

GOVERNING MOBILITY: DEPORTATION AND THE POSSIBILITY OF LIFE IN PEQUEÑO HAITÍ, SANTO DOMINGO

Gobernando la movilidad: deportación y posibilidades de vida en Pequeño Haití, Santo Domingo

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Keywords

Haiti
Dominican
Republic
Deportability
Census
Life

ABSTRACT: On September 23, 2013, the Constitutional Court of the Dominican Republic ruled on the case of Juliana Dequis Pierre. Known simply as «la sentencia», the 168-13 ruling created a new deportability situation that Haitians and Dominicans started facing in 2015. Combining interviews and ethnographic fieldwork, I analyze the experience of these actors and how they conceived this new situation along with the political vocabulary they mobilized. Drawing from an anthropology of the state, I track how the Dominican government and its technologies and apparatus of counting and control operated a sort of cunning politics by not being clear about what was being conceived and planned in relation to a specific group considered as «in transit people». I argue that after the Constitutional Court ruling 168-13, the Dominican government took advantage of the moment to actually create an ambiguous spectacle of exclusion that selectively produced the «illegality» of subjects and at the same time promoted its own image, both nationally and internationally, as one of the most modern nations in the Caribbean, producing not only citizenship but life itself. How people managed to navigate this new situation through a political epistemology grounded in historical struggles constitutes the main theme of this article.

Palabras clave

Haití
República
Dominicana
Deportabilidad
Censos
Vida

RESUMEN: El 23 de septiembre de 2013, el Tribunal Constitucional de República Dominicana juzgó el caso de Juliana Dequis Pierre. A partir de 2015, la sentencia 168-13 creó una nueva situación de «deportabilidad» que enfrentaron haitianos y dominicanos descendientes de haitianos. A través de entrevistas y de un trabajo de campo etnográfico, discuto las experiencias de esos actores y como ellos conciben la nueva situación y movilizan un vocabulario político específico. A partir de un aporte teórico de las discusiones sobre una antropología del estado, me dedico a pensar como el Estado dominicano y sus tecnologías y aparatos de conteo y control, a partir del censo nacional de 2010, llevó a cabo una política ingeniosa no siendo claro sobre lo que concebía y planeaba con relación a un grupo específico de personas considerados «en tránsito», tras la Sentencia 163-19 del Tribunal Constitucional, conocida bajo el nombre de *la sentencia*. Argumento que, al hacer esto, el gobierno dominicano se aprovechó del momento para crear un espectáculo ambiguo de exclusión que produjo la ilegalidad de algunos sujetos mientras promovía su propia imagen como una de las más modernas naciones del Caribe, produciendo no solo formas de ciudadanía sino la vida de sus sujetos. Como las personas navegaran en esta nueva situación, y qué categorías históricas, políticas y epistemológicas movilizaron, es el tema central de este artículo.

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Cómo citar / How to cite: Charafeddine Bulamah, Rodrigo (2020). Governing mobility: deportation and the possibility of life in Pequeño Haití, Santo Domingo. *Papeles del CEIC*, vol. 2020/1, papel 229, 1-19. (http://dx.doi.org/10.1387/pceic.20764).

Recibido: abril, 2019; aceptado: octubre, 2019.

ISSN 1695-6494 / © 2020 UPV/EHU



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Eske Kristòf Kolon te gen alyenkat?

Michel-Rolph Trouillot¹

1. INTRODUCTION²

The first time I arrived at Calle Benito region, also known as Pequeño Haití, in Santo Domingo, it called my attention the fact that the area, as many others in the Dominican Republic, holds some sort of familiarity with other regions I have been to in Haiti. It made me think about what is really at stake in debates about differences between Haiti and the Dominican Republic and how they tend to essentialize and dehistoricize that same difference. In Calle Benito, back in 2015, I encountered Haitians, Dominicans, Dominicans of Haitian descent, and other nationals living their daily life, facing problems, and creatively dealing with adversities, building social bonds as well as ties of family, neighborhood, and friendship. My interest on the new deportability situation and decisions from the Dominican government was what led me to cross the border. When in northern Haiti in early 2015, I started witnessing the daily arrival of people from the Dominican Republic, most of them carrying not only bags and personal objects, but also furniture and wholesale goods. It was not a massive arrival, as many people were forecasting from both sides of Hispaniola and from abroad. Indeed, it ended up not being a large migration, as I came to realize sometime later.

Having arrived during key moments of this humanitarian crisis, between June and August, most of the people I met in Pequeño Haití were discussing what was going to happen next after every new resolution the Dominican government announced and that the media and people themselves cared to spread. A constant feeling of uncertainty mediated the interactions between those people and the Dominican state. Notions of *abuso* (abuse) and not having right to *lajistis* (justice) were common references when describing their actual situation. Concurrently, my interlocutors were also conscious that they were facing not a clear and coherent new political situation, but an ineffective and disconnected one. Recent literature on mobility and migration in the Caribbean and abroad have shed light on how mobility is historically grounded and how practical engagements with situations constitute not only politics but also subjectivities (Richman, 2005; Khan, 2007; Bartlett, Jayaram & Bonhomme, 2011; Jayaram, 2014; Joseph, 2015; Montinard, 2019). De Genova (2002, 2013), for instance, has emphasized the way the state produces illegality in daily life and how exclusion ends up engaging specific forms of inclusion based on marginality in what he rightly calls «the obscene of inclusion» (2013: 1181 *et passim*). Aisha Khan (2007), on her side, working with Indo-Trinida-

¹ Refrain of Michel-Rolph Trouillot's song *Alyenkat*. Lyrics available at <http://pawolmizik.com/lyrics/paroles-alyenkat-manno-charlemagne/>. Last access: 05/01/2016.

² Besides the three anonymous peer-reviewers and the editor Gabriel Gatti, who gave generous and thoughtful advice to improve this text, I would like to thank Gabriela Read, Henry «Chip» Carrey, Eve Hayes, Miller Wright, Vincent Joos, Kiran Jayaram, Jean-Philippe Belleau, Federico Neiburg, Nadège Mézié, Mélanie Montinard, Victor Macedo, and Omar Ribeiro Thomaz for their careful reading and suggestions. I am grateful to Miller Wright for proofreading the manuscript and to Mélanie Montinard for her suggestions in Haitian Creole spelling. Most importantly, I would like to express my gratitude to all those I have met in Pequeño Haití. Nevertheless, as it ought to be, any mistake is entirely my fault. This research was financed by the São Paulo Research Foundation (FAPESP), grant n. 2013/24916-4.

dians belonging to different religious traditions reveals the way mobility is framed into religious and spiritual settings that gives both meaning and historicity to diasporic situations. In a recent work (Bulamah, 2015), I have argued that people's mobile experiences are historically grounded in narratives and interactions with other beings, humans and more-than-humans, such as ancestors and spirits, producing a geophysical landscape that combines different times and spaces in daily situations of displacement. In this article I develop this argument further by combining an anthropology of the state and its effects and the way popular forms of politics are lived through. I wish to show how State and popular politics are at the basis of contemporary forms of mobility and compose mobile existences that are hard to grasp if we stay attached to the assumed isomorphism of culture, people, and place (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992; De Genova, 2016; see also Premawardhana, 2018).

I will explore two dimensions of the new deportability situation that Haitians and Dominicans started facing in 2015. First, I analyze the experience of these actors and how they conceived this new situation along with the political vocabulary they mobilized. Second, I track how the Dominican government and its technologies and apparatus of counting and control, after the national census in 2010, operated a sort of cunning politics by not being clear about what was being conceived and planned in relation to a specific group considered as «in transit people». After the Constitutional Court ruling 168-13, known simply as *la sentencia* (the verdict), the Dominican government took advantage of the moment to actually create an ambiguous spectacle of exclusion that selectively produced the «illegality» of subjects and at the same time promoted its own image, both nationally and internationally, as one of the most modern nations in the Caribbean, producing not only citizenship but life itself.

2. LIFE IN PEQUEÑO HAITÍ

Pequeño Haití holds a strong position in the urban imaginary of Santo Domingo. It is the place where many Haitians and Dominicans live and organize their shops and open-market stands. Characterized by some locals as a «bridge» (*yon pon*), Pequeño Haití is the main destination for many Haitians who arrive in Santo Domingo to «make a living» or *chache lavi*, a polysemic notion that can also be translated as «looking for life». This area is also the place to go if one is looking for outdated second-hand electronics, used clothes, ritual objects and religious artifacts, cosmetics, hairdressers, fresh food, spices, and flowers. It is located a few blocks away from Zona Colonial, including parts of the Barrio Chino (the Dominican Chinatown) and stretching its way beyond the Mercado Modelo (the biggest tourist market in Santo Domingo). Pequeño Haití is therefore right at the center of a diverse and busy economic and linguistic landscape where multiple forms of spatial practices and projects including housing, commerce, exchange, and cultural activities take place—all this gathered in a complex intersectional interplay between class, gender, ethnicity, and nationality—³.

³ See Hintzen (2014a) and Coulange-Méroné (2018) for a historical analysis of Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic. Since early 2000s, there is a remarkable presence of Haitians in educational institutions in the neighboring country. See for instance, Jayaram (2014) for an ethnography conducted in Pequeño Haití focusing on class, race and education.

This whole central region attracts a significant amount of attention and public and private investments mainly through renovation projects that end up reproducing a gentrifying pattern and a colonial nostalgia, as exemplified by the recent dollarization of Calle El Conde, the never ending works in the main streets of Zona Colonial, or the controversial renovation proposed to the ruins of the San Francisco Monastery. Nevertheless, not only upper class capital and elitist projects are notable in that region. The whole area is full of popular houses, *tien-das*, ethnic restaurants and markets, second hand stores, and street shops, being densely integrated into networks of local and transnational exchange and mobility.

My first visit to Pequeño Haití took place in June 2015. I had just started my long-term fieldwork in northern Haiti working on conflicts over land, historical narratives, and heritage around the National Historical Park which hosts the Citadel, the Sans Souci Palace, and other constructions from the time of King Henry Christophe (1806-1820) (Bulamah, 2018). Watching groups of people arriving daily from the Dominican Republic to different rural communities in the North after the end of the National Regularization Plan for Foreigners —*Plan de Regularización Nacional de Extranjeros*, established by the law 169-14 on June 17— I decided to cross the border to gather a more precise understanding of what was happening on the other side of Hispaniola. This was a «critical event», in terms proposed by Veena Das (1997), in which the nation-state is invested with an agency to define its citizens and its non-citizens allowing new modes of action in different scales and to different actors and institutions. With the Plan reaching its conclusion, the next phase, scheduled to start on August 1st, was suddenly announced as the deportation of «illegal immigrants». Indeed, many migrants and citizens feared being kidnapped and sent to Haiti without the opportunity to see relatives, friends, and gather their belongings. The announcement of this measure was enough to make thousands of people leave the Dominican Republic after June 17—an event that forced them to redefine their routes and expectations of mobility—.

At Pequeño Haití, I met people who were worried about this new situation, discussing it publicly while doing their daily duties in a scene that is common in many parts of Haiti (Mèzié, in press). Several had registered themselves according to the Regularization Plan, while others were suspicious about the whole process fearing surveillance and did not go to the state office at the time required. Marco⁴ was one of those who had gone through all the phases of regularization and was, by the time we met each other, waiting for the legal decision about his condition. The first thing he did after our first conversation was to show me a reduced and laminated copy of the receipt they gave him after handing his documents to the state officer. He carried that little copy with a lot of care and used it to prove that he was not *ilegal*. This document can be seen as a constitutive part of his mobile strategies and the original one he left at home, afraid of losing it or, as he stated, of some policemen that could eventually tear it down. This was a common practice as I would later discover. During our conversations in the streets of Pequeño Haití, Marco and other people told me about the considerable amount of papers that they had to take to the Immigration Office, such as birth certificates, declarations of good manners, testimonials, and letters from employers, as well as declarations from the *junta de vecinos* (neighborhood associations). Some of these documents were perceived as highly contradictory. For instance, the employer's letter, because in some cases it was necessary to already have a resident card to be employed. An important point of the whole process are exactly these multiple and contradictory demands coming from the state.

⁴ All informants' personal names employed here are pseudonyms.

Besides those small contradictions, lies the well-known practice of using undocumented people in local and national disputes for power during electoral times. Along with gathering people from sugarcane plantation companies, known as *bateys*, and popular neighborhoods to forge images of spectacular popularity for political candidates, parties, and state officials, was the common practice of giving away electoral cards (*cédula* or *sedola*, in Haitian Creole). As part of a «time of the politics», as defined by Heredia and Palmeira (1993), in which a new temporality is established fracturing daily life interactions, this situation allowed Haitian nationals to participate in elections, establishing new alliances and exchange ties with politicians, political parties and local elites. During Joaquín Ballaguer's terms (1960-1962; 1966-1978 and 1986-1996) this was quite common and became a wide-spread political tactic after his third presidency⁵. Furthermore, with the *sedola*, undocumented people were allowed, not only to vote, but also to access certain public services and therefore experience certain forms of recognition and citizenship. As Marco explained once, with reference to the new situation:

If it's electoral times and we speak Spanish as we all do here, you can find a political party that will easily give you an electoral card. But this *sedola*, they give us only to vote. This card doesn't inscribe us in the Dominican register that guarantees that you're born in such hospital [in Haiti or elsewhere]. If they gave me a card for me to vote, what do I do afterward? I've had children under this *sedola*. Now from the moment I've had children under this card, they start to bear my name. [...] Consider for instance these Haitians when they are recently born and suppose their father dies, they'll need his birth certificate. They won't find it. Nevertheless, it was a *sedola* that they gave me. Politicians know what they do. When they've reached a situation like the present one, they said they would come to take away the *sedola* from the hands of people. Explain to me why when you enter somewhere with the *sedola*, they process your name in the computer and your name was supposed to grant access to all your information but this doesn't happen. Why when they process all the data, they find all the stuff they need but even so they say you're not registered? Why do they say you're not registered?

To vote is perceived here as a form of taking part in a wider arrangement of civil rights and duties as well as new forms of clientelistic alliances (Heredia, 2010). The *sedola* can be seen then as a technology of citizenship and works symbolically as such (Bartlett, Jayaram & Bonhomme, 2011). The question remains why the fact of being registered and voting was not considered a form of experiencing a political right and, therefore, granting people access to other civil rights. This giving and taking back was (and still is) actually a persistent feature in the Dominican state's actions towards undocumented people. According to Marco and other interlocutors I encountered during my stay in Pequeño Haití, the main problem after the *sentencia* and the constitutional changes on the parameters of nationality was the fact that government was never clear and precise about what people had to do. One might suspect that it was an intentional political disposition of the state to actually retain information and avoid being totally transparent about its political decisions and demands, subscribing a certain social environment of uncertainty and paranoia that is so important in the production of illegality and consequent submission to poor conditions of labor (De Genova, 2010). Indeed, we can argue that the Dominican state worked as a «cunning state», defined by Shalini Randeria (2003) as a mediating institution that far from being weak or weakening «capitalize on their perceived weakness in order to render themselves unaccountable both to their citizens and

⁵ Gabriela Read, journalist, personal communication, 05/2016.

to international institutions» (ibídem: 28). My investigation suggests, nevertheless, that even for the state apparatus itself and its many branches it was never quite clear where all this would end. As Omar Ribeiro Thomaz observes in the Mozambican context, the state here «while trying to be strong behaves as a weak institution and therefore interacts with local determinants of power and domination expression, particularly with cosmological elements» (2008: 181). Inefficiency and confusion were actually constitutive parts of the whole process, as we can see from contradictory information that was spread, constant changes of deadlines, surreal demands of paperwork and documents. This cunning disposition promoted a feeling of insecurity among undocumented people and those who were subject to the Constitutional Court's decisions. This process was dragged on for months.

These situations were constantly described to me in dialogues with Haitians and Dominicans as a form of *abuso*, understood here as precariousness and structural violence. Interestingly enough, they employed the term «abuse» in Spanish even if the dialogue was happening in Haitian Creole⁶. This precariousness gave rise to other forms of *abuso* such as extortions from lawyers and government officials that would overcharge undocumented people to complete their dossiers and mediate their legal demands. Apart from that, episodic violence based on racism and on what has been known as *anti-haitianismo* became more common with aggressions against Haitians happening in many parts of the country, most of them far from the spotlights of the media⁷. This whole situation gave rise to rumors about policemen entering houses of Haitians during the night to kidnap people and steal from them and stories about the recurrent appearance of the spectral figure of *la camionera*, a truck that could be summoned by anyone, from neighbors to employers, to take a person to the border.

Haitian transnational mobility has been described by many authors as a form of «making a living» (*chache lavi*): finding one's ways to providing money and goods for the family household (Richman, 2005; Jayaram, 2014; Joseph, 2015; Montinard, 2019). *Chache lavi* is both an individual and a family dynamic that is part of Haiti's social landscape not only outside its borders but also inside. «Life» (*lavi*) in Haitian Creole has the semantic ambivalence that defines both livelihoods and existence as a whole (Richman, 1984: 53), hence, the possibility of translating *chache lavi* both as «making a living» and «looking for life» (Neiburg, 2019). Migrating means, therefore, an expansion of social networks in order to grant provisions and also a social dynamic attached to an existential mobility that is itself part of Haitian history.

Situations of *abuso* and allegories such as *la camionera* became common in the Dominican Republic and granted the dynamic of «looking for life» (*chache lavi*) a condition commonly defined as *nan kouri* (on the run), expressing an intense feeling of uncertainty, vulnerability, and anxiety. Indeed, the fear of going missing, losing one's stuff, and being deported had impacts on people's physical and mental health. As Marie, Marco's wife, stated to me in Pequeño Haití: «Many haitians have lost a lot here». As she continued: «If someone lives here, life be-

⁶ The same thing happened with other terms, such as *racista*, *esclavos*, etc. Another remarkable process was the creolization of Spanish terms, for instance *merkad* (for market), *kolmad* (for food market or bar) and so on. This was justified to me by a friend as «Every place has its own Creole; Cap Haitian has one Creole, Port-au-Prince has one Creole, Santo Domingo has one Creole».

⁷ For an approach to *anti-haitianism* and the history of Haitian and Dominican relations, see: Derby (2012), Turits (2002), Martínez (2003), Hintzen (2014a), Moya Pons (2013), Eller (2016), among others.

comes stressful. [...] I've had all sorts of diseases due to stress. One gets diabetes, one gets hypertension. One gets cancer, everything». As another person living in Pequeño Haití told me during that same conversation: «Haitians aren't worth anything here (*pa gen vale*). They treat us as dogs (*tankou chen*). In the Dominican Republic it's like this: dogs have more rights than Haitians and Haitians are *esclavos*».

As we can see, there is an important political epistemology underlining these arguments that I would like to argue is built through concepts such as value (*valè*), abuse (*abuso*), and metaphors about dogs, economic and moral dispossession, and forced labor during colonial and contemporary times (*esclavos*) (Beckett, 2017; Johnson, 2012). This was actually a feature that I followed more carefully on the other side of the border among peasants and lower class Haitians. Slavery was a recurrent metaphor used to describe illegitimate forms of labor in Haiti and abroad. To work without being paid or under difficult conditions brought questions and reasoning about its proximity to forms of labor under the French colonial regime and plantation life (Marcelin, 2012). Nevertheless, I suggest that this political framework not only reveals a mechanism of comprehension that operates historically and in reference to past experiences, but also sustains a form of expectation and actual ground of action for contemporary and future mobilizations for resistance or social change. In northern Haiti, this was pretty clear when the theme of the Haitian Revolution was brought up in recollections about episodes of land occupation after the fall of Jean-Claude Duvalier and during the presidential campaign in 2015/2016 when popular mobilizations would bring into the public scene ancestors such as Henry Christophe and Jean-Jacques Dessalines (Bulamah, 2018).

As for the people I have encountered in Pequeño Haití, them not having *valè*, and being treated as dogs or slaves was perceived as a general situation of undocumented or marginalized people «not having the right to justice» (*nou pa gen dwa lajistis*). «Justice» (*lajistis*) here is conceived as the abstract sphere of the rule of law and legal jurisdiction, in opposition to «justice» (*jistis*) as the popular and ordinary forms of regulation of life and conflicts, such as in the expression «We're doing justice ourselves» (*Nap fè jistis nou menm*). Finally, to illustrate a bit more what I am trying to define here as a practical and conceptual political epistemology and the way people make a living or look for life (*chache lavi*), it might be interesting to look at two notions that appeared constantly during my fieldwork: the notion of *lite* (to fight) and of *degaje* (to get by).

In ordinary situations and encounters in Haiti, one of the possible answers to the question «how are you?» (*kijan ou ye?*) is the phrase «nap lite» (*We're fighting*), usually preceded by a «bon» (*well*) pronounced with a tone of resignation: *Bon, nap lite*. Fight here means that everyday life is something to struggle for, neither easily earned nor endured. In situations like the one lived by Haitians in the Dominican Republic, fight acquires a new meaning that overcomes resignation becoming an imperative of action: «Nou gen pou lite» (*We have to fight/resist*). *Degaje* (to get by), on its own, is a common description of how life is creatively lived through forms of improvisation in a constant struggle to earn money and get by. In the contexts of uncertainty, «nap degaje nou» (*we're getting by*) unfolds as a certain disposition to overcome political structures and rules in favor of more creative forms of life, even in the contexts of extreme vulnerability and control. These situations and notions give a more precise image of how certain political categories acquire new meanings when looking for life in Santo Domingo and bring up forms of historically-grounded struggle.

3. A SPECTACULAR CENSUS

There might be some analytical gains if we look at the other side of this social situation carefully considering how the Dominican state acted politically to produce illegality and the consequent deportability of people living on its borders. By doing that we can overcome unfruitful discussions about weak or strong states, taking into account local and global features that define how power and domination are created and reproduced in different scales. For that we have to take into account a previous process that produced an image of the country's population based in numbers and multiple categories through a great effort within the bureaucracy and state apparatus—an effort that had many state effects (Trouillot, 2001; see also Vieira, 2017)—. In 2010, parallel to the constitutional changes on the parameters to grant nationality, the *IX Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda* (9th National Census of Population and Housing) took place all over the Dominican Republic and was followed by a great amount of propaganda support organized mainly by the *Oficina Nacional de Estadística* (National Statistics Bureau). Videos, news, and radio bulletins were spread in order to elucidate the process and stimulate the population to contribute information about their lives, houses, and wealth. However, this did not happen without a notable amount of rejection and resistance in forms ranging from pickets organized by *empadronadores* (census takers) demanding their payment to peasants avoiding the census takers or giving distorted information. The vocabulary and symbols of the state's populist propaganda in those videos and pronouncements is what I would like to analyze now.

With a strong, intentionally-stressed countryside accent (*cibaeño*, to be more precise), the video «Campaña de mantenimiento IX Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2010-Campesinos» displays two men sitting under a tree, holding their labor instruments, surrounded by goats and what appears to be a donkey⁸. The video was released in November 2010, and uploaded to YouTube later that same month. The younger man is explaining to the oldest why «they will come and count people» (*venir y contar la gente*). He states: «Listen, if I tell you that we're preparing a *sancocho*, the first thing that you'll ask me is for how many people. For you have to know how much meat to put in. It's the same thing. If we don't know how many we are, it's impossible to do anything». The elder replies with a question that employs the double sense of the verb «to count» in Spanish (*contar*, meaning both including by counting and taking into account): «So they will *count* me alive?». The answer follows: «That's it! Even foreigners will be counted. And the one who's not counted is *as if he were not alive*». The last sentence reveals how the eldest was persuaded and becomes convinced that he has a sort of obligation to show that he is alive; moreover he is joyful for that: «They have to count me, as I'm alive and wagging the tail!»

The video is densely comic but also very touching. The display of a senior peasant to be included in his way into the nation's numbers is highly moving. On top of that there is a reference to one of the most important national dishes, the meat soup called *sancocho*, as a metaphor of this big assemblage promoted by the state. Nevertheless, and maybe most significantly, the census is not only counting people, but actually producing life. Claiming the importance of registration focused mainly on peasants, the video mobilized the fear of death

⁸ Oficina Nacional de Estadística (ONE). *Campaña de mantenimiento IX Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2010-Campesinos*, YouTube video, posted by ONEvideos1, 30/11/2010, available at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JqBXTuSs8w4>. Last access: 10/04/2019.

establishing the state as the only place where life was possible and even thinkable. To be outside the census—and therefore outside of the biopolitics of the modern state (Foucault, 2003)—is a form of death, revealing how this whole process culminated in what Samuel Martínez and Bridget Wooding (2017) named a «biopolitical turn» in the long tradition of anti-haitianism in the country. As Georges Bataille (1991: 221-222) famously argues, this interplay between vitality and death are constitutive of the dialectics of sovereignty. If death is but one feature of the sovereign gesture, this «spectacular display of life force» as Chelsey Kivland (2014: 675) puts it, is what negates death and shows life in its excess. The positive dimension of power is here taken as an aspect of a sovereignty that unveils itself less in a stable and definitive collection of actions than a constant and multiple process of becoming.

Death is an important subject in both the Dominican and Haitian peasant and popular cultures, always submitted to intense debates and reasoning. Death is not feared in and of itself, as constant morbid jokes and popular sayings show. However, illegitimate death through poisoning, witchcraft, or other evil forces is frightening. A lot has been said about magic and religion in Hispaniola, particularly in Haiti (Métraux, 1995 [1958]). My interest here is not to develop a theory of magic suffice to say that I agree with a perspective that puts aside an holistic understanding of magic in favor of a more ethnographic take that comprehends these visible and invisible phenomena in connection to kinship, labor, land, material, and spiritual agency being therefore a dynamic process subject to changes according to its many powers and agencies in connection with each other (Lowenthal, 1978; Richman, 2005; James, 2012; Derby, 2015; Dalmaso, 2018; Fiod, 2019). During my fieldwork in northern Haiti, and as I would also notice during stays in the Dominican countryside, illegitimate death by magic brings about suspicion of occult methods that potentially inflict death. Being killed by magic overcomes «God's choice» (*volonte Bondye*) as it belongs to an immanent dimension of human affairs. In fact, a great amount of money can be spent in funerals in order to guarantee that the person follows up a journey that many informants named as a journey «back to Africa-Guinea» (*Lafrik-Ginen*) or, in case of those converted to one of the many protestant churches in the region, «paradise» (*paradi*). As anthropologist Rémy Bastien argues in his classic ethnography in southern Haiti «a great concern of [the Haitian] peasant is the fear that his or her relatives would not dutifully fulfill their necessary obligations to rest in peace» (1951: 103).

This fear is justified by the possibility of not only being killed by magic but also by being turned into a zombie (*zonbi*)—which is actually an inescapable condition once someone is killed by magic—. In fact, zombies are hard to define in terms that are familiar to us as they have little in common with what United States cultural industries have spread around the world (Glover, 2005; McAlister, 2012; Ramsey, 2011). In fact, they are far from the active beings that wander around looking for flesh and blood. Indeed, zombies are beings with a lack of conscience, created to fulfill the desire of someone motivated by evilness (*mechanste*) or, more specifically, envy (*jalouzi*). Therefore zombies are victims of evil desires to generate wealth through socially illegitimate means as they can be sold or put to work in plantations or factories. «It's definitely a slave» (*se esklav menm*), as a young friend from Milot once told me. The different being that slaves were not buried and brought back to life (*esklav yo pa pase anba tè a*). Common to the narratives I heard about zombies is that if someone is zombified in the North, they will be sold or put to work in the South and vice-versa. Zombies actually reveal a connection with missing people (Edkins, 2011), someone that was taken away from the family circle by magic and could not go back to the ancestral land (*Lafrik-Guinea*) or find its way to paradise.

If we look to the Dominican census effort, it is clear that by employing meanings and vernacular dimensions of life and death, shared between Haitians and Dominicans, the Dominican state's qualitative and quantitative technologies as well as its propaganda were able to speak closely to rural workers and poor people and even overcome rejections, suspicions, and resistances through the fear of death and a promise of a common welfare —the ultimate goal of someone «looking for life» (*chache lavi*)—. In addition, the video also included the detail that: «Even the foreigners will be counted». The IX Census was probably the first one to ever count foreigners for explicit political purposes and even a video was made directed to them⁹.

4. SECRECY AND THE (IN)EFFECTIVENESS OF BUREAUCRACY

Once a general image of the country-wide statistics was established, it was easier to conceive of and produce illegality and deportability. I will not enter here the debate about which group was specifically affected by the constitutional change in 2010 concerning the right to nationality and the *sentencia* of 2013 (Baluarte, 2017). The important fact to keep in mind for the sake of my argument is that the Dominican Constitutional Court's decisions and the new condition that some citizens faced had impacts on a larger number of people living in the Dominican Republic, documented or not.

Rather than just looking at the rational and effective side of bureaucracy, my intention here is focus on the inefficiency, uncertainty, and confusion that bureaucracy can produce along with forms of precariousness and episodic and structural violence. Through the work of what Erica James (2012) called «bureaucraft», this confusion led to an excessive production of documents, letters, and statements in innumerable copies that were carried by people on their daily activities no matter where they were, as the case of Marco illustrates. However, it is important to note that this is also evident for the state itself. After the end of the *Plan de Regularización*, the former president Leonel Fernández published in his own website a declaration that clearly reveals what sustained the Dominican state's actions. Fernández elucidates how Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent are framed and how citizenship was actually «wrongfully granted» to them. Written in English, probably as an effort to publicly justify the government's actions not only for national public opinion, but also for international observers, his own words stated that:

Historically, in our different Constitutions and laws, there has been a consistency in determining that Dominican nationality could be obtained either by descent (*jus sanguinis*) or by birth (*jus soli*). However, the *jus soli* system is not unconditional, just as in other 164 countries in the world. In our case, it does not apply to children of diplomats or those in transit.

The Dominican Supreme Court defined transit in its 2005 decision, indicating that it refers to *non-immigrant foreigners*, as is the case of *temporary workers*.

⁹ Oficina Nacional de Estadística. *Campaña de mantenimiento IX Censo Nacional de Población y Vivienda 2010-Extranjeros*, YouTube video, posted by ONEvideos1, 01/12/2010, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GsiNuGldiw>. Last access: 10/04/2019.

After the 2013 ruling by the Constitutional Court, which reversed the faulty judgment of registry officials, Congress, nevertheless, enacted law no. 169-14, in favor of all descendants of illegal Haitian migrants, to whom Dominican nationality had been wrongfully granted by *record-keeping authorities*.¹⁰ (Emphasis added).

What was perceived as a problem —the citizenship of «all descendants of illegal Haitian migrants»— was actually the fault of «record-keeping authorities» and their wrongful understanding of the Dominican legal system. This argument stands as one of the multiple explanations of the absurdity of a law that retroactively removed the citizenship rights of innumerable people. The problem of this decision is not only that it actually took rights away from a group of people, but by doing so it also opened up the possibility to revisions of former decisions, creating jurisprudence to undermine any rights not only of Haitians but of nearly every citizen, as long as some «record-keeping authority» was to blame (Hintzen, 2014a). By doing that, the state avoided being held accountable for its actions, framing its cunning dimensions once again (Randeria, 2003). Besides, by ignoring history and dynamics of migration and labor between Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and the shared histories between these two countries, the former president applied the same status of diplomats to Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent, considering them «non-immigrant foreigners» and «temporary workers.»

As Amelia Hintzen convincingly argues, «[f]or much of the twentieth century, immigration policy did not serve to regulate and legalize the migrant population, but instead was a way to isolate and exploit Haitian workers» (2014b: 110). Also common in many migration contexts, from North to South, this happened in the Dominican Republic through many forms such as making it difficult for Haitians to acquire lands in the country or withholding their immigration documents. All this happened through systematic extra-legal strategies and policies that were oriented towards territorializing Haitians to a specific *batey* and producing labor immobility that could be used to serve Dominican capital. In the case of *la sentencia*, the novelty here is that we were not facing a process of forced immobility, which was the case of the colonial sugar-cane plantation or the *bateys* (Mintz and Wolf, 1957), but of forced mobility.

In an interesting piece that was published in the wake of the deportation process, historian Anne Eller called in her blog¹¹ our attention to the fact that disputes over historical narratives to justify the contemporary decisions of the Dominican state are not only taken by professional historians, reverberating an argument that Michel-Rolph Trouillot developed in his book *Silencing the Past* (1995). In public debates, politicians can act as agents of historical production and consciousness formation creating and reproducing biased understandings of events, rewriting history in a «dialectics of mentions and silences», to use Trouillot's formulation (*ibídem*). During the discussions about *la sentencia*, there were many distorted episodes such as references to the Haitian Occupation (1822-1844) placing it as the cosmogonic

¹⁰ Fernandéz, Leonel. «The Dominican Republic/Haiti Immigration Process.» *Personal website*, 07/01/2015: <http://leonelfernandez.com/articulos/the-dominican-republichaiti-immigration-process/>. Last access: 10/04/2019. One can also argue that he published this announcement in English also aiming toward gaining support from members of the Dominican diaspora as many Dominican and Haitian writers and activists were vigorously publishing and expressing their opinions against *la sentencia* and the deportation process in many international media vehicles. See, for instance, Mariñez (2016).

¹¹ Eller, Anne. «How history has been distorted to justify the Dominican deportation.» *Africa is a country* (web blog), 17/06/2015, <http://africasacountry.com/2015/06/how-history-has-been-re-written-to-justify-the-dominican-deportations/>. Last Access: 05/01/2016.

episode of both countries' animosities¹². In the case of Fernández's writings, we can take this analysis further and name him not only a politician-historian but also a political theoretician, finding his place in the political scene even after the end of his terms and after PLD's (Partido de la Liberación Dominicana) refusal to support his candidacy in favor of Danilo Medina's reelection.

If we go back to Marco's story, he was waiting, by the time we met, to receive an answer from the immigration office regarding his situation. When I returned to Santo Domingo again for several weeks in early August 2015, he had already received a stamp on his passport that granted him the right to stay in the Dominican Republic. The stamp he received however bears the phrase «No Residente» and it was valid for 2 years. Others who did not have a passport received a document known to them as *ti kat* (little card), in this case, valid for only 1 year. The same non-resident condition was written down. As Marco told me, «With this document, we're a little bit at ease. It's a permission they gave us. We're legal in the country, but it's not a visa nor a residency.»



Picture 1

«No Residente» ID Card, Santo Domingo, photo by the author, August 2015

¹² For a careful historical research about the Haitian Occupation of the Eastern side of Hispaniola, see Moya Pons (2013).

Marco as well as others I have talked with in Pequeño Haití recognized that the new document gave them some security to work and stay in the country. But the non-resident condition and the demand to come back again to the state office in one or two years and to go through all the bureaucratic entanglements again is something seen with suspicion, burdensome and discouraging. As Daniel, who also lives in the region, argued:

If they really wanted to give you [a visa], they would have done it now! Do you understand? For example, you've promised to give residency, right? You've asked me for lots of documents. Now, I struggled to get them, I took all the documents to you. After the first time I showed up, you just give me something else. You asked me to wait for 2 years more. After 2 years, I don't even know if you're really giving me [the visa] for good.

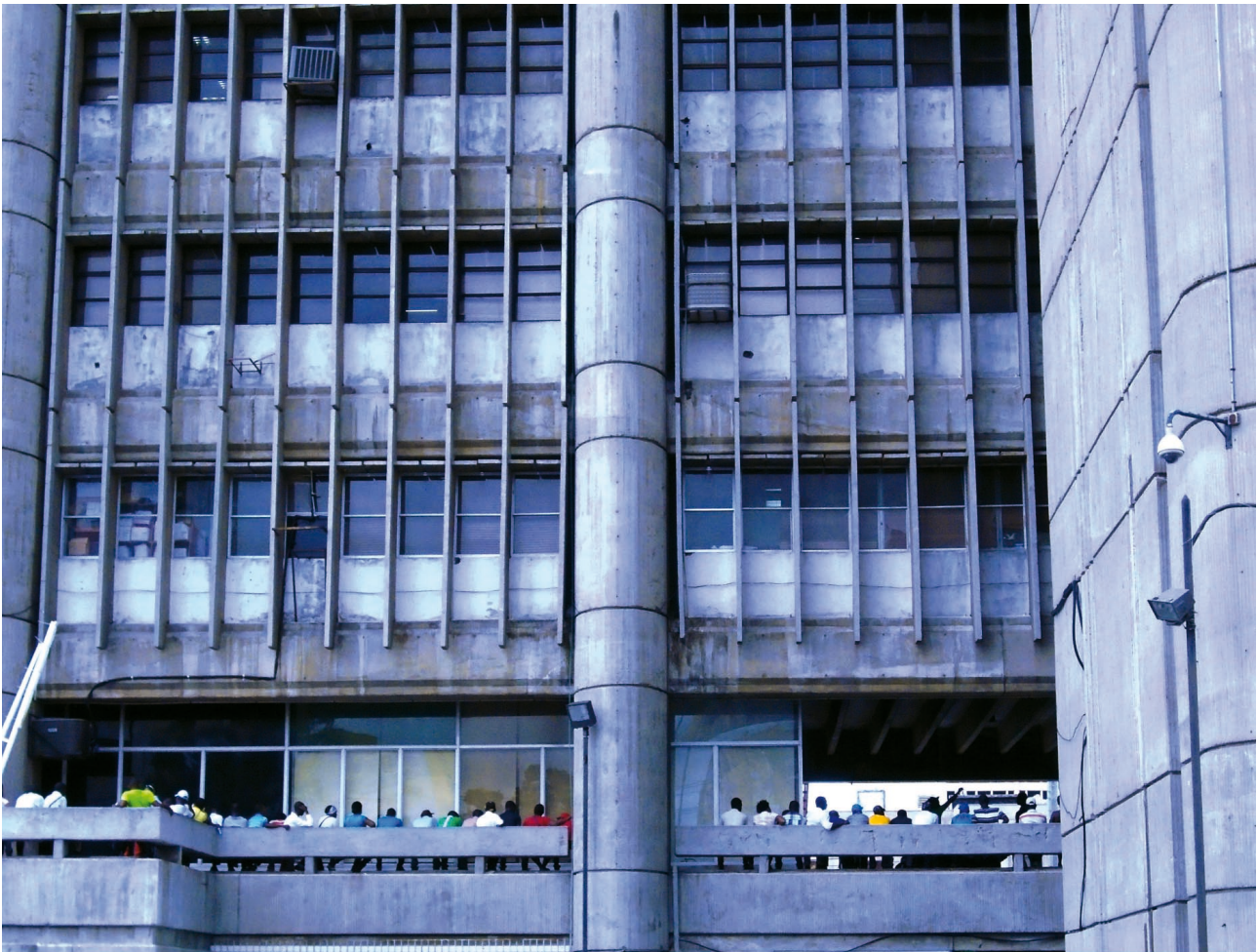
This whole situation was perceived as a result of the lack of organization and confusion on the part of the Dominican state that since the beginning was not clear about which path they would follow. Referring to the situation of undocumented people as a «dossier» and to the state bureaucracy as mobilizing different «systems,» Daniel stated: «These dossiers (*dosye*) have passed from one system (*sistèm*) to the other and then again to another one. These dossiers are really hideous». As Max Weber emphatically stated, secrecy is a constitutive part of bureaucracy: a tendency in certain administrative fields that «follows their material nature» (1946: 233). For Weber, secrecy was a form of protecting information and data from a foreign power, be it an economic competitor or a hostile polity, and he foresaw, «[w]ith the increasing bureaucratization of party organizations, *this secrecy will prevail even more*» (ibidem; emphasis added). In the Dominican Republic, all this bureaucrat was, in fact, engaged inside the nation-state borders in order to hide information from citizens and subjects.

The constant changes of «systems», to use Daniel's argument, and the secrecy and unclarity around the state's intentions with the registration process were subject to rejections and resistances from undocumented people. Only by the end of the process, the state started to elucidate that their intention was to actually grant people their right (or, at least, analyze their possibilities) to stay and work in the country. Before that, many undocumented people avoided registration, as rumors were being spread stating that it was a kind of ambush and going to the state office would facilitate one's deportation¹³. This was the reason why many decided to cross the border to Haiti. A process that was dubbed as *repatriación voluntaria* (voluntary repatriation) —a term derived from the program proposed by the United Nations International Organization for Migration (OIM)¹⁴— or, to use the more cynical definition that

¹³ This was made public by many organizations and political activists. Centro Bonó, for example, an NGO associated with the *Servicio Jesuita a Refugiados y Migrantes* (Jesuit Refugee Service), has been an important actor during the regularization process receiving undocumented people, distributing informative brochures, and publicly denouncing abuses on the part of the state during the whole process, a position that it holds until today. See, for instance, Lozano, Wilfredo. «La política de la incertidumbre», *Centro Bonó website*, 06/30/2015, <http://bono.org.do/la-politica-de-la-incertidumbre/>. Last access: 05/01/2016. Another actor that was central during the struggles for citizenship was the activist Ana María Belique that constantly criticized the lack of clarity of state's demands and after the end of the Regularization Plan denounced its failure through many vehicles, cf. «Ana María Belique afirma fracasó el Plan de Regularización de Extranjeros», YouTube video, posted by Acento, 17/06/2015. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=S41vCI2IXgM>. Last access: 10/04/2016. For an analysis of how rumors shape networks and routes of mobility in a Haitian diasporic context, see Montinard, 2019.

¹⁴ I thank Mélanie Montinard for calling my attention to this genealogy. See «Assisted Voluntary Return and Reintegration», OIM website, available at: «<https://www.iom.int/fr/aide-au-retour-volontaire-et-la-reintegration-avrr>». Last access: 14/09/2019.

was currently employed by media and politicians themselves, *deportación voluntaria* (voluntary deportation).



Picture 2

Line at the Immigration Office, Edificio de Oficinas Gubernamentales («El Huacal»), Santo Domingo, photo by the author, July 2015

The Regularization Plan asked those who lost their citizenship because of the Constitutional Law 169-14 to also present themselves at the Immigration Office. A total of 55.000 Haitians and Dominicans-born persons of Haitian descent have done so. Citizenship was granted back to them, but not fully. Besides, as a Dominican of Haitian descent told me during a visit to the NGO Centro Bonó: «They inscribed us in another book». During this process, they were registered in a new civil record book. We do not know why this happened and what the consequences are, but we know that this opens up the possibility to many interpretations in the present or in the future once the difference was produced and registered. To those registered as non-residents the right to vote was not granted as had been obvious, for example, during the past elections¹⁵. All this reveals the establishment of a citizenship of lower degree, ques-

¹⁵ See Afonso, Fran. «Los nadies.» Personal website, <https://franafonsofotos.wordpress.com/2016/04/15/los-nadies/>. Last access: 10/04/2016.

tioning the universalistic principles of constitutional rights that are so central to the modern Dominican state.

However, the entire process was considered a great achievement by the government, and in similar language that it used publicly during the 2010 census campaign, it released other videos to reaffirm its own success. Two of those videos, one released on YouTube on 4 July 2015, the other on 23 July 2015, had a similar script, featuring Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent describing their new condition and how the state, through the personal figure of president Danilo Medina, granted them recognition and citizenship less as a right and more as a form of gift. The first describes how more than 500 Haitians living for a long time in the country were granted a visa. With this document, as one Haitian argues during the video, they can «open a small bank account» (*abrir una contecita en el banco*), have «civic freedom» (*libertad ciudadana*), and ask for credit. Affirming the actual inefficiency of the state, another man says, «It's been a long time since we haven't seen an effort like this» (*Hace mucho tiempo no se veía un trabajo como esto*). Then, almost at the end, another ethnic Haitian concludes with what was chosen to be the title of the video: «El país me ha puesto gente» (*The country turned me into a person*)¹⁶. The second video specifically talks about the Plan de Regularización Nacional de Extranjeros. It describes people's daily life and indirect answers to questions such as references about undocumented people suffering racism and harassment or if they lived in better conditions in the Dominican Republic. In addition, the video reaffirms the benefits of being categorized and surveyed and having a document or an official stamp. It finishes with a man arguing that «if I have documents, I'm free» (*si tengo papeles, soy libre*)¹⁷. Again, on these videos, a triumphalist language is employed, placing the state as the main and sole institution where life (or the opportunity of «looking for life») is made possible. In these two specific pieces of propaganda, they go further and place the state as an institution that not only can grant someone a visa but also its personhood, turning oneself into *libre* (free) and, more powerfully, *gente* (person).

5. A PLACE IN THE WORLD

Did Christophe Columbus have an alien-card? This question, which I used as an epigraph composes the refrain of Michel-Rolph Trouillot's song *Alyenkat*. Himself a Haitian immigrant in the United States, Trouillot's strong words describe a life of constant fear of detention and deportation during the 1970s¹⁸. As writer and artist Michelle Voltaire Marcelin wrote after Trouillot passed away: «The song questioned the ethics of the USA's immigration policy and the required Alien Registration Card. Popularized by Manno Charlemagne, it became a hymn to the undocumented in Haiti and the diaspora.» (Bonilla, 2014: 164). After claiming for «another 1804», Haiti's year of Independence, the final phrase of the song states that «when the time comes in the cemetery there will be no alien card» (*lè sa nan simityè pap gen alyenkat*), revealing a desire for revenge for those who suffered all the political pressure and violence

¹⁶ «El paí me ha pueto gente», YouTube video, posted by Presidencia República Dominicana, 04/05/2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjofodJLBO0>. Last access: 10/04/2019.

¹⁷ «Si tengo papeles, soy libre,» YouTube video, posted by Presidencia República Dominicana, 23/07/2015, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-uNJVTTu20>, (Access: 10/04/2019).

¹⁸ For a complete English translation, see Jayaram (2003).

during the registration process. However, the phrase reminds us of the universal side of death, as for «in the cemetery there will be no alien card».

In the Dominican Republic, as if history was repeating itself, the tragedy of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent has gained airs of farce with a confused and inefficient process of registration opening the possibility for suspicion and resistance. To navigate around these bureaucratic institutions and practices (James, 2012), people had to mobilize ways to get by (*degaje*) and fight (*lite*), making politics beyond the state. Under this critical event (Das, 1997), notions like *abuso* and *lajistis*, as well as metaphors about slavery and animality became constitutive parts of people's experiences of mobility and labor. To put these categories and experiences at the center of our reflection might bring interesting analytical possibilities. What is at stake in the case analyzed here is not only the possibility of deportation and the production and experiences of illegality, but a dimension of life itself and its mobile potentialities in a world that insists to attach identities to borders and to oversee shared histories such as those between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

From the beginning, Dominican deportation politics were considered a great success by Dominican media and some politicians despite not having reached the promised extensive and massive arbitrary deportation of people at the hands of the state. Rumors, harassment, episodic violence, institutional cruelty, suspicions over the role of the state's registration, disorganized information, and multiple changings of the objectives and «systems» of migration policies became efficient political actions that made thousands of undocumented people choose to hide or make their way to Haiti. Even if an expressive amount of them were born in the Dominican Republic, had previously been granted residency, and had no family connections on the West side of Hispaniola they were all considered «in transit». Contemporary forms of mobility control in contexts such as the Dominican Republic reveal the imminent character of exploitation as a biopolitics regulating both frontiers of the nation and actively producing specific forms of life. The Dominican state aimed towards being included in the hall of modern nations but for that, and acting like a cunning state (Randeria, 2003), it was necessary for the nation-state not only to become a place that attracts a labor force from other nations, but also to be able to discipline and submit those people to a precarious life, governing their mobility, and, if judged necessary, to deport them as a sign of spectacular yet confused and fragmented state sovereignty.

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