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# Good Hair, Bad Hair, Dominican Hair, Haitian Hair

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# GOOD HAIR, BAD HAIR, DOMINICAN HAIR, HAITIAN HAIR

Katie E. Saunders

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The goal of this research is to build on the literature concerning presentation practices of racial and national identity. The research examines presentation practices of race and national identity among Haitian heritage residents of the Dominican Republic (DR). Haitian immigrants have been an important part of the Dominican economy and the Dominican way of life since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Their descendants have to manage between Haitian and Dominican identities, while under the incredible pressure of anti-Haitian prejudices.

The current literature concerning Dominican presentation practices asserts that normative presentation practices hide racial blackness. However, more recent literature questions the existence of a relationship between Dominican presentation practices and race. This research is placed to adjudicate between the two arguments within the literature. While this research is accomplished in a different environment among a different population, the research conclusions of this thesis support the connection between race and presentation practices.

This study offers a preliminary look at how a substantive minority group manages

racial and national presentation practices. This is accomplished through the investigation of hair styling norms of Haitian-Dominican women living in a batey in the Eastern region of the country. The study analyzes data from ten semi-structured interviews, one follow up focus group, and participant observation in Batey El Prado.

The research results show that presentation practices of hair styling and hair management reflect race, social class, and nationality. Hair management practices allow women to manage how others perceive their racial and national identity. The respondents show normative hair presentation practices that are nearly identical to that of the dominant culture. The major finding is that hair styling techniques are used by the respondents as a status attainment strategy. By manipulating their hair, the respondents of this study attempt to hide racial blackness, avert the Haitian label, and assert a Dominican identity.

GOOD HAIR, BAD HAIR, DOMINICAN HAIR, HAITIAN HAIR

KATIE E. SAUNDERS

A Thesis Submitted in Partial  
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for the Degree of

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GOOD HAIR, BAD HAIR, DOMINICAN HAIR, HAITIAN HAIR

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CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

KES: *Que quieres por tu cumpleaños, mi amor?* What do you want for your birthday, my love?

Yumeli: *Quiero alisarme.* I want to straighten my hair.

Yumeli is the daughter of Haitian migrants, and she lives in a community in the Dominican Republic called Batey El Prado. In December of 2012 Yumeli was turning ten years old, and the only thing she wanted for her birthday was to straighten her hair. Yumeli looks like a typical black girl. Her hair is short, thick, and wiry, and her mother normally keeps it pulled back in six twist-braids on her head. But for her birthday Yumeli's hair was straightened.

There had been no electricity in the Batey for the past three months, but one wealthy family bought gas to keep a generator running in their house, and it was here that all the women came to maintain their hair. One blow drier and one flat iron was passed around the room, followed by a tub of hair gel. The women gossiped and did their hair, while their kids played on the floor.

Yumeli's hair was done in two and a half hours. Her hair was transformed into a sleek four inches, though straightening it made it appear uneven. Nonetheless, she was proud of her new hair, which she flipped side to side and then carefully smoothed over her ears. Yumeli promptly returned to her house, put on a miniskirt, and a pair of high

heels to complete her look. I asked her if she liked her new hair, and she nodded enthusiastically. As she walked around proudly, all of the neighbors complimented her on the new look.

Why is straightening her hair so important to Yumeli? The answer to that question is found in the unique understanding Dominicans have of race, nation, social class, and identity. This matters to Yumeli because some claim that Dominican identity has been formed as the antithesis to perceptions of Haitians. Dominicans, in general, despise Haitians. To Dominicans, Haitians are voodoo-practicing bloodthirsty witches. This tension is evident in daily conversation with Dominicans and all manners of media. For example, in August of 2013 a university professor announced in the newspaper *Dahabon Noticia* that she had uncovered a Haitian plot, called *Teclado de Guerra* to take over the entire island on December 31, 2013 (Genao). According to her, the Haitians have been importing mass amounts of weaponry for the sole purpose of uniting the island under black leadership once and for all. In gruesome detail, this professor described exactly how Haitians would put an end to Dominicans, even going so far as to assert that the Haitian immigrants selling fruit in the streets are key players in the plan.

The tension between Dominicans and Haitians is a story that is centuries old. The two nations' histories are so intricately intertwined that the Dominican-held perceptions of Haitian identity are intimately involved in the idea of what it means to be Dominican. As a Batey resident, Yumeli is part of an enclave of Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans, but born in the Dominican Republic, she lives negotiating between the two cultures. This thesis is a look into how Yumeli, and other Haitian heritage residents of the Dominican

Republic like her, are managing their lives as Haitian-Dominicans. This will be accomplished by exploring the subject of hair.

Hair is an expressive tool of individual and group identity. Dominican identity performance through hair care and management has been a subject of considerable research and debate recently. Amongst Dominican women, straight hair is the presentation norm, and research has shown that hair straightening is a way that Dominican women perform racial identities (Candelario 2007). This research has also suggested that hair care reflects national identity, and that by straightening their hair, Dominicans attempt to approximate a Hispanic or indigenous look. What this research has not considered are the perspectives of Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans living in the Dominican Republic.

While race and racial identity of Dominicans has been studied extensively, very little research concentrates on the 500,000 to one million Haitian heritage residents of the Dominican Republic. This is odd, considering that since the 1990s this population has been at the center of a debate over citizenship and human rights. Haitians born on Dominican soil and Haitian-Dominicans have, at times, been denied medical care, education, and financial stability. Adding to an already difficult living situation, Haitian-Dominicans have to navigate daily between Haitian and Dominican influences, while knowing that everything associated with “being Haitian” is despised in the general context of the Dominican Republic. Though this is a well-known reality of life for them, having been the subject of much media attention, there is no research literature that considers how these people manage their racial and national identities.

This thesis is a preliminary look at hair-related presentation practices amongst this population. The central questions this research attempts to answer are, “What are the hair-related presentation practices amongst Haitian heritage residents of the Dominican Republic?” and “How do these practices constitute or reconstitute racial and national identity?”. I endeavored to answer these questions in Batey El Prado, Yumeli’s community situated in the Eastern side of the country. Over a period of five months I practiced participant observation, completed ten interviews, and one focus group.

The results show that presentation practices of hair styling and hair management reflect race, social class, and nationality. The respondents show normative hair presentation practices that are nearly identical to that of Dominicans. The major finding is that hair styling techniques are used by the respondents as a status attainment strategy. By manipulating their hair, Haitian heritage residents of the Dominican Republic are able to hide racial blackness, avert the Haitian label, and assert a Dominican identity.

In the following sections I discuss the sociological understandings of race and presentation practices, as these are the central concepts I utilize during the research. I then describe the context of the Dominican Republic, drawing from previous research on racial and national identity, as well as my own experiences living and working in the country as a Peace Corps Volunteer for over a year. I also explain recent political issues that took place in the Dominican Republic after my research was complete to further illustrate the relevancy of this research. I then explain the problem statement and objectives of the research, ending with a discussion of the significance of this study.

## **Race**

Since the nineteenth century social scientists have wrestled to understand race, race relations, and racism. The sociology of race has made great gains, particularly following the conclusion of World War II. However, in the 2000 issue of the *Annual Review of Sociology*, Howard Winant, a leading sociologist of race, wrote, “As the world lurches forward into the 21st century, there is widespread confusion and anxiety about the political significance, and even the meaning, of race.” Clearly, there is still much work to be done.

Contemporary scientists have come to the conclusion that there is no biological basis for distinguishing human groups along the lines of race. Ninety-nine percent of genetic makeup is identical in all humans. The remaining 1% variation in genetic makeup occurs at the level of the individual or the family (Graves 2009). The absolute differences between racial phenotypes are ambiguous. Though the concept of race has little scientific traction, race is a social fact, and its consequences are very real. Race is created from social and historical processes, and it plays a fundamental role in structuring the social world.

Most race theories today can be categorized as assimilation theories or power-conflict theories. Though these race theories are built on the foundation of a US-oriented consideration of race, they still have important considerations for the discussion of race within the Dominican Republic. The assimilation perspective holds that minority races or ethnicities will eventually conform to the host society’s culture and social structure. Robert E. Park proposed a four-step model of assimilation between groups in which the inevitable conclusion is assimilation. Milton Gordon expanded Park’s assimilation



model to a seven-step process. He also emphasized that these changes take place across generations, and may not occur within one lifetime. Assimilation theorists tend to focus on immigrant groups, acculturation, and inter-group dynamics that value consensus (Feagin and Feagin 2009: 14).

Power-conflict theories of race recognize class as an integral element of the understanding of race. W.E.B. Du Bois was one of the first major conflict theorists to argue that racial oppression and class-based stratification are linked. In his 1948 article “Is Man Free?” Du Bois argued that U.S. capitalism combined with racism prevented the United States from enjoying political democracy across the racial spectrum. Drawing on Marxist ideas, conflict theories focus on institutionalized racial and ethnic inequalities, and emphasize the relationships between these inequalities and the capitalist system. In contrast to assimilation theories, power-conflict theories are concerned for subordinate groups that resist domination.

As one of the most contemporary race theories, Racial Formation Theory offers a unique understanding of race—one in which race is viewed as socially constructed and not static. The founders of Racial Formation Theory, Michael Omi and Howard Winant, view race as the accomplishment of ongoing racial projects. Racial projects create ideology that defines and represents what “race” is. Through this process, racial projects also institutionalize and structure relationships of power based on race. On both the micro and macro level Omi and Winant understand racial identities as unstable. They assert that, “We all make our own racial identities, though we do not make them under circumstances of our own choosing” (2013: 963). Thus, race, is subject to both individual and group agency.

Omi and Winant consider racism to be a concept separate from race. For them, racism is a project that combines harmful representations of race, such as stereotypes, xenophobia, and aversion, with patterns of domination, such as violence, hierarchy, and exploitation. For Omi and Winant, racism is coded into appearance. Racism marks visible characteristics of the human body for purposes of domination. Thus, “to see racial projects operating, at the level of everyday life we have only to examine the many ways in which, often unconsciously, we notice race” (1986: 201). This brings us to examine presentation practices and appearance norms as an active racially coded activity.

### **Presentation Practices**

Presentation practices refer to the body of norms, mores, customs, and attitudes concerning appearance. In choosing presentation practices as a conceptual device in this research I am proposing that individuals and groups purposefully use appearances to convey and perceive identity. This approach is influenced by theories of symbolic interactionism, in which self-identity is created through interactions with other individuals, groups, and institutions. Symbolic interactionism assumes that people are inherently social, and that society is used as a mirror for judgment of self. In other words, people create meanings for their bodies, and they evaluate their bodies based on social and cultural standards, taking into account the perceived attitudes of others. Thus, people learn shared codes and symbols for the presentation of self, and they learn how to influence others through appearance.

One concept that is important to symbolic interactionists, and useful for the development of this thesis research, is stigma. Erving Goffman defines stigma as the framing of identity such that the individual attached to that identity is conceived as sub-

human and disqualified from society (Goffman 1969). Thus, a stigma is something of a “master status” that envelops all other personal qualities. Examples of stigma include morbid obesity, development disorders, and mental illness. For Goffman, defining the stigma and managing it is an interactive social effort (Smith 2011). That is to say, normative society must define a script in which to deal with the stigmatized, just as the stigmatized require a script to relate to normative society. The label, the stigma, exists within a duality: it projects itself as a barrier, but it also constitutes a social role.

While stigmas can be socially-consuming, Goffman, and other theorists posit that stigmas can be overcome through impression management. According to Goffman, the individual has three standard control moves that can be utilized: concealment, accentuated revealment, or misrepresentation (Goffman 1969). By controlling social perceptions, stigmatized or marginalized individuals are practicing their social agency. This social agency is exactly what this thesis is analyzing through the study of hair-related presentation practices.

Despite its significance for identity studies, hair itself has received relatively little attention from social researchers (Candelario 2007). Hair is one of the most personal and public displays of individual and group identity. Because it is one of the body’s physical characteristics that is the most malleable, it is an expressive vehicle for identity displays. Presentation practices involved in hair care, management, and styling convey important messages about identity, including race and nationality.

Benedict Anderson has argued that national communities are formed in the construction of an ideology that resolves internal differences (1991). Through a social and historical process of nation building, a singular identity emerges to bind a national

community together. Appearance is one aspect that can unite a people. Oluwakemi Balogun states that “markers of appearance, such as dress, make up use, accent, and grooming are vehicles of collective identity” (2012: 368). The body is the terrain where national identities are (re)produced. This means that through the management, alteration, or presentation of the body individuals and groups can submit to, or resist, national collective identity.

Physical differences demarcated by racial phenotypes make hair a racially political characteristic. Black people are typified as having curly, course, wiry, thick-bodied hair, while White and Asiatic people are characterized as having fine, smooth straight hair. Black hair is subject to a number of different codes and symbols of interpretation. For instance, natural Black hair can be interpreted as confidence or rebelliousness. Going natural can be even be interpreted as a sign of LGBT status (Prince 2009). In contrast, straight Black hair can signify conservativeness, seriousness, or professionalism. The symbols encoded in the presentation of Black hair are especially significant because in most Westernized societies natural White hair is considered normative, and natural Black hair is considered non-normative (hooks 1988). In other words, racially Black hair in its natural state is socially uncomfortable, while White hair lacks the political element associated with Black hair (Grayson 1995).

While Black hair is political, it is also very personal. Althea Prince explains in her personal account of her relationship with her hair, “The hair on a Black woman’s head is treated as if it is an entity separate from her body. She and her family treat it that way, and other Black people treat it that way” (Prince 2009: 6). Her respondents describe each time they change their hairstyle as a change to themselves. They feel fresh, vibrant,

and new. This shows that Black hair is associated with the psychological and social self, as well as with the political self. Prince's findings show that hair care practices invoke important themes of identity. By studying hair presentation practices we can understand how hair acts as a vehicle for collective and individual identity across a number of platforms—including race and nationality.

### **The Context of the Dominican Republic**

Contemporary conceptualizations of race in the Dominican Republic (DR) are intimately linked with nationality. Many Dominicans do not distinguish between race and nationality—taking the two to be one and the same (Godreau 2000). This forms a racial dichotomy between Dominicans, who are construed as mixed and/or white, and Haitians, who are construed as black. The following excerpt from Julia Alvarez's personal account of her childhood in the Dominican Republic is illuminating.

“I was visiting La Romana where Haitian sugarcane workers flood the market on Saturdays to shop. Two equally Black men were arguing in loud voices over some mistake in an exchange of pesos. One insulted the other, "*Negro maldito!*" Cursed Black! "Aren't they both Black?" I asked the Dominican friend who was with me. "Oh no," he explained. "The Haitian one is Black, the other one is Dominican.”  
(Alvarez 1993: 129).

Dominicans are the descendants of Spanish colonialists, African slaves, and the indigenous *Taino*. Approximately 90% of the Dominican population is black or mixed. Despite the fact that the vast majority of Dominicans can be categorized as black or mixed, no other country exhibits greater indeterminacy regarding racial identity (Duany 2006). Visitors to the Dominican Republic claim that “Dominicans are confused about who they are...they don't know that they are black” (Simmons 2008: 97). Juan Rodriguez, a Dominican anthropologist says, “If we are told we're black, we say, ‘Oh,

no, I'm not black! I am something else.' Dominicans are in complete denial about who they are" (Louis Gates 2011:155). Despite the diversity of skin colors and tones, the typical Dominican thinks of himself as a European of Spanish descent.

The United States subscribes to the one-drop rule of racial Blackness (developed from Jim Crow laws stating that one drop of black blood defines a individual as Black). Dominicans also believe in the one-drop rule, but for them the rule goes in the other direction. For them, the one-drop rule is "*la gota no-negra*" the one drop of non-blackness. If a Dominican has any Hispanic or indigenous ancestor, that then qualifies him as non-black. Thus, instead of the US idea of "black contamination" the Dominican Republic embraces "black purification". This racial paradigm is something that has intrigued and attracted social scientists to the island of Hispaniola for the past several decades.

The literature concerning Dominican racial identification shows that Dominican identity has been formed as polemic to that of Haiti. This is not simply a latent theme of what it means to be Dominican, but is something that is very active in current events. Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century hundreds of thousands of Haitians have crossed the border to seek a better life. With them came a debate over citizenship rights, a debate that escalated in 2007, as authorities refused to issue citizenship documents to Haitians born in the Dominican Republic. Just recently, on September 23, 2013, the Dominican Republic's Constitutional Court issued a decision that retroactively denationalized all Haitians born in the Dominican Republic since 1929. Anyone who does not have at least one parent of Dominican blood is denied Dominican nationality. This ruling effectively renders more than 250,000 residents of the Dominican Republic stateless (Arroyo 2013).

The United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) has expressed concern that the ruling could create a human rights crisis, as the ruling blocks tens of thousands from receiving medical care, pursuing careers or education, and threatens deportation (UNHCR 2013). This issue of citizenship is just one example of the problematic relationship Dominicans have with Haitians.

Race is one of the most basic perceived differences between Haitians and Dominicans. Like most societies, Dominicans have a complex coding system associated with racial identification. Hair is arguably one of the most prolific modes of racial presentation in the Dominican Republic. Both male and female Dominicans engage in presentation management through hair treatment, style, and care. Dominican men by and large keep their hair cut very close to the scalp. Dominican women treat and straighten their hair (Murray 2010). Both tactics are meant to downplay African roots and emphasize a Hispanic, or, at the least, an indigenous look (Candelario 2007).

In contrast to Dominicans, Haitians are more popularly known for celebrating their blackness through their hair. This includes leaving it natural, braiding it in cornrows, and braiding in extensions. It is also popular to weave yarn and colored hair into braids. Before the devastating earthquake of 2010, dozens of hair stylists braided and colored hair in the Iron Market of Port-au-Prince (Associated Press 2012). These hair stylists had a lot of business, and usually worked from six A.M. to dusk. In the wake of the earthquake these hairstylists have renewed their businesses, working amidst the rubble. Their presence is interpreted as a symbol of Haitian pride and resilience.

## **Statement of the Problem**

The body of research on Dominican presentation practices is small, but it is growing. Researchers such as Ginetta Candelario (2000; 2001; 2007), Wendy Roth (2004), Gerald Murray (2010), and Marina Ortiz (2012) have made important contributions to the field. Ginetta Candelario's work on transnational Dominican identity displays provides the foundation for contemporary research on Dominican presentation. Her research found that hair is the Dominican symbol for racial identity and that Dominicans engage in strategic ideological code switching to maintain identity salience across social contexts. Candelario's thorough work on the subject has been the preeminent research in this field. However, the most recent contribution—that of Gerald Murray and his co-author, Marina Ortiz (2012)—asserts that Dominican hair care norms are not part of strategic presentation practices to manage racial identity. They say that the way that Dominicans style and care for their hair is not a way for Dominicans to assert a Hispanic, non-black identity. They claim that hair straightening is a beauty aesthetic, similar to the attempt of white women to tan. Murray and Ortiz challenge the basic relationship Candelario established between Dominican presentation practices and racial identity, creating a rift in the current literature. Further investigation is needed to substantiate the relationship between race and presentation practices.

In addition to the new rift in the literature, the current research available neglects to consider the population of Haitian heritage residents in the Dominican Republic. It has been estimated that between half a million and a million Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans reside in the Dominican Republic, both legally and illegally (Arroyo 2013). Haitians, according to the literature, represent the antithesis of Dominican identity, yet, as



a minority group in the Dominican Republic, Haitians are actively engaged with normative Dominican presentation practices concerning national and racial identity. Additionally, with reference to the current citizenship debate, residents of the Dominican Republic with Haitian lineage are under unique political pressure and social scrutiny. Under these circumstances, Haitians may acculturate the Dominican model of presentation or reinforce Haitian presentation norms.

### **Goals and Objectives of the Study**

Since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Haitian immigrants have been integral to the Dominican economy and the Dominican way of life. However, there is very little research that considers how Haitian heritage residents of the Dominican Republic manage identity between Haitian and Dominican norms of racial and national presentation. This study offers a preliminary look at how a substantive minority group manages racial and national presentation practices, under the pressure of anti-Haitian prejudice.

This study has two overall research goals. The first is to investigate the relationship between race/racial identity and presentation practices. This research adjudicates between the current research conclusion (that of Ginetta Candelario) and the recent challenge (that of Gerald Murray and Marina Ortiz). Second, this research seeks to offer a preliminary understanding of Haitian-Dominican identity in the Dominican Republic.

These research goals will be fulfilled through the following objectives. The first objective is to investigate presentation practices through the medium of hair among Haitian heritage women. The results will show whether or not the respondents of this

study present signs of acculturation. The second objective is to understand how these practices constitute or reconstitute racial and national identities. Both objectives seek to fill a research void, as virtually no research exists concerning the practical lives of Haitians living in the Dominican Republic. This study will be accomplished through qualitative research, using participant observation, ten semi-structured interviews, and a focus group.

### **Significance of the Study**

This research will contribute to the body of research on racialized and nationalized presentation practices. An investigation into the presentation practices of Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans living in the Dominican Republic is pertinent and timely, considering the current division in the literature about the relationship between race and presentation practices. In this, the study is filling a direct literature need.

The difference between the theses of Murray and Candelario is fundamental and ideological, and it calls into question the existence of the relationship between presentation practices and race/racial identity. This rift in the literature is important to address because the two differing conclusions have great implications for the state of race relations in the Dominican Republic. Candelario's conclusion shows that race and racial identity is a very important consideration for average Dominicans, implicating that racial identity is practiced every day. Murray's findings implicate the opposite—that race and racial identity are not acted out in every day life. If this is true, then the subject of racial identity is not of great importance to average Dominicans.

My research can be seen as a direct response to the debate between Candelario and Murray. Though the study is accomplished in the environment of a batey among a

very different set of respondents, this research adjudicates between the conclusions of Candelario and Murray. I substantiate the relationship presentation practices have with race and racial identity through the investigation of hair care and management.

More specifically, this study seeks to understand how a minority population is reacting to dominant presentation practices. Identity management research concerning Haitian heritage residents of the Dominican Republic does not exist, something that is surprising, considering the documentation and Haitian-rights movement currently making headlines. This research is original, one of the first sociological looks at this population. I hope that more research will be forthcoming.

CHAPTER II  
REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

**Dominican Nation Building:**

**Race and Identity**

A cursory understanding of basic Dominican history is necessary to comprehend contemporary discourses of Dominican identity, which developed against a complex backdrop of French and Spanish colonial interests, Haitian nationalism, and U.S. imperialism.

Christopher Columbus claimed the island of Hispaniola for Spain in 1492. The arrival of the Spanish explorers meant the decimation of the local population from strenuous working conditions and disease. Thirty years after the arrival of the colonialists, the native population had dwindled from an estimated 1 million to 5,000 people (Dominican Republic History). Colonial development had to be supported by African slaves.

The Spanish colonialists were different from other colonialists in that rather than place legal and social barriers on interracial marriage, as did the English, the Spanish encouraged racial miscegenation. Over time, intermarriage produced an extensive blending of physical traits and racial phenotypes. Today it is reported that 73% of the Dominican population is a mix of Afro-European phenotypes (Central Intelligence

Agency). This is the highest documented proportion of people of mixed African/European descent in the Americas. On the other side of Hispaniola, French colonialists forbade intermarriage, in direct contrast to the Spanish colony.

The island of Hispaniola is shared by two nations—one of only five cases in the world in which islands are divided into two separate political territories (Lopez-Severino and de Moya 2007). The Ryswick Peace Agreement of 1697 legalized the French occupation of the Western half of Hispaniola, which would be called Haiti, and the Spanish occupation of the Eastern half, which would be called the Dominican Republic. However, both Haitians and Dominicans are the descendants of slaves and slave owners. They share a common land, ecology, geography, and they have an intertwined history, but in most respects, Haitians and Dominicans are regarded as completely distinct from one another.

While Haiti blossomed socially, culturally, and economically during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the Spanish settlement became increasingly unprofitable, and the Spanish lost interest in maintaining the colony. Dominican landowners found it impossible to sustain black slaves in plantation-style conditions, and the number of free blacks on the island rose to become a majority. According to a study by the American Library of Congress, by the nineteenth century, the population included 40,000 of Spanish descent, 40,000 Black slaves, and 70,000 freed Blacks or mulattoes (2010). The economic distances between Blacks and Whites were diminishing, as the destitution of Whites closed the social status gaps (Torres-Saillant 2000). This gave Black people opportunities for economic and social mobility. Those that have claimed the Dominican Republic to be a racial democracy mark this period as the beginning of said democracy (ibid).

In this rearrangement of social hierarchy, Moya Pons, a distinguished Dominican historian, writes that:

“Skin color came to be of secondary importance for social differentiation, although not completely unimportant. At the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, Dominicans perceived themselves as a very special breed of Spaniards living in the tropics with dark skin, but nevertheless, culturally white, Hispanic, and Catholic” (1981: 24).

French travel writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century noted that Dominicans of clear African descent would call themselves “*los blancos de la tierra*”—the “whites of the land” (Candelario 2007).

Despite their dark skin color, they considered themselves to be culturally white. Race was conceived of as a concept that included social class, profession, income, and friendship. In other words, ‘whiteness’ was an achievable status (Duany 2006). A person on the darker side of the spectrum might attain a lighter race by achieving a better economic status or gaining the friendship of White people. Therefore, racial mobility, within limits, was possible. A popular Dominican saying goes: “A rich Black is a mulatto; a rich mulatto is a White man” (Alvarez 1993:129).

While Dominicans were “whitening” the nation, Haiti was revolutionizing under the direction of Toussaint Louverture. In 1804, Haiti became the first sovereign Black republic. Black skin color was a, if not the, central component of Haitian national identity. The Haitian Constitution of 1805 declared all residents of Haiti black, regardless of skin color: “Because all distinctions of color among children of the same family must necessarily stop, Haitians will henceforth only be known as blacks” (Louis Gates 2011:173). In one of the earliest political acts of Pan-Africanism the Haitian

government of 1816 welcomed all black people around the world to become Haitian citizens.

The Haitians sought to unite the island of Hispaniola under one black governance, and occupied the Dominican Republic from 1822 to 1844, in what became known as the dark period of Dominican history. Haiti had been fined an indemnity by France for its independence, and the burden of paying the debt was transferred to the Dominicans. Dominicans have not forgotten the brutality of the Haitian occupation, and to this day celebrate their independence from Haiti (Jansen 2007; Moya Pons 1998).

When the Dominican Republic gained independence from Haiti in 1844, the Dominicans again pledged allegiance to the Spanish crown. The 1844 independence manifesto of the Dominican Republic decisively stated Dominican opposition to unification, "due to the difference of customs and the rivalry that exists between ones and the others [referring to Haiti and the Dominican Republic], there will never be a perfect union nor harmony" (Despradel 1974: 86). Dominicans lived in fear of the Haitian military, the Haitian economy, and Haitian migration.

For the ten years following Dominican independence, Haitians continued military excursions into the Dominican Republic, which led to Dominican nation-building projects. Benedict Anderson has argued that national communities are formed in the construction of an ideology that resolves internal differences (1991). However, it is sometimes forgotten that in the ambition of homogenization, "others" and "out-groups" are created—groups and people outside of the space of the national community. In this case, anti-Haitian prejudices were actively encouraged as an element of Dominican national cohesion.

Over the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, the Dominican elite sought to encourage a national identity in opposition to that of Haiti, and the primary accomplishment was the “racialization” of Haitians. Howard Winant defines racialization as “the extension of racial meaning to a previously unclassified relationship, social practice, or group” (1994:59). The Haitian racialization project construed Haitians as truly Black, the sons and daughters of African slaves, while Dominicans were somatically "White"—the descendants of Spanish conquistadores. To be Dominican was to be Hispanic, and not black. The Dominican anthropologist Juan Rodriguez states, “Nobody here is black because the word is reserved for Haitians” (Louis Gates 2011: 157). Only Haitians are considered black. Blackness in the Dominican Republic does not mean African—it means Haitian.

Colonel Rafael Trujillo’s dictatorship over the Dominican Republic (1930-1961) was the height of the racializing project. Trujillo, who ironically had a Haitian grandmother, used anti-Haitian sentiments to define a common enemy around which to unite the country (Louis Gates 2011). During the era of Trujillo, the collection of anti-Haitian prejudices called “*antihaitianismo*” was aggressively delivered through a variety of media, through the public school system, and through the all-powerful ruling party. In addition, the antithesis conceived between Haitians and Dominicans was actively built by intelligentsia—particularly by Manuel A. Peña Batlle and Joaquín Balaguer, historians and writers of Trujillo’s party (Duany 2006). Peña Batlle’s famous address to the border town of Elías Piña, “*El Sentido de una Política*” (The Meaning of a Policy), clearly displays the state's official opinion regarding Haitians:



“There is no feeling of humanity, nor political reason, nor any circumstantial convenience that can force us to look indifferently at the Haitian penetration [the Haitian migrant]. That type is frankly undesirable. Of pure African race, he cannot represent for us any ethnic incentive. Not well nourished and worse dressed, he is weak, though very prolific due to his low living conditions. For that same reason, the Haitian that enters [the Dominican Republic] lives afflicted by numerous and capital vices and is necessarily affected by diseases and physiological deficiencies which are endemic at the lowest levels of that society” (Peña Batlle 1954).

Joaquin Balaguer, president of the Dominican Republic for three terms (1960-62; 1966-1978; 1986-1996), and founder of modern day Dominican democracy, claimed that race was the “principal problem” of the Dominican Republic. He called for measures to halt the “africanization” of the nation. He expressed hope that over time the Dominican people would improve their “anthropological traits” by whitening the nation and opposing Haitian migration (Torres-Saillant 2000).

Other intellectual leaders concerned themselves with the past, and rewrote history to emphasize the Dominican Republic’s whiteness and deny African roots. The distinguished historian Henriquez Ureña wrote that “until 1916 the black population did not predominate...not even the mixture of black and whites” (Torres-Saillant 2000: 17). Here Ureña indirectly denies Dominican African lineage, claiming that Dominicans are of unquestionable European background. Ureña claimed that the “new” influx of Black people in the Dominican Republic was due to foreign influence, and expressed particular concern over immigration from Haiti. At the same time Luis Julian Perez, a member of Trujillo’s party, defined Dominicans as “A community of Hispanic origins, by virtue of customs and traditions, religion, language, and, in general, a culture in constant interaction with European civilization.” In contrast, Haitians “lack the most elementary attributes of civilized men” and are committed “body and soul to foul dealings and cults

that clash with Dominican life” (ibid:8). These racist, negrophobic, and xenophobic anti-Haitian sentiments reached their apex in 1937. The Trujillo dictatorship authorized a massacre of all Haitians living on the border, which resulted in the execution of as many as 15,000 Haitians (Sagas 1993).

The long-standing anti-Haitian prejudice in the Dominican Republic is a well-documented historical and present reality. Instead of the ‘dangerous Haitians’ of the past, Dominicans are now afraid of the ‘poor and defenseless Haitians’ (Grateraux 1988). It is estimated that there are between 500,000 to a million Haitians in the Dominican Republic, a large number for a country that holds ten million people (Murray and Ortiz 2012). Jorge Duany argues, “Once groups are racialized they develop distinctive patterns of occupational specialization, educational achievement, residential segregation, marriage, cultural representation, and legal treatment by the dominant society” (2000: 233). This certainly holds true for Haitians who have migrated to the Dominican Republic.

Haitians often live in abysmal conditions. An unknown number of Haitians in the Dominican Republic live on sugar company settlements called bateyes, and work for six months out of the year harvesting sugar cane, an occupational niche that confines them to poverty. Haitians also work undocumented outside of bateyes in agricultural positions—harvesting cacao, coffee, beans, or rice.

Lack of legal documents is a major problem among Haitian immigrants and Haitian descendants. Many Haitians are actually stateless—without Haitian or Dominican legal status—which further complicates matters. Haitians are often refused basic social, educational, and medical rights for lack of documents. They have been

denied basic human rights and have been brutally victimized (Human Rights Watch 2002). Dominicans mistreat them in day-to-day life and in public media. Public perceptions of Haitians draw on stereotypes of backwardness, barbarianism, and filthiness (NPR 2013). Popular and elite forms of culture portray Haitians as alien to the imagination of national identity (Wooding 2009).

### **Overview of Presentation Practices in the Dominican Republic**

Though Dominican elite have been concerned with constructing an image of a White Dominican Republic in contrast to a Black Haiti, contemporary research shows that Dominicans do not identify as white, though they aspire towards the lighter side of the mixed spectrum (Candelario 2007; Roth 2004). White skin is valued, but Dominicans are not white, they are not black, they are somewhere in between. Julia Alvarez, a renowned Dominican author, recounts:

“All of us aspired to be on the white side of the spectrum. Don’t get me wrong. None of us wanted to be white-white like those pale, limp-haired gringos, whales who looked like they’d been soaked in a bucket of bleach. The whiter ones of us sat out in the sun to get a little color *indio*, while others stayed indoors rubbing Nivea on their darker skin to lighten it up!” (1993: 129).

In this context “*indio*” does not actually connote indigenous descent, but is the officially recognized term for racial mixture. It is the label for skin color that is between black and white.

The “*indio*” label was invented as an official racial category of the nation during the Trujillo era. It was added to the census to signify someone of mixed race. “*Indio*” was meant to be used in place of “mulatto”, a word that connotes African ancestry. Until 1998 only three racial groups were officially recognized on government-issued identification cards (*cedulas*)—white, black, and *indio* (Murray 2010). According to

Dominican researcher Ernesto Sagas, hardly anyone is classified as black, a term that is designated for Haitians, and the majority of Dominicans claim *indio* descent (1993).

While there are only three official racial categories, there are a plethora of popular racial terms to describe the shades of Dominican skin. Table 1 presents an inexhaustive list of major racial terms used in the Dominican Republic to describe the rainbow of skin between black and white. Terms such as *indio* can be broken down further when additional qualifiers are added to the original term describing skin color: such as *claro* (clear, light), *oscuro* (dark), *lavado* (washed), or *quemado* (burnt) (Roth 2004). In the United States all of these terms would be categorized as either white or black. However, in Wendy Roth's study of racial identity, respondents reported that there are no Dominicans that are pure white or pure black, showing Dominican commitment to a racial spectrum.

“Respondents saw mixture as a commonality among all Dominicans; this was what overcame differences such as color or appearance, for even someone who looked White or Black in reality was something more complex. What drew them all together, then, was the fact of being mixed—their Dominicanness” (2004: 10).

Torres-Saillant points out that a flexible concept of race is incredibly important in a country with such a high degree of mixture (2000). A multivalent conceptualization of race “removes the psycho-social turmoil provoked in other societies by the sight of two people, one visibly white and the other visibly black, who identify themselves as biological siblings” (Torres-Saillant 2000: 21).

Dominicans use a number of racial labels to distinguish themselves and others, detailed in Table 1 below.

<b>Table 1: Popular Racial Labels in the Dominican Republic</b>	
<b>Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
Blanc@	White
Blanquit@	A little white; can be used as euphemism for elitist or upper class
Rubi@	Literally, blonde, however, this term is used to signify silky European hair
Jaba@	Fair skinned with curly hair
Trigeuñ@	Wheat colored
Moren@	Dark-skinned
Mulatt@	Mixed race of African descent
Indi@	Brown skin of mixed descent
Café con leche	Tan or light brown skin
Piel canela	Cinnamon skin
Priet@	Very dark skinned; usually derogatory
De color	Euphemism for black
Negr@	Black
Negrit@	A little black; usually a term of endearment
@ is used to connote female/male neutrality	
Source: Candelario 2007	

These racial terms are used in every day life in the Dominican Republic, and they are not necessarily negative. It is not uncommon to hear children or adults called by their skin color: *morena, ven aca!* (dark-skinned girl, come here!). Using racial labels is a way to get that person's attention, but also lets everyone else know who is being addressed. Racial terms can also be used as caring nicknames between family or loved ones: *mi negrita bonita, te amo!* (My beautiful black girl, I love you!) (Godreau 2000). In other situations racial terms can be used to cause psychological harm. For example, *priet@* is almost always a derogatory term that is not used in polite conversation.

These racial classifications are based on more than skin color. They are also based on a combination of physical and social characteristics, including hair color and texture, eye color, facial features, social class, income, and status. Terms such as *rubi@* and *jaba@* directly refer to hair as a racial qualifier.

It has been suggested that among Dominicans, hair is perhaps eclipsing skin color as the primary identifier of race (Candelario 2000; Murray 2010). In Roth's study of Dominican perceptions of race she found that someone with the same dark skin tone as someone else would be perceived as lighter skinned if they had straight, European hair (2004). This implies that racial mobility is possible, as hair is an element of appearance that can be managed and changed.

“Black people's hair has been historically devalued as the most visible stigma of blackness, second only to skin” (Mercer 1987: 36). In the Dominican Republic this stigma expresses itself as *pelo malo* (bad hair). When questioned as to what *pelo malo* means, Dominicans reply that *pelo malo* is *pelo grueso* (coarse, thick, snarled hair)—black hair. *Pelo malo* is hair that is kinked, tightly curled, and hard to control. In contrast, *pelo bueno* (good hair) is hair that is silky, straight, relaxed, and easy to manage—European hair. Dominicans define hair in four general categories, ordered here from good to bad: *lacio* (straight), *ondulado* (wavy), *rizado* (curly), and *crespo* (wiry) (Murray and Ortiz 2012). Hair that is straight is good hair, and all other types of hair are varying degrees of bad. Research has shown that *pelo bueno* is enough to classify a woman as “not black”—regardless of skin color (Candelario 2007). This means that racial transformation can be achieved through hair care.

Hair is the easiest of physical features to change cosmetically, but also one of the hardest to alter permanently, creating an opportunity to study the performance of Dominican racial identity (Palacios 2004). While black hair is an element of stigma for both Dominican men and women, women invest their time, money, and concern much more deeply in hair management practices than men.

The social stakes are higher for women, too. Dominican women consider racially compromising hair “worse than AIDS. It never goes away” (Badillo 2001: 35). Hair straightening has not only become the standard of beauty, but a social expectation. Women are considered rebellious if they do not straighten their hair (Badillo 2001). Straight, smooth, fine hair is a Dominican appearance norm, and violations of the norm constitute deviance. Women and girls who do not manage their hair are verbally castigated for their deviance with derogatory racial terms and other expressions of contempt: “*Muchacha, porque tu anda con ese pelo? Tan feo.*” (Girl, why do you go out with this hair? So ugly.) In contrast *pelo bueno* is a marvel that is complimented and stroked while women share hair stories and secrets.

Straight hair is a symbol of sophistication and professionalism (Grayson 1995, Palacios 2004). Professional Dominican women have *pelo bueno*. Women would not consider going to a job interview or going to school with hair that is not sleek and shiny. In this, hair acts as a signifier of status. This phenomenon is not specific to the Dominican Republic, but is also well documented throughout the developed world (Grayson 1995).

Also common throughout the world, but particularly prominent in Dominican culture, is the association of maturity with hairstyle. Hair straightening is a sign of womanhood. It is a way to act out gender and sexuality. Young Dominican girls have their hair braided by their mothers or neighbors and use hair bobbles until puberty, when they begin to process, treat, and straighten their hair. Treatment can range from cheap treatments bought on the street or expensive chemical processing done at a salon. The

change from braids to processed hair is very significant, and it is taken as a sign that a girl is sexually developed.

Women manage their hair by relaxing or straightening it and/or putting in extensions. Dominican women go to the salon or care for their hair in their homes or on street corners at least once a week. Thus, hair management involves a large time and energy investment. The sites of these hair practices often become female-dominated centers for bonding over stories and advice. bell hooks describes the ritual of Sunday afternoon hair care with nostalgia:

“There is a deeper intimacy in the kitchen on Saturdays when hair is pressed, when fish is fried, when sodas are passed around, when soul music drifts over the talk. It is a time without men. It is a time when we work as women to meet each other’s needs, to make each other feel good inside, a time of laughter and outrageous talk” (1988: 1).

In the Dominican Republic hair is also a wealth symbol. Hair beautification practices require material resources and aesthetic practices that correspond to wealth status. A trip to the salon for a professional hair fix is affordable to a portion of the population—and indeed, the growing number of hair salons (recent estimates place the number at 55,000) implies that women have resources to invest (Murray and Ortiz 2012). While 25% of Dominicans live on less than a dollar a day, Dominican women find the resources to process their hair in the salon or at home (Central Intelligence Agency). Women who have more money to invest in their hair go to the salon to achieve a more natural look. The differences in wealth are visually expressed in women’s hair.

As already discussed, hair is one of the primary racial signifiers in the Dominican Republic. The 19<sup>th</sup> century Dominican poem “*El negro ‘tras de las orejas’*” (The black



behind the ears) by Juan Antonio Alix helps illustrate the relationship between hair, hair management practices, and race.

“Such and such relative’s  
hair is always mentioned;  
But never the black pepper  
Of aunt so and so  
One strives to be very white,  
Even distances oneself from the black man  
Always arching an eyebrow  
When he comes to speak with one  
Because one thinks that one does not have  
The black behind the ears”  
--Alix, 1883, translated by Ginetta Candelario, 2000

The poem suggests that all Dominicans have a bit of black in them, but management of that blackness (through hair) puts it out of direct sight, and behind the ear. It has been argued that hair relaxing and straightening practices are evidence of cultural engagement in negrophobia and *blanquemento*—the whitening of the nation (Candelario 2001). bell hooks writes that the reality is that “straightened hair is linked historically and currently to a system of racial domination that impresses upon black people, and especially black women, that we are not acceptable as we are, that we are not beautiful” (1988: 2). Others have pointed to the painful processes required for hair management as an expression of black inferiority. Hair relaxing and straightening involves heat and chemical treatments, and the recipients can receive scalp burns and blisters that make it painful to brush the hair afterwards. According to Badillo, “hair straightening is a sign of docility and subjection to painful acts...it is a ritual of humiliation (2001: 35).”

The significance surrounding hair and race can also be extended to encompass the issue of nationality. Dominicans are construed a racial mix, as opposed to the blackness and African-ness of Haitians. Thus, hair is another point of difference between Haitians

and Dominicans. The Dominican standard of beauty is to straighten hair to accomplish a Hispanic beauty ideal. Dominicans think that in comparison, Haitian hair is ugly and unprofessional. “Haitian hair” is any hairstyle that is perceived to be outlandish, though oftentimes there is no real difference between the hair texture and quality of Dominicans and Haitians.

### **Contemporary Research on Dominican Presentation**

The field of research on Dominican presentation practices is one that has developed recently. Wendy Roth has made an important contribution to understanding how Dominicans interpret racial characteristics. Ginetta E. Candelario’s impressive work on Dominican identity displays has made her the preeminent researcher of the field. Gerald Murray has conducted research on racial perceptions between Dominicans and Haitians, making him the first to analyze Haitian presentation practices. Finally, Gerald Murray and Marina Ortiz have recently collaborated on a research project concerning Dominican beauty salons. Their research has questioned the previous consensus of the literature.

Wendy Roth, in “Understanding Race at Home and Abroad: The Impact of Migration on Dominican and Puerto Rican Identities” compared Dominican and Puerto Rican migrants’ perceptions of race with non-migrants (2004). Part of Roth’s study included a photographic instrument. She showed her respondents twenty photos of individuals of differing racial phenotypes, and asked them to describe the racial appearance. This led to an in-depth discussion of racial terms. She found that Dominicans appeared to have racialized the label of “Dominican” to signify racial

mixedness. In other words, diversity of racial appearance itself is what defines looking Dominican (2004:10).

Ginetta Candelario's book *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops* (2007) provides an extensive analysis of Dominican racial identity. Candelario used a variety of methods to accomplish her research, including participant observation of a Dominican beauty salon in New York, photo elicitation, and an analysis of the *Black Mosaic* exhibit in the Anacostia Smithsonian museum in Washington D.C. The main argument of Candelario's text is that throughout history, Dominicans and other actors have strategically hidden the African origins of the nation "behind the ears." According to Candelario's research, Dominicans define themselves as "*indio*" (indigenous) first, of Spanish origin second, and "keep the black behind the ears".

Through her ethnography of Salon Lamadas in New York City, Candelario shows that hair is a medium of racial identity management. In other words, Dominican women manage their hair to approximate a Hispanic and/or European look. Candelario reported that her respondents came to the beauty shop at least once a week to have their hair relaxed and straightened to approximate the Dominican idealization of beauty—straight haired, tanned, and fine featured. This ideal is that of a European, Asian, or indigenous woman, indicating that Dominican aesthetic ideals are intertwined with racial perceptions.

Through a photo elicitation project conducted at the beauty shop, Candelario found that Dominican women referred to hairstyle over skin color to define another woman's race. Candelario's subjects reported that fine, straight hair is enough to classify

a woman as “not black”—regardless of skin color. One respondent explained: “black women are confusing, but the hair lets you know” (2007: 237). By emphasizing Hispanic or indigenous heritage, Dominican women avoid the label of racial blackness.

Gerald Murray’s research, “Dominican-Haitian Racial and Ethnic Perception and Sentiments”, conducted on the Haitian-Dominican border, is the only published report that addresses Dominican as well as Haitian hair presentation practices. His research found that Haitians throughout the Dominican Republic engage in varying hair presentations. In some areas Haitian women weave their hair with colorful yarn and use complex braiding styles to create intricate designs. Murray’s extensive interviews on both sides of the border suggest that hair is becoming the primary racial signifier for Dominicans, while Haitians express fewer concerns over hair as a symbol of race.

The most recent development in literature on Dominican hair culture is Gerald Murray and Marina Ortiz’s book, “*Pelo Bueno, Pelo Malo*” (2012). Murray and Ortiz studied the Dominican “beauty market” by studying the Dominican hair salon as a micro-enterprise. They conducted fifty interviews with Dominican men and women about their salon habits, surveyed one hundred salons from different socioeconomic statuses, practiced participant observation in various salons, and conducted a document analysis of beauty aesthetics in the Dominican Republic, in the Santo Domingo area.

Their central argument is that Dominican women do not go to the salon to “whiten” themselves, they go to the salon to make themselves beautiful: “*La norma de cabello lacio en la Republica Dominicana representa una simple premisa estetica*” (The norm of straight hair in the Dominican Republic represents a simple aesthetic premise) (2012: 275). They consider the norm of straight good hair to be a beauty aesthetic, and

attribute the obsession for straight hair in the Dominican Republic to be an aspiration towards being “different”. Their respondents compared the Dominican desire for straight hair, just the same as straight-haired women’s desire for curly hair. For Murray and Ortiz, hair styling techniques are not a way to hide blackness, but a way to have beautiful and manageable hair.

They argue that the term “*pelo malo*” is not derogatory, that it is simply a term that means hair that is difficult to manage. Most shockingly, Murray and Ortiz suggest that the “racial problem” of the Dominican Republic is something of the past, and that a Eurocentric conception of beauty no longer exists in the Dominican Republic. This book has captured the attention of many, as it challenges the previously accepted findings put forth by Candelario.

The literature that exists concerning Dominican presentation practices is by no means complete. However, from even a short examination of the literature available, it is clear that the current thesis regarding Dominican presentation practices has not been extended to Haitian heritage residents of the Dominican Republic. It is exactly this paucity of literature that this thesis attempts to address.

CHAPTER III  
RESEARCH DESIGN

**Background of the Setting**

As a Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) stationed in the Dominican Republic, I have unique access to rural, impoverished, and otherwise unknown areas through the extensive network of Peace Corps Volunteers within the country. Through this network I identified Batey El Prado, a batey in the Eastern region of the country between Hato Mayor and El Seibo, as an ideal location to accomplish this research.



Figure 1: Map of the Dominican Republic, Nations Online Project

El Prado is a batey. Bateyes are properties owned by sugar cane companies who provide for the basic needs of the inhabitants that care for the company's sugar cane. The majority of these sugar companies use Haitian workers as cheap labor. Inhabitants of bateyes have very few rights. In the past it has been reported that batey residents work for 12-18 hours a day and come home to be locked in their barracks at night to minimize risk of runaways (Larr 2013). Batey residents are marginalized, unable to exercise their human rights, and dominated by the batey owners. The batey is a community that is fundamentally defined by labor—specifically exploitative labor. In this, a batey can be considered an economic enclave.

Sociologist Roger Waldinger defines an economic enclave as an economy that “imports every input and exports every output. Most importantly, profits are exported; consequently, economic enclaves fail to generate growth in other sectors” (1993: 448). As sugar-oriented communities, bateyes have little to offer other than day-to-day survival. Employees and workers do not own any part of the production process, and the poorest of the poor are contracted for work to maintain the status quo. Bateyes can be seen as microcosms of the larger dynamic between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, in that the physical realities of life in bateyes heighten the racial and class tensions that exist across the country. Thus, bateyes are ideal research sites for understanding how race is articulated, performed, and lived.

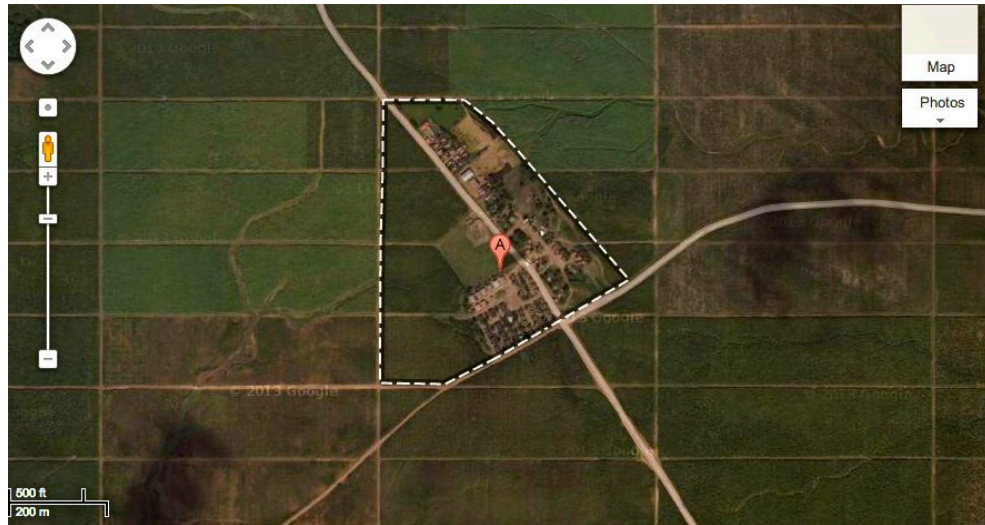
Batey El Prado is a community that is home to approximately 650 people. The Batey was founded in 1977 by the company Central Romana. Central Romana is the largest private landowner in the Dominican Republic, owning 200,000 acres of the land in the East. Central Romana itself has been in existence for over one hundred years, and

its sugar production accounts for 70% of the total sugar production of the country, making it the largest producer and exporter of sugar in the Dominican Republic (Central Romana 2013). While the company is moving towards mechanization of the planting, cut and haul of sugar cane, batey communities like El Prado continue to exist to do the manual labor.

El Prado is called an “active batey” meaning that all of its occupants, besides children, work in the processing of sugar cane. Workers primarily from Haiti are contracted as seasonal workers for picking the sugar cane during the zafra, the six-month season of the year when the cane is ripe (December-May). During the other six months of the year a minimum number of workers are contracted out for cultivating and maintaining the cane fields. The majority of El Prado residents have Haitian ancestry and approximately 30% were born in Haiti. Most other residents are second or third generation Haitian immigrants or Haitian-Dominicans (DeHart 2013).

Batey El Prado’s diverse demographic and “active” status was what first attracted me to it as a research site. During my first visit I found El Prado to be even more intriguing than it had first appeared. Social life in Batey El Prado is organized in a spatially striking manner. There is one road that divides the Batey in two distinct parts. The managers and employees live on the left near the entrance to the Batey (the top left of the figure below), and the workers live further into the Batey and on the right side of the road (bottom right of the figure below). All spaces have designated uses for Central Romana and the Batey’s design is more factory than community. Just as Carlos Andujar Persinal noted in his report on Batey El Soco, every inch of the batey is marked by its owner (2001).





**Figure 2: Aerial View of Batey El Prado, Google Maps**

Accompanying the visual social status divide is a marked difference in living quality. The employees live in wood or block houses with indoor bathrooms or private latrines and water spigots for every household. The workers live in groups of four in eight-feet by eight-feet barracks. They have communal latrines, and access to two water spigots that do not receive potable water. The majority of the employees have wives and children that live on Central Romana property and go to a Kindergarten-8<sup>th</sup> grade school that is provided for by World Vision. The workers may have wives and children, but there is no room for them to live together in Batey El Prado. Most of the employees' children have Dominican documents that allow them to go to high school. Children of workers are often undocumented and cannot attend school beyond eighth grade. In fact, approximately 43% of El Prado residents do not have Dominican citizenship, something that magnifies other social inequalities (DeHart 2013). The employees receive a salary that is approximately four times the income of workers, who receive payment piecemeal for their work. All of this demonstrates that the Batey employees have livelihoods in El

Prado, while the workers are treated in every way as temporary labor, though their stay is long-term.

Though employees receive preferential treatment from Central Romana, both employees and workers have few opportunities while working for the company. For both employees and workers there is no work available on Central Romana property besides that which is related to sugar cane. Batey residents cannot open small stores for selling goods, and they cannot raise cows or pigs. Though few entrepreneurial opportunities exist, the company provides for basic needs. Central Romana provides housing, water, and electricity for the employees and workers of Batey El Prado, in varying degrees of quality.

In this fascinating social atmosphere I chose residents living on the employees side as subjects for my research. This choice was practical. Occupants of the employees side are fluent in Spanish, while those who live on the workers side are much more likely to speak Creole, and at best, broken Spanish. Being a researcher with an intermediate level of Spanish speaking abilities, I thought it best to concentrate my work in an area where fewer interpretation errors would occur. Second, by working on the employees' side I had access to a larger pool of female respondents. As explained above, employees are more likely to have established homes and children, something that is incredibly difficult for workers to manage. Employees have wives and daughters while the workers side is majority male between the ages of 18 and 30. Thus, residents of the employees side both satisfied the ideal population of this research thesis and were willing and able to participate.

## **Research Overview**

The research design includes semi-structured interviews with ten female respondents between the ages of eighteen and thirty-five, participant observation within El Prado, and a focus group. The age range on the interview respondents was put in place to confine research volunteers to a population that is applicable to the research and is more likely to speak Spanish with proficiency.

Over a period of five months I spent time in El Prado, completing research tasks, participating in local events, and spending time with Batey residents. Peace Corps Volunteer (PCV) Elizabeth DeHart served as my guide and intermediary for the research tasks. Elizabeth DeHart had lived in Batey El Prado since October of 2012, and at the time of the research had lived for eight months in her site. Over this time period DeHart had been working on community projects with youth and families, and in so doing, had thoroughly integrated herself into the community. She had established relationships of trust and rapport, making her support throughout the collection of data invaluable.

## **Data Collection**

While I had been visiting Batey El Prado sporadically for several months, it was PCV Elizabeth DeHart who informally solicited women to participate in the study. One month before I had planned to begin research DeHart spread the word that I would be coming to spend time and learn about life in the Batey. Her preparation of the locals enhanced the level of trust I encountered.

Once I arrived with the intent of conducting research I first spent time participating in local events before asking for volunteer research subjects. I announced my research intents at all local functions and waited for volunteers to approach me. Once

a research subject had volunteered she was asked to complete an interview with me at her own convenience. All volunteers lived within a five-minute walking radius, so we had the ability to accomplish interviews with the ease of informality. I asked research volunteers to refer me to other potential women who would be interested in participating. Thus, my respondents were obtained through volunteer and snowball sampling methods.

Interviews were held where respondents were comfortable. I conducted the majority of the interviews on Elizabeth DeHart's front porch in full view of the neighbors, which put the respondents at ease. I conducted the other interviews at the houses of the respondents. The focus group was held in an outdoor meeting area and was accompanied by cake. Data for the interviews and focus groups was recorded using my laptop computer that was placed on the floor, so as not to distract. These recordings were necessary for accurate transcription. All interview materials and transcripts were kept in my home in a locked cabinet.

I sought active consent from the research participants (Berg 2009). Prior to participation respondents gave verbal and written consent. Participants signed two informed consent forms—I kept one, and the other was for the respondent to keep. Additionally, before each formal research session, the contents of the informed consent form were reiterated for complete clarity. This means that all respondents reviewed the informed consent document at least three times prior to participation.

I had plans to maintain the confidentiality of my respondents by using pseudonyms. However, the respondents found the idea of pseudonyms confusing, and preferred not to have pseudonyms. Instead, during the transcription stage I assigned each respondent a pseudonym to maintain confidentiality.

Data collection was conducted in Spanish. My Spanish proficiency level is rated as intermediate-high based on the ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines that Peace Corps Dominican Republic uses to test its Peace Corps Volunteers following ten weeks of Pre-Service Training. Eight months after Pre-Service Training I was interviewed a second time to assess my progress and was given very positive feedback. I am able to converse with ease and confidence concerning routine tasks and situations. However, in times of stress my performance can show signs of break down, such as failure to maintain accurate tenses in narration. Native speakers who are unaccustomed to non-native speakers normally understand me.

The interviewees responded positively to my Spanish speaking abilities. I believe this is due in part to their familiarity with PCV Elizabeth DeHart, who is also a non-native speaker. My understanding of Dominican nonverbal communication also contributed to the success of the research. For example, when a respondent scrunched her nose, I knew immediately that she had not heard the question correctly. To ensure accuracy I would occasionally summarize the respondent's response, verifying its correctness. This also proved to be a helpful interview tactic, as it also encouraged the respondent to provide more detail on the topic at hand. I did not feel that Spanish was a barrier towards mutual understanding—in fact, I often felt that the interview could not be conducted in English, as the Spanish words and phrases held much more meaning than the English translation would. I am confident that the interviews that I conducted are complete and accurate.

High quality data is most often the result of good relationships—established rapport and trust between the respondent and the researcher. Through my friendship with

PCV DeHart I felt that I gained a significant amount of trust by extension. Additionally, by participating in routine activities with the neighbors—washing clothes and dishes, sharing food, etc—I was normalized to the community. My participation in routines and special events strengthened the trust, or “*confianza*”, that I felt within El Prado.

To accurately reflect the social setting in which I had the privilege to live, work, and conduct research I had to practice reflexivity. Reflexivity involves an understanding of personal epistemology—of understanding the origins of my own knowledge and recognizing my assumptions (Burroway 1998). As a foreign female and white researcher living in a different part of the country for a considerable amount of time, I recognize that I have many presuppositions about race and identity as it concerns me, and also as it concerns Dominicans. I do not want to contribute to what Steven Steinberg calls a “white sociology”—reflecting of elite ideological trends or white guilt. To maximize my research I had to constantly engage in an internal dialogue to understand myself and my experiences, in relation to the research I was conducting.

There is no one method to accomplish reflexivity. However, one of the methods that the Peace Corps Masters International program staff recommends for PCVs is to keep a journal detailing their research process. Journaling mimics the memo writing that Kathy Charmaz describes as formative to the grounded data analysis process (2006). Since I was already carrying around a notebook for use during participant observation, I used the margins to write down my own thoughts. I included anecdotes about my own community in relation to Batey El Prado and other thoughts that I did not want to cloud the data. By utilizing a journal to manage my own role as a researcher, I attempted to

interpret the data without the hindrance of my own biases. This process was helpful at all stages of the research.

### **Semi-Structured Interviews**

The ten semi-structured interviews included demographic questions, a narrative portion, and direct questioning. From the demographic and narrative sections I compiled the demographic information of my respondents, shown below in table 2. The focus group that I conducted one month after the initial interviews was composed of the same group of women, so the demographic information for the participants of the interviews and focus group do not vary.

<b>Table 2: Interviewee Demographics</b>					
<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Age (Years)</b>	<b>Education (grade completed)</b>	<b>Employment</b>	<b>Haitian Lineage (defined by citizenship)</b>
<b>Edelin</b>	F	20	12	None	Grandfather (P)
<b>Starlin</b>	F	18	12	None	Grandparents
<b>Marines</b>	F	19	12	None	Mother and Father
<b>Leila</b>	F	22	12	None	Grandma (P)
<b>Yulisa</b>	F	18	12	None	Grandparents (M)
<b>Marineli</b>	F	20	12	None	Father
<b>Dalquiris</b>	F	18	11	None	Father
<b>Yohani</b>	F	20	12	None	Grandparents
<b>Anabel</b>	F	34	8	Sells phone cards	Father
<b>Nirelis</b>	F	35	8	Sells ice cream	Mother and Father

All of the respondents were between the ages of 18 and 35 with the median age being 20 years old. Of the ten interviewees, eight were in the 18-20 age range, and two,

Anabel and Nirelis, were in their thirties. Seven of the eight interviews in the younger age range had completed high school, and one, Dalquiris, was going into her final year. The women in their thirties had completed eighth grade before dropping out. Two of the women had some form of small income.

Haitian lineage was established by using the concept of Haitian citizenship. I asked the respondents if they had family members who lived and worked in Haiti. Five of the ten interviewees had parents that migrated to the Dominican Republic from Haiti, though, of those five, all had been born in the Dominican Republic and had Dominican documentation. The other five interviewees had grandparents who had migrated from Haiti. Vignettes of three selected participants are offered below in Table 3.

<b>Table 3: Vignettes of Selected Respondents</b>	
<b>Marineli, 20</b>	Marineli is a girl that does not trust easily. Her hands are rough from work and her arms are toned. Her hair is combed back into a short ponytail and she constantly has her cousin Rebecca on her hip like a third limb. Rebecca is five years old and has not yet spoken her first word, though she understands spoken Spanish. Rebecca only lets Marineli brush her hair. As she does, she mutters, “you have bad hair, yes, you do.” Marineli is the daughter of Haitian migrants. Her father works as an employee, and her mother maintains the house. Her parents speak only Creole at home, but Marineli’s Spanish is perfect, with only a slight accent.
<b>Nirelis, 35</b>	Nirelis is an opinionated and generous person. Her short hair is straightened and slicked back with gel. She sells homemade ice cream in little plastic bags, and though she works hard in the heat, she never looks sweaty or dirty. Her parents are from Haiti, but she was born in the Dominican Republic. Her parents first worked in a batey in the South, near the Haitian border, and she says that Batey was a living hell for her family. When her family moved East, Nirelis married a man from Batey El Prado and now has two daughters (ages 20, 22) and a son (age 25).



<b>Starlin, 18</b>	Starlin has her hair covered with a scarf, and while she explains about hair practices, she apologizes for her own hair, which she says she doesn't have the money to straighten at the moment. Both sets of her grandparents are from Haiti, though she has never met them. Her father and mother moved around the country before settling in Batey El Prado. She explains that she thinks that all people should be treated equal, no matter their color of skin. Pointing to her own skin she said, "I came out lighter, but that doesn't mean I treat anyone differently."
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The interviews were semi-structured, which allowed for flexible question flow and conversational ease. The interview guide contained twelve questions. The interviews began with an open-ended question that asked for a personal history narrative. From responses to this question I gauged the immigration status of each respondent and a better understanding about each respondent's family history. The rest of the interview guide contained one question about self-assigned national identity, one question about the differences between Haitians and Dominicans, seven questions about hair-related presentation practices, one question about presentation practices and race, and finally, one question about presentation practices and identity perceptions. The complete interview guide can be found in Appendix A.

The interview guide did not include direct questions about race because my intent was to draw out racial themes as they were related to presentation practices. One of the goals of this research is to substantiate the connection between race and presentation practices. Instead of assuming the connection and asking the respondents directly about race, I thought I would find it more revealing to wait for the respondents themselves to reference race. Indeed, in discussing hair-related presentation practices, many of my

respondents revealed their conceptions of race and nationality, as those concepts apply to other people and also to themselves.

### **Participant Observation**

During the same time period in which the semi-structured interviews were occurring I also practiced participant observation. Clifford Geertz says, “If you want to understand what a science is you should look in the first instance not at its theories or its findings...you should look at what the practitioners of it do” (Clifford Geertz in Van Maanen 1988:73). This is especially important in the context of the Dominican Republic. The culture of “saving face” means that Dominicans often say one thing and do another. Using participant observation as a research method allowed me to recount what people say as well as what people do.

Over several days in Batey El Prado I informally observed the community from a plastic chair. I sat on the corners with older women, I participated in Saturday homemade hair salons, and I helped PCV Elizabeth DeHart with her girls group, called *Chicas Brillantes*. I carried around a small notebook for writing down compelling phrases, but I kept the notebook use to a minimum so as not to be conspicuous. When I was asked what I was doing with the notebook I said that I was learning about batey culture, a statement that was easily accepted. On the bus ride back to my own site I elaborated on my field notes, filling in descriptions of conversations, actions, and anecdotes that had been left incomplete.

### **Coding and Data Analysis**

After I had completed the semi-structured interviews I took a month to transcribe the interviews in Spanish, code the data, and begin to piece together a theory. My coding

method involved first identifying “anchors” that encapsulated key points of the data (Charmaz 2006:82). The anchors were words or phrases that held a significant amount of meaning beyond their direct translation. Examples include “*cuchicheo*”, (which directly translated means “whisper”, but in the Dominican context really means negative talk or gossip), “*alla arriba*” (up there, which the respondents used as a designated term for the area where the Haitians lived in barracks). I also included phrases that were repeated a lot—either by one individual or many. For instance, I heard “*pero, es negra*”, “but, she’s black” repeated over and over both in interviews and on the streets. This phrase was used to show that even though a woman may have a million wonderful qualities, they will never quite redeem her from being black. Any phrase or word that held intrinsic meaning was used as an anchor.

After I developed the anchors I combed through the transcriptions for statements or narratives that supported or explained the significance of each anchor. For instance “*cuchicheo*” was grouped with other statements about norm reinforcement or social consequences for breaking norms. Once an anchor and its supports were grouped together it became a complete concept category that I could order into a narrative-theory. For example, the category of social expectations and norms built a narrative of the category of ‘social consequences’. Through the synthesis of this narrative, the resulting theory became clear.

The entire process of transcribing and coding the data was conducted in Spanish to maintain the original meaning. Throughout this thesis I also attempt to maintain the original language, directly translating for non-Spanish speakers with explanations of the cultural meaning. Language is an integral element of culture. Enriquez Frederico

Grateraux, a Dominican writer, claims that language is like a psychological collective of the makeup of a people (1988). As this research seeks to analyze elements of identity through the lens of hair management practices, it is important that the original language be maintained.

### **Focus Group**

After the coding process was complete I returned to Batey El Prado for a reflection-oriented focus group with the same group of women with whom I conducted one-on-one interviews. Ester Madriz posits that focus groups can be viewed as “a form of collective testimony” (1998:117). She states, “the interaction in focus groups emphasizes empathy and commonality of experiences...fostering self-disclosure and validation” (ibid). The focus group was meant to provide the women with an opportunity to share in their experiences, as well as voice any additional thoughts or opinions about the research subject. The focus group allowed me to ask follow-up questions and confirm the findings that I had come to while analyzing the data. The complete focus group interview guide is located in Appendix B.

During the focus group I would introduce a question, the participants would ask me questions confirming the question, and the group would discuss their opinions, often becoming very verbose and energetic. Once the group had come to a conclusion I introduced the next question and the discussion would continue. When an argument arose, all the participants seemed to enjoy the varying opinions. They seemed to feed off of the positive energy of the other participants.

Elizabeth DeHart was present during the focus group, to assist in its supervision. The participants of the focus group chose not to adopt pseudonyms. Through the focus

group I was able to confirm my original findings and supplement the findings with additional details.

### **Implications**

I feel that the methods used in this study appropriately reflect the study's objectives. The informal style of the interviews contributed to a rich exchange of data and the usage of participant observation allowed me to see how my respondents and other members of Batey El Prado act and interact on the basis of presentation practices. The variety of methods I used enabled me to obtain high quality data that is reflective of the reality of life for Haitian heritage residents of the Dominican Republic.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

The findings of the data are discussed in the following order: First, I describe in detail the realities of life in Batey El Prado and how the interview respondents fit into the setting of the batey. Second, I analyze narratives from the interview respondents describing their racial and national self-identities. Third, accounts of race and nation are examined, using data drawn from participant observation and interviews with respondents. Fourth, I detail presentation practices communicated through interviews and also seen in practice. The final section of the findings concerns focus group discussion points and conclusions drawn from the data.

#### **Batey El Prado Social Environment**

*“Allá Arriba”*  
Up There

Batey El Prado is a physically and socially isolated community. To get to Batey El Prado from the capital one must take a three hour bus from the city, and once among the cane fields of the East, it's easy to lose your bearings. The sugar cane fields stretch on for miles and miles over rolling hills, a seemingly endless ocean of sugar. The entrance to El Prado is virtually indistinguishable from all other dirt roads that lead into the cane fields. There are no signs marking its existence, and if you're not traveling with

someone who knows where it is, you're likely to miss it. The dirt road leading to El Prado is traversed by motorcycle, a twenty-minute ride.

On entrance it is clear which side of the Batey belongs to the employees, and which side of the Batey is reserved for the workers. All the amenities—the grade school, the corner store, and the generators providing electricity are situated amongst the well-kempt houses of the employees. Water spigots are located throughout the houses, to provide regular running water, but some people also have running water in their houses. Their houses are fenced, and adorned by little gardens of flowers and potted plants.

The workers side is simply rows and rows of dusty barracks, over spilling with men and women who look much older than they are. Four people sleep in each eight feet by eight feet barrack, leaving little room for their belongings, which are arranged outside the barrack under a makeshift tarp protecting them from the rain. Communal latrines pockmark the area, and water spigots are sparse. Though the conditions are rough, it is clear that a culture lives and thrives amongst the workers. Old women sell Mamba, a spicy Haitian peanut butter, and bisqui, a Haitian bread. Near the entrance to the barrack area there is a well-worn circle in which the community gathers for celebrations and religious ceremonies—Catholicism and Voodoo. Though living conditions are harsh, the workers clearly find solace in cultural activities.

The difference between the two sides of Batey El Prado is striking to the eye, but the social and political divide was made even clearer by my interviewees. I shortly found that though my respondents live in the same physical space as the rest of the El Prado residents, they unanimously described themselves as living outside of the Batey. It was as if the respondents considered El Prado to be two communities—the Batey and the

employees. When asked where the Batey itself begins my respondents stated that it starts “allá arriba”—“over there, above”, where the workers live. The longer I spent in El Prado the more I heard declarations substantiating the Batey from the employees side. I heard that “up there” they do voodoo. “Up there” everyone speaks Creole. “Up there” life is hard. “Up there” they are not like us. These declarations exhibit “us vs. them” “othering” processes.

Sociologists have addressed and understood how physical space becomes a racial space through a range of social processes. Tanya Golash-Boza, conducted research on understandings of race and color amongst Afro-Peruvian coastal communities in Peru (2010). Her research showed that the racial continuum and social whitening theses apply to indigenous and non-black Peruvians, but for Afro-Peruvians, race is understood as fixed, eliminating the possibility of social whitening. Coastal Afro-Peruvian communities are racially Black while other areas are considered along a spectrum. The comments of my respondents show a similar racialization of space. They have projected ideas of fixed racial categories, in which the people “up there” are Haitian-Haitian, and the employers are Haitian-Dominican.

The relationships between Dominican, Haitian, and Dominican-Haitian people in the Batey are complex. The workers are Haitian, speak mostly Creole, and live “in the Batey”. Haitian-Dominicans speak Spanish and live outside of the Batey on the employees’ side. According to my respondents, almost all residents of El Prado have some Haitian blood. Because of this, they believe that Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans are treated better in their community, compared to the rest of the country. However, the sentiment that “*el dominicano...vea el haitiano por abajo*” “the Dominican looks down



on the Haitian” is still openly expressed, and in the time that I spent in El Prado, I found that Dominican preference and Haitian prejudice is a dynamic that permeates social life. The physical and ideological system of the batey is maintained through this understanding of fundamental inequality.

After living in my own rural campo for four months I had become accustomed to the unfiltered and direct prejudiced comments often expressed by Dominicans, but I was not ready for the shock that Batey El Prado brought. On my first day in the Batey I found myself saying “*Ay, pero hablan fuerte aquí!*” “Wow, they speak strongly here!” more often than I would like to admit. The people in the Batey very openly and directly, voiced their opinions and stereotypes, and when they did, it was in a loud voice dripping with feeling. During participant observation it was common for me to hear the strongest racial slurs directed at Haitians.

It was here that I first heard the term “congosso Haitiano” which is something akin to the American slurs “nigger” or “chink”. One respondent explained to me, “*Siempre dicen morena, morena. Pero aquí también Haitiana. Congosso Haitiana.*” “They always say morena, morena [in the Dominican Republic]. But here [in the Batey] they also say Haitian. Congosso Haitian.” The term “*congosso*” is both racial and class-related. It refers to a Haitian who has recently immigrated to the Dominican Republic, most likely illegally, and, in the words of my respondents, “knows nothing”. The Haitian does not know how to speak Spanish, and because he does not know how to speak, also does not know how to write or read. The only thing the “*congosso Haitiano*” is good for is manual labor of the simplest type. It is speculated by the Batey residents that the word “*congosso*” comes from the slaves brought from the Congo, known for being extremely

black and uncultured. The term “*congosso Haitiano*” was used amongst my respondents as a jest, explained by them as a strong insult, and was occasionally used in my presence for its true intent.

The people of Batey El Prado are very diverse. Each person has their own story of how they ended up in the Batey, and their dreams for the future are wildly different than their present circumstances. In Batey El Prado some people are very proud to be Haitian, or to be a Dominican–Haitian mixture, but each identity label comes with its own baggage.

### **Self-Assigned Identity**

“*Yo soy Haitiana de sangre, pero yo nací aquí.*”  
“I am Haitian by blood, but I was born here.”

The women who participated in my research were a mix of second and third generation Haitian immigrants—five had grandparents who migrated from Haiti and five had parents who had migrated. One of the first questions I asked during interviews was whether the respondent considers herself Haitian or Dominican. There were some very interesting responses. One of my first respondents burst out in laughter as if I had asked her a completely insane question, “*Estoy aligado, Katty!*” which basically means, “I’m torn”. Other respondents echoed her sentiment. At first questioning, six of the ten participants described themselves as “*entre las dos*”—in between Haitian and Dominican. Three proclaimed themselves Dominican. One called herself “*arrayana*”. Table 3 below shows the self-assigned identity of the respondents by immigration status. Table 3 also shows how the respondents identified themselves throughout the interviews. Self-assigned identity differed from identity references during the interviews in six out of the ten respondents.

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Immigrant Status</b>	<b>Self-Assigned Identity</b>	<b>Identity References</b>
<b>Edelin</b>	2nd generation	In between	Dominican
<b>Anabel</b>	2nd generation	In between	Dominican
<b>Nirelis</b>	2nd generation	In between	Used 3rd person
<b>Marineli</b>	2nd generation	Dominican	Used 3rd person
<b>Starlin</b>	3rd generation	Dominican	Used 3rd person
<b>Yulisa</b>	3rd generation	In between	Dominican
<b>Leila</b>	3rd generation	In between	Dominican
<b>Dalquiris</b>	3rd generation	In between	Haitian
<b>Marines</b>	3rd generation	Dominican	Dominican
<b>Yohani</b>	3rd generation	Arrayana	Used 3rd person

After the respondent had specified a self-assigned identity I then asked the interviewees to describe what it means to be between Haitian and Dominican. Three of the six participants who had described themselves as “in between” then used the term *arrayana* as a way to put a label on the in-between-ness. I had not heard this term before. My respondents described it as a Dominican term that means someone of Haitian descent who was born and raised in the Dominican Republic. It is not used as a pejorative term, but is merely a label. After doing some additional research I found that “*arrayana*” means someone who is Haitian, but born in the Dominican Republic and may or may not have Dominican parents. I also found that the word “*arrayana*” itself is derived from the Spanish word “*raya*”—meaning line or border (Lopez-Severino 2007). Thus, “*arrayanos*” are those who come from the border, both literally and figuratively. The label *arrayano* then, perfectly describes the reality of Haitian-Dominicans who are, living on the hyphen, so to say.

While the women claimed themselves as *arrayanas*, during the course of the interviews most women referred to themselves in passing as being either Dominican or Haitian. The women would begin discussions with introductions like: “*nosotras, o sea,*

*las Dominicanas...*” “we, that would be the Dominicans...” . Five referred to themselves as belonging to the Dominican group, while only one continually referred to herself as Haitian. The other four refrained from putting themselves in either group and talked in the third person. This phenomenon could be evidence that my respondents were engaging in what Ginetta Candelario referred to in her research as ideological “code-switching” (2007). In order to compensate for living “in between” the respondents changed their label of self-ascribed identity as it applied. This shows that identity is a fluid concept.

During interviews all women emphasized the fact that they have Haitian blood, but were born in the Dominican Republic. Haitians born in the Dominican Republic had, at the point of these interviews, the right to claim government-issued Dominican identification. However, in reality, many people are denied access to documentation because of strong anti-Haitian sentiments. I suspect that the women emphasized their birthright to be treated Dominican because documentation is such a contested issue. While the women expressed pride in their Haitian backgrounds, their claim to Dominican citizenship is frankly of more importance in their current context.

### **Narratives of Skin Color and Nationality**

*“Aquí en la Republica Dominicana todo tiene su caja con su raza, con su color.”*  
“Here in the Dominican Republic everyone has a box with their race, with their color.”

The interview guide included several questions concerning nationality—specifically the differences between Dominicans and Haitians. These questions primarily concerned presentation practices: “How can you tell the difference between a Haitian and a Dominican?” and “Is Haitian hair different from Dominican hair?” Skin color was an issue that came along with the responses to these questions, and it would be

impossible to discuss their narratives of nationality without discussing racialized blackness.

My respondents referred to skin color and race as an issue of paramount importance in their lives. Nine of the ten respondents were considerably dark. They told me that dark black skin color is highly associated with Haitian heritage, with stupidity, uncleanliness, poverty, backwardness, violence, voodoo, and magic. Through personal narratives my respondents described these prejudices as the “box of baggage” their skin color brings, as shown in the following:

*“Si estamos en una reunión. Ella habla, ella habla, yo hablo. Dicen, wao, ella es negra, pero sabe hablar. Mira, ella es negra, pero inteligente. Es el color, la Republica Dominicana no se lleva de eso. Ella es muy buena persona, pero ella es negra. Siempre un pero. No sé porque, pero aquí en la RD nos gusta la palabra negro. Negra. Morena. Prieta. Ella es muy buena, pero es prieta. Ella es simpática, pero es negra.”*

“If we are in a meeting, she talks, she talks, I talk. They say, wow, she is black, but she knows how to speak. Look, she is black, but intelligent. It’s the color, the Dominican Republic can’t get rid of it. She is a good person, but she is black. Always the ‘but’. I don’t know why, but here in the Dominican Republic we like the word ‘black’. *Negra. Morena. Prieta.* She is great, but she is black. She is nice, but she is black.”

I heard the phrase: “but she is black” used very consistently. The “but” seemed to signify that skin color could be redeemed by other personal qualities, but never completely.

Dark skin will always be noted, and it will always be stigmatized. For my respondents, skin color is the primary trait by which they are labeled. In this, skin color was considered a “master status”, a label that has sweeping symbolic value. One respondent shared:

*“Yo tengo dinero, yo compro una yipeta, una casa, pow, yo tengo de todo. Dicen, pero esta negra tiene... ‘negra’, oíste? Nunca vas a escuchar ‘mujer’.”*

“[If I had] money, I buy a jeep, a house, pow, I have everything. They say, but this black woman has it all...’black woman’, did you hear that? You are never going to hear just ‘woman’.”

Despite all of the attention that skin color receives, hair is just as important, if not more important. It is said that a mother prays that her son or daughter will find a spouse with light skin, but if not with light skin, at least with good hair. Mixed color couples are rare and very intriguing in the Dominican Republic. When women past their prime sit around to talk about the latest gossip, the individuals involved in mixed couples are judged based on whether they are lightening or darkening their future children. Participant observation and semi-structured interviews showed that if skin is dark, good hair could be a redeeming quality:

Respondent: *“A veces una Dominicana se casa con el Haitiano, el mas feo de aquí...Dominicana con mucha pelo, clara, el Haitiano, feo, poco pelo...la niña sale prieta, pero con el pelo bueno.”*

Researcher: *“Pues, no importa que ella es prieta, pero el pelo...”*

Respondent: *“Pero el pelo... y eso aquí en la Republica Dominicana, es algo terrible con el pelo.”*

Respondent: *“Sometimes a Dominican woman marries a Haitian man, the most ugly from here...the Dominican with a lot of hair, light skin, the Haitian ugly with little hair...the baby girl is born dark-skinned, but with good hair.”*

Researcher: *“So, it’s not important that she is dark-skinned, but the hair...”*

Respondent: *“But the hair...and this here in the Dominican Republic is something terrible with the hair.”*

This respondent asserts that hair is one of the most important aspects of appearance, and of racial perceptions. Being black is perceived by my respondents as one of the most professionally and personally destructive statuses. Black skin can never be erased. However, good hair can be a redeeming factor involved in the perception of race. This finding mirrors Ginetta Candelario’s study, in which she found that hair can mitigate for color, and allow women to qualify as non-black (2007).

## **Presentation Norms and Consequences**

*“La gente tienen malo. Hay que alisárselo.”*  
“The people have bad hair. They have to straighten it.”

Hair has been shown to be one of the principal markers of race among women in the Dominican Republic (Candelario 2007). Obsession with hair has reached such a high that some have referred to the Dominican Republic as a “pelocracy” (Murray and Ortiz 2012). cursory interviews with Haitians living on both sides of the Haitian border show that Haitians do not place as much importance on hair as Dominicans do, and that Haitians show different culturally embedded hair practices (Murray 2010). Seven of my twelve guiding interview questions had to do with presentation, appearance, and hair. Through these questions, women discussed the physical processes of caring for their hair, hair care norms and expectations, consequences for breaking hair care norms, and how hair reflects racial and national identity.

During the interviews, seven of the women had their natural hair treated to be straight and smooth, one of the women had her hair covered with a scarf, one had a weave, and one had left her hair natural, though it was pulled back. Among my respondents, straight hair was considered the most beautiful hairstyle. The natural state of their hair was something to be avoided—or covered with a scarf. Straight hair is the norm, the expected way to manage hair.

My respondents told me that practically all women in the Dominican Republic straighten their hair. If a woman does not straighten her hair it is assumed that she is either an Evangelical Christian or Haitian. They explained that Evangelical Christians believe that the Bible says that they should not alter their natural appearance. Evangelical Christians commit to recognize God by maintaining their natural appearance.

The women specified that not all Evangelical Christians leave their hair in its natural state, but it is expected of them. In turn, the women explained that Haitians “do not feel the need to straighten their hair”, and so do not participate in the practice. Haitian and Evangelical Christian women are the only populations who are exceptions to the norm.

### **Good Hair and Bad Hair**

According to my respondents there is a difference between Haitian and Dominican hair, but the difference is not that great. Haitian hair is shorter because it grows slower, and is thick and nappy. Dominican hair is longer and in between the coarseness and thickness of African hair and the fineness of European hair:

*“El cabello Dominicano se conocen porque es bueno, y lo Haitiano tiene malo, tiene chiquito, y el Dominicano muy largo.”*

“The Dominican hair is known as good hair, and the Haitian hair as bad hair—they have short hair, and the Dominicans have long hair.”

The respondents explained that good hair is pretty and easy to manage. Bad hair is ugly and hard to manage. During interviews I asked respondents to define good hair “*pelo bueno*” and bad hair “*pelo malo*” for me. The interviewees often used my own hair as a reference point for defining good hair. They described it as hair that, like mine, fits a Eurocentric beauty ideal—hair that is blonde, fine, has body, and has individual strands that move with the wind.

They referred to someone with good hair using the word “*rubio*” which technically means blonde hair. When I asked if the hair must necessarily be blonde to be good hair, the response was that no, dark hair is just as good as light hair. The term “blonde” “*rubio*” is used as a synonym for good hair—it does not specifically refer to the



color of the hair. My respondents told me that good hair is hair that appears of European or Asiatic origin, and good hair is considered beautiful.

In contrast, bad hair is hair that is thick, knotty, curly, and wiry—African hair. It often takes a very long time to grow and is difficult to brush and style. Bad hair is ugly. The association between African type hair and ugliness was noted by all but two respondents. These descriptions of bad hair and good hair were clearly racially marked for my respondents. There is hair that is between good and bad. However, having hair that is in-between does not qualify someone as having good hair. In-between hair is still considered bad, and needs to be treated and straightened.

The term “*pelo malo*” is not seen as an insult. My respondents said that it is a descriptive term for the state of one’s hair. This is exactly how Murray and Ortiz’s interview respondents described the term (2012). However, in my interviews “bad hair” was always linked with the descriptive words ugly, unmanageable, and uncleanly. It would seem that the term itself is not derogatory, but it does connote a negative stigma, and it is definitely rooted in a racial understanding.

### ***Cuchicheo***

Both good hair and bad hair is subject to public judgment and commentary. The judgment comes from all sides. During participant observation I noticed that physical appearance was always open for public discussion:

*“Pelo malo, casi no te puedes ni peinar, y hay que hacerte un cambio, un look. Y cuando tu pelo es bueno, dicen que, oh, tu pelo es bonito, me encanta tu pelo, me encanta como tu tratas tu pelo, como lo cuidas, como lo peinas.”*

“Bad hair, you almost can’t even brush it, you have to give yourself a change, a look. When your hair is good, they say, oh, your hair is pretty, I love your hair, I love how you treat your hair, how you care for it, how you brush it.”

What “they say” has a lot of importance. Within the Batey the pressure generally comes from two sources. There is the “*cuchicheo*” —the critical gossip for which Dominican doñas are famous, and direct insults from community members, family members, friends, and acquaintances. Following is a list of the common insults I heard during participant observation:

<b>Table 5: Common Insults</b>	
“ <i>Perdiste el peine?</i> ”	Did you lose your comb?
“ <i>Vete al salón! Esa no puede cuidarse peinado así, porque se queda muy feo.</i> ”	Get yourself to the salon! This one can’t care for her hair like that, it looks really ugly on her.
“ <i>Esta te queda feo, alísate!</i> ”	That looks ugly on you, straighten it.
“ <i>Tú te vas a poner feo.</i> ”	You are going to make yourself ugly.
“ <i>Pareces como una Haitiana peinado así.</i> ”	You look like a Haitian with your hair like that.

These insults are usually yelled from the street corners or kitchen windows. The insults do not just reflect an aesthetic preference for straight hair, they also articulate a connection between bad hair and Haitian-ness. Additionally, insults such as “you are going to make yourself ugly” are tainted with a special type of judgment. This comment asserts that the recipient is really a good-looking girl, but she is not caring for herself correctly. Hairstyle reflects on personal character. Thus, the above insults can also be viewed as helpful comments from one friendly community member to another. Women who do not straighten their hair are judged more than just on an aesthetic basis. Not straightening hair puts personal character, mental health, and hygiene into question, as evidenced from the following narrative:

*“Fíjate, aquí mismo cuando vean una chica y parece que ella no conoce el salón, o como que no tiene cuarto para ir al salón a alisarse, lo primero que lo vean es el pelo y los pies. Cuando vean una mujer con los pies sucios, como que no se baña, o como que no hay agua en su casa... dicen, ay, pero esta vive con sus pies en el suelo, y su pelo malo. Y no se da trata.”*

“Pay attention: here when they see a girl and it looks like she has never known the salon or that she doesn’t have money to go to the salon to straighten her hair, the first thing that they look at is her hair and her feet. When they see a woman with dirty feet, like she doesn’t bathe, or like she doesn’t have water in her house, they say, whoa, but this girl lives with her feet in the mud and with her bad hair. And she doesn’t even try to change it.”

While the pressure from within the Batey is great, the women I interviewed said that the pressure is even greater when leaving the community. When asked when they have felt judged by their looks all of my respondents mentioned the experience of getting on the bus to leave El Prado: *“Lo primero que te miran cuando subes en la guagua es su pie y su cabeza.”* “The first thing they look at when you enter the bus is your feet and your head.” The hair and feet are symbols of race and social class. By looking at a woman’s feet one can judge where she came from, her personal hygiene, and her social class. If she is wearing a bright colored pair of high heels and she has her toenails well manicured and recently painted, she will be treated accordingly. If her feet are dusty and muddy she is, without doubt, a woman from the batey, and other passengers will treat her with disdain.

When the woman is dark skinned getting on a bus to the capital the women explained that the judgment becomes even more dramatic, as evidenced in the following quotes:

*“Ah, mira esta, subiendo con la gente, como ya cree que es gente. Se miran por arriba y por abajo, o sea de su pelo a los puntos de los dedos.”*

“Oh, look at her, getting on the bus with the people, like she believes that she is one of us. They look her up and down, from her hair to the points of her toes.”

*“...si una mujer sube con su mono en potisa y sus unas, vean, y dicen, esta mujer, es una Haitiana y viene a dársela a la Republica Dominicana.”*

“...if a woman enters the bus with extensions and nice nails, they see her and say, this woman, she’s a Haitian, and she came to give herself over to the Dominican Republic.”

These comments show that women from Batey El Prado are cast as outsiders, and subject to incredible pressure to maintain appearances. Because they get on the bus from the El Prado stop it is automatically assumed that they are Haitian. Though the judgment is worse if they do not try to present themselves in an acceptable manner, no matter how they do their hair or nails, they are judged as Haitian, and therefore, from low social and class status.

For the women of Batey El Prado, hair care is closely linked with hygiene. If one does not correctly maintain her hair in good form, hygienic codes are not being followed. According to one of my respondents, *“tengo el derecho de ser feo, pobre, negra, pero puerca, no”* “I have the right to be ugly, poor, black, but a pig, no.” To be *“puerca”* for my respondents is to lack hygiene. The hair that is the prettiest (straight, fine hair) is the hair that is the most hygienic. Because of the number of Haitian prejudices that exist, the general expectation is that between Haitians and Dominicans, Dominicans are the cleaner, more hygienic and healthy group. Women who have Haitian ancestry can compensate by conforming to the Dominican expectation.

In summary, the hair care norms among my respondents mirror Dominican hair care norms. The population of Haitian-Dominicans that I observed had expectations that women straighten their hair. These norms are enforced by community members, friends, and family through direct and indirect insults. When hair care norms are broken, women

face being labeled Haitian and therefore, ugly. Women who do not comply with the norms have their personal character questioned, and are looked down on for being unhygienic. However, despite all their efforts to achieve a Dominican standard of hair care, women are judged as low class for living in the Batey.

My respondents define good hair as hair that reflects European or Asiatic influences. Bad hair is defined as hair that reflects African roots. The term “bad hair” is not an insult itself, but it does connote uncleanliness and ugliness.

### **Hair Management Practices**

*“Me voy al salón, me recortan, me pasan el blower, ya, yo tengo pelo!”*  
“I go to the salon, they trim my hair, they blow it dry, now I have hair!”

For women in the Dominican Republic, hair is an accessory. It must be well-kept, and it must follow current trends. When talking about the pressure to manage their hair, the women I interviewed said, *“hay que hacerte un cambio, un look”* “you have to give yourself a change, a [different] look.” The “look” that one takes on is subject to heavy criticism. For example, one of my respondents stated that she likes to leave her hair down a lot. Because of this she receives criticism from her peers: *“La gente dicen que cuando las mujeres dejan su pelo suelto, están tratando de enamorar los hombres.”* “The people say that when the women leave their hair down, they are trying to attract men.” When I asked the women if they ever saw women wearing their hair in natural afros, all of them responded that yes, women do wear their hair naturally. Here is an example of that discussion:

Researcher: *“Hay mujeres que deciden dejar su pelo suelto y natural?”*  
Respondent: *“Si.”*  
Researcher: *“Por siempre?”*  
Respondent: *“No, porque cuando viene una moda todo el mundo la quiere.”*

Researcher: “Are there women who decide to leave their hair natural?”

Respondent: “Yes.”

Researcher: “Forever?”

Respondent: “No, because when a new style comes, the whole world wants it.”

On further discussion I found that the natural afro look had been in style a couple of months earlier for a few weeks. I also found that the afro style, encouraging girls and women in the Dominican Republic to sport a natural ‘fro came almost singularly from the popularity of a Dominican-American pop star, Amara. In the spring of 2013 Amara came out with the song “Ayy!”. The song begins: “*Soy Amara la Negra, los chicos me caen atras, no se si es mi pelo o mi forma de bailar*” “I am Amara, the black girl, the boys fall behind me, I don’t know if its my hair, or my form of dancing”. Shortly after the songs release Amara came out with a music video to accompany the song. The music video is remarkable for two reasons: one, the entire music video consists of scenes of her butt popping, and two, she is dancing while wearing an afro. This song rose to the top of the charts, as did her hairstyle and form of butt popping. When my respondents talked about the afro style, they did not use the word “afro”, they called it “Amara’s style”. When my respondents said that the afro style was popular, they meant that it was popular in reference to Amara. Amara, in popularizing the afro style, brought women and girls of the Dominican Republic to begin to respect their natural roots.

Hairstyle choices represent personality, but so much more is communicated through different hairstyles. When girls are young, their hair is generally managed by a family member or a neighbor. Their hair is brushed, separated into at least four separate sections, twisted, and tied with bobbles. Once girls are near puberty they invest more

time, money, and care into their hair. They buy a packet of fake hair, commonly known as a weave in the United States, and braid the fake hair into their natural hair.

Once girls have passed through puberty and are considered physically ready to initiate intimate relations, they begin to straighten their hair. They can do this in several manners. The cheapest option is to pass a hair blower through their locks, loop their hair on rollers and let it dry in the sun. This can be done at home or at a neighbors house, depending upon who has electricity and a hair dryer. The more sophisticated option is to add a hair treatment to the homemade hair solution. This hair treatment is a chemical that eats away at the hair, stripping away its outer layer and eliminating the wirey-ness of black hair. While it causes the hair to be very weak, it does create hair that looks finer. Others who do not have hair long enough to straighten braid their natural hair in lateral braids and then sew in extensions. The most expensive option is to have real human hair sewn into the scalp by a professional in a salon. There are women who go to the salon so often that they never wash their hair at home, and their natural hair never sees the light of day:

*“...hay mucha que le gusta, se quita los gruenos y se pone una capa, hasta que nadie sabe como su mono es, porque se van cambiando, y no paran...”*

“...there are a lot who like to take out their knots and put in extensions until no one knows how their real hair is, because they are always going about and changing their hair, they don't stop...”

The women told me that maintaining their hair is a lot of work and effort. Sometimes when they didn't have the energy, they said they would cover their hair with a scarf. However, overall the women are convinced that all of the work that is put into their hair is worth it:

*“Me tengo que lavar, tengo que alisarme, ponerme un tratamiento, ponerme un tinte, pasarme un blower, ve...que yo tengo un look que es mejor. Eso es que pasa.”*

“I have to wash my hair, I have to straighten it, I have to treat it, I have to dye it, pass the hair blower, see...that I have a look that is better. This is what happens.”

During my time spent in Batey El Prado I did not see much resistance to the hair care norm on the employee side. The women and girls I observed seemed to be much more focused on resisting their natural states of being—their “bad hair”. However, the women on the workers side did not observe the hair care norm. When I saw the women on the workers side they always had their hair natural and either pulled back or covered by a scarf. This was explained to me as a way to minimize the dirt and dust in their hair. There was very little acknowledgment of resistance to the hair care norm.

These normative hair care processes are identical to those of Dominican women. The Dominican aesthetic norm of straight hair is replicated amongst my respondents, which can be seen as evidence that Haitian heritage women in Batey El Prado have adopted Dominican presentation practices.

### **The Costs of the Hair Care Norm**

*“Aquí las mujeres gastan en el pelo. Para tener pelo bonito tiene que tener dinero.”*  
“Here women spend money on their hair. In order to have pretty hair, one has to have money.”

Modern technology means that good hair is something that every woman can achieve. But it comes with numerous costs, one of which is monetary. Women in Batey El Prado and all over the Dominican Republic invest money in their hair, and their partners also invest in their woman’s hair. My respondents say that on average, they



spend between six and eight thousand pesos, or between one hundred and fifty and two hundred dollars on their hair each month, depending on the styling choices they make.

On the conservative end, women will spend four thousand pesos on a hair treatment set that includes shampoo, conditioner and treatment. They will then spend seven hundred pesos on each bimonthly trip to the salon to straighten their hair. Those who have short hair buy a packet of extensions for five thousand pesos, spend two thousand in the salon to sew in the hair, and one thousand on a hair dye to make the extensions seem more natural.

For families that have more than one woman of age, the costs are extraordinary. One person working as an employee for Central Romana receives on average twelve thousand pesos a month. If a woman maintains her hair for the whole month, she conceivably uses the majority of the monthly paycheck. My respondents communicated the difficulty of managing the costs of maintaining their hair by stating in a variety of ways that, “*Hay personas que dejan de comer para ir al salon.*” “There are people who don’t eat in order to go to the salon.”

To maintain their hair in good form many women have to look for other sources of income. However, because of the lack of economic opportunity for women in Batey El Prado, isolated as it is, women look to men. One of my respondents said that, “*La mayoría de las muchachas tienen un novio para pagar para las uñas y todo de esa vaina.*” “The majority of the young girls have a boyfriend to pay for the nails and all of the [beauty] stuff.” When I asked other women about the dependency on men for money, they unequivocally agreed:

Researcher: *“Yo he escuchado que cuando una mujer esta buscando novio, hay una expectativa que el va a pagar para el salón...”*

Respondent: *“SI! Hasta para la ropa!”*

Researcher: “I have heard that when a woman is looking for a boyfriend, there is an expectation that he is going to pay for the salón...”

Respondent: “YES! Even clothing!”

Other women echoed the monetary expectations women have for their significant others:

*“Si tú tienes un novio y él quiere verte linda, él tiene que pagar para el salón. Todos los fines de semana, hay que entregarse 300 pesos para el salón.”*

“If you have a boyfriend and he wants to see you looking beautiful, he has to pay for the salon. Every weekend, he has to give you 300 pesos for the salon.”

The expectation that a male significant other will fund his woman’s salon needs is part of the communal culture of the island, as exhibited in the following account:

*“Si él tiene un trabajo y tú no, el novio tiene que ayudarte, si él te quiere. Ay mira mis uñas, tan feo, dame! Si no trabajo tú tienes que darme.”*

“If he has a job and you don’t, the boyfriend has to help out, if he loves you. Oh, look at my nails, so ugly, give me! If I don’t work, you have to give to me.”

When asked if this is a just relationship and whether it shows inequality or equality in the relationship the women responded that it is a relationship of equality because the man is given a job and the woman does not have the same opportunities. The man is obligated to support the woman because he has access to a job and the woman doesn’t. When a woman doesn’t have enough resources to care for herself or her children she is directly encouraged by family and community members to look for a man. This relationship of dependency is outright encouraged. It is such a common survival strategy that old women will shout at young women with nappy hair that they should be using their time in looking for a boyfriend.

Hair maintenance in this fashion is a vicious cycle. Once a woman begins treating her hair, she must continue or she will face the awful consequence of hair damage. All of the women I talked with in Batey El Prado mentioned how often hair falls out. This is a very traumatic experience that results from overtreating the hair, or, as they said, not keeping up with their hair treatments and trips to the salon. They called the state of hair loss “casco pelaba”—a peeling scalp.

*“Tienen que tratarlo bien, como que, si tu te alisas demasiada, hay alguna gente que se alisan demasiado y el pelo empieza a caer.”*

“They have to treat their hair well, because if you straighten your hair too much—there are people who straighten their hair too much—and the hair begins to fall out.”

The fear of hair loss perpetuates many myths about hair care. While I was practicing participant observation in the Batey I heard that women should be putting avocado, coconut, honey, beer, and all other sorts of substances in their hair to keep it healthy and strong. The lack of a real solution for hair loss contributes to the booming hair treatment market. One of my respondents told me about the time she bought a treatment that was sold in the streets:

*“Una vez me puse una que estaba vendido en la calle, y hizo que me quedaba ‘caco pelaba’ sin poco pelo, porque me cae todo el pelo. Luego mi madre tenía que comprarme el tratamiento y me fui aplicándolo hasta que mi pelo me quedaba en forma.”*

“One time I applied a treatment to my hair that was sold in the street, and it left me ‘casco pelaba’ with very little hair, because it all fell out. Then my mother had to buy me a treatment and I had to keep applying it until my hair didn’t fall out.”

Other women explained to me that when they were young they had long, healthy, fine European-looking hair. However when they moved to El Prado, the people of the Batey

fixed them with the evil eye, “*mal de ojo*” and their fine hair turned into the nappy hair that they have today.

*“Cuando era más pequeña antes de vivir aquí yo tenía el pelo bueno bueno. Hasta que me peinaba, de muchísimas formas. Pero cuando yo llegué aquí, me echaron el mal de ojo, pues mi pelo estaba muy malo. Yo tenía el pelo lacio..mi familia es de la raza de pelo fino. Entonces, a nosotros echaron mal de ojo.”*

“When I was young, before living here, I had very good hair. I could put it in many styles. But when I arrived here, they fixed me with the evil eye, so my hair became very bad. I had straight hair...my family is from the race with fine hair. So, they fixed us with the evil eye.”

In their explanations, the evil eye is when someone is complimented for some aspect of their appearance, and the statement “*Dios te bendiga*” —“God bless you” does not follow. As in most cultures around the world, the evil eye is a form of lust. If you feel that you have been fixed with an evil eye you can go to a shaman that lives in the Batey and he will bless you so that your hair continues growing normally. When asked if they truly believed in the evil eye, most said that they felt they had to believe in it because they had seen hair loss that could only be attributed to the evil eye.

Maintaining good hair is expensive—in monetary terms and otherwise. From semi-structured interviews and participant observation I found that the difficulty of maintaining hair care norms creates dependency on men and perpetuates superstitions.

### **Hair as a Status Attainment Strategy**

*“No pueden definir el pelo por la raza, porque últimamente, ya la gente van al salón y se alisan y ya tienen pelo bueno.”*

“They cannot define hair by race, because ultimately, people go to the salon and straighten their hair and now they have good hair.”

The majority of my respondents pointed out differences between Haitian and Dominican hair. They said that Haitian hair is ugly, knotty, unmanageable, and, ultimately, just bad hair. Dominican hair, by contrast, is hair that is straight, smooth, and

manageable. They said that, “*la gente no puede negar su raza, que se lo ve en el pelo*” “people can’t negate their race, it can be seen in the hair.” However, when pressed, my respondents explained that Dominicans and Haitians have the same hair in its natural state. The only difference is that Haitians and Dominicans treat and/or manage their hair differently.

*“El cabello de los Haitianos se anota por su trato, es grueso, es malo, es feo. Y los Dominicanos casi todos van al salón, hacen su tratamiento, y los Haitianos no.”*

“Haitian hair is noted for its treatment—it is thick, bad, and ugly. And the Dominicans, almost all of them go to the salon, they treat their hair, and the Haitians do not.”

This respondent asserts that there is a notable difference between Haitian and Dominican hair, but that the difference is rooted primarily in the treatment of the hair. She also makes a value statement. By calling Haitian hair ugly she distances herself from that population and groups herself with the Dominicans who go to the salon and treat their hair. Another respondent saw little difference between Haitian and Dominican hair in general, but noted the difference in treatment.

*Researcher: “Hay una diferencia entre el cabello Haitiano y el cabello Dominicano?”*

*Respondent: “No tanto, no, solamente que los Dominicanos van al salón y pasan blower, tenasan y todo de eso, pero lo Haitiano se lavan la cabeza, se ponen en rolos, y lo dejan hasta que lo seca.”*

Researcher: “Is there a difference between Haitian and Dominican hair?”

Respondent: “Not so much, no, only that the Dominicans go to the salon and use a hair dryer and treat their hair, but the Haitian washes her hair, puts it in rollers and leaves it until it dries.”

Another respondent asserted that Haitians and Dominicans have more in common than they do in difference.

Researcher: *“Hay una diferencia especifica que puedes ver?”*

Respondent: *“No, porque, fíjate, hay dominicanos que son morenitos, y hay dominicanos que son como blanco, también. Yo he visto mujeres con los ojos azules y el cabello largo, entonces, son haitianas y son blanquitas. Y uno se sorprende, pero hay tantas cosas que puedes ver en este mundo, y yo he visto que los haitianos también son blancos. Y yo no veo diferencia allí.”*

Researcher: “Is there a specific difference that you can see [between Haitians and Dominicans]?”

Respondent: “No, because there are Dominicans that are dark and there are Dominicans that are White. I have seen women with blue eyes and long hair who are Haitian and White. And one is surprised, but there are so many things that you can see in this world, and I have seen that Haitians are also White. I do not see any difference in that.”

In the quote above this respondent asserts that the diversity that is definitive of Dominicans is also present amongst Haitians. She claims that Haitians, like Dominicans are a mixed people, and that a physical difference between the two cannot be claimed.

Dominicans allot resources, time, and energy into straightening their hair.

Haitians in Batey El Prado do not. According to my respondents, the difference is cultural preference, but it is also a cultural preference that is predicated by lack of funds.

*“Alla arriba viven de la caña, pican la caña, pero en la semana cobran mil o mil quinientos pesos. Pero no es igual con los que cobran dos mil o tres mil. Cuál va a brindar más? No es mucho más, pero es más. Un mínimo. Pues, allá, cuando se alisan, se lo hacen una vez al mes o una semana si, otro no, pues su mono se parte. No tienen cuarto para seguir alisándose. Si tú te alisas, tienes que irse cada dos meses. Si no, se te parte.”*

“Up there above [in the batey] they live from sugar cane, they pick the cane, but in a week they earn one thousand to one thousand five hundred pesos. But it’s not the same with those that earn two or three thousand. Which is going to give more? It’s not a lot more, but it is more. A minimum. So, up there [in the batey] when they straighten their hair, they do it once a month or one week yes, the other week, no, and their hair begins to break. They don’t have money to continue straightening it. If you straighten your hair, you have to go [to the salon] every two months. If not, it breaks.”

Haitians in Batey El Prado simply do not have the financial capability to manage their hair the way that Dominicans typically do. The people on the workers' side are paid enough to survive each month. Employees are paid a little more each month, which enables them to enjoy a few luxuries that the workers of the Batey cannot afford. While the women who live on the employees side think of their trips to the salon as a necessity, in reality, they are a luxury to those who are from the workers side.

Despite the clear difference in resources and opportunity, the women I interviewed and passed time with in Batey El Prado viewed hair straightening as a sort of “equalizing” factor between diverse people. One woman said,

*“Hay personas que nacieron que el pelo bueno. Pero para las personas que no nacieron con el pelo bueno, se pueden ponerlo bueno.”*

“There are people that were born with good hair. But for the people who were not born with good hair, they can make their hair good.”

The possession of fine European hair—good hair—is expressed as a common desire for all women, and, by going to the salon; good hair can be achieved by all. Other respondents echoed the same sentiment. Everybody can have good hair, and if they are good Dominicans, they will have good hair. This means that for those whose ancestry is part Haitian, hair straightening is a way to improve status. One of my respondents stated:

*“Yo soy Haitiana de sangre, pero yo nací aquí. No es igual de aquellos que vienen de Haití y yo. Porque yo tengo las costumbres Dominicanas. Si yo dejo mi pelo, mucho más van a criticar por el cabello y decir que soy Haitiana.”*

“I am Haitian by blood, but I was born here. It's not the same for those that come straight from Haiti. Because I have the Dominican customs. If I leave my hair [natural], many more people are going to criticize for the hair [that I have] and tell me that I am Haitian.”

This respondent, in straightening her hair can assert her Dominican identity and successfully avert the “Haitian” label. The women I interviewed called having straight, fine hair being “Bien Dominicana”—the Dominican equivalent of “All American”. The follow-up focus group allowed me to explore this topic more in depth, and I found that all the women believe that by straightening their hair, they can achieve a more Dominican look. Thus, hair can be used as a status achievement strategy.

### **Privilege and Class**

While the women were happy to talk about hair and its relation to race, our conversations almost always took a turn towards class and privilege. When talking about Dominicans and Haitians one of my subjects said, “*Tenemos preferencia, y ellas se sienten mal.*” “We [the Dominicans] have preference, and they [the Haitians] feel bad.” However, when asked about how Haitians are treated in the Batey itself, the women responded that Haitians are treated very well because almost everyone has Haitian blood. The positive response did not change when I pointed out that all the Haitians directly from Haiti live on the destitute side of the community that is called the Batey, while Haitian-Dominicans enjoy an easier lifestyle on the other side. They thought that in general (in the DR) Haitians are treated badly, but that their treatment in El Prado is fine. When asked how the Haitian-Dominicans—the *arrayanos* are treated, the women said that they are treated almost the same as Haitians. They are treated with respect in El Prado, but outside of El Prado are subject to prejudice.

What my respondents consistently stated was “*Aquí dan preferencia a los que no son de aquí*”. “Here they give preference to those that are not from here.” This statement does not apply to Haitians—it applies to tourists, business owners, and all other



foreigners that come to the Dominican Republic with enough money to buy a little bit of the island. One respondent indignantly asked me about the beauties of the Dominican Republic, asserting that I, being a foreigner, would be more likely to know and understand Dominican beaches, waterfalls, caves, and resorts better than she would.

When she talked about a resort near the tourist town of Barbaro she asked me,

*“Tu eres de allá, yo soy de aquí, yo nací aquí, este es mi país, pero porque tú puedes entrar y yo no, porque tú eres blanca? No, yo voy a entrar.”*

“You are from out there, I am from here, I was born here, this is my country, but why can you enter, and not I? Because you are white? No, I’m going to enter.”

The narratives of my respondents brought to mind W.E.B. Du Bois’ words: “To be a poor man is hard, but to be a poor race in a land of dollars is the very bottom of the hardships” (1903: 133). If a social hierarchy ladder of the Dominican Republic was designed, foreigners from developed countries would be on the top rung, along with the Dominican elite, the second rung would be the small middle class, and the third rung would be the Dominican poor. On the lowest rung are the Haitians.

Presentation practices directly reflect class differences. Women who can afford to visit the salon once a week are able to achieve a better look, which is the equivalent of a more Dominican look. Women who can afford to go every once in a while risk having their hair fall out from lack of treatment, and they also have gaps in their hair management process, during which they use scarves to cover their hair. Women who do not have the money to go to the salon attempt to achieve the same look through homemade remedies. Women who are impoverished are more concerned with eating than they are with managing their hair. These class differences have significant hold in a

country in which 3.5 million of its 10.2 million habitants are living below the poverty line (Central Intelligence Agency).

This discussion shows that the capacity that women have to engage in hair management practices is directly related to consumption capacity. Those who have a greater capacity to participate in the capitalist system are able to accomplish a more beautiful and a “more Dominican” look. Normative hair care practices communicate class and status in a way that is difficult to negate.

CHAPTER V  
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

**Summary of Problem Statement, Methods, and Findings**

The current research concerning Dominican hair presentation practices is split between two camps—that of Candelario who argues that hair management is a way to hide racial blackness, and that of Murray and Ortiz, who argue that hair management practices are not racialized and do not support a Eurocentric standard of beauty. The current research available neglects to consider Haitian heritage residents of the Dominican Republic, who constitute a minor, though significant, portion of the population. According to the literature on Dominican identity, Haitians represent the antithesis of Dominican identity, yet, as a minority group in the Dominican Republic, Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans are actively engaged with normative Dominican presentation practices concerning national and racial identity. Examining presentation practices of race and national identity among this group is an opportunity to mend the rift in the current literature, and to understand how Haitian heritage residents manage Haitian and Dominican norms of racial and national presentation.

This study is accomplished through the investigation of hair styling rituals of women living in Batey El Prado, in the Eastern region of the country. The study analyzes data from ten semi-structured interviews, one follow-up focus group, and participant observation.

The research results show that presentation practices of hair styling and hair management reflect race, social class, and nationality. I found that amongst my respondents, the normative hair presentation practices are nearly identical to that of the dominant Dominican culture. Additionally, I found that the difficulty of maintaining these hair care norms creates dependency on men and perpetuates superstitions.

A Eurocentric/Asiatic beauty ideal exists among the population studied, expressed through the terminology of good hair. “*Pelo malo*” “bad hair” is used by the respondents as a term for hair that is hard to manage. Other researchers have asserted that bad hair is a racialized and derogatory term (Candelario 2007; Murray and Ortiz 2012). My respondents did not consider it a derogatory term. They considered it simply a term synonymous with hair that is difficult to manage. However, from narrative accounts and descriptions of the “evil eye” it is clear that it is a negatively charged term, associated with ugliness, uncleanliness, racial blackness, and the lower class. During observation hours I saw older sisters and mothers braiding the hair of girls between the ages of three and five, all the while complaining about the “bad hair”. How can a girl hear how “bad” her hair is from three years old on, and not be affected? While Dominicans may be accustomed to this treatment, I am not, and if I had heard that my hair was “bad” from a young age, I would accumulate a deep sense of shame about my hair. While my respondents insist that the term itself is not derogatory, I would argue that it is a racialized term with an attached negative stigma.

Through the interview narratives and the follow-up focus group, I found that hair styling techniques are a way to hide racial blackness, and for my respondents, to assert a Dominican identity. Thus, hair management practices allow women to manage how

others perceive their racial and national identity. These presentation practices allow the women of Batey El Prado to avoid the stigma of blackness and the Haitian label. While the unique environment of the batey community does not apply to the Dominican Republic as a whole, this finding does hold potential implications for Haitian-Dominicans throughout the country. If this population uses hair as a status attainment strategy within an environment that is majority Haitian, how might Haitian-Dominicans act under direct pressure to conform from Dominican neighbors?

The ability to accomplish good hair through hair styling practices is intricately linked with class and privilege. Presentation practices reflect the Dominican social hierarchy, with foreigners from the developed world on the highest rung and Haitians on the bottom. Taking into account the previous finding, this means that presentation practices pose a quandary to women living in the Dominican Republic. Because the quality of hair styling is directly related to wealth and class, normative presentation practices maintain the status quo. However, complying with dominant presentation practices allows women a status attainment opportunity. This means that women can use hair styling strategically as a status attainment strategy, but only insofar as is within their socioeconomic reach.

### **Conclusions**

This study was able to fill two gaps in the literature. First, it supports the previous conclusions drawn by Ginetta E. Candelario, and challenges the thesis of Gerald Murray and Marina Ortiz in their recent book *“Pelo Bueno, Pelo Malo”* (2012). As I state in the introduction, addressing this particular rift in the literature is important because of the implications each conclusion draws about the situation of race in the Dominican

Republic. If Murray and Ortiz are right to consider the relationship between presentation practices and race nonexistent, then racial identity is not acted out in every day presentation, and racial profiling should not exist. Indeed, Murray and Ortiz suggest that racism and racial tension is part of the Dominican past, but not the present, something that I find absurd considering how racial profiling is a distinct part of anti-Haitian discrimination.

My findings show that race is far from being an issue of the past, as Murray and Ortiz claim. My respondents referred to race and skin color as one of the most predictive elements of opportunity in their lives. People with lighter skin will have more life chances than people with dark skin. But my respondents included hair type as a secondary racial characteristic that can redeem dark skin and also “lighten” racial Blackness. Respondents also racialized national identities, claiming that Haitians have racially Black hair and Dominicans have racially White hair. However, when pressed, respondents admitted that Haitians and Dominicans have the same hair, but the difference between the two is how they treat their hair—the normative presentation practices. The respondents then explained that if they straighten their hair, following Dominican hair care practices, they can assert a Dominican identity (perceived as racially White) and fewer people will accuse them of being Haitian (perceived as racially Black). These testimonies show that the link between Dominican hairstyling and race is valid, if not fundamental.

Murray and Ortiz deny the racial element of Dominican hair care practices, citing interview transcripts in which their respondents stated that they straighten their hair because it is more beautiful and manageable that way. My research challenges that

finding. After having lived in the Dominican countryside for over a year I know that Dominicans do not interpret their hair in a racial light. However, they do interpret hair as “Dominican” or “Haitian”. In this complex context it is important to acknowledge the country’s racial history in which the concepts of race and nation are intertwined. Here the term “Haitian” is synonymous with “Black”. I do not doubt that Murray and Ortiz’s respondents reported their data correctly. I doubt that they accounted for the understanding Dominicans have of race and nation. By accomplishing my research in a different context among a population of Haitian-Dominicans I have been able to tap into a different perspective on the matter. My conclusions support those of Ginetta Candelario and the general research consensus. I conclude that presentation practices (through the medium of hair) are intricately linked with race and racial identity management.

The second gap within the literature that this research fills is that this study offers an understanding of how a group of Haitian-Dominicans manage dominant Dominican presentation practices, of which there is very little academic research. In respect to race theories, the findings from this study support assimilation theories. While race in the Dominican Republic is almost certainly best understood from a Racial Formation perspective, my study population—Haitian-Dominicans living in Batey El Prado—is evidence that some Haitian-heritage residents of the Dominican Republic are adopting norms of the host society. My research specifically concerns presentation practices, but considering the consequences for Haitian-Dominicans who emphasize their Haitian ancestry, I would not be surprised if this population also adopts other Dominican-held

norms. These results offer data that provides a foundation for further research on the topic.

### **Recommendations**

The research concerning Dominican presentation practices is limited, but the research concerning Haitians living in the Dominican Republic is almost non-existent. This study provides a preliminary look at presentation practices among this population. However, the batey community is an environment that does not apply to the rest of the country. This research was conducted with a small population in a batey in the Eastern region of the country. Further research on the topic is required to establish the prevalence of Haitian acculturation to Dominican society, especially in areas that are close to the Haitian-Dominican border and may have more resistance to Dominican-held norms.

This research has pointed out several other research opportunities. For example, it was not within the capabilities of this research to properly examine the direct benefits of attaining good hair. How does good hair relate to life chances in the Dominican Republic? (i.e. poverty, educational advantages, career attainment, marriage, salary, etc.) More statistical research is needed to conclude the direct benefits of having good hair. Additionally, considering my finding that Dominican-Haitians use Dominican hair styling as an attempt to assert Dominican identity, future research could look at the success of these attempts to integrate into Dominican society and gain social mobility. I hope that this research inspires new studies to investigate what hair “says” about our daily lives and our group, as well as personal, ideologies.



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## APPENDIX A

### SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW GUIDE

1. “Can you tell me how you and your family came to live in this batey in the Dominican Republic?”  
*“Podría decirme como usted y su familia vinieron a vivir en este batey?”*
2. “Would you say that you are Dominican or Haitian?”  
*“Dirías que usted es Dominicana o Haitiana?”*
3. “How can you tell the difference between a Haitian and a Dominican?”  
*“Que es la diferencia entre una Haitiana y una Dominicana?”*
4. “Is Haitian hair different from Dominican hair? If so, how, and why?”  
*“El cabello Haitiano es diferente que el cabello Dominicano? Como que si? Porque?”*
5. “In the Dominican Republic some people classify hair as bad hair or good hair. Do they use these terms here? What does the term good hair mean? What does the term bad hair mean?”  
*“En la Republica Dominicana alguna gente clasifican cabello usando las palabras pelo malo/pelo bueno. Usan estas palabras aquí en este sitio? Que significa pelo bueno? Que significan pelo malo?”*
6. “Can you please describe the different ways that women wear their hair here?”  
*“Podría describir los estilos de modo de cabello aquí?”*
7. “What do women have to do in order to wear their hair this way?” (more specifically refer to money, time, and resources if women are confused by this question)  
*“Que tienen que hacer para mantener su pelo así?”*
8. “Are there women who decide not to do this?” Alternative question if this does not apply: “Is there a stigma here against grown women wearing their hair naturally?”  
*“Hay mujeres que deciden no seguir los estilos de modo? Hay una estigma en contra las mujeres que tienen el pelo natural?”?”*

9. “Some people say that hair is a reflection of race, what do you think about that?”  
*“Algunas personas dicen que el cabello es un reflejo de la raza. Que usted piensa de eso?”*
10. “Have you ever felt judged by your hair? Can you describe any specific example of this?”  
*“En su vida, has sentido juzgada por su cabello? Podría describir un ejemplo o incidencia específico de eso?”*
11. “Some people say that you can change how other people see you by changing your hairstyle. What do you think about this?”  
*“Alguna gente dicen que puede cambiar como te vean por cambiar el estilo de cabello?”*
12. “If you were to go to the capital to apply for a professional job, how would you wear your hair?”  
*“Si usted fuera a la capital para aplicar por un puesto profesional, como haría su cabello?”*

## APPENDIX B

### FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. “How do Dominicans treat Haitians in El Prado?” *“El dominicano, como se trata al Haitiano aquí en El Prado?”*
2. “In the DR in general?” *“..en la Republica Dominicana en general?”*
3. “How do Haitians treat Dominicans in El Prado?” *“El Haitiano, como se trata al Dominicano aquí en El Prado?”*
4. “In the DR in general?” *“..en la Republica Dominicana en general?”*
5. “How do they treat the *arrayanos*?” *“Como se tratan a los arrayanos?”*
6. “Do they give preference to the Dominicans here in El Prado?” *“Dan preferencia a los Dominicanos aquí en El Prado?”*
7. “In the country in general?” *“..en el país en general?”*
8. “If you have Dominican customs, you straighten your hair?” *“Si tú tienes las costumbres dominicanas, tú te alisas?”*