

DOMINICAN AND HAITIAN NEIGHBORS: MAKING MORAL ATTITUDES AND WORKING RELATIONSHIPS IN THE BANANA BATEYES

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Esto No Tiene Madre” (This has no mother) said the billboard that towered above us as we hurtled down the highway towards the small border town of Montecristi. I smiled at Hipólito Mejía’s latest campaign slogan. The billboard displayed two gas gauges side by side: the one on the left was full and the one on the right was almost empty. The full tank was labeled “2004” and “RD \$1,000” whereas the nearly empty tank read “2011” and again “RD \$1,000.”¹ Beneath these gauges it said: “Esto no tiene madre. Llegó Papá (Dad has arrived).” Hipólito Mejía, popularly known as ‘Papá,’ had been fiercely campaigning against Danilo Medina for the 2012 presidential election. His popular merengue song with the catchy chorus “Llegó Papá!” had been blasting from his campaign’s fleet of trucks for months. Hipólito Mejía, who had been president from 2000 to 2004, seemed to be capitalizing on what many Dominicans viewed as a paternalistic style of leadership. The full and empty gas tanks were showing us what RD\$ 1.000 could get you then versus now, an indication of an economy in need of fixing by none other than Papá. Having been overly bombarded with political advertising, I had stopped being a captive audience. Still, the slogan “esto no tiene madre,” something I had heard Dominicans say when someone does something poorly, caught my attention.²

When I heard the saying again a few days later, it made me realize how strongly my Dominican informants felt about the changes occurring in their community. Vanessa and I were chatting outside of her mother’s *colmado* and her childhood home in a community nestled in banana

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farms.³ I first met Vanessa in 2011 while conducting ethnographic research among Dominican and Haitian residents of small banana-growing communities, known as *bateyes*, near the town of Montecristi in northwestern Dominican Republic.⁴ Vanessa and I were discussing potential titles for a film we were working on together and knowing her obsession with *telenovelas* (soap operas), I jokingly tossed out a few titles that were soap opera worthy such as “The Secret in the *Batey*.” I was surprised by Vanessa’s reaction. She turned uncharacteristically somber and said: “No Kimberly, it has to be something that really relates to what the movie is about. Like, ‘*La Vida de un Campo Desamparado*’ (The Life of a Forsaken Land).” I asked her what she meant by forsaken and she said: “It is a place like this that does not have its mother, that does not have family...like a *batey* that does not have water, does not have electricity, is not maintained, that does not have Dominicans. Only has Haitians and garbage.” She motioned with her arm to the buildings in front of us and continued: “The Haitians here cannot say that this is their place, they are not from here. Look, you can say that a person is forsaken too. Someone who does not have family, does not have anything. It is the same as ‘no tiene madre.’” I asked her if a nearby *batey* was also forsaken and she shook her head and said: “No, because everyone is Dominican, there is electricity, there is water. It is not forsaken.”

When she had finished speaking, I looked around the *batey* and examined what had become a familiar sight to me: the worn out buildings, the ground strewn with garbage, the smelly pools of waste water. Vanessa was right. It wasn’t pretty. I sympathized with Vanessa’s use of the term “no tiene madre” regarding the grim conditions one finds in the community. Yet, she was referring to more than the battered state of the *batey*. Her distinction between two kinds of *bateyes* revealed not only local moral dispositions about respectable modes of living, but what she believed to be a transgression of these. From Vanessa’s perspective, the *batey* was a fallen place. As she describes, it was not only in a state of disrepair, but it was inhabited by Haitians who could not stake a claim to the community which made it a place without anybody or anything. This description was in stark contrast to the “lindo” (pretty) community she remembered from her childhood when the community was inhabited by Dominicans. She described how back then, the homes were cared for and the trash was collected and burned. She remembered the canal with fresh water that used to flow behind the *batey*. She talked about the nearby school that has since been shut down and overrun by goats. Now she saw a place that was quickly filling up with outsiders. She saw

garbage littered everywhere and buildings deteriorating before her eyes. And she attributed this change to the Dominicans moving out after the arrival of Haitians.

My Haitian informants in the *batey*, however, did not disagree with Vanessa's low opinion of the place. The *batey* did not exactly live up to their expectations of what life would be like in the Dominican Republic, but they remained there because of convenience and cost. Shortly after her arrival, a Haitian informant told me her impression of the *batey*: "Kimberly, I don't like it here. I thought it would be prettier. But, it is like Haiti. I don't have money to trade and the houses have no electricity or water. (...) I like Santiago and Montecristi. I thought it would be like Santiago. If I were to choose, I would have lived in the other place (meaning Montecristi)."⁵ Haitian residents would frequently complain about the conditions in the *bateyes*. Women would bemoan the absence of job opportunities available to them and men would dream about moving to Santiago to work in construction. Regardless of the complaints voiced by Haitians, Vanessa, like many other Dominican *batey* residents, attributed the decline to the Haitians' desire to "live like animals."

Vanessa's use of "no tiene madre" when referring to the *batey* sheds light on how Dominicans regard the changes taking place in the local moral landscape as increasingly more Haitians arrive in their communities. Haitians are considered potentially dangerous strangers by the Dominicans in the *bateyes*, who believe themselves to be morally superior to the Haitian migrants. Scholars have demonstrated thoroughly how anti-Haitian and anti-black nationalist ideologies have taken root in the Dominican Republic and have been nourished by the interests of colonists, nation-building politicians, elites, and capitalists (See e.g. Sagás 2000, Howard 2001, Martínez-Vergne 2005, Candelario 2007, Simmons 2009, Mayes 2014). Less common are studies that explore how Dominicans negotiate the state's ongoing balancing act between the economic demand for Haitian migrant workers and the political pressure to exclude Haitians from Dominican society on a daily basis at the local level. This article takes place among poor Dominicans, already positioned in the lower rungs of their own society's hierarchy, who are brought together with Haitians in marginalized communities. By living among Haitians, they feel threatened of being pulled down into the Haitians' rank at the bottom.

Though Vanessa and other Dominicans in my study had concerns about Haitians that have been partly informed by an anti-Haitian ideology advanced by institutions and public discourses, this article

considers how moral attitudes were negotiated on an everyday basis through working and living among Haitian residents. Due to the close interaction with their Haitian neighbors necessitated by a shared economic livelihood, Dominican residents were often placed in situations which prompted reflection about what defined them as different from the Haitian 'other.' In what follows, I explore how Dominican residents coped with deep-seated feelings of fear and distrust triggered by the changes taking place in their communities. It is my central argument that cultivating a perceived moral superiority became a way to not only protect a Dominican identity and the accompanying privileges, but to feel that one is defending the physical person from harm. This process of moral othering made a more comfortable living and working relationship among Haitians possible for Dominican residents.

My analysis of moral attitudes and mechanisms of othering takes inspiration from a growing anthropological literature on ethical work. The distinction between morality and ethics, as theorized by Jarrett Zigon (2007, 2009), allows for a more tangible study of the shaping of moral personhood and moral worlds on an everyday basis. As has been widely recognized by many scholars (Wolfram 1982, Parkin 1985, Howell 1997, Laidlaw 2002, Heintz 2009, Karsenti 2012), Émile Durkheim's view of society as a system of moral facts effectively made morality too broad to pin down. In his endeavor to establish a positivist social science of "moral facts," Durkheim argued that morality was a codified reflection of a particular society which, consequently varied between societies (see Laidlaw 2002, Karsenti 2012). Following this line of reasoning, what constitutes morality becomes so extensive and congruent with society that it is subsumed by other more concrete analytical categories. Rather than viewing morality as a unified system of codes and rules of social behavior, Zigon suggests that morality exists in three interrelated aspects: institutional morality (such as the state and religious structures), public discourse on morality (like the media and everyday sayings), and embodied dispositions. Institutional morality and public discourse on morality are part of what Zigon (2008) calls a "discursive morality" and are influential but do not determine embodied dispositions which occur on an individual level as a person's unreflective everyday way of being. For Zigon, ethics is a moment of interrupted embodied morality when the individual is forced to reflect and work on one's moral self to return to an embodied moral way of being. Ethics and ethical practices are therefore creative processes where the individual draws from multiple moralities to work on oneself and in doing so,

moralties are continuously shaped and reshaped for the individual and ever so slightly in institutions and public discourse.

Building on Zigon's analysis, I propose that the arrival of increasingly more Haitians into the communities of my study has generated feelings of distrust and insecurity among Dominican residents who respond by actively and consciously working through contradictions and changes occurring in the local moral landscape with the aim of returning to a more morally comfortable existence. I suggest that these moments of moral reasoning and positioning, or the practice of ethics, in daily interactions between Dominican and Haitian residents are not necessarily drastic encounters, but more often are gradations of moral consciousness in the flow of everyday life as fictions are maintained in attempts to preserve one's respect and slight gestures or comments are made to send messages to others. In what follows, I explore how the Dominicans in my study are creatively making sense of the moral shifts transforming their communities in the context of their daily lives as they explain the significance of a checkpoint on a local road, reflect on personal appearance, give reasons for the trustworthiness of certain neighbors, and tease or rebuke others for perceived transgressions of respect.

I begin by contextualizing the migration from Haiti into the banana *bateyes*, experienced by the locals as new, within a regional history of transborder relationships and migrations from Haiti as well as from other parts of the Dominican Republic. In this section I show how the relationships between the three main groups examined in this article (Dominicans living in town, Dominicans living in the *bateyes*, and Haitian migrants) have been historically constituted. With this context in mind, I next explore local moral attitudes among Dominicans living in town. To understand Dominican *batey* residents' response to the recent migration we must first examine their positioning in the local moral landscape in relation to the Dominicans in town. The next section returns to the seeming inconsistency in Vanessa's description about why the *batey* in which she was raised has changed because of a lifestyle regarded as specifically Haitian while Haitian residents view living standards in the *batey* as subpar. Why is it so important to Dominican residents to reason that Haitians "live like animals" and "cannot be trusted" despite a lived experience among Haitians proving otherwise? This question leads us to the discussion in the remaining pages on how Dominican residents work towards establishing a perceived moral superiority in situations where spatial separation is not possible and physical security is thought to be at stake.

II. OLD AND NEW MIGRATIONS

Although the Haitian migration into the banana *bateyes* is regarded as a relatively recent phenomenon among locals, there was a large population of Haitians living in the region long before the Dominican banana farmers depended on Haitian labor. Under dispute since 1844, the demarcation of the boundary between the Dominican Republic and Haiti was not agreed upon until 1936 when a treaty between the two countries established an official border. Due to inadequate roads on the Dominican side, Dominican border provinces were economically integrated through networks of trade with Haitian towns rather than Dominican towns (Derby 1994:492). Haitian peasants, who had been working agricultural plots abandoned by eastern sector residents during the nineteenth-century wars, continued to be born and raised on the Dominican side of the border even after the negotiation of the Dominican-Haitian border (Lundahl 1983:112-113, Krohn-Hansen 2009:28). The landholdings of many Haitians and Dominicans traversed the borderline and economic networks were established between social and kin ties residing on both sides (Derby 1994:493-494). Though there was a socially significant notion of difference between the groups, it was not based on skin color or a perceived Dominican national superiority.

This lived reality of the border flew in the face of urban elites in Santo Domingo and Santiago who envisaged a different Dominican nation. The border was porous and the frontier population was bilingual and bicultural. Hence, there existed, as Richard Turits argues, “a conflict between two visions of the Dominican nation” (2002:594). For the elite living in the cosmopolitan capital, the presence of Haitians in the Dominican borderlands added to the overall image of an “uncontrolled backlands” and began to signify a “pacific invasion” that would threaten Dominican territory and identity with the eastern sector’s “Haitianizing” and “Africanizing” influences which were believed to be savage and backwards (Turits 2002:599, Derby 1994:491). Added to these concerns about culture were the interests of the state. Dominican political leaders had long struggled to envelop the independently-minded and sparse population on the frontier into state authority and regulation. Securing the border militarily and controlling the traffic of goods and people across it had also been a longstanding goal of the government.

In the early years of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo’s regime (1930-1961), the state attempted to integrate the border by reinforcing the use of Spanish, strengthening local Catholic churches, and building public schools equipped with new nationalist inspired curricula (Turits 2002:608-609). However, this more assimilationist approach took a

drastic turn. In October 1937, after he had an extensive tour of the northern half of the country, Trujillo commanded his army to kill the Haitian population living in the northwestern border region.⁶ These Haitians, according to Trujillo, had been raiding the cattle and crops of local Dominican residents. Hundreds of Dominican troops fanned out across the region from the 2nd to the 8th of October and with the help of local authorities, residents believed to be of Haitian origin were collected and massacred with machetes. The population of an estimated 20,000 to 50,000 ethnic Haitians living in the province of Monte Cristi either fled to Haiti or were killed (Turits 2002:621). Following the massacre, the Dominican public was bombarded by anti-Haitian ideology through speeches, broadcast and print media, laws and historical documents. Another aspect of Trujillo's Dominicanization of the frontier involved establishing infrastructure such as military posts, roads, and schools along the border. Thus, the massacre was the impetus for a stratified relationship between the two nationalities. As Robin (Lauren) Derby argues: "This process introduced hierarchy into a previously horizontal ideology of difference: As frontier Dominicans became part of the nation as citizens, the Haitian community came to be labeled as foreigners threatening the body politic" (1994:489).

The massacre profoundly and irrevocably transformed the economy and culture of the border, but it did not eliminate the Haitian presence in the Dominican Republic. Haitians working in the sugar industry were protected from deportation or attack and continued to arrive and settle in the country's eastern provinces. Through their work as cane cutters on the sugar plantations and in other low-wage labor and the repositioning of power between the countries as the Dominican Republic grew to be more economically and militarily powerful of the two, the Haitian population has come to signify degrading poverty in the eyes of many Dominicans. The housing built for the seasonal immigrant cane workers on the sugar company compounds is still widely known as *bateyes*.⁷ Before 1999, *bateyes* were not officially part of the Dominican state and were under the jurisdiction of the sugar companies themselves who were responsible for providing infrastructure and services (Wooding and Moseley-Williams 2004:41). The word *bateyes* has become practically onomatopoeic. It captures the daily suffering endured by impoverished people with nowhere else to go but the dire surroundings that they would rather not call home. The number of *bateyes* is expanding as agricultural communities that provide labor for industries other than sugar, such as the banana *bateyes*, are locally recognized as *bateyes*. The *bateyes* are typically relatively isolated in

rural areas and have limited or no access to water, electricity, waste disposal, schools or health services. Moreover, they are often targeted by the police for arbitrary surveillance and deportations.

In contrast to the sugar producing areas further east in the Dominican Republic, the flat and relatively arid land surrounding the town of Montecristi attracted the U.S.-based United Fruit Company. Between the years 1937 and 1938, studies were carried out on behalf of the United Fruit Company throughout the river basin of the Yaque del Norte River, from the city of Santiago to where the river empties in Montecristi Bay (Lara Viñas [1995] 2010:40). The company was satisfied with the results and by 1942 had started hiring crews of Dominican men to clear the land outside the town of Montecristi, where today's *bateyes* and banana farms are located. The United Fruit Company built the twelve banana *bateyes* still in use today during the 1940s and 1950s to house a Dominican labor force, many of whom migrated to the remote border province from other parts of the country. After the United Fruit Company pulled out of the region in 1966, the company housing and surrounding plantations changed hands several times before being divided into small farms currently owned and operated by Dominican farmers. Many of these farmers were raised in the *bateyes* and are the descendants of those who worked on the United Fruit Company plantations. Several Fairtrade banana-growing cooperatives have been formed by these small farmers and their bananas are currently exported to Europe. The laborers on these small banana farms are primarily undocumented Haitian workers who are said to work harder and for less money than Dominicans.

According to Dominican residents, Haitians started arriving in the banana *bateyes* in large numbers in the mid-1990s. The increase in Haitian migration into the area is therefore often attributed to the foundation of numerous Fairtrade banana-growing cooperatives during the mid to late 1990s and the subsequent demand for labor. As my middle-aged Dominican neighbor explained: "The Haitians living in the *campo* (countryside) are now needed to work on the farms. There were not many Haitians living in Montecristi when I was young. Sometimes you would see one and say 'Look there is a Haitian!' But, there were so few and they worked in people's homes: cleaning, ironing, and cooking. Trujillo massacred the Haitians that were here." The Haitian migrants in Montecristi are part of a later migration following the decline of the sugar industry in the 1980s. However, it is important to stress that Haitian *batey* residents have not migrated from the sugar *bateyes*, but from their hometowns in Haiti. The banana *bateyes* are closely situated

to the northern Haiti, an impoverished and densely populated agricultural region.

The Haitian migrants in the banana *bateyes* have much in common with the cane workers, or “peripheral migrants” in Samuel Martínez’s study. “Peripheral migrants,” as Martínez calls this pattern of rural-rural migration, are circulating in the world’s economic periphery. Largely emigrating on their own and with limited job skills, they “go to the least desirable destinations and take the most arduous, worst paid, and least secure jobs available in the host area” (Martínez 1995:27). Rather than returning home with money that enables them to abandon their old livelihood for a better one, the result of their sacrifice typically keeps them economically marginalized (Martínez 1995:28). Since their migration takes them to places that are closer to home, they are able to return regularly to deliver money and renew ties with family members. This mobility can hinder their ability to form a community in the host country. Perhaps due to the small-scale nature of the banana industry in Montecristi and the fact that bananas are cultivated year-round, the Haitian migrants in the banana *bateyes*, as we will see, developed friendships with their neighbors and Dominican bosses. Nevertheless, these relationships were always precarious. The risk of being deported always loomed over them and most of the Haitians in my study had very little knowledge about their labor rights or what government services were available to them. Even though some had lived for years in the Dominican banana *bateyes*, they regarded it as a temporary situation.

Since the migration of Haitians to the banana *bateyes* is viewed by locals as relatively recent, there exists a clearly defined boundary between who is considered Haitian and who is considered Dominican in comparison to other parts of the Dominican Republic where Haitians have been settled for many generations. As one Dominican informant explained it to me: “It is a newer migration, the people are not as accustomed to the Haitians.” I observed only a few cases of intermarriage between Dominicans and Haitians. Apart from several Dominicans of Haitian parentage in their early 20s, who were described by my Dominican informants as “almost Dominican” because they spoke fluent Spanish and behaved and dressed more like Dominicans, most residents of Haitian descent who identified themselves as Dominican in the *bateyes* were children. However, the children of the Haitians born in the *bateyes* typically returned to Haiti after they reached school age.

The Dominicans who live in the *bateyes* are known as *bateyeros*. Haitians are not included in this category and are usually collectively

called “haitianos.” *Bateyeros* are looked down on by Dominicans living in neighboring towns and villages. This is not necessarily because of the stigma of the *bateyes* on a national level, but because of a localized prejudice based on local moralities regarding work, education, and lifestyle. Poverty and lack of resources is certainly an aspect, but does not explain the discrimination entirely. Large sections of the town of Montecristi and neighboring villages also have families who live in conditions of poverty similar to the *bateyes*. In my view, the difference is that the *bateyeros* are commonly held more responsible for their circumstances. *Bateyeros* suffer from many of the same justifications for discrimination that the Haitian migrants do. Many arrived as migrant workers hoping to find jobs on the United Fruit Company’s plantations prior to the company’s departure from the region. The upper-level employees of the United Fruit Company were based elsewhere and worked in offices, socialized at elite clubs, and sent their children to private schools. Those who labored and lived on the plantations were spatially and socially separated from their supervisors. Today, *bateyeros* are not always accepted as true locals among the native community of Montecristi. They were and continue to be associated with manual farm labor which is considered undignified and dirty work. Moreover, as we will see in what follows, with the arrival of the Haitian migrants, Dominicans in town have another reason to think that the *bateyeros* are beneath them.

III. A MORAL LANDSCAPE

In conversations with Dominicans in town, the notion that *bateyeros* were unwilling or incapable of ‘progress’ was often used to describe their circumstances. For example, Soledad, a Dominican living in town told me: “They (the *bateyeros*) are like the chicks of a bird” (mimicking a chick opening its mouth to receive food from its mother). They just sit and wait for things to be given to them instead of taking control of their life. For this reason, they do not progress. Sure, there are difficulties, but it is the culture, their mentality that prevents them from progressing. Look, my coworker lives in the *bateyes* and her children have stopped going to school. I asked her why she doesn’t push them to continue and do you know what she said? She said: ‘What for?’ And they will just end up working with the bananas like they see others around them doing. They are not motivated to go to school and to change their situation.” Mass consumption in the Dominican Republic is entwined with the notion of *progreso* (progress), the idea that circumstance should get better or as Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof puts it,

“progreso is how things ought to work” (2008:11). For my informants in the *bateyes*, progress meant finding a good job or attending school, but perhaps more importantly, it was about improving one’s status through personal appearance and the renovation of one’s home. As Hoffnung-Garskof explains: “Progreso is not only an idea about social change. It is also an idea of social mobility. In Dominican vernacular, progreso describes the improving status of an individual or family, not just of the neighborhood or nation” (2008:11). Among the Dominicans in my study, progress was regarded as something that individuals should work towards for themselves and for their families. It was believed that those who could not keep up with progress, measured through personal appearance, clothing, and modern material goods, only had themselves to blame. This moral attitude, or the placement of blame on individual failings rather than considering historical or structural disadvantages, was common among both Dominicans in town and in the *bateyes*. A main difference, however, was that the Dominicans living in town seemed to believe that the *bateyeros* were incapable of progress and the *bateyeros* did not share this point of view about themselves. *Bateyeros* generally believed that one could improve his or her circumstances if money and energy was invested in a manner deemed appropriate.

The term *cultura* or culture used by Soledad in her explanation above is also significant to local moral attitudes. Used in state projects to instruct rural people about ‘modern’ and ‘civilized’ life, the notion of *cultura* has a history of being a tool of exclusion in the Dominican Republic (Hoffnung-Garskof 2008:62). It has been used to marginalize the rural and urban poor as well as those who are regarded as cultural ‘others’ like the Haitians. As seen with Soledad’s description above, *bateyeros* are regarded as unable to progress owing to their lack of culture. However, even if they achieve aspects of progress, such as a certain appearance, they might never truly ‘belong’ because of a perceived lack of ‘culture.’

Both Dominicans in the *bateyes* and in town referred to a lack of progress when describing the Haitians. A Dominican neighbor informed me during a conversation: “In Haiti it is sad because there is no education and no culture. They (the Haitians) are responsible for their own poverty...they just don’t progress.” In my neighbor’s view, the entire country of Haiti is seen as not progressing, and if we are to follow the local moral notions of progress, it would lead us to the belief common among many Dominicans that the country deserves its plight. Additionally, we see another example of how the term ‘culture’ is used to define who belongs in the Dominican Republic. In light of the moral

conceptions of progress which Haiti and Haitians are measured against, it becomes easier to understand how the *bateyes* have been designated by townspeople as undeserving and morally inferior. Not only are the *bateyeros* not progressing according to Dominican standards, but they are living among Haitians who are thought to be even less capable of progressing. As Soledad once remarked: “In the *bateyes*, it is like Haiti, it never progresses.”

The *bateyes* were viewed by Dominicans in town as not only an area without progress but as dangerous since “Haitians cannot be trusted” and are believed to be prone to committing crimes, practicing sorcery, and capable of spreading disease. The threat that disease or violence from the *bateyes* could spill over and affect the people in town did concern residents in Montecristi. However, they viewed the *bateyes* and the Haitians living in them as spatially separated from their own neighborhoods where Dominicans far outnumbered Haitians. The Haitians living in predominately Dominican neighborhoods in town, about a 10 to 15 minute drive from the *bateyes*, were called ‘peaceful’ and ‘friendly’ compared to the more ‘dangerous’ Haitians living in the *bateyes*. As a Dominican informant in town, pointing to a Haitian family’s home across the street from her own, explained: “Like them, they work in town, in jobs at people’s businesses and in people’s homes. They are different because they have grown up here and went to school here, have children here. They have two children. And many even have Dominican papers. The Haitians living in the *bateyes* work in agriculture and they have not been to school, have nothing and live like animals.” She informed me that they were different from the Haitians living in town and would not be allowed past the checkpoint to enter town. I was surprised to hear this since I had spoken with her Haitian neighbors and not only did they not have Dominican papers, but they had not grown up in the Dominican Republic nor had they gone to Dominican schools. Furthermore, many of my Haitian informants in the *bateyes* had children and often came to town to shop, go to the hospital, and visit friends. Through my network of informants, I had also met with many Haitians who lived in town and worked on the banana farms.

As mentioned by my informant above, Dominicans in town found the National Guard checkpoint (*chequeo*), which all traffic from the *bateyes* must pass through to get to town, reassuring since they reasoned that it kept the ‘dangerous’ elements of the *bateyes* segregated from town.⁸ Although the checkpoint was meant to prevent undocumented Haitian migrants from traveling further into the country, and to keep them on the banana farms where they were needed as workers, the

reality was quite different. Haitian *batey* residents frequently passed through the checkpoint and considered the multiple checkpoints further down the highway between Montecristi and Santiago more threatening. The risk was higher at these checkpoints where they were entirely unknown to the officers and the bribes were reportedly higher.

Although the checkpoint between Montecristi and the *bateyes* seems arbitrary, it did effectively delineate and throw attention on the target (undocumented Haitians) to all who passed through it. For the local community, who had no control over the Dominican government's efficacy at limiting undocumented migration, the checkpoint became a site where feelings of powerlessness were made sense of and transformed to account for the contradiction between actual practice and the way residents would like things to be. As Oyvind Eggen has argued, even though bureaucratic practices do not always "produce 'real' social effects corresponding to the governing techniques used," they still create "an *image* of such effects" (2012:2, emphasis in original). Though not exactly fulfilling its intended role, the checkpoint "enables seemingly conflicting social entities," since it provided residents with a source of security in an insecure landscape (2012:19). Thus understood, the image of the checkpoint, regardless of its effectivity, still held authority in the eyes of my Dominican informants.

Anthropologists studying narratives on crime, such as Teresa Caldeira (2000), explain that moral mechanisms of distancing and othering are important to maintain feelings of order in an insecure landscape. By classifying town as separated and protected from a dangerous and marginal life in the *bateyes*, the Dominicans performed what Caldeira refers to as "symbolic labor" to disassociate themselves from what is perceived as an immoral other. Dominicans in town reinforced and protected their moral superiority by reasoning that they were on the 'right' side of the checkpoint and that unlike the Haitians living in the *bateyes*, the Haitians who lived among them were more aligned with their own moral conceptions. For Dominicans living in the *bateyes*, where spatial separation was not realizable, there existed more pronounced contradictions in daily life as the symbolic barriers Dominicans placed between themselves and their Haitian neighbors eroded.

IV. MORAL OTHERING THROUGH APPEARANCE

Not all of the twelve banana *bateyes* were inhabited by Haitian residents during my research and while those with primarily Dominican residents were considered nice, the *bateyes* with mostly Haitian residents

were regarded as, borrowing Vanessa's wording, "forsaken." These *bateyes* were not frequently visited by Dominicans and were said to be unsafe places for Dominicans to spend time. The *batey* in which Vanessa grew up and where her family continued to live was in a morally ambiguous position because there were still Dominican residents, but it was sandwiched between neighboring *bateyes* with mostly Haitian residents. Vanessa, who lived in a primarily Dominican *batey*, was frustrated by the condition of the *batey* of her childhood not only because she worried about the safety of her parents but because she felt like her parents were changing as a result of living among Haitians. Like many of my Dominican informants, Vanessa invested a great deal of time and money into what was viewed as a distinctly "Dominican" appearance. I suggest that this conscious work on oneself reveals ethical practices enacted by Dominican residents to protect themselves from the perceived threat of 'becoming Haitian.'

The appearance and behavior of Vanessa's mother got on her nerves. She was not embarrassed of her mother, but disappointed in her because she believed that her mother ought to know better: "My mother used to have very long hair, but now that she is living with Haitians she is just like them, with the same bad habits as them. Look at her hair! She washes her hair in the canal everyday and lets it air-dry so it breaks. And she doesn't use rollers or go to the salon. She used to use rollers and go to the salon. And look at her skin! She used to be much whiter, but now she is out in the sun all day like a Haitian. And her clothing too. She has stopped dressing nicely, not even when she goes to town." Her mother was not meeting the standards of appearance that Dominicans set for themselves and was therefore demonstrating that Dominicans are also capable of "bad" hair. Still, rather than admit this explicitly, Vanessa reasoned that her mother's previous practices of "proper" grooming had been damaged because of the Haitians who had taught her "bad habits." Thus, implying that as a Dominican, her mother once had "good" habits that became "bad" by living among Haitians.

For my Dominican and Haitian informants, how you had your hair done, how you dressed, if you had a television, and how cleaned your house were all moral statements. For the most part, my Dominican and Haitian informants shared notions of what constituted a proper appearance or household, but the Haitians were typically unable to meet these because of their precarious position in the *bateyes*. Both the Dominicans and Haitians in my study were living in poverty, nevertheless, there was a stark contrast in the amount of disposable income each group had. While Dominicans were able to purchase

furniture, televisions, stoves, decor, and other household items, the Haitians scrimped and saved to have enough money for basic needs like food and health care. One reason for this difference was that while Dominicans were on the receiving end of remittances from relatives abroad, many Haitians sent as much as they could to their families in Haiti. More importantly, Dominicans had an advantage in that they had access to informal lines of credit. Haitians, who were perceived as untrustworthy, were generally not given the option to buy on credit from local Dominican vendors.

Apart from financial barriers, there were also practical reasons for why the Haitians could not live up to certain standards of beauty. Unlike the homes in the primarily Dominican *bateyes*, theirs did not have electricity or running water. This made it more challenging to keep their bodies, clothing, and homes clean. Moreover, the backbreaking work on the banana farms where bodies got sweaty and clothing became stained with banana sap, presented a different appearance from the Dominicans who typically spent large parts of their day in the shade. Despite the obvious barriers that prevented my Haitian informants from achieving local conceptions of self-care, my Dominican informants argued that Haitians chose to live the way they did and were therefore not as dignified as Dominicans. To my Dominican informants, the crumbling homes and unkept yards of Haitians further reinforced their notion that the latter were not the moral equals of Dominicans. They knew that Haitians sent money to their families, but the fact that Dominican residents did not see how the hard-earned money of the Haitian migrants was spent enabled them to understand the apparent contradiction that Haitians had money yet “live like animals” as another reason why they were morally superior. My Dominican informants often made comparisons between the way they spent money and the way their Haitian neighbors did. They had the tendency to see themselves as interested in self-improvement, which was financed by what they saw as an informed attainment and application of funds. The Haitians, on the other hand, were thought to be only interested in crude money and were not concerned with the ‘proper’ protocol of getting and using it.

These rationalizations are partly a response to the uncomfortable position in which Dominicans in the *bateyes* find themselves. Already struggling to uphold a personal appearance deemed proper among their fellow Dominicans, they were now living with Haitians. Haitians were thought to be morally inferior to Dominicans and thus living among them posed a challenge to their status as Dominicans. Maintaining a certain appearance and owning material possessions thus became a

response to the threat of a diminished Dominican identity by living among Haitians. If they were not able to be socially recognized as Dominican, and thus moral persons, then they were seen as dangerously close to, as I heard some Dominican informants say, ‘becoming Haitian.’ As we will see next, Dominicans regarded intimacy with Haitians as not only threatening a Dominican’s identity, but also physical security.

V. MITIGATING FEAR WITH RESPECT

The Dominicans in my study had no tolerance for the Haitian residents or visitors that they did not find trustworthy. Their entire demeanor would change. When interacting with ‘untrustworthy’ residents, most turned suddenly serious and reserved. Like many of my Dominican informants, Vanessa would often say “you can never trust a Haitian” and that she had “no Haitian friends.” However, her relationships with many of the *batey*’s Haitian residents seemed to contradict these statements. The notion that Haitians were immoral criminals was gradually chipped away as Dominicans came to know their Haitian neighbors, coworkers, and customers. For my Dominican informants, Haitians were unwelcome, but necessary to keep their businesses running and the banana farms operating. For practical reasons, Dominicans in the *bateyes* could not avoid having relationships with Haitians, which eventually became friendships. However, the closer Dominicans became to their Haitian neighbors, the more afraid they were of making themselves vulnerable not only to the loss of their identity as morally ‘superior,’ but to physical harm.

In the following, I examine how conscious feelings of fear and distrust were worked through in everyday interactions between Dominican and Haitian neighbors. The practical engagement of their daily lives clashed with moral conceptions and it compelled them to work through feelings of insecurity in order to find a comfortable mode of living and working among Haitian neighbors. For my Dominican informants, being able to trust someone (*tener confianza*) was an essential aspect of a good relationship. Trust, or the ability to feel secure in your relationship with someone, would often be used when discussing romantic and sexual relationships between men and women, when talking about friends and family members, and when describing the relations between the farmers and their workers. In a similar vein, those who could not be trusted were referred to as shameless (*sinvergüenza*). Trust was necessary to build relationships which provided protection in precarious and fragile livelihoods. As someone who was trustworthy,

you would be called on to help your friends, neighbors, and family members and they would be obligated to help you in return.

Inspired by Daniel and Knudsen (1995), I argue that trust, like morality, is embodied in an unreflective way on a daily basis. Hence, a breakdown of trust leads to an ethical dilemma, or a moment where one must stop and reflect on how to proceed. During crises of trust, I propose, a demand is placed upon an individual to which they must respond. Unable to live in a community without forming relationships of trust with neighbors and coworkers, the Dominicans in my study found ways to determine who could be trusted and how to protect themselves from the untrustworthy. As I explore below, most Dominican residents responded to the dilemma of distrust in their community by cultivating a perceived moral superiority over their Haitian neighbors through a hierarchy of intimacy and respect. Those who had more intimate relationships with Haitians, as we will see, were thought to be exposing themselves to risk of physical harm because of diminished respect.

Though Haitians were not trusted because they were thought to be immoral, that is, capable of doing things that went against locally accepted moralities, they were still hired as security guards at Dominicans' homes and businesses and trusted with important tasks on the banana farms. These Haitians, the ones considered trustworthy, were said to be exceptions. What many of the more 'trustworthy' Haitians had in common was that they respected a hierarchy of respect and intimacy imposed by the Dominicans. My observations correspond with those of Martínez who notes from his research in the sugar *bateyes*: "Haitians avoid open conflict with *dominicanos* largely by knowing their place in *batey* society, and keeping to it" (1997:231). The demonstration of respect shown by a Haitian through knowing his or her place, correlated with trustworthiness.

Subtleties of respect are poignant when observed, but difficult to describe. I find Anthony Lauria's approach helpful in explaining how respect operates in relationships of trust. Writing about Puerto Rico, Lauria argues that *confianza* refers to "an invasion of that social space surrounding the self which is demarcated by the ritual avoidances enjoined by the maintenance of generalized *respeto*" (1964:62-63). To Lauria, "*respeto*" is a "proper attention to the requisites of the ceremonial order of behavior, and to the moral aspects of human activities" (1964:55). Being respectful means obeying local moralities and standards embodied in social relationships. Lauria's conceptualization of *confianza*, then, is based on the careful balance of confrontation and respect. *Confianza* implies that there exists a degree of

intimacy in a relationship, but if this intimacy is abused or overstepped, confrontation occurs because that is regarded as disrespectful. Lauria argues that “relajos,” that is, joking, banter, nicknames, and humorous insults allow for intimacy to be transgressed but in a way that is not perceived as insulting. The interaction that constitutes *relajos*, Lauria explains, indicates a relationship of *confianza*. In this light, humor and joking can signify intimacy when the people involved are in a relationship of *confianza*. Humor, as seen below, can also be used to demonstrate distancing and disrespect.

The status of Norberto, a Dominican *batey* resident, illustrates the delicate daily negotiation of respect involved in *confianza* and how one’s reputation or security was regarded as negatively impacted by too much familiarity. Norberto’s interaction with the Haitian residents led to a higher degree of intimacy than most Dominicans in my field felt comfortable with. He worked for a Dominican farmer, he often socialized with Haitians, wore similar clothing to Haitians, worked alongside them, and ate with them. He had also been previously married to a Haitian woman and had traveled with her to Haiti. To my Dominican informants, this kind of familiarity with Haitians, threatened what they viewed to be a superior status based on their Dominicaness. To use Lauria’s terms, the level of intimacy or *confianza* between Norberto and the Haitian residents was to the point where the Haitians treated him more as an equal than as a superior and this was seen as disrespectful by Dominican residents. Since Norberto was breaking with local moral conceptions, he was not as respected by his fellow Dominicans nor the Haitian residents.

I once overheard several Dominican farmers teasing Norberto for “becoming Haitian,” something that I had heard others say about him before behind his back. Norberto responded by laughing, but he did not seem to appreciate the joke. He was very often the butt of jokes made by both Dominican and Haitian *batey* residents. There was the time, for example, when Vanessa’s mother found the jaw bone of a pig in her garden and held it up in front of a large group of Haitians and said: “It looks just like Norberto!” Everyone burst into peals of laughter and clapped their hands with enjoyment. Norberto would also joke around with the Haitians more than the other Dominican residents. Norberto’s engagement in banter indicated that he was on friendly and familiar terms with Haitians, but it also gave him a different level of respect. By allowing Haitians to tease him in such a familiar way, he was conceding that they were his equals. Therefore, he was seen as more a friend than a superior. According to the local hierarchy of intimacy and respect,

Dominicans and Haitians could be friends, but Dominicans felt the need to maintain a sense of authority. The Dominicans that commanded more respect from Haitians like Vanessa's father, Chepe, still socialized with Haitians but had a much lower threshold for perceived transgressions of intimacy. I remember a time when a Haitian resident, Osse, walked by and greeted Chepe by calling him "my friend" (*mi amigo*). Chepe said roughly: "I am not your friend!" and swore at him. Osse's face dropped, but he just chuckled nervously and walked away. Here, Chepe defined to Osse and everyone else who was watching what his boundaries of intimacy were. It was believed by my Dominican informants that Norberto was making himself vulnerable to intimacy being transgressed in more dangerous ways, such as assault or theft. To Dominican residents, garnering respect among Haitians was significant not only for the protection of their superior status as Dominicans, but to distance themselves from those who were considered untrustworthy. If they commanded respect, then they felt more secure that Haitians would not dare harm them.

The Haitian men who behaved in more disrespectful ways were viewed essentially as criminals. They were called 'tígueres,' but not in the good way. A term commonly used among Dominicans since the 1930s, the *tíguere* is a man or a woman who is witty and guileful (See Krohn-Hansen 1996 for an overview). It is the person who can find a way around any problem and charm others in the process. While they may commit acts that are deemed immoral, they are respected for their cunning and bravery. For example, a Dominican man who had been accused of numerous robberies in the *bateyes*, but who was never found guilty, was referred to as a *tíguere*. Vanessa told me, "He is a thief (*ladrón*), but saying *tíguere* is politer." The fact that she maintained the desire to be polite, reveals the irresistible respect that he had managed to command, which made him a *tíguere*. Christian Krohn-Hansen, who has written about the moral ambiguity of the *tíguere*, argues that "the *tíguere* seems to swallow the ethical evaluations of his peers. He is a man seen as both without and with 'shame', as not completely 'serious' but not 'bad' or 'evil' either" (1996:123). From my observations, the moral flexibility given to the Dominican *tíguere* is, however, not awarded to the Haitian *tíguere*. To my Dominican informants, they were seen as categorically "bad" and "shameless." The Haitian *tíguere* defied local moralities by demanding recognition rather than accepting the inferior status imposed on him by Dominicans. This kind of behavior threatened my Dominican informants because it went against local standards by which Dominican-Haitian relationships were governed. They reasoned

that the kind of Haitian who would upset local conceptions of respect by presenting himself as an equal to Dominicans, could potentially be capable of other immoral activities.

Demonstrations of respect which recognized a Dominican 'superiority' were essential to establishing trust between Dominicans and their Haitian neighbors. Trust was hard to earn in the *bateyes* and once earned it was often very fragile. Nevertheless, it was necessary for a working relationship and it was therefore continuously forged through daily interactions. During crises I observed in the *bateyes*, such as the murder of a Dominican resident by a Haitian resident, relationships of trust between Dominicans and their Haitian neighbors already established as 'trustworthy' remained unchanged on the surface. However, these incidents provoked reflection among Dominicans as they sorted through doubts and fears to make sense of what happened and to restore feelings of security.

VI. CONCLUSION: FEELING SECURE IN AN INSECURE PLACE

I began this article with the contradiction posed by Vanessa in her conclusions that the *batey* has become a forsaken place without a mother because of the way that Haitians are thought to live, while Haitians residents view this lifestyle as a temporary necessity on the Dominican side of the border. I have argued that this is an example of processes of moral reasoning and moral othering that demonstrates the need among Dominican residents to make sense of a lived reality that has been disrupted and is rapidly changing. Life in the banana *bateyes* might be more precarious for Haitian residents, but they do not regard these communities as a permanent home. While the Haitian residents are sacrificing their present moral person for the future one they picture in Haiti, Dominicans are shackled to the present through the social and financial debt they incur while working towards social mobility. However, this mobility through appearance and material possessions will likely be imaginary for most Dominican *batey* residents whose opportunities beyond the *bateyes* are limited.

The fictions which Dominican residents produce regarding the mobility, appearance, behavior, and general inferiority of Haitians are significant because they provide a sense of comfort in an insecure everyday life. For Dominican residents, daily crises that destabilize feelings of security extend beyond the influence of an anti-Haitian ideology and into a precarious existence based on chronic economic

insecurity, persistent illness, threat of violence, and shaky familial relationships. While a new migration from Haiti into their communities is regarded as threatening to Dominican residents, it is not the only dilemma they face. Rather, it is one of many problems they regularly navigate to get by in a fragile lived experience. The practices of Dominicans struggling to earn a living alongside their Haitian neighbors reveals a relationship that is complicated by not only an anti-Haitian nationalist ideology, but by a historically constituted precarious life marginalizing both Dominican and Haitian *batey* residents together.

By providing an ethnographic portrait of how Dominican *batey* residents strive for morally comfortable lives alongside their Haitian neighbors, I hope that I have shed light on the daily experiences and concerns of those who must be practical and cultivate working relationships in spite of ongoing political positioning and decision-making on the issue of Haitian immigration occurring outside of their sphere of influence. Through an examination of more intimate encounters and the immediacy of everyday life, I have attempted to expose how moral compromises and negotiations are worked through in a less visible but significant way. I propose that local relationships between Dominicans and Haitians create possibilities for transformation despite dominant and dividing discourses. However, it is necessary to situate these relationships in the local because what is considered moral or immoral is understood very differently from inside and outside perspectives. What one does to feel moral or closer to being the person one desires to be will not necessarily be viewed as 'good' by everyone. In order to understand complex and challenging relationships, such as the one between Dominicans and Haitians, we must take moral striving seriously regardless of whether we believe it to be 'good' or 'bad.'

NOTES

¹ In 2011 US\$ 1 (United States dollar) was equal to RD\$ 42 (Dominican pesos).

² Although I do not recall hearing my Haitian informants use the saying "doesn't have a mother," Amy Wilentz writes that the phrase in Haitian Creole, "Li se yon san manman," means literally, "He doesn't have a mother," but is used to refer to "a vagabond, someone with no respect for anything or anyone, a brigand, a person capable of any transgression (...) someone without a mother has no reason to respect rules and customs, because in breaking them he will shame no one" (1989:154-155).

³ *Colmados* are operated by small grocers selling basic food items often out of their homes.

⁴ The names of my informants presented in this article are pseudonyms to preserve confidentiality. Ethnographic fieldwork was conducted from January 2011 until January 2012.

⁵ Montecristi is the nearest sizable town where *batey* residents can run errands and go to the hospital. Santiago, the Dominican Republic's second largest city, is much further down the highway.

⁶ This area includes the provinces of Monte Cristi, Dajabón, Santiago Rodríguez and the northern part of Elías Piña.

⁷ The word *batey* is an Arawakan (Taíno) term which means "ball court" (Moya Pons 1974). Sidney W. Mintz notes that *batey* is used in Puerto Rico for "yard" (1989:247). Rural settlements inhabited by Haitian seasonal workers located near sugar-growing estates in Cuba were also called *bateyes* (Cunha 2014).

⁸ The *Guardia de Frontera* were established to police the border under the Dominican-American Convention of 1907, which made the United States responsible for customs collections (Derby 1994:502).

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