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Not a Cockfight

Rethinking Haitian-Dominican Relations

by
Samuel Martínez

Michele Wucker's *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola* powerfully conveys the message that Haiti and the Dominican Republic are, like two fighting cocks, locked in an all-out struggle for preeminence. "The cornered rat, the cock in a ring, the boisterous young man: all of them fight to defend territory," Wucker (1999: 238) writes, citing the ethologist Konrad Lorenz: "When a creature is attacked, its options are to fight back or flee. . . . On Hispaniola, geographic, economic, and political pressures have intensified urges to aggression and elaborate mechanisms for escape." Written in vivid, nonacademic prose, *Why the Cocks Fight* has rapidly become the first—and for many, I suspect, the *only*—book that people turn to for information about Haitian-Dominican relations. What concerns me is not just the book's popularity but the old ideas to which it gives new life. Wucker perpetuates two of the most questionable, if widely accepted, ideas about relations between the two countries. The first is that the citizens of Haiti and the Dominican Republic are consumed with animosity toward their island neighbors. The second is that the two nations are engaged in some sort of contest for control over the island of Hispaniola. These two assertions constitute the core of a "fatal-conflict model" of Dominican-Haitian relations that I aim to call into question in what follows.

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The idea that the two nations are fated to be enemies is an old one. In spite of or perhaps because of its age, the fatal-conflict model has rarely been systematically formulated or even announced or defended openly as a theory, even by its academic exponents. That none of the published reviews of *Why the Cocks Fight* has taken issue with Wucker's general message seems to confirm that many knowledgeable people consider the existence of an all-out conflict between the two nations to be a fact. Two recent scholarly books—*Race and Politics in the Dominican Republic*, by Ernesto Sagás (2000), and *Coloring the Nation*, by David Howard (2001)—have given extended scrutiny to Haitian-Dominican relations but are almost as one-sided as Wucker's in identifying their interests as lying not in Dominican views of Haiti generally but in *anti-Haitian* ideology alone. Neither scholar gives extended consideration to past and present instances of cooperation and evidence of converging interests among the Haitian and Dominican people and their governments. Were the whole story to be told, the end product would be a story so full of contradictory emotions and impulses—of tenderness and violence, love and hatred, incorporation and rejection of the Haitian “other”—that no theme as monolithic as “anti-Haitian ideology” could contain it.

THE FATAL-CONFLICT MODEL

The fatal-conflict model has many fewer dogmatic proponents than casual propagators, but although vaguely defined it has identifiable premises:

1. Each country is fated to regard the other as its main foreign nemesis, whether because of racially inspired animosity, misunderstandings stemming from their cultural differences, or the need to carve out living room for its growing population.

2. The two nations are engaged in a *total* conflict in at least three ways: First, the conflict involves people at all status levels, from the political leadership and the commercial elite down to the peasants and urban lumpenproletariat. In other words, “nations” means not just the Haitian and Dominican states but their people. Second, instances of cooperation or mutual understanding between Haitians and Dominicans are rare and perhaps nonexistent.¹ Third, what is at stake is control of the island of Hispaniola, with “control” being defined in such a way as to permit all attempts at domination or instances of struggle between Haitians and Dominicans to serve as evidence.

3. To the degree that the conflict involves people of all social statuses and is waged for domination at the highest possible level, the survival of the two nations as cultural entities ultimately hangs in the balance. The conflict is “fatal,” then, because it is not only predestined but a fight to the death.

Far be it from me to suggest that there are no fundamental conflicts between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. There is no way to paint a happy face over the grave problems that divide the two countries. On the Dominican side, for example, openly racist expressions of hostility toward Haitians abound. Haitian immigrants have been victimized and denied basic rights, including due process in deportation proceedings and citizenship even for those born in the Dominican Republic (Human Rights Watch, 2002). No number of counterexamples of acceptance and influence of Haitian cultural practices in the Dominican Republic can negate the fact that there is strong opposition to Haitian immigration among some sectors of Dominican society.² Perhaps even more important, people of both nationalities but especially many Dominicans *believe* themselves to be utterly different from and incompatible with their neighbors from across the island. Acceptance of this idea generates unwarranted pessimism and provides leaders on either side of the island with a ready-made rationale for not trying harder to improve relations with their island neighbors. The fatal-conflict model also has important negative consequences for the Dominican Republic's standing in the world. The allegation that Dominicans are implacably hostile to all things Haitian is tarnishing the Dominican Republic's image in international relations, particularly when it is linked to explosive allegations that Haitian migrant workers are enslaved on Dominican sugar plantations.³

While it is undeniable that anti-Haitian feeling and ideology are a central part of Dominican nationalism, insufficient research has been given to why and when *anti-haitianismo* became so important. I cannot pretend to answer these questions but sooner consider my task here to be clearing away old misconceptions and half-truths that through uncritical repetition have come to be taken as fact. I aim to show that viewing the Dominican-Haitian relationship as a fatal conflict has little foundation in what scholars know about the historical composition and the present-day beliefs, values, and ways of life of people on either side of the border.

Concerning the historical origins of *anti-haitianismo*, it can be said with certainty that the regime of the Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo (1930 to 1961) aggressively propagated anti-Haitian ideology through a variety of means, including the schools, broadcast and print media, national commemorations and holidays, and participation in the all-powerful ruling party. Although anti-Haitian feeling may not be the creation of elite discourse and certainly predated Trujillo, it surely owes its prominence in Dominican culture and politics largely to government propaganda during and after the Trujillo regime. At the same time, Trujillo and his successors not only permitted the recruitment of braceros from Haiti but brought this recruitment and the sugar industry that it served under progressively greater government

control (Martínez, 1999). Official policy toward Haiti has thus been double-edged. Anti-Haitian propaganda puts forward the Haitian immigrant as a scapegoat for problems in the Dominican political economy while state-sponsored immigration from Haiti has created a mass of malleable nonunion labor.⁴

It also bears noting from the outset that the fatal-conflict model approximates Dominican perspectives more fully than it reflects Haitian perspectives. It is little exaggeration to say that for most Haitians the Dominican Republic might as well be on the other side of the planet or is at most that sugar-plantation netherworld that swallows up the most desperate of Haiti's emigrants.⁵ Few in Haiti, elite or working-class, perceive their country to be engaged in a struggle for supremacy with the Dominican Republic or with any other nation. Most instead see their country engaged in a struggle for survival in which the Dominican Republic plays only a minor, if largely antagonistic, part. Contrary to the fatal-conflict model, most Haitians probably underestimate the importance of the Dominican Republic to their country generally and have little accurate knowledge of its place in the survival strategies of the hundreds of thousands of their compatriots who live across the border. Surely, the Dominican Republic has low visibility in part because those Haitians who go to the Dominican Republic are drawn from the poorest and least vocal segments of society. But whatever the reasons, the Dominican obsession with Haiti is an unrequited passion: Haitians do not regard Dominicans with anything like the same feeling as that of Dominicans looking upon Haitians.⁶

These observations alone call into doubt that the conflict between the two countries stems primarily from ancient or quasi-instinctive animosities and raise questions about who the main parties are and what interests are in play. It would be inaccurate to say that the conflict involves the totality of the two nations or even matches two parties of equal strength. Instead, the conflict is at base about immigration from Haiti, and the main parties to it are the large mass of immigrants and their advocates, Dominican and international, versus the political power holders who have an interest in making an issue out of "uncontrolled" immigration and the economic power holders who wish to secure cheaper, more easily disciplined labor from Haiti. The fatal-conflict model distracts us from these issues through its exaggerated emphasis on past instances of conflict and cultural differences between the two countries.

I approach these issues as a cultural anthropologist with more than three years of accumulated fieldwork in Haitian migrant communities on both sides of the island. The more I study the Dominican-Haitian relationship, the more I become aware of how many unanswered questions surround it, especially concerning Dominicans' varied attitudes toward Haiti, Haitians, and

blackness. One thing that does emerge clearly from my fieldwork is that the people of the two nations do not confront each other in unmitigated enmity but are bound together in a more complex weave of mutual fascination and repulsion, attraction and dislike, respect and fear. This does not mean that the tensions between Haiti and the Dominican Republic have easy answers. It does call for more careful study of just where the conflicts lie.

Most of my essay is given over to questioning of the historical and cultural premises of the fatal-conflict model. Cultural exchanges between the eastern and western sides began even before the Haitian Revolution brought an end to slavery on the island and only accelerated with the independence of each nation from European rule (Baud, 1996: 142). Examining the history of their relationship and comparing elements of the two nations' cultures, I conclude that the fatal-conflict model has been and can be sustained only by ignoring mountains of evidence of past and present understanding and collaboration between the two countries' people, who share so much culturally that their beliefs, values, and ways of life ought to be—and I suspect often *are*—a basis for mutual trust and understanding rather than a source of suspicion and fear. Through this path, I hope also to identify some of the real points of conflict and sketch an alternative understanding of the Haitian-Dominican relationship.

HISTORY

The idea that “the problem” between the two countries began with Haiti’s early-nineteenth-century attempts at political domination over the entire island has wide currency in the Dominican Republic. On their way in to Santo Domingo from the Aeropuerto Internacional Las Américas, the video crew of the PBS documentary series *Americas* filmed its cab driver offering the following—apparently spontaneous—explanation for the existence of antiblack prejudice among Dominicans: “We deny that we are mulatto. Blacks are marginalized and treated badly in this country. There is a complete denial of blackness in this country. All this hatred of black people began in 1822, when the Haitians invaded the Dominican Republic. They wanted to take over the country. This hatred started to grow in our national consciousness, because they wanted to trample us” (WGBH, 1993). For words like these to be spoken by a cab driver seems to give strong support to James Ferguson’s (1992: 15) contention that “the alleged mistreatment of the former Spanish colony by the Haitians is still considered a justifiable reason for anti-Haitian feeling and national security concerns in today’s Dominican Republic.”⁷ Similarly, Larman Wilson (1973: 19, my translation) begins his essay on

Dominican and Haitian foreign policy by attributing primary causal importance to “the legacy of the violent history of the island of Hispaniola,” including “attitudes based on racial concerns”: “Whereas Haiti obtained its independence from a European power, the Dominican Republic obtained its independence in 1844 after 22 years of Haitian occupation. The harshness of the Haitian occupation, later exaggerated and incorporated into Dominican folklore, produced in that predominantly mulatto country a hatred toward blacks and a fear of Haitian ‘Ethiopianization.’” Some writers are even more direct in positing that the events of over 150 years ago still have a direct influence on the feelings of Dominicans today: “The harsh Boyer dictatorship left a legacy of deep Dominican loathing and distrust of their Haitian neighbors” (Plant, 1987: 10). “The accumulated prejudice and hatred of two centuries and an ingrained anti-Haitian instinct . . . runs through every sector of Dominican society” (Ferguson, 1992: 91). Similar opinions are voiced not just by scholars and ordinary people but by highly placed government officials. According to Haiti’s foreign minister, Fritz Longchamp, “There’s [still] a deep-seated suspicion between the two countries because of what the Dominicans perceive has been done to them by Haiti and vice versa” (Navarro, 1999).

Many historical facts are at variance with this consistent and overwhelming emphasis on acts of war, treachery, and brutality. Thanks largely to the work of the revisionist generation of Dominican historians and historical sociologists of the 1970s, including Frank Moya Pons, Roberto Cassá, and Franklin Franco, we possess a handful of highly detailed, authoritative alternative readings of the Dominican past. Contrary to what is propounded by official Dominican media and accounts of Haitian-Dominican relations written in the fatal-conflict mode, Haiti did not in fact *invade* the East in 1822 but was instead invited to enter. In the days immediately following Núñez de Cáceres’s proclamation of the independent state of “Haití Español,” mayors and popular juntas in a number of towns in the interior denounced independence without abolition as an “antisocial measure” and appealed to Haiti’s President Boyer to intervene (Franco, 1993: 176–177; Moya Pons, 1972: 34). The Haitians, for their part, entered the East not out of greed or distrust of their Spanish-speaking neighbors but primarily to bolster their eastern flank against the threat of attack by France or another European power (Moya Pons, 1972: 22–23).

Once in power, Haitian government was of course not universally popular in the Spanish-speaking East. Dominicans were sharply divided over unification with Haiti and in their perceptions of Haitian rule. It is, even so, significant that only a small minority, made up of the Catholic clergy and white *criollo* landowners, stood from the first in opposition to Haiti (Franco, 1993:

182–184). The rest of the population seemed initially to regard Haitian rule as the lesser of two evils. When we think about the sources of widespread support for political integration with Haiti, it cannot be forgotten that the Haitian army twice liberated Afro-Dominicans from slavery, in 1801 and again in 1822. It is almost never mentioned that, for nearly 20 years of their 22-year reign, the Haitian “occupiers” held power not with their own troops but solely with regiments recruited among the Spanish-speaking black, mulatto, and white men of the eastern part of the island (Franco, 1993: 181). On the cultural front, attempts to impose use of the French language in primary schools and official documents inspired resentment in the East (Moya Pons, 1972: 86). Yet widespread discontent with Haitian rule was not immediate but arose primarily after 1836, when a major global economic downturn made the weight of taxes imposed by the Haitian government seem less bearable to the residents of the East (Franco, 1993: 189–191). Up until that point, blacks and mulattos in the East regarded Haitian rule as an improvement upon the Spanish colonial government that had preceded it and considered it preferable to living under an independent but white-dominated state. The Haitians not only abolished the loathsome institution of slavery but brought about greater prosperity through land reform and the opening of ports in the East to legal commerce with other nations (Franco, 1993: 186–188). It is significant that even after Dominican independence, in 1844, certain Afro-Dominicans took up arms out of fear that slavery would be reimposed after the Haitians gave up power (Franco, 1977: 161; Moya Pons, 1974: 21).

The point is clear: the period of unification with Haiti, so often identified as the founding moment of the Haitian-Dominican conflict, was neither an “invasion” nor an “occupation,” nor do the historical facts concerning this period sustain the notion of a fatal enmity between the two countries. Unfortunately, accounts written in the fatal-conflict vein perpetuate the myth that the two states and their people have always been at odds with each other. Thus, the fatal-conflict model stands in the way of correcting the anti-Haitian bias that generations of Dominicans have had etched into the minds by their country’s schools and official information media. The fatal-conflict narratives of history of today echo the extreme pessimism of Dominican historians and social observers of the era of Trujillo, including Joaquín Balaguer, Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, and Manuel Arturo Peña Batlle. Much could be written about the enduring and generally unremarked influence of these state-authorized historians of the Trujillo era on today’s received ideas about Haitian-Dominican relations. Their totally negative appraisal of relations with Haiti and their sense that the two nations were fated to be enemies from the very moment the island of Hispaniola ceased to be unified under Spanish rule to this day constitute the default template for writing the history of

Haitian-Dominican relations.⁸ Suffice it here to add that the anti-Haitian historiography of the Trujillo era differs even so from today's fatal-conflict model to the degree that scholars of today tend to regard both sides, Haitian and Dominican, with "total negativity" while the anti-Haitian thinkers of old attributed malevolent intent only to the Haitians. Thus even observers who are overtly sympathetic to the Haitian cause can write in the fatal-conflict mode.

What holds true for most interpretations of the period of direct Haitian rule over Santo Domingo holds also for the prevailing wisdom concerning the entire subsequent history of Haitian-Dominican relations. History written according to the fatal-conflict model gives privileged place to the shedding of blood and tears, and it ignores evidence of mutual understanding and collaboration between the two nations, as occurred when Haiti gave support to the Dominicans' final struggle for independence from Spain, in 1865. Lastly, the fatal-conflict model gives an appearance of simplicity and immutability to a complex relationship whose lines have been redrawn repeatedly over the course of the past four centuries. Recent historical studies of the Haitian-Dominican borderlands suggest, for example, that the social boundary between the two nations has not always been so clear as it seems today, the Dominican urban elite of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries showing as much disdain for and racism toward the Dominicans of the frontier zone as it did toward the Haitians living there (Baud, 1993; Derby and Turits, 1993).

THE "HAITIAN CARD"

After making a required stop in the 1822–1844 period, virtually every exposition of the fatal-conflict theory (except for those whose authors are openly hostile to Haitian immigration) makes a second obligatory stop at the political crucifixion of the late José Francisco Peña Gómez. Accounts of the 1994 and 1996 Dominican presidential elections illustrate how the many lights and shadows of Dominican attitudes toward Haitians and blackness are smoothed out into a monochromatic anti-Haitianism and racism by observers writing in the fatal-conflict mode (Howard, 2001: Chap. 7; Sagás, 2000: 105–115; Wucker, 1999: 161–162, 188–195). During his campaign for the Dominican presidency, Peña's Haitian ancestry made him the target of openly racist slurs and innuendoes of hidden disloyalty to the Dominican Republic. It is virtually established fact that this smear campaign swung enough votes against him to cost him the election of 1996. He may in fact have won in 1994; evidence of balloting irregularities was so widespread that

President Balaguer was obligated after the election to accept a two-year rather than a four-year term of office.

Even as Peña's travails are gone over again and again in popular and academic treatments of racism Dominican-style, it is never pondered how Peña came within a hair's breadth of winning the presidency in 1994 and 1996 in spite of the virulent hate campaign waged against him. Who are these nearly 50 percent of Dominicans who were so unperturbed by Peña's blackness and presumed Haitian ancestry that they voted to place the country's highest political office in his hands? I know of only one scholar (Torres-Saillant, 1998: 133) who has paused to ask the obvious question: considering that a near majority of Dominican voters chose *el haitiano* (the term by which Peña was widely referred to on the streets of Santo Domingo) to be their president, does anti-Haitianism really have so powerful a hold on Dominican imaginations as most observers seem to think?⁹ In most accounts, Peña's plight is evidence of a feeling of repugnance for Haiti and Haitians so strong that the mere labeling of someone or something as "Haitian" is enough to send all Dominicans scurrying. Clearly, the reality is more complex, and a balanced account may be possible only once the sources of Peña's support, including the virtual cult of personality that his supporters built up around him and preserve even after his death, are given just as serious study as the terrible racism and xenophobia that he endured in life.¹⁰ It is nonetheless troubling that reporters, columnists, political cartoonists, and other opinion makers joined in the Haitian-bashing, with no apparent misgivings about how their racism and xenophobia might be coarsening the Dominican democratic process. Yet there is reason to doubt that the majority of Dominicans accorded much respect to these media racists and Haitianophobes. While it cannot be doubted that there were many people for whom Peña's Haitianness and blackness were a major concern, they probably do not amount to more than the 20 percent or more of Dominican voters who made up Peña's hard-core base of electoral support (Howard, 2001: 162–163). Although Peña's downfall illustrates the lingering importance of the "Haitian card" in Dominican politics, it does not provide unambiguous evidence of a nearly universal repulsion among Dominicans against all things Haitian.

There is also considerable evidence that large segments of the Dominican population, perhaps especially those who have frequent daily contact with Haitians, do not reject all things Haitian. Even though the Haitians who reside in the sugar company compounds and work camps (*bateyes*) are largely segregated from the mainstream of Dominican society (Dore Cabral, 1987), few live entirely without meaningful contact with Dominicans. In all but perhaps the most remote camps, Haitians and Dominicans live in close proximity and mingle constantly in their daily affairs. In the Batey Monte

Coca on the Ingenio Consuelo estate, where I lived doing ethnographic fieldwork for 12 months, the two groups are bound together by ties of reciprocal aid between households, cooperation at work and at leisure, and mixture of the two ethnicities through intermarriage. It is remarkable how much less common it is to hear *haitiano* said in an insulting manner there than in those neighborhoods in the capital city of Santo Domingo in which fewer Haitians are to be seen. The evidence is equivocal, but several writers (Howard, 2001: 35; Murphy, 1991: 139–140; Newton, 1980: 94) confirm that the more frequently Dominicans interact with Haitians as neighbors and coworkers, the less likely they are to voice anti-Haitian sentiments.¹¹ My experience suggests that in any one of several hundred work camps and urban slums one would find Dominican residents who speak of their Haitian neighbors with respect and even affection.

What, then, of opinion surveys (Equipo ONÈ-RESPE, 1994: Chap. 5; Howard, 2001: 35; Sagás, 2000: 78–88; Vega, 1993: 36) that find that a majority of Dominicans hold strong prejudices against Haitians? This finding is not necessarily anomalous. First, most Dominicans do not have frequent egalitarian exchanges with Haitians, and thus those who are in a position to enjoy cordial relations with Haitians are simply not the majority. Second, it is often observed that people's general appraisals of a group or institution differ from their attitudes toward known, particular individuals or examples of these groups or institutions, as when North American parents say that public education is in shambles even as they insist that the public schools their children attend are just fine. In like manner, one and the same person may express both negative feelings about Haitian immigration generally and positive feelings about the Haitians who live next door or down the street or alleyway. It is hard to say which is more significant, the general perceptions of Haitians captured by the decontextualized questions posed by opinion surveys or their personalized and context-specific views on the same topic. But the incommensurability of these sources matters less in my opinion than the need for more context-specific information to round out our understandings of what Dominicans of different backgrounds really think about Haitians.

Much the same can be said about Dominicans' attitudes toward blacks and blackness. Even as a numerically sizable minority of Dominicans voices blatantly racist sentiments, it is common for people of lower-income groups to identify themselves and their loved ones as "blacks" in song and folklore. For examples one need look no farther than the lyrics of the *bachata*, the popular song-dance genre that provides an omnipresent auditory accompaniment to life in the Dominican Republic's urban slums and rural work camps. In her groundbreaking monograph on *bachata*, Deborah Pacini Hernández (1995)

defines it socially and historically as the music of the rural proletariat and the urban working classes. Until recent years dismissed as unspeakably vulgar by the Dominican middle and upper classes, *bachata*'s potential as an archive of the voices of *los de abajo* remains almost entirely untapped by scholars.

In *bachata* it is common for the singer or his beloved or both to be "black." According to Pacini Hernández (1995: 135), "the commonly used terms *negro/a*, *prieto/a*, *moreno/a*—all terms for black or dark men or women—clearly situated the singers, their mates, and, by extension, their audience within an Afro-Dominican social context." Martínez Pacini Hernández (1995: 135-36) cites verses from Bolívar Peralta's "Espero por mi morena" as evidence that this singer regards dark women as "preferable to indias and blondes because they better understand their men—who, by implication, are also dark." In this song, Peralta expresses affection for and praises the beauty of women of all colors—white, brown and black—but expresses a final preference for the black woman with whom a greater understanding is possible.¹²

Such popular celebrations of blackness suggest that scholars stand to gain by more closely studying the subjective formulations of identity of those Dominicans who have dark skin and stand low in the social hierarchy. Only thus may we achieve an understanding of the social construction of race that is less one-sided and monolithic than the often repeated observation that Dominicans consider themselves not black but rather one or another shade of brown (Charles, 1992: 151; Sagás, 2000: 36-37).

A CLASH OF CULTURES?

At the symbolic surrender of the keys to the city of Santo Domingo to Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer, in 1822, Núñez de Cáceres warned, "The word is the instrument of communication among men, and if they do not understand each other through the organ of speech, there is no communication; and thus you see here a wall of separation as natural and insuperable as . . . the Alps or the Pyrenees" (Rodríguez Demorizi, 1975: 17, my translation). These have gone down as prophetic words in Dominican history. According to fatal-conflict theorists, the differences in language, values, and worldview between the two nations are so vast that they add up to a "clash of cultures." Ferguson (1992: 8) writes, "With a radically different history, language, and set of cultural traditions, Haiti inspires fear and dislike among many Dominicans." Although the evidence about the social isolation of the Haitian immigrants and the allegedly unmitigated hostility of most Dominicans toward them is at best contradictory, the cultural barriers to understanding between the two peoples have to be taken seriously.

Yet even the language barrier pointed to by Núñez is perhaps not so insurmountable as many suppose. Hundreds of thousands of Haitian men and women have spent months or years working on the Dominican side of the border. Most of them have learned at least the rudiments of the Spanish language. Far fewer Dominicans speak Kreyòl, and this clearly is an obstacle to mutual understanding. But, then again, just how many Dominicans speak Kreyòl is a question that has no easy answer. Few Dominicans have undertaken formal study of the language, but this does not give an accurate count of those who speak it. In the sugar work camps it is not at all rare for children of Dominican parents to grow up speaking a fairly fluent Kreyòl along with their parents' Spanish. They are an exceptional, perhaps unique, group among Dominicans, but they do number in the thousands or even tens of thousands.

The ironic truth may be that people at the bottom of the social ladder surmount the linguistic barrier with much greater ease than their countries' highly educated elites. Loanwords, with which each country's language is dotted, attest that understanding across the linguistic boundary is not only possible but fairly frequent. Were the loanwords in each language to be systematically collected, classified, and situated in their historical and social contexts, an as-yet untold history of peaceful contact, cross-cultural exchange, and overlapping experiences between the Haitian and the Dominican people might be unearthed.

Religion must surely be one of the leading domains of lexical borrowing, at least on the Dominican side of the border (Torres-Saillant, 1998: 132). For Hispanophilic and Haitianophobic thinkers among the Dominican bourgeoisie, the devout adherence of Dominicans to Roman Catholicism and the passionate devotion of Haitians to *vodú* are like oil and water: they cannot mix (Sáez, 1988; Sagás, 2000: 59–64).¹³ Yet, according to Martha Ellen Davis (1987) and Carlos Esteban Deive (1992), a Dominicanized form of vodou is practiced throughout the country, with beliefs and practices clearly derived from the Haitian religion, albeit in somewhat simplified forms. Many Dominican supernatural beliefs and popular religious festivals and rituals are recognizably Haitian in content or even in name. And it is not only the lower classes who practice *baquinís*, *prillés*, and *montaderas* and believe in *galipotes*, *bacás*, *zombís*, and *luases*. Even the notoriously anti-Haitian heads of state Rafael Trujillo and Joaquín Balaguer are rumored to have governed in consultation with Haitian spiritual leaders. Whether or not these rumors are true is less important than that Dominicans widely accept them to be true. A report on Balaguer's episode of ill health in January 1999 filed by television journalist Dario Medrano captured the following words of encouragement being shouted by a burly party sympathizer from the sidewalk

outside Balaguer's Santo Domingo compound: "¡Así no [inaudible] nada, Balaguer! Tú fuiste bautizado a nivel de redoblante en Cabo Haitiano. ¡Son rumores! ¡Son rumores, Balaguer!" The precise meaning of being "baptized a redoubler in Cap Haïtien" is not clear to me—it perhaps refers to the speaker's wish or even prediction that Balaguer would return for a third time to the presidency (hence, "redoubling") in the upcoming 2000 elections. But clearly, for this sympathizer at least, it did not seem in the least bit inappropriate to proclaim for anyone to hear and in the presence of TV news cameras that Balaguer enjoyed the protection of Haitian spirits, a blessing gained for him in Haiti (viz., Cap Haïtien) itself.

Language and other forms of symbolic action point to historical experiences beyond religion that have been shared by people across the island. For example, highly similar terms on either side of the Haitian-Dominican border, *convite* and *konbit*, denote essentially the same practice of festive, collective agricultural work. The *Almanaque folklórico dominicano* describes the *convite* or *junta* as follows (Domínguez, Castillo, and Tejeda, 1978: 118, my translation):

When a peasant is going to roof his house, plant his crops, or collect his harvest, etc., and does not have the means to pay, he invites his neighbors and friends to carry out the task in question between them all without receiving any monetary remuneration for this.

The organizer of the "convite" or "junta" is responsible for [providing] food and drink for the participants. Beautiful work songs are sung there, and at meal-time instruments are also played.

The *konbit* has been more frequently described and commented on by Haitianist scholars (Herskovits, 1937: 70–76; Métraux, 1951: 69). Their descriptions of the custom match what has been written about the *convite* in the Dominican Republic. It is almost certain that the custom developed first on the Spanish side of the island and later traveled, along with its name, to the French/Haitian side.¹⁴ Just as Juana Méndez became Ouanaminthe when this town shifted from the Spanish to the Haitian side of the border and *bolita* became *bòlèt* when Haitian returnees from Cuba brought home their acquired passion for playing the lottery, so *convite* became *konbit* when Haitians adopted the custom of inviting large numbers of neighbors for a day or half-day of collective labor in the fields, accompanied by food, drink, and song.

Beyond loanwords/practices, the peasant heritage has furnished both peoples with a rich set of metaphors for evaluating and coping with the uprooting of the peasantry and its migration to the cities. Similar gendered agrarian metaphors on the two sides of the border express the dissatisfaction of subalterns with the price exacted of them in economic insecurity by their societies'

capitalist, urban-dominated development regimes. When, for example, Antony Santos refers to a beautiful woman's sexuality through the metaphor of a parcel of land in his hit *bachata* "La parcela," he unconsciously echoes a Haitian aphorism, "Chak fanm fèt ak yon kawo tè—nan mitan janm-ni" ("Every woman has a *carreau* of land . . . between her legs") (Lowenthal, 1984: 22). The lyrics of "La parcela" not only employ metaphors that resonate across the Haiti-Dominican Republic border but project values that I think Haiti's peasants and recent rural-urban migrants would readily endorse. In this song, Santos breathlessly admires how beautiful and well-tended his neighbor's *parcela* (parcel of land) is, and begs her, a pretty *morena* (dark girl), not to sell it to a developer.¹⁵

Bachata has been denounced as misogynist, and it may well be. The lyrics of "La parcela" certainly objectify woman. But astute and well-informed interpreters could have an interpretive field day by reading the competitive and troubled man-woman relations sung about by *bachateros* as allegories of a larger social malaise. Reflected in its uncertainty that the city woman will continue to exchange her sexual fidelity for her husband's vow of lasting support there is a sense in "La parcela" and uncounted other *bachatas* that in the city the order of life is not as it should be. Not just nostalgia for the country life but alienation from the city's more highly commercialized human relations is conveyed in Santos's plucky plea that his beautiful neighbor sell her "land" to him, a humble "farmer," rather than putting it out for more lucrative, if sterile and ultimately unsustainable, commercial development. She might get "a million" by placing her sexual assets on the open market, but she will not get the kind of knowing and caring treatment that a good husband can give.

Haitian migrant sugarcane workers tap into a similar vein of protest, veiled as disparagement of women, when they refer to the Dominican Republic as a *peyi bouzen* ("hookers' country"). I have developed the argument elsewhere that, far from claiming that all Dominican women are prostitutes, these migrants may be expressing the fear of having prostituted *themselves* in swapping their Haitian livelihoods rooted in independent cultivation of the soil for more lucrative, if riskier, work for wages on the Dominican side of the border (Martinez, 1995: 88):

Haitians look down on the prostitute not just for being immoral. They condemn her also for exchanging use of her "natural" assets for ephemeral gain rather than trading these for a commitment of lasting support. In like manner, the Haitian *bracero* knows that, no matter how hard he works, he will gain little or nothing in long-term security by remaining on the sugar estates. Only by returning home to Haiti can he convert his Dominican money into assets of his own.

FINAL OBSERVATIONS

There is little that I can add to what has already been said by scholars about the social and political role played by anti-Haitian ideology since the time of Trujillo (Cassá, 1976; Cordero, 1975; Fennema and Loewenthal, 1987; Franco, 1973; Sagás, 2000). Since the ethnic cleansing of the Dominican frontier region in 1937, anti-Haitian campaigns have been repeatedly conjured by Dominican politicians as a diversionary tactic. While Trujillo may have played the Haitian card to divert his people's attention from the threat posed by U.S. neoimperialism, the Haitian immigrant today is more likely a scapegoat for the declining purchasing power of wages. For example, the deportation campaign launched against undocumented Haitians by the incoming administration of Leonel Fernández in 1997 seemed calculated to gratify the right wing of his unstable governing coalition but was even more obviously aimed at diverting popular attention from a range of social and economic demands for which his administration had no immediate response.

One larger lesson to be drawn from such political manipulation of the Haitian issue is who the parties to the Haitian-Dominican conflict really are and what the struggle is about. There *is* a struggle taking place on the island of Hispaniola, but that struggle focuses on the specific issue of immigration. What is being struggled for is not the island but control over the immigrant population on one side of it. The assertions of certain right-wing xenophobes aside, Haiti and Haitians are no more contesting Dominicans for control over Hispaniola than Mexico and Mexicans are contesting Americans for control over North America. Nor does the struggle involve two parties of equal strength, much less engage the two nations in their totality against each other. Rather it is a match that pits immigrants, with no defenses but their wits and their large numbers, against the security apparatus of the host state and the politicians and other opinion makers who seek to score points against their political adversaries by raising a scare about uncontrolled immigration. More a game of cat-and-mouse than a cockfight, the struggle is one in which only one party bears deadly weapons and only the survival of the weaker party is at risk. Yet in this game the point is not to eliminate the mouse but to prolong its pursuit indefinitely. Doing away with the mouse would be counterproductive to the cat's larger ends, for a dead mouse would leave the cat with no one to blame for things going wrong in the house and no spectacle of pursuit with which to divert the attention of the residents from the dwindling stocks in the larder.

The greater part of my essay has been given over to arguing that history and culture are not the main sources of tension between the two countries. While it would be an overstatement to say that Haitians and Dominicans are

two “ethnic groups” within a single island society, the two cultures overlap too much and have borrowed too freely from each other’s practices and beliefs to be regarded as unambiguously distinct societies. In any event, discussion of the Haitian-Dominican relationship should no longer fail to call attention to the significant cultural overlap and history of continuous exchange across the island. Does this give reason for optimism concerning the prospects for improving relations between the two nations? Not if one considers recent examples of other social groups—Hutus and Tutsis or Croats, Serbs, and Bosnian Muslims—who share significantly more culturally than Haitians and Dominicans but even so have killed each other en masse. Yet I think it is still important to be as accurate as we can in specifying what divides the island of Hispaniola into two social entities. Dominicans’ anti-Haitian feelings stem more from elite-produced anti-Haitian propaganda, reinforced by the resentment built through decades of labor market competition with cheaper and more easily disciplined immigrant workers, than from fatal incompatibilities of language, race, and culture (Vega, 1993: 31). Focusing on the cultural distance between the two nations distracts us from the root causes of their conflict.

My second recurrent concern has been how little we truly know about ordinary Dominicans’ attitudes toward Haiti and Haitians. Standing in the way of developing a new understanding of racism and national identity in the Dominican Republic is our woefully incomplete knowledge of the dialectic of repulsion and fascination with which Dominicans regard Haitian culture, a dialectic of which anti-Haitianism is just one pole. Much of what is not known could be discovered by going beyond survey data and analysis of elite texts to plunge into the ephemera of the everyday lives and the at times intricately encoded subjective formulations of experience of the Dominican masses. Information concerning all these things is there for the taking, as freely available as the air around us. It is to be found not just in such obvious folkloric Africanisms and Haitianisms as *palos* drumming and the Lenten *gagá* festival but in the popular culture that most Dominicans inhabit daily. Yet, like air, this information is evanescent and resistant to being fixed on paper. Scholarly understanding of these issues will remain inadequate so long as evidence of the kind that I have drawn upon only anecdotally here is not more systematically gathered from sources as diverse as *bachata* lyrics, what supporters shout outside the walls of Joaquín Balaguer’s Santo Domingo compound, and the continuing adoration of the late José Francisco Peña Gómez by hundreds of thousands of Partido Revolucionario Dominicano supporters. In the streets, alleyways, work camps, and villages that working-class Dominicans share with Haitians are to be found little-studied perspectives on the Haitian-Dominican relationship. Prolonged

firsthand study in these places would reveal hitherto unsuspected complexities and might yield strongly differing interpretations. Yet I would venture that the more scholars delve into the contradictory lived realities and formulations of experience of the Dominican masses, the less satisfying we will find ideas about Dominican identity derived from elite texts. We may also yet be surprised to find that most working-class Dominicans adapt more easily to the challenges of social change and show greater tolerance of racial and ethnic complexity than do their more affluent compatriots.

NOTES

1. Many individuals and organizations are working to promote harmony and justice for Haitian immigrants and Haitian-Dominicans. A short list includes the Centro Cultural Dominicano-Haitiano, the Movimiento de Mujeres Dominicano-Haitianas, the Movimiento Socio-Cultural de los Trabajadores Haitianos, the Centro de Reflexión Encuentro y Solidaridad ONÉ RESPE, the Centro Puente, and the Catholic Church's Pastoral Haitiana.

2. I thank *LAP* reviewer Hilbourne Watson for bringing this point to my attention.

3. In 1990 and 1991, advocates of the immigrants' rights even presented official testimony to the U.S. Congress in favor of imposing trade sanctions on the Dominican Republic. In recent years the plight of the Haitian *braceros* and their Dominican-born children has also been taken up with great feeling by Haitian expatriate groups, at times lumping it with disparate other causes as a symbol of Haiti's global subordination. Consider the following statement of invitation to the Haiti Support Network's event of November 9, 2000, "From Philly to Haiti: The Struggle for Sovereignty" (as posted to the Haiti-L listserv):

This summer, the anti-neoliberal Lavalas Family party of former president Jean-Bertrand Aristide swept nationwide parliamentary and municipal elections in Haiti. Unhappy with the results, Washington is trying to discredit those elections and to derail presidential elections set for November, which Aristide is expected to win.

In the neighboring Dominican Republic, Haitians are being rounded up, beaten, and deported by authorities. Tensions are growing and Dominican troops, led by U.S. Special Forces, remain massed along the border, poised for invasion.

Meanwhile, Haitians in the U.S., like African Americans and other oppressed communities, are victims of growing police brutality and unfair incarceration. Some even face execution, like Borgella Philistin, a Haitian on Pennsylvania's death row alongside political prisoner Mumia Abu-Jamal. Haitians are joining in the fight-back, for which Mumia has become a living, world-renowned symbol.

The program consisted of speakers and "a video on the situation of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic."

4. I thank *LAP* reviewers Alex Dupuy and Hilbourne Watson for their suggestion that I more explicitly discuss the political economy of Haitian immigration at this early point in my article.

5. There are signs that people in the lower strata of Haitian society are looking toward the Dominican Republic with increasing worry and hostility, as when rumors of an impending Dominican military invasion ran through Haiti in 1999 and 2000 (*Haiti Progrès*, 1999). But, other than among migrant workers, international higglers, and border-dwellers, the prominence

of the Dominican Republic is nothing compared with that of the United States either as a destination for emigrants or as a potential foreign threat or benefactor. When the sociologist Sabine Manigat (1997: 97, 121), in the course of a survey on urbanization, asked a group of Port-au-Prince residents about migration, they rarely mentioned the Dominican Republic but focused instead on the United States, Canada, and Europe. This disregard of their island neighbor is shared by Haiti's intelligentsia. On the basis of extensive study, Bernardo Vega (1993: 40, my translation) writes, "Little has been written by Haitian intellectuals about Dominican-Haitian relations, and what exists has usually been limited to the theme of the *braceros*" (also Castor, 1983: 10). Generally, the Haitians in the Dominican Republic enter into the Haitian media spotlight only when others choose to speak for them, as President Aristide did so forcefully before the United Nations General Assembly just days before being deposed in 1991.

6. As if in tacit recognition of this asymmetry, only 10 of the 99 pages of firsthand description and life stories in Wucker's book are set in Haiti; the rest are set in the Dominican Republic or among Dominicans in New York City.

7. What Dominicans know about the events of the nineteenth century is filtered primarily through the prism of the anti-Haitian histories propagated extensively through official channels since the Trujillo-led massacre of Haitian immigrants in 1937 (Candelario, 2000: 100–104). These accounts depict Haitian intentions and actions as entirely aggressive and Dominican postures toward Haiti as always intransigently resistant to Haitian domination. I still find it remarkable how frequently working people, especially men over the age of 50, can give detailed narratives of Haitian atrocities and duplicity during the Dominican wars with Haiti of the early and mid-nineteenth century. It must remain an open question whether these events would be so salient in the historical consciousness of ordinary Dominicans had the "memory" of them not been so persistently and widely promoted by Dominican primary school textbooks, the Armed Forces Radio, and other official information media (González Canalda and Silié, 1985: 24–26).

8. Important analyses and original works of these anti-Haitian intellectuals include Balaguer (1983), Balcácer (1989), González et al. (1999), and Vega (1990). I thank Emelio Betances for providing these references.

9. While not citing the case of Peña, Baud (1996: 140–141) questions "how seriously . . . everyday anti-Haitianism should be taken, and whether it has been a constant component of popular culture." "As far as we can deduce from current research," he continues, "no militant popular anti-Haitianism has existed or exists in the Dominican Republic." Baud (1999: 176, my translation) writes more recently, "Although *anti-haitianismo* is present in the working classes, [among whom] depreciative comments about Haitians are not rare, I think that for many these opinions play an insignificant part in their lives." Sagás (2000: 147 n.12), in contrast, explains enduring mass support for Peña by contending that his followers did not consider him Haitian.

10. In the 2000 presidential election, so strongly did support for Peña endure that posters with his image were almost as common a sight on the streets of Santo Domingo as pictures of the actual presidential candidate, Hipólito Mejía. On inauguration day, President Mejía and his vice president, Milagros Ortiz Bosch, made a very public pilgrimage to Peña's grave, where they made a solemn oath *to Peña* that neither the filth of corrupt gains nor the blood of innocent citizens would ever taint their hands.

11. Howard (2001: 39) cites the report of one Dominican social scientist that expression of anti-Haitian feeling neither diminishes nor increases with frequency of contact with Haitian immigrants, and Dore Cabral (1995) reports survey data supporting the idea that lower-class Dominicans are more anti-Haitian than upper-class Dominicans.

12. The verses from "Espero por mi morena" may be found in Pacini Hernández (1995: 135–36) but cannot be printed here because permission could not be obtained from the copyright holder.

13. The Dominican Constitution even identifies “the diffusion of the culture and the religious tradition of the Dominican people” along the length of the country’s border with Haiti to be a priority of “supreme and permanent national interest” (Cornielle, 1980: 320, my translation).

14. Already more than half a century ago, James Leyburn (1966: 199 n.6) concluded, “The word ‘coumbite’ was apparently borrowed from the Spanish part of the island, and from the Spanish word *convidar*, convey. In Colombia ‘convite’ means exactly what ‘coumbite’ means in Haiti: a gathering of peasants to work in common, or else a coöperative society for mutual agricultural self-help.” A Spanish colonial origin for the *konbit/convite* would be in keeping also with historical circumstances. When the ancestors of today’s Haitians were still mired in the living nightmare of industrial slavery, people on the Dominican side were more free to develop technical knowledge and social institutions around “proto-peasant” farming, ranching, and logging activities. Circumstantial linguistic evidence in favor of an east-to-west diffusion of the custom is that the hypothesized transformation of *convite* into *konbit* is in keeping with a broader phonological pattern of lexical borrowing, in which the word-final vowel or syllable of the Spanish source term is generally dropped as the word enters the Kreyòl lexicon.

15. “La parcela” is found on the audio CD, *Grandes Exitos de Antony Santos*, Plátano Records 5108 (2000).

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