

OBMICA

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Special Edition
English



ON THE EDGE IN CUBA

IN FRENCH ANTILLES

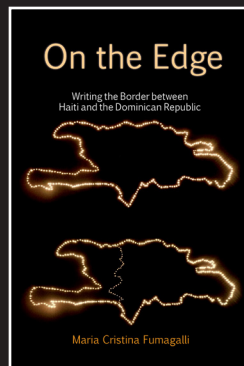
IN HAITI AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC



WRITING THE EDGE:

TOWARDS A CULTURAL APPROACH IN CONFLICT TRANSFORMATION:

Almost ten years ago Professor Maria Cristina Fumagalli set foot for the first time on the island of Hispaniola, the beginning of a five yearlong study of the Dominico-Haitian border from a literary and cultural perspective. The result was *On the Edge: Writing the Border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic* (Liverpool University Press 2015; 2018), a literary and cultural history which brings to the fore a compelling but largely neglected body of work which has the politics of borderline-crossing and the poetics of borderland-dwelling on Hispaniola at its core.



[...] The exhaustive and omnivorous “intercultural archive of the borderland” assembled by Fumagalli [...] is a must read for literary scholars and historians of Hispaniola, the Caribbean, and the Latin American borderlands, and serves as a crucial reminder that the current wave of anti-Haitianism is not the only narrative of Haitian–Dominican relations.’

Extract from Lauren Derby, Review of *On the Edge* for *Journal of Borderland Studies*, 2016

This special bulletin pays tribute to the ongoing impact of this book on OBMICA and other stakeholders in the region seeking new approaches to tackling hoary topics on island.

▶ SANTO DOMINGO, JANUARY 2013: FIRST STEPS

Prior to the finalization of the book, OBMICA organized a colloquium entitled “The relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic: perspectives of island artists” which enabled Fumagalli to share her preliminary research results in Santo Domingo. The activity took place in FLACSO with an engaged audience composed of members of the Dominican Government, Embassies, international organizations, civil society and members of the public.

▶ SANTO DOMINGO, APRIL 2015: LAUNCH OF ON THE EDGE

On the Edge: Writing the Border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic was launched under the auspices of OBMICA, on 16th April 2015 in the Art Space Casa Quien in the Colonial Zone of Santo Domingo. Fumagalli was introduced by Bridget Wooding, Director of OBMICA and Steven Morgan, Deputy Ambassador and Her Majesty’s Consul, to a broad church of interested parties including artists, writers, civil servants, diplomats, and member of international organizations.

Fumagalli ended her presentation by underlining the concrete advantages of collaboration between the two countries which share Hispaniola, by insisting on the importance of seeing the island as a living organism which needs all of its parts to function properly, and by underlining the need for a change not only in perception but also self-perception.

During the conversation which followed the presentation, the Director of a well-respected academic institute in Santo Domingo remarked that it was both refreshing and stimulating to hear a researcher from outside the island presenting such a compelling snapshot of Dominico-Haitian relations to those who, living *in loco* on a daily basis, do not always have the time to reflect in depth on their lived experience.



Maria Cristina Fumagalli, Bridget Wooding, Steven Morgan, Deputy Ambassador and Her Majesty’s Consul, Amy Hussein, Directora Casa Quien.

LAUNCHING ON THE EDGE IN HAITI, JUNE 2016

In June 2016, OBMICA facilitated and participated actively in the book launch for *On the Edge* in FOKAL, Port au Prince.

"On June 8th something out of the ordinary happened in Port au Prince, something which resonated with the whole island of Hispaniola. Maria Cristina Fumagalli came from her University in England, crossing the Atlantic in order to empower us with an account of her *On the Edge*. In this book, with its evocative title, and in a wealth of pages --unfortunately not yet translated into French-- Fumagalli, a specialist in Caribbean literature, directs her gaze to the literary and cultural links between the two states which share the island of Hispaniola.

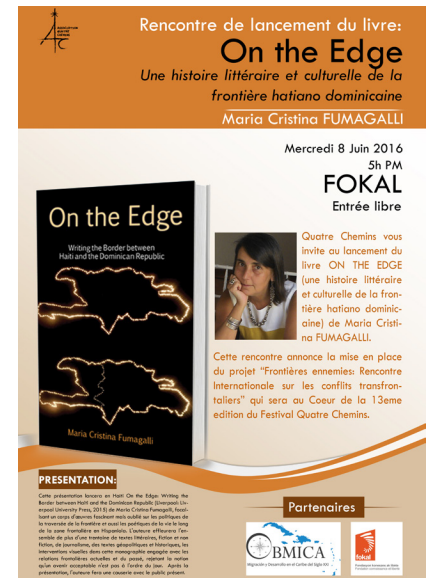
This enlightening work enables us to trace, through historical texts and modern literary creations, the birth and development of the two colonies and countries of Hispaniola. We are greatly surprised to observe the plethora of novelists, poets, and historians who have taken the island and its borderland as their muse. The assembled public in FOKAL, Port au Prince, formulated pertinent questions after the presentation: the public was amazed because the many cultural links highlighted by Fumagalli are always shadowed by the different repeated conflicts which punctuate our common history and had never been made so plainly. According to Fumagalli, in fact, there are more links that those we give credit for but, all too often, we do not use the correct binoculars (*bonnes jumelles*) when we assess the situation and are not discerning enough.

The characters of Jacques Stéphen Alexis in *Les arbres musiciens* (his last great novel), for example, live in and talk about the central portion of the borderland and its lakes but we do not take the time to concentrate on the cross-border links which illuminate his book.

Fumagalli instead invited us to open our eyes to these links and not to pirouette around the nationalist quarrels which separate us. She highlighted the work of the contemporary Dominican artist Karmadavis whose video performance *Complete Structure* --according to her, the best visual metaphor for the island-- presents us with a blind Dominican carrying in his arms and being guided by a Haitian amputee in the streets of Santo Domingo. She also reminded us that the wealthier Dominicans would do their shopping in the thriving city of Port-au-Prince in the 20s and 30s of the past century, a city which then was much more modern and vibrant than Santo Domingo.

Overall, Fumagalli promotes a concrete utopia where a relationship between the two peoples based on mutual understanding is a real possibility. We are not leaving her call for action unheard on our side of the island. The theme of our 13th *Festival Quatre Chemins* in Port-au-Prince will be precisely the question of cross-border conflicts and its slogan will be: *El amor no es tan complicado/L'amour n'est pas si compliqué...*

Excerpt of Trailer for December 2013 Festival, (translated from French), Quatre Chemins/FOKAL <https://www.festival4chemins.com/>



The Dominican artist Karmadavis, the Haitian journalist Rosny Ladouceur and Bridget Wooding and Maria Cristina Fumagalli



Maria Cristina Fumagalli and Bridget Wooding interviewed by the Haitian media.

FESTIVAL QUATRE CHEMINS, PORT AU PRINCE, NOVEMBER-DECEMBER 2016

After the June book launch in FOKAL, Fumagalli and Wooding were invited back to Haiti for the November-December *Festival Quatre Chemins* to give a joint presentation and to elucidate the context (politico-socio-cultural) of the work of the Dominican artist Karmadavis who visited Haiti for the first time as Invited Artist to the Festival.

Taking advantage of Fumagalli's presence in Haiti, on December 2nd 2016 a workshop was organized at CRICH, Port au Prince, by the same cultural organisation (FOKAL, *Quatre Chemins*) which organised Fumagalli's book launch in June 2016. During

the workshop, where some 25 participants engaged in a lively debate and policy advocacy discussion, Fumagalli's work was put in dialogue with new applied research from the borderlands generated by OBMICA in order to gather recommendations for policy makers on how to handle deportations from the sending and receiving countries alike.



CUBA, MAY 2017: RETHINKING THE 1937 MASSACRE

Inaugural Panel, VI International Colloquium - Cultural Diversity in the Caribbean: "Memory and Border Conflicts", May 2017, Casa de las Americas, Havana, Cuba

Camila Valdés León (Director of the Centro Estudios del Caribe, Casa de las Americas), Frantz Voltaire (Director of CIDIHCA), Simone Rodrigues Pinto (University of Brasília), Maria Cristina Fumagalli, Bridget Wooding, and Edgar García (Fundación Bosch, Santo Domingo).

"Inaugural Panel: Interrogating Anti-haitianism in the Dominican Republic: From the 1937 Massacre to the *Sentencia* of 2013

In May 2017 the inaugural session of the *VI International Colloquium - Cultural Diversity in the Caribbean* dealt with a little known --or at least insufficiently discussed-- event in the Caribbean region, namely the 'Parsley Massacre', as it is sadly remembered, which reaches its eightieth anniversary this year [...]

The University of Essex Professor, Maria Cristina Fumagalli, using as springboards artistic and literary texts, highlighted how, to a certain extent, the massacre of eighty years ago continues to the present day with what the Dominican journalist Juan Bolívar Díaz has termed 'civil genocide', namely, the bureaucratic process of regularization and naturalization for Haitian migrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent. This is so complex that many cannot manage to complete the necessary paperwork, as noted by the researcher Bridget Wooding in her talk [...]

Fumagalli, an academic of Italian ancestry, constructed her talk around fictional and non-fictional texts and examples from the visual arts to illustrate the complex history of the two nations, issues of identity, inter-cultural relations, and representations of border conflicts. Manuel Rueda's *Bienvenida y la noche. Crónicas de Montecristi*, was one of her primary exemplifications: here the author narrates the

wedding of Trujillo and Bienvenida Ricardo, a member of the elite of Montecristi, where the wedding took place. In this text Fumagalli finds a crude and direct metaphor for Trujillo's attitude towards Haiti and the borderland when the future Dominican President arrogantly cuts, using his solid gold sword, the wedding cake: with a single brutal blow he destroys the beauty of the wedding cake, cutting it into two. Fumagalli completed her talk mentioning, amongst others, photographs and video performances by Pobilio Díaz, the novel *El hombre del acordeón* by Marcio Veloz Maggiolo and Jesus María Ramírez's memoir, *Mis 43 años en La Descubierta*.

For her part, Wooding, of the Centro para la Observación Migratoria y el Desarrollo Social en el Caribe, covered topics related to the legal status of Dominicans of Haitian ancestry who have not had their status recognised. For Wooding this has to do with the change from a feudal regime to a biopolitical one. Previously exclusion may have entailed physical abuse but currently the situation is one of civil handicap as migrants and Dominicans of Haitian descent are discriminated against with more insidious forms of control. "It is a thin dividing line between let die and let live", she explained in relation to inclusive citizenship. "The effects of the legalization of exclusion run deep in society".

Excerpt from Casa de Las Americas press note, 22nd May 2017 <http://laventana.casa.cult.cu/>

CUBA, JUNE 2018: LAUNCHING THE PAPERBACK VERSION OF ON THE EDGE

Fumagalli and Wooding were invited to return to Cuba in June 2018 to launch the paperback version of *On the Edge* published in March 2018. They continued to put the book in dialogue with current events in a series of talks which took place in the Casa de las Americas (Havana), Casa de la Diversidad Cultural (Camaguey) and Casa del Caribe (Santiago de Cuba). An interview by Wooding and Fumagalli with the Director of the Casa de la Diversidad Cultural is excerpted here: <http://obmica.org/index.php/actualidad/218-intercambiando-con-la-casa-de-la-diversidad-cultural-de-camagueey>.



Yoelxys Pilliner Lopez (Director of Casa de la Diversidad Cultural)

Another joint-talk/launch took place in the Ignatio de Loyola Centre at the Parish of Reina, Havana, and a copy of the book was donated to the *Biblioteca Dulce María Loynaz*, also located in Reina.



Bridget Wooding, Maria Cristina Fumagalli and Alejandro Amaro, Casa de las Americas, Havana.



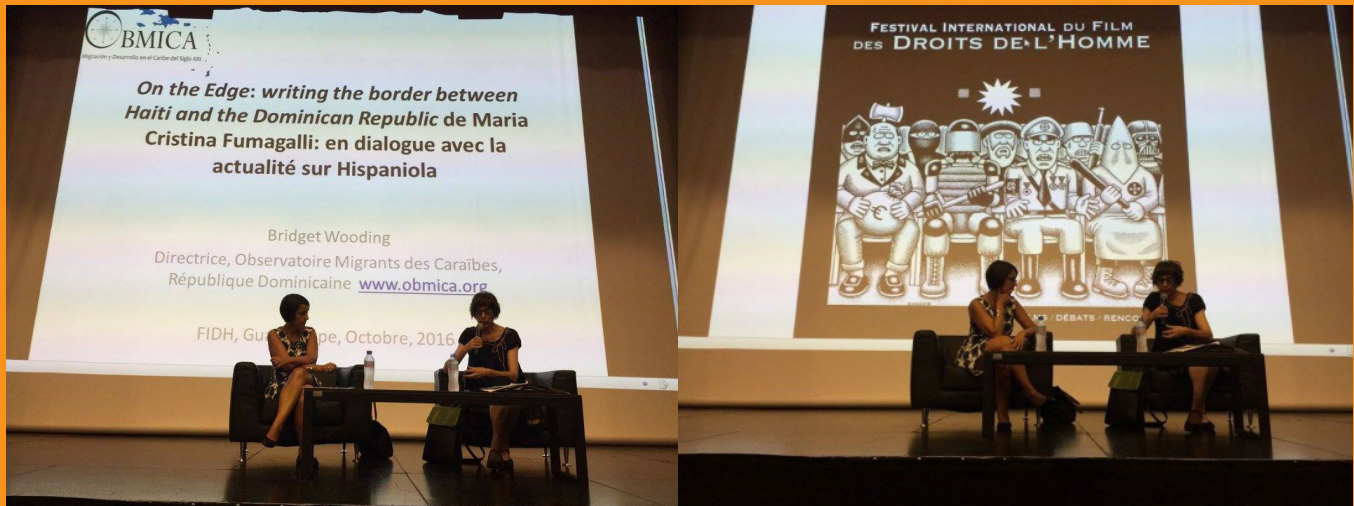
Bridget Wooding, Orlando Vergés (Director of Casa del Caribe), Maria Cristina Fumagalli and Raúl Ruiz Miyares



Bridget Wooding, Maria Cristina Fumagalli and David Pantaleon SJ, Havana

SPREADING THE WORD IN THE FRENCH ANTILLES

In October 2016, through contacts developed with the Ministry of Culture in Guadeloupe, Fumagalli and Wooding were invited to give a joint talk in the Third Festival International du Film des Droits de l'Homme (Third International Film and Human Rights Festival) housed in the new Museum Memorial ACTe. Open to the public since the middle of 2015, the Memorial ACTe commemorates human trafficking and the slave trade, and is lodged in the iconic industrial site of the old Darboussier sugar mill on the seafront near Point-à-Pitre.



La citoyenneté des originaires d'Haiti en République Dominicaine
Rencontre avec Maria Fumagalli, professeure de littérature à l'Université d'Essex, Angleterre et
Citizenship and Dominicans of Haitians descent in the Dominican Republic- a talk by Maria Fumagalli, Professor of Literature at the University of Essex, England and Bridget Wooding, Director of the Observatory for Caribbean Migration in Santo Domingo (OBMICA)

Invitations were also issued by the University precincts of Guadeloupe and Martinique to meet with a broad range of interested people, not only from academia but also from civil society. These activities are available courtesy of MANIOC-Bibliothèque Numérique Caraïbe Amazonie Plateau des Guyanes

<http://www.manioc.org/gsdll/cgi-bin/library?e=q-01000-00---off-0fichiers--00-1----0-10-0---0---0direct-10-DO--4-----0-11--11-fr-Zz-1---20-about-Droit+humain--00-3-1-00-0-0-11-0-0utfZz-8-00&a=q&q=Fumagalli%2C+Maria&fqf=DN&t=0>



Maria Cristina Fumagalli and Bridget Wooding giving their presentations in Camp Jacob, Saint Claude, Guadeloupe, and Amphithéâtre Sellaye, Schœlcher, Martinique October 2016.

Round table with Myriam Moïse, Yolande-Salomé Toumson, Karine Galy, Maria Cristina Fumagalli, Bridget Wooding, and (via skype) Nicolas-Alexandre Tremblay, Schœlcher, Martinique October 2016.

Fumagalli presented the research underpinning *On the Edge* and, building on this cultural framing of a literary and cultural history of the border, Wooding reflected on the human rights of migrants with irregular migration status and the predicament of a population exposed to possible deportation.

Through these visits Fumagalli and Wooding established new links with local interlocutors working with immigrants (Dominicans and Haitians among others) in a context in which these organizations have to battle with the policies handed down from the Metropolis to these two "overseas Departments" anchored in the Caribbean. Thanks to the connections made on this visit to the French Antilles, both Wooding and Fumagalli have submitted papers to an edited collection under review with Palgrave Macmillan on the theme of border transgression and reconfiguration of caribbean spaces edited by their Martinican host Myriam Moïse and Fred Reno.

THE DOMINICO-HAITIAN BORDER: PAST AND PRESENT



Public Talk in Comendador: Bridget Wooding and Maria Cristina Fumagalli with the Head of Police in Belladère (Haiti)

Santo Domingo and Comendador/Belladère: October 2017

In October 2017 Fumagalli and Wooding aimed to transform the 80th anniversary of the 1937 massacre of Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans in the Dominican borderland into an occasion to rethink and help reframe past, present and, crucially, future relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Human rights concerns were put in dialogue with Fumagalli's research on the literary/cultural history of the massacre and current literary/artistic responses to border relations in a series of talks in Santo Domingo and on the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

In **Santo Domingo** Fumagalli and Wooding took part in a seminar on the 1937 massacre spearheaded by the Bosch Foundation and co-organised by OBMICA which included international academics and local activists and was hosted by INTEC. The Bosch Foundation is preparing an edited collection of the proceedings which includes contributions from Fumagalli and Wooding.

In **Comendador**, the local cultural centre (Centro Cultural Juan Pablo Duarte) hosted a talk which targeted a younger age group and was attended by some 75 school children. The talk was accompanied by a photographic exhibition on the border crossing of Belladère/Comendador and by performances by Dominican and Haitian artists which highlighted (past and present) positive exchanges, solidarity, and collaboration between the two peoples. Musicians from Haiti and the Dominican Republic (known as the binational group *Azuei*) performed in the main square of Comendador, with guest artist Delmas T1, a Dominican rapper of Haitian ancestry. Two visual artists, the Dominican Gabriel Shak Doñe and the Haitian Olivier A Ganthier painted together a mural in the same location aimed at reiterating solidarity, peace and cooperation between the two countries. The local population at large participated in the talk, the concert and the photographic exhibition alongside officials from Haiti and the Dominican Republic.



Maria Cristina Fumagalli and Bridget Wooding with Delmas T1, Azuei Group and concert organizers in Comendador, October 2017

On 18th December 2017, Wooding and Fumagalli commemorated International Migrants' Day with the launch of the video *La frontera dominico haitiana: pasado y presente* (available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YruDo3mjfpU>) documenting the activities which took place in October 2017. Their lens put in focus a situation of fraternal exchange and intense cross-border trade which has been the rule rather than the exception along the Dominico-Haitian border.



TAKING STOCK AND MOVING FORWARD

Unlike much scholarship on the region, Fumagalli's *On the Edge*, the first literary/cultural history of the area, draws attention to the existence of long-standing across-the-border collaborative linkages between Haitians and Dominicans.

Highlighting disavowed transnational positive exchanges and cultural continuities in Hispaniola has become particularly urgent since 23rd September 2013, when the Dominican Constitutional Court ordered that all birth registries from 1929 should be audited for people who had been (allegedly) wrongly registered as Dominican citizens. Since 2013 local civil society organizations have continued to demonstrate against nationality stripping, plead their case in the media, and use all the legal means at their disposal to restore the fundamental rights of those affected. It has become evident, however, that for human rights activities to gain traction it is vital to challenge received ideological perspectives on the Haitian-Dominican border and border relations from a cultural (not only legal) point of view.

Cultural impact is a cumulative process of challenging outdated ideological perspectives, raising awareness, capacity building and empowering civil society to make its voice heard by policy makers. To better understand border relations and the current migration and denationalization crisis in the Dominican Republic and to counteract the nefarious effects of anti-Haitian and divisive propaganda, for example, it is beneficial to remember the words of René Philoctète who, at the end of his novel *Le peuple des terres mêlées* (1989), set in the Dominican borderland near Comendador, describes a multitude of people who, in the middle of the 1937 massacre, head for Haitian soil. These refugees are of 'every color, every walk of life, every belief, every character, every kind of memory and beauty'. Significantly, the narrator cannot tell (and does not care to know) if they are Haitians or Dominicans: all he knows is that they have 'so many things in common, share so many wounds and joys that trying to distinguish between the two peoples violates their tacit understanding to live as one'.

Intercultural archives such as *On the Edge* are valuable to the human rights agenda --French and Spanish translations of the book would be invaluable in this respect-- because they make past experiences available to those who want to

engage fully with the present and refuse to comply with the idea that an acceptable future is unattainable. The fictional, non-fictional and visual texts under scrutiny in the book (and *On the Edge* itself) have the potential to be redeployed as solid stepping stones towards a better Hispaniola: after all, as Fumagalli puts it in her conclusion, 'being "on the edge" also means being at the point at which something is likely to begin'.

For OBMICA a cultural turn means taking a cultural perspective on migration, especially Haitian immigration on island. Collaborations with photographers, videographers, journalists, and cultural studies experts have enabled us to contextualize and reframe the issues through photo exhibitions, launches of documentaries, and discussions of literary and artistic production in the border region and elsewhere. Fumagalli has catalyzed this novel approach to hoary topics by OBMICA and other stake holders, as demonstrated in this special bulletin.



The border market in Comendador

LEVERHULME
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University of Essex

Writing and archival/field research for *On the Edge: Writing the Border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic* were supported by the AHRC (Arts and Humanities Research Council; American Tropics Project, 2006-2011) and the Leverhulme Trust (Research Fellowship, 2012-2013). The activities listed in the bulletin were supported by the ESRC (Economic and Social Research Council) Impact Acceleration Account at the University of Essex (2016-2018) and OBMICA.