

NATIONAL IDENTITY & NATIONALISM ON HISPANIOLA:  
AN ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT CONFLICT BETWEEN  
HAITI & THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

BY

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*Finally, to Dave Thomas and Sarah Kardash: May the strength embodied by the Haitian Revolution and the beauty of Dominican shores guide you and family along the path of recovery to nothing but health and happiness.*

## **Abstract**

Despite close geographic proximity and a similar colonial history, Haiti and the Dominican Republic are widely divergent in terms culture, economic reality, and national identity. These differences make relations between the two nations cold at best and outright hostile at worst. Yet the Haitian-Dominican conflict is hardly about military prowess. Instead, it has developed into a stand-off of juxtaposed national identities and interests. Postcolonial and Social Constructivist theories are used to explore the role of national identity in creating and perpetuating this conflict. The manipulation of national identity has created a self-reinforcing conflict that has both direct and indirect consequences that are both profound and far-reaching.

# Introduction

Located in the heart of the Caribbean between Cuba and Puerto Rico, Haiti and the Dominican Republic find themselves sharing the island of Hispaniola, the second largest island in the region. In spite of their close proximity and shared colonial history of slavery and settlement, these two nations sharing a single island are widely divergent in culture and economic reality. These differences make relations between the nations troubled. The by-product of these differences is a series of conflicts stretching back multiple generations. While the conflicts have not historically risen to the level of armed warfare, the psychological warfare, cultural posturing, and economic trade issues of these two nations suggest that they see themselves as diametrically opposed in most aspects – in everything from language to religion to ancestry to national character.

Interstate conflicts are often described in terms of military strength, yet the model of the Haitian-Dominican conflict does not allow for such a perspective to gain much of a foothold. By using both Postcolonial and Social Constructivist theories, this paper will argue that national identity formation and manipulation has led to and enflamed the current conflict raging on the island of Hispaniola. Conflict, from an international relations standpoint, is more complicated than military prowess, and the Haitian-Dominican conflict embodies that broader philosophy.

National identity does not emerge overnight; instead, it emerges instead over generations and is self-reinforcing. In order to understand the current tensions between the nations, this study will explore the concept of national identity and apply it to Haiti and the Dominican Republic. This study will explore the nature of the fractious relationship between these two countries by exploring how each state's sense of national identity not only has roots in the past but also affects relations today. In order to understand national identity in this situation, the study will explore how it manifests in both nations and the roots of the differences. Following that, the study will explore the historical roots of the current national identities in both nations and explain how the current tensions and conflicts are a direct result of how the citizens of these nations see themselves. Finally, the study will conclude with a discussion of current efforts to resolve the problems through reducing the sense of Otherness that currently pervades both sides of the island and building transnational linkages in place of the barriers that currently exist.

With the passage of a constitutional reform in 2010, the Dominican Republic changed its citizenship law to state that anyone who did not (read: could not prove) have a parent or grandparent who was legally in the Dominican Republic as of 1929 is not a citizen. This deliberate attack on Haitian immigrants and those of Haitian-descent, who make up the majority of the Dominican Republic's foreign population, is simply a continuation of a centuries-long antagonistic conflict that has been drawn out between the two nations. With hundreds of thousands of Haitians being forcibly deported, a refugee crisis has developed along the Haitian-Dominican border. Those who have lived in the Dominican Republic for years or whose family has lived there for generations suddenly have found themselves without a country.

This displacement has led many of these refugees to live in inhumane and impoverished conditions in various refugee camps in the center of the island. With an unhealthy lack of latrines, limited infrastructure, and little to no job opportunities, these people have been pushed to the margins of society – neither truly Dominican nor Haitian. They are stuck in limbo until the two countries sort out their disagreements, which, given historical precedent, could take centuries. The refugee situation in the camps along the border is quickly spiraling out of control and must be dealt with as soon as possible to prevent a full-blown humanitarian disaster both on the tiny island of Hispaniola and in the entire region. As more and more Haitians are deported from the Dominican Republic “back” to Haiti, more and more reports of human rights abuses and unsanitary conditions arise.

Conflicts have a way of getting entrenched and escalating over time. The continuing refugee problem of displaced and stateless persons is already putting major economic stresses on Haiti, which has had trouble staying afloat even before this refugee crisis began. Will the US and the other countries in the region accept these refugees within their borders as the situation deteriorates? Or will they remain stateless and stuck in the shadow zones along the border? The longer the situation (and these people) remain in refugee camps, the more conditions will deteriorate. Will it spur widespread chaos as was seen in both Port-au-Prince and Santo Domingo over gasoline prices in February 2019? Will it prompt more travel advisory warnings from surrounding nations? At the very least, travel advisories from countries like the United States can be economically debilitating, especially for countries

working on building their tourism sectors. Once again, all eyes turn to look at Hispaniola, for a conflict between the Caribbean region's largest economy (the Dominican Republic) and the Western Hemisphere's poorest nation (Haiti) can have far-reaching impacts that upset the peace and stability of an entire region. In response to these actions taken by the Dominican Republic, the Haitian government has declared an embargo on Dominican goods crossing over the border in order to strong-arm them into halting the mistreatment of Haitian immigrants.

A continued and protracted conflict can have a significant negative impact on the tourism industry – the lifeblood of both the island and the region's economies. In recent years, especially given the magnitude of both historical and natural disasters that have befallen Haiti, the Dominican Republic's more privileged position in the conflict cannot be ignored. Their relative wealth and power exacerbates by their draconian response to the influx of Haitian immigrants into their country over the past 100 years. The Dominican Republic is a tropical paradise – a beautiful location that thrives on tourism. In 2017 alone, the country attracted over 6 million visitors with an estimated economic impact of \$7.2 billion USD.<sup>1</sup> An information campaign raising awareness of this conflict, or even a boycott as some activists have suggested, may very well scare tourists away from those shores.

Haiti's instability is legendary – its burgeoning tourist and economic sectors are languishing. Haiti, seeing the success that tourism has brought neighbouring countries, considers that sector to be the most viable growth area for the country and is the government's number one priority.<sup>2</sup> This begs the question, of course: Are people willing to invest in and visit the country under the current circumstances? How can Haiti overcome its smeared reputation (which dates, again, back to the colonial era) and emerge as a viable tourist location? How is this possible when the country that it shares an island with cannot find a way to coexist with them comfortably?

Yet the two states that share the island of Hispaniola do not have time to bicker as they face rapidly rising sea levels and desertification, environmental issues that disregard

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1. "Dominican Republic Economic Report 2018," *The Canadian Trade Commissioner Service*, last modified July 4, 2018, <https://www.tradecommissioner.gc.ca/dominican-republic-republique-dominicaine/market-facts-faits-sur-le-marche/0001545.aspx?lang=eng>.

2. "Haiti – Travel and Tourism," *Export.gov*, last modified, February 14, 2019, <https://www.export.gov/article?id=Haiti-Travel-and-Tourism>.

political boundaries and disputes. Despite these very pressing problems, a more ominous one looms on the horizon: climate change. The island of Hispaniola is situated such that it will deal with rising sea levels, interior desertification, and the increasing frequency and magnitude of freak weather events like hurricanes. If Haiti and the Dominican Republic do not learn to work together to address such catastrophes, they would both be at risk of losing their homes. Mother Nature does not care for political squabbles and boundaries and enacts her rage upon everyone equally.

This study will start with a literature review and an overview of the paper's theoretical foundations (Part One). The collective body of literature about Haiti and the Dominican Republic will be explored, individually and in reference to each other. In addition, the Postcolonial and Social Constructivist theories that the paper is situated in will be outlined. Three basic theoretical concepts will be explored throughout the study that connect the theories of identity to the Haitian-Dominican conflict: identity and interests, identity and conflict, and identity and nationalism.

After the literature review and overview of theoretical foundations, an analysis of the Haitian-Dominican conflict using these theories and sources will be divided into three sections (Part Two): the historical roots of Haitian and Dominican national identities, a snapshot of the current conflict plaguing the island of Hispaniola, and a section that integrates theory and evidence to analyze the conflict fully. The purpose of this section is to show, definitively, how nationalism and the manipulation of such identities by the two states have played a large part in defining the current conflict.

# **PART ONE**

## **Literature Review & Theoretical Foundations**

Scholars have struggled to understand why the national trajectories of Haiti and the Dominican Republic are so divergent given what, on the surface, looks like a common history of slavery and colonialism. The literature shows several distressing patterns. First, there is little attention to the post-colonial effects of European domination in both countries and how these nations have been differentially affected by long-standing results of colonial actions. For example, the division of the island and the different ways that Spain (Dominican Republic) and France (Haiti) managed these lands has lingering effects still felt today. What literature exists focuses on one nation or the other, with very little attention paid to each nation's relationship and vision of the other nation. Moreover, the literature devoted to each country, in English, is particularly limited.

The body of literature devoted to Haiti generally emphasizes tragedy, corruption, and poverty. While there is no question that all of those things – tragedy, corruption, and poverty – exist in Haiti, the nation is more than those. The root causes of many of these problems can be tied to its colonial past, yet the extreme negative bias surrounding Haiti is pervasive. As recently as 2017, United States President Donald Trump put into words what others undoubtedly believe about Haiti: he called it a “shithole” country with people “who all have AIDS.”<sup>3</sup>

The Dominican Republic, too, is a product of its troubled past, but its *relative* success compared to Haiti has largely been attributed (directly and indirectly) to its embrace of a Western European identity emphasizing its links to Spain, compared to the distinctly Afro-centric identity of Haiti.

To understand these two nations, we need to explore the concept of national identity and how it shapes not only outside views of the nations but, more importantly, how it shapes the perceptions the citizens of each nation have of themselves.

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3. Ibram X Kendi, “The Day ‘Shithole’ Entered the Presidential Lexicon,” *The Atlantic*, last modified January 13, 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2019/01/shithole-countries/580054/>.

## Literature Review

Exploring the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic creates a challenge for scholars. Within the field of Caribbean Studies, there are two distinct sets of literatures with little overlap between them: one for Haiti and one for the Dominican Republic. The bulk of the scholarship falls into one of these two categories; a source discusses Haiti, or it discusses the Dominican Republic. Rarely, if ever, do sources give a comparative or cross-cultural analysis of the two noticeably different countries and cultures sharing the island of Hispaniola. Noticing this gap within the academic literature, scholars have made a push in recent years to publish more cross-border and transnational scholarship focusing on the symbiotically entwined relationship that has developed between the two countries. This section aims to outline this intellectual gap by exploring what is being said, separately about Haiti and the Dominican Republic and situate the topic of this paper within the relatively new movement of transnational Hispaniola studies.

The prominent Haitian scholar Patrick Bellegarde-Smith makes the case in his book *Haiti: The Breached Citadel* that, “Haiti is still somewhat inaccessible today because of its economic insignificance and its Kreyol [Creole] language.”<sup>4</sup> Haitian scholars, he maintains, write quite a lot about their country. However, their work is often in French or Kreyol and is not easily accessible to international audiences, making the authors and the works virtually unknown. The amount of literature available about Haiti in English is somewhat limited, then, especially if one were to look for works solely by Haitian authors. This inaccessibility presents an interesting catch-22 for Anglophone scholars studying the country: either work with the limited number of Haitian-produced sources available in English or rely on accounts by non-Haitian writers – both of which have their downsides. The non-Haitian scholars have the disadvantage of not being immersed in the culture and language, leaving them open to bias, misrepresentation, or errors.

In recent years, non-Haitian academics have started to study Haiti more significantly due to its instability and the potential for social revolution.<sup>5</sup> The problem with this attention lies in the fact that those from the Global North have an overwhelming

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4. Patrick Bellegarde-Smith, *Haiti: The Breached Citadel, Revised and Updated Edition* (Toronto: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc., 2004), 8.

5. Bellegarde-Smith, *Haiti: The Breached Citadel, Revised and Updated Edition*, 8.

tendency to “see Haitians as solely responsible for their nation’s plight.”<sup>6</sup> The author Philippe R. Girard, notably not Haitian, is one of those people. According to Girard, “Haitians’ tendency to blame foreigners for Haiti’s troubles is a primary reason for their country’s poverty, for it makes it impossible to foster a spirit of enterprise.”<sup>7</sup> Misinformed ideas such as these end up becoming increasingly harmful to normative ideas of justice in the Global South as the Global North tries to wash its hands of its colonial past. Formerly colonized populations are then forced to pick up the shambles of their societies and, if faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles laid in place by the very same colonizing powers, are criticized for not being industrious enough to overcome them.

Haiti presents a unique case that proves intriguing to international relations scholars. In the field of International Relations, it is generally accepted that “the later the colonization and independence occurred, the greater struggles and challenges of post-colonial governance.”<sup>8</sup> Haiti does not follow this model. In fact, it breaks it entirely; it was one of the very first colonized countries to gain independence, yet its struggles have been extreme. Since Haiti’s history breaks from the understanding of any contemporary paradigmatic framework, a majority of the scholarship surrounding Haiti involves underdevelopment and violence.

Similar to modern media representations that often portray Haiti in a negative light for the morbid curiosity of their audiences, academia seems to subconsciously focus on creating a narrative of death, destruction, poverty, and underdevelopment about Haiti.<sup>9</sup> While a bit less pervasive in areas like Anthropology that look at Haitian identity and culture, this phenomenon is especially true in the field of International Relations. A review of productive search terms will show that buzzwords like “poor,” “destruction,” and “violence” (along with a multitude of other negatively-connoting synonyms) are often in the titles of scholarly works about Haiti.

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6. Bellegarde-Smith, 7.

7. Philippe R. Girard, *Paradise Lost: Haiti’s Tumultuous Journey from Pearl of the Caribbean to Third World Hot Spot* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 9.

8. Christine Sylvester, “Post-colonialism,” in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations, Sixth Edition*, eds. John Baylis, Steve Smith, and Patricia Owens, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 185.

9. Michele Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola, First eBook Edition* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2014), preface.

Girard, author of *Paradise Lost: Haiti's Tumultuous Journey from Pearl of the Caribbean to Third World Hot Spot*, describes the phenomenon like this:

Strangely, the violence and poverty only add to outsiders' fascination with Haiti. Studying Haiti is like watching a car wreck on the highway: one can feel the distasteful thrill of seeing blood spattered on the warm asphalt, while enjoying the luxury of being on the safe side of the road.<sup>10</sup>

Another common theme in Haitian-related literature is the Haitian Revolution, due, in part, to its link to social revolution. The Haitian Revolution is the only successful slave rebellion to lead to an independent state; this unique case means that many historians and political scholars have studied the events leading up to January 1, 1804 with close scrutiny. Without a doubt, the Haitian Revolution has had a dramatic impact not only on Haitian history but on the world stage as well. Johnny Harris at *Vox* notes that the United States, France, and the United Kingdom refused to recognize Haiti's independence for over 50 years on the basis that recognition of the newly independent black republic would foster slave rebellions in their own nations. The wave of abolition following the Haitian Revolution cannot be ignored, as many of the European powers, now under intense international pressure, were forced to abolish slavery within their own societies.<sup>11</sup>

Regarding the Dominican Republic, Alan Cambeira in *Quisqueya La Bella: The Dominican Republic in Historical and Cultural Perspective* mirrors Bellegarde-Smith's sentiments on the lack of available resources: "There is a lamentably a profound scarcity or often total lack of information written in English about the cultural formation of La República Dominicana."<sup>12</sup> He makes the case that there are only a handful of truly commendable pieces of literature in English detailing the politics and history of the Dominican Republic. This dearth of research leaves scholars with relatively little to explore, a situation similar to that of Haiti.

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10. Girard, *Paradise Lost: Haiti's Tumultuous Journey from Pearl of the Caribbean to Third World Hot Spot*, 4.

11. *Borders*, Episode 1, "Divided Island: How Haiti and the Dominican Republic Became Two Worlds," directed by Johnny Harris, aired October 17, 2017, on Vox, <https://www.vox.com/a/borders/haiti-dominican-republic>.

12. Alan Cambeira, *Quisqueya La Bella: The Dominican Republic in Historical and Cultural Perspective* (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, Inc., 1997), 9.

A majority of the literature about the Dominican Republic has a heavy focus on identity. Because the Dominican Republic is not as poor or as politically unstable as Haiti, International Relations scholars have not taken as much an interest in the country's political workings. This fact is odd given the close geographical proximity of the two countries. When they do focus on the country's governance, however, a majority of the scholarship revolves around two of the most important political events in the country's history: the United States occupations in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the dictator Rafael Trujillo. Anthropologists, sociologists, and other social scientists, however, have repeatedly discussed the multicultural origins of modern-day Dominican society, placing specific emphasis on the Spanish, Taíno, and African heritages. Many of the sources follow the series of historical events that led to the creolization of Dominican society.

Despite Dominican society being made up of a variety of multicultural elements, a large portion of literature available focuses on race, racism, and anti-Haitianism within the country, especially within the last generation. This racial problem is so severe that it defines the identity of Dominicans – as definitively *not* Haitian and *not* African. According to Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., approximately 90% of Dominicans are of (partial) African descent yet are not reared to think of themselves as black. Due to strongly-held colonial ideas of white superiority, anti-black sentiments have become ingrained in Dominican society.<sup>13</sup> Thirty-one years of leadership by the autocratic Rafael Trujillo reinforced this anti-black identity. In fact, as discussed by Allan Wells in *Tropical Zion*, Trujillo saw the possible influx of 100,000 Central European Jews in the 1930s as a necessary counterbalance to the influx of black Haitians.<sup>14</sup> The favoritism shown to white European immigrants over Haitians was, by many accounts, a means of making the Dominican Republic whiter. According the Dominican-owned *Abreu Report*, Trujillo was paranoid about his own Haitian lower-class roots; he used makeup to lighten his skin and wore long sleeves to hide his darker-skinned arms. Trujillo is said to have solidified his pro-white stance when he

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13. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Black in Latin America*, Episode 1, "Haiti and the Dominican Republic: An Island Divided," Public Broadcasting Service (PBS), aired April 19, 2011, <https://www.pbs.org/video/black-in-latin-america-haiti-the-dominican-republic-an-island-divided/>.

14. Allen Wells, *Tropical Zion* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

was trained by the United States military at the height of racial segregation in the United States. He believed he could curry favor of politicians by “being” white.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, there are several other sources available that, while not directly acknowledging this gap in academic literature, have discussed Haiti and the Dominican Republic together. Most of this academic literature discusses transnational cooperation movements and is quite contemporary. Otherwise, most of the sources referencing the relationship between the two countries are media outlets reporting on current events. According to Rayford W. Logan, author of *Haiti and the Dominican Republic*, his study (published in 1968) is the first comparative history of the two countries.<sup>16</sup> Even so, Logan divides his book into two distinct sections: one for Haiti and the other for Dominican Republic. Only at the very end is there a three-page outline directly comparing the developmental trajectories of the two states; academic tropes are hard to shed.

Since the turn of the century (and even more so after the catastrophic earthquake *Goudougoudoum* hit Haiti on January 12, 2010), there has been increasing scholarship meant to bridge this intellectual gap and foster a narrative that reflects the interdependent nature of Haitian and Dominican societies. Often in the form of academic journal articles, these pieces cover a wide range of issues from collective environmental management to illegal immigration and transborder disaster response. For example, due to climate change, the landscape of Hispaniola is changing drastically, causing a lake that was once entirely within the borders of Haiti to expand across the shared border.<sup>17</sup> Similarly, Alscher looks at comparative environmental degradation across the island. Because the social and political boundaries of Haiti and the Dominican Republic do not follow the natural geography of the island but, rather, split it up, issues regarding the environment and climate change adaptation have created a significant subsection in Haitian-Dominican literature.<sup>18</sup>

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15. Abreu Report, “The Root of the Dominican Skin Crisis,” *Abreu Report*, last modified on July 14, 2015, <http://www.abreureport.com/2015/07/the-root-of-dominican-skin-crisis.html>.

16. Rayford W. Logan, *Haiti and the Dominican Republic* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), preface.

17. Mimi Sheller and Yolanda M. León, “Uneven Socio-Ecologies of Hispaniola: Asymmetric Capabilities for Climate Adaptation in Haiti and the Dominican Republic,” *Geoforum* 73 (2016): 35. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.geoforum.2015.07.026>.

18. Stefan Alscher, “Environmental Degradation and Migration on Hispaniola Island.” *International Migration: Environmentally Induced Migration in the Context of Social Vulnerability* 49, no. 1 (2011): 164-188. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2435.2010.00664.x>.

In general, the new scholarship coming out on cross-border collaboration has not been widely integrated into the main body of academic literature. Many popular news sites like *Vox* or *PBS* have covered the issue as a part of a special academically-focused series, but rarely have established academics followed this trend. It is encouraging that some newer academics, having noticed this gap in the main body of Haitian-Dominican literature, address it within their own papers. Most notably, April Mayes, Yolanda C. Martín, and others published in *Radical History Review* about their attempt to create a transnational annual conference covering issues of importance to Haitian-Dominican relations. Despite significant pushback from participating parties and outside individuals, Mayes and Martín have succeeded in hosting the conference for the past several years, with plans to continue it for many more in order to bridge the gap in Haitian and Dominican studies.<sup>19</sup> Still, there remain comparatively few published pieces of literature along this vein of thought.

It is in this literature gap where this current study hopes to contribute. In adding to the scholarship surrounding transborder relations and cross-cultural phenomenon on Hispaniola, the hope is that this paper becomes part of a larger dialogue in improving relations between the two countries by exploring the causes of the tensions. Furthermore, it challenges the narrative that Haitian and Dominican identities are incompatible at best and naturally hostile at worst. The fact remains that Haiti and the Dominican Republic remained as connected as ever moving forward into the 21<sup>st</sup> century; many similar social, political, and economic ills befall both countries, and both share a difficult history, both during and after colonialism. Moreover, both are trying to navigate a hemisphere dominated by the United States. In recognizing that these troubles are not caused by each other but are a result of their colonial pasts, a new era of peace, prosperity, and cooperation could be on the horizon.

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19. April Mayes, Yolanda C. Martín, Carlos Ulises Decena, Kiran Jayaram, and Alexis Yveline, "Transnational Hispaniola: Toward New Paradigms in Haitian and Dominican Studies," *Radical History Review* 115 (2013): 26-32. <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-1724697>.

## **Theoretical Foundations of Identity in International Relations**

In the following discussion, identity will be explored paradigmatically within the context of International Relations. Which paradigms help to explain a conflict of identities? Additionally, the intersection of identity with interests, conflict, and nationalism is explored. In subsequent sections, the study will explore how understanding identity helps clarify the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

For centuries, International Relations theory has been dominated by Realism. This top-down and state-centric approach focuses, almost solely, on traditional security concerns of powerful state actors. Realism views “periphery” powers as unimportant in the grand scheme of international politics and completely ignores any and all non-state or transnational actors. Similarly, this theory holds firm to the belief that nation-states only act rationally, unilaterally, and in their own self-interest. As the world enters the 21<sup>st</sup> Century on the heels of a huge wave of decolonization, however, it has become abundantly clear that Realism cannot, or will not, account for the changes in the international system – especially with regard to identity politics.

For the Haitian-Dominican conflict, Realism does not help explain the situation. Interstate conflict is usually explained using the Realist paradigm but, unlike most other interstate conflicts, the Haitian-Dominican conflict is not about military might or prowess. The conflict in question is almost more insidious – it is about who does and who doesn’t belong, a conflict of supposedly juxtaposing identities. Both countries realize, however, that despite their dislike or distrust of each other, they still heavily rely upon each other. War is not an option.

According to Philip T. Hoffman in *Why did Europe Conquer the World?*, between 1492 and 1914, the Europeans conquered around 84% of the entire globe.<sup>20</sup> Even those autonomous regions that did not fall directly under European political and/or military occupation knew the increasing pressures of European hegemony and felt their sovereignty undermined by political and economic initiatives of the European colonial powers.<sup>21</sup> While colonialism is not solely confined to the European context, never before had the world seen

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20. Philip T. Hoffman, *Why Did Europe Conquer the World?* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015), back cover excerpt.

21. Margaret Kohn and Keally McBride, *Political Theories of Decolonization: Postcolonialism and the Problem of Foundations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 10.

such a preponderance of imperialism and domination with such far-reaching and long-lasting impacts that Realism failed to predict or even understand. This includes, arguably, the most impactful series of events to take place in the past century: the massive struggles to decolonize and the subsequent rise of Postcolonial identities.<sup>22</sup> Postcolonialism and Social Constructivism are available to help us explore phenomena through a different and clearer lens than Realism.

A quick introduction to these two theories is necessary. Designed specifically to enrich the traditional discourses surrounding freedom, equality, sovereignty, and rule of law, Postcolonialism aims to show that the Global South is a centre of power and agency in its own right rather than solely peripheral to the whims of greater political powers.<sup>23</sup> In opposition to Realism's top-down approach to international relations, Postcolonialism introduces a bottom-up approach to show the "many ways that some colonial conditions of the past interact with today's international relations of globalization, war, empire, migration, and identity politics."<sup>24</sup> It is crucial to look through the Postcolonial paradigm and understand the impacts of colonialism because the historical legacies of such a system have set the stage for current socio-economic conditions in the Global South.<sup>25</sup> According to Margaret Kohn and Keally McBride in *Political Theories of Decolonization: Postcolonialism and the Problems of Foundations*, "[t]he problem of founding is that is never happens on an empty canvas: there is a history that precedes it."<sup>26</sup>

Social Constructivism, on the other hand, is another challenge to Realist hegemony in International Relations theory. Its slightly different focus (compared to Postcolonialism) indicates that ideas, especially persuasive ones, are as real to international politics as Realism's traditional security concerns; ideas have power. These ideas (which include, for example, people's goals, threats, fears, and/or identities) define the international system. In fact, Social Constructivist believes that these norms can trump any materialistic power concerns when it comes to how international agents and systems interact with one another.

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22. Sylvester, "Post-colonialism," 185.

23. Kohn and McBride, *Political Theories of Decolonization: Postcolonialism and the Problem of Foundations*, 3.

24. Sylvester, 185.

25. Jeffrey Nealon and Susan Searls Giroux, *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences, Second Edition* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2012), 156.

26. Kohn and McBride, 9.

Ideas have power, and when these ideas are, in part, results of colonial histories, these approaches together explain phenomena that elude the Realist approach.

Alexander Wendt once famously noted, “Anarchy is what states make of it.”<sup>27</sup> Put another way, the “anarchy” of the international system that Realism promotes only exists because states have decided it to. Negative or defensive reactions to another state, people, or group’s actions have been socially constructed because of the way the international system has been viewed as being solely a “dog eat dog” world. Social Constructivism notes that identity is not static, however. Fortunately, this constructivist approach also means that these practices and assumptions can not only be learned but they can be *unlearned* in order to promote peace and cooperation. To do this, Social Constructivism examines identities and interests and how socio-political structures constrain and construct those of their subordinate agents.

Theorists have long recognized that identity can be plural, multiple, fluid, and merging.<sup>28</sup> Eduardo Mendieta describes identity more as a verb than a noun:

Our identities are never discovered. They are always constituted, constructed, invented, imagined, imposed, projected, suffered, and celebrated. Identities are never univocal, stable, or innocent. They are always an accomplishment and a ceaseless project.<sup>29</sup>

Therefore, just because a person is a part of one community does not necessarily exclude that person from being a member of another community. Take dual citizenship, for example. Many countries allow nationals to be dual citizens – both of their home country and of another country that similarly grants dual citizenship. Rather than having divided loyalties and rights (e.g., resulting in a 50%-50% split of civic rights and responsibilities) dual nationals are 100% members of each of their respective countries. The existence of their second passport does not negate the value of their first one.

It is important to note that many political theorists consider the current state of affairs to be “neo-colonial.” This conclusion is due to the fact that the inequalities facing

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27. Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power,” 395.

28. Linda Martín Alcoff, “Introduction: Identities Modern and Postmodern,” in *Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality*, eds. Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 7.

29. Eduardo Mendieta, afterword to *Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality*, eds. Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 408.

the Global South today in terms of inequities regarding wealth and material resources hauntingly mimic the divisions drawn under colonialism due, in large part, to the inequality of access to cultural resources, texts, images, media, and telecommunications.<sup>30</sup> While this paper will also examine how modern forms of imperialism have complicated (rather than soothe) the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the terms “Postcolonial” and “Postcolonialism” will be used when applicable to convey the idea that the legacy of colonialism still significantly burdens these countries and impacts their relationship with each other.

Based on the previous discussion, identity is defined here as the socially constructed image of a nation held by its citizens (i.e., “self”). It also includes the identity created for other nations (i.e., “Others”). Thus, identity defines both the nation and the Other. To explore this concept further, identity will be linked to national interests, conflicts, and nationalism. These three areas are especially fruitful in helping explain the situation between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

### **Identity & Interests**

The Social Constructivist Alexander Wendt claims that “identities are the basis of interests.”<sup>31</sup> Actors’ interests, therefore, are situational and depend upon the socio-political context in which they find themselves. An identity is simply a lens through which an actor tries to make sense of a complicated scenario by showcasing basic in group/out group ideas and behaviour<sup>32</sup>. Interests worth pursuing are ones that reinforce and/or support the identity of the ingroup with other interests are seen as secondary or unimportant if they do not align with the ingroup identity. This is especially true with regard to conflict as it heightens the “us” versus “them” factor and is prone to trying to solidify usually fluid identities.

Alexander Wendt continues in saying that Social Constructivist literature identifies two types of interests: objective and subjective. Objective interests, in reference to national

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30. Nealon and Giroux, *The Theory Toolbox: Critical Concepts for the Humanities, Arts, & Social Sciences*, 164.

31. Alexander Wendt, “Anarchy is What States Make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics,” *International Organization* 46, no. 2 (Spring 1992): 398.  
<http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0020-8183%28199221%2946%3A2%3C91%3AAIWSMO%3E2.0.CO%3B2-9>.

identity, are those functional needs that must be met in order for the identity to be reproduced. These interests are the ones that have become so critical to a nation-state's sense of self that, without them, the nation-state (or the current incarnation of such) would crumble. On the other hand, however, subjective interests are those interests that the ways in which states believe is the best way to go about securing their needs; it is the motivation for their behavior.<sup>33</sup>

Along the same line of thought, Wendt continues that all nation-states have four general objective interests: physical survival, autonomy, economic well-being, and collective self-esteem.<sup>34</sup> Of particular interest to the Haitian-Dominican conflict is the idea of collective self-esteem. According Wendt:

A key factor is whether collective self-images are positive or negative, which will depend in part on relationship to significant Others, since it is by taking the perspective of the Other that the Self sees itself. Negative self-images tend to emerge from perceived disregard or humiliation by other states... Since groups cannot long tolerate such images if they are to meet the self-esteem needs of their members, they will compensate by self-assertion and/or devaluation and aggression toward the Other.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, Martha Finnemore, another prominent Social Constructivist, argues in her book *National Interests in International Security* that a nation-state's interests are created by the systemic norms that are produced by the existence and/or goals of international organizations. These institutions provide states with both direction and goals for action by teaching members to accept new norms, values, and interests.<sup>36</sup>

Once again, it appears that the Haitian-Dominican conflict breaks the mold in terms of international relations theory. Because Haiti and the Dominican Republic find the origins of their relationship spanning more than 500 years before the creation of the United Nations in 1945, the Organization of American States in 1948, or even the Caribbean Community in 1973, one would expect that their relationship would have become different over time – less antagonistic and more in favour of bilateral cooperation given the mandates of these organizations. Yet, as has become clear, it has not. The same distrust still exists between

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33. Alexander Wendt, "The State and the Problem of Corporate Agency," in *Social Theory of International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999: 231-232.

34. Alexander Wendt, "The State and the Problem of Corporate Agency," 235-236.

35. Wendt, "The State and the Problem of Corporate Agency," 236 – 237.

36. Martha Finnemore, *National Interests in International Society*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

the two nation-states and their unwillingness to cooperate has remain a constant factor within the Caribbean region.

On the other hand, Finnemore's argument might find a foothold. After the creation of the United Nations in 1948, the physical violence that once characterized the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic (i.e., invasion, massacre, etc.) seemed to disappear in favour of mutual distrust and dislike. Given the penchant that international organizations have for promoting cross-cultural cooperation, it seems likely that the chaotic violence that once characterized their relationship would no longer stand in a world "focused on human rights" after World War II. Postcolonial discourse shows that the Global North, or the countries that were/are the colonizing powers, are not expected to live by these norms. This phenomenon could explain quelling of the outright violence between Haiti and the Dominican Republic post-United Nations but also help explain the United States invasions of Hispaniola in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century.

### **Identity & Conflict**

Aiming to explore the complexities of ethnic and sectarian conflicts, Patricia M. Thornton and a group of Fulbright New Century Scholars collaboratively outlined three broad ways in which collective identity (i.e., national identity) and conflict are related:

1. Sub/super-national identities are seen, by those in power, as undermining national identities,
2. The nation-state often imposes identity, both national and collective, from the top down, and
3. Socio-political collective identities can sometimes reduce instead of trigger conflict.<sup>37</sup>

The New Century Scholars first make the case that sub-national identities are, as seen by those in power, undermining the overarching national and/or civic identities within which they exist. The fracturing of national unity into smaller, more closely-knit factions of identities could destroy a relatively unified state from the inside out. On the other hand,

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37. Patricia M. Thornton, introduction to *Identity Matters: Ethnic and Sectarian Conflict*, eds. James L. Peacock, Patricia M. Thornton, and Patrick B. Inman (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 9.

super-national (e.g., regional identities) and transnational identities risk eclipsing national identity in terms of importance. The nation-state then risks losing power and prominence as national identity becomes, in and of itself, a subordinate identity to more a universalistic one.

Second, the authors make the case that nation-states often exert control over collective identities within their borders. While the specifics for doing so are as varied as the nation-states themselves, the overarching reasons for doing remain eerily similar across space and time. The nation-state attempts to control, subdue, or eliminate members whose super-national collective identities could pose a threat to the existence of the current national one. Instead of being the fractured and politically unstable victim, the nation-state risks being aggressive against its own people in order to maintain authority, power, and control.

Still, the existence of collective socio-political identities does not always denote violence or even conflict. In fact, Thornton states that “the existence of multiple overlapping or intertwining identities [can inhibit] collective violence and promote social cohesion.” In these cases, the “conflicting identities” have been redefined, depolarized, and intertwined.<sup>38</sup> While it is clear, then, that collective identities do not always lead to ethnic or sectarian violence as shown by point three above, the authors of the study showed that, when pitted against national identity, conflict often ensues as a result of points one and two. What is this connection, then, between national identity and conflict?

Not all identities can – or will — cause conflict, especially on a large scale. Collective identities are not naturally inclined toward inciting violence and have even been shown, in certain cases, to have a pacific influence. Given that our current international system is dominated by the nation-state, it is only fitting that national identity, and those in control of it, would be willing to exert this type of power. In order to understand the connection between identity and conflict, attention must fall on national identity.

Whereas national identity is far from being the only type of identity, it is one of the only identities with enough power and force of will behind it to cause conflict, violent or otherwise. The addition of “subordinate identities” only further adds to the power of the nation-state, which by its very nature, is defined by its national identity. An ethnic and

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38. Thornton, *Identity Matters: Ethnic and Sectarian Conflict*, 9.

sectarian conflict must, by definition, involve the nation-state in some capacity. If any case study were to show this, it would be the practically tangible tensions between Haiti and the Dominican Republic that are explored in this study.

Whenever the existence or well-being of the nation-state is threatened – not necessarily its people, *per se*, but the idea of the nation-state as a whole – conflict is prone to break out. Specifically, state-sanctioned violence emerges as the state tries to regain authority and assert control. Because the nation-state has assumed *de facto* control over “subordinate identities,” any conflict relating to linguistic, cultural, or even ethnic identity is put into the hands of the government.

The imposition of identity from the top down by the government acts as both a cause and effect of the conflict. To promote national unity, the state will promote both internally and externally what it sees as the “most desirable citizen” to 1) influence how outside actors perceive the nation and 2) enforce such ideals upon their own denizens in order to create a unified citizenry that moves, talks, thinks, and acts similarly. But, should any ethnic or sectarian conflict occur, the state pushes harder upon these imposed identities in order to suppress the sub-national identities that threaten to fracture the nation.

Those who do not readily identify themselves with the prescribed national characteristics (or who are perceived as not doing so by members of their community) are then categorized as the Other – a juxtapositional threat that endangers the very existence of the ingroup. Because national identity is the cornerstone of the nation-state, the wellbeing of ingroup has been readily associated with the well-being of the state. Any deviance is seen as a threat to national security.

Apparently, this perceived threat is not an uncommon phenomenon. D.J. Christie states, in his book *The Encyclopedia of Peace Psychology*, that siege syndrome is a collective state of mind of victimization and defenselessness where the group in question feels isolated, attacked, and oppressed by outside and opposing factors. Christie continues that the consequences of such thinking are viewing the world in “black and white” (i.e., “us” versus “them”), a lack of trust, and a strong sense of social cohesion and conformity.<sup>39</sup>

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39. Daniel J. Christie, *The Encyclopedia of Peace Psychology* (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), 997-998.

Drawing upon Alexander Wendt's Mirror Theory of Identity Formation through his Ego/Alter Scenario, the Haitian-Dominican conflict can be put into another theoretical framework. According to Wendt, when two actors (Ego and Alter, respectively) interact for the first time, one of the actors must make the first move – much like in a game of chess. This singular act sets out the expectations for the ensuing relationship, as it is rationally assumed that the first actor would act as they “normally” with no strings attached. Wendt goes on to state that “if Ego is predatory, Alter must either define its security in self-help terms or pay the price.” Ego's aggressive actions force Alter to respond in kind, risking competitive power politics, under the threat of societal degradation or destruction.<sup>40</sup>

Wendt concludes that identities that have been forged in conflict naturally reinforce it. Conflict creates a competitive system in which the efforts of Ego threaten the security of Alter and vice versa. This phenomenon perpetuates distrust and alienation. Wendt describes it as such:

Interaction rewards actors for holding certain ideas about each other and discourages them from holding others. If repeated long enough, these ‘reciprocal typifications’ will create relatively stable concepts of self and other regarding the issue at stake in the interaction.<sup>41</sup>

### **Identity & Nationalism**

According to Ross Poole in his essay *National Identity and Citizenship*, nation-states have tried for the past two centuries to prove that national identity is superior to any other form of identity.<sup>42</sup> In fact, the narrative has been that these other “subordinate identities” (whether they be ethnic, religious, linguistic or any of the other categories and sub-categories into which humans divide themselves) feed into and support the overarching national identity of a person. Poole explains the phenomenon:

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40. Wendt, 405-408.

41. Wendt, 405.

42. Ross Poole, “National Identity and Citizenship” in *Identities: Race, Class, Gender, and Nationality*, eds. Linda Martín Alcoff and Eduardo Mendieta (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 271.

For much of the modern world, the nation has appropriated to itself the linguistic and cultural means necessary for the articulation of the sense of self of its members. ... Another aspect of the strength of a national identity lies in the richness of the cultural resources which are employed in forming the conception of national community. This identity provides us with a land in which we are at home, a history which is ours, and a privileged access to a vast heritage; it also assures us that it is *ours*.<sup>43</sup>

In effect, the existence of a nation-state has promoted the idea of national unity across (sometimes vast) geographical differences. Where, once, cultural and linguistic identities were limited to one's own community, technological advances in communication (including but not limited to everything from the written word to social media) have expanded the definition of community. A government now has more direct contact with and access to its denizens – and vice versa – no matter their geographical region. A unified state, therefore, that is not dealing with internal conflicts and fractures along the lines of cultural or linguistic identity, can become more powerful, wealthy, and secure.

To cement control over these growing ideas of community and its power over them, the nation-state has used linguistic and cultural similarities among its peoples as a form of national solidification and unification. By declaring itself a single distinct unit whose peoples practice specific cultural traditions or speak a certain (family of) languages, linguistic and cultural identities are subsumed into national identity. These cultural and linguistic identities are assumed to be – and become – merely facets of a larger national identity. In the terms of Poole, by “appropriating” these other identities in order to boost its own cachet and power, national identity becomes the basis for which “community” is identified.

National identity, when taken by itself, does not pose much of a problem – much less instigate violent bilateral or multilateral conflict. David Brown, in talking about national identity in *Ethnic Conflict and Civic Nationalism: A Model*, makes a point to distinguish national identity from nationalism. Whereas national identity is the sense-making that results from belonging to a nation-state, nationalism and nationalist ideologies aim to politicize such identities for socio-political gain. He claims that nationalist ideologies are reactionary processes of thought that aim to make sense of social change and/or upheaval.

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43. Ross Poole, “National Identity and Citizenship,” 272.

It tries to make sense of the complex and ever-changing nature of modern socio-political relationships through simplification.<sup>44</sup>

Nationalism is, in part, a distortion of national identity. The status quo, by its very nature, exists within a state of equilibrium. Any type of disruption to the socio-political sphere is seen as endangering this delicate and hard-earned balance – especially to those who benefit from the current system of privileges. The simplification of nationalism contorts the situation into rhetoric whereby the “pure and just nation is disrupted or contaminated by the demonized Other.”<sup>45</sup> Other, in this case, as defined by Allan G. Johnson is,

[T]he key word in understanding how systems are identified with privileged groups. The privileged group is the assumed ‘we’ in relation to ‘them.’ The ‘other’ is the ‘you people’ whom the ‘we’ regard as problematic, unacceptable, unlikeable, or beneath ‘our’ standards.<sup>46</sup>

The problem with nationalism, then, is that it views simple conflicts of interests as moral battlegrounds between an inherently polarized “us” versus “them.” In order to have an ingroup such as a national community, there must also be an outgroup. Identities are as much about what or who we are *not* as they are about what or who we *are*. The national identity marker for a national community serves to signify both that you are a member of such group and that you are not a member of another group.

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44. David Brown, “Ethnic Conflict and Civic Nationalism: A Model,” in *Identity Matters: Ethnic and Sectarian Conflict*, eds. James L. Peacock, Patricia M. Thornton, and Patrick B. Inman (New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 23-24.

45. David Brown, “Ethnic Conflict and Civic Nationalism: A Model,” 23-24.

46. Allan G. Johnson, *Privilege, Power, and Difference, Second Edition* (Boston, McGraw-Hill, 2006), 96.

## **PART TWO**

### **Analyzing the Current Conflict Between Haiti & the Dominican Republic**

In the preceding sections, a case has been made for the exploration of Haiti and the Dominican Republic as a symbiotic system, two states with an intertwined history who co-exist in proximal space rather than two wholly independent nation-states. Additionally, the concept of identity and the power it exerts to define a nation-state's sense of self and its "enemies" has been explored.

In the following section, the various aspects of the conflict specific to Haiti and the Dominican Republic are discussed, with specific application of identity issues that are primary drivers of attitudes and actions. Following a brief overview of the historical roots of the conflict and of both Haitian and Dominican identities, three primary aspects of the current conflict will be explored: the refugee crisis, the ongoing trade war, and the two countries' inability to cooperate on environmental issues. There emerge two distinct consequences, then, of the conflict: direct and indirect.

Following this, the current conflict is analyzed in terms of how the nation-states has manipulated the two identities to become opposing and fanned the flames of nationalism. Similarly, the study examines how the Haitian-Dominican conflict has become cyclical and self-reinforcing. The longer the conflict goes on, the longer the identities are seen as fundamentally incompatible and the harder it is to find a common ground for peace actions.

Prior to any analysis of the sources and causes of conflict between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, however, it is necessary to provide some historical context of Hispaniola and the nations that inhabit the island.

### **Historical Roots of Divided Identities**

Originally and interchangeably called *Quisqueya* (“Mother of All Lands”) and *Haití* (“Land of Mountains”) by the indigenous Taínos, the island of Hispaniola was renamed as such by the Spanish upon colonization. Geographically, Haiti occupies the western third of the horizontally-oriented island and covers around 27,750 square kilometers with the Dominican Republic claiming the other two-thirds and having a total land area of 48,734 square kilometers. The north-south border between the two nations is 375 kilometers in length and marks the division between two distinct nations, cultures, and peoples.<sup>47</sup>

The human history of Hispaniola can be traced as far back as sometime before 3,000 BCE to when the indigenous Taíno people first inhabited the island along with many neighbouring archipelagos. Home to a vivid culture and an advanced civilization, the Taínos were far from the “ignorant savages” they were often described as by colonial accounts. In fact, and among many other major accomplishments overlooked by the European colonizers, Taíno culture was largely egalitarian, had a fully-developed belief system with a full pantheon of deities, and was noted for being more artistic than militaristic. By 1548, a mere 56 years after Christopher Columbus’ first voyage to the Americas, only an estimated 500 Taínos remained on the island out of a population numbering between 300,000 and 400,000 people. The population collapse of the Taíno people mirrors what many other indigenous American societies experienced during the early stages of colonization. This deadly phenomenon was facilitated by the, first accidental and then deliberate, use of biological warfare against the indigenous population, along with years upon years of massacres, rapes, and acts of physical and cultural genocide. However, contrary to popular belief, all was not lost; traces of the Taíno people, their culture, and their language can still be seen today throughout the island.<sup>48</sup>

December 6, 1492 is a critical date for the colonization of Hispaniola. Christopher Columbus arrived on Hispaniola, claiming it for the Spanish empire. In 1697, in the Treaty of Ryswick, Spain ceded the western part of Hispaniola, what is now Haiti, to the French empire. The Spanish crown had already abandoned the western part of the island years earlier in favour of exploiting the mainland of South America in their pursuit of gold, while

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47. Cambeira, *Quisqueya La Bella: The Dominican Republic in Historical and Cultural Perspective*, vi, 20.

48. Cambeira, 34-38.

keeping a foothold in the eastern part of the island. Hispaniola became divided into French-controlled Saint-Domingue in the west and Spanish-controlled Santo Domingo in the east.<sup>49</sup> After 107 years of direct French rule, Saint-Domingue declared itself independent on January 1, 1804 under the new name of Haiti.<sup>50</sup> Forty years later, Santo Domingo declared itself independent as the new Dominican Republic, on February 27, 1844. Interestingly, the Dominican Republic gained its independence from its newly liberated neighbor Haiti rather than from Spain. Haiti had begun to occupy Santo Domingo in 1801 under the principle of total island unification, even before their own independence in 1804.<sup>51</sup> Since then, relations between the two countries have been icy at best and outright hostile at worst.

All of the current crises and conflicts are symptoms of a larger and more overarching phenomenon. According to Pedro L. San Miguel, author of *An Island in the Mirror: The Dominican Republic and Haiti*, both the Dominican Republic and Haiti suffer from siege syndrome. Haitians see themselves, he claims, as under constant attack by outside forces that mean to hinder their development. The phrase “besieged citadel” is often used in reference to Haiti, with the nation being juxtaposed to the West, imperialism, and white power. This narrative was born out of the Haitian slave uprising of 1791 and the following revolution of 1804 that validated Haiti as the first independent black republic and overthrew the shackles of slavery.<sup>52</sup>

According to Bellegarde-Smith, Haiti is the only state to have successfully gained its independence from not only a successful revolution, but a slave uprising. Occurring in 1804, Haiti’s independence struggles precede those faced by former colonies around the world during the huge wave of decolonization that swept the globe in the 1950s and 1960s by around 150 years. Yet Haiti remains the poorest country in the western hemisphere and is plagued by political unrest and instability as if it had only gained independence within the century.<sup>53</sup>

Regarding internal politics, Dupuy makes the case that, after the Haitian revolution, the laboring classes were liberated but then quickly became ensnared in a classist hierarchy

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49. Bellegarde-Smith, 50.

50. Logan, *Haiti and the Dominican Republic*, 94.

51. Logan, 31-33.

52. San Miguel, “An Island in the Mirror: The Dominican Republic and Haiti,” 568.

53. Bellegarde-Smith, 6-7.

that only made them subordinate to the new dominant class. The dominant class was then further broken into the economic and political elite. The economic bourgeoisie continued to enforce the classist hierarchy by passing wealth through generations, while the political elite tried to follow by making government positions hereditary (e.g., Duvalier family dictatorship). This class system meant that *coup d'états* became the principal means by which to take power.<sup>54</sup>

Haiti was officially a unified republic in 1819, becoming internally divided over political ideologies after the Haitian Revolution.<sup>55</sup> In 1825, France agreed to recognize Haiti as independent if the new nation paid the French an indemnity of over 150 million francs. This price was later negotiated down to 60 million francs that Haiti finally paid back in 1922.<sup>56</sup> This debt may help explain the brutality with which the Haitians occupied Santo Domingo in the early years of the nation. In order to meet this massive and overwhelming indemnity imposed upon them by the French, Haiti heavily taxed Santo Domingo's citizens and institutions when it occupied them from 1822 to 1844.<sup>57</sup> Even though nominally independent and not passed around from occupying power to occupying power like the Dominican Republic, Haiti was diplomatically isolated and ostracized, with world powers refusing recognition, enforcing embargos, and slandering the newly independent nation.<sup>58</sup>

In 1915, the United States began an occupation of Haiti that would last 19 years. The United States government had hoped to “starve the Haitian government into submission so that it would accede to U.S. [economic and political] demands.”<sup>59</sup> Martial law was used during most of the occupation, and the Haitian legislature was dissolved from 1917 to 1930. When they were finally ousted in 1934, the United States made sure to sow the seeds for the Duvalier dictatorship that would control Haiti from 1957 to 1986. A shorter, yet no less brutal, United States occupation happened in the Dominican Republic; from 1916 to 1924, in order to “maintain order and stability.”<sup>60</sup> This was not the last time

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54. Alex Dupuy, “From Revolutionary Slaves to Powerless Citizens,” in *Haiti: From Revolutionary Slaves to Powerless Citizens: Essays on the Politics and Economics of Underdevelopment, 1804-2013* (London: Routledge, 2014), 53.

55. Cambeira, 148.

56. Bellegarde-Smith, 74.

57. Henry Louis Gates, *Black in Latin America*, Episode 1, “Haiti and the Dominican Republic: An Island Divided.”

58. Bellegarde-Smith, 70-71.

59. Bellegarde-Smith, 98.

60. Cambeira, 165.

the Dominican Republic was to lose total independence. The United States intervened again in Dominican politics from 1965 to 1966, under claims that the civil war raging in the capital, Santo Domingo, was a threat to American lives and to the economy.<sup>61</sup>

Bellegarde-Smith makes the case that Haiti's national religion, vodou, played a major part within both political and cultural spheres. Because so many Haitians mix vodou with Christian beliefs in a syncretic style of worship, there is a popular saying that Haitians are 70% Catholic, 30% Protestant, and 100% vodou, although the exact number of believers remains unclear.<sup>62</sup> Outlawed by both the French and successive semi-independent dictatorships for years, vodou was systemically and systematically repressed within the country. Practitioners and priests were often killed or imprisoned, their sacred places of worship destroyed, and vodou was outlawed as a threat to the Euro-Christian hegemony and the Haitian dictators propped up by such powers. Vodou was officially recognized in the 1987 Haitian constitution, but it was only in 2003 that vodou was recognized legally as one of the state's official religions, with up to 90% of the population practicing.<sup>63</sup> Given these statistics, it is unsurprising that vodou played a major role in not only the Haitian Revolution, but also in resisting the United States invasions in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century and the overthrowing of the Duvalier regime in 1986.<sup>64</sup>

The solidification of the country and its continued existence was secured through vodou practitioners. The Fon and Yoruba peoples of West Africa (to whom a majority of the Haitian people can trace their ancestry) were often led by royal priests who, according to traditional belief, were allowed to rule only through the will of the spirits and ancestors. Therefore, when they were captured and enslaved by invading European forces, those with spiritual knowledge often became leaders in their communities and were the ones actively pushing for rebellion and revolution.<sup>65</sup> In fact, Toussaint L'Ouverture, the leader at the forefront of the Haitian Revolution, was a notable vodou priest within his community. This tradition of grassroots vodou activism has been passed down through the generations and

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61. Cambeira, 191-193.

62. BBC News, "Haiti Makes Voodoo Official." <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/americas/2985627.stm>

63. BBC News, "Haiti Makes Voodoo Official."

64. Bellegarde-Smith, 21.

65. Rod Davis, "The Revolution Denied" to *American Vodou: Journey into a Hidden World* (Denton: The University of North Texas 54, 1998), 354-355.

is widely acknowledged as a unifying force within the country of which the Haitian people are very proud.

Once two separate colonies, Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) and Santo Domingo (now the Dominican Republic) were unified under French control by the Treaty of Basel in 1795, a mere nine years before the end of the Haitian Revolution in 1804.<sup>66</sup> Toussaint L'Ouverture, leader of the Revolution, had started invading/occupying Santo Domingo as early as 1801, however, meaning that the independence he declared in 1804 was meant for the entire unified island of Hispaniola.

But there was a problem. Due to differences in their colonial histories, the people in what was formerly known as Santo Domingo were very different than those who occupied what is now called Haiti. Santo Domingo's population was only one-fifth of Saint-Domingue's and was comprised of a more multi-ethnic population who spoke Spanish rather than French or Kreyol. They wished to return to Spanish colonial rule and, ten years later in 1814, Spanish rule became law.<sup>67</sup> This exact date is debated, however; Dominican scholar Alan Cambeira claims Santo Domingo was returned to (a rather disinterested and preoccupied) Spain in 1809, when the French only gave up official control in 1808 after being ousted by Santo Domingo's citizenry. He continues in saying that this colonial status lasted in 1821 when a successful coup placed Santo Domingo under the protection of Colombia.<sup>68</sup>

Unfortunately, this new status only lasted for a year as Haiti began its twenty-two-year occupation of Santo Domingo in 1822.<sup>69</sup> Cambeira makes a point to note that while many modern Dominicans claim that Haiti forcefully invaded Santo Domingo, there was ample support among the Dominican political and military elite at the time for a unified Hispaniola. Again, this date is contentious; Haitian scholar Patrick Bellegarde-Smith claims the occupation began in 1821 and lasted for twenty-three years.<sup>70</sup> This academic disagreement is only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Regardless, both parties can agree that on February 27, 1844, after a

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66. Bellegarde-Smith, 75.

67. Bellegarde-Smith.

68. Cambeira, 141-143.

69. Cambeira, 147.

70. Bellegarde-Smith, 75.

long and bloody struggle for independence, the Haitian occupation of Santo Domingo was officially over, and the Dominican Republic was born.<sup>71</sup>

This independence was short-lived, however, as Spain suddenly reannexed the Dominican Republic seventeen years later in 1861. However, the feelings of anti-Haitianism at the crux of Dominican national identity remained. Keeping in the pattern of short-lived occupations, this annexation only lasted four years (until 1865) due to internal Spanish politics and the determination of the Dominicans to become independent again.<sup>72</sup>

The Dominican narrative, on the other hand, portrays the colonial period at the height of the golden age. Given the Haitian occupation in the 1800s and the recent influx of immigrants (illegal or otherwise) coming from their neighboring country, the Dominicans view their own society as one that is being constantly assaulted by their aggressive and unrelenting neighbor. The Dominican Republic has endured so many “Haitian land seizures, raids, conquest, illegal immigration, and cultural and ethnic encroachment” that any mention of Haiti sparks an immediate visceral negative response.<sup>73</sup>

It is important to note that the Dominican Republic does not take its independence from Haiti lightly. During the occupation, the Haitian government was taxing the people of Santo Domingo more heavily than their own, which led to a widespread pivot towards Dominican national identity. With a different language, set of cultures and customs, historical roots, and economy than their Haitian counterparts, it was only logical that they pursued independence as the Dominican Republic. After independence, Dominicans tried to reject everything about Haiti and largely continue to do so today. Haitians, and Dominicans of Haitian descent, had now become a new class – the Other – in Dominican society. Because of the difference in economic wealth, Dominicans learned to see themselves as better than Haitians. There became, then, a distinction between Haitians and Dominicans with Blackness becoming almost solely associated with Haitian identity and, due to the contentious history between the two nations, negatively connoted. Dominicans were now Hispanic, while Haitians were Africans.

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71. Cambeira, 151.

72. Bellegarde-Smith, 76.

73. San Miguel, 568.

The colonial French agricultural model of planting only cash crops in Haiti year after year stripped the land of any arability. Haiti, graced with less land to begin with, is very mountainous and geographically prone to landslides and earthquakes.<sup>74</sup> During the United States occupation of the island in 1916, however, the Haitians came to the Dominican Republic as desperate migrant workers in the sugar industry that the United States propped up as a neocolonial resource extraction system. Here, they were dehumanized and reduced to near-complete destitution. Similar to anti-immigrant rhetoric across the world today, poor immigrants were assumed to be lazy, stealing jobs, and somehow less worthy of respect than their non-immigrant Dominican counterparts.<sup>75</sup>

Under the Trujillo regime in the Dominican Republic from the 1930s to the 1960s, these othering ideas were taught as nationalist propaganda within the education system and through state-sponsored media propaganda until the late 1960s. Using anti-Haitianism, Trujillo hoped to mobilize nationalist sentiments in order to form a unified state after years of political chaos. To do this, he often favourably promoted white immigration and advertised the Dominican Republic as a white country, as an extension of Europe in the Caribbean.<sup>76</sup> Unfortunately, these sentiments still remain within society and emerge whenever tensions with neighbouring Haiti become enflamed.

Given this historical context, Dominicans are immensely proud of their Spanish heritage and revere Christopher Columbus as a national hero. There still exists, in the undercurrents of Dominican culture and society, the idea that since they are derived from the oldest Spanish colony in the Americas, the Dominican Republic is inherently “the most Spanish.” Juan Rodrigues, Director of Cultural Diversity for the Ministry of Culture in the Dominican Republic, claims that this romanticism of the past has led many Dominicans to consider Spain at the “motherland” despite the fact that over 90% of Dominicans are of African descent.<sup>77</sup>

Henry Gates, Jr. maintains that the roots of this structure reach all the way back to Spain’s original conquest of Hispaniola. After the colonists in Santo Domingo abandoned their plantation-based economy due to the shifting of the centre of sugar production to

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74. *Borders*, Episode 1, “Divided Island: How Haiti and the Dominican Republic Became Two Worlds.”

75. Gates, “Haiti and the Dominican Republic: An Island Divided.”

76. Abreu Report, “The Root of the Dominican Skin Crisis.”

77. Gates.

Brazil, the colony turned to cattle ranching. This new economic system, while still slavery, led to changes in the conditions of slaves on the eastern part of the island. Gates states that this new economic system allowed (read: needed) people of any colour to be ranchers; the result was that the ranchers were given more freedom and autonomy. Similarly, many white people, sensing declining revenues, left the colony at this time to return to Spain. Many of the vacant jobs in the army, church, and government began to be filled with Dominicans.<sup>78</sup>

In fact, Howard claims that the term *indio* is an important part of Dominican culture and society. Acting as a unique racial categorizer specific to the region, the term *indio* connotes a connection to Hispaniola's original inhabitants, the Taíno. This word of both self and collective identification covers any skin tone from coffee-coloured and cinnamon-coloured to chocolate- and/or wheat-coloured. He goes on to claim that this phenomenon is a way to negate African heritage and the terms *negro* or *mulatto*.<sup>79</sup>

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78. Gates.

79. Howard, 3.

## **The Current Conflict Between Haiti & the Dominican Republic**

Given their history, it is not surprising that Haiti and the Dominican Republic have a tense relationship. In the following section, several aspects of the current conflict that define their relationship are identified. Two consequences of this conflict can be readily identified: direct and indirect. Direct consequences include “the Western Hemisphere’s worst refugee crisis” and the ongoing trade war linked to their distrust of each other. Meanwhile, there are also indirect consequences or ones that the conflict make it harder to resolve. The most pressing example of this phenomenon would be Haiti and the Dominican Republic’s inability to work together despite impending environmental catastrophe on the island of Hispaniola.

### **“The Western Hemisphere’s Worst Refugee Crisis”**

In 2010, the government of the Dominican Republic adopted a new constitution. Intentionally or not, this new constitution came on the heels of *Goudoumgoudoum* - the huge earthquake that shook Port-au-Prince in January of that same year. Despite recognizing the principle of *jus soli* (birthright citizenship) for over 75 years, the revised constitution only granted citizenship to those born to legal Dominican residents. Children of illegal immigrants and “foreigners in transit” (defined in 2004 by the Dominican Congress as any person without official residency status) now did not receive Dominican citizenship.<sup>80</sup> Given that around 90% of the Dominican Republic’s foreign-born migrant workers are Haitian, it is clear that the revised citizenship clause was meant to target this already vulnerable population, even if it does not explicitly say so in the legislation’s wording.<sup>81</sup> In fact, people of Haitian descent make up 86% of the affected population, ruling out all doubt that this new legislation was not meant to target Haitians.<sup>82</sup>

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80. Keturah T. Reed, “Dominican Republic Violates Int’l Law in Cancelling Citizenship,” *North Carolina Journal of International Law*, last modified January 26, 2016, <http://blogs.law.unc.edu/ncilj/2016/01/26/dominican-republic-violates-intl-law-in-canceling-citizenship/#11>.

81. Javiera Alarcon, “It’s Really Happening: The Dominican Republic Is Deporting Its Haitian Residents,” *Foreign Policy in Focus*, last modified April 4, 2016, <https://fpif.org/really-happening-dominican-republic-deporting-haitian-residents/>.

82. Simone Young, “In Our Backyard: The Caribbean’s Statelessness and Refugee Crisis,” *Brookings Institution*, last modified June 20, 2017, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/order-from-chaos/2017/06/20/in-our-backyard-the-caribbeans-statelessness-and-refugee-crisis/>.

Three years later, the Dominican Constitutional Court passed ruling 168-13, which retroactively denationalized the descendants of people thought to have immigrated illegally to the Dominican Republic since 1929. This ruling meant that anyone who could not prove their ancestors' legal status in the country was automatically stripped of citizenship.<sup>83</sup> In 2017, an estimated 200,000 people (Michelle Wucker puts this number as high as 350,000<sup>84</sup>) were thought to be left stateless as a result of this new legislation creating the “Western Hemisphere’s worst refugee crisis.” Many NGOs, namely the Organization of American States (OAS), the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) have denounced this new legislation as a targeted attack on human rights. Despite these outcries and simply “slaps on the wrist” for the Dominican government, the larger international community has remained relatively silent, allowing the deportations to continue.<sup>85</sup>

In response to the criticism, the Dominican government passed a subsequent piece of legislation that stated that affected persons could “reinstate” their citizenship if they could prove their parents were legal residents at the time of birth.<sup>86</sup> At the same time, it promised to halt all deportations until the deadline for reinstatement had passed: June 18, 2015.<sup>87</sup> As a press release by *Open Society Foundations* states, however, ruling 169-14 (officially the *Ley de Régimen Especial y Naturalización 169-14*) applies to anyone with a registration of birth from 1929 to 2007.<sup>88</sup> Simone Young at Brookings Institution explains the problems with this new law:

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83. Michele Wucker, “The Dominican Republic’s Shameful Deportation Legacy,” *Foreign Policy*, last modified October 8, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/10/08/dominican-republic-haiti-trujillo-immigration-deportation/>.

84. Michele Wucker, “The Dominican Republic’s Shameful Deportation Legacy.”

85. Young, “In Our Backyard: The Caribbean’s Statelessness and Refugee Crisis.”

86. Wucker, “The Dominican Republic’s Shameful Deportation Legacy.”

87. “Where are we Going to Live?": Migration and Statelessness in Haiti and the Dominican Republic,” Amnesty International, June 2016, 4, <https://www.amnesty.org/download/Documents/AMR3641052016ENGLISH.PDF>.

88. “Dominican Republic’s New Naturalization Law Falls Short,” *Open Society Foundations*, last modified June 3, 2014, <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/press-releases/dominican-republics-new-naturalization-law-falls-short>.

[I]t placed the burden of proof on the victims to provide records of their births and also their parents' births in the Dominican Republic and was plagued by implementation flaws. Many of the births were either never registered — in many cases because Dominican government officials deliberately denied records to people of Haitian descent, or because Dominican officials did not return original birth certificates to people who were deemed to “look” or “sound” Haitian when they presented their certificates for renewal.<sup>89</sup>

According to Michelle Wucker, Dominican officials took the term “in-transit” in the previous constitution on 1929 very liberally. They repeatedly used it as an excuse to deny Haitians living in the Dominican Republic birth certificates, education, passports, and government identification cards.<sup>90</sup>

Given those difficulties, by the deadline of this citizenship “trial period,” only 1% of applications submitted for permanent residency had been approved, and the deportations went on as scheduled, thus proving ruling 168-14 a sham.<sup>91</sup> This conclusion is backed up by statistics from Javiera Alarcon from *Foreign Policy in Focus*. She claims that of the total 200,000 Haitians affected by Law 169-14, only about 7,000 had a chance to apply for “reinstatement.”<sup>92</sup> The math is quite simple from here: only 70 or so Haitians out of an estimated 200,000 were granted the right to have citizenship in the Dominican Republic returned to them in 2016. That is approximately 0.035% of the total affected population, using the conservative estimates for the number of those affected. If we use the higher-estimate of affected people, that number plummets to 0.02%. While there has been some increase in recent years, the total number of denaturalized citizens who have regained rights is less than 10%.<sup>93</sup>

Even for those who were eligible under ruling 169-14 to (re)apply for Dominican citizenship, the process had its complications. They first had to register themselves as foreigners with the Dominican government in order to obtain a migratory permit. This

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89. Young.

90. Wucker, “The Dominican Republic’s Shameful Deportation Legacy.”

91. Reed, “Dominican Republic Violates Int’l Law in Cancelling Citizenship.”

92. Alarcon, “It’s Really Happening: The Dominican Republic Is Deporting Its Haitian Residents.”

93. Jonathan M. Katz, “What Happened When a Nation Erased Birthright Citizenship,” *The Atlantic*, last modified November 12, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/11/dominican-republic-erased-birthright-citizenship/575527/>.

permit, after two years, would theoretically eventually open the door to full citizenship status. This process forces Haitians born “illegally” in the Dominican Republic to register as foreigners in the hope of regaining official citizenship status.<sup>94</sup> The situation has become a quandary for Haitians in the Dominican Republic, trapping them between a rock and a hard place. They either voluntarily register as foreigners in their country of birth (becoming *de facto* stateless) or risk being deported to Haiti where they are also not citizens. Either way, the Dominican Republic has systematically backed those of Haitian-descent into a corner: voluntarily become stateless or forcibly become so.

According to Amnesty International, the Dominican Republic immediately resumed full-scale deportations after the end of this deadline. Estimates at the time of the report were that nearly 40,000 Haitians had been deported from the Dominican Republic as of May 26, 2016. Another 66,000 were reported to have returned “spontaneously” due to societal pressure and threats of physical violence and other harmful acts.<sup>95</sup> In February 2015, a Haitian man was lynched in a public park in Santiago, Dominican Republic. Throughout the Dominican Republic, the news sparked tensions and uncovered the simmering and growing anti-Haitianism. Many of those who returned “spontaneously” said they did so because of direct threats from their neighbors. In a few extreme cases, their property and houses were burned down, and they had nowhere else to turn to except the Haitian border.<sup>96</sup>

As a result of these deportations, statelessness has become a massive problem across the island of Hispaniola. According to the UNHCR, a stateless person is not recognized as a citizen “under the operations of the laws of any country.” This means that they have little to no access to education, healthcare, employment, public utilities, and housing (among many other necessary goods and services necessary for a dignified survival).<sup>97</sup> In addition, statelessness leaves individuals more vulnerable to arbitrary detention, expulsion, forcible family separation, and arrest.<sup>98</sup> Haiti, recognizing that the Dominican Republic is legally free to deport irregular migrants from its own territory, insisted that the deportations be

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94. *Open Society Foundations*, “Dominican Republic’s New Naturalization Law Falls Short.”

95. “Where are we Going to Live?”: Migration and Statelessness in Haiti and the Dominican Republic,” Amnesty International, 4.

96. Reed.

97. Young.

98. Young.

negotiated between the two countries. The Dominican Republic turned down this proposal, stating the matter was subject to the Dominican government alone.<sup>99</sup>

In pursuing this legal course of action, the Dominican Republic has broken a variety of international laws and human rights conventions. Keturah T. Reed from the North Carolina Journal of International Law states that the Dominican government broke both the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (UNDoHR) and the American Convention on Human Rights (ACoHR) – specifically Articles 15 and 20. Article 15 of the UNDoHR states that “[n]o one shall be arbitrarily deprived of [their] nationality nor denied the right to change [their] nationality.” Article 20 of the ACoHR echoes that statement. Where the Dominican Republic had once recognized the rulings of Inter-American Court of Human Rights as law, they decided to withdraw from the organization in November 2014.<sup>100</sup>

It is important to note that even ardent supporters of the current Dominican government have their reservations about the attack on the country’s Haitian-Dominican population. The Dominican government contends, however, that the Haitian government is lacking in its responsibility to document its own citizens, extraterritorially or otherwise. Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic express similar concerns that Port-au-Prince has offered little to no support for them to regularize their status on the eastern part of the island.<sup>101</sup>

Regardless of who holds the bulk of the responsibility, the situation has become desperate. According Amnesty International, there were 544 households (or 2,203 people) living in six refugee camps along the Haitian-Dominican border. Situated close to Haitian border town of Anse-à-Pitres, the camps are within a region that has been struck hard by climate change-driven drought and food insecurity. Even before the camps were established, the permanent residents of Anse-à-Pitres and surrounding areas had little access to social services such as healthcare, clean water, and education. The current refugee crisis has only exacerbated the predicament, turning a bad situation worse. Described as arid and dry, inhabitants are often exposed to rain and colder temperatures. Of the population in the camp, approximately 45% of residents stated they were born in the

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99. *Amnesty International*, 10.

100. Reed.

101. Wucker, “The Dominican Republic’s Shameful Deportation Legacy.”

Dominican Republic. Others stated they had lived in the Dominican Republic for over ten years.<sup>102</sup>

For the residents of the camps, shelters have been made from cardboard, discarded metal, tree branches, and clothing items. In rare cases, tin and brick have been used to make a more weather-resistant and more permanent shelter. At the time of Amnesty International's study, there were six camps: Fond Jeanette, Maletchpe, Parc Cadeau 1, Parc Cadeau 2, Savane Galata, and Tête à l'eau. The smallest sites, Maletchpe and Savane Galata are the worst, with no latrines for their residents. Tête à l'eau, while not much better, is the most organized with 12 latrines and participatory committees governing the camp in which women take part. At the time of the report, Amnesty International reported that there was no waste management system and that garbage was burned outside the camp – albeit in close proximity to the camp.<sup>103</sup>

Due to the precarious conditions of the camps, several diseases have appeared in the camps including, but not limited to, diarrhea, frequent vomiting, skin infections, fever, and breathing problems. An outbreak of cholera was reported in the neighboring town of Anse-à-Pitres in 2015, causing at least 7 deaths. As access to health services is extremely limited, the residents of these new makeshift camps have been left to fend for themselves. Hunger and lack of income-generating jobs has become a problem in the camps, as well.

### **The Ongoing Trade War**

Haiti and the Dominican Republic are in the midst of an ongoing trade war, exacerbating the tensions between the nations. In 2015 and seemingly in response to the Dominican government's deportation scheme, the Haitian government outlawed the trade of 23 products (including pasta, snacks, and cement mix, according to Amy Bracken<sup>104</sup>) coming from the Dominican Republic over their shared land border.<sup>105</sup> Given that Haiti is one of the three biggest trading partners of the Dominican Republic, this trade embargo is

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102. *Amnesty International*, 11-14.

103. *Amnesty International*, 11-14.

104. Amy Bracken, "Haiti Cracks Down on Eggs Smuggled in to Feed a Hungry Nation," *USA Today*, last modified December 31, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2017/12/31/cracking-down-smuggling-eggs-into-haiti-people-eat/965028001/>.

105. "Haiti, Dominican Republic to Reopen Talks on Migration, Trade Disputes," *Deutsche Welle (DW)*, last modified October 14, 2015, <https://www.dw.com/en/haiti-dominican-republic-to-reopen-talks-on-migration-trade-disputes/a-18779965>.

putting significant strain on the Dominican economy.<sup>106</sup> It is largely believed that Haiti's actions have been ramped up as a specific response to the Dominican Republic's revocation of citizenship of Dominicans of Haitian descent, although the language of the embargoes carefully refrains from saying so.

This is not the first time that Haiti has placed a ban on Dominican goods. In 2008, just a few years before *Goudougoudou*, Haiti banned the import of eggs from Dominican producers. While the official story is that they were trying to prevent an outbreak of avian flu, many speculate that the Haitian government wanted to encourage local production. This ban led to a rise in contraband eggs and an increase in smuggling across the Haitian-Dominican border. Eggs are a staple diet protein item for people stuck in dire poverty. Given that Haitians eat, on average, 30 million eggs a month (most of which previously came from the Dominican Republic), the lost revenues for the Dominican producers are quite substantial.<sup>107</sup>

This trade war has highlighted the disparity in trade between the two countries. Whereas the Dominican Republic exports about \$2 billion USD worth of goods to Haiti every year, Haiti only replies in kind with \$51.3 million USD of goods. To this end, the Dominican government has been trying to pursue a free trade agreement with the Haitian government to allow for more trade across the border. This type of agreement is exactly what the Haitian government wants to try to avoid at all costs, as it would exacerbate the already tremendous trade imbalance between the two countries. A free trade agreement would benefit the Dominican Republic far more than it would benefit Haiti. The governments are at a standstill – neither willing to give up ground for they see their position as the most beneficial for their respective countries.<sup>108</sup>

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106. "Dominican Republic Points to Increased Trade with Haiti," *Jamaica Observer*, last modified June 18, 2018, [http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/dominican-republic-points-to-increased-trade-with-haiti\\_136135?profile=1373](http://www.jamaicaobserver.com/news/dominican-republic-points-to-increased-trade-with-haiti_136135?profile=1373).

107. Bracken, "Haiti Cracks Down on Eggs Smuggled in to Feed a Hungry Nation."

108. "Dominican Republic Wants Free Trade with Haiti, While Haitian Government Continues to Ban Dominican Products." *Hougan Sydney*, last modified January 18, 2018, <http://hougansydney.com/whats-happening-in-haiti/dominican-republic-wants-free-trade-with-haiti-while-haitian-government-continues-to-ban-dominican-products>.

### *Climate Change & Environmental Disaster*

In addition to any man-made conflicts, Hispaniola is on the brink of a climate disaster. By 2050, more than 50% of Haiti's total land area will be in danger of desertification. Similarly, the Dominican Republic has been designated one of the world's "climate hot spots," coming in 12<sup>th</sup> out of 150 total countries. Increases in temperature, a decrease in precipitation, and more frequent intense weather events have all been predicted.

Currently, one of the most pressing issues facing the island is the growth of both Lake Enriquillo in the Dominican Republic and Lake Azu  i in Haiti. Both lakes have expanded in recent years with Enriquillo reaching 347 km<sup>2</sup> and Azu  i growing to 154 km<sup>2</sup>. These statistics are up from 160 km<sup>2</sup> and 126 km<sup>2</sup> in 2003/2004, respectively. Lands around the lakes have been flooded, with the Dominican government reporting that 27,046 people have been directly affected. It remains unclear how many people are affected on the Haitian side of the border.<sup>109</sup>

According to Sheller and Le  n,

...[g]iven the unequal power relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, there is little cross-border coordination of responses, risk-assessment strategies, or bi-national risk mitigation, leaving the border a site of conflict rather than cooperation. ... Any comprehensive response to the rising waters of the two lakes will require sharing knowledge, building institutional capacities for action, and strengthening scientific and governmental cooperation across the border.<sup>110</sup>

Coordination is imperative, Sheller and Le  n claim, because Haiti's response to *Goudougoudoum* showed an inability to respond productively to an ecological crisis. The two governments cannot afford to let another catastrophe strike any time soon, lest they suffer more societal fractures.

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109. Mimi Sheller and Yolanda M. Le  n, "Uneven Socio-Ecologies of Hispaniola: Asymmetric Capabilities for Climate Adaptation in Haiti and the Dominican Republic," 33-35.

110. Mimi Sheller and Yolanda M. Le  n, "Uneven Socio-Ecologies of Hispaniola: Asymmetric Capabilities for Climate Adaptation in Haiti and the Dominican Republic." 44.

## **Analysis of the Relationship Between Haiti & the Dominican Republic**

The preceding sections have explained the history and conflicts plaguing the two nations on Hispaniola. In this section, an identity approach to the conflicts will be explored, with specific emphasis on the rise in nationalism.

### **Nationalism & the Manipulation of Identities**

Given that the Haitian-Dominican conflict is not “traditional,” in the Realist sense of the word, much of the animosity between Haiti and the Dominican Republic is subtle or psychological. At the least, the conflict is more subtle than outright warfare. The case to be made in this section, then, is that the conflict is largely fueled from the top down by cynical politicians who use the animosity between Haitians and Dominicans to their own benefit. Through the manipulation of national identity and the fostering of nationalism, internal state identity politics are pushed onto external actors. For Haiti and the Dominican Republic, given their close proximity to each other on their shared island of Hispaniola, each acts as the other’s external actor. In this way, differences between Haitians and Dominicans are perceived as direct attacks upon the other’s national identity.

According to France François, founder of *In Cultured Company*, many Haitians do not learn much about Dominicans or the Dominican Republic growing up – besides the Parsley Massacre of 1937. In fact, she claims, many Haitian maps of the island leave the Dominican Republic off altogether.<sup>111</sup> In an interview with *HipLatina*, Cassandre Théano, an international human rights lawyer and human rights legal consultant for MADRE, echoes these statements. She says that it’s “almost as though the DR was not next door. We knew it was there geographically, but it was not a central part of the discourse in the country....”<sup>112</sup>

Yet, as any activist will tell you, silence on an issue is a statement just as loud as vocal agreement or disagreement. While the Dominican government may be vocal about their distrust and dislike for Haitians, the Haitian government takes a different approach: out of sight, out of mind. While it may not look like it at first, the standoffish attitude Haiti takes to the Dominican Republic manipulates national identity just as effectively as the

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111. Janel Martinez, “These Women Share How They’re Healing From Haitian-Dominican Conflict,” *HipLatina*, last modified February 1, 2019. <https://hiplatina.com/healing-haitian-dominican-conflict/>, 5.

112. Janel Martinez, “These Women Share How They’re Healing From Haitian-Dominican Conflict,” 2.

vocal anti-Haitianism across the border. It also impedes the peacebuilding process; to deal with an issue, you first have to admit that it exists.

On the Dominican side of things and as an example of how the nation imposes identity from the top down, a quote Joaquín Balaguer (president of the country from 1966 to 1996) summed up the situation up in 1992:

There are today, as in earlier times, those who hold dear the idea of the unification of the island, to make it once again what it was in its early days, one of the most beautiful islands in the Caribbean Basin. The idea in itself is infantile and even ridiculous. Water and oil can coexist for many years but cannot be mixed together without losing their organic composition or giving up their identities. ... The Dominican Republic, then, will continue being, for centuries upon centuries, a nation with her own flag, an addict to Iberian culture, not like Haiti to Afro-French culture. She will continue for centuries on centuries a nation proud of her traditions, her origin, guardian of Spain in the New World, guardian of her immortal nature and jealous of the radiance with which Spanish character projects its star in the American territory.<sup>113</sup>

Essentially, the point Balaguer is making can be summed up as an “us” versus “them” argument. Dominicans, he claims, are intrinsically different than Haitians, and it is this difference that makes them irreconcilable. While this rhetoric may seem outdated, the fact that Balaguer gave this speech only 27 years ago speaks to the deeply-entrenched nature of the Haitian-Dominican conflict, and it makes the contemporary anti-Haitianism seem totally consistent with Dominican sense of identity. Similarly, Howard’s statements on the three main pillar of Dominican identity (whiteness, Catholicism, and Hispanic heritage) are clearly illustrated in his perspective.<sup>114</sup> This phenomenon is not just something found in academic theories and textbooks; instead, it has very real implications.

As it was talked discusses above, identity is hardly black and white. People are not solely Haitian or Dominican, and, in fact, there are many people who fall along the margins of these identities or straddle the two. The current refugee crisis shows that the two states view these people in identity limbo as too Haitian to be Dominican and too Dominican to be Haitian. This narrative that has been construed to be viewed only in the binary hurts those of both nations and the prospect of cooperation.

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113. Quoted by Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, 75.

114. Howard, 17

Because Haitians take great pride in their African heritage and Dominicans see themselves as equally proud to be an extension of Spain in the Americas, they still view each other through the colonial lens. Each is the antithesis of the other; each is the Other. Haiti struggled long and hard to break away from colonial domination, and they see the Dominican Republic as upholding the very “virtues” that led to their original colonisation and subjugation. The Dominican Republic, on the other hand, sees its own society as the one being constantly assaulted by their aggressive and unrelenting neighbor. In the minds of Dominicans, the Haitians are takers – wanting Dominicans’ land, their jobs, their resources – based on their antagonistic history. It’s no surprise, then, that any mention of Haiti sparks an intense sense of nationalism.<sup>115</sup> These super-national identities of Blackness and/or of Hispanicity are seen as a threat not to the nation of which they are a part, but to the opposing one. The fear of a united Other could threaten the very existence of the self, in the minds of both Haitian and Dominican realities.

More important than Balaguer’s dismissal of pan-Hispaniolan unification above, however, is how he both builds national identity and then effectively weaponizes it. Balaguer’s speech was given at the national inauguration of the *Faro a Colón* (i.e., Columbus Lighthouse), a monument honoring Christopher Columbus’ quincentennial landing in the “New World.” Meant as a way to both draw tourism to the country and act as Balaguer’s legacy, the lighthouse symbolized – or was supposed to symbolize – a unified Dominican Republic unbothered by corruption and poverty to the outside world.<sup>116</sup>

By juxtaposing the ideas of the Dominican Republic’s sovereignty and national identity with those of Haiti, Balaguer is defining the country as much by what is it not as by what it is. It is clear that the Dominican Republic is a symbol of Spain in the Americas and proud of that Hispanic heritage; it is also, more importantly some would point out, something else – definitively not Haiti. Matias Bosch, a Dominican activist and the grandson of President Juan Bosch (who was elected after the fall of Trujillo) stated, “One

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115. Pedro L. San Miguel, “An Island in the Mirror: The Dominican Republic and Haiti,” in *The Caribbean: A History of the Region and Its Peoples*, eds. Stephan Palmié and Francisco A. Scarano (553-569. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 568.

116. Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, 71.

of the characteristics of Dominican racism is that it is not assumed to be racism.” This perspective suggests that being anti-Haitian is part of *being* Dominican.<sup>117</sup>

In the case of Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the main objective interest and driving force behind the conflict is the fact that they have defined themselves in opposition to each other. Haitians *are not* Dominican, and Dominicans *are not* Haitian. The state, then, begins to pursue policies and actions that will uphold this core tenant of identity – from the expulsion of Haitians from the Dominican Republic or the steadfast embargo of Dominican goods into Haitian society. No matter the political or economic fallout of these actions, this specific objective interest is so strong that the states will pursue the actions anyway.

There exists a tendency to blame a country’s own problems on an outside actor. Either as a political smokescreen to distract the general populace from noticing what is going on behind the scenes in the national government or as a unifying tactic, the Dominican Republic’s actions have proved effective. More often than not, focus lies on the “invading” Haitians for any political instability rather than on the country’s own leaders and political agenda.

Balaguer’s sentiments are far from unique and can largely be traced back to the Trujillo era (1930 to 1952) when the Dominican elite utilized anti-Haitian rhetoric to unify the country in a cult of personality around Trujillo. Edward Paulino puts it like this:

The seeds of this perspective and antagonism date back to the 19th century, but it was the dictator Rafael Trujillo and his western-oriented, light-skinned elites who crystallized a historic but diffuse anti-Haitian ideology and created a state doctrine through mass violence where Haiti was portrayed as an eternal invader – something to be racially feared, loathed, and shunned.<sup>118</sup>

Activists argue that the media over-report crimes in the Dominican Republic that are perpetrated by Haitians or by people of Haitian descent; moreover, they are regularly discussed as a threat and invaders. And this propaganda *always* emphasizes ethnicity.<sup>119</sup>

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117. Aida Alami, “Between Hate, Hope, and Help: Haitians in the Dominican Republic,” *The New York Review*, Last Modified August 13, 2018, <https://www.nybooks.com/daily/2018/08/13/between-hope-hate-help-haitians-in-the-dominican-republic/>.

118. Edward Paulino, “The Dominican-Haitian Border Has Always Been A Revolutionary Space,” *Remezcla*, last modified March 14, 2018. <http://remezcla.com/features/culture/the-dominican-haitian-border-has-always-been-a-revolutionary-space/>.

119. Aida Alami, “Between Hate, Hope, and Help: Haitians in the Dominican Republic.”

Deliberate misinterpretation of Haitian identity and the widespread use of nationalist propaganda like Trujillo's has led to many modern-day superstitions in the Dominican Republic about the Haitian people. In El Cibao, a region in the northeast of the country (the most populous region and largely considered to be the Dominican "cultural heartland"), Paulino states that the idea that Haitians are cannibals remains prevalent even today.<sup>120</sup>

### **A Self-Reinforcing Conflict**

One of the trickiest aspects of the Haitian-Dominican conflict, especially for those looking for a way to build metaphorical bridges, is its self-reinforcing nature. In order to quell the animosity between the two countries, a base of similarity, of common humanity, must be found. Yet, the longer the conflict goes on, the more juxtaposed the identities become. How do you solve a conflict that, in the broadest sense, is over 500 years in the making?

A large part of what perpetuates the self-reinforcing conflict is intergenerationally transmitted ideas, attitudes, and memories. Not only are those who grew up during the Trujillo years (and Balaguer to a lesser extent) now in power, but the lived experiences of parents and grandparents are passed down from generation to generation include both trauma and stories. Misrepresentations and fears simply feed on themselves.

The 1937 Parsley Massacre is a prime example of using cultural identity to secure political goals. Trujillo sought to secure a permeable border, and he whipped the populace into a frenzy over the Haitians living in the border areas of the Dominican Republic. Backed by the army, Dominicans engaged in "systematic extermination."<sup>121</sup> The new citizenship attacks from the Dominican Republic are viewed through the lens of this memory. When a mass killing like this (where anti-Haitian sentiment led to the deaths of thousands of "inferior" people) is forefront in Haitians' cultural memory, it's no wonder they are reluctant to reach out the hand of friendship across the island, even in the unlikely event such a hand would be offered by the Dominicans.

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120. Edward Paulino, "The Dominican-Haitian Border Has Always Been A Revolutionary Space."

121. Nick Davis, "The Massacre That Marked Haiti-Dominican Republic Ties," *BBC News*, Last Modified October 13, 2012, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-19880967>.

France François of *In Cultured Company* recalls that during a cross-national healing workshop put on for Haitians and Dominicans in New York City, a Dominican woman said:

I'm crying because when you guys said that we don't know the number of people who were killed in the Parsley Massacre, because the bodies were burned where they were thrown into the river, I know that to be true because my father did the burnings....<sup>122</sup>

The woman then went on to explain how she carried this trauma with her for life and that she brought her son to the workshop so he would not have to do the same.

Wendt's Mirror Theory of Identity Formation can be clearly demonstrated in the tit-for-tat strategy that Haiti and the Dominican Republic have employed in their relationship with each other. The Ego/Alter scenario is reciprocity in action, and it creates a vicious cycle of act and react. Underneath the animosity and tensions connecting the two countries, there exists an underlying current of revenge and/or retaliation. Every act of aggression taken by either government can be linked back to a previous act of aggression committed to them by the Other.

This back-and-forth political game being played between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, is not about reciprocity, however. Identities are being formed and reintroduced. Every time one of the countries retaliates, their identity as the Other, as the enemy, is reinforced. In fact, with every barbed exchange, there is more ammunition for the nations to reinforce the opposing identities narrative. This phenomenon is especially true as rhetoric becomes more and more bitter as the conflict flares up from time to time.

Take, for example, the current trade war taking place between Port-au-Prince and Santo Domingo. Analysis by *The Economist* concludes that the imposition of a ban of 23 Dominican goods is a retaliatory act.<sup>123</sup> However, Haiti cannot continue the trade war forever given its fragile economic and political state. And, as has been clear with the violent

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122. Janel Martinez, "These Workshops Aim to Heal Haitian-Dominican Divides With Lessons on Their Shared History," *Remezcla*, last modified December 21, 2018,

<http://remezcla.com/features/culture/decolonizing-hispaniola-workshop-series/>.

123. ---, "Haiti Imposes Additional Restrictions on Dominican Imports," *The Economist*, last modified July 22, 2016,

[http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=304436614&Country=Dominican%20Republic&topic=Politics&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=International%20relations&fbclid=IwAR3mSjuMdAhtEG5O0yHXNdcwstUUG-RoTQ3v0kig7r8ZN\\_H0CdAg24rFZ-c](http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=304436614&Country=Dominican%20Republic&topic=Politics&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=International%20relations&fbclid=IwAR3mSjuMdAhtEG5O0yHXNdcwstUUG-RoTQ3v0kig7r8ZN_H0CdAg24rFZ-c).

2018 and 2019 riots in Port-au-Prince at the imposition of fuel taxes, corruption, and discontent with failed promises from the government, Haiti is again imperiled by instability. With the trade ban raising consumer prices across the impoverished country, the Haitian government needs to find the right balance: hold onto the travel ban long enough to strong-arm the Dominican government to relax its deportation policies or risk even more civil unrest.

“The Western Hemisphere’s Worst Refugee Crisis,” as the current citizenship situation has been called, is seen by the Dominican Republic as a retaliatory act against the “silent invasion” of Haitians flooding into their country. Concerned by the number of undocumented Haitians now living in the country and the supposed drain on society (both economically and culturally), the Dominican Republic passed the constitutional amendment stripping thousands of Haitians of citizenship and began the deportation process.

This sequence of events can be traced throughout the history of Hispaniola with Haiti and the Dominican Republic trading blow after blow. From the Massacre des Vêpres Jérémiennes to the Parsley Massacre of 1937, the Haitian-Dominican conflict can be traced all the way back to the time when the newly independent Haiti occupied the Dominican Republic first interacted, creating the catalyst scenario as in Wendt’s Ego/Alter scenario. Because this first action was inherently aggressive (to which the Dominican Republic responded in kind through the Dominican War of Independence), future relations were doomed to be contentious. The stage had been set. Michele Wucker points out: “[H]istory, especially one that repeats itself as Hispaniola’s does, is hard to rewrite.”<sup>124</sup>

These patterns of retaliation exemplify and further reinforce Wendt’s ideas of collective self-esteem and the siege syndrome phenomenon. The self-reinforcing conflict only serves to strengthen each country’s respective narrative of continuous victimization. Each time the Other retaliates, the nation state can point to the situation and claim that it adds to a long list of attacks by the Other. Whether it be the “ethnic encroachment” that concerns the Dominicans or the anti-Haitianism that concerns the Haitians, the narrative is doomed to repeat itself again and again if they continue to see current events as building upon those of the past.

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124. Wucker, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, 74.

The states use the tit-for-tat strategy as a reaction to the Other that they see as the source of their historical embarrassment. For Haiti, the Dominican Republic represent all that is colonial, and, given their long and bloody struggle for independence, they feel they must defend their collective self-esteem by defending themselves against perceived attacks by the Dominican government and people. For the Dominican Republic, there is a similar narrative. Still reeling from Haiti's initial invasion of the country in in early 1800s, a need is felt to protect their borders. Dominican ultra-nationalists, then, see the influx of Haitian immigrants as an echo of this previous invasion and see a need to defend themselves against this perceived encroachment.

Furthermore, for Haiti, the Dominican Republic exemplifies the nature of colonialism because of its national emphasis on Hispanicity and whiteness. Given the absolute disregard, humiliation, and devastation that the Haitian people faced under slavery colonialism, one can see how self-assertation by the state would be a natural reaction. Their aggression was taken out on the Dominican Republic given that it closely identifies and embraces its colonial history. The Dominican Republic, for its part, acutely remembers the Haitian invasions of the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century and the humiliation and disregard that their own people faced under Haitian occupation. Their response was to assert their sense of self by devaluing Haitians in a vicious cycle.

## Conclusion

This study began by asking some fundamental questions about Haiti and the Dominican Republic. How can two countries who share the same island and have centuries of similar histories of colonialism generate such antipathy toward one another? How have Haiti and the Dominican Republic diverged from each other so much that one remains the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere and the other the strongest economy in the Caribbean region? It has become apparent that while colonialism has had a drastic impact on Hispaniola's current socio-political situation, so have the countries' respective reactions to it – especially in how they have defined themselves as a society and a nation.

Starting with a review of the current literature published about Haiti and the Dominican Republic, it is clear that, despite their symbiotic relationship, the two countries are almost never talked about in conjunction with each other. The bulk of literature identified either talked about the Haiti context or the Dominican Republic narrative, rarely both. Only recently has this gap in the literature been identified with certain academics attempting to bridge this gap. This paper is intended to add to this growing set of transnational Hispaniolan literature. A suitable resolution to the Haitian-Dominican conflict must include, at the very least, discussion of both parties in the same sentence.

Given that the nature of the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic is not one of outright war, but rather one of distrust, resentment, and just plain dislike, the Realist paradigm that traditionally deals with interstate conflicts have proven unhelpful. The conflict in question is a political one, not a military one. Instead of bombs and missiles flying over the border, highly politicized narratives are competing for control. But the Haitian-Dominican conflict clearly shows that a lack of invasion or occupation does not mean peace. Conflict itself is a varied and diverse as the nations that commit it, rather than the single monolith of war. To understand the complexity of this situation, then, this paper utilized both Postcolonial and Social Constructivist theoretical foundations. A nuanced understanding of these paradigms helps illuminate the importance of identity and identity formation to the Haitian-Dominican conflict.

Identity (national identity in particular) is paramount and cannot be overlooked. While conflict between long standing enemies are obviously made of up a variety of different factors and not triggered by a single event acting at the lynchpin, identity

definitely plays a major role. That is to say, identity is major causal factor to be examined in the Haitian-Dominican conflict. National identity determines how a country acts by defining its interests and which actions are in its favor. Similarly, when national identity is challenged by other super- or sub-national identities, it can lead to conflict. Most important to this paper, however, is how national identity can be twisted and distorted to become nationalism.

Identity, and the manipulation thereof, can contribute to conflict in a variety of ways, both directly and indirectly. Directly, identity can determine how one sees the self and the Other. If your identity and that of your neighbour state are similar or compatible, an alliance may be in the works. In contrast, however, if your identity and that of your neighbour state are seen as opposites, competing, or juxtaposed, two potential enemies have just been created. A state's national identity determines who they see as an enemy. Haiti, for example, sees any vestige of colonialism and anti-Black sentiments as an attack on their national identity and security as a state. On the opposite side of the border, the Dominican Republic sees Haitians as a threat to their way of life.

At the same time, entrenched identities can create a lack of trust that prevents actors from bridging differences. Not only could their identities be different, but the fallout from such perceived differences could prevent future cooperation from taking place. There exists, then, a lack of confidence in a nation-state by a neighboring actor if they share different or competing identities. The Dominican Republic, for example, does not trust the large majority of actions taken by the Haitian state because their identities, and therefore interests, do not align. Whatever actions the Haitian state might take will be in order to solidify or enhance its own identity rather than ones that could be potentially mutually beneficial.

Identity is more than just a theoretical idea that exists independent of various actors. Identity has the power to mould state-building processes and also guide governmental decisions regarding the allocation of scarce resources. Regarding state-building, the Dominican Republic uses its national identity of Whiteness, Catholicism, and Hispanicity to underscore the belief that being Dominican inherently means being *not Haitian*. One cannot be both. With Haitians cast as the Other – not White, not “truly” Catholic, and not Hispanic – the Dominicans' sense of self and self-worth is reinforced. Haitians, on the other

hand, embrace their African ancestry. They reinforce this identity through differences – in language, religion, and culture – between them and their Dominican neighbours. Both sides are using identity as a zero-sum game: the worse the Alter seems, the better Ego seems in comparison.

Identity also interacts with state power consolidation. One of the easiest ways for states emerging from trauma to redefine themselves is by defining themselves in terms of things they are not. Haiti, breaking violently away from an exploitative colonial system, has defined itself in opposition to that colonial power. The Dominican Republic, getting its independence from Haiti, has defined itself in opposition to its invader.

The nation-state thrives when there is a singular national identity, with no significant challenges from either super- or sub-national identities. The state creates a clear message of identity from the top down that is promoted repetitively. Each generation teaches this message to the next in a self-reinforcing cycle. The reason that Haitian-Dominicans are seen as a threat in the Dominican Republic is that they still hold onto blended identities that are a threat to the hegemony of the Dominican Republic within its borders. Haitians living in the Dominican Republic do not see themselves as solely Dominican; they are still Haitian, despite having lived outside of Haiti, perhaps for generations. While Afro-Dominicans diverge from the state-supported identity, Haitian-Dominicans are viewed through a separate lens, one that questions their loyalty. How Dominican can they be if they still identify as Haitian? Dominicans fear a cultural invasion coming from inside their own country, harkening back to previous Haitian invasions. To the Dominican Republic, Haitian-Dominicans must leave before they do more damage and erode Dominicaness further.

Identity and the processes through which a state decides who is and who is not “an enemy” can also determine how scarce resources are allocated. The nation decides which projects receive funding and which ideologies are supported, directly or indirectly. It is not a surprise that the economic capital that is undoubtedly scarce on both sides of the island (albeit to different extents) is funneled to the social and political “elites.” These elites are the very same ones who have the ability and power to shape the nation’s identity through media, education, and cultural narratives. In a self-reinforcing system, the state ensures that the national identity that the elites create and sustain conforms to the already existing

nationalistic narrative. When limited resources are available, states see themselves as having to choose between two options: supporting themselves or supporting the Other. The Other is subsequently dehumanized based on identity in order to rationalize how resources should be allocated to *this* group and not *that* group. The Dominicans' denigration of Haitians, for example, camouflages their identity-based beliefs as economic and further fuels their decision to expel those who are deemed to be too much a drain on the state.

As this study has shown, these identities have emerged from the socio-historical roots of both Haitian and Dominican experiences. Going back over 500 years, the roots of both national identities are rooted in colonialism and how the nations responded to colonialism post-independence. Where Haiti rejected everything about colonisation in favor of a pro-Black revolutionary state, the Dominican Republic upheld the principles of Whiteness, Catholicism, and Hispanicity.

This analysis showed two major themes: that the national identities have been manipulated for political gain and that the conflict has been toxically self-reinforcing. The longer the Haitian-Dominican conflict goes on, the more their ideas of opposing identities are solidified, and the conflict gets harder to resolve.

Is there a way out of this conflict? Is there anyway that supposedly solid national identities can change to be both more accepting and cooperative? What is the future of Haitian-Dominican relations?

The easiest way forward, from a Social Constructivist perspective, would be through transnational confidence-building measures. These actions do not have to be large or grandiose expressions of respect at first. In fact, it might even be more productive to start with the small things. With every positive and/or cooperative interaction, Haiti and the Dominican Republic can build a new identity as partners. Or, at the very least, weaken the existing narrative that they are naturally juxtaposed enemies. Once enough smaller actions and, subsequent trust, build up between the two nations, larger actions can be taken to right the wrongs of the past.

In fact, such actions have already begun to occur, if only tentatively. According to Mireya Navarro, the presidents of Haiti and the Dominican Republic in 1998 (René Prével and Leonel Fernández, respectively) rerouted mail that was meant to go between the two nations. This simple action now meant that letters and parcels could travel directly from

Port-au-Prince to Santo Domingo and vice versa instead of traversing first through Miami as they had done for decades prior.<sup>125</sup> Similarly, in 1998 Préval and Fernández visited each other's capitals – a monumental step since it had been over 60 years since a sitting president on either side had visited their neighboring nation.<sup>126</sup> Even though a large part of the relationship between the two countries depends on who holds the reigns of political power (and this has been changing on a regular basis since the fall of both Haitian and Dominican dictatorships), these steps signal that there is a recognition of an underlying want and need for peace across the border.

More recently, activist movements have picked up the torch on social media and have advocated for better Haitian-Dominican relations. Take for example, the recent hashtag #RealDominicansAreNotAntiHaitian. While it remains unclear who exactly started the movement, the hashtag quickly gained momentum across various social media platforms with Dominicans (both on Hispaniola and as part of the diaspora) of all shapes, sizes, and colors showing support for their Haitian neighbors.

Perhaps the narrative of the self-reinforcing conflict can even be reversed. If, little by little, the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic is changed through small acts of cooperation, as time goes on their identities as partners rather than as enemies will be reinforced. It is imperative, then, that positive (or even neutral) interactions between Haitians and Dominicans continue to happen. In this way, Dominicans can see that the stereotypes they “know” about Haitians are not true and vice versa. Haitians are not cannibals by any stretch of the imagination, for example, and not all Dominicans conform to their state's white-washed ideology. With more interactions between these two peoples can only come more familiarity and a willingness to set aside passé tropes and stereotypes in order to work together for the betterment of Hispaniola as a whole

All is not lost. Far from it in, in fact. The younger generation of Haitians and Dominicans have two things that, if harnessed properly, can lead to peaceful coexistence on the island on Hispaniola. First, the current generation in power is within memory's distance of both the Duvalier and Trujillo dictatorships and the chaos that ensued therein.

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125. Mireya Navarro, “At Last on Hispaniola, Hands Across the Border,” *The New York Times* (July 11, 1999): 3.

<https://search.proquest.com/docview/431212353/abstract/644332891BE4201PQ/1?accountid=12599>.

126. Mireya Navarro “At Last on Hispaniola, Hands Across the Border,” 3.

Soon, administrators at the local, provincial, and national levels will be beyond these memories. Given the state-building tactics both dictators used that involved the vilification of their respective neighbouring countries, the further removed from such rhetoric, the better a chance of peace.

Second, with the rapid increase in communication technologies that has developed over the last few decades, the newest generation of Hispaniolans joins a generation of young people interconnected by the internet. Too often, ignorance and bigotry are acquired through lack of knowledge and communication – especially with the Other. It is quite possible that using the internet, with its ability to interact within the same webspace, could pave the way for future relations on the ground. More steps like these need to be taken if the Haitian-Dominican conflict is to ever be resolved. The culturally engrained narratives of conflict and distrust can be undone, it appears, if one is willing to look past the tightly-controlled and propagated ideas of national identity and nationalism on either side of the border.

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