratives that offer a rhetoric of proof to what is really happening. Additionally, she challenges Supplice's assertion of the fact that, while he suggests "repatriations won't happen en masse, "the AP reported that twelve buses and processing centers at the border had been set up to assist with the process (4). Here, Danticat counters similar practices of the past, where the "official" rhetoric from the Dominican Republic actively denies the actions taking place.

This isn't the first-time accusations like this have been thrown around regarding the questionable relationships between government officials in each nation. For example, the relationship between Sténio Vincent (Haitian President, 1930-1941) and Trujillo, during the time of the Parsley Massacre, has often been criticized. In particular, Vincent has been accused of failing to hold Trujillo accountable for The Parsley Massacre. Additionally, the contract-labor relationship of the sugarcane industry set up between the Dominican and Haitian governments (Duvalier and Trujillo) became a "broader system of extortion [for Duvalier and the] national coffers that totaled some \$10 million a year from the Haitian treasury" (Derby 53). One definite truth required at the time of this publication is the need for Danticat to continue countering "official" narratives about the ruling and deportations. Per this article, it appears that she must challenge the denial of events on behalf of both countries. In conclusion, Danticat offers up a call to action that reminds the reader of the very precedent the ruling and its accompanying actions have

set. Making discriminatory actions legal gives rise to state-sanctioned human rights violations that contravene “international treaties and conventions, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” (4). Equally important, they have the potential to “establish a sad and dangerous precedent in the region,” such as the removal of Haitian immigrants “in places like the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos” (4). As the Dominican Republic decries its national sovereignty as the right to dispose of huge populations of people deemed no longer useful, it sets the stage for other countries in the region to follow suit.

Writing this piece and circulating it through fast media in *The New Yorker* continues the work Danticat has engaged in since 1999. That being, creating a counter-narrative and culling together counter-archival materials that directly challenge the Dominican Republic’s ruling and its accompanying human rights violations. The genre allows for the inclusion of physical evidence, like the photograph and Toussaint’s testimony, that substantiate Danticat’s argument, while offering evidence of the rulings impact. This isn’t new work for Danticat, considering her novel *The Farming of Bones* engages in similar work. More specifically, the novel produces a counter-archive of the Parsley Massacre, takes to task both Dominican and Haitian governments, and offers up a main character, similar to Deisy Toussaint, who is initially incredulous of the government’s capacity for abuse. As the reader accompanies Amabelle along her journey of awareness of the atrocities committed by both states, readers are informed of a historic genocide that has also been silenced from “official” narratives. Continuing this work in the genre of fast media, Danticat expands the potential for a wider audience and the

capacity for reader response. While the call to action is the same, the means to understanding the history and its implications in the present moment is different.

For Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz the 2013 citizenship ruling requires immediate attention. Collectively these authors have used op-editorials, via fast media, as modes to address concerns with statelessness and precarious citizenship, while simultaneously producing a strong counter-narrative to the “official” state account. Additionally, it has created the space to assemble together materials including human rights reports, photographs, and testimony to compile into a larger counter-archive. These three authors have employed op-editorials, letters to the editor, and additional social media platforms in order to situate “official” and counter-narrative conversations in dialogue with one another. In addition, fast media offers the potential for larger audiences to weigh in and engage in some form of action. While it may be idealistic to assume their entire readership will be roused by the call, what’s important here, is that the counter-narrative is being told. More specifically, the history and the actions of the present moment are exposed and up for debate.

Notes

¹ *Bateyes* are encampments where sugarcane cutters reside.

² Resolution 168/13 declared that “children born to migrant non-citizen parents were no longer automatically considered citizens... and that citizenship would only be granted to people who were born to at least one Dominican parent since 1929” (DeGraff 2).

³ In Deborah Thomas’s article “Caribbean Studies, Archive Building, and the Problem of Violence” she uses the phrase “historicizing the present moment” to articulate the way in which historic events and ideologies manifest in present day politics.

⁴ The Dominican Republic is not the only nation responsible for recruiting Haitian laborers. Countries such as: the Bahamas, Cuba, and Turks and Caicos have. Additionally, the Bahamas and Turks and Caicos have recently adjusted citizenship requirements in a similar fashion to the Dominican Republic, which has contributed to

the “repatriation” concern of the Haitian government. The history of Haitian immigration outward is a long one that can be connected back to the Haitian revolution (1789-1809) wherein thousands of Haitians migrated within and outside of the Caribbean. See Cecile Accilien et al., *Revolutionary Freedoms: A History of Survival, Strength, and Imagination in Haiti*, Laurent Dubois *Avengers of the New World: The Story of the Haitian Revolution*, James Ferguson’s “Migration in the Caribbean: Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Beyond,” and Jeremy Popkin’s *You are All Free: The Haitian Revolution and the Abolition of Slavery* as sources documenting this history.

⁵ See Lauren Derby’s “Haitians in the Dominican Republic: Race, Politics, and Neoliberalism” for a history of the rise of the sugar industry in the Dominican Republic from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century.

⁶ *Jus Soli*, Spanish for “by right of the soil,” is the clause found in Article 8 of the 1929 Dominican constitution which establishes automatic citizenship for all children born on Dominican soil.

⁷ Joaquín Balaguer was president of the Dominican Republic for three non-consecutive terms (1960-1962), (1966-1978), and (1986-1996).

⁸ Derby’s “Haitians in the Dominican Republic: Race, Politics, and Neoliberalism” provides a thorough explanation of the history of U.S. involvement in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. In particular, Derby describes the impact of U.S. military occupations and imperial involvement in both countries and the larger impact on current politics.

⁹ In the article “In the Shadow of the State: The Politics of Denunciation and Panegyric during the Trujillo Regime in the Dominican Republic, 1940-1958” Derby uses the term “shadow bureaucracy” to discuss the way in which the media circulated a controlled narrative of the Dominican State during the Trujillo regime.

Conclusion. Creating Dangerously: Counter-Archives in the Diaspora/Dyaspora

In *Create Dangerously: The Immigrant Artist at Work* (2011), Edwidge Danticat describes counter-archival work as an act of writing dangerously. For Danticat, writing is a resistant act, “a revolt against silence. . . [an outright] disobedience to a directive” (11). As I have demonstrated in my first chapter, silences in relationship to the Trujillo dictatorship were not only a violent mandate of the regime, but also a space in which narratives and generational traumas remained. Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz’s work of extrapolating these narrative accounts creates more nuanced historical renderings of the dictatorship, as well as a starting point for building a counter-archive. In the process, their work pushes parameters around what counts in terms of historical documentation. Their choice to include imagined, familial, testimonial, and ephemeral experiences leads to a broadening of finite definitions of history, narrative, and literature.

While this undertaking is not as dangerous as the perils faced by those who experienced the dictatorship firsthand, as Danticat suggests, “writing is nothing like dying in, for, and possibly with, your country,” this work does come with its own set of risks and responsibilities (12). As each author creates a revisionist history bearing witness to the continuous effects of history in the present moment, they are “striking a dangerous balance between silence and art” (10). A balancing act that requires highlighting the way in which history and the “official” archive continue to occlude particular accounts, falsify information, and offer up inaccurate records as fact. Their counter-archival project becomes a collective tool in which they analyze dangerous assumptions about the archive as unmediated. Further, their counter-archive lends to the creation of new epistemologies and pedagogies in regards to the making and learning of history.

To be clear, in applying the phrase the “danger of the unmediated archive,” I’m referencing the work done in each of my chapters to address how “official” archives have manipulated historical accounts, and in turn, framed how individuals understand this particular history. In her analysis of imperial histories, Myriam Chancy articulates this point further, offering a critical assertion of the way in which imperial histories are constructed:

There is no such thing as a ‘natural’ history or account of events, at least not from a human point of view. But more to the point is the fact that the institution of imperialism does not seek to simply make sense of the world and happenings in it: rather, it actively seeks to dominate and impose a version of the facts, a version which, upon further examination, unfailingly reveals itself not only to be false but also constructed with the knowledge of its falsehood. (298)

Throughout this dissertation, I’ve examined Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz’s argument regarding the state’s manipulation, much like that of imperial history, of the history of the Trujillo regime and its aftermath.

As Danticat suggests, this “dangerous balance between silence and art” does not come without its own set of consequences (10). Consequences, I described earlier as a set of risks and responsibilities each author faces when engaging in this work. There are two in particular that I want to spend some time discussing. First, I want to address how the authors’ efforts become complicated, and heavily criticized, at times, by their positionality as diasporic writers. Not only has their national affiliation and citizenship been challenged, i.e., Junot Díaz and the questioning of his Dominican identity and rescinded literary prizes— including the Order of Merit, but also the intentions behind the work itself. Secondly, I want to complicate questions regarding whether or not their work is inclusive of the voices of those most marginalized by the history itself. Here, I suggest not only has this proven a difficult task, one in which they have fallen short of, as their

dominant voices as “representatives” of their countries of origin have made it extremely difficult for the elevation of the voices of local writers. However, I also see this line of critical questioning of their work as a sweeping gesture that fails to consider the reach of their counter-archival efforts.

In *Create Dangerously*, Danticat intimately grapples with this question of whether or not she has the right to speak about these particular issues. In the chapter “I Am Not A Journalist” she highlights very personal moments in which she’s returned to Haiti and been immediately silenced from political conversations because of her diasporic status. Ultimately, she appears to not only understand this immediate dismissal, but justify it as an issue she, herself, grapples with, even going so far as describing her own work as a “passive career of distant witness[ing]” (Danticat 19). The logic being, if she doesn’t directly experience the social and political realities in Haiti on a firsthand and consistent basis, it makes it extremely difficult to speak about such issues. Conversely, one of the most interesting arguments expressed in the counter-archival work of these three authors is the point that this particular logic has been used historically, through various state machinations, to not only muzzle contestation, but also maintain the notion that history and its social impact reside within national borders. “Will to Remember” directly challenges this assertion, illuminating instead, the different ways in which historic events extend beyond borders.

In her conversation with activist, Jean Dominique, Danticat shares her internal confusion regarding her own identity and ability to speak up about political issues impacting her home country.¹⁶ Dominique, in return, offers up a definition of the diaspora/dyaspora as individuals with “feet planted in both worlds” (Danticat 51). His

definition not only provides some clarity for Danticat to make sense of this internal conflict, but addresses the larger criticism surrounding who can rightfully speak of the relationship between historical moments and modern day forms of oppression. From Dominique's perspective, one doesn't simply negate a genuine investment in ones' home place, regardless of how far away someone lives. Even further, while this state of being in-between is a complex positionality, one created and maintained by vexed relationships mired in colonial and neo-colonial relationships, it is a position that allows for a sort of purview into the workings of multiple nation-states. This is an ultimately advantageous space to reside in when unpacking complex historical narratives designed to obfuscate the truth.

The larger problems present for Alvarez, Danticat, and Díaz, as evidenced throughout this project, is a coming to terms with historical memories that speak a complicated truth to the failings of multiple nation-states. For example, Danticat highlights this difficulty when recollecting Haitian history that doesn't immediately include the Haitian revolution: "grappling with memory is, I believe, one of many complicated Haitian obsessions. We have, it seems, a collective agreement to remember our triumphs and gloss over our failures" (63).

For Alvarez and Díaz, their work requires a critical analysis of the way in which Dominican-ness is fundamentally defined in opposition to race, a definition deeply entrenched in a legacy of state-enacted racial violence towards ethnic Haitians. The U.S. is also not excluded from their critical gaze, as their work turns to larger questions regarding the impact of U.S. invasions as well the country's own contemporary immigration policies. These three authors must balance whether or not one can critique a

home they no longer reside in and one they currently do, while being mindful of not falling into the trap of emphasizing national “humiliations” that re-situate the Dominican Republic and Haiti in the existing imperial and totalizing lenses through which they are most often read.

Their counter-archival project poses integral questions to the discipline of history. In particular, their direct criticism of state and “official” history fosters a line of questioning critical to historiography. Additionally, their literary efforts push the boundaries of what is considered appropriate documentation capable of producing historical fact. In chapter two, I spent significant time talking about the way in which their literary project and work with *Border of Lights* both build upon and lend to earlier arguments presented in the archival scholarship of Diana Taylor regarding the importance of not only including what has long been considered “archivable,” but also the ephemeral. Overall, the claims I found most significant throughout their collective project, deals with the study of history in general, and the particular events their work speaks to. First, their unflinching argument that history is not a vestige of the past is extremely important. Rather, instead of recording exact dates and palatable descriptions of events, the authors argue historic accounts must expose the very real consequences of events on material reality. Second, these particular historical impacts don’t stop at borders; instead, the emotional impact of history proves porous in that history is experienced across generations and national affiliations. Finally, their literary work and nonprofit efforts point to the fact that the grotesque atrocities of the Parsley Massacre and the assassination of the Mirabal sisters were very real events, and the ideologies that undergirded these violent actions have direct consequences in the present moment, the

most pointed example being the 2013 citizenship ruling and its accompanying mass deportations. Their counter-archival efforts become all the more acute as the Trump administration's zero-tolerance policy continues to up the ante on the privatization of immigrant detention centers, and as of recent, forcibly detain and drug children. In the contemporary moment wherein similar socio-political rhetoric to that of Trujillo is employed, counter-archives are necessary. More specifically, as violence informed by imperialism and racism continues to undergird border relationships, legislature, and detention and deportation practices in the Dominican Republic and the United States, the counter-archive is vital.

This project would be remiss if it did not address the allegations of sexual misconduct and misogynistic behavior raised against Junot Díaz following his 2018 *New Yorker* personal history piece, "The Silence: The Legacy of Childhood Trauma." In the article, Díaz details his history of childhood sexual abuse at the hands of a trusted adult. Immediately following the publication, several authors including Zinzi Clemmons, Carmen Maria Machado, and Monica Byrne came forward, through social media, sharing their personal experiences of violence with the author. In light of the #metoo movement, wherein individuals take to social media to call out sexual abuse and harassment, these accusations are serious. In addition to the claims, Díaz's article raises interesting questions regarding long-held notions of the cyclical nature of abuse. Further, it is fair to say a tandem reading of his essay in relationship to his fictional work, including *The Brief Wondrous Life*, has the potential to yield an entirely new reading of the novel. Such a co-reading would prove a fruitful and necessary scholarly intervention, however; it is not

something this dissertation addresses at this point in time, as the focus of this project centers on an analysis of Díaz's counter-archival efforts in regards to the Trujillo dictatorship.

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Vita

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