85. The struggle for overcoming the internalized norms of masculinity: *This Is How You Lose Her*

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Abstract

An old Chinese proverb says, "Fish is the last to discover water." That is, water is the whole body of the world in which the fish lives. As such, the fish does not reflect on the water, does not need to "discover" it, just because the fish is not cognizant of anything else. There is, moreover, no other reality for the fish until it comes out of the water, its common environment. If we adapt this proverb to human society with its institutions and culture and the people living in it, it is possible to assume that it can be difficult to be aware of something when one is so much submerged in it. Since the present paper revolves around men as power holders and the privileged side of the heterosexual gender dichotomy, it can be argued that men do not need to see that gender is constructed in society and that the dominant constructs of gender are are merely fabricated concepts of behaviour, which are controlled by the prevalent ideas in society. This study depicts masculinity as a fluid social construct in Junot Dĩaz's *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012) through an investigation of the protagonist Yunior's struggle to overcome his internalized cultural trainings of gender identity in a strange land where he is required to reveal, question, and reconstruct his gender identity. Hence, the notion of hypermasculinity, as an artificial construct, is analysed first in terms of his relationships with other Dominican men as potential role models in shaping his perception of masculinity and with women with regard to the multifaceted status of women within Dominican culture. The study, moreover, extends its purview to encompass the repercussions of the immigration experience, dissecting its impact on the intricate tapestry of gender politics that reverberates through the lives of both men and women.

Keywords: gender, hypermasculinity, invisible-masculinity, immigration, machismo

İçselleştirilmiş erkeklik normlarının üstesinden gelme mücadelesi: *This Is How You Lose Her*

Öz

Eski bir Çin atasözü şöyle der: "Balık suyu en son keşfedendir". Başka bir deyişle, su, balığın yaşadığı ve bu dünyada bilip bileceği tek yerdir. Bu nedenledir ki, içine doğup, büyüdüğü ve ölene kadar yaşadığı bu yeri keşfetmeye ya da açıklamaya hiç ihtiyacı yoktur balığın. Çünkü içinde yaşamını baştan sona sürdürdüğü bu dünyadan başka bir gerçeği yoktur; ta ki oradan dışarıya çıkıncaya kadar. Bu atasözünü kurumları, kültürleri ve içinde yaşayan insanları ile günümüz toplumuna uyarlayacak olursak, görünen odur ki, bir şeyin içinde aşırı yoğrulduğumuzda, o şey ile ilgili bilinçlenmemiz mümkün olmamaktadır. Bu makale, gücü elinde bulunduran ve kadın-erkek ikileminde hep ayrıcalıklı taraf olan erkeklerin, toplumsal cinsiyet kavramının, kurgulanmış olduğunu ve bunun var

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olan baskın ideolojiler ve fikirler ile korunup üretildiğini bilmeye ihtiyaçları olmadığını incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu çalışma, Junot Dĩaz'ın *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012) adlı romanında, erkekliğin akışkan bir toplumsal olgu olduğunu, başkahraman Yunior'ın kültürel bağlamda içselleştirdiği toplumsal kimliğini, yabancı bir yerde ortaya çıkarma, sorgulama ve tekrar oluşturma yollarıyla nasıl yenmeye çaba gösterdiğini incelemektedir. Hiper-maskülenlik kavramının, toplumsal bir kurgu olduğu da birkaç bakış açısıyla bu çalışmada irdelenmektedir: Yunior'un Dominikli diğer erkeklerle etkileşimleri, onun erkeklik algısını şekillendiren önemli bir unsurdur. Bu erkekler, onun için, potansiyel rol modelleri olarak işlev görmektedirler. Diğer taraftan, Yunior'un kadınlarla ilişkileri, kadının Dominik kültüründeki yeri ile de yakından bağlantılı olarak ele alınmaktadır. Bunlara ek olarak, bu çalışma kapsamında, göç deneyiminin, kadın ve erkeklerin hayatlarına akseden, karmaşık toplumsal cinsiyet politikaları üzerindeki etkileri de göz önüne serilmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: toplumsal cinsiyet, hiper-maskülenlik, görünmez-erkeklik, göç, maçoluk

Introduction

> To men, gender often remains invisible. Strange as it may sound, men are the "invisible" gender. Ubiquitous in positions of power everywhere, men are invisible to themselves.
>
> Michael S. Kimmel — The History of Men; Invisible Masculinity

Dominican-American author Junot Dĩaz, who was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 2008 for his first long novel, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007), vividly depicts the life of Dominican American community, both in the U.S. and in the Dominican Republic, which makes him a significant figure in multi-ethnic literature of America. In *This Is How You Lose Her* (2012), he conveys, as he states in an interview with Gina Frangello, "a tale of a young man's struggle to overcome his cultural training and inner habits in order to create lasting relationships" (Frangello, 2012). Constituted by fragmented short stories from different periods of the protagonist's life, the novel portrays Yunior's endeavours to grapple with the internalized codes of masculinity behind his consistent infidelity which prevents him from sustaining "lasting relationships" in a new environment. This strange land does not tolerate the practice of his training that he has acquired in a deeply hyper-masculine Dominican culture and his inflated cult of virility, in other words, machismo. Thus, the novel first unveils the conflicts in his love relationships engendered by his macho identity, which expresses itself in the form of "an exaggerated pride in masculinity, perceived as power, often coupled with a minimal sense of responsibility and disregard of consequence" (T. Editors of Encyclopedia, 2015, "Machismo", Para.1). To put it differently, the novel initially displays Yunior's expropriation of women and his betrayals without any signs of regret as these are normalized in Dominican culture, which promotes machismo as the hegemonic form of masculinity. Likewise, it reveals the man-making process of Yunior by shedding light on his social, economic, and cultural background. Closely connected with this process is his relationship with his family and his profound sense of uprootedness in the U.S. His efforts to internalize the masculine gender script he is exposed to as he grows up in this environment, especially through his father, Ramon, his brother, Rafa, and his friends from Dominican background, are also dramatized throughout the novel. The chapters presenting flashbacks to his formative years during childhood and adolescence, thus, offer diverse perspectives into his cultural training of masculinity as well as his marginalization as an immigrant and its influence on his gender identity construction. Finally, the concluding section of the novel demonstrates Yunior's traumatic struggle against facing his hypermasculine gender identity, the poignant realization of his failure to "sustain lasting relationships" because of his abusive treatment of women in a way in which he emulates his father and his brother's exaggerated sense of manliness. Only

after his recognition of his entrapment in the hypermasculine gender script, the hollow remaining of his Latino identity in which he does not fit, does he start feeling hopeful for change, for a new beginning (Díaz, 2012, p. 213). However, to achieve this insight, he has to go through varied experiences to confront his past-the social, cultural, and economic conditions-that serve as a pedestal for his gender construction. This confrontation reveals the impact of the immigration process on gender politics and gender stereotypes and, indisputably, on Yunior's formation of gender identity. Dysfunctional family structure, the disconnection between the male members of the family due to the absence of the father[2], poverty, and, being marginalized in the host country are some of the main issues related to immigration process. The novel, thus, provides a three-step structure within itself for this study; the problem, causalities, and the resolution or hope for change and the present paper examines the novel in the same order. Initially, Yunior's problematic hypermasculinity is revealed with an emphasis on Michael S. Kimmel's term, 'invisible masculinity', to explore his unawareness of his internalized hypermasculine codes such as, excessive and uncontrollable sexual appetite, seeing women as sexual objects to possess and abuse, a tendency to violence, and considering bodily strength as a way of reaffirming his primacy as the omnipotent patriarch. Subsequently, social, cultural, and economic conditions are considered as possible causalities of his hypermasculine gender training, considering Connell's idea that masculinity is an internalized social role, a product of social learning and socialization (1995, p. 23). As such, Yunior's gender identity is investigated with a consideration of different cultural, social, and economic factors, which constitute the gender norms of the community. His eventual realization of his toxic gendered behaviours and his concluding demonstration of signs of empathy, which is, undoubtedly, not considered manly within hypermasculine gender norms, are discussed as a re-evaluation of gender politics and the importance of men's awareness of it. Essentially, an individual's struggle for realizing these invisible conditions and cultural trainings is explored to highlight the importance of making gender politics, as well as for rendering the socio-cultural and psychological conditions behind it visible to men. That is, the reconstruction of the hegemonic gender regulations, which results in "the legal subordination of one sex to the other" (Mill, 1869, p. 4), is possible only with the collaboration of men in process. Men's perception of their own sexual identities and gender roles can be achieved via an understanding into the way these are constructed within a matrix of social and cultural conditions so as to replace the hegemonic framework of gender relations with alternative and more flexible ones which would neither give privilege to one side nor do injustice to the other.

1. The problem: invisible masculinity, hypermasculinity and/or machismo

In his book, *The History of Men: Essays on the History of American and British Masculinities*, Michael S. Kimmel introduces the idea of 'invisible masculinity' as a term for men's complete incognizance of possessing a gender. In other words, gender is usually considered as part of the social relations based on the distinction among the sexes in which the standard has always been taken as man (2005, p. 5). Accordingly, invisibility is one of the main causes behind the persistent reproduction of inequality among the sexes. However, only the disadvantaged side of the gender dichotomy is aware of gender politics, which privileges one side while targeting the other with injustices.[3] Thus, invisibility constitutes

[2] In the paper, I use the expression "the absence of the father" to point out that in the beginning, Ramon himself goes to the U.S. to start a new life there. Thus, the wife and the sons are lonely back in the homeland. Later, his family arrive in the strange land. They start living together, yet this time, they suffer under the tyrannical sway of the patriarch as the head of the family, which is further suggested by his absent presence. Ultimately, the inhabitants of that prison-like house begin to experience the devastating effects of the literal absence of the father, who abandons them ruthlessly.

[3] In this respect, it is not coincidental that gender studies around the world have been carried out largely by woman scholars. Thus, studies on masculinity play a key role in providing men with a better insight into their masculine identity which is continually constructed and reconstructed as part of "a political process affecting the balance of interests and the direction of the social change in society" (Connell, 1995, p. 44).

a considerable part in the normalization of certain gender norms under certain socio-cultural settings. Correlatively, Dīaz's *This Is How You Lose Her* depicts Dominican-American society as a specific social community where machismo is the legitimized practice of masculinity.

While machismo is a kind of hypermasculinity which expects men to perform "an expansive and almost uncontrollable sexual appetite and see it as their right to satisfy that desire in the ways they choose" (Parker, 1996, p. 62), female sexuality, on the other hand, is utilized by men in an attempt to strengthen their injured sense of self in an alien culture by subjecting women to their power. Thus, upholding sexual dominance over as many women as possible is regarded as a source of pride to prove manliness (Hirsch, 2007, pp. 995-996). The men of Dominican background, furthermore, practice hypermasculinity throughout the novel without a sense of responsibility or awareness despite the great injustices they perform against women.

The novel portrays Dominican-American community and its socio-cultural setting as a backdrop for Yunior's social training of gender identity. Exposed to machismo in this social environment, Yunior performs hypermasculinity in the shape of an excessive and uncontrollable sexual appetite and of an ardent desire for sexual dominance over as many women as possible. He persistently cheats on his girlfriends which he himself admits in the chapter, entitled "A Cheaters Guide to Love". He recalls being caught up with fifty different women in a six-year period by his girlfriend (Dīaz, 2012, p. 219). Considering fifty is only the number of women he has been caught up with over a six-year period, the total number of women he might have had sexual intercourse during the period implies his degenerate sexual indulgence and decadence. It not only shows his hypermasculine identity but also his apprehension of women as trophies to collect, sexually dominate, and even to abuse. Conversely, he ironically expects the women in his life to be submissive and courteous since women are compelled to remain mute and amenable on the crimes committed against them in a patriarchal culture that seeks to hurl the female into a state of obscurity and submission. In line with this argument, it is worth mentioning Hélène Cixous who states that the whole basis of Western language and culture is founded on 'dual, hierarchical systems' that place the female in a position of inferiority or effacement: "Either woman is passive or she does not exist" (2004, pp.348-354). As women are idealized with these qualities of passivity and docility in Dominican gender politics, Yunior ignores the fact that they are made of flesh and blood and reduces their personalities to what he desires to see in them. They have obviously to comply with the conventional lot of women: silent submission to the male. Yunior states, "this was not the Magda I knew. The Magda I knew was super courteous. Knocked on a door before she opened it. I almost shouted, What is your fucking problem!" (p. 10). As seen clearly, Yunior epitomizes the privilege and freedom assigned to males within the hypermasculine gender construction which normalizes even infidelity for men while designating certain roles for women which keep them subjugated and cast them into a state of utmost passiveness. That is, surely, illustrative of the old-aged struggle between the sexes and the male anxiety of the power of the female to challenge and defeat his dominating sense of himself from a situation of total male control. Therefore the female must be put in her proper place or be diminished to a living dead.

Interestingly enough, beyond this double standard, a stunning sense of innocence can be observed in Yunior's inability of realizing his sexist way of treatment against women which is further implicated by his self-assertion in capitals at the beginning of the novel: "I AM NOT A BAD GUY" (p. 3). The same implication is reverberated later in the novel, "I'm feeling sorry for myself, *como un parigüayo sin suerte*. I'm thinking over and over, I'm not a bad guy, I'm not a bad guy" (p. 37). His self-justification is hardly a surprise for his infidelity and it is this dehumanized treatment of women that is normalized by

his Dominican hypermasculine characteristics. Consequently, Yunior's infidelity and unrestrained desire to have sexual dominion over as many women as possible is invisible to him since these are the normalized masculine gender norms. To put it another way, he is socio-culturally programmed to hypermasculinity. Naturally, despite his uncontrollable infidelity and being caught up with fifty different women, Yunior becomes jealous of his girlfriend as she has an amiable conversation with another Dominican man on the beach (p. 29). She provokes his fury and fear by challenging male control of female sexuality and his reaction reflects hypermasculine evaluation of sex as more important and enjoyable for men than women. Men are more prone to separate sex from other social aspects of life. That being so, he tries to have control over Magda's sexuality because as he states, having Magda on the beach, that is, "half naked in public, a demonstration of her body and sexuality, he feels "vulnerable and uneasy" (p. 15). The reason why he feels uneasy and susceptible stems from the fact that he expects all men to perceive and treat women as he does: merely as sexual objects to possess. Hence, his sense of masculinity suggests not only a masculine freedom of gratifying his sexual desire as he wishes but also a masculine control over the female body with the aim of nourishing his strength and asserting male ascendancy over the female since he has gained his identity from the myth of the male as the owner of woman. The novelist alerts us to the way power is exercised through sexual subjugation as far as males are concerned. Yunior is in pursuit of egotistic self-gratification and sees women as sexual objects to be used, and ignores, and, in effect, rejects their humanity and subjectivity.

The value Dominican men attach to physical strength in the novel entails another hypermasculine point implying a connection between masculinity and bodily strength. Kimmel points to that connection by suggesting the self-made man in the 1840s, which he relates to "increasingly physical connotations". He stresses that for man "inner strength was replaced by the physicality and the body in the 19th Century". Thus, man started to "work over his physique to appear powerful physically, perhaps to replace the lost real power he once felt" (2005, p. 66). In a similar vein, as immigrant men who fled to America from the plague of poverty in their own country, Dominican men lack the social, cultural, and economic background to assume an inner masculine strength. Therefore, throughout the novel, they all commend physicality and bodily strength, for physicality contributes to a major part of their sense of masculinity. To illustrate, Yunior expresses his admiration for his brother, Rafa's, muscled body. He points out that, "even the white girls knew about my over muscled about-to-be-a-senior brother and were impressed" (p. 34). He further comments on Rafa and his body: "Rafa was still boxing then and he was cut up like crazy, the muscles on his chest and abdomen so striated they looked like something out of a Frazetta drawing" (p. 33). Hence, Rafa, Ramon, and Yunior represent the shift Kimmel suggests since they all identify manhood as something that includes bodily strength and immoderate sensuality. Rafa and Ramon do boxing, play baseball, and Yunior carries the pool tables around and does yoga later to be physically strong. The sports activities these men engage in tend to align with those traditionally dominated by men. Surprisingly enough, Yunior's transition to practicing yoga, a predominantly female-oriented sport that appeals not only to the well-being of the body but also of the mind symbolically signifies his inner desire and struggle for personal transformation. The application of yoga practices rejuvenates physical strength and offers flexibility, meditation, and mental tranquillity while at the same time diminishing emotional and spiritual suffering. Yunior suffers a severe injury to his back during one of the yoga sessions, compelling him to abandon the practice. This setback in his yoga endeavours mirrors his inability to relinquish the deeply ingrained masculinity norms.

The relation of masculinity to physical strength is reflected upon the archetypal of the man as hunter. In Dominican culture, hypermasculine men are called *tigueres* (tigers), an allusion to the monolithic idea of men as predators and women as preys. Rafa, who chases and abuses numerous women throughout

the novel, like a predator until he loses his physical power after his chemotherapy treatment, stands for this archetypal motif in the novel. It is quite ironical that once he loses his physical strength, he falls prey to a woman who, for the first time, abuses him instead. Deprived of his physical power and sexual capability, the predator thus goes through a castration process and becomes the prey, which is indicative of a reversal of the gender roles as far as men are concerned and of the deconstruction of the myth that the female is the prey and the possession of the male. Yunior, like the other Dominican men around him, behaves within the framework of a hypermasculine gender construction in which he is led to perform excessive forms of masculinity, virility, and physicality. However, his machismo and the construction of the hypermasculine gender codes within which this macho identity takes place are quite complicated. Therefore, the next step of this study investigates the social, cultural, and economic conditions that give shape to the hypermasculine gender script, considering Yunior's relation to other men, women, and his ethnic identity as an immigrant in the U.S.

2. Causalities: socio-cultural and psychological background of hypermasculinity

> ALL OF MAGDA'S FRIENDS SAY I cheated because I was Dominican, that all us Dominican men are dogs and can't be trusted. I doubt that I can speak for all Dominican men, but I doubt they can either. From my perspective it wasn't genetics; there were reasons. Causalities
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> Junot Dĩaz — This Is How You Lose Her

"In every culture gender polarity is internalized, and thus, each child is directed to develop these qualities attributed to his or her own sex", claim Bruce Reis and Robert Grossmark in their *Heterosexual Masculinities* (2009, p. 59). In other words, masculinity cannot be deemed to be a single entity since there are a wide range of masculinities both within Western culture and across cultures (2009, p. 21). The man-making process of Yunior from childhood to manhood is scrutinized in this part of the paper to interrogate the socio-cultural factors underlying the construction of his hypermasculine gender script formed by means of a matrix of social interactions and cultural training. Accordingly, as Yunior also implies in the epigraph above, there are various causalities behind his hypermasculinity and interrogating those causalities as they are revealed to the reader in the novel, would provide an insight into the realization of hypermasculinity as the prevailing form of masculinity in Dominican-American society. First, Yunior's relationship and interactions with other men from his childhood to adulthood is discussed in relation to the traditional role model theory which suggests that an individual internalizes his/her gender role through imitating the same sex models around him/her while doing his/her best in order to differ from the opposite sex.

2.1 Role models

It is not a gospel truth that humankind is an imitative creature by nature and learns the world around him through imitation; and this is no different for the genders. A male individual, thus, internalizes a similar gender identity like his father and brother/s while he tries to depart from his mother and sister/s. The division of the gender roles caters for a hegemonic gender dichotomy as part of the gender politics which is formed by the priorities and interests of each society. Yunior consciously takes his father Ramon as a role model, who inflicts violence on him; belittles, cheats, and later abandons his mother, and his brother, Rafa, who is a womanizer and physically abuses every woman as much as he can in order to reinforce his masculinity. Even though Yunior has always hated the idea of becoming like them, he desperately realizes that he has ended up exactly like the two males in the family:

> Both your father and your brother were sucios. Shit, your father used to take you on his pussy runs, leave you in the car while he ran up into cribs to bone his girlfriends. Your brother was no better, boning girls in the bed next to yours. Sucios of the worst kind and now it's official: you are one, too. You had hoped the gene missed you, skipped a generation, but clearly you were kidding yourself. The blood always shows. (p. 205)

Yunior's statement, noted above, is emblematic of the unconscious part of the gender identity training which works indiscernibly for the individual. By the end of the novel, he realizes that his actions are not completely under his control but rather programmed in a more complex structure of collective interactions and social conditions. Connell reflects on this by stating that "human action" which is mostly gendered" is highly structured in a collective sense. It is constituted interactively, not by context-free individual predispositions" (1987, p. 71). Thus, Yunior must face the fact that, whether he intends or not, he is inferentially under the influence of his interactions with other people, especially with his father and brother, a factor that accounts for a crucial part in the construction of his gender identity.

In the chapter titled "Invierno," the intricate dynamics between these three characters are disclosed, shedding light on their relationships. The chapter depicts the arrival of Yunior, Rafa, and their mother to the United States in a winter season. It is no coincidence that the chapter is aptly named "Invierno", which means winter in Spanish. In the first place, it is the season of harsh weather conditions and it is when they arrive in the U.S. from the Dominican Republic. The family has to endure great affliction owing to the weather conditions outside in order to survive and they also have to grapple with Ramon, who cannot act out the role of the proper patriarch as the head of the household. In that sense, the winter outside parallels the suffocating and torturing atmosphere elicited by the patriarch inside the house which is converted into a kind of prison or domestic hell for the inhabitants, who have been doomed to a life-in-death. The relationships among the members of the family in this part represent a traditional concept in gender studies labelled "Zeus energy." This concept can be defined as the "accepted authority of a single man over both men and women for the sake of the community" (Aims, 2001). Ramon appears as a stereotypical breadwinner figure who is supposed to provide the material well-being of the family as an immigrant in the U.S. He tries to hold power and authority not only over his wife Virta but also his children. These fellow-sufferers who live under the roof of the patronizing and domineering Ramon, must submit to his patriarchal sway, to which his roles as male/husband/father entitle him. This oppressive patriarch does not allow them to go out of the house for months which might be interpreted as his attempts to subject them to his domination and authority because he fears that his privileged attitude could be nullified in this new environment where the gender politics differs markedly as compared to the Dominican one. In this sense, he imprisons his family within the narrow confines of the house, emblematic of a patriarchal world in which they live as exiles. He tells them that they will go out when he thinks they are ready (Diaz, 2012, p. 123). However, Yunior later exclaims that actually "there was no reason other than that's what he wanted" (p.123). Accordingly, after Ramon abandons them, Yunior comments, "I was just happy not to be getting my ass kicked in anymore" (p. 24). He recalls how they were exposed to physical torture inflicted upon them by their father when they just wanted to look out the window,

> If he burst in and caught us at the window, staring out at the beautiful snow, he would pull our ears and smack us, and then we would have to kneel in the corner for a few hours. If we messed that up, joking around or cheating, he would force us to kneel down on the cutting side of a coconut grater, and only when we were bleeding and whimpering would he let us up. (p. 130)

The havoc Ramon wreaks upon his children and his wife, and their flawed relationship manifest a sense of alienation and estrangement caused by the immigration process, which is discussed in detail in the

following paragraphs. There is almost no sign of love and affection between the family members, especially among the boys and their father. Hence, their relationship echoes the Freudian fear of castration as they interact with Ramon and emerge as possible enemies and rivals. Rafa, who can see his father's hypermasculine violence and desire to hold his authority, frees himself from the fear of a possible castration through showing total obedience to his father and identifying himself with him. In contrast, Yunior keeps disobeying and vying with his father, who poses a threat to him. In this regard, Yunior's hair, which, unlike Rafa's, does not get into an ordinary shape, by order of Ramon, is shaved against his will (p. 80). This violent attitude might be read as a symbolic castration because hair is almost always associated with power in mythopoetic stories of many cultures, like the story of Samson in Hebrew culture (Fairchild, 2019).

Similarly, as the traditional form of patriarchy suggests, the masculine power as well as the possession of Virta as a commodity passes on between these three men, from the oldest male to the next oldest one. Therefore, Rafa holds great sway on the family, especially on his mother, only after Ramon abandons them, and the same masculine power, this time, is transferred to Yunior when his brother Rafa dies of cancer. Ramon abuses Virta not only by imprisoning her to the domestic sphere but also by not supporting or encouraging her to learn English. He belittles and discourages her with his sexist remarks such as, "It's best if I take care of the English. You don't have to learn. Besides, the average woman can't learn English" (p. 160). Besides, Rafa constantly steals money from her. Yunior treats her like a house maid, "my mother was checked out in her own way. She wore herself down—between my brother and the factory and taking care of the household I'm not sure she slept. (I didn't lift a fucking finger in our apartment, male privilege, baby)" (p. 91). Consequently, the interactions between Ramon, Rafa, and Yunior reveal a kind of cultural training for Yunior which is constructed upon a lack of communication and empathy. Throughout the novel, Dīaz not only depicts Yunior as a child who receives neither love nor affection from his family members, but also as a child who never sees them, especially his father and brother, showing any love or affection to other people. This attitude is closely tied to another essential machoistic element which stigmatizes emotional displays as a feminine trait. Thus, neither Ramon nor Rafa shows any signs of emotion in the novel. Rafa even avoids revealing his emotions when he is asked by Yunior about how he has felt after being diagnosed with cancer. Surprisingly, this inability becomes apparent when Nilda, one of his brother's girlfriends, whom he believes his brother physically and emotionally has abused, reveals that his brother was a good man who treated her kindly. She states, "he was a good guy to me. I must have disbelief on my face because she finishes shaking out her towels and then stares straight through me. He treated me the best. He used to sleep with my hair over his face. He used to say it made him feel safe" (p. 41). Yunior is baffled about Nilda's expression for he has never witnessed his brother's loving face. Therefore, as a male role model, Yunior considers his brother as an insensitive monster who has never cared about women in his life. He even thinks of warning Nilda about his childhood by telling her that Rafa is a monster (p. 33). Rafa's attitude towards his ex-girlfriend conceals but at the same time reveals wide divergences between Rafa the lover and Rafa the son in the family. His treatment of Nilda can best be explained by Michael S. Kimmel's assertion that "masculinity is a homosocial enactment" (1995, p. 129). To Kimmel's mind, men feel compelled to demonstrate their masculinity not only in the presence of women, but in the presence of other men as well. To put it differently, men primarily need to prove themselves to their fellowmen by not showing any signs of emotions, which might lead to shame and humiliation on their part. In doing so, they attempt at asserting their superiority and power (Leverenz, 1986, p. 452). Given that the display of emotions is conventionally associated with femininity, Rafa deliberately shrinks from exhibiting his feelings in front of other men, thereby exemplifying another form of hypermasculinity in the novel.

The lack of communication among these men and their disability to show their emotions contribute a great deal to Yunior's construction of a hypermasculine gender identity. Overall, his alienated father and brother as the closest masculine role models to Yunior in his childhood provides him with a hallow pattern of masculinity that he tries to practice and, in effect, to fill after they are gone. He internalizes hypermasculine attitudes he has learnt from them such as, evaluating violence as manly and feeling extraordinary pride in exaggerated forms of masculinity, virility, and physicality. Although he has never wanted to become like them, in the end, he admits that he is his father's son and his brother's brother (p. 158).

2.2. Interdependence: masculinity in relation to femininity

An analysis of Yunior's relationships with women, which is, unfalteringly, influenced by the socio-cultural perspective of women in the community he grew up, is indispensible for having a better understanding of his gender identity. Masculinity, after all, is how men understand and position themselves in relation to women. It is a constructed role that is defined within certain cultural and historical circumstances. Hence, the representation of women in Dominican society portrayed in the novel is explored in this part through multifarious incidents narrated by Yunior to draw attention to the commodification of the female body as possession among males. Women are sometimes sold for a sum of money or a pair of goats or sent to the U.S. to work to provide for their families in the Dominican Republic. For instance, Pura, Rafa's wife, in "Pura Principle" tells Yunior how "she was sold for an undisclosed sum by her mother to be married at thirteen to a stingy fifty-year-old when her father had died" (p. 62). Moreover, Yunior tells Pura's bleak story to his mother who also suffered under the same tyrannical sway of her oppressive father who treated her as a commodity. As such, Yunior acknowledges the fact that even though his mother had always told him not to believe in such stories, he recalls how she and her friends lamented on "how often that happened in the Dominican Republic, and how his mother herself had had to fight to keep her own crazy mother from trading her for a pair of goats" (p. 62). This example exposes the power of hegemonic systems to submerge the female identity by indicating the degradation of the female to an object that is given and taken.

In addition, Yasmin, the narrator of "Otravida Otravez", narrates the agony of the Dominican girls like her who are sent to the U.S. by their families to work. She reflects on the devastating situation of young women in a foreign environment; their struggle to survive which results in their return to their homeland after one year. She states, "They're young, sent to the States by their parents. The same age I was when I arrived; they see me now, twenty-eight, five years here, as a veteran, a rock, but back then, in those first days, I was so alone that every day was like eating my own heart" (p. 55). What she says epitomizes the abuse of women in the Dominican culture. They are being traded for money or sent to work to fend for their families. Once they arrive in America as immigrants, their situation gets more and more desperate because they become vulnerable in this unfamiliar environment where they lack the necessary cultural background, education, and language to settle successfully. Consequently, the perspective and representation of the women in the novel allude to the normalization of physical and material abuse of women within Dominican gender politics. This is symbolic of how women are entangled in the same sea of disintegrating ideologies and social contexts.

2.3. Immigration and masculinity

> In the face of the difficulties, uncertainties and discrimination that they suffer, migrant men often respond by trying even harder to live and act like 'real men'.
>
> M. Donaldson and R. Howson — 'Men, Migration and Hegemonic Masculinity'

Transitional periods occurring at specific junctures in history as a result of structural changes transform the institutions affecting personal life such as, marriage, family, work etc. which are some of the various sources of gender politics. Moving from one country to another, immigrants must adjust themselves to the new social, cultural, and economic conditions they face in the host country. Nevertheless, the immigration process has some initial impacts on the structure of the family that, in the long term, exerts influence on the cultural and social training of children's gender identity. Dysfunctional family formation, the absence of the father, and the idea of marginalization are some of the impacts of the immigration process that affect Yunior's gender identity construction in the novel. His hypermasculine gender identity script is, in a sense, enhanced by his immigration process. The detrimental and indelible outcomes of his status as an immigrant adolescent are discussed in the following section.

In his "Situating Latin American Masculinity: Immigration, Empathy and Emasculation in Junot Dĩaz's Drown", John Riofrio highlights the severe circumstances brought about by poverty in the Dominican Republic which have given impetus to the immigrations from the island to the States. He writes, "the poverty which plagues the island has created a situation in which survival depends upon fathers leaving the island to try and carve out a better life for themselves and their families" (2008, p. 26). Admittedly, Yunior, in the following quotation, points out the disastrous conditions back in the Dominican Republic where his family lived before immigrating to the U.S.,

> You've been to the Nadalands a couple of times before; shit, your family came up out of those spaces. Squatter chawls where there are no roads, no lights, no running water, no grid, no anything, where everybody's slapdash house is on top of everybody else's, where it's all mud and shanties and motos and grind and thin smiling motherfuckers everywhere without end, like falling off the rim of civilisation. (p. 223)

Yunior's father, Ramon, is one of those fathers who come to America to provide a living for his family. As might be expected, once the immigration process starts, the family unit becomes debilitated. That is, once Ramon arrives in the host country with the aim of earning money to meet the required conditions for the settlement of the whole family, he becomes alienated from them. Yunior expounds his alienation from his father and his father's alienation from them when Ramon returns to the island to take them to the U.S thus:

> I had expected a different father, one about seven feet tall with enough money to buy our entire barrio, but this one was average height, with an average face. He'd come to our house in Santo Domingo in a busted-up taxi and the gifts he had brought us were small things—toy guns and tops—that we were too old for, that we broke right away. Even though he hugged us and took us out to dinner on the Malecón—our first steaks ever—I didn't know what to make of him. A father is a hard thing to compass. (p. 125)

The quotation reveals not only Ramon's inability to predict the age of his sons, but also Yunior's never seeing his father before. Therefore, he contrives a fantasy father figure of his own to fill the conspicuous emptiness in his life buried deep from childhood. There are no signs of a healthy communication or interaction among the inhabitants of the house even after they come together in the U.S. Ramon's abandonment of his family can also be taken partly as the consequence of this sense of estrangement. The absence of the father is one of the inimical fruits of immigration process which definitely impacts

on Yunior's gender identity formation: his hypermasculinity. Charlotte Hooper restates the idea of Nancy Chodorow in her *Manly States: Masculinities, International Relations, and Gender Politics* (2001) as such,

> Absence of a close bond with the father … means that masculinity is defined in reaction to the mother, is defined as that which is not feminine. The more powerful his mother's influence, the more the growing boy struggles to separate from her to establish his own gender identity, the more exaggerated and aggressive his style of masculinity becomes, and the more he fears and abhors the feminine, whether within himself or in relationships with women. Thus, while masculinity is overvalued in society, it remains fragile, precarious, and neurotic. (p. 25)

As Chodorow and Hooper suggest, lacking a close relationship with their father, Rafa and Yunior have to construct their own sense of masculinity, by "crafting their masculine identities via their interaction with, and reactions against, all that is feminine" (Riofrio, 2008, p. 31). Throughout the novel, Yunior and Rafa avoid empathizing with their mother as a way of detaching themselves from what is feminine to constitute a sense of masculinity for themselves. The following quotations from the novel evince that even though they are well aware of their mother's agony, they prefer to ignore her sufferings:

> We even saw the ocean, up there at the top of Westminster, like the blade of a long, curved knife. Mami was crying but we pretended not to notice. We threw snowballs at the sliding cars and once I removed my cap just to feel the snowflakes scatter across my cold, hard scalp. (p. 145)
>
> BY THE THIRD WEEK I was worried we weren't going to make it. Mami, who had been our authority on the Island, was dwindling. She cooked our food and then sat there, waiting to wash the dishes. She had no friends, no neighbors to visit. You should talk to me, she said, but we told her to wait for Papi to get home. He'll talk to you, I guaranteed. (pp. 131-132)

Rafa and Yunior struggle to build a gender identity for themselves by rejecting what is feminine, and thereby frail. The most probable explanation of this process is offered by Riofrio who persuasively argues that, "for them, [the adolescent, fatherless boys] crafting a masculine identity is profoundly connected to the daily struggle to keep the feminine at arm's length thus enabling the boys to rightfully claim their masculinity" (2008, p. 31). This argument partially explains Yunior and Rafa's avoidance of intervening with their mother's emotional breakdowns. The absence of the father forces them to construct their masculine identity in reaction to their mother and other women, as suggested by Chodorow and Hooper. Therefore, Virta becomes a fundamental point for the construction of their gender identity. While she is loyal, almost selfless, and sexually inactive throughout the novel, Yunior and Rafa, on the other hand, are unfaithful, self-centred, and sexually hyperactive. Virta is mistreated not only by her husband but by her children as well. Rafa and Yunior exploit every single woman that gives room for it. Consequently, as Hooper suggests, "the more powerful the mother's influence, the more the growing boy struggles to separate from her to establish his own gender identity, the more exaggerated and aggressive his style of masculinity becomes, and the more he fears and abhors the feminine"(p.25-26). It comes as no surprise that Yunior abhors his mother's friends whom he calls "The Four Horse Faces of the Apocalypse", and of Magda's girlfriends whom he blames for his disrupted relationship with Magda.

Moreover, as Gwen J. Broude claims in her essay, in the absence of the father the child sees mother as the one who has control of the "valued resources" (1990, p. 105). He envies and emulates the mother until the later stages of childhood when he realizes men as the real authority for the control of the resources and falls into an identity conflict that usually results in hypermasculinity as an outcome. Unsurprisingly, after the reunion with Ramon in the U.S., Yunior realizes it is his father who holds the authority (Díaz, 2012, p. 131). Thus, the crisis of identity that infiltrates his whole life necessitates the detachment from the mother to create his own masculinity in imitation of his father.

Another detrimental effect of the dysfunctional family bonds related to the absence of the father is the unfamiliarity with some concepts such as, love and affection. Yunior grows up in a community where there is a regard toward emotional displays as feminine and abusing women in every viable way is somehow accepted as the norm. In result, he confuses sexuality with love. Sexuality and physicality are the only relationships between men and women he witnesses due to the lack of communication between the male members of the family. The only kind of relationship with women he observes from his father and brother is the sexual one. There are no signs of love or compassion in his interactions with his family members and their interactions with the others in the novel. As mentioned earlier, he is baffled by Nilda's observations about Rafa as an affectionate guy who treated her very well, and her recollection of a very romantic expression he used for her when he was alive and healthy. However, his confusion of love and sexuality becomes apparent when he seems curious about what he feels for his androgynous teacher Miss Lora, who, in fact, has many sexual encounters with him that actually stems from her fantasy of having sex with his brother, Rafa. He exclaims: "You wonder if she feels like you do. Like it might be love (p. 159). Miss Lora is the first person he has had a sexual relationship with and he thinks they might be in love with. The doubt involved in his way of expressing it, "like it might be", demonstrates his inability to distinguish sexuality and physicality from love. Consequently, the physical intimacy is the only thing he seems to be interested in throughout the novel. As he remarks, "I'm thinking about Magda, how I'll probably never taste her chocha again" (p. 33), "sadness at being caught, at the incontrovertible knowledge that she will never forgive you. You stare at her incredible legs and between them, to that even more incredible pópola you've loved so inconstantly these past eight months"(p. 57). As these quotations explicitly suggest, when women in his life abandon him, he seems to be concerned only with the fact that he will not have access to their bodies rather than their inner resources anymore.

3. Resolution: realization and masculine awareness

> Latino men experienced internal conflict as a result of their attempts to adhere to a traditional form of masculinity that was no longer attainable by them in the United States.
>
> Bob Pease— 'Immigrant Men and Domestic Life'

Immigration as a transitional process affects the structure of gender politics in demand of adaptation and integration to the new society and its cultural and social norms. Thus, gender roles call forth changes according to our status in society. Once immigrated, a man is not only a man but an immigrant man which would make some changes on his perception of some of the social establishments including gender politics. Since he is insecure in this unfamiliar environment, culturally and socially as an immigrant man, he has to fall back on his masculine pride and physical capacity to survive in a new environment in which he is not accepted as privileged as he was in his own culture in terms of gender politics. One of the major reasons of this shift is the new status of women which means a transformation of women's place in the public sphere. Earning their own money, women are able to get out of economic insecurity and of the boundary of the men's authority as stereotypical breadwinners. The anthropologist Patricia Passer, who has studied the effects of immigration on Dominican identities, notes that, "work enhances women's self-esteem as wives and mothers, affords them income to actualize these roles more fully and provides them with a heightened leverage to participate equally with men in household decision making" (2003, p. 281). As a second-generation immigrant who moves to the U.S. and grows up there, Yunior's problem with his cultural learning of masculinity derives mainly from the requirement to reconstruct his masculinity within social conditions of the host country as part of his adaptation and integration process. His excessive sexual appetite and desire to have sex with multiple women might be tolerated in Dominican culture since it is normalized within the hegemony of the macho men dominating

the gender politics through a hypermasculine attitude and economic supremacy. Nevertheless, when it comes to the U.S. this attitude is unwelcome since women find opportunities to have economic and social freedom as well as security. Therefore, Yunior has to rebuild his internalized gender script, which he has been exposed to in his Dominican environment to be able to have a lasting relationship. Yet, this process is a painful and traumatic one because this pernicious hypermasculine gender script is not visible to him until finally he realizes the havoc it wreaks upon him and the women in his life after reading the 'Doomsday Book'[4] included in "The Cheater's Guide to Love" and which is composed by one of his ex-girlfriends, who leaves it behind after their separation. There is no denying that the title 'The Doomsday Book' is a witty twist on an important historical book of the 11th century. Like a record of a land survey, the ex-girlfriend picks up the copies of all the e-mails and photos from his cheating days for the composition of the book. Nevertheless, it is quite ironical that "Doomsday" also points to the time that marks the end of the world and it is also the moment of last judgment. It seems as if he has come to the end of his lifetime: making a confession in front of the Ultimate Creator and coming face to face with the experiences that he had in his salad days. As the following epiphany reveals:

> You read the whole thing cover to cover (yes, she put covers on it). You are surprised at what a fucking chickenshit coward you are. It kills you to admit it, but it is true. You are astounded by the depths of your mendacity. When you finish the Book a second time you say the truth: You did the right thing, negra. You did the right thing. (p. 270)

After reading it, for the first time, instead of blaming his ex-girlfriend or her friends whom he thinks always provoked her against him, he starts empathizing and accepts the fact that she was right to desert him. The book thus turns into a kind of fragmented autobiography for him and leads him to question his problematic past relationships, his hypermasculine gender script, and the causalities behind it. His macho gender norms are no longer invisible to him. Subsequently, he achieves a promising awareness, a hope for change (p. 271). On the other hand, his brother Rafa's death and his father's desertion of them becomes a symbolic manifestation of the impossibility to exist in American society without reconstructing their previous cultural training. To adapt and integrate, one has to overcome his/her internalized habits to which Rafa cannot bring himself even to try.

Conclusion

The proverb that has inaugurated this study could be updated as such: men are the last to discover gender crisis in a society in which the status quo is so deeply ingrained that the battle between the sexes appears to be as common to them as breathing air. Díaz's *This Is How You Lose Her*, which is sometimes criticized for being a sexist novel, full of misogynist expressions and sexist attitudes, actually portrays an individual's conflict with his cultural training of the gender roles which entraps him into a hypermasculine gender script. He is, thus, not able to sustain a long lasting relationship with women because of his consistent cheatings, which are normalized by his Dominican background, promoting machismo as the ideal form of masculinity. Thus, Yunior's struggle with his own masculinity serves as a model for what an individual has to go through to overcome his problematic views on gender, which is a social product of different social conditions that one is exposed to. Díaz's narrative, accordingly, offers a chance to explore how deep the roots of gender politics are. As artificial social constructs, gender roles go through transformations as the conditions and expectations of the society change. Yunior's story manifests how painful that process can become since the gender and the different social, cultural, and

[4] The Domesday Book, the Middle English spelling of "Doomsday Book," is a record of the ownership of English lands prepared at the behest of William the Conqueror in 1086. It was made for the purpose of calculating the value of king's property and the tax value of other lands in the country. The book is very significant in that it tells a lot about England at that time (Oxford University Press, n.d.).

economic sources that play a vital role in its construction, remain invisible to men. Essentially, the novel gives the message that difficult and agonizing though it is, making men aware of their toxic hypermasculine gender script and reasons behind it are essential for the reconstruction of the gender identity and gender politics. *This Is How You Lose Her* interrogates the meaning of masculinity with respect to individual and the importance of the factors in the development of gender identity that dwells on culturally constructed signification. Consequently, it is significant to give men an insight through which they can realize they are also the victims of this hypermasculine gender script. Providing this awareness is the only way to reconsider and reconstruct gender dichotomy, which would exist interdependently in a better and more equal way.

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