

## Suspicious Movements: Diaspora, Queer & Deferred Belonging in the Dominican Republic

*Movimientos sospechosos: diáspora, queer y; la pertenencia pospuesta en la República Dominicana*

*Mouvements suspects: diaspora, queer et; appartenance reportée en République Dominicaine*

Mónica Espaillat Lizardo\*

### Abstract

What makes us belong or cease to belong to a state, to a society? What transforms us into the “other”? The author analyzes how identities that fall outside the norm viewed as acceptable by those in power become targets for discrimination, segregation, and false divisions among communities. The article reflects on how a rich and diverse queerness challenges the discourse of a uniform citizenship, which is ultimately a discourse that promotes foundational prejudices for an anti-Black and anti-queer project in the Dominican Republic.

**Key words:** diaspora, queer, otherness, discrimination

### Resumen

¿Qué nos hace pertenecer o dejar de pertenecer a un Estado, a una sociedad? ¿Qué nos convierte en “otro”? La autora analiza cómo las identidades que salen de las normas que el poder considera aceptables se constituyen en blanco de discriminación, segregación y falsas divisiones en las comunidades. Sus reflexiones ahondan en cómo la riqueza y diversidad de lo *queer* reta la narrativa de una ciudadanía uniforme, que es, a fin de cuentas una narrativa que promueve los prejuicios que sientan la base para un proyecto anti negro y anti “queer” en la República Dominicana.

**Palabras clave:** diaspora, queer, otredad, discriminación.

\* Estudiante de doctorado en Historia en el Centro Boham para Estudios en Diversidad Sexual (Canadá).

## Résumé

Qu'est-ce qui nous fait appartenir ou cesser d'appartenir à un État, une société? Ce qui nous fait devenir "l'autre"? L'auteur analyse comment les identités qui échappent aux normes que le pouvoir considère acceptables devient en cibles de discrimination, de ségrégation et de fausses divisions dans les communautés. L'essai réfléchit comment la richesse et la diversité de queerness défie la récit de la citoyenneté uniforme, qui est en fin de compte un récit partial qui jettent les bases d'un projet anti-noir et anti-queer dans la République dominicaine.

**Mots-clé:** diaspora, queer, alterité, discrimination

## Introduction

What unravels here into a meditation, both an existential and intellectual proposition is resultant in messy degrees of my own intimate geographies propelled into studied un/learning, propelled into un/belonging, propelled by the ethical consideration urged by Haitian anthropologist Michel Rolph-Trouillot. Trouillot exhorts the intellectual to think critically about "the relation between scholarship and political responsibility."<sup>1</sup> The propositions that follow are a working draft of my response to Trouillot's call. At the risk of losing disciplinary credibility from the capital H discipline of History, I note here that I am not a historian politically disinterested, disinvested, nor disembodied from the histories I am attempting to approximate. In *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* Jacqui Alexander calls our attention to the "archaeologies of dominance" marked by "the will to divide and separate."<sup>2</sup> Though systematized, the hegemony of these disproportionately violent archaeologies is not total. Alexander points to the "reciprocal investments we must make to cross over into a metaphysics of interdependence" and I would like to suggest that to arrive at the metaphysical space of interdependence we must traverse the murky *physical* space of archives of power and the relationalities they materialize.<sup>3</sup> Here I am reading colonial archives, state archives, the discipline's 'traditional' archive, as archives of power.

What we say about the past matters, importantly though only in part, because it a/e/ffects our shared present, it conditions the way violence

1 Michel-Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1995).

2 M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Duke University Press, 2006): 6.

3 Ibid.

and access are dispersed. Trouillot suggests that the past is both a *place* and a *position*. It is a place that, while important unto itself, no historian can ever visit except by approximation, by rigorous (re)readings of its remnants and by ethical triangulations of archives, voices, and legitimacies, an applied historical practice that might be the tools of Alexander's "rememory."<sup>4</sup> It is irrevocably true that the past is important unto itself. Our intellectual, affective, and bodily relationship to the past, our current terrains of life and living are overwhelmingly conditioned by the past as *position*. The past as position is defined by the ideological and political imperatives and motives that read the past in particular ways to facilitate (ensure) a particular present. Thus, a great extent of our relationship to the past is as position. Then, how are we to read the archive, particularly archives of power defined by what Stephanie Smallwood terms "mathematical reasoning," what Riley Snorton calls "logics of accumulation?"<sup>5</sup> How do we approach and read through archives knowing that they are always already a curated bundle of omissions, silences, opacities, and fractures? If "hegemony works as a spectacle but more importantly as a set of practices that come to assume meaning in people's everyday lives," and if hegemony is performed by "ordinary people [doing] the work of the state" and its predecessors than this is both a problematic and a possibility.<sup>6</sup> History and the work of historians, outside and within academic institutions, can be a practice of hegemony. But as the work of Alexander, Trouillot, Smallwood, Lucille Mathurin Mair, Mimi Sheller, Sidney Mintz, Elsa Goveia, and others amongst them evidence, it does not have to be. Where then are we left and where are we to go? Edouard Glissant suggests we might "return to the point from which we started...a return to the point of entanglement, from which we were forcefully turned away."<sup>7</sup> The suggestions that follow are a preliminary attempt to refine the tools necessary for this return.

The methodologies of return and the returning at stake in this analysis (a re/turn towards the point of entanglement) take the lead from the work of Keguro Macharia who notes their "thinking emerges from and tries to inhabit the s/place between an ungeography called Africa and a deracination called the black diaspora."<sup>8</sup> Macharia highlights that

4 Alexander, 14, 16.

5 Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* (Harvard University Press, 2008): 2. C. Riley Snorton, *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017): viii.

6 Alexander, 5.

7 Edouard Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays, CARAF Books: Caribbean and African Literature translated from the French* (University of Virginia Press, 1999): 26.

8 Keguro Macharia. "On Being Area-Studied: A Litany of Complaint." In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 22, No. 2 (2016): 186.

“from this s/place, archives become tricky.”<sup>9</sup> The ‘trickiness’ of archives and archival excavation in uprooted and up/un/routed spaces thus necessitates a different type of historical approach. An approach that is able to read return as a form of *future*-making thus rupturing, undoubtedly painfully, notions of return that function as what Glissant terms processes of reversion, an “obsession with a single origin,” or attempts to return to some true or immutable origin. Glissant holds that these attempts are always already “too late” and thus “not satisfactory.”<sup>10</sup> In *Caribbean Discourse* Glissant proposes two dangerous tendencies of transplanted (“deported”) populations.<sup>11</sup> The first, as described above, is reversion. The second of these dangerous tendencies, diversion, is “the ultimate resort of a population whose domination by an Other is concealed.”<sup>12</sup> When the source of oppression successfully makes itself invisible or mundane the oppressed search elsewhere for the roots and causes of their suffering. This search furthers them (us) from the “point of entanglement,” the only cathartic return available for the transplanted, one that is about re/memory and continued and continual becoming (creolization as catharsis).

In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* Trouillot issues an ominous warning that poignantly highlights the conditions that offset diversion. Trouillot notes that “the ultimate mark of power may be its invisibility” while “the ultimate challenge [remains] the exposition of its roots.”<sup>13</sup> Examining the ways that archives of power function as technologies of oppression elucidates the ways their construction and uses adroitly *estrange* the transplanted from the point of entanglement. They attempt, literally, to make strangers of and between the transplanted and history (as past and future). So then what is this different type of historical approach necessitated by these “tricky” archives, how might return become future making? Imagining new forms of legibility to approach Macharia’s tricky archives may allow for the imagining of new non-hegemonic historical approaches where tricky archives offer sites to contest the violent logics of archives of power that facilitate reversion and diversion and perpetually estrange from the point of entanglement.<sup>14</sup> I will return to this point further in the analysis to think through the alternative forms of reading encouraged by Macharia’s tricky archives.

9 Ibid.

10 Glissant, 17-19.

11 Glissant, 9.

12 Glissant, 20.

13 Michel Rolph Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press, 1995): xix.

14 Macharia, 186. Glissant, 21.

Alongside Macharias's ungeography of Africa and the Black diaspora I also place focus on the process of queering. Here I am imagining the process of queering as a process that marks the mundane for exclusion via a rhetoric of difference and degeneracy. I am proposing an analysis that imagines the process of queering, making strange to, as a state systematized process undertaken to mark and make vulnerable potential citizens it does not wish to include within its imaginary. By examining the work of notions of diaspora and the process of queering alongside the state's project of nation-making I suggest that the state not only makes use of mobilities (affective and material notions of diaspora) but engineers and enforces them as part of a eugenicist nation-making project (the process of queering). Diaspora and queer are identity categories, but when moved from the register of identity and applied as tools of reading state power and logic they serve as analytical tools that rearrange notions of suspicious movements off of the bodies of 'devious subjects' and onto the state and its formation processes. This move then is a shift between diaspora and queer *as a way of being* to diaspora and queer *as a way of seeing* (analyzing/reading power). This is not to suggest that they cannot be both at once. Yet, if these ways of being, reading oneself as part of a Black diaspora and/or as Queer, were offset by the structured violence of the state and its predecessors then turning these logics back on to the state might serve as a useful way to expose the very logic and processes that created the possibilities for these identarian spaces to coalesce in the first place. It is, as Glissant posits, a method that attempts a return to the point of entanglement, not the place of some immutable origin, but the place of laying bare the formulations and methods of relationality; here the relation between the Dominican Republic's state apparatuses and the bodies of *impossible citizens*, Dominicans of Haitian descent and Trans Dominicans.

Trouillot asserts that "History is the fruit of power."<sup>15</sup> Here attention is focused on the process of construction (the archive, historical narratives) thus destabilizing the idea of history as narrative told and received as uncontestable truth. Because "power itself is never so transparent that its analysis becomes superfluous" it is imperative to undertake historical work that proceeds from a denaturalization of power. In using diaspora and queer/ing as a way of seeing, a way of disentangling obfuscated logics and collapsed processes, I want to understand their relationship to the project of nation-state formation and citizen (un)making in the Dominican Republic, in this way I am attempting to return to the point of entanglement. This imperative is a part of a larger and unfolding project

---

15 Trouillot, 5. Emphasis my own.

that examines the time period from 1931, the beginning of the Trujillo dictatorship, to 2012, the year before the denationalization of hundreds of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent. By momentarily disrupting diaspora and queer as identities and turning them inside out to posit them as spaces of *identification*, marking by the state for exclusion, I attempt to take up and respond to the challenges posed by Trouillot and Alexander in the doing of a history that focuses on making visible the operations that create the Dominican citizenry and its concomitant margins. I am proposing this “way of seeing” methodology as a response to a specific geographic and temporal context. Though this form of analysis may offer some utility within other spaces and places its formulation was a response to the tensions faced in studying a very particular history (though, as Antonio Benitez Rojo notes, the Caribbean is a “repeating island”). I would like to first provide a contextualization of the history under investigation and core research methods as a way to begin emplacing the work that diaspora and queer as a “way of seeing” might do. Following this contextualization, I would like to develop a working definition of diaspora and queer as a “way of seeing.” From this outline I move to offer a modest sketch of how this “way of seeing” methodology might be used and how I imagine it within my own forthcoming work. The work takes up the tool of diaspora and queer as a “way of seeing” to examine how (1) The Archive, (2) The Cédula/The Citizen ID Card, and (3) National Symbols have been both a part of a eugenicist nation making project and contested and reimagined by the very impossible citizens the state marks for exclusion.

### **The capital H in Dominican history**

In 1931, less than a year into what would be a 61-year dictatorship, Rafael Leónidas Trujillo made it a legal requirement for all adult Dominican men to pay for and carry a citizen I.D. card (*cédula*). The requirement was violently enforced. Historical records note thousands of imprisonments made as punishment for failing to pay for and carry the *cédula*. Dominican historian Alejandro Paulino noted that “no citizen errand was possible without having and showing a *cedula*, this meant that socio-political life and the exercise of fundamental rights were limited by the referenced document.”<sup>16</sup> The document was the first of its kind in the

16 Alejandro Paulino, “Mecanismos de Trujillo para la represión política: una *cédula* para recaudar, perseguir y controlar a opositores,” in *Acento* (September 2018). <https://acento.com.do/2018/cultura/8603932-mecanismos-trujillo-la-represion-politica-una-cedula-recaudar-perseguir-controlar-opositores-6/>

Dominican Republic, one of the first within Latin America and globally. The first iteration of the document noted the citizen's name, residential address, "skin type," and ability to read amongst other referents. With every iteration of the *cédula* these categories change yet "skin type" remains until 2012, one year before the denationalization of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent, a legal battle offset after Juliana Pierre, a Dominican born national of Haitian descent, was denied a *cédula*. The categories of "sex" and "marital status" were only introduced in the 1941 iteration after it became a legal requirement for all adult women to also pay for and carry a *cédula*. The introduction of this document (1931) and its evolution throughout the Trujillo dictatorship (1930-1961) and beyond reveal a great deal about how the citizen was imagined, what the state was interested in knowing about its citizenry, and, how and why these interests might be changing. No extensive study of the Dominican *cédula* exists to this day. Thus, we have only begun to understand how the (body of the) citizen was codified by and on the *cédula*.

A genealogical inquiry of the *cédula* is useful in understanding the construction of the Dominican citizenry. Though momentous, the introduction of the *cédula* should be understood as only one aspect within a larger eugenicist nation making project. A project that, in the Dominican Republic, as in much of Latin America, began before Trujillo's ascent to power though it quickly intensified under his rule. Eugenicist ideas have shaped the ideological, discursive, legal, and social spheres of *Dominicanidad*. This eugenicist nation making project mobilized various tools and methods in order to work towards the creation of an ideal citizenry. I want to suggest that primary amongst these are (1) the formalization of the Dominican historical imaginary (2) the introduction of legal and institutional surveillance structures aimed at controlling and educating the citizen (3) the construction of a shared social identity.

These sites of analyses allow me to gesture towards the following: (1) there is, as Lorgia Garcia-Peña suggests, an "erasure of racialized Dominican subjects from the nation and its archive," and, "a prevalence of anti-Haitianism in the Archive of Dominicanidad," (2) the citizen, as per the *cedula*, can be *Blanco* (white), *Moreno* (tan), *Trigueño* (the color of wheat), *Indio* (Indian color) but is rarely ever *Negro* (black), and, heterosexism is not only privileged, but enforced, and, (3) the rights of national symbols are often greater than the rights of certain impossible citizens.<sup>17</sup>

17 Lorgia Garcia-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction* (Duke University Press, 2016): 1.

Of course a citizen or subject is never quite the sum of its enforced parts but is also always in excess of them. It is somewhere within these geographies of lack and excess that citizenship is, in messy and contradictory ways, lived. In an attempt to access not only the ‘facts’ of citizenship construction but, its performances, embodiments, and contestations I turn to the embodied oral archive of Trans Dominicans and Dominicans of Haitian descent. Trans Dominicans and Dominicans of Haitian descent have been historically frustrated in their attempts to access citizenship. I have been told, at the Dominican National Archives that, “*that* doesn’t exist here,” *that* being LGBTQ and Dominico-Haitian histories. The attempts made by Trans Dominicans and Dominicans of Haitian descent to access a *cédula* have always been difficult if at all possible, because of their perceived racial, gender, and sexual identities. There are countless examples of public personalities claiming that the national symbols suffer “disrespect” at their being wielded by Trans Dominicans and Dominicans of Haitian descent, spaces often read as degenerate or anti-national.

Dominicans of Haitian descent and Trans Dominicans were and continue to be forcibly kept in motion, in a place of non-arrival, through the denial of an archival persona in the state’s national archives, a *cédula*, and, access to wield the patriotic symbols of the nation which serve as ideological markers of the inside/outside of *Dominicanidad*. Though I recognize that Dominicans of Haitian descent and Trans Dominicans were and remain bodies in motion, across and through state sponsored notions of propriety, desirability, and profitability, it is the state’s logic of mobility, exclusion through deferral, that I consider here. What analytically unifies these groups is precisely the 20th and 21st century Dominican nation’s logic of mobility, one that seeks to bar access to any formal claim on networks of belonging, it is the deferral of their inclusion that renders their exclusions from citizenship as parallel processes.

### **The Problematics/Presentation of the Problem (Diaspora and its correlates)**

As I have attempted to put these ideas into words I have struggled with a number of questions. Is the notion of diaspora a religious one, psychic, metaphysical, social, political? What does the concept of diaspora give us to further understand our realities? What work does diaspora and queer/ing do, and for whom? Read as affective identarian spaces of sutured kinship and belonging, across, through, and beyond a sense of loss, diaspora and queer are arguably categories that keep us alive (in



psychic and material ways). They are Cesaire's "racial geography," an alternative imagining of "the map of the world...coloured not with the arbitrary colours of schoolmen but with the geometry of my spilt blood."<sup>18</sup> They are by and for those most dispossessed by colonial projects (past and present). As Alexander makes clear, "while differently located, both neo-imperial state formations...and neo-colonial state formations (those that emerged from the colonial "order" as the forfeiters to nationalist claims to sovereignty and autonomy) are central to our understandings of the production of hegemony;" to understand this hegemony it is crucial to highlight the "role of the imperial in transforming the national."<sup>19</sup> That is to say national projects, states, are an iteration of the colonial project not a contestation of it. As Glissant poignantly asserts, "the colonizers launch their creations in the political arena."<sup>20</sup> Michel Foucault suggest that we see "things not in terms of the replacement of a society of sovereignty by a disciplinary society and the subsequent replacement of a disciplinary society by a society of government... [but rather, turns us to the reality of a] triangle sovereignty-discipline-government, which has as its primary target the population."<sup>21</sup> Glissant concisely suggests that we return to the point of entanglement, the processes of colonial world making that gave birth to the Black Atlantic, the point that conditions all futures and potential ideological and material realities. It is a point (process) that made and continues to make us even as it is made invisible (remember here Trouillot's warning about the greatest power of power). We are somehow both at the point of entanglement, living its enmeshed and complex realities, and intentionally kept estranged from it via erroneous formulations of time and progress that feed us inadequate antidotes to our colonial maladies (the state and its nationalisms are here both malady and symptom).

Then, what work does diaspora and queer/ing do, and for whom? Additionally, how might we reconsider the uses and meanings of diaspora and queer/ing to assess what other forms of analysis this concept allows for? If read as affective identarian spaces they keep us alive how do we contend with the appositional and oppositional assertion that, read as logics of state sponsored power they are processes of other making, cate-

18 Aime Cesaire, *Return to my Native Land*, trans. John Berge and Anna Bostock (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1969),

19 Alexander, *Pedagogies*, 4. Jacqui M. Alexander, "Not Just (Any) Body can be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas," in *Feminist Review* 48, *The New Politics of Sex and the State* (1994): 7.

20 Glissant, 7.

21 Michel Foucault, *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon, Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 102.

gories of exclusion, ways of being marked for the outside. Read as logics of state sponsored power they are not only the original “deracination” but its echos, derivatives, and contemporary correlates.<sup>22</sup> The inside/outside at stake here is legal belonging. Within the logics of the modern state citizenship is conceived of as the end-point of legitimate belonging, which as much as we must continue to contest it, undeniably conditions intimate to global realities. As I develop this suggestion I continue to feel the weight of an uncertainty, a deep discomfort that is as much existential as it is intellectual. I feel caught in these seemingly irreconcilable contradictions. I am not arguing, at least I am not intending to argue, for fixity as resolution. I do not mean to suggest that we turn away from the categories of diaspora and queer as registers of belonging in favor of a state-centric reading of them as categories of exclusion. Glissant’s much necessary warning resounds. We must indeed “abandon the idea of fixed being. One of the most terrible implications of the ethnographic approach is the insistence on fixing the object of scrutiny in static time, thereby removing the tangled nature of lived experience and promoting the idea of uncontaminated survival.”<sup>23</sup> Yet, as I am attempting to, very clumsily, sort through these tensions, contradictions, and vertiginous realities I cannot but return to the realization that indeed the state does not relate benignly to any formulation of self and self within the community. While my intention is not to romanticize a place of arrival or to reify a legible type of belonging I am urged forward by the real material effects of non-arrival. But Glissant offers a way out, or perhaps more aptly, a way in. My concern here is not with the static time Glissant cautions against, rather, my analysis requires the paralleling of various temporalities, that of the state (colonial time), and that of those who traverse and contest the state to survive and belong in spite of it (perhaps something like maroon time). Additionally, I aim to highlight the imbricated nature of diaspora and queer as indentarian categories of survival and logics of marking for exclusion; these constitute each other in a formative if tense dialectic.

In *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* Saidiya Hartman shares a poignant realization, a pained realization that might perhaps offer the very catharsis she sought though in a different place (can there ever be catharsis in deracination?). Hartman shares that:

My friend from the *diaspora*,” was how Akam addressed me, in contrast to the group whom he called his brothers and sisters from the continent.

22 Macharia, 186.

23 Glissant, 14.

*Diaspora* was really just a euphemism for stranger, since for the most part, none of my colleagues, with the exception of Prof and Hannington, gave much thought to the way their history was enmeshed with mine, nor did they entertain the idea that the Africa in my hyphenated African-American identity had anything to do with their Africa. They made it clear: Africa ended at the borders of the continent.<sup>24</sup>

Via his address to Hartman Akam marked an inside and an outside. The inside, as Hartman notes, “ended at the borders of the continent” and the oceans that nestle it became the liminal space where outside begins and stretches outward seemingly always in a singular direction.<sup>25</sup> Yet being the “friend from the diaspora” also marks a doubled-inside. This doubled-inside coalesces from (1) its exteriority, here to Africa, and from (2) its interiority to “a shared deracination called the black diaspora.”<sup>26</sup> The stranger, the diasporic person, is estranged and strange both to “the ungeography called Africa” and to the diasporic community they are purportedly a part of.<sup>27</sup> In *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora* Stephanie Smallwood concisely points to this doubled-inside:

Atlantic commodification meant not only exclusion from that which was recognizable as community, but also immersion in a collective whose most distinguishing feature was its unnatural constitution: it brought strangers together in anomalous intimacy.<sup>28</sup>

Smallwood importantly notes that the “anomalous intimacy” of the passage across the Atlantic did not automatically make a community of those who survived the journey. Rather, community was something they became via violent yet productive processes of creolization.<sup>29</sup> Those who survived the Atlantic crossing “inhabited a new category of marginalization, one not of extreme alienation within the community, but rather of absolute exclusion from any community.”<sup>30</sup> As such becoming a community was a process that happened somewhere within this doubled-inside.

Before I proceed further in conceptualizing the doubled-inside of diaspora and how it might relate to more contemporary conceptions of the

24 Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2007): Chapter 12, “Fugitive Dreams,” 157. Emphasis mine.

25 Ibid.

26 Macharia, 186

27 Macharia, 186.

28 Smallwood, 101.

29 Smallwood, 101.

30 Smallwood, 30.

im/migrant. I want to offer a simple and admittedly simplistic formulation. If the Black diaspora is, at least in part, a result of a colonial project then: colonialism –diaspora (Black diaspora) . If the Dominican state is, at least in part, a continuation/iteration of a colonial project then: Dominican Republic (state formation)– internal diasporas (impossible citizens). It is these relationships and correlations that I am attempting to disentangle. If the Black diaspora, of which Dominicans are a part, stems from a deracination carried out by a colonial project, an alienation from a homeland that Glissant gestures can only be recovered as a future making (creolization) project then what can we say about internal diasporas? In the first instance, how do we move from thinking about the Black diaspora to considering internal diasporas? Additionally, when we interrogate how the state makes strategic use of notions of diaspora, via an implication of the elsewhere belonging of impossible citizens, how might we rearticulate and strategize around the state’s co-optation of our affective networks of survival and belonging?

Article 11 of the 1987 Haitian Constitution, still in force today, notes that “Any person born of a Haitian father or Haitian mother who are themselves native-born Haitians and have never renounced their nationality possesses Haitian nationality at the time of birth.”<sup>31</sup> This generous metric of conferring citizenship brings into the Haitian nation persons who themselves may have never crossed into the territorial boundaries of their parents country of origin. Thus, in this way these children, themselves the first generation in an elsewhere, are also rooted in the Haitian nation. The language mobilized in the Dominican Republic in and since the General Law on Immigration (No. 285-04) was passed in 2004 capitalizes on this Haitian constitutional notion of belonging to define who is and is not legally Dominican.

Since 1844 the Dominican Republic has promulgated 39 constitutions, the highest number of constitutions of any country in the region. Between 2002 and 2013 two constitutions along with adjacent legislation evidence the attack on Dominicans of Haitian descent and begin to muddle two distinct conversations, one about citizens and the other about immigrants. The 2002 constitution (Article 11) notes that citizenship is the right of “all persons who were born in the Republic’s territory with the exception of the legitimate children of foreign diplomats or those persons who are transiting through it” though it does not define in any way who is deemed in transit.<sup>32</sup> For the first time the 2004 General Law

31 Maria del Carmen Gress and Jefri J Ruchti, trans, *Haitian Constitution of 1987* (William S. Hein & Co, 2012), 6.

32 Constitución Política de la República Dominicana de 2002. Article 11-1. Transla-

on Immigration (No. 285-04) begins to define “transit” by noting that anyone under the category “The Non-Resident” is considered a “person in transit for the purposes of applying Article 11 of the [2002] Dominican Constitution.”<sup>33</sup> The “Non-Resident” category is divided into the following sub-categories: tourists, business persons, persons employed by any type of transportation company, travellers in transit to another final destination, temporary workers, border inhabitants who traverse the border for petty commerce but return to their place of residence (Haiti) daily, foreigners entering on a residence visa who will be formalizing their residency, [and] students.”<sup>34</sup> The 2004 General Law on Immigration thus dictates that the “Non-Resident” is in transit. Additionally, The General Law on Immigration sets forth a new protocol for “foreign Non-Resident women who during their stay in the country give birth.”<sup>35</sup> If the father of the child is Dominican the birth is to be registered within the Dominican Civil registry, otherwise “all health centers who render birthing assistance to any foreign woman who does not possess documentation that validates her status as a legal resident will be given a pink birth record, different than the Official Birth Certificate,” and the birth will be registered in a “book for foreigners” as opposed to the Dominican Civil Registry.<sup>36</sup> Together the 2002 Constitution and the 2004 General Law on Immigration create a slippage between the right of an immigrant to be in the Dominican territory, and the right of a child to Dominican citizenship via *jus solis* when their parents are not “in transit” as per the “Non-Resident” category.

While seemingly attempting to stabilize the violent slippage co-created by the 2002 Constitution and the 2004 General Law on Immigration the 2010 Constitution capitalizes on it. The 2010 constitution clarifies that Dominican citizenship was and is conferred on “all persons born in the national territory with the exception of the children of diplomats or consular emissaries or of foreigners in transit **or** who reside illegally in the Dominican territory.”<sup>37</sup> Explicitly and for the first time in Dominican history the 2010 constitution addresses the citizenship status of those born in the territory to non-legal persons. It is an addendum, a new ad-

---

tion mine.

33 Congreso Nacional de la República Dominicana, “Ley General de Migración, No. 235-04,” July 21, 2014: 19, 22.

34 Ibid.

35 Congreso Nacional de la República Dominicana, “Ley General de Migración, No. 235-04,” July 21, 2014: 18-19.

36 Congreso Nacional de la República Dominicana, “Ley General de Migración, No. 235-04,” July 21, 2014: 18-19.

37 Constitución Política de la República Dominicana, 2010. Article 18-3. Translation mine.

dition to the category of eligibility for legal belonging that betrays itself by noting that “foreigners in transit” are a category apart and different from “those who reside illegally.” It would be erroneous to treat the “or” of this articulation as merely semantic since the very legal document that creates it articulates it as a different category and way of being in the country. It recognizes, via omission versus admission, that undocumented folks were indeed not in transit, especially not across multiple generations of nationals born within the country’s territory. Yet the 2013 constitutional decree TC/0168/13, known widely as *La Sentencia*, *The Sentence*, made retroactive a legal rereading of “in transit” within the Dominican constitution. This rereading denationalized hundreds of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent who had been born in the country since 1929 many of whom held citizen ID cards, passports, and other government issued citizen documents that evidenced their status as Dominican nationals. *La Sentencia* notes that the undocumented population of “non-Haitian foreigners are 100,638 persons, while those of Haitian origin amount to 668,145 persons.”<sup>38</sup> It goes on to clarify that of the Haitian foreigners 458, 233 were born in Haiti, meaning that the remaining 209,912 “Haitian foreigners” were born in the Dominican Republic.<sup>39</sup> The systematized denationalization was presented as a plan of regularization of foreign nationals. The Dominican legal system greatly benefited, both semantically and legally, from the Haitian constitutions provision of citizenship to these newly denationalized Dominicans. As Nassef Perdomo Cordero notes, “That a person has the possibility to obtain citizenship in a country distinct to their place of birth cannot be the rational for arbitrarily stripping them of citizenship obtained by *jus soli*.”<sup>40</sup> Yet this allowed the Dominican Republic to defend itself against claims of violating international treaties of which it was a signatory, amongst these the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness.

With this contextualization I return to the question of how the state capitalizes on notions of diaspora (emotional, legal) to mark particular bodies as ‘outside’ or in motion and to thus keep them in a perpetual state of transit, enforced non-arrival. These perpetually transiting persons are kept in motion even across generations born in and as Dominican

38 República Dominicana Tribunal Constitucional, Sentencia TC/0168/13. 2013. Nassef Perdomo Cordero, “Análisis crítico de la sentencia TC/0168/13,” in *Memorias: Revista Digital de Historia y Arqueología desde el Caribe Colombiano* 12, No. 28 (2016): 110-111.

39 Ibid.

40 Nassef Perdomo Cordero, “Análisis crítico de la sentencia TC/0168/13,” in *Memorias: Revista Digital de Historia y Arqueología desde el Caribe Colombiano* 12, No. 28 (2016): 119.

citizens, they are never allowed to arrive at the legitimate point of formal legal belonging. Thus Dominican citizenship becomes (is) a violent deferred form of belonging for certain impossible citizens. How then do we think notions of diaspora, that are bigger and outside of the nation-state yet also somehow refracted by it, alongside formal state structures? And if notions of diaspora really do (and they really do!) keep us alive how do we contend with state intrusions into affective networks of belonging that are not codified by legal notions of belonging though they intersect with notions of *jus soli* and *jus sanguinis*?

In “The Disappearing of a Migration Category: Migrants Who Sell Sex” Laura Agustín critiques the tendency of diaspora studies to exclude current migrants “as though diaspora were something more profound or complex than mere migration.”<sup>41</sup> She cites Homi Bhabha’s depiction of postcolonial migrations where he notes the “major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees.”<sup>42</sup> For Agustín this list “appears to omit ordinary working migrants,” but there is no explanation of what makes some migrants “ordinary” as opposed to others that are seemingly extra or un-ordinary.<sup>43</sup> Inarguably the trade in human beings that created the Black Atlantic and its diaspora was indeed more deeply profound and complex than mere migration. The condition of being slave cargo bound for the Americas “laid the groundwork for a new kind of diasporic identity. But the existence and dimensions of that diaspora would become known to them only in the setting of the Americas.”<sup>44</sup> Yet, Agustín’s critique raises a pertinent consideration; does the mobile person inhabit a diasporic network, an immigrant group, neither, both? More particular to my concerns here, does *the body kept in motion* through state orchestrated exclusions inhabit a diasporic network, an immigrant group, neither, both? Is either a safer or more desirable form of belonging?

In *Saltwater Slavery* Smallwood engages heavily with notions of diaspora. She highlights the deep rupture between those who were stolen away and those who remained. This meant that the enslaved not only suffered Orlando Patterson’s social death but also a type of diasporic death that ruptured their metaphysical and ancestral connection to their kin, at least from the perspective of those they left behind, those on

41 Laura María Agustín, “The Disappearing of a Migration Category: Migrants Who Sell Sex.” In *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 32, no. 1 (2006): 33.

42 Ibid.

43 Agustín, 3

44 Smallwood, 120.

the inside. The violent and almost always permanent break from their place of departure, the one-way travel away meant that those who were stolen were never heard of again, their fates entirely unknown to those they left behind. Thus, “their disappearance threatened to put saltwater slaves beyond both the physical and metaphysical reach of kin” into the “perpetual purgatory of virtual kinlessness.”<sup>45</sup> Smallwood explains that some African communities believed that the stolen returned not on the ancestral plane but rather as commodities “suggesting that the special violence of commodification produced not only social death, but more ominous still a kind of total annihilation of the human subject.”<sup>46</sup> Perhaps this is the why of Akam’s “euphemism for stranger,” the why Hartman was the “friend from the diaspora,” a too far departed someone, instead of kin returning home.<sup>47</sup>

How is distance from and to such a profound loss best measured? Perhaps to even attempt to measure distance in the diaspora is always an act of violence, what Smallwood calls a “traumatic echo.”<sup>48</sup> Belonging to the diaspora is not measured generationally. We do not speak of first, second or so on generation diaspora or diasporic person. Yet something about the nature and structure of migration allows us, almost encourages us to do so. I am a first, second and so on generation immigrant. In an immigrant imaginary and embodiment we can and often do measure our distance from place of departure and thus also our proximity to our place of arrival. The distance from departure and arrival is quantifiable, the side of belonging we fall on neatly tallied up. The further we are removed from *there* the more legitimate becomes our claim to the *here*. Immigrant wombs give birth to a more proximally rooted arrival, that arrival in turn births an even more legitimized belonging. How many generations have to pass before arrival seems secured? I would conjecture that the equation is different for black and brown bodies, those most marked for exclusion.

I argue that within the 20th and 21st century Dominican Republic the category of the “immigrant,” particularly the Haitian immigrant, is essentializing and violent. In *Saltwater Slavery* Smallwood describes the multiple processes through which an African Diaspora in the Americas comes into being. The “renewed imprint of the saltwater,” “the inescapability of the saltwater,” and “the traumatic echos” that renewed the connection between the diaspora and Africa were characteristic of this dias-

---

45 Smallwood, 61.

46 Smallwood, 61.

47 Hartman, 157.

48 Smallwood, 7.



poric network.<sup>49</sup> Smallwood articulates another process, one that does not happen outside of the notion of diaspora but within it or perhaps at least parallel to it. Smallwood contends “that the Africans enslaved in America were immigrants was thus not an axiomatic truth, but rather one Africans had to fight for.”<sup>50</sup> Africans transformed themselves into immigrants in 3 ways: (1) by engaging the cognitive problem of orientation, (2) by creating kinship out of disaggregated units, and (3) by coming to “terms with the saltwater journey’s haunting imprint on their communities (the traumatic echo).”<sup>51</sup> Once migrants these enslaved persons did not cease to be a part of the African diaspora yet they created for themselves an important foothold for the legitimacy of their belonging in the new world. But how do we conceptually contend with the creation of the immigrant as a perpetual category, a bid to defer entry into the supposed modernity of the nation-state via the denial of citizenship, and, how does the immigrant as perpetual category relate to the impossibility or possibility of a diasporic way of being for Trans Dominicans and Dominicans of Haitian descent? While the process of becoming immigrants rooted enslaved Africans in the Americas it now functions to perpetually keep their descendants from belonging, arriving, or restfulness within a nation-state. Lorgia Garcia-Peña succinctly summarizes the problematic, “...black Dominican migrants are exiles at home and abroad. They are symbolically and physically expunged from their home nation because they are black and poor, yet they remain unadmitted into their host nation for the same reasons.”<sup>52</sup> Dominicans of Haitian descent are read as perpetual migrants, *La Sentencia* in 2013 leaves no doubt about this. Haitian Blackness has been particularly targeted for statelessness; Haitians and their descendants have been constructed as the perpetual migrant, they are blocked from completing a transition into a citizenry of belonging. The independence of Haiti symbolized the self-liberation of some 450,000 enslaved Africans who under Jean- Jacques Dessalines became capital “B” Blacks. The Black citizenry of Haiti was not a racial one, but an ideological one. Article 14 of the 1805 Constitution denounced distinctions of color declaring, “Haitians will henceforth only be known generically as Blacks.” This was a political attempt to collapse color distinctions whose divisive potential was great. Dubois notes that by “redefining the coloureds as black Dessalines sought to reject whites” traditional definition of them as not belonging to any coherent community. Thus, the ascription of Blackness is the assertion of a radical

49 Smallwood, 185, 202.

50 Smallwood, 182.

51 Smallwood, 182-183.

52 Lorgia Garcia-Peña, *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction* (Duke University Press, 2016): 2.

diaspora one that solidifies ideological belonging while challenging the validity of race and racial categories altogether. The construction of a bifurcated world where the bodies of Dominicans of Haitian descent and Trans Dominicans are condemned to an eternally incomplete belonging is a project of colonialism carried out by the Dominican nation-state. As conceptualized by state formations the immigrant embodies and inhabits an inexhaustible and liminal foreignness arising from the nowhere between temporal and spatial geographies imagined as old and new. I reiterate my earlier formulation; if the Black diaspora is at least in part a result of a colonial project then: colonialism -diaspora (Black diaspora). If the Dominican state is at least in part a continuation/iteration of a colonial project then: Dominican Republic- internal diasporas (impossible citizens).

My project here is not to attempt to rescue people from their (non)belongings. Indeed folks have been and continue doing this for one another within and often times outside of the purview of the state. What I am attempting to do here is conceptualize the roots of power, to disentangle or return to the tangling, to begin to understand the systematized functions that create legal nonbelonging and prohibit arrival for citizens imagined as impossible or undesirable by the state. Legal belonging is only one form of belonging and certainly not the only valid or valuable one, but because I want to resist romanticizing forced and enforced non belonging and because I want to acknowledge the material effects it has on people's lives, I suspect it may be valuable to undertake a systemic study of state formation that shifts the notions of suspicious movements off of bodies and onto processes undertaken by the state. This is a small addition to the many voices that have signaled that if there indeed is suspicious movements it is because the state has offset or criminalized mobility, reading it via notions of danger and suspicion that evidence the systematization of the Dominican state's power.

In the introduction to *Black/Queer/Diaspora*, a seminal issue of *GLQ*, Jafari S. Allen offers "a genealogy of black/queer/diaspora work."<sup>53</sup> The genealogy in "Black/Queer/Diaspora at the Current Conjuncture" highlights the pressing problematics and possibilities in the study of Black/Queer/Diaspora as categories that press, caress, and perhaps re/a/dress one another. As Allen notes "the stakes of belonging and unbelonging in Black/Queer/Diaspora are high."<sup>54</sup> They are high in the realms of affect and material effect. Allen posits diaspora as a "way out of

53 Jafari S. Allen, "Black/Queer/Diaspora at the Current Conjuncture." In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 18, No. 2-3 (2012): 211.

54 Allen, 220.

the nation-state.”<sup>55</sup> Though here I am attempting to posit it as a way into it and through the nation-state it remains a meditation of Allen’s urgent question, “where is the place for the black queer?...if in fact black(s and) queers cannot be full citizens in the liberal sense, can they at least be free?”<sup>56</sup> Within what Foucault might term “program failures” but Melanie J. Newton takes up as interstices of freedom life is lived with and against state definitions and logics.<sup>57</sup> Allen proposes we read diaspora as “conditions of movement and emplacement...processes of (dis)identification, but also relationality.”<sup>58</sup> Doing this might offer us a way to understand what states want to do with ‘diaspora’ and how it relates to the state’s process of marking for exclusion, what here I call queering.<sup>59</sup>

I want to make use of the Queer to speak of not only sexuality and gender, but of race as well. I seek to understand the way that the hardening of the Dominican Republic’s racial imaginary under Trujillo coincides, if at all, with the hardening of sexual and gendered mores and expectations. I want to explore the utility of conceptualizing of Queerness is a hyper normality, as the mundane elevated to the point of incongruence, as the mundane made noxious, as the mundane made obscene with a sleight of the hand. By conceptualizing the Queer in this way I intend to highlight the process of queering itself. I want to focus attention on the process to posit that the making of the queer is a subversion of the mundane not the perversion of it.

Marginalized subjects are subjects that have been queered (excluded from the mundane) based on the State’s active production of raced, gendered, and sexualized norms. Thus in this way this project aims to pay particular attention to *Queered Subjects*. I do so taking seriously Trouillot’s call to analyze the power in the process as a way to understand the “the power in the story.” If we account for the process of queering, for the power that makes the queer and in turn makes it vulnerable, then perhaps an honest history of the Dominican Republic cannot be anything but a queered history understood through a methodology attuned to articulations of power. These marginalized, thus queered through their marginalization, subjects exist; their existence is mundane both historically and contemporarily. Yet perhaps only a methodology attuned to the processes of coercive and often invisible power can view these sub-

55 Allen, 220.

56 Allen, 220.

57 Melanie J. Newton, *The Children of Africa in the Colonies Free People of Color in Barbados in the Age of Emancipation* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008), 23.

58 Allen, 216.

59 Allen, 216.

jects as such (the mundane made obscene) within the History (capital h) of the Dominican Republic. What is at stake then is the historian's methodology for seeing and understanding rather than merely or only what is to be seen and understood. This project departs from the belief that Queered subjects are not a niche to understand outside of or next to some conceived 'broader' Dominican history. In fact it holds that these Queered subjects are crucial to the understanding of Dominican history precisely because it is the very processes of power that 'niched' these subjects in the first place whose sinews hold together a Dominican historical imaginary that does not actively contend or contest hegemonic power. Taking up diaspora and queer as a way of seeing, a way of reading and making state power visible, may perhaps offer another tool in the contestation of this hegemony.

Allen notes that "not only are black subjects always already queer relative to normative ideals of the person, but black queers also often seem a *queer too far* for much of queer studies and gay and lesbian popular culture and politics."<sup>60</sup> The way race, particularly Blackness, intersects with Queerness compounds and marks queer Black folks in ways that make them hyper visible to surveillance structures yet invisible, or more accurately invisibilized in state memory, to legal access, and in national imagining. If the process of queering is one carried out via power, whether the power of the sovereign or that of the modern state, and this power creates the queer, by classifying, medicalizing, marking the mundane as perverse, then how can the queer be claimed in ways that, as Macharia warns in relation to notions of diaspora, do not fetishize deracination?<sup>61</sup> In *Black on Both Sides: A Racial History of Trans Identity* C. Riley Snorton proposes a "queer politic based on analyses of power rather than a fraught sense of shared identity."<sup>62</sup> This is not a turn away from identity as binding but a turn towards the way power functions over people as a modality of unity. It is claiming queerness not only within the register of identity but also as a mode of inquiry that is attuned to power structures that create normalizing logics, an invitation to imagine community across registers of identity precisely because the way power functions over people is itself a site that coalesces a shared community.

Official state narratives did and continue to imagine Dominicans of Haitian descent and Trans Dominicans as engaged in a dangerous and suspicious type of movement; one group across ethnic and national lines the other across gender. These persons are conceived of as exterior

60 Allen, 222.

61 Macharia, 183.

62 Snorton, X.

and foreign to the very soil on which they were born and thus constitutionally speaking, at least until 2013, were implied citizens of. Their in-the-body and historic cross-border movements were deemed perverse and this perversity made them ineligible for citizenship, the end point of belonging within the logic of the modern nation-state. Trans Dominicans and Dominicans of Haitian descent were certainly engaged in complicated constellations of movement. However, diaspora and queer as a way of seeing allow for an analysis of the ways the state constructs citizenship as a place some bodies are not able to rest, thus constructing bodies that are both in apposition and opposition to citizenship, rest less bodies. In shifting the notion of “suspicious movement” from the bodies of these persons, where Dominican state narratives sought and seek to place it, and onto the state’s notion of citizenship itself, Dominican-ness, *Dominicanidad*, can be analysed as a perpetually deferred form of belonging. Diaspora as a way of seeing can serve as an analytical tool to think through the ways the formal state sponsored logics that define legal and social belonging attempt to keep certain bodies in motion, to continuously defer their entry into a wider community of legitimized and formal belonging. The analysis I am proposing seeks to momentarily destabilize diaspora and queer as ways of being (identity) to posit them as ways of seeing to analyze how systematized power functions over Dominicans marked for exclusion; the way this power functions over Dominicans of Haitian descent and Trans Dominicans exposes Dominican logics of citizenship while allowing for, as Snorton urges, an “analyses of power [not based on]...a fraught sense of shared identity.”<sup>63</sup>

### **The Archive/s & Archival Non/Belonging**

Snorton marks “the problem of history as a mode of organizing time according to antiblack and antitrans “rule”.”<sup>64</sup> Archives of power are the sites through which teleological history is propagated and defended. Archives of power are organized around rules that read time as an ordered and organizable whole. If archives are used to read (*imagine*) the past (*a past*) and nationhood is contingent on a shared historical imagining then it is not too radical an assertion to claim that archives are used to imagine a national present and future. As such, erasures and silences in archives of power are pressing; archival silences are an epistemological violence that bar the entry of some persons into the nation. The borders of the archive and the borders of the nation might indeed have much

---

63 Snorton, X.

64 Snorton, ix.

in common. Dominican archives of power, the national archive and its appendages, do not provide a restful place (a resting place) for these impossible citizens and their histories. Instead, impossible citizens are kept on the outside of archival borders as they are estranged from access to full legal belonging.

In *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics & the Limits of Law* Dean Spade proposes a “critical Trans politics” that does not, under the guise of inclusion, reproduce the liberal violence that rights-based approaches to political and social redress might.<sup>65</sup> Snorton asks us to consider “what are the seductions for a trans activism for [which] traumatized citizenship is more than merely an identitarian pit-fall...and is rather a key condition of its own emergence.”<sup>66</sup> I want to turn to Snorton’s urgent question, “what modes of dispossession are possible under the ruse of state inclusion.”<sup>67</sup> Spade suggests that the systems of oppression that “traumatize the citizenship” of Trans folk actually do not function as a separate system of law. Rather, they are the same systems of law that govern the lives of all potential citizens, but because they contain a pointed if invisible organizing logic they affect the lives of specific populations in particularly violent ways. I turn to Spade’s analysis as a way to ask whether, without romanticizing exclusion, there is a way to read the exclusion of Dominicans of Haitian descent and Trans Dominicans from Dominican archives of power that acknowledges that inclusion in apparatuses of current power are indeed not easily read as successes when understood as co-optations into the logics of violence instead of contestations or rearrangements of them. There are numerous ways that archives of power and the academic and professional discipline of history are being contested via the maintenance, construction, dissemination, and preservation of the very histories and voices being excluded. But then, what do we do with these archives of power that propagate violence in autonomous states? Should the political priority be not the reconstruction of the formal archive but rather the reconstruction of notions of legitimacy that prioritize analysis via its exploration? If we are to make this move are we to focus on the borders of the archive to change the nation-state or the borders of the nation-state to change the archive?

If archives of power evidence a great deal about how the state imagines itself then the archives housed in the bodies and narratives of Domini-

65 Dean Spade, *Normal Life: Administrative Violence, Critical Trans Politics & the Limits of Law* (Duke University Press: 2015), xvi, 1 -2.

66 Snorton, xii.

67 Snorton, xi.

cans of Haitian descent and Trans Dominicans evidence a great deal about how they reimagine the state and redefine legitimacies. If as Macharia notes archives become tricky in “an ungeography called Africa and a deracination called the black diaspora” then this trickiness is a radical opportunity of re-imagining the nation-state.<sup>68</sup> The trickiness Macharia is nodding towards suggests the impossibility of successfully stabilizing the innumerable array of histories ensconced in and projected forth by the construction of Africa and the Black diaspora. There is also another side of this trickiness exploited by those whom archives of power would erase. I want to offer two sets of images as a way to situate the contestation of archives of power by the very impossible citizens the state marks for exclusion. I propose these images as representations of an alternative archive, one that contests the exclusion of Dominicans of Haitian descent and Trans Dominicans from a Dominican historical imaginary and from conceptualizations of *Dominicanidad*.

### Set 1: “...Los Haitianos”<sup>69</sup>



68 Keguro Macharia. “On Being Area-Studied: A Litany of Complaint.” In *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 22, No. 2 (2016): 186.

69 Images taken in the Dominican Republic by the author.

## Set 2: “LGBTQ HETEROSEXUAL”<sup>70</sup>



These images, shot in 2017/2018 on an old point and shoot film camera during recent research trips to the Dominican Republic suggest a radical contestation, a talking back to Dominican Archives of power. Set 1, “... Los Haitianos,” was shot in the Espaillat Province of the Dominican Republic. The first image of the set was shot in Moca, my natal city, and the second in Jamao, a roughly 20-minute drive out of Moca. Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent make up a large portion of the manual labor force that keeps the expansive and important agricultural industry of the region moving, labor that allows the province to feed much of the country and furnish exports. It is difficult, nearly impossible to traverse Moca without routinely encountering graffiti nearly identical to that seen in the first image. The words, ironically placed next to a redaction shaped into a heart read “*Fuera a los Haitianos*,” “Out to the Haitians.” These words have been visible on Moca’s walls well before the denationalization and continue well beyond it.<sup>71</sup> Yet, the second image of the set reads “*Bien Benidos Haitianos*,” “Welcome Haitians.” Taken together these two images evidence and contest state-sponsored imaginings of Haiti and Haitians within the Dominican nation. The first image, “Out to the Haitians,” rehearses what some Dominican Historians have called *La Mentira Oficial*/The Official Lie, that *Haitianidad* is not only foreign but antithetical to *Dominicanidad*. Yet the second image pushes back on this notion, it is an invitation by those who inhabit the nation, literally,

70 Images taken in the Dominican Republic by the author.

71 The first time I saw these words graffitied on the walls of Moca was in 2008.



physically, to welcome *Haitianidad* and Haitians. Though the state provides an education in anti-Haitianism its effects, as evidenced here, are not and cannot be totalizing. These sites of resistance challenge official narratives and the formal exclusions of Dominicans of Haitian descent from archives of power.

The images in Set 2, “LGBTQ HETEROSEXUAL,” offer an opportunity to reflect on the ways that queerness is always already a mundane part of *Dominicanidad*. It is mundane in the ways that it is celebrated and in ways that are accidental, this accidentality rupturing the carefully engineered systematization of a heterosexual state institution and apparatus. The first image of the set, taken during the 2017 La Vega Province Carnival, depicts a traditional character of the Dominican celebration in a way that is anything but traditional. *La roba gallina*, the chicken thief, is always female presenting but the performer or masquerader is very often a male. The traditional attire of the *roba gallina* is the folk attire of Dominican countryside women, long plain often colorful skirts, blouses, and headscarves. The buttocks and breasts of *la roba gallina* are always exaggerated since, presumably, that is where she has stashed the chickens she has claimed. Yet this *roba gallina* evokes not the Dominican countryside but the glitz and glamour of a ball room. The performative femininity of the ensemble, a full body cascade of iridescent pink sequins, is enhanced by the also all pink all glam parasol. This *roba gallina*’s locks flow down her back in a famed Dominican blow-out, unrestrained by the traditional kerchief of the character. Before I snap the picture she twirls in front of me, two fabulous luminous twirls, as she completes the final revolution she gracefully falls into the pose depicted here. Her eyes are set directly on me and on the camera demanding an acknowledgement of her presence, she leans into the picture, neck slightly cocked back to suggest an enjoyment of the play she has undertaken and brought me into. In a country where the lives of Trans folk is consistently vexed by profound violence, where aesthetic expectations fall neatly into a staunchly defended cis-gender binary, this *roba gallina* found a stage for her performance creating a counterpoint to enforced gender violence using and coopting state approved avenues of ‘proper’ play and performance.

The second image of Set 2 was taken in the never quite quiet Dominican capital Santo Domingo. As I waited in a mechanic shop, a deeply masculinized space, for a flat tire to be repaired I spotted a man sitting coolly in a chair watching patiently as the car in front of him had the windows tinted so dark it became impossible to see inside. His attire, the neatly laced black boots, neat khaki pants sustained by a shiny black

belt, and perfectly fitted cap suggested to me that this man was probably an off-duty police officer or a part of some enforcement agency. My eyes veered to his tee which did not seem to match the rest of his official attire. The all black shirt in all white block font read, “LGBTQ Hetero-sexual.” It was, accidentally or intentionally I am still not sure, a testament for and to gender and sexual diversity. Dominican police institutions have been and continue to be responsible for violence faced by Trans and Queer Dominicans. The contrast depicted here, a person presumably adjacent to Dominican enforcement institutions wearing an ensemble curating both state enforcement and contestations of it, is perhaps then not a contrast after all. In confusion I walked over to the man and asked if I might take a picture of him on my camera. His cool demeanour unbothered he hesitated for only a fraction of a second before, without a single word, leaving his chair to begin a series of poses for me to capture. The image, the space, the outfit in the space, betrays the idea that any state can ever achieve or enforce a project of hetero and cis existence in any total or totalizing form. These sets of images taken together represent a bid to other ways of knowing, being, performing, and naming *Dominicanidad*, an alternative archive of belonging (or an archive of alternative belonging) to the Dominican state and its archives of power.

These sites of both mundaneness and alterity might be usefully conceptualized by returning to Macharia’s tricky archives. So then, what is this different type of historical approach necessitated by these tricky archives, how might return become future making? In “Ephemera as Evidence: Introductory Notes to Queer Acts,” José Esteban Muñoz offers an approach to reading archives, legitimacy, and remembering, that contest the violent logics of archives of power. Muñoz defends a way of reading evidence that intentionally positions itself against academic notions of rigour, intelligibility, and repeatability, all logics that deny the legitimacy and even existence of queer acts, queer embodiments, and queer bodies. It is a method of:

anti-rigor and anti-evidence that, far from filtering materiality out of cultural studies, reformulates and expands our understandings of materiality. Ephemera, as I am using it here, is linked to alternate modes of textuality and narrativity like memory and performance: it is all of those things that remain after a performance, a kind of evidence of what has transpired but certainly not the thing itself. It does not rest on epistemological foundations but is instead interested in following traces, glimmers, residues, and specks of things.<sup>72</sup>

---

72 Muñoz, 10.

This method poignantly and importantly insists that academic methods of analysis and modes of inquiry, themselves hegemonic and rooted in notions of order, cataloguing, and categorizing, attune themselves to the necessities of queer survival. Muñoz begins to provide an answer for a question posed earlier regarding the impetus or importance of rearranging the formal archive versus rearranging our notions of legitimate sources, narratives, and research methods. That “queerness is often transmitted covertly [is not coincidental or accidental]. This has everything to do with the fact that leaving too much of a trace has often meant that the queer subject has left herself open for attack.”<sup>73</sup> The very survival of persons marked for exclusion by state institutions attempting to perfect a citizenry depends on ephemera and to engage in an analytical approach that insists on understanding all archives as indexed or indexable repositories is reproducing the logics of archives of power.

The state’s archives, these archives of power, serve as a tool in the process of both citizen making (approving/legitimizing belonging) and unmaking (both in a sense of not allowing and stripping of). But as evidenced in the images above the state’s hold on narrative production via its archives will never be total. Muñoz describes “queer acts” as acts that not only imagine but create “queerness as a possibility, a sense of self knowing,” they are acts read as such because of a commitment to the “performative as an intellectual and discursive occasion for a queer world making project.”<sup>74</sup> Muñoz’s “queer acts” are acts of defiance, lives and forms of living, and ways of performing that attest that anti-colonial modalities can be lived parallel to colonial structures. They are not only strategies of survival but also of thriving, strategies of life making that exist parallel to colonial legitimacies and also replace them, even if ephemerally. They are a way of using diaspora and queer as ways of seeing, of reading, contesting and enacting new forms of power into the very state theatre that attempts to erase them. Queer acts are forms of strategically slipping in and out of the state gaze, they are enactments that imagine and make possible forms of belonging that highlight the facetiousness of citizenship.

The modern nation-state and its apparatuses, its institutions and systems of surveillance and marking, are an anti-queer project. In the Dominican Republic it is also an anti-Black one. Though state hegemony remains an incomplete project its current reaches discipline the lives of all persons within its borders, it marks for in- and exclusion in ways that evidence national notions of desirability. The state makes strate-

---

73 Muñoz, 6.

74 Muñoz, 6.

gic use of historical and contemporary notions of elsewhere-belonging to perpetuate colonial processes of deracination, to create impossible citizens who are negated the possibility of arrival, impossible citizens whose legitimate belonging is deferred. When the end point of legal belonging, citizenship, can no longer be deferred the state has historically and will continue to turn to processes of clearing, cleansing, *cutting*, to rid itself of the folks it has kept in motion and whose mobility has been marked as suspicious. Analyzing the violence of enforced and forced non-arrival via an examination of the borders of archives of power, legal constructions, and state endorsed social norms, by temporarily disrupting diaspora and queer as ways of being and taking them up as ways of seeing may provide a way to reimagine the boundaries of community, belonging, and citizenship.