

**DOMINANT RACIAL AND CULTURAL IDEOLOGIES IN DOMINICAN  
ELEMENTARY EDUCATION**

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## Relevant Maps

Map of the Caribbean



Map of the Dominican Republic



## **Abstract**

This master's thesis looks at the content of social studies textbooks used in public elementary education in the Dominican Republic, and analyzes the way discourse is used to construct a "national" identity. Particular emphasis is placed on the ways racial and cultural ideologies are embedded in the depictions of Dominican identity. The rationale for this study is to assess the Dominican curriculum, which rests almost entirely on the use of textbooks, and therefore draw conclusions as to the ways that Dominican children are socialized in their educational environment. To this end, this qualitative inquiry addresses the following questions: How do textbooks used in public elementary schools in the Dominican Republic portray Dominican identity? What notions of race and culture are included in these portrayals? I show that the prevailing notions of identity found in the DISESA textbooks consist of the celebration of "racial mixing," which identifies the majority of Dominicans as *mulattoes*, and the recognition of Spanish culture as the foremost precursor to Dominican society.

## **Résumé**

La présente thèse examine le contenu des manuels de sciences humaines utilisés pour l'éducation élémentaire publique en République Dominicaine et analyse la manière dont le discours est utilisé pour construire l'identité « nationale ». Un regard particulier est porté sur les manières par lesquelles les idéologies raciales et culturelles sont déterminées dans les représentations d'identité dominicaine. La raison fondamentale de cette étude est l'évaluation du programme d'étude dominicain qui repose presque entièrement sur l'utilisation de manuels scolaires. Cette évaluation vise à tirer des conclusions quant aux voies par lesquelles les enfants

dominicains sont socialisés dans leurs environnements éducatifs. À cette fin, cette recherche qualitative répond aux questions suivantes : Comment les manuels utilisés dans les écoles primaires publiques en République Dominicaine décrivent-ils l'identité dominicaine ? Quelles notions de race et de culture sont incluses dans ces portraits ? Je démontre que les principales notions d'identité trouvées dans les manuels DISESA se composent de la célébration « de mélange de race » identifiant la majorité des dominicains comme *mulâtres* et de la reconnaissance de la culture espagnole comme le précurseur principal à la société dominicaine.

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## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction**

The Dominican Republic currently boasts one of the most impressive growth rates in the region of the Americas. For two decades, its economy has increased at an average annual level of five percentage points, fuelled by the tourist industry, remittances from Dominicans living abroad, and traditional agribusiness commodities such as sugarcane, cacao, and avocado. The country is also now considered a stable democracy – since 1996 it has experienced three times the successful handover of power through the electoral ballot system. Dominicans today enjoy key components of an open society, including freedom of press and religion. Nonetheless, poverty levels in the Dominican Republic remain excessively high: unemployment is at a whopping sixteen percent of the labour force, the population living below the poverty line is about forty percent, and the education system lags behind most countries in the region (CIA – The World Fact Book, 2009).

The present condition in the public education sector is especially dire. For starters, successive governments have traditionally spent more money on universities than on elementary and secondary schools. Dominican public schools usually run three separate shifts in order to fit the greatest possible number of students, due to the general lack of school infrastructure and qualified teachers. Although enrolment rates are relatively high for children between the ages of seven to fourteen, repetition and dropout rates are also exceedingly high, and secondary completion levels are significantly lower than most countries in the region. A study published in 2001 by the Partnership for Educational Revitalization in the Americas, or PREAL, revealed that Dominican urban public school students on average scored less than students in rural areas in

other Latin American countries (Murray, 2005). Similarly, the results of SERCE, a test of reading and mathematical skills administered by UNESCO in sixteen countries in the region, exposed that Dominican students scored way below any of the participants in the study (Puryear, 2008).

For some analysts, the problem in the Dominican Republic's public educational system is mainly political. There is plenty of evidence to support this claim. For instance, the same PREAL report cited above also mentions that the country is last in the region in terms of government spending on education at a mere 1.7% of GDP (Murray, 2008). Professor of Anthropology Gerald Murray (2008) argues that the precarious condition of Dominican education is owing to the failure of governments to address crucial systemic problems. He mentions excessive centralization of the public system as a major setback to educational quality. The Dominican Ministry of Education oversees everything from teacher payrolls to the acquisition of materials. School directors do not have the authority to hire potential candidates or fire incompetent teachers, not even for reasons of inadequate attendance levels, since this authority also rests with the ministry. Murray also points to the high level of political activism in public schools. Governments tend to assign jobs and salaries based on patron-client relationships rather than individual merit – a change in government for the most part leads to changes in school directors. Furthermore, all public school teachers belong to the *Asociación Dominicana de Profesores*, the main teacher's union, and are generally militants for political parties. Excessive unionization and strikes on behalf of teachers often leaves students without proper hours of schooling. Low salaries also constitute a significant setback, since teachers are thus encouraged to leave the public system or take on second and third jobs that ultimately reduce their quality of teaching.

Murray further suggests that the *Plan Decenal*, a government scheme to improve the quality of public schools that began in the 1990s and continues today, neglects the majority of these systemic problems and thus fails to improve the overall efficiency of public education. In general, the *Plan Decenal* consists of a conversion to a competency-based curriculum, improvements in the quality of textbooks, the offer of professional training for teachers and directors, the implementation of a school breakfast program, and higher wages and benefits for teachers (Secretaría de Estado de Educación República Dominicana, 1991). While I agree with Murray that systemic reform is fundamental, I disagree with his assertion that pedagogical reforms, consisting of modifications to educational content and practices, are nonessential. Recent studies in countries with very similar systemic problems in their education system, such as Brazil, suggest that the implementation of uniform textbooks improve the performance of students in standardized tests (The Economist, 2009).

Furthermore, based on my observation of classrooms in Dominican public schools and my own experience as a school teacher, I am convinced that textbooks are much more influential in the experiences of students than the actual written curriculum. Most of the teachers that I have spoken with have not even seen the national curriculum. In contrast, the majority of Dominican teachers rely heavily on textbooks to guide their lessons<sup>1</sup>. It is therefore a basic premise of this master's thesis that in order to improve the quality of Dominican education, particular attention must be placed on the textbooks used in classrooms.

Hence, for this study I have chosen to conduct research on the *content* of social studies textbooks used in public elementary education in the Dominican Republic. The purpose is to

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<sup>1</sup> This claim is brought forth based on my five-year experience working in Dominican elementary schools, which includes a three-month internship as an academic coordinator for a public school pilot program launched by the Dominican Ministry of Education.

analyze the way discourse is used in Dominican elementary school textbooks to construct a “national” identity. The portrayal of a “national” identity serves to promote a sense of belonging amongst the inhabitants of a country by articulating commonalities that include race, culture, patriotic symbols and history. In this respect, education is a key component of institutionalized “nation-building,” and should be understood as a political act and as an agent of social conditioning.

### **Textbooks and Ideology**

According to John Fiske (1989), “knowledge is power, and the circulation of knowledge is part of the distribution of power” (p. 149). Textbooks are a key component in the circulation of knowledge. Furthermore, the content found in textbooks is never an accident, but rather “conceived, designed, and authored by real people with real interests” (p. 150). In other words, textbooks are someone’s idea of what constitutes “legitimate” knowledge and culture, and serve usually to maintain the particular interests of certain people: namely the powerful (Apple, 2000). Fiske (1989) further states that “the discursive power to construct a commonsense reality that can be inserted into cultural and political life is central to the relationship of power” (p. 150). These “discursive power” strategies include reducing knowledge to manageable components and promoting it in such a way that people accept these components as absolute truth (Apple, 2000).

The following passage by Down (1988) demonstrates the scope of influence that textbooks have on schools and society in general:

Textbooks, for better or for worse, dominate what students learn. They set the curriculum, and often the facts learned in most subjects. For many students, textbooks are their first and sometimes only early exposure to books and reading. The public regards textbooks as authoritative, accurate and necessary. And teachers rely on them to organize lessons and structure subject matter. (p. viii)

Michael Apple (2000) maintains, however, that the content of textbooks is not necessarily limited to the dominant discourse, that is, to the propagation of ideologies by dominant groups. Over time, and due to the efforts of a range of communities, the perspectives of the less powerful are incorporated within the rhetoric of textbooks. Nonetheless, Apple (2000) also asserts that the process of “mentioning” the positions or perspectives of the less powerful is often reduced to simplistic notions, which downgrade their importance, and often contain stereotypical views that are informed by dominant perspectives (p. 53). One of the purposes of this project is therefore to illustrate where these instances occur in social studies textbooks currently used in Dominican elementary public education.

It must be stated, however, that there are limitations to the scope of influence of school textbooks. For starters, textbooks do not always propagate what they mean to convey. Apple (2000) rightly asserts, for instance, that “the meaning of a text is not necessarily intrinsic to it” and that “any text is open to multiple readings” (p. 57-58). One also needs to consider agency on the part of school teachers, who may refuse altogether to use particular textbooks in their classroom. “[N]or can we assume that what is taught is actually learned,” Apple adds (p. 58). Students do in fact bring their own perspectives to class that include views on culture, race, and identity.

Apple further dwells on the issue of different ways that both students and teachers can engage with textbooks, including “dominant”, “oppositional”, and “negotiated” readings of the discourse found in them (p. 58). To summarize briefly, a “dominant” reading occurs when a person assumes that everything that was read is true while an “oppositional” reading occurs when a person disagrees almost entirely with what was read. Finally, a “negotiated” reading occurs when a person picks and chooses what aspects of the reading he or she identifies with,

and what aspects are altogether questioned or disregarded. What Michael Apple does not consider, however, is that most often the “negotiated” and “oppositional” ways of reading a text have to be taught, especially when it comes to young children.

### **Dominant Racial and Cultural Ideologies in Dominican Elementary Education**

For this reason, this study will focus particularly on the ways racial and cultural ideologies are embedded in the depictions of Dominican identity that are found in the textbooks. In the Dominican Republic, students make sense of racial and cultural identity in multiple and contradictory ways as they negotiate the dominant discourse of national identity. The rationale for this study is to assess the Dominican curriculum, which rests almost entirely on the use of textbooks, and therefore draw conclusions as to the ways that Dominican children are socialized in their educational environment. To this end, this qualitative inquiry will address the following questions: How do textbooks used in public elementary schools in the Dominican Republic portray Dominican identity? What notions of *race* and *culture* are included in these portrayals?

This research project is organized as follows: Chapter Two will assess the literature on Dominican history and identity formation, since the content of these textbooks cannot be properly understood on its own, but rather as a reflection of a historical process of “nation-building”. Chapter Three will describe the methodology and the ways in which data was collected, and then analyze the content found in the social studies textbooks examined for this study. Finally, Chapter Four will conclude with recommendations for necessary reform in the Dominican educational curriculum.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Literature Review**

“[T]o many in the Dominican Republic, to look pretty is to look less black,” pronounces Frances Robles (2007) in her article “Black Denial,” published in the *Miami Herald* (p. B3). Indeed, the impression that Dominicans are “negrophobic” and deny their “blackness” is widespread among the international media. In scholarly channels, however, the picture is more nuanced. As indicated by Bailey (2001), Dominicans lack the “binary racial division” that characterises North American conceptions of race (p. 677). In the United States, for instance, any phenotypic feature identified as “African” automatically equates an individual to the racial category of “black.” In the Dominican Republic, racial identity is more fluid, and notions of race, culture and nationality are intrinsically correlated.

The process of identity formation in the Dominican Republic is quite particular in its history and socialization process, and is unique even within Latin America and the Caribbean. For instance, the Dominican Republic fought its independence wars against Haiti, and not Spain, like the rest of the Spanish speaking countries in the Americas. For this reason, the first component of this chapter will present an overview of the historical foundations of the country from Spanish colonialism to the recent “nation-building” experience. The second component of this chapter will assess the literature on racial and cultural identity in the Dominican Republic.

## Historical Overview

### *A Genesis of Races*

The origins of contemporary Dominican identity date back to the advent of Spanish colonization following the arrival of Christopher Columbus in the Americas. *Hispaniola*, the name assigned to the island that is today shared by the Dominican Republic and Haiti, was host to the first European settlements and the first European cities in the Americas. It was also the “cradle of blackness” in the Americas, as denoted by the Dominican historian Silvio Torres-Saillant (1998), because it was there that the first African slaves were brought to work in sugar plantations (p. 126). Yet, before the arrival of Africans, the Spaniards encountered a local civilization that contained between three hundred thousand to one million inhabitants, according to some estimates (Moya Pons, 1995). Columbus wrote in his diaries that these inhabitants, who today are referred to as *Tainos*, mostly received the Europeans in a friendly manner (Cohen, 1969). Nonetheless, a war of conquest was soon waged against the locals, who were enslaved and forced to work extracting gold from local mines. The Spanish authorities proceeded to set up a system where indigenous workers were rewarded to local *conquistadores*, who in turn paid a gold tax to the crown. This mercantilist economic enterprise proved devastating to the aboriginal population, and many fought back and died or, rather, committed suicide. Nevertheless, it was European diseases that caused the most deaths amongst the *Tainos*. According to Frank Moya Pons (1995), the indigenous population of 300,000 was reduced to a mere 3,000 in a period of 30 years, a loss of about 99% of the population<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> As a matter of fact, these figures are rough estimates at best. We do not know what the original indigenous population was, or how many “survived” Spanish colonization since there were no census carried out by the Spanish authorities and because many locals fled from European centers.

It was this unequal coexistence between Spaniards and the indigenous population that gave rise to present day ethnic relations in the country and in the region. The Spanish, however, already had a previous history of racial and cultural antagonism in other areas of the world, including their own mainland territory. The most prevalent example is that of Andalucía, today a province in the south of Spain, which was ruled by an Arab dynasty for nearly eight hundred years. In 1492, the recently married King Fernando of Aragon and Queen Isabella of Castilla concluded a conquest of the territory, ousting the “Moors” and all other non-Catholic groups including Jews. This conflictive coexistence of different ethnic groups set a precedent for racial relations in the Americas since differentiation in Spain also meant the formation of racial hierarchies assigned and propagated by dominant institutions (Ivory, 1979). Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries in Spain, notions of racial superiority were intrinsically associated with notions of religion. For instance, “Moors” were seen as “black” and believed to be practicing a “primitive” religion. The ideology of “Purity of Blood” established “white” and Catholic lineage as the most desired ethnic trait, and religious and racial intermixing were strongly prohibited (Ivory, 1979).

The concept of “Purity of Blood” also became prevalent in the Spanish colonies (Martínez, 2004). However, in contrast to the mainland, where non-Catholics were expelled, the colonial venture in the Americas included the effort to convert indigenous populations. Thousands of religious figures arrived to the Spanish colonies in order to “save” the local “Indians,” as Columbus had prophesized in the first series of letters to the King and Queen of Spain. Columbus considered the locals as primitive, yet noble and worthy of “accepting” the authority of the Church and crown (Cohen, 1969). With this pretext in mind, and due to the lack of Spanish women to sustain the “white” population in the colonies, racial intermixing was

allowed, although discouraged in practice (Moya Pons, 1995). The expansion of racial categories began with the first children born out of Spaniards and “Indians”, who came to be known as *mestizos*. Racial mixing, in turn, accelerated with the arrival of the first Africans.

The arrival of African slaves to Hispaniola was triggered by the fact that gold was not very abundant in the island: this economic venture was quickly substituted by sugarcane production. Moreover, the considerable reduction in the indigenous population spurred the demand for a new subordinate labour force (Moya Pons, 1995). Ideologically, the Spanish crown considered the suggestions of Bartolomé de Las Casas, a priest who today is renowned for his advocacy of indigenous rights. In 1519, Las Casas proposed that Africans should be used as slaves for the sugar plantations because “Indians” possessed souls and could be saved, whereas Africans were a lost cause (Bailey, 2001). In other words, the *Tainos* were considered noble savages while the Africans were branded as merely barbarians. Nevertheless, Africans quickly became the majority of the colony’s population due to the rapid increase of sugar plantations in the early 16<sup>th</sup> century, and thus partook in racial mixing (Moya Pons, 1995). The term *mulatto* was coined for the offspring of a “white” Spaniard and a “black” African. Hence, in terms of the hierarchy of races imposed by the dominant colonial structure, Spaniards represented the most desired status of “purity,” followed in descending order by *mestizos*, *mulattoes* and “Indians”. Africans held the least desired racial status, and the racial category of “black” automatically represented the social status of slave (Bailey, 2001).

In the Spanish colonies, moreover, a racial category was something that was assigned, but that could also be attained *legally* through political, social, and economic mobility. Manumission policies were indeed more common in this region, as opposed to North America, since active participation in the local economy allowed many slaves to accumulate enough

wealth to essentially buy their freedom (Turits, 2006). Furthermore, the rapid growth of these new colonial societies allowed for increased flexibility by local administrations, which often found themselves in need of personnel for military or bureaucratic work. According to historian Lyman Johnson (1979), “colonial societies in Latin America tolerated manumission, but the process was not encouraged actively by either Church or state” (p. 263). However, the systematization of manumission policies allowed former slaves to essentially negotiate their social status within the colonies, and to claim some type of European lineage often went to their advantage. Manumission policies, although not widespread, affected *all* Spanish colonies in the Americas, and contributed significantly to racial identity formations (Johnson, 1979).

#### *The Social Effects of Economic Downturn*

According to prominent Dominican historians, the particular history of Hispaniola would consequently shake the foundations of the strict racial code enforced in this colony by the Spaniards and contribute to the distinctive socio-racial identity formation in the Dominican Republic (Martínez, 2003; Moya Pons, 1995; Torres-Saillant, 1998). For starters, the sugarcane plantation venture in the island was a short lived experience, only lasting until the early 1500s. Already in the late 16<sup>th</sup> century, notably after the colonization of Cuba, Mexico and Peru, Hispaniola ceased to be of great importance to the Spanish crown (Moya Pons, 1995). Cuba had replaced the island not only as the center for sugarcane plantations, but also as the strategic port to carry out future colonial expeditions. Meanwhile, Mexico and Peru provided Spain with a mining “boom”, and were both the fastest growing population centers at the time. This phenomenon led to “white” emigration from Hispaniola to the other Spanish colonies, further reducing European influence in the island (Torres-Saillant, 1998). According to Frank Moya

Pons (1995), by the end of the century, Africans in Hispaniola outnumbered Europeans by nine to one.

Consequently, Dominican scholars refer to the 17<sup>th</sup> century as the “Century of Misery” in the colony (Torres-Saillant, 1998, p. 131). Several historians point to the diminishing of the social gap between slaves and their masters (Martínez, 2003; Moya Pons, 1995; Torres-Saillant, 1998). In addition, due to the economic hit taken by the colony by the collapse of the sugar plantations, the island’s population resorted to trading with pirates and smugglers from other European countries. This was strictly prohibited by the Spanish crown, which had instilled a monopoly over the production and distribution of the resources of its colonies. The persistence of contraband was therefore severely punished by the Spanish authorities, which forcefully depopulated, in several cases burning down, various peripheral cities and forced its subjects to reside closer to Santo Domingo, the main city and port of the colony. This event was crucial because it led to further European emigration, and according to Frank Moya Pons, Juan Bosch, and other Dominican historians, it created a vacuum in the Western side of the island that was exploited by French “buccaneers,” who in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century began to form outposts that eventually became the French colony of Saint Domingue, or present day Haiti (San Miguel, 2005).

### *The Emergence of Saint Domingue*

The formal establishment of Saint Domingue in 1697 radically altered the socio-racial foundation of the Spanish colony. The French side experienced a massive influx of African slaves to work on sugar, coffee and tobacco plantations. The overwhelming labour imposed on Africans caused many runaway slaves to flee to the Spanish side of the island, where the authorities did not put to practice the French fugitive-slave laws of the time. Thus, the African

presence in Santo Domingo augmented with the economic rise of Saint Domingue (Moya Pons, 1995). More significantly, the rise of Saint Domingue as the most important colony of France triggered a complementary boom in the Spanish side during the 18<sup>th</sup> century, which increasingly specialized in cattle ranching. Santo Domingo sold its cattle meat to feed the slaves in Saint Domingue, and later also began to export cow hide to meet the rising demand of leather goods in Europe (Candelario, 2007).

Another decisive historical event that shifted the social foundations of the island was the Haitian revolution, which lasted from 1791 to 1804, and led to the independence of the first “black” republic in the Americas. At the time of the Revolution, Haiti’s slave population numbered around 600,000, compared to 30,000 Europeans; and indeed many of the Revolution’s leaders, such as Toussaint L’Ouverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines, were former slaves (Fick, 1990). Haiti’s first constitution affirmed that all of its citizens would be regarded as “black,” and the abolition of slavery was institutionalized. In 1822, Jean-Pierre Boyer, Haiti’s president, led his army to the eastern Spanish side to assume control of the entire island. This episode served as a political manoeuvre orchestrated by Boyer to unite the island under a common front and therefore deter any foreign powers from interfering with the affairs of the island. Boyer proceeded to abolish slavery in the eastern part of the island as well, which in turn provoked fear in the minds of Dominican elites who regarded themselves as “non-black” (Bryan, 1995). Prior to the unification of the island under Haitian rule, members of the landowning elite, under the leadership of José Nuñez de Caceres, moved in 1821 to declare independence from Spain. This pre-emptive act, labelled by authors as the *Independencia Efimera*, sought to ally with the political cause of South American military leader Simon Bolivar. The leaders of the *Independencia Efimera* hoped to maintain the institution of slavery, as the new independent

countries in the South America had done, but were easily derailed by Haiti's superior army (Bryan, 1995).

Many Dominican politicians and historians continue to interpret the unification of the island in 1822 as an invasion and occupation by "lustful" Haitians. They emphasize alleged atrocities committed by the Haitian army and describe leaders such as Jean-Jacques Dessalines as "cruel" and "barbaric" (San Miguel, 2005). Other revisionist authors, including Frank Moya Pons (1995), Samuel Martinez (2003), and Silvio Torres-Saillant (1998), have questioned the validity of this historical paradigm. Samuel Martinez, for instance, argues that to the masses of Dominicans, who were mainly slaves and *libertos* of African descent, the Haitian state provided a better alternative for nation building. Besides Haiti's abolitionist stance, other reasons why "non-white" Dominicans opted for Haitian rule included the recruitment of Spanish speakers to high ranks in the Haitian army, as well as the economic benefits promised under land reform and the opening of new trading ports (Martínez, 2003).

#### *A New Nation under the Shadow of U.S. Imperialism*

The subsequent Dominican independence movement of February 1844 acquired numerous followers, many whom had a change of heart towards the Haitian government. Sociologist Ginetta Candelario (2007) writes: [T]he 'Father of the Republic,' Juan Pablo Duarte [...] fashioned a liberal vision of the emergent Dominican nation-state that integrated the 'coloured' masses while differentiating them from Haitians by extolling their Hispanicity, their allegiance to Catholicism, and their (relative) whiteness (p. 37)." The independence movement of 1844 can thus be interpreted as crucial to the racial and cultural distancing that Dominican leaders, through the undertaking of "nation-building", sought from their Haitian neighbours. Candelario further suggests that Dominican notions of race and culture were "developed

simultaneously and dynamically in contrastive relation to Haiti,” but also under the expansive imperial presence of the United States (p. 38).

As various authors have noted, foreign intervention after 1844, particularly from the United States, proved an influential factor for the exacerbation of racial identities on both sides of Hispaniola (Sagas, 2000; Torres-Saillant, 1998; Wucker, 1999). Representatives from the United States treated racial status ambivalently, playing “black” and “white” identities against each other in order to pursue their interests. For instance, during the war for Dominican independence in 1844, US Secretary of State Calhoun thought it was prudent to “prevent the further spread of negro influence in the West Indies” (Torres-Saillant, 1998, p. 130). He sided with Dominican elites in the conflict with Haiti and sought to magnify the “white” population of the Dominican Republic. Subsequent attempts to annex the Dominican Republic by the U.S. government prolonged these racial ideologies. During one of the annexation proceedings in the late nineteenth century, a senate commission argued that racial tension in the island was “the refusal of *white* Dominicans to be governed by *black* Haitians” (Torres-Saillant, 1998, p. 131). Candelario (2007) notes that “[a]t various moments throughout the first half of the twentieth century, U.S. government agents and North American capitalists colluded with [the] Dominican elite in presenting the Dominican Republic as the most ‘Hispanic, Catholic, and white’ of (Latin) American nations against the Haitian Other” (p. 37). She also adds, “Expansionists to a one, they saw enormous potential for capitalist investment and military positioning in the Dominican Republic” (p. 37). Thus, in her view, these racial and cultural ideologies served “both U.S. imperialism and Dominican nation building through anti-Haitianist discourses” (p.36).

But the interests and agenda of the United States government did not always coincide with those of Dominican elites. At the start of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after all plans for annexation

were aborted, the US occupations of Haiti (1915-1934) and Dominican Republic (1916-1924) deepened racial tensions on both sides of the island (Torres-Saillant, 1998). The United States pursued their economic interests by transferring Haitian migrant workers, along with other groups from the British Caribbean, to the Dominican Republic in order to work for recent sugar plantations established by American companies. These initiatives were denounced by Dominican elites, who favoured “white” immigration as a means for “civilizing” Dominican society. To propagate their beliefs, elites labelled Haitians and other “black” groups as culturally and racially distinct identities from “Hispanic” Dominicans (Martínez-Vergne, 2005).

### *A Nationalist Agenda*

The idea of racial and cultural “whitening” reached its violent heights during the nationalist dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo from 1930 to 1961. Trujillo, renowned for lightening his face with make-up, used racism to promote Haitians as a “common enemy” who were silently invading the Dominican Republic and taking away much needed jobs. In 1937, he ordered the massacre of more than fifteen thousand “Haitians” (many were Dominican citizens of Haitian descent) who were living close to the Dominican-Haitian border. Trujillo later claimed he had acted to save the nation from “africanization” (Sagas, 2000).

As an integral participant to the Trujillo regime, Joaquin Balaguer served to justify the actions taken by his superior. During the events of 1937, Balaguer had been Dominican ambassador to Colombia. He reacted to the massacre by issuing a letter defending Trujillo’s nationalist program:

[...] by 1935 there were 400,000 Haitians in our country, resulting in the corrosion of national solidarity; voodoo, a kind of African animism of the lowest origins, became the preferred cult among Dominicans of the border area. The *gourde* replaced the *peso*. Peasants were learning from the Haitians’ anti-Christian customs, such as incestuous unions. We were about to be absorbed by Haiti. (Sagas, 2000, p 87)

In 1947, still under the Trujillo regime, Balaguer wrote *La realidad dominicana* in an effort to sustain what he considered to be the “natural right” of Dominicans to defend themselves against the Haitian menace. Using the same logic employed in 1937, Balaguer attempted to distance Dominicans from Haitians both culturally and racially. For Balaguer, the most important cultural symbol of *Hispanidad* was the Christian religion:

There is, therefore, no reason either of justice or humanity, which can prevail against the right of the Dominican people to exist as a Spanish country and as a Christian community. (Sagas, 2000, p. 89)

In terms of race, Balaguer equated Haitians to “blacks” in general, and considered them an inferior and uncivilized race. His arguments employed racial theories that dated back to the nineteenth century:

The Haitian immigrant has also been a generator of sloth in Santo Domingo. The Ethiopian race is indolent by nature and applies no special efforts to anything useful unless it is forced to obtain its subsistence by that means. (Sagas, 2000, p. 87)

Another aspect of *La realidad dominicana* worth mentioning is Balaguer’s distorted view of Dominican history. He portrayed the former Spanish colony as being composed of the “best European families,” and attributed the influx of African slaves to Spain’s cession of the colony to France in 1795 (Sagas, 2000, p. 89). He disregarded the fact that centuries before, the colony’s African slaves composed the majority of the population. Another misinformation given by Balaguer in the book concerns the supposedly numerous Haitian attempts to invade the Dominican Republic, either militarily or by illegal seizure of Dominican lands (Sagas, 2000, p. 88).

Balaguer’s command of the presidency after the fall of Trujillo in 1961 sealed the institutionalization of *antihaitianismo* sentiments and protection of *Hispanidad*. Scholars point to several explanations for the persistence of such ideologies. First, *antihaitianismo* served as a

political tool used against Haitian immigrants for the purpose of diverting attention from economic problems plaguing the country. Authors such as Ernesto Sagas (2000) have explained this phenomenon as a form of political control by authoritarian figures like Balaguer. As such, “it denies dark-skinned citizens and the poor generally their own socio-cultural space, and intimidates them from making demands or otherwise participating in politics” (p. 107). Although both Trujillo and Balaguer constantly pointed fingers at Haitian workers who supposedly robbed Dominicans of their jobs, both figures were in fact profiting from striking deals with Haitian governments in order to facilitate the entrance and use of Haitian workers into state-owned sugar plantations (Wucker, 1999). Another political utility which Balaguer found in *antihaitianismo* ideology was its use against his biggest political rival in the early 1990s, Jose Francisco Peña Gomez. Balaguer launched several campaigns that portrayed Peña Gomez as Haitian, and therefore conspiring against the Dominican population by secretly plotting the unification of the island (Sagas, 2000). As a highly influential author and politician, he disregarded any “black” presence to what constitutes the Dominican population. The persistence of the “non-black” ideology of Dominican racial identity came to characterize Balaguer’s political and social agenda, and the continuation of nationalist discourse thereafter.

### **Notions of Racial and Cultural Identity in the Dominican Republic**

In her article, “Character or Caricature: Representations of Blackness in Dominican Social Science Textbooks,” Sheridan Wigginton (2005) points out that the relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti has significantly influenced Dominican racial identity. Evidence for this claim has been brought forth by numerous authors, as discussed previously, who point to the conflicting relationship between both countries that began when the Haitian

army annexed the Dominican Republic in 1822 and successively governed the entire island for twenty-two years (Howard, 2001; Moya Pons, 1995; Wucker, 1999). Torres-Saillant (1998) and Candelario (2007) describe how the Dominican independence movement of 1844, as well as the international context of the time, contributed to the racial distancing that Dominican elites sought from their Haitian neighbours. According to Torres-Saillant, “[a] large part of the problem of racial identity among Dominicans stems from the fact that from its inception their country had to negotiate the racial paradigms of their North American and European overseers” (p. 127). He contends that part of the negotiation discourse which Dominican elites imparted was their portrayal of the Dominican Republic as essentially a “non-black” nation. This makes sense in terms of the ongoing racial dynamics in the United States that characterized the period preceding the American Civil War. Since its declaration of independence in 1804, Haiti was considered to be under “black control” and, therefore, a threat to the system of slavery in the United States (Reid Andrews, 2004). Dominican elites therefore persistently characterized their newly independent nation as “non-black” in part to receive international recognition, particularly from the United States.

Suffice it to say that the late nineteenth century was a period of nation-building in the Dominican Republic and the rest of Latin America. According to George Reid Andrews (2004), a prominent historian of race relations in Latin America, ideas of urbanization, progress and modernity were interchangeably linked to notions of white racial superiority. Most Latin American countries sought European immigration as a way to “whiten” society. Those countries that failed to attract significant number of European migrants, including the Dominican Republic, consequently adopted different and often ambiguous notions of nation-building. According to anthropologist Peter Wade (1997), elites in these countries had to accommodate a space for

racial mixing that was considered non-acceptable in North America. Thus, previously mentioned ideologies of *mestizaje* and *mulataje* were commonplace in countries such as the Dominican Republic, where the population of European descent did not compose a majority. Nevertheless, George Reid Andrews (2004) adds that these notions of racial mixing maintained previously conceived ideologies of racial hierarchies and ideas of progress expressed in terms of “whiteness”. Thus, in the case of Dominican Republic, the idea was that Dominicans of African descent could progress by “whitening” their race.

These notions of racial mixing also served to distance Dominicans from their “black” neighbours in Haiti. In her book, *Nation and Citizen in the Dominican Republic, 1880-1916*, Teresita Martinez-Vergne (1998) points to the impact of the growth of the Dominican sugar plantation industry in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the subsequent arrivals of Haitians and workers from the Caribbean as an influential factor in defining racial relations in the country. She points to a significant rise in the discourse of discrimination, particularly in newspapers, which commented on the silent invasion of “blacks” into the Dominican Republic. These attacks were directed most notably at Haitians, who were perceived as primitive and culturally inferior – the antithesis of progress and modernization. Paradoxically, while the Dominican landowning elites sought out Haitians and other groups identified as “black” to work on sugar plantations, a significant portion of the intelligentsia also simultaneously complained of “black plagues” which swept the country and posed a threat to *dominicanidad*.

These racist notions constitute what historians have labelled as *antihaitianismo* in the Dominican Republic. In her book, *Why the Cocks Fight: Dominicans, Haitians, and the Struggle for Hispaniola*, Michelle Wucker (1999) makes the central claim that Dominicans are consumed with animosity towards their Haitian neighbours. Wigginton (2005) also employs this logic, for

example, in her statement that “Dominicans [...] have long constructed their perspectives of ethnicity, race, and culture based upon negative attitudes toward the neighbouring Haitian population” (p. 197). The argument is that the majority of Dominicans, who are also descendants of Africans, view Haitians as “primitive” and see themselves as a “whiter” race. Furthermore, according to Wucker (1999), the spread of *antihaitianismo* ideology serves the interests of the elites, who exploit the hostility that mainstream Dominicans hold towards Haitians who live in the Dominican Republic. As such, Dominican nationalism, characterized as the outright rejection of Haitians, is used to consolidate the privileged positions of an elite minority, since social grievances are channelled towards Haitians, rather than towards the hegemonic powers in the country.

While I do not intend to downplay the historical relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti and its undeniable influence on notions of race, I would like to explain the limitations of these claims. Those who emphasize Dominican and Haitian relations as a major component of racial identity construction tend to disregard nearly 350 years of colonial history which preceded the annexation of the Dominican Republic by Haiti. Torres-Saillant (1998) discusses colonial notions of race in the Dominican Republic, and mentions that contrary to Haiti under French colonial rule, the Spanish side of the island experienced a rapid decline of its plantation economy in the early sixteenth century that continued until the end of the nineteenth century. Even though the Spanish colony was the first spot in the Americas to import African slaves, and although African descendants comprised the majority in terms of population, the rapid deterioration of the plantation economy diluted strict racial codes previously established. With the subsequent economic dominance of cattle ranching, workers of African descent attained more power to negotiate with employers, and part of this negotiation process involved setting a

racial discourse that distanced themselves from “black” slaves. Candelario (2007) refers to this economic model as both patriarchal and feudal in its patron-worker relationship. Consequently, the colony’s population of “free-coloureds” identified themselves as “whites of the land,” and improved their livelihoods by working in the colonial administration, the church and the military. Still others lived secluded and autonomous lives from the government, dedicating themselves to shifting subsistence agriculture. This phenomenon is contrary to the development of Haiti, which operated as an industrial-plantation economy that eventually provided a fourth of France’s total wealth, and functioned under a rigid racially-defined labour force until 1793, consisting primarily of an overwhelming presence of African slaves (Moya Pons, 1995). According to Torres-Saillant (1998), Dominican celebration of racial mixing, contrary to post-independence Haiti’s penchant affirmation of “blackness,” was spurred by the interests of many previously marginalized groups who “whitened” their own racial perception in pursuit of upward social mobility, rather than as a reaction to Haitian “blacks,” as noted by Wucker (1999) and Wigginton (2005). This explanation also causes difficulties for Wigginton’s (2005) idea that Haiti’s and the Dominican Republic’s pasts are very “similar” (p. 192). In the Dominican Republic, “whiteness” became to an extent an *achievable* social status linked to political and economic participation.

Furthermore, Wigginton (2005) claims that “the reality [...] is that no clear racial and ethnic lines exist in the Dominican Republic” (p. 192). This argument, however, disregards the assertion made by many modern historians, sociologists and anthropologists that *all* racial categories are in fact social, cultural and historical *constructs* (Wade, 1997). Wigginton (2005) mentions that racial categories in the Dominican Republic are “extraordinarily subjective,” but she fails to mention that *all* racial categories are equally subjective (p. 192). She even appears to

take for granted that all Africans and African-descendant Americans are undeniably “black.” I do not want to suggest, however, that Dominicans do not in fact devalue their African heritage. The argument that Dominican attitudes towards “blackness” amount to self-loathing dominates the literature on Dominican notions of race, and considerable evidence has been brought up to support this claim (Howard, 2001; Martínez, 2003; Sagas, 2000; Wucker, 1999). The prevalence of *antihaitianismo* in Dominican popular culture is one important dimension of this argument.

In addition, several authors have pointed to the adherence of Dominicans to the racial category of “Indio” (literally, Indian) as evidence of the denial of African heritage and as an effort to “whiten” Dominicans in general (Howard, 2001; Sagas, 2000). In the literature, this assertion practically goes unchallenged, and I therefore would like to address the complexities of the so called “Indian” Dominican racial identity. According to Benjamin Bailey (2001), “Indian,” or *Taino* heritage is equivalent to Dominican nationalism under the dominant discourse. This does not necessarily mean, however, that “Indio” is used to signify an indigenous heritage, but rather refers to a mixed pantheon of skin colors and phenotypes. In other words, the term “Indian” is used exclusively to identify *la raza dominicana*, but includes different racial (or phenotypic) categories such as *indio claro* (“light Indian”), *indio obscuro* (“dark Indian”) and *indio trigueño* (“wheat-coloured Indian”).

Today the racial category of “Indian” is institutionalized in Dominican everyday parlance, and social and political institutions. In the last census carried out in the Dominican Republic (1980), only 16% of the population was identified as “white” and 11% identified as “black;” the great majority, 73%, were categorized as “Indian.” In addition, the Dominican *cédula*, the country’s voter permit and main identification document, contains the category of *Indio* in the field of *raza*, along with *blanco* and *negro*. Candelario (2007) adds that the association between

Dominicans and “Indians” is propagated in education literature, media, “Indo-Hispanic” models of female beauty, commercialization of indigenous words (I would also add commercialization of indigenous historical figures) as images and icons, and Dominican museums.

Thus, the question remains: is the adherence to an “Indian” racial identity a denial of “blackness”? Frank Moya Pons (1994) argues:

By calling themselves Indians, Dominicans have been able to provisionally resolve the profound drama that filled most their history: that of being a coloured nation, ruled by a quasi-white elite, which did not want to accept the reality of its colour and the history of its race. Somehow Dominicans assimilated the romantic discourse of the “*indigenista*” writers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and found it instrumental in accommodating their racial self-perception to the prejudices of the elite, by accepting their “color” while denying their “race”. (p. 174)

Similarly, sociologist Ginetta Candelario (2007) claims:

The rise of the “Indio” category as a rejection of, and replacement for, black categories is historically rooted in a simultaneous recognition of dark(er) skin color and disavowal of Dominican affinities with both Haiti and Spain. Unlike mulatto, which historically had connotations of illegitimacy and the stigma of slavery in colonial and early national discourses of race, Indio “identity was an ‘internal’ identity with historicity, as opposed to ‘white/Spanish’ or ‘black/African,’ identities which had their roots elsewhere”. (p. 67)

According Candelario (2007), the majority of Dominicans consider themselves to be racially “Indian,” and culturally “Hispanic,” even though the country’s population overwhelmingly descends from Africa.

Hence most authors affirm that the so called “Indian” Dominican heritage is really an affinity to lighter skin tones that are results of racial mixing, but also a negation of African heritage (Howard, 2001; Sagas, 2000; Wucker, 1999). Furthermore, as confirmed by Candelario (2007), the *Indio* can make the claim of being strictly Dominican. What does not appear in the

literature is that the term “Indian,” like other previously mentioned racial identifications, could have also been assigned by the dominant groups during Spanish colonialism, and consequently assimilated by the masses. Richard Harvey Brown (1993) alludes to this logic with his statement: “Efforts to resist domination can readily re-enforce it, if such resistance is cast in the code of the dominator” (p. 679). We have seen this, for instance, with the term *mulatto*, which continues to be widespread in Latin American countries despite the fact that it was first used as a derogatory assignation.

Furthermore, the claim that the “Indio” identity has its origins in the Latin American *indigenista* romantic movement of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, which sought to equate the identity of the populations to the region’s indigenous past, is challenged by travellers’ accounts of the period. For instance, M.L. Moreau de Saint-Méry, a French citizen who travelled throughout the Spanish colony in the latter 18<sup>th</sup> century, before the advent of *indigenista* writers, commented on the adherence of its inhabitants to the “Indian” racial category:

If we could believe some individuals of the Spanish part, we would have to add to the three classes into which this population is divided a fourth class that would be very interesting due to the long series of misfortunes which it recalls. I refer to certain Creoles (really a small number) who have hair similar to that of the Indians, that is, long, straight and very black, who claim to be descendants of the primitive natives of the islands. They give great importance to that ancestry, although it is denied by the historical facts that prove that that race of men was completely exterminated. (Candelario, 2007, p. 64)

Although Moreau de Saint-Méry found it inconceivable that these inhabitants were in fact “Indians,” his observation supports the argument that Dominican adherence to the “Indian” racial category is a continuation of colonial racial categories.

Moreover, sociologist David Howard (2001) suggests that racial hierarchies and the ideology of “whitening,” in terms of being seen as desirable for the attainment of upward social

mobility, continue to be prevailing notions in the Dominican Republic. Howard's (2001) contention also points to the way Dominicans perceive race and class as interrelated notions. Howard further mentions, for instance, that families encourage their children to marry people of lighter skin tones, in order to "improve their race" (p. 127). Women in particular are pressured to imitate standards of beauty that are associated with the physical characteristics of Caucasians, and therefore go to salons to straighten their hair or use make-up to lighten their complexion. In Candelario's (2007) view, women play a distinguishable role as "symbols, icons, producers, and reproducers of Dominican identity" (p. 43). Candelario further argues that hair is the quintessential characteristic that defines race in the Dominican Republic. She claims that since hair is malleable, and can be moulded in hair salons, Dominicans adhere to this physical feature to affirm their whiteness as well as non-blackness. These examples are indeed manifestations of racialized conceptions of status and beauty that prevail in the unconsciousness of Dominican society. Overall, by presenting the complex discussion on racial identity in the Dominican Republic, I want to set the stage for my exploration of racial and cultural ideologies that can be found in the Dominican national curriculum and social studies textbooks used in Dominican elementary public schools today.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Methodology and Document Analysis**

#### **Research Question**

In her article published in *Race, Ethnicity and Education*, Sheridan Wigginton (2005) examined representations of race in social studies textbooks used in Dominican public schools throughout the 1990s. The author identified three themes that were prevalent in the textbooks: that “blackness represents less desirable social status,” that “blackness can be prevented through generational ‘whitening,’” and that “blackness is represented by negative and exaggerated stereotypes” (p. 191). Since then, the Ministry of Education in the Dominican Republic has modified the contents of the social studies curriculum as part of the above mentioned *Plan Decenal*, and as a result textbooks created by the publishing house Distribuidora Escolar (DISESA) have been introduced into the public education system (República Dominicana, 2008). Under these modifications, the new goals for the elementary social studies program included:

- The formation of an individual and collective identity.
- Focus on the cultural contributions of different human groups that have affected the formation of Dominicans.
- Focus on the process of internal and external migrations that shaped Dominicans

The main objective of this chapter is to consider Wigginton’s (2005) research question – “How do social science textbooks used in Dominican public schools portray national identity and ethnicity to its students?” (p.191) – through an analysis of the content of the new textbooks. I show that the prevailing notions of identity found in the DISESA textbooks consist of the

celebration of “racial mixing,” which identifies the majority of Dominicans as *mulattoes*, and the recognition of Spanish culture as the foremost precursor to *dominicanidad*. Furthermore, my findings point to a continuation of the three prevailing themes raised by Wigginton.

### **Data Collection and Methodology**

This study will center on document collection of social studies textbooks used in all Dominican public elementary schools, but will also mention other relevant curricular data such as the Dominican National Curriculum. The rationale for focusing primarily on social studies textbooks is that the content of these courses provide crucial insights into the ways notions of Dominican identity are propagated by the Dominican Ministry of Education. The textbooks presently used for *Estudios Sociales*, published from 2002 to 2003 under the publishing house Distribuidora Escolar, S.A., contain discourse on historical narrative and alleged racial and cultural components of Dominican society. For this study, I was able to obtain third to sixth grade elementary social studies textbooks printed by abovementioned publisher (Almanzar, 2002; Almanzar & Perez, 2002; Cabrera, 2003; Diaz, 2002; Vargas, 2002). In the Dominican Republic, the Ministry of Education establishes the National Curriculum and assigns the same textbooks for all public schools throughout the country. The Curriculum Department at the Ministry of Education is in charge of on-going curricular modifications and publishes annually the content of the elementary program in two volumes: *Theoretical-methodological Foundation and Course Content*.

The methodology to be used in this study is document analysis – focusing on various thematic sections within the textbooks, which generally comprise historical narratives of the process of colonization and nation building, and sections that describe “Dominican Identity”. In

particular, notions such as race, culture and identity, as depicted in the discourse throughout the textbooks, are examined. The section titled “Identity in DISESA Textbooks” in this chapter includes a discussion on abstract concepts such as civilization, religion, portrayals of Indigenous and African groups, physical descriptions, and overall depictions of Dominicans and Haitians. The purpose of this section is to identify similarities among these abstract concepts in terms of underlying racial and cultural ideologies. The section titled “Implications: Representations of the Oppressed” will discuss a range of issues including the repercussions of racial interpretations of identity, outright discrimination against African populations, historical inaccuracies and stereotypes, and indigenous romantization. The overarching purpose of this section is to establish significant relationships between the content of the textbooks and studies of Dominican racial and cultural identity that have been carried in various academic fields, including education, history, anthropology and political science.

### **Document Analysis: Identity in DISESA Textbooks**

For the sake of simplification, throughout this chapter the third grade textbook will be referred as Book Three, the fourth grade textbook as Book Four, and so on. On the whole, my findings confirm that Dominican elementary social studies textbooks portray the majority of Dominicans as “non-black”. In terms of defining Dominican racial and cultural identity, the two overarching themes that run throughout the DISESA textbooks consist of: 1) Dominicans as the inheritors of Spanish “superior” culture, and 2) Dominicans as the result of racial mixing between Africans and Spaniards, or as *mulattoes*.

Education in the Dominican Republic generally follows a “Eurocentric” model. This paradigm, which follows the line of the study of history under the lens of European determinism

that is also common in North American countries, is reflected in the national curricular mandate. As such, European societies are praised for their “civilizing” role in the world, and European history dominates the curricular content. For instance, according to the Dominican national elementary curriculum, a standard goal for students is to understand the evolution of Europe from “ancient” to “modern.” No such standard that identifies history as a progression within a certain time and place exists for other regions prior to 16<sup>th</sup> century. In other words, the curriculum includes the “mentioning,” to borrow the term used by Michael Apple (2002), of non-European ancient civilizations, but disregards their cultural and technological development. Interestingly, the national curriculum does not consider the mentioning, much less the historical development, of African societies as a standard of Dominican elementary education. As such, educators are likely to portray to their students other groups such as Africans or indigenous Americans as static societies.

In addition, the DISESA textbooks vividly demonstrate an affinity for promoting Spanish – and generally European – heritage among Dominicans. Book Six, for example, begins with the socio-economic changes experienced under feudalism in Europe. As such, Europe is represented as the natural starting point for the concept of “civilization,” which later expands elsewhere following the extension of European groups. Thus, Columbus’ arrival to America is labelled as the “discovery” of the “New World,” and all the subsequent establishments of colonies in the Americas are depicted as discoveries carried under the Spanish, Portuguese, French and English (Almanzar, 2002, p. 80; Cabrera, 2003, p. 16). Book Five, for instance, dedicates a chapter to the “expansion of civilization”, a theme that completely disregards notions of civilization in other regions such as Africa, Asia and the Americas (Diaz, 2002, p. 156). Accordingly, the

notion of Europe as the natural onset for civilization sets the stage for the representation of European culture as the foundation of *dominicanidad*.

In the context of the Dominican Republic, the DISESA textbooks thus identify Spanish culture as naturally dominant over cultural contributions from other groups in the Americas. Book Four, for instance, mentions Spanish culture as having “the biggest influence” on Dominican society, and then describes the Catholic Religion as the central component of Dominican culture (Vargas, 2002, p. 74). This follows a general curricular trend in the country, which began after the Dominican government signed a Concordat with that Catholic Church in 1954 that guaranteed the Catholic authorities of the country input into the educational curriculum. Currently, all Dominican schools, both public and private, must provide two hours of “Religious and Human Development” courses at all educational levels (Secretaría de Estado de Educación República Dominicana, 1991). These courses are indeed focused on providing explications of Catholic doctrine. The assumption therefore is that *all* Dominicans are in fact Catholic.

In terms of the actual religious practices of Dominicans, the social studies books mention little about the many forms of religious syncretism found today particularly in rural zones. When mentioning indigenous spiritual forms, such as Sarandunga, one textbook states that these “expressions have been disappearing along the years” (Vargas, 2002, p. 73). Other prominent religious practices in the Dominican Republic, such as Voodoo, are not even addressed in these discussions. Book Six does mention religious syncretism as a common characteristic among “Caribbean culture,” but falls short of providing an explanation of what syncretism means (Cabrera, 2003, p. 149). The same can be said about the concept of “transculturation,” which is presented in Book Six in the following manner: “the Taino heredity, the imposition of Spanish culture, and the culture of the enslaved blacks preceding from different African tribes are what

shaped Dominican culture” (Cabrera, 2003, p. 143). This oversimplified description, however, lacks a considerable explanation of the “transculturation” phenomenon and to its significance in Caribbean and Dominican cultures. Book Six goes on to reiterate that the Spaniards “imposed their culture over the conquered peoples” (Cabrera, 2003, p.149). Then again, what does the “imposition” of Spanish culture in actual fact mean?

When comparing Spaniards to native Tainos and Africans, one textbook claims that Spaniards possessed “a more advanced culture,” and were “more powerful” (Almanzar, 2002, p. 76-77). In contrast, indigenous Tainos are presented as naturally weak and submissive to Spanish domination (p. 77). In fact, the DISESA textbooks, and particularly Book Six, make reference to the so-called “extinction” of Tainos:

Gold had become exhausted and the aboriginal population had been eliminated due to the maltreatment and forced work to which they were submitted by the Spanish. (Cabrera, 2003, p. 31)

Yet again:

The sugar industry in its beginnings rested on aboriginal labour; but the rapid extinction of these, especially in the Caribbean, made necessary the introduction of African blacks. (Cabrera, 2003, p. 49)

Furthermore, the portrayal of cultural attributes of Tainos and other non-European groups is reduced to mere stereotypes. These portrayals accentuate the fact that Tainos walked around “almost naked,” while many of the caricatures show men full of body painting and carrying a spear, and women with their breasts exposed (Almanzar, 2002, p. 72-75). Cultural contributions of Africans are also simplified and stereotyped. For instance, the activity of carnival, a prominent cultural symbol amongst Dominicans today, and traditionally a form of religious expression among African descendants, is denied any significance other than “African blacks using masks as a form of letting out their pain” (Vargas, 2002, p. 46). The same textbook mentions that different groups, namely from the British Caribbean colonies, arrived and spread

their cultures in the Dominican Republic, but only treat this topic in terms of music and dance (p. 72). One illustration portrays African culture as tied only to drums, plantains, and sugar (p. 184). In general, African and Indigenous history is reduced to several historical personalities, such as the indigenous Enriquillo and the runaway slave Sebastian Lemba, who posed threats to Spanish rule by leading popular uprisings. These characters are identified as “defenders of their race,” but their actions are described as “disputes to bowshots by natives and groups of unrestrained blacks” (Cabrera, 2003, p. 53, 56).

In particular, the depictions of African populations emphasize their backwardness or primitiveness. According to Book Five, “The majority of African nations have not consolidated themselves due to their low culture,” and “there exists between them constant revolutions and wars that have caused huge genocides among the different ethnicities that inhabit the continent” (Diaz, 2002, p. 87). Anything that can be associated with progress is said to be lacking in Africa:

Even though Africa possesses enormous riches, they are very badly taken advantage of principally because of the lack of modern communications and technology. (Diaz, 2002, p. 88)

Other aspects of culture, such as religion and music, are also presented in a similar backward manner. For example, Book Five suggests that Africans are close to barbaric, since “they practice an animistic and fetishist religion” (p. 87). Similarly, when referring to the African continent, Book Six states that “Europe found in the primitive black cultures a barbarian style of music of reiterated rhythms, violent attitudes and open sexuality” (Cabrera, 2003, p. 150).

The discourse found throughout the DISESA textbooks that associates Africans with primitiveness also contains explicit racial references. For instance, included in the affirmations of African backwardness are statements that assert the African population is in its majority “black” (Diaz, 2002, p. 87). The term “black” appears as an element that describes slaves

brought during colonial times. For instance, Book Six states that “in order to substitute the aboriginal work force, the Spaniards brought from Africa large quantities of blacks in the condition of slaves” (Cabrera, 2003, p. 69). Thus, “black Africans” and “black slaves” almost appear as indistinguishable notions throughout the discourse. This racial element is introduced to resonate with the “low culture” exhibited by Africans and is a constant theme among all books. Book Four, for example, claims that race is an intrinsic part of culture (Vargas, 2002, p. 127). The association made between race and culture therefore lends itself to the generalization that everything associated with Africa or anything “black” is part of this “low culture.” Moreover, the labelling of Africans is juxtaposed with the identification of the majority of Dominicans as *mulattoes*.

In fact, most of the discourse on identity found in the DISESA textbooks is highly racialized. Chapters dedicated to the discussion of “Dominican identity” only refer to racial characteristics (Almanzar, 2002; Diaz, 2002). For instance, the construction of a national identity, as suggested in Book Three, is as follows:

The Taino were the first inhabitants of La Hispaniola, followed by the Spanish (second inhabitants), and finally the third inhabitants, black Africans. The Spaniards united with the aboriginals and had children. These were called mestizos. (...) Many Spanish united with the black Africans and these produced mulattoes. These groups gave origin to what is today the Dominican population. We are Mulatto people! We are Dominicans! (Almanzar, 2002, p. 78)

It then reiterates, in case students miss the point, “The majority of Dominicans are mulattoes” (p. 79). The textbooks do not discuss that the term mulatto was a derogatory term instituted by Spanish colonizers, and that derives from the word “mule,” or the cross between a horse and a donkey.

In contrast, North American societies are presented as having lacked racial mixing altogether:

Racial mixing did not occur in the same manner among the different territories of the American continent. The colonizers of North America in most cases arrived to the continent alongside their families. For this reason they did not have the need to mix with the local women. In South America, Central America and the Caribbean, European colonizers arrived by themselves because the Spanish crown forbade the emigration of single women. For this reason, in these parts of the Americas, mestizos were the fruit of the union between Spaniards and the aboriginal women. The Spaniards also mixed with black slave women, giving rise to the mulatto population. (Cabrera, 2003, p. 69)

This last passage raises two important issues. First of all is the apparent justification for racial differentiation between North America and the rest of the region. Book Six explains that no racial mixing occurred in the English and French colonies “because of the outright rejection marked towards the blacks Africans” (Cabrera, 2003, p. 143). The same book goes on to say that it was in the colony of Santo Domingo where racial mixing was carried out “more profoundly” (p. 149). The second issue raised by the abovementioned passage is the overall interpretation that Spanish *men* intermixed with indigenous and African *women*, and never the other way around: an understanding of history under the lenses of patriarchy.

Book Six nevertheless contains more nuanced interpretations of racial identity that go beyond simply portraying the origins of racial categories as something natural or inherited, and rather signalling the intricate relationship between racial hierarchies and the colonial structure. For instance, one particular fragment states that “although this [colonial social] classification refers to an underlying social arrangement that contains certain physical ties, it also reveals the underpinnings between race and class (Cabrera, 2003, p. 70).” Another section contains the following explanation, quoted from Dominican sociologist Carlos Esteban Deive:

The African, by arriving to the new world, was transformed into the black or mulatto; and it is through this condition, under the institution of slavery, where biological, psychological and cultural characteristics differentiate, discriminate and devalue him before the white man. (Cabrera, 2003, p. 147)

The ambiguity of these depictions, however, stems from the fact that this same textbook, and all the others that were reviewed for this study, fervently affirm that Dominicans are indeed mulattoes. Furthermore, it must be noted that these nuanced interpretations are in fact direct quotes from academic sources that are written in a language that is generally above the comprehension level of the average sixth grader.

Where the textbooks advance the generalization that Dominicans are mostly “mulatto,” they also identify Haiti as a country “where the majority is black” (Diaz, 2002, p. 54). For instance, the Haitian Revolution is described as the “rebellion of the blacks from Saint Domingue with the primary purpose of attaining the freedom of all blacks (Cabrera, 2003, p. 111). Similarly, the Haitian military and political leader Jean-Jacques Dessalines is identified as an “illiterate black slave” who defended the rights of “all black slaves (p. 112).” The discourse used in the textbooks also carefully weaves a narrative that sets apart Haitians from Dominicans, and even antagonizes Haitians in some cases. For example, when referring to the Haitian “occupation” of Santo Domingo, Book Six explains that “the Haitians in their retreat committed crimes and atrocities against Dominicans,” and then goes on to ask “why did Haitians invade our country in three occasions?” (Cabrera, 2003, p. 114-116) The same textbook affirms that the Haitian Revolution influenced the feeling of a common identity among Dominicans. In addition, an activity in this textbook asks students to determine the characteristics that differentiate Dominicans from Haitians and proposes, among others, to focus on the following components: language, religion, and race. This same activity fails to ask the students to identify similarities between the two populations.

At the same time, however, the racial category of “black” is not limited to Haiti or Africa, but is also mentioned as a component of the Dominican population. One of the textbooks, for instance, dedicates a chapter exclusively to the impact on Dominican culture of Haitians and other groups arriving from the Caribbean (Vargas, 2002). The chapter focuses on the “Characteristics of the Rural Population in the Southeast” of the Dominican Republic, and begins with the following statement: “The population of the Southeast has ethnic characteristics that are mostly black” (p. 67). The text goes on to assert that “in this region there are higher proportions of blacks” (p. 67). Furthermore, it mentions groups labelled as *cocolos*, who emigrated from the British Caribbean, and declares, “This is why the population of the Southeast has racial features which are predominately black” (p. 67). A similar affirmation is made of the South-western region, which is the closest to Haiti. The implications of these assertions, in respect to their underlying message about what constitutes as “Dominican,” will be discussed in the forthcoming section.

### **Implications: Representations of the Oppressed**

In terms of defining Dominican identity, the content analyzed in the previous section suggests an essential relationship between belonging to a collectivity or community and possessing common physical characteristics amongst its participants. Since different categories of race are introduced, the claim is not necessarily that all Dominicans look exactly alike, but nevertheless that there is a biological or physical dimension for determining who is Dominican. This representation of race, in terms of physical attributes, also includes the explication of racial “mixing,” and its results comprised in the designation of Dominican to a particular race: the mulatto – a clearly racialized social category.

This celebration of racial mixing, nevertheless, can be understood in various ways. On the one hand, racial mixing can be interpreted as an inclusive ideology that celebrates the contributions and acceptance of different social groups. From this view, African heritage is not denied as a feature of Dominican society, but rather openly acknowledged. On the other hand, racial mixing can be understood as part of a more general ideology of “whitening,” linked to racialized notions of progress and modernity. The evidence I gathered from the DISESA textbooks concurs with the second interpretation and is demonstrated, for example, by the portrayal of Spanish culture as superior from that of other groups. Moreover, “blackness” is equated with the “low culture” of Africans and portrayed as separate from the majority of Dominicans. The category of “black” is, thus, assigned to the majority of Haitians and to Dominicans from regions that have received significant migrations from Haitians and other Caribbean groups.

This racial assignation corresponds to historian Nancy Appelbaum’s (2003) concept of “racialized spaces”. Appelbaum states that in many Latin American countries, “spatial boundaries have been constructed by racialized ideas of progress and modernity” (p. 3). This explains the labelling of several areas in the Dominican Republic as “black regions.” By conveying the idea that these regions were formed by migratory groups, the implication promoted here is that the populations of these regions are not fully part of the nation, and are not yet included into wider notions of Dominican identity. A further implication is that “blacks” can only “progress” by mixing with “whites”, and therefore creating a new mixed race of *mulattoes*.

Racial mixing is indeed identified as a phenomenon that contributes to Dominican patriotism. In one of the activities found in the DISESA textbooks, for instance, students are asked to fill in a chart with the legacy of three (white, Indian and black) races to Dominican

society. The same activity subsequently asks students the following questions: “Should one love his or her culture? Why is no one citizen above the flag of his or her country?” (Cabrera, 2003, p. 146). This corresponds to Bailey’s (2001) assertion that notions of culture, race and patriotism are interchangeable in the Dominican context.

In certain cases, the activities suggested by the DISESA textbooks facilitate an environment of discrimination inside a classroom. For instance, Book Three proposes the following activity:

Count and write the number of mulattoes in your class, the number of whites, and the number of blacks. Then, come up with your own conclusions on how we became Dominican. Finally, explain to your fellow students how Dominican society was formed. (Almanzar, 2002, p. 81)

Similarly, Book Six states:

Observe your classroom. How would you classify the majority of your peers? And you? Are you white, mulatto, or black? (Cabrera, 2003, p. 69)

In any school environment, compare and contrast games between children can easily turn cruel. In addition, the racial categories presented in this activity (white, mulatto, black) do not have equal connotation in Dominican society. Dominican children are taught at an early age that white skin equates to intelligence and beauty, while black skin stands for ugliness and stupidity. Book Six later asks, “Do you think people should be discriminated against because of their race?” (Cabrera, 2003, p. 71) But overall, the material is presented in such a way that may be easily interpreted as “whites” being superior to “blacks”.

Moreover, the notion of the racial mixing, or the so-called “union of races,” deemphasizes the role of cruelty, slavery and general subordination which characterized the sexual unions between Spaniards, Africans, and Tainos. For instance, in the chapter entitled “We are Dominican,” the following statement is made about racial intermixing:

These three groups, Spaniards, Africans, and Tainos, started mixing. That is to say, they married each other and had children. (Vargas, 2002, p. 128)

Similarly, Book Six states:

Many Spaniards emigrated to the Americas in search of a better fortune. Other Europeans arrived with the desire to conquer territory in the new world, mixing with the local populations, which in turn gave rise to the current population in the American continent. (Cabrera, 2003, p. 69)

The textbooks propose that these groups, in fact, intermixed happily and by choice. The obvious failure to engage with the economic and social brutalities of slavery and its impact on the population functions to normalize slavery as a natural phenomenon of history in the Dominican Republic. Indeed, the ways Tainos and Africans are represented in Dominican social science textbooks demonstrates how the current curriculum ideologically reproduces and legitimizes the inequalities which are characteristic of Dominican society.

Additionally, it has been suggested that the emphasis given to native Tainos in the Dominican social studies curriculum is also part of the more general “whitening” ideology (Howard, 2001; Sagas, 2000; Wigginton, 2005). Indeed, when the textbooks discuss Tainos, the main references are racialized or phenotypical. The physical description given in Book Three illustrates this point:

The Tainos had black and straight hair. Their skin was cinnamon colored (Almanzar, 2002, p. 72).

Physically speaking, the Taino, or “Indian,” came to represent a middle ground between the “white” and “black” races. In the evidence compiled by Sheridan Wigginton (2005), the connection made between Dominicans and Tainos is even more pronounced. She includes a chapter entitled “We are Dominicans,” that begins with an illustration of a painted Taino, followed by the subsequent discussion:

Select two partners from your class. In your notebook, come up with a list of their physical characteristics. Then comment on how they resemble the Taino in the picture. How do you resemble the Taino? Also, talk about a person you know that looks like the Taino in the picture. (Wigginton, 2005, p. 205)

Thus, the activity influences students to assume a physical or phenotypical association between modern day Dominicans and Tainos, the people of the Caribbean, who are generally and dubiously deemed an extinct race.

Here, again, exists an unproblematic historical representation of the first peoples of the island. Both African and Taino groups are portrayed as primitive and inferior, yet Tainos also tend to be romanticized as “noble savages,” or mythical others that existed in the past and that today can only be found in our imaginations. Part of this insinuation consists in describing Tainos as “beings” who were entrenched to their environment. The implication of these portrayals is that Tainos were completely shaped by their environments, denying them social agency. In fact, the idea that Tainos are today “extinct” is actually misleading. How could Spaniards *completely* wipe out a civilization of millions? True, many, if not most, Indigenous people in the Dominican Republic died due to European diseases and harsh treatment. However, to become *extinct* is an entirely different phenomenon. The word “extinction” in fact serves to dehumanize Tainos by implying that they somehow belong to another species altogether. As such, this discourse casts off Tainos as “primitive” and understood as separate to what constitutes Dominican society today.

Many educators whom I have worked with, in fact, have recognized the problems with these representations and in reaction have sought to teach Taino “culture” to their students. These lessons are performed through “hands-on” activities that include building a model of a “primitive” Taino house or village, and imitating Taino paintings which today are still found in many sites. Interestingly, these educators tend to disregard the explanation that Taino values and

socio-political structures were essential to their community arrangements, or that their worldviews and philosophies were integral components in the symbolism of their paintings. It is important to stress these omissions because the emphasis on “hands-on” activities is done to promote “cultural understanding” by replacing negative portrayals for positive ones (Dion, 2000). Yet these activities seldom encourage critical thinking skills, and more often than not reinforce the view that Tainos were primitive. More importantly, however, the notion that is propagated remains that Tainos existed only in the past and therefore remain isolated from Dominican society. To be fair, it is worth mentioning that some textbooks refer to Taino cultural practices that continue today, particularly farming methods and food preparation techniques (Almanzar, 2002). However, what these books essentially affirm is that Tainos have completely disappeared and all that remains are particular traces of their culture. Hence, educational practices in the Dominican Republic continue to reproduce the myth of the vanishing Indian. The ambiguity of setting Tainos aside as separate “species,” while simultaneously romanticizing Dominicans as “Indian,” as found in the dominant discourse in the Dominican Republic, points to the penchant for confirming Dominican identity in racial, as opposed to historical, terms, but also to the continual denial of the impact of African groups to what constitutes modern day Dominican society.

Similarly, social studies textbooks currently used in public schools limit cultural contributions from Africans to food, music and dance (Vargas, 2002). As with Tainos, the effort is made to portray Africans as primitive and inferior. However, quite different from Tainos, who are romanticized as being “noble” although primitive, Africans are sometimes cast off as something not even to be respected, as demonstrated by the abovementioned examples. Furthermore, Africans are also excluded from the narrative of Dominican nation-building. This

correlates with the emphasis made on “progress,” which is taken to mean that the dominant European culture is superior and deserves to have advantage over inferior ones. This understanding of history and nation-building not only excludes Africans and Tainos as significant contributors to Dominican society, but also serves to forget past injustices. The omission of past injustices sometimes takes the form of portraying Africans and Tainos as helpers, rather than as people who were coerced to work for the Spaniards (Almanzar, 2002). Indeed, many educators prefer this “safe approach” in opposition to raising difficult issues such as slavery, violence and other forms of oppression (Dion, 2000). This “safe approach” to teaching, sometimes characterized by outright historical exclusions and sometimes taking place through “hands-on” activities rationalized under the cloak of “cultural understanding,” is in fact the norm in the Dominican Republic. In my teaching experience, I’ve heard colleagues say that parents simply do not want their children to learn about the history of violence in schools. What these educators fail to acknowledge, however, is that an understanding of history that includes the study of past injustices also has important implications for understanding the present.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Conclusion: Towards Curriculum Reform**

I now turn to discuss the changes that I deem necessary to the social studies curriculum in the Dominican Republic. Admittedly, the most fundamental change needs to be attitudinal, and to replace more than five hundred years of Euro-centrism may prove a daunting task. Therefore, major obstacles for curriculum reform in the Dominican Republic are the attitudes and prejudices towards Tainos, and especially Africans, held by educators, parents and students. Social studies teachers need to foment pride towards the African and Indigenous heritage of Dominicans in order to attempt to reverse existing notions of “white” superiority.

In practice, Dominican history classes should encourage awareness and appreciation for traditionally marginalized groups. An encouraging phenomenon is that in modern times, the learning of history is moving away from the studies of leaders and dominant groups to the study of general society, and in particular the poor. In Carolyn Ficks’s (1990) *The Making of Haiti: The Saint Domingue Revolution from Below*, for instance, the landmark revolution which led to Haiti’s independence from France is discussed with particular emphasis on plantation slaves, soldiers, and subsistence farmers. Figures such as Toussaint L’Ouverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines, which in the past have dominated the historical narrative of Haiti, are rather discussed in terms of the impact their actions had on the masses. This is not to suggest that these important figures, as well as the many powerful leaders such as Christopher Columbus, whose actions have left a lasting influence on the course of history, should be taken out of the narrative altogether. The point is that Dominicans should understand that the masses have also influenced history, in order to understand that they themselves are part of history. In terms of the

Dominican Republic, a conscious effort should be made to bring the African and the Indigenous back to the forefront. As the famous Dominican poet Pedro Mir once stated:

History could not get his name. The black had not time to pose for the lens of history, which is a dialectic form of photography....He is, thus, anonymous. To be anonymous is to be unanimous. Not to have a name is to contain all names.....Anonymity is a kind of sum total, collectively, unanimity. To be no one is, at the same time, to be everyone. Anonymity is plural. (Mir, 1984, p. 14)

I can suggest two approaches for raising awareness and appreciation of historical marginalized groups such as Africans and Indigenous Tainos. The first is to foment a profound understanding for the cultures of these groups as they existed before colonization. In the past, this has involved what Susan Dion (2000) identifies as “cultural dissection” (p. 347). As such, educators prepared activities for students to engage in superficial understanding, including the clothing these groups wore (usually portrayed as “almost nothing”), their shelter (I have mentioned above the construction of village models), and religious beliefs (all misunderstood, and therefore simplified and linked to superstition). In short, if these activities do not promote critical thinking, then the view of Africans and the Indigenous as “primitive” and culturally inferior will remain prevalent and unchallenged. A deeper understanding of past cultures, therefore, involves an exploration of the values and philosophies of these groups, with emphasis on their spiritual worldviews, which for both groups constituted a central component to the practices of their daily lives. These notions and their representation in social studies classes, nevertheless, should not disregard the fact that there was in fact no homogenous “African” or “Taino” group. Africans who were shipped to the Americas came from a variety of backgrounds: from the Igbo of modern day Nigeria to the Mina of modern day Angola. Similarly, the many groups that comprised the first inhabitants of what is modern day Dominican Republic and Haiti were also quite distinct, varying from their economic and political livelihoods to their beliefs and

religious expressions. Bartolomé de Las Casas (1999), for instance, commented on the various languages which were spoken on the island then known as Hispaniola. To represent these groups as simply “Africans” or “Tainos” is therefore misleading.<sup>3</sup> Lastly, cultural understanding also involves recognizing shared oppression – and shared resistance and solidarity – amongst these groups under Spanish domination. One particular example that comes to mind is the above mentioned Cacique Enriquillo, a man of Indigenous descent who was raised by Spaniards, and who eventually mounted the most successful rebellion against the island’s colonizers with the help of runaway African slaves.

A second strategy for fomenting awareness and appreciation of historical marginalized groups is to examine the process of cultural change, resulting from both coercion and adaptability, which was brought through the structure of colonialism and that carried on through the process of nation-building. In other words, this means to examine the effects of the historical interactions between Spaniards, Africans, Tainos and other groups which today make up Dominican society. The underlying assumptions that should be stressed are the inevitability of cultural change and the legacies of past cultures (rather than their disappearance). For instance, the African and Indigenous survival in Dominican society today appear in the language that Dominicans speak – the language structure and intonation of the modern day Dominican version of Spanish suggests preservation from the languages of Africans and Tainos (Torres-Saillant, 1999). Additionally, the abundance of diverse religious expressions found in the country today also indicates a major influence from both Africans and Tainos. Although many practitioners of local faiths such as Voodoo consider themselves Catholic, it is important nevertheless to stress

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<sup>3</sup> Although admittedly, and for the sake of simplification, I sort these groups into the categories of Africans and Tainos. My point, however, is that teachers should acknowledge the fact that these were not homogenous groups, just as Dominicans today are not either.

the role and prevalence of syncretised religious expressions. Furthermore, these cultural representations should be examined under the framework of past injustices and of their unrelenting resilience. For instance, forced religious conversions on behalf of the Spanish crown took place at the eve of the colonial venture, following Queen Isabella's decree of all the inhabitants of the island as her vassals (Mills et. al., 2002). In addition, Dominican politicians and historians of the past have attributed the presence of syncretised religious expressions to the unwelcomed foreign influences, particularly Haitian (Martinez-Vergne, 2005). Under the dictatorship of Rafael Trujillo from 1930 to 1961, the state's promotion of "whiteness" and euro-centrism led to the creation of laws that banned "subversive" religious practices (Torres-Saillant, 1999). That these practices remain prevalent today in effect demonstrates cultural adaptability and resilience in the face of injustices. Furthermore, that Dominican society continues to be characterized by these injustices demonstrates that the effects of colonialism undoubtedly remain today.

Further evidence of the impact of colonialism in the Dominican Republic are the stereotypes and prejudices that characterize popular notions of race and culture. Hence, a curriculum aimed at overcoming prejudices and stereotypes, while exploring issues of social conflict, is of utmost importance. As explained by Canadian educator Susan Dion (2000), the goal of this curriculum is to promote understanding, equality and justice by exposing, examining, and arguing about prevalent stereotypes and racist ideas. For instance, in the Dominican Republic, notions of nationalism are often tied to *antihaitianismo* ideology, or the rejection of Haitians and Haitian descendants in the Dominican Republic based on ideas of racial and cultural superiority. In fact, various authors have identified *antihaitianismo* as an ideological legacy of colonialism (Howard, 2001; Martinez-Vergne, 2005). It serves to ask then, as Dion (2000)

suggests, “What are the assumptions and attitudes that underlie judgements of cultural superiority?” (p. 359). In answering this question, one should explore historical reasons for unequal social status, and link these reasons to contemporary Dominican society.

In addition, dominant historical narratives in the Dominican Republic, including representations of less powerful groups, have been constructed under the lenses of euro-centrism and ideologies of “white” superiority. The constant repetition of the portrayal of Christopher Columbus as the “discoverer” of the Americas – a land that was extensively inhabited upon his arrival – is an example of the continual prevalence of euro-centrism. Indeed, from the onset of colonialism, the first “authors” of the “history” of the “new world” were European nobles, conquerors (including Christopher Columbus), merchants and religious authorities. Popular notions of Dominican history spring from these primary sources – which include diaries, letters, paintings, and other firsthand accounts – and contain the assumptions and attitudes that characterized the European perspective of the time. A close examination of these primary sources is therefore a necessary inclusion to the social studies curriculum. Relevant questions that can be addressed in relation to these accounts include:

- What is the author’s place in society? (profession, status, class, sex, race, religion, age, political beliefs.) How might these factors shape the author’s perspective in this source?
- Why do you think the author created this source? What was its purpose? Is the message explicit, or are there implicit messages as well?
- Who is the intended audience for this source, and how might the intended audience shape the perspective of this source?
- What biases or other cultural factors might have shaped the message of this source?

- Does the source tell us about the beliefs of the elite, or of “ordinary” people? (Carleton College, 2008).

Take the example of the Indigenous Caribs: a pre-Colombian society that occupied various islands and for whom the Caribbean gets its name. Today, most people believe that the Caribs were cannibals – social studies textbooks in the Dominican Republic mention that they would regularly pillage the villages of the Tainos, kidnap people and eat them (Vargas, 2002). On the other hand, there is no archaeological evidence that the Caribs ate their captives: archaeologists have not found broken bones on Carib sites, or traces of symbolic representations of cannibalism in Carib art or burial grounds (Cruxent, J. & Deagan, K., 2002). How, then, did the Caribs become known for eating other human beings? By looking at various primary sources, we may decipher the historical reasons. Initially, we notice that the first person to mention that the Caribs were cannibals was Columbus in his letters to the king of Spain upon his first voyage to America (Cohen, 1969). At the same time, we notice that Columbus mentions the word “gold” more than sixty-five times in these letters, which indicates his fervour for initiating an economic venture in the encountered lands. We also know that the portrayal of the Tainos as “noble savages” begins in Columbus’ writings: Columbus writes to the king that the Tainos are defenceless against attacks from the Caribs and need Spain’s “help.” Thus, Spain’s colonial venture begins with the ideological justification to “protect” the “noble” Tainos, and subsequently to convert them to the Christian faith. The Spanish crown also demanded the enslavement of “cannibals,” which threatened the fragile and noble Tainos. Consequently, other Spanish *conquistadores* mention horrendous acts of cannibalism performed by the Caribs in the same letters in which they ask for land and Indigenous labour. Moreover, it is no surprise that the eventual announcement by the rulers of Spain to enslave the Tainos, and use them for

construction and plantation work, coincides with letters sent by Spanish *conquistadores* describing the “hideousness” of the island’s inhabitants. Thus, the “noble savage” became merely a “savage.”

The analytical framework employed above is thus a necessary step towards reversing notions and stereotypes found both in the dominant discourse and everyday parlance. The previously mentioned *Plan Decenal* tried to address these issues when reforming the national curriculum. I argue, however, that these initiatives did not go far enough because it is textbooks that are most influential to the lesson plans of educators and therefore to the student population. In other words, further curriculum reform must focus on the content of textbooks.

Admittedly, although curricular reform is a necessary step in the right direction, it is certainly not enough to heal the afflictions of Dominican education. A general systemic transformation, such as that proposed by Gerald Murray (2005), is vital in order to improve the quality of Dominican public schools. The purpose of this master’s thesis, however, was to confront the equally important issue of curricular content. My hope is that the racial and cultural ideologies that portray anything associated with “black” or “African” as inferior remains in the past. It is time for Dominicans to engage with their history and identity in more constructive ways.

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