

Rebecca Fuchs

Caribbeanness as a Global Phenomenon

Junot Díaz, Edwidge Danticat, and Cristina García

INTER-AMERICAN STUDIES
Cultures – Societies – History

ESTUDIOS INTERAMERICANOS
Culturas – Sociedades – Historia

Volume 12

Series Editors:

Josef Raab

(North American Studies, University of Duisburg-Essen)

Sebastian Thies

(Latin American Studies and Media Studies, University of Tübingen)

Olaf Kaltmeier

(Transnational History of the Americas, Bielefeld University)

Editorial Board:

Luzelena Gutiérrez de Velasco (Colegio de México)

María Herrera-Sobek (University of California at Santa Barbara)

Djelal Kadir (Pennsylvania State University)

Gary Francisco Keller (Arizona State University)

Carmen Martínez Novo (University of Kentucky)

Olga Ries (Universidad Alberto Hurtado)

Stefan Rinke (Free University of Berlin)

Rebecca Fuchs

Caribbeanness as a Global Phenomenon

Junot Díaz, Edwidge Danticat,
and Cristina García

 **Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier**

Copublished by



Bilingual Press / Editorial Bilingüe

Caribbeanness as a Global Phenomenon

Junot Díaz, Edwidge Danticat, and Cristina García /

Rebecca Fuchs. –

(Inter-American Studies | Estudios Interamericanos; 12)

Trier : WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2014

ISBN 978-3-86821-533-5

Tempe, AZ : Bilingual Press / Editorial Bilingüe, 2014

ISBN 978-1-939743-09-1

Cover Image: © Julia Borst, 2010

Cover Design: Brigitta Disseldorf

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Fuchs, Rebecca.

Caribbeanness as a global phenomenon : Junot Díaz, Edwidge Danticat,
and Cristina García / Rebecca Fuchs.

pages cm. -- (Inter-American Studies/Estudios Interamericanos ; Volume 12)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-939743-09-1 (alk. paper)

1. American fiction--Caribbean American authors--History and criticism.
2. Díaz, Junot, 1968- Brief wondrous life of Oscar Wao.
3. Danticat, Edwidge, 1969- Dew breaker.
4. García, Cristina, 1958- Agüero sisters.
5. Group identity--Caribbean Area.
6. Caribbean Americans—Intellectual life. I. Title.

PS153.C27F83 2014

809.3'99729--dc23

2014014753

© WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2014

The original version of this manuscript was submitted as a doctoral dissertation to the University of Mannheim.

No part of this book, covered by the copyright hereon, may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means without prior permission of the publisher.

Publisher:

WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier

Postfach 4005, 54230 Trier

Bergstraße 27, 54295 Trier

Tel. 0049 651 41503, Fax 41504

<http://www.wvttrier.de>

wvt@wvttrier.de

Copublisher:

Bilingual Press / Editorial Bilingüe

Hispanic Research Center

Arizona State University

PO Box 875303

Tempe, AZ 85287-5303

<http://www.asu.edu/brp>

brp@asu.edu

This book is dedicated to my mother and my father.

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vii
1. INTRODUCTION	1
2. CARIBBEANNESS AS A BORDER SPACE	16
2.1. The Modern/Colonial World and the Decolonial Option	20
2.2. Crossing Theoretical Borders and Creolizing Concepts in Caribbean Thought.....	25
2.3. An ‘Other Logic’: Thinking in Fluid Dualities.....	32
2.4. Caribbean Theory: ‘Polyrhythm’ and ‘Poetics of Relation’	39
3. JUNOT DÍAZ’S <i>THE BRIEF WONDROUS LIFE OF OSCAR WAO</i>	47
3.1. “A World of (Poly)Rhythm”: Polylingualism in <i>Oscar Wao</i>	47
3.1.1. Weirding the Standard: Oscar as Parigüayo	52
3.1.2. Body, Language, and Coloniality.....	57
3.1.3. The Power/lessness of Language and the Mysterious Mongoose.....	60
3.1.4. The Fukú as a Repetition with a Difference	64
3.1.5. Making Fun of the Dictator—Humor as a Decolonial Strategy	69
3.2. Rhizomatic Intertextuality in <i>Oscar Wao</i> : “a book about other books”.....	71
3.2.1. Dangerous Absences: La Página Blanca and ‘Lost’ Books.....	74
3.2.2. Demystifying the Dictator: In Dialogue with Trujillato Novels	79
3.2.3. Going ‘Wao’: <i>Oscar Wao</i> as a Decolonial Bildungsroman.....	83
3.2.4. Galactus Meets Shabine and the Power of the Imagi-Nation	86
3.2.5. “who more sci-fi than us?”: Science Fiction and Caribbeanness.....	91
3.3. Decentralizing Narrative Authority in <i>Oscar Wao</i>	97
3.3.1. Masking as a Caribbean Performance	102
3.3.2. Metanarrative Comments: Demasking Authority.....	107
3.3.3. Footnotes as the Voice of a Jester: Yunior as a Narrative Trickster.....	110
4. EDWIDGE DANTICAT’S <i>THE DEW BREAKER</i>	116
4.1. Living with Torture and Trauma: Language and Silence in <i>The Dew Breaker</i>	116
4.1.1. Ka’s Transgenerational Trauma	122

4.1.2. Dream Communications: “those who spoke their nightmares out loud to themselves”	126
4.1.3. Letting Valuable Silences Speak	130
4.1.4. “what will we do with our beast?”: Speaking as Resistance	133
4.2. Intertextuality and Trauma in <i>The Dew Breaker</i>	137
4.2.1. <i>The Book of the Dead</i> and the Trauma of Guilt	140
4.2.2. Ancient Egyptian and Vodou Conceptions of the Soul	144
4.2.3. The Dew Breaker as a Zombi	147
4.2.4. <i>The Dew Breaker</i> and <i>Gouverneurs de la rosée</i> : A Dialogue	150
4.3. “restoration of our shattered histories”: <i>The Dew Breaker</i> as a Story Cycle	159
4.3.1. Triple Focalization in “The Dew Breaker”	166
4.3.2. The Dew Breaker’s Presence/Absence in “The Bridal Seamstress”	172
4.3.3. The Dew Breaker’s Absence in “The Funeral Singer”	175
5. CRISTINA GARCÍA’S <i>THE AGÜERO SISTERS</i>	180
5.1. “Balancing Preoccupations”: Truth and Lies	182
5.1.1. “knowledge is a kind of mirage”: Blanca as a ‘Blank Page’ and Ignacio’s Lies	185
5.1.2. ‘Facing’ and Dreaming the Past	190
5.1.3. “quench the incessant burning”—A Patchwork of Truth	198
5.2. “An uncanny sense of the aberrational”: Science and Santería	201
5.2.1. (En)lightening the Dark and the Limits of Science	204
5.2.2. Balancing the Agüero: Santería in <i>The Agüero Sisters</i>	211
5.2.3. The Agüero Sisters as Divine Twins	215
5.2.4. Creolizing Knowledges	219
5.3. Contesting Ignacio’s ‘Master Narrative’	223
5.3.1. Sharing the Narrative	227
5.3.2. Ignacio’s Tension between Reliability and Unreliability	229
5.3.3. Ignacio as a Trickster Narrator	233
5.3.4. Blanca as a Complementary Narrative Force	237
5.3.5. <i>The Agüero Sisters</i> as a Patakí	240
6. CONCLUSION	244
WORKS CITED	250

Acknowledgements

Writing this dissertation would never have been possible without the invaluable help of numerous institutions, colleagues, and friends. On a practical level, my research was supported by a doctoral scholarship from the Graduate Program “Formations of the Global” at the University of Mannheim. I want to express thanks to the board of directors, the program coordinator, and my colleagues for the stimulating intellectual environment and the assistance I received. I am particularly obliged to Prof. Dr. Ulfried Reichardt, who has supported and advised me in my academic endeavors through all these years. Moreover, I am grateful to Prof. Dr. Nicole Waller for her invaluable help and motivation. A grant from the FAZIT-Stiftung allowed me to spend one semester at Duke University in Durham, North Carolina. As a visiting scholar at the “Center for Global Studies and the Humanities,” I was able to use Duke’s excellent research facilities. I owe many thanks to Prof. Walter Mignolo for inspiring conversations. I am very grateful for a grant of the Deutscher Akademikerinnenbund e.V. and for my father’s support that allow me to publish this book. Equally important as these financial and academic forms of assistance have been my family and friends. Thank you for your patience, encouragement, and love. Above all, I want to thank my dear friend Julia Borst for her inexhaustible support, her suggestions, advice, and friendship.



1. Introduction

[I]n Santo Domingo, like everywhere else throughout the Caribbean, in those tiny countries you find the entire world. All the world's history is found in those countries.
—Díaz, "Conversation" 47

[I]f we accept the paradox according to which humanity is one and diversity is infinite, then the Caribbean is its most perfect metaphoric expression.
—Lahens, "Afterword" 156

Geographically, the Caribbean is both an island chain and a basin that includes the countries situated in and around the Caribbean Sea. In addition, it is an "*ethno-historic zone*" (Girvan, "Creating" 31-32; emphasis orig.) that embraces Central and South American coastal communities with a comparable history, culture, and similar ethnic origins. What is more, the Caribbean as "a *transnational community*" (Benítez-Rojo, *Repeating Island 2*; emphasis orig.)¹ embraces its diasporic communities, above all in the U.S. and in Europe. As a space where the Old World and the New World meet in a temporal sense in addition to its geographic connections across the world, the Caribbean exhibits global features. Robert Márquez, among other critics, considers the Caribbean as the "[f]oundational site and crucible of the European colonial (and later United States neocolonial) enterprise in the Americas ..." (1). Thus, one of the basic assumptions relevant for this study is that the Caribbean is a transnational space where complex global phenomena can be observed.

The Caribbean's spatio-temporal globality is mirrored by the cultural and ethnic diversity of peoples in the Caribbean, which can be described as a "sponge"² of cultures from Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas. In an interview, Antonio Benítez-Rojo designates the people of the Caribbean as "probably the first people affected by globalization" and as "the avantgarde of globalization" (qtd. in Schwieger Hiepko, *Rhythm* 237). This ethnic diversity in turn has scattered globally as people from the Caribbean have migrated and dispersed all over the world. Thereby, Caribbeanness has developed a dynamic that has an impact on a global scale (cf. Fernández Olmos/Paravisini-Gebert, "Introduction" 10), so that Caribbeanness becomes "a conglomerate of people having to do technically with the whole world" (Benítez-Rojo, qtd. in Schwieger Hiepko, *Rhythm* 235). As a consequence of these observations, this study argues that the Caribbean is global in a geographical, cultural, ethnic, and historical

¹ Henceforth *RI*.

² According to Bernard Mergen, the metaphor of the 'sponge' is more appropriate to describe the processes of culture change and mixture than the melting pot or the salad bowl: "Squeeze it and out pours something we call 'culture' that is quickly reabsorbed by other cells. The cultural stuff is endlessly recycled, creolized, hybridized" (315-16).

sense; and through its history of slavery and migrations, it is connected to the whole world.

This study refrains from judging the contested term of ‘globalization’ as either a positive phenomenon as supported by Western economists or as a negative phenomenon as claimed by globalization critics. Rather, according to Ulf Hannerz, it can be argued that the “contemporary interconnectedness in the world is really too complicated and diverse to be either condemned or applauded as a whole” (5-6).³ It is furthermore rewarding to regard globalization as being inextricably interrelated with the ‘modernity/coloniality’ paradigm since “colonization is not behind us but has acquired a new form in a transnational world” (Mignolo, *Darker* 1). This statement is based on the conception of ‘coloniality’ (*colonialidad*) by Anibal Quijano, which describes the mechanism behind colonialism that continues to be felt at the present time. Such a view of modernity/coloniality includes the dimension of a geopolitical power politics that decides what is remembered and what is silenced.⁴

This study understands Caribbean history as one of these silenced histories and regards Caribbeanness as a complex phenomenon of geopolitical interconnectedness that represents the global on a micro-level and therefore is globally paradigmatic. The Caribbean as a complex whole contains a plurality of elements, which the Cuban critic Antonio Benítez-Rojo has called “a union of the diverse” (*RI* 2). In this space, different cultures have come together and have generated a collective Caribbean identity—Caribbeanness⁵—that has the potential to embrace and affirm its constitutive cultures in spite of their diversity.⁶ It is precisely this diversity that unites the cultures and ethnicities in the Caribbean (cf. Alleyne 29). The unity refers to both common historical experiences, above all those of colonization, slavery, racism, and violence, and to a comparable present situation still characterized by a dependence on Europe and the U.S.

It is the aim of this study to contour Caribbeanness rather than eventually defining it or speaking *for* it.⁷ In this process, it is necessary to be constantly aware of the

³ For a definition of globalization and an overview of globalization theory, see Reichardt, *Globalisierung* and *Vermessung*.

⁴ See Mignolo, *Local* 13; M. Trouillot, *Global* 48; Dussel, “World-System” 232.

⁵ I prefer the term ‘Caribbeanness’ to ‘Creoleness,’ used by Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphaël Confiant in their study *Éloge de la creolité/In Praise of Creoleness* (1989). ‘Creoleness’ is a biased term, as it implies the word ‘Creole’ that “referred first to a biological reality: a European, and especially a Spaniard, born in the Caribbean islands in America” (Lahens, “Afterword” 156). ‘Caribbeanness’ is a less racially connoted and thus more neutral umbrella term for the diverse peoples of the Caribbean.

⁶ This collectivity does not imply the creation of a homogeneous culture. Nevertheless, it constitutes part of the Caribbean people’s self-definition and liberation from within the Caribbean that maintains its interior diversity but serves as a group-consolidation and marker of identity (cf. Bolland).

⁷ I do not consider this book to be an act of speaking *for* the people in the Caribbean but rather a contribution to a dialogue, an act of speaking *with*. This implies always remaining conscious of the danger of misrepresentation due to my privileged position in the