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**LIMPIAR LA RAZA: ISLAND VS. DIASPORA REPRESENTATIONS
OF DOMINICAN RACE**

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LIMPIAR LA RAZA: ISLAND VS. DIASPORA REPRESENTATIONS OF
DOMINICAN RACE

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
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ABSTRACT

LIMPIAR LA RAZA: ISLAND VS. DIASPORA REPRESENTATIONS OF DOMINICAN RACE

Selines Sanchez

Investigating Dominicans and Dominican-Americans in the context of whiteness studies, specifically through the Spanish phrase *limpiar la raza* (cleaning the race), this thesis will examine the existence and effects of whiteness on Latin Americans. Using my experience and current discourse and representations, I am exploring the way this history is both re-enforced and transformed in the Dominican-American diaspora and what *limpiar la raza* might mean in the 21st century amongst island based, U.S. born, and immigrant Dominicans. My goal is to reveal how the history of whiteness, anti-blackness, and racial confusion persists in the diaspora today and explore how both native and diasporic Dominicans translate this confusion differently. Using existing scholarship on whiteness and on racial understanding in the Dominican Republic, this project analyzes Dominican racial relations through whiteness studies in a way that does not yet exist in the scholarship. The fields of Whiteness Studies, Latinx Studies, and Black Studies have rarely looked at the Dominican population specifically; my project corrects this oversight.

DEDICATION

Para Papa. Yo sé que este libro le va dar choque a todo el mundo. Pero espero que podamos leerlo juntos algún día. Te quiero mucho papa.

- Maria Palito

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A very special thanks to my Mentor since 2019, Dr. Tsou, and my reader, Dr. Chetty. Thank you both for your genuine care and support of my work. From beginning to end, I could not have done this without you both.

To my incredible parents, who've sacrificed everything so I may even have the opportunity to produce such work. Thank you for believing in me, especially in the times I didn't.

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INTRODUCTION

In a usual deep conversation with my older cousins about the many flaws of our upbringing, the term *Limpiar la raza* was mentioned, once again. A Spanish term repeated throughout our lives that signifies cleaning our Latino/a race of black people and black skin color. But this time, the meaning of the term resonated so deep I began to think about how this could be not just a conversation, but also a threat. In my own experience, growing up in New York City as a U.S. born Dominican, I distinctly remember being raised to look and behave like the “average” white American. As a daughter of Dominican immigrants, my understanding of who I am was always infiltrated by this pressure from older relatives to straighten my natural curly hair, conform to normative white speech, and marry into a lighter skin color. Though I understood I was Dominican, I did not understand all the parts that made me such.

This thesis will therefore use this experience to examine the existence and effects of whiteness on Latin Americans and explore what *limpiar la raza* might mean today in the 21st century amongst U.S. born and immigrant Dominicans. Exploring the way this history is both re-enforced and transformed in the Dominican-American diaspora today, my goal is to reveal how this has affected and continues to affect the way both native and diasporic Dominicans learn to identify and understand their race.

Chapter 1 Literature Review

The concept of race in the Dominican Republic has never been a linear one. A long and treacherous history on the island of Hispaniola reveals how white identification was not just prominent but also heavily affected the socioeconomic rights of many Dominicans who were not considered constitutionally white. Using whiteness as a signifier of the racial divide within the Dominican Republic, I am exploring the *limpiar la Raza* phenomenon that derives from the implication of whiteness ideologies on the island, and how this thinking has developed a complex understanding of Dominican national identity in the Diaspora, one that marks a parallel between tradition and ideology.

Throughout the Americas, the idea of race has commonly been used to make social distinctions used to justify the unequal distribution of material resources, opportunities, and rights. Whiteness scholarship states that “races” are social constructions, categorial identifications, and based on a discourse about physical appearance or ancestry, defining whiteness as, in short, a social identification. Since the nineteenth century, social critics and policymakers have tried to frame the modern Latin American nation as a “racial democracy.” By this they mean the racial relations in the Spanish-speaking nations, with the prominent categorial identification being white.

Whiteness and the Latin American Subject

Whiteness, as defined by philosopher Linda Alcoff in her study *The Future of Whiteness*, is a “social and historical identity that is conceived as nothing but a project of race supremacy” (Alcoff 149). She acknowledges that being white is a powerfully important element in one’s life, just as powerful as not being white, and explains how “whiteness is a prominent feature of one’s way of being in the world, how one navigates that world, and how one is navigated around by others” (Alcoff 9). There is a facticity to whiteness, she states, and it has a very particular and unique relationship to historical atrocities such as slavery, the genocide of native people, and in this case, the racial segregation of an entire country. Alcoff insists that it is imperative for people to consider how whiteness could be “lived” or “inhabited” and continues to define whiteness as a “historically emergent lived experience, variegated, changing, and changeable” (Alcoff 8).

Focusing on the connection between the historical formation of white identity and the political ploys by elites to divide and conquer the working masses, Alcoff extends her argument to warn against uncritically taking white identity as something “historically unique or exceptionally universal, unaffected by historical and social occurrences” (Alcoff 82). In other words, we should not view whiteness as merely an identity that originated amongst others, but one that has also been glorified for its characteristics of privilege, appearance, and power,

which have been accumulated via theft, war, and racial domination; all of which have created a severe dividend between those raced as whites and those raced as non-whites.

Since the early colonial period, whites have been the dominant racial class and whiteness has represented power, wealth, privilege and beauty in virtually every part of Spanish and Portuguese America, while Afro-descendant and Indigenous persons have been at the bottom of the social structure. Racial categories implemented by elites on the island of Hispaniola during this period reveal how race emerged as a social identity and legal status, and how people were classified by race and racial mixture. Spanish and Black studies professor Eva Michelle Wheeler's study, *Race, Legacy and lineage in the Dominican Republic*, empirically analyzes present-day notions of "raza" (race) for what they reveal about how the term is understood in the Dominican Republic.

By the time Spanish colonizers brought Africans to the island as slaves, at least 10 racial categories existed. Terms like *Negro*, *Mulatto*, *Mestizo*, *Blanco*, and others were used to make racial distinctions amongst Dominicans (Wheeler 34). The different origins and heritages of the various racial categories reveal the unique linkage between lineage and legacy. Wheeler explains how these racial categories had legal meaning and how within this legal framework, whiteness could be reclaimed after five generations of mixture, as long as there had always been ties with persons of "white blood" (Wheeler 35). This gave mixed-race the

power to function as a bridge towards legal whiteness. However, this framework was different from that of the United States, where the slightest traceable African ancestry revoked the privilege of whiteness.

Additionally, Wheeler explains, these categories “communicate clear ideologies regarding racial hierarchy” (Wheeler 35). Physical appearance and proximity to whiteness was and remains a major determining factor in the way in which a person’s race would be described in the Dominican Republic, many times regardless of descent. Whiteness is clearly placed at the top of the Dominican racial hierarchy and its power to be reclaimed is exemplary of the history of privileging whiteness in the Dominican Republic. Thus, phenomena such as *limpiar la raza* are inevitably developed to acquire the privileges of whiteness.

The process by which whiteness becomes privileged dates back to European colonization. In his book *White Identities: Historical and International Perspectives*, scholar Alistair Bonnett examines whiteness in Latin America and how it is rooted in the European social and economic patterns that were connotated through the symbols of race, “symbols that gave capitalist incursion and modernity a European, and hence white, identity” (Bonnett 48). Whitening ideologies have made whiteness a more spacious category, one that is largely shaped by skin color, but also by national context and social status. Bonnett addresses the fact that the power and status of European colonizing powers in Latin America were justified by, and interpreted through terms like “Christian,”

“civilized,” and “white.” Non-whites were considered none of these things, and were instead “monstrous,” “other,” and “poor” (Bonnett 35). These terms were employed to organize the economic and social structure of colonial societies. But the most inflexible of these identities, the one that was least available to be assimilated by either native people or imported African slaves, was whiteness.

Dominican Republic VS. Haiti

On July 22, 1795, the Treaty of Basel granted the approval for a geographical divide on the island of Hispaniola. This contest for territorial control in the Caribbean created a power struggle between France and Spain. As a result, the two colonial powers co-created a border that separated the French’s western third portion (modern-day Haiti) and the Spanish’s eastern two-thirds (modern-day Dominican Republic). This divide was both a physical and a symbolic separation of the two nations in terms of race, culture, and history; used to mark Dominicans as superior to the inferior Haitians. Over time, Dominican elites, such as slaveholders, planters, catholic clergy, and wealthy white immigrants, permeated their work with Haitian hate. This border became not a just a physical but also a psychological divide. Skin color, morality, religion, and health conditions became powerful forces in the creation of Dominican national subjectivity, intentionally in contrast to Haiti as the “other” (Ricourt 19). This racist discourse laid the foundation for the years of racial complexities, imaginaries, and marginalization to follow. Race in Hispaniola would become a

culmination of “perceptions of exceptional negrophobia, exceptional xenophobia, exceptional confusion, and essential denial of ‘true’ racial identity” (Wheeler 34).

Professor of Latin American studies at Lehman College, Milagros Ricourt, explores the question of why Dominicans deny the African component of their genetic DNA, culture, and history in her book *The Dominican Racial Imaginary: Surveying the Landscape of Race and Nation in Hispaniola*. She argues that Dominican racial self-perception in fact divides into different “imagined communities” (Ricourt 5). Understanding race within a dialectical process, that throughout history incorporates and accommodates spaces of resistance, she focuses on the island of Hispaniola and how the Dominican-Haitian divide is responsible for much of the racial misunderstanding in the country. She understands Dominican race specifically as “a hybrid nation of longstanding racial and ethnic complexity generated by spaces of accommodated resistance, and negotiation of racial identity simultaneously, at both individual and community levels” (Ricourt 7). In other words, people construct their own way of thinking according to their background, social class, and education. But when a rich white community takes political control during the colonial settling of the Dominican Republic and appropriates an elite racial discourse, it certainly influences the concept of race and the way of thinking about identification in the country. So, what about the composition of the Dominican elite racial discourse has come to alter the concept of nationality in the Dominican Republic?

By 1865 the Dominican War of Restoration had been won, and after an already secured independence from Haiti in 1844, the Dominican Republic secured its long-awaited sovereignty from Spain. At the same time, the U.S. Civil War had ended, and their eyes immediately pierced towards the Caribbean, including the Dominican Republic and Haiti, in search for more power. Five years later, from 1870-1940, the emergence of a regional modernizing elite that increasingly defined itself in exclusively racial terms and governed accordingly took place in the Dominican Republic. During this time period various U.S. presidents considered acquiring the Dominican Republic, but one of the main impediments towards annexation was, as pro-annexation American journalist Samuel Hazard puts it, that “the great majority of Dominicans are neither pure black nor pure white; they are mixed in every conceivable degree” (Cobas, Duany, & Feagin 5). They instead annexed Puerto Rico in 1898, which was perceived to have a whiter population at the time.

For much of the twentieth century, the dictatorship of General Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, “unified” the country through a more explicit rejection of blackness and a campaign to de-haitianize the Dominican side of the border, thereby cementing a racist conceptualization of the Dominican Republic as a nation. Some of the most brutal expressions of white national identity took place during his dictatorship, which lasted over 30 years, justified under the term *hispanidad* (white Hispanic) which derived from *hispanicismo*, the elevation of,

and closer proximity to cultural norms and values associated with Spain and Spanish colonialism. Both terms emerged in contention with U.S. and European imperial projects through which Dominican elites sought to break colonial ties with Spain and maintain sovereignty during several U.S. interventions.

Although lighter skinned, Trujillo faithfully applied face powder to whiten his appearance. Similar to the controversial and drastic skin whitening transformation of former Dominican baseball player Sammy Sosa, who transformed socio-economic whitening into a fact when he used a “rejuvenating” skin cream to lighten his much darker skin. Trujillo’s rapid rise through the ranks of the national guard demonstrates the anti-black ideology that allowed him to command his army to kill all Haitians and border-dwelling people living in the Dominican Republic’s Northwestern frontier and the Cibao region, who it wouldn’t be easy to mark as Haitian or Dominican.

But even with the pernicious dictatorship of Trujillo and the transformation of a racist conceptualization in the Dominican Republic, contemporary Dominican national identity is not simply a persistent legacy of the Trujillo regime. History Professor April Mayes demonstrates that while the path from *hispanicismo* forward was never a linear one, the patriarchal, racist, and authoritarian representation of the Dominican nation became normalized amongst modernizing elites by the 1920s. In her book *The Mulatto Republic: Class, Race, and Dominican National Identity*, Mayes concludes that Trujillo’s anti-blackness

and anti-haitianism, referred to as “Trujillo-era nationalism” (Mayes 6), was an ideological invention unique to his dictatorship that drew on long held ideas that national unity derived from Dominican’s culturally pure white Hispanic tradition. In other words, Trujillo-era nationalism was just one inevitable occurrence amongst many to come from an evolving elite racist nationalism, one that relied on proximity to whiteness and rejected anything else. Mayes argues that the U.S. occupation of the island of Hispaniola, Haiti from 1915-1934 and the Dominican Republic from 1916-1924, occasioned yet another debate about Dominicans’ race, one that proceeded from an already existing racist national elite.

Racial Formation & Confusion: A Framework

The “mixed as a bridge to legal whiteness” ideology established in the Dominican Republic during the colonial period was eventually expanded into the idea of a “race war” (Mayes 96). U.S. occupation eliminated the maintenance and celebration of racial mixture and mixed unity. In other words, U.S. occupation participated in a social and cultural whitening of the Dominican Republic because, as Mayes argues, “U.S. intervention was predicated on the idea of white racial superiority and racial inferiority of African- and Asian-descended people” (Mayes 96). This established a racist conceptualization of the nation, one that created an image of a country unified by anti-blackness and permeated with racist ideologies in their culture and society.

Michael Omi & Howard Winant's *The Theory of Racial Formation* explains how in the United States, "race is a master category— a fundamental concept that has profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the history, polity, economic structure, and culture of the United States" (Omi & Winant 106). The concept of race specifically as a marker of difference has created the template for the process of marginalization that continues to shape social structure as well as our "collective and individual psyches" (Omi & Winant 107). That is, how we think of who we are within this template of race created by elites. The racial imaginaries that Ricourt speaks about are an example of the affects of race as a social marker of difference on the individual psyche. They are a result of overlapping contradictions that stem from the United States' extension of the already existing racial hierarchy imposed by Spain, France and European colonialism.

The embedding of racial ideologies into the minds and culture of Dominicans has led to tension, unresolved conflict, and contradiction in the understanding of race within the Dominican Republic. Omi and Winant explain that one of the lingering legacies of racial formation is understanding ourselves as racial subjects. But what constitutes our understanding as racial subjects has become an unresolvable culmination of confusion. I'll return to this point in my analysis of how this confusion presents itself currently.

For many U.S observers, Haitians were “pure” blacks and Dominicans were racially mixed “mulattos.” These contradictories were formed from the contrast between the whiteness implicated in the creation of the Dominican elite racial discourse, designed to be physically distinct from Haiti, and the African roots apparent in the lineage and legacy of Dominicans. This is the process of whiteness intertwined with “Americanization,” which created phenomena such as *limpiar la raza* that were then forced upon Hispanics with the goal of achieving a racially distinct and white proximate civilization.

So how has this complex history translated into the Dominican-American diaspora? How does a country with a history of overlapping misconceptions come to understand the concept of nationality? This prejudice is bound to create controversy. If identifying with the terms and features of whiteness meant freedom and prevention of exclusion, loss of rights, and sometimes death during the development of the island within elite racial discourses, then the denial of African descent by Dominicans and the evolution of phenomena such as *limpiar la raza* is an almost forced occurrence. Forced and mixed representations of Dominicans have created layers of complication and confusion concerning Dominican identity in the past and present. The official twentieth century view of blaming Haiti for blackness has tainted Dominican identity for centuries, but has also transformed with the movement of time.

Dominican Blackness and Diasporic Representation

A long history of racial complexity is almost certain to cause identity complications both in the past and present. Logia García Peña's chapter "Dominicans negotiating Race and Belonging," from the article *Translating Blackness* traces the Spanish term *vaivén*, which means to come and go. In Dominican culture, *vaivén* is a typically used phrase to describe things coming and going in life. García Peña argues that Dominican blackness must also be understood in terms of *vaivén*, as "a trans-local concept very much linked to historical, cultural, and political continuities and that represent the movements, translations, and negotiations of racial ideology across markets and nations" (García-Peña 11). In other words, we must look at Dominican blackness as an embodied concept based on the U.S. empire over Latin America after the U.S. Civil War, but also one that changes with the movement of time, and across nations other than Dominican Republic. So, the question now becomes, how has this confusing history of race translated into the culture and society of the Dominican-American diaspora? I am focusing specifically on New York City, as it contains the highest population of Dominicans in the United States and it is the origin of my own experience as a Dominican-American.

Terms and phrases like *vaivén* and *limpiar la raza*, used heavily amongst Dominicans on the island and in the diaspora, are the result of generations upon generations of Dominicans engaging in transnational practices to mediate their

own sense of displacement. Transnationalism, as defined in Jorge Duany's study *Quisqueya on the Hudson: The Transnational Identity of Dominicans in Washington Heights*, is "the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement," including "multiple relations—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political—that span borders" (Duany 1). Though many diasporic Dominicans participate in transnational engagements, scholars like Ricourt question whether all sectors of the Dominican American population can be deemed transnational. That is, in the Diaspora, much is influenced by the United States, creating a divide between the experiences of native and U.S. born Dominicans. Dominicans engagement in these practices to mediate their displacement is the act of "living out" racial categories differently while having race imposed on you. So, are these engagements traditionally tied back to the Dominican Republic? Or are they variations influenced by American ideologies? Therefore, presenting themselves as American and not Dominican-American.

Yanique Hume's study *Diaspora Tourism in the Dominican Republic: Capitalizing on Circular Migration*, examines the opportunities and constraints of diasporic tourism in the Dominican Republic. Focusing on the Dominican transnational presence in the United States, her analysis is placed within a wider contextual background of the establishment of a diasporic enclave in New York and the multiple attachments that Dominicans have to their homeland. Like

Duany states, “place of origin, rather than destination, provides the basic reference point for most immigrants” (Duany 62). Hume explains how the United States, for many Dominican nationals, is often imagined as an extension of the Dominican homeland, especially Washington Heights and the New York City area more generally. And even with its treacherous history of occupying the Dominican Republic, “The United States remains the country of choice and the space most populated by Dominicans both born in the Republic and overseas” (Hume 158). Duany also focuses on NYC and the Washington Heights area and makes the crucial observation that the diaspora “calls into question the immigrant’s conception of ethnic, racial, and national identities as defined in their home countries” (Duany 62).

García-Peña makes the exceptional observation that “to be black in the world— that is, to have access to the discourse of social dissent that can result in one’s positionality as interlocutor of power and history— it is necessary to enter blackness as theorized and meditated by the U.S. empire,” (García-Peña 11). But to be black in America, is to enter a racialization process in which the color of your skin determines your value as a citizen. It’s evident that the U.S. occupation of the Dominican Republic perpetuated anti-blackness and anti-mixedness and imposed an obsession with whiteness in the country that built upon white supremacy preceded by Spanish colonialism; causing phenomena such as *limpiar la raza* to perpetuate across the native Dominican population. Such ideologies and knowledge of the racist history

of the Dominican Republic continues to persist in the dense population of Dominicans in New York City. How it is being portrayed is what varies with the movement of time.

In her book *Represent and Destroy: Rationalizing Violence in the New Racial Capitalism*, Jodi Melamed explores the key term “multiculturalism” by portraying the postwar racial break as a transition from white supremacist modernity to a formally antiracist liberal capitalist modernity in which racial violence is normalized through controlled representations of difference. She talks about how after WW2, the U.S. shifted from an explicit white supremacy to a formal anti-racism. That is, segregation was “formally” removed by law, but really just continued without being acknowledged. This formal “anti-racism,” referred to as multiculturalism, promoted the visibility of minorities (TV shows, literature courses, etc.) but underneath the vision of representation, what causes even more racial inequality and increases under the idea of colorblindness is an official anti-racism that promotes diversity and unity of differences. She specifically focuses on the emphasis on “minority” literatures on college campuses which serves to promote the vision of multicultural differences being celebrated, but in reality, just shuts down any real material distributive justice (source of racism).

This serves as an example of her crucial distinction between what she terms “official antiracism” or state-sanctioned antiracism and “race-based social

movements” (Melamed 26). While “official antiracism” affectively rejects cultural normativity and Americanism, Melamed argues that “race-based social movements” were devised originally in the pre-World War II era which she calls, referring to Omi and Winant, the “racial break” era, as a tool to combat the Jim Crow U.S. South (Melamed 4). In other words, after World War II, racism was said to have disappeared but instead manifested in the form of official anti-racisms such as multiculturalism which are then used as a tool to capitalize off of diversity and the idea of a unity amongst differences.

Official antiracism measures have then counterproductively created essentializing and oppressive versions of antiracism portrayed as a positive multiculturalism. Melamed is unpacking how American official antiracism was and remains a way for the United States to position itself at the top of the world order as the societal, cultural, and political example of rightness. This, in turn, is America’s racial liberalism. Melamed’s initial subject, “racial liberalism,” is an example of a “racial formation”--created by the state, guided by research foundations, and the corporations that fund them--that promotes a new kind of whiteness that is committed to formal equality, and the inclusion of blackness in these “colorblind” principles. She shows that this new racial liberal formation, though against all forms of discrimination, affectively expands and protects the normative power exercised by whites from the threats posed by white supremacy and southern resistance to civil rights law. The racialization procedures in

America feed the liberal politics in the country, creating this idea of a unity despite still existing inequality. Melamed is saying that official antiracisms are acts that portray racial unity with proximity to whiteness and advertise diversity as the driving force behind the act. Multiculturalism, a kind of antiracism, dismisses the harsh history of inequality experienced by non-whites and molds it into the false conception of a unified nation; disguising how these inequalities continue to be perpetuated in the present.

Once the manifestation of racism in the form of official anti-racisms became a tool used to capitalize off of diversity and the idea of a unity amongst differences, another branch of confusion manifested itself as well. The concepts and terms that Melamed employed would become the terms and concepts countries, institutions, and people would use as a way to hide the process of justifying their racism with state-sanctioned anti-racism. They often present themselves in explicit or metaphorical narratives that simultaneously assist and resist anti-blackness. Revealing the nuanced qualities of racial confusion. My analysis of how this confusion is present today will explore how these different anti-racisms are employed currently when addressing Dominican racism and inequality.

To understand the physical qualities that manifest from these overlapping contradictions, I turn to Ginetta Candelario's book *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops*. In examining the

relationship between race, ethnicity, the body, and nationalism in the Dominican, Candelario argues that although the Dominican Republic has engaged in both ideological and cultural means to keep the African ancestry of Dominicans hidden, or “behind the ears,” Dominicans nevertheless engage in practices that both assist *and* resist antiblack narratives and practices in transnational contexts. So, for Candelario, Dominican identity travels, making it situational and predicated on local context. She examines identity in two separate transnational contexts, Washington D.C. and New York City, examining within the realm of symbolic interactionism. She argues that the self, in this case the Dominican self, is produced through interactions with other individuals, social groups and institutions. She emphasizes the relationship between institutions and individuals, and between official discourses and everyday life practices, reinforcing the fact that Dominican identity formation must be situated within the historical triangulation of relations between Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the United States.

Candelario suggests that it is not a desire for whiteness that guides Dominican identity discourses but rather an ideal norm of what it means to be both Indigenous to the Dominican Republic (*indios*) and “Hispanic.” Even though this is valid given the visible strategies Dominicans employ in response to foreign occupation, struggles for sovereignty, and the development of migrant communities, I argue that it is also a reinforcement and transformation of white

supremacy that guides Dominican identity and its discourse. Even in their inclusion of blackness and the existence of Dominican blackness, there is still an explicit rejection of blackness happening simultaneously, seen in the Dominican's oftentimes unintentional racism towards themselves.

In his essay *The Racial Contract*, Charles Mills explains that slavery was practiced in the United States and the Americas "so that a sustained relation between races obtained, whiteness and blackness evolved in a forced intimacy of loathing in which they determined each other by negation and self-recognition in part through the eyes of the other" (Mills 58). In other words, blackness does not exist without whiteness. What's important here, what's really presenting itself in all of this history isn't biologically white body against biologically black body, but a forced intimacy of loathing between the racial formations of whiteness and blackness. When talking about one, you are inevitably addressing the other. If its origin lies in the eyes of the other, then the possibility to "live out" what one sees inevitably becomes a part of the driving force of the lingering legacy of race.

Limpiar la raza is just an example, an umbrella term under which the history of confusion and distorted conceptions of race are lived out in the Dominican Republic and its diaspora.

I understand that research in this sense cannot make a formal judgment or decision on moral values. The purpose of this thesis is to understand how whiteness affects Dominicans on the island and in the Diaspora in an effort to

discover how its implications challenge and reframe their understandings of identity. This is important because it is something that has consistently affected generations upon generations of Latin Americans, including myself. Not just in the way we identify ourselves, but also in the way we are raised to understand who we are, and who we should strive to be. I am focusing on the New York City Diaspora to avoid the notion that Dominicans behave the same everywhere. However, as thinkers on this subject demonstrate, this is much more complicated than an issue of Dominicans running away from their blackness. Looking at how whiteness gets constructed and absorbed in the Dominican Republic reveals how the diaspora challenges and re-frames the U.S. understanding of the term. What exactly this is, where it comes from, and how it has affected Dominicans in the past is what I have inquired thus far.

The following section examines a social media altercation between American rapper and Bronx, NY native Cardi B, and Native Dominican singer Aliany Garcia. With Cardi B representing the Dominican NYC Diaspora and Aliany representing Dominicans on the island, I am examining their Instagram live responses to each other and Cardi B's tweets to reveal how the history of whiteness, anti-blackness, and racial confusion persists in the diaspora today. I am using the Cardi B and Aliany social media feud as evidence to explore the question of why Dominicans tend to have distorted conceptions of national

identity and how this is translated and understood in the New York Dominican
Diaspora.

Chapter 2 CARDI B VS. ALIANY GARCIA

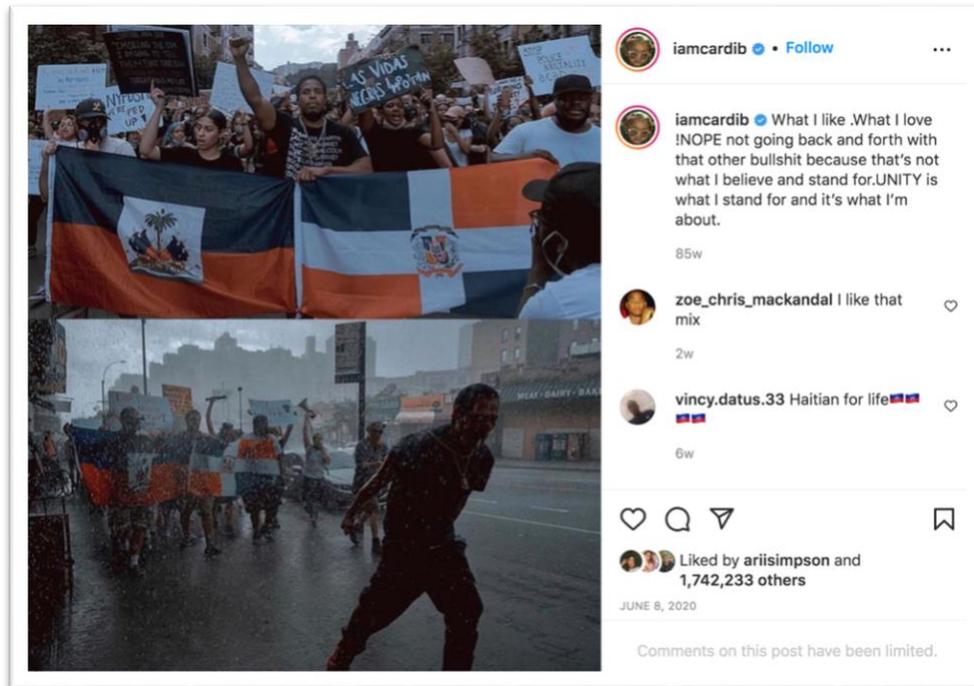


Figure 1: Cardi B’s Instagram Post Depicting Haitian & Dominican Unity.

On June 8th, 2020 Cardi B posted a photo on Instagram of protestors in New York City marching with the Haitian and Dominican Republic flags side by side. She captioned the photo “What I like. What I love !NOPE not going back and forth with that other bullshit.” Amidst the Black Lives Matter movement (BLM), the post was commended by other Hispanic celebrities and many that interpreted the post as a symbol of “peace and love” and Cardi’s desire for unity amongst Haiti and Dominican Republic as opposed to two separate countries. But some artists just weren’t having it, specifically Dominican native singer Aliany

Garcia, who went “live” on Instagram to publicly express her anger towards Cardi B’s post, and “educate” her on the painful history of Hispaniola.

The following is a translation of Aliany’s monologue response on Instagram live to Cardi B’s Instagram post:

“I’m not afraid and I’m going to speak because we cannot get confused. The Dominican is not pretentious because people assume they don’t want to keep the peace with Haiti. First of all, the Dominicans aren’t at war with Haitians. To say that two countries are at war and need to keep the peace would be to talk about something like the United States and Iraq, who are killing each other and who kill their own citizens, this is not our case. You can’t say Dominicans oppress Haitians because to talk about oppression is to talk about cleaning the rights of a citizen and to mistreat them and this isn’t the case with Haitians. Here Haitians work. Here Haitians educate themselves in our schools. Here Haitian women have their babies in our hospitals, and they are not mistreated. The Dominican Republic is the most hospitable country in the world. We treat the Chinese, Italians, and anyone who wants to come here, great. And we treat them better than ourselves. The problem lies within ourselves not foreign people.

A person that doesn’t live in the Dominican Republic needs to limit whatever comments or opinions they have since they do not live here. You don’t know the system and how the grand majority of Haitians in the Dominican Republic live. They have the hygiene of a dog; they poop in the streets and they sleep in the streets. But I’m not saying all of them act this way so it’s a delicate subject. You can’t talk about racism between the Dominican Republic and Haiti because it’s not a topic of skin color. This is a matter of social security.

We can’t take cultural and racial movements and profit off of their momentum. You want to give advice to the Dominican Republic? You want to enhance the growth of the Dominican? Let’s contribute by saying that we need to keep the peace in general. Don’t talk about one country, talk about everyone, not take a movement that’s trending and generalize it” (Translation is my own).

After becoming aware of Aliany's direct response to her post, Cardi also took to Instagram live to respond to Aliany and to clarify her initial intent of her post. Before fully addressing Aliany's response, she shared a video clip while "live" on Instagram from a documentary entitled "La Frontera: Where Haiti and Dominican Republic Meet, One Family is Split Apart." The video documents the killing of Haitians by Dominicans and its impact on Haitian families. The American rapper was sure to mention multiple times at the beginning of her Instagram live video that she would solely be speaking in Spanish and advised fans and "haters" to make sure they recorded the response because it would be the last time she would speak publicly about Dominicans. After playing the video she proceeded to respond with:

"When I was talking about how Dominicans need to treat Haitians better, I didn't call them racist. I never said Dominicans were mean, at that I'm a Dominican. I was talking about what I see those American gringos you all love and respect so much post on YouTube. Because that's what they put on YouTube. And I'm not saying that Haitians are angels because each race and each country has thieves and killers, literally the whole world. So that's what I want to say. So, it saddens me that people from the Dominican Republic didn't understand that. I never want problems with people from the Dominican Republic. And I also want the country that my father is from to always be on top. I got my boobs done when I was 19 and I lived there for two months. I've been to the Dominican Republic multiple times and the entire island is my favorite island because real fun happens over there. So, when I say that Dominicans need to treat Haitians better, it because American people have discredited both Haitians and Dominicans. So, whenever I say hey let's do this let's do that, they want to eat me up and call me insipid when I talk about Dominican people. Now the people of Univision are going to think I'm a crazy idiot. They only want to film Dominicans being crazy and talking shit. We aren't crazy.

People want to be involved in problems that aren't theirs. Or topics that they don't even know about and so they lie too. You're blaming me for having your page deleted but you looked for problems with me for publicity. World Latin star posted a video of you saying you want to have a flow like mine. I commented, liked the photo, and listened to your music. When you started to attack me, people started to attack you. Your page got taken down for vulgar activity, not because of me. So please stop going on shows to talk shit and make me look like a crazy idiot. You're making our country look stupid and beneath others. Stop talking about topics you don't even know about. The moment you hear Cardi B you want to be involved.

But like I was saying, I want you guys to search 'Dominican Republic and Haiti' and there you'll see how discredited both countries are in American media. But you don't talk shit about gringos, who are the ones discrediting you and making the country appear racist. But when I say let's treat Haitians better, I get asked why I am talking shit and told to shut up because I don't live in the country. I posted a photo of a situation happening in New York City. Not over there, here. Thank you very much. Goodbye" (Translation is my own).

But despite the 2020 backlash Cardi received for her Instagram post and her public remark about not addressing Dominican history again, the Bronx native continued to speak up on Twitter in the following year tweeting:



Figure 2: Cardi B's Twitter Post using #freehaiti.



Figure 3: Cardi B's Twitter Post on Colonization.



Figure 4: Cardi B's Twitter Post Relaying Sentiments towards Haiti.

Chapter 3 Analysis

Here, and for centuries prior, desire for whiteness and pro-blackness go hand in hand. What Cardi displayed in her 2020 post and continues to display here is a kind of official anti-racism described by Melamed. While Cardi advocates for the better treatment of Haitians and acknowledges them as her cousins because of their proximity to the Dominican Republic, at the same time, blackness is erased from her representation of herself with the use of white hand emojis seen in figure 4. She uses the hashtag “freehaiti” in figure 2 with adherence to the fact that Haitian “brothers and sisters” were placed against each other by reason of skin color in figure 4. But uses a lighter shaded representation and ends the tweet with the Haitian flag emoji. In figure 3, she makes sure that the fact that the first diaspora boat arrived in the Dominican Republic remains clear. But in fact, African-to-Caribbean slave trading was the initial increasing factor for the beginning of the transatlantic slave trade. Ships arrived at the Caribbean settlements of Puerto Rico and the island Columbus named Hispaniola (today’s Dominican Republic and Haiti) in the 1510s and ‘20s, long before it was Dominican Republic or Haiti.

Here, blackness and whiteness are functioning at once, modeling a perfect representation of racial confusion. Cardi’s and Aliany’s respective actions represent this complication no matter what they say because this confusion is built

in. They are both representing different aspects of the unresolved spectrum of confusion currently existing within the island and the NYC diaspora.

This feud is a current example of *limpiar la raza* functioning in the Dominican diaspora under the auspices of “pro-blackness” with the rejection of blackness. That is, Cardi claims to be for pro-unity and pro-blackness, but still represents herself on the lighter spectrum. She isn’t explicitly stating that she’s against cleaning the race but, represents this act regardless. Aliany bases her rebuttal on the point that it’s a matter of social security, while differentiating the lifestyle of the Dominican from that of the “unhygienic” Haitian. To say that it is a matter of social security is to say that it concerns one’s rights, but the context that Aliany uses it implies the elevation of the Dominican over the Haitian. She focuses solely on the fact that Dominicans do not mistreat Haitians but not vice versa.

Aliany emphasizes that it’s a matter of social security and not of skin color in the Dominican Republic because Cardi is not from the Dominican Republic, therefore to Aliany’s understanding, she cannot speak on the subject nor does she understand. What’s really presenting itself here is Aliany acting on the fact that she’s situated in the Dominican Republic, so she is invested in presenting the Dominican Republic in a certain way, so she may criticize Cardi B for her "privilege" in not having to live in the Dominican Republic. But this pointed criticism of Cardi B is what allows Aliany to ignore her own anti-Blackness. She

directs our attention to how Cardi B represents the Dominican-American diaspora which looks down/criticizes Dominicans on the island. By attacking Cardi's "diasporic privilege" and asking her to mind it when speaking on such a "delicate" subject in the country. Aliany is representing a classic Dominican strain of thought that being from the diaspora does not make you an authentic Dominican.

But this isn't to say that Aliany falls upon the "correct" part of the spectrum. Rather, she represents the anti-Haitian Dominican defense described by Mayes and Ricourt. Despite her obvious jealousy towards Cardi's fame and fortune, she demonstrates an official anti-racism that glorifies the Dominican at the expense of the Haitian other. She isn't attacking Cardi from a stance of anti-racism but emphasizing that it's a matter of social security. Such a response towards a post like Cardi's is representative of the *Hispanicismo* enforced by Trujillo. It is a xenophobic, conservative stance of protecting Dominican national sovereignty. That is, protecting the divide between Dominicans and Haitians, a sovereignty rooted within the country's colonial history and expanded through historical turning points such as the Treaty of Basel (1795), Dominican independence (1844), the War of Restoration (1863-1865), the U.S occupation (1916-1924), the reign of Trujillo (1930-1961), and now the Black Lives Matter movement. Aliany's words are exemplary of the contemporary xenophobic discourse that Dominicans who do not want to appear as anti-black use to

describe their culture; with Spanish and African elements that are separate from Haitians.

Aliany's defense is representative of how and why the Dominican case of race is so "curious" (Candelario 17). The Dominican relationship to Haiti was perceived and represented by Dominican and U.S. elites alike. This meant that Dominican pro-annexationists (to the U.S.) warned Dominicans of the "threat" of Haitian invasion in a persuasive attempt to have the United States protect the "young republic" (Candelario 18). Aliany represents this specific type of Dominican nationalism rooted in anti-Haitian racism. Because Cardi was not born in the Dominican Republic, Aliany rests on that fact as the main reason for calling her out on the internet for false information and educating her from a pro-national sovereignty stance.

However, it is because Cardi is from the diaspora that she's able to make statements that imply an "all-black unity," an idea that is ignorant in Aliany's mind. Being from the Dominican-American diaspora, Cardi can't avoid the way that Americans conflate the Dominican Republic and Haiti as "same," "black" places. This is essentially what allows her to point to the "gringos" or whiteness as the problem. Perhaps this is also because as a brown person in the U.S. and Dominican diaspora, Cardi is aware that white Americans tend to group all brown/ black folks together. As she states, "I posted a photo of a situation happening in New York City. Not over there, here." Aliany being situated in the

Dominican Republic makes her unaware of this obvious white supremacy that cannot differentiate between brown/black/Haitian/Dominican bodies, which is obvious to Cardi.

But even though Cardi is aware of this, she rests on the Melamed's official antiracism example of multiculturalism. The kind of antiracism, she explains, that dismisses the harsh history of inequality experienced by non-whites and molds it into the false conception of a unified nation; disguising how these inequalities perpetuated and continue to perpetuate in the present. Though Aliany is wrong with intent, she is right in calling Cardi out on the fact that you can't just advocate for better treatment and unity without addressing the long history of inequality. Cardi reduces this history to American YouTube video depictions of Haitians and Dominicans. And her take on giving her followers a mini lesson on the slavery and American colonization was simply incorrect.

While Aliany's main argument is present as solely social security and being native, she's also enforcing this anti-racist multicultural idea of a unity/welcoming of all races as well. She states it herself, "you can't say Dominicans oppress Haitians because to talk about oppression is to talk about cleaning the rights of a citizen and to mistreat them and this isn't the case with Haitians. Here Haitians work. Here Haitians educate themselves in our schools. Here, Haitian women have their babies in our hospitals, and they are not mistreated. The Dominican Republic is the most hospitable country in the world.

We treat the Chinese, Italians, and anyone who wants to come here, great. And we treat them better than ourselves.” This is representative of diversity justification, which Melamed explains is used by institutions, in this case the country of Dominican Republic, looking to solely represent the denial of anti-blackness or racism, not actually enforce it. Aliany expresses this diversity to support the connotation of the Dominican Republic positioned at the top as the societal, cultural, and political example of rightness. This is the essentializing and oppressive version of antiracism portrayed as a positive multiculturalism that Melamed explains is used to acquire such a position. This is exactly Aliany’s tone in her reaction to Cardi. In other words, focusing on that fact that you don’t mistreat Haitians, or any foreign people doesn’t mean that you’re addressing the racism at hand. It also means, in many cases and in both perspectives here, that you are playing into the very anti-black narrative you’re trying to exclude yourself from.

It is possible to prove both correct and incorrect points from both Cardi and Aliany because, returning to my initial point about the lingering legacy of racial formation, the confusion built into racial formation is what constitutes our understanding as racial subjects. Overlapping ideologies have become a culmination of confusion. Their legacies, the way they present themselves physically and the way we understand them in mentally and within society, have become unresolvable conflicts. These conflicts that arise from varied

understandings of we as racial subjects can present themselves in any one-on-one racial discourse. The fact that this is feud takes place on a social media, multiple platforms at that, is just another testament to how this is playing out currently for Dominicans on the island and in the diaspora.

But in a spectrum of such confusion, there are never solely two parts. What this feud simultaneously reveals but conceals are nuanced “local” Dominicans amidst these understandings. Specifically, the Dominican that is against anti-blackness and anti-Haitians and present in Dominican diasporic reality. Because though the history is treacherous, strides have been made. And while the divide and racial confusion clearly persists, the spectrum is only enlarged by Dominicans seeking to break such generational curses.

Limpia La Raza: An Umbrella Hovering Above the Island and the Diaspora

As I stated earlier, I understand that research in this sense cannot make a formal judgement or decision on moral values. As Aliany Garcia, Cardi B, and many scholars reveal, this is beyond an issue of moral values. For those values are distorted amongst many Dominicans on the island and in the diaspora due to the confusion built into racial formation and the varied understandings of this confusion. We have seen how whiteness has acted as the perpetrator of anti-Haitianism and anti-blackness in the Dominican Republic and its diaspora. Cardi and Aliany represent only a fraction of how this contradictory history is

understood amongst various Dominicans and how it is represented within the culture. They represent how this is an ongoing, developing racial discourse.

Let's think back to Omi and Winant's theory of racial formation, in which they speak about the "individual psyche." Racial phenomena like *limpiar la raza* are a result of race as a marker of difference. Racial categories are not just imposed, resisted, and transformed, but so much more is also happening that really cannot be resolved as a part of the unavoidable consequences of racial formation. These consequences exhibit what Omi & Winant define as racial formation, "the sociohistorical process by which racial identities are created, lived out, transformed and destroyed" (Omi & Winant 109). What problematizes my specific argument further is the specific unresolved conflict of the simultaneous desire for, and rejection of whiteness. This is one lingering legacy of racial formation amongst many. It is the result a conglomerate of racial ideologies built into Dominican race formations and culture and the imaginaries that societal, cultural, and diasporic activity creates beyond them. Alcoff's explanation of how whiteness can be lived out is a lingering legacy that has complicated race relations in the Dominican Republic, its diaspora, and across other races. This is simultaneously occurring across sociohistorical time and space, where various formations build various legacies. As ideologies of race continue to vary, so does its representation. Distorted creations create distorted representations. Dominican

representation is engulfed with confusion and contradiction, longing and rejection.

How this is playing out currently reveals what I believe is the ultimate depiction of Dominican racial understanding; a linkage between tradition and ideology. Like the link between lineage and legacy explained by Wheeler, much of a Dominican's understanding of race is influenced by white ideologies. As generations upon generation continue to grow and expand across diasporas, so does the topic of racial understanding. This linkage represents itself metaphorically through phenomena like *limpiar la Raza* that causes Dominicans to simultaneously accept and reject whiteness. Such linkage exists and persists due to the lingering legacy of racial formation. That is, the confusion that Dominicans and Dominican-Americans have internalized throughout the persistent history of race as a marker of difference translates as official anti-racisms disguised through the protection of one's own national sovereignty. We see how Aliany's excuse of the situation being a matter of social security and her emphasis on the "welcoming" Dominican serves as an example of this protection of one's own national sovereignty. Cardi also plays into the protection of her own national sovereignty when she states "I also want the country that my father is from to always be on top... So, when I say that Dominicans need to treat Haitians better, it's because American people have discredited both Haitians and Dominicans." Here, Cardi is on the traditional spectrum of this linkage, as she

advocates for the Dominican Republic to be “on top” because that is where her father is from. She uses America’s discreditation of Hispaniola as her reason behind the need to unite with and treat Haitians better. She calls Haitians her cousins, emphasizing a unity amongst lineage, not differences, and one against white American ideologies. She also states, “I never said Dominicans were mean, at that I’m a Dominican.” While she really never did say Dominicans were mean, she makes sure to repeat multiple times to fans that she is Dominican, and even though she is from the Diaspora, her loyalty remains with the Dominican Republic. Aliany, however, rests on the ideological spectrum when she uses diasporic privilege and social security as the basis of her argument, projecting it through an emphasis on sovereignty.

This linkage physically represents itself through phenomena such as *limpiar la raza*; through the action of compromising oneself for varying social achievements that change with the continuity of time. Also, through the act of maintaining one’s own national sovereignty. At one point it was for the achievement of life, then freedom, then social security, then beauty, and so forth. And now? The distortion continues. We find ourselves at a crossroads. Simultaneously burning and maintaining a bridge created with intent to last a lifetime but built on a foundation of the expense of the “other.”

Conclusion

Aliany's representation of the official anti-racism that glorifies the Dominican at the expense of the Haitian "other" was one employed by my older relatives my entire life. It's not that my relatives hated being Dominican, but they were aware of the power and privileges of whiteness and simply wanted that for their generations to come. The way they projected this longing for their children and grandchildren mirrored the confusion built into racial formation. Using the method of instilling *limpiar la raza* as a goal into the daily lives of their kin is the result of its habitation in our individual psyche. That is, a result of how this template of race created by elites governs our understandings of identity, and how we want our legacies to identify.

I'm sure some may still not understand this self-inflicted racism. The internalized official anti-racism of multiculturalism that Cardi represents is an anti-racism that was and remains heavily normalized in all the American institutions and programs I've attended. I was taught that because I was lighter skinned it would be easier for me to get through school and attain a successful job. But because my natural hair wasn't straight, I'd have to maintain it to ensure a better future. However, these very schools were the institutions that exploited off of photographing my big curly hair and creating student engagement groups based solely off of ethnicity. So, I knew I was Dominican, but never understood the parts that made me such. I understood that my parents emigrated from another

country, but that the parts they brought with them, and gave to me, weren't accepted here in the United States, only utilized. It's these experiences that have driven me and other Dominicans into a nuanced diasporic category against antiblackness, against anti-haitianism but grounded in diasporic reality. The same category can persist on the island, along with various others, representing the confusion and white ideology built into Dominican racial formation. What results is an essential denial of true identity.

While we are in the middle of a modern civil rights movement, what does this mean for the future of diasporic relations? I am using *limpiar la raza* as an umbrella term, meaning these phenomena can happen across other races. Because, in a spectrum of confusion, there cannot solely be two parts. My project provides the literal/historical oversight of the Dominican/diasporic spectrum of racial confusion. Revealing how the re-enforcement and transformation of whiteness exists within Dominican racial composition simultaneously reveals the effects of whiteness on racial formation, colonization, diasporic representation, and racial understanding. However, I understand that further research must be conducted to fully understand how this translates across other races and across different parts of Hispaniola, and how this will impact future generations. But in whatever term or form it may show up the goal remains the same; closer proximity to equality, freedom, and justice for the lives lost at the expense of a racial hierarchy.

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