

***MUÑECA LIMÉ***

*A two-part analysis of gendered Blackness in the Dominican Republic*

By

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## Introduction

Quisqueya and Ayiti were the first names given to the islands Christopher Columbus arrived at in 1492, those which would eventually make up the “longest European-inhabited territory” in the Western hemisphere. Not yet divided along colonial lines, Quisqueya meant “mother of all lands” and Ayiti “land of mountains”, and the land was sectioned in directions: Maguá in the center, Jaragua in the west, Marién in the northwest, Higüey in the east, and Maguana in the south (“Quisqueya” 2021). When Columbus arrived, he renamed the island to La Isla Espanola, then shortened to Hispaniola. In 1607, when the French won colonial territory, they named their portion Saint-Domingue. Since 1492, then, Quisqueya has been a land of conquerors and the conquered. There have continuously been divisions among race, class, and culture between settlers, the enslaved Africans they brought, the aboriginals they nearly eradicated, and all those who fell in between.

Despite being the “longest European-inhabited territory” in the Western hemisphere, Hispaniola is also home to the first free Black nation in the world. Haiti, liberated in 1804, embraced its Blackness to the detriment of the colonizer, and yet was ignored by history<sup>1</sup>. In 1843-44, when Haiti controlled all of Hispaniola, Dominicans then sought independence by recruiting help from their previous colonizers. Although Blackness was [and is] abundant on both sides of the island, it has been embraced unequally on either side of the island. Throughout history, via US occupation and the rule of Trujillo, Hispaniola has remained divided along colonial lines and rules, with Haiti embracing Blackness, and the Dominican Republic aligning itself with whiteness.

In conceptualizing Blackness on the island, womanhood is foregrounded, though not explicitly. In the Dominican Republic, it is the Dominican woman who is most beautiful when she is *rubia*<sup>2</sup> and her hair preserved in a *tubi*<sup>3</sup>, and the Dominican woman who must *mejorar la raza*<sup>4</sup> and produce the next generation of Dominicans who are as light as possible. Conversely, it is the Haitian woman who is most hated, “...because [she may] reproduce the Haitian nation and even more so when in the Dominican Republic” (Guilamo 1). This reproduction extends past the creation of life to include the sharing of Haitian culture, which ultranationalists view as “cultural contagion”, as well as the dissemination of the idea that Haitians may *not* be subhuman (Guilamo 83).

Born to a *rubia* Dominican artist from Washington Heights and a Black photographer from Baltimore, my Blackness, however, was not conceptualized in the Dominican context. Rather, it was first developed in Baltimore, a city of only Black and white, and within my African-American family. My Dominicaness, however, is centered in New York, in that family which my grandmother started at 17 when she migrated to Washington Heights, where I am the darkest member of the family. Differently than my

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<sup>1</sup> Though Dessalines declared Saint Domingue independent in 1804, renaming it Haiti, the French government did not acknowledge this officially until 1824. The United States, on the other hand, recognized Haiti in 1862. More on making the Haitian revolution a non-event and the ignoring of Haitian independence in Ch. 3, *An Unthinkable History: The Haitian Revolution as a Non-Event in Silencing the Past* by Michel Rolph-Trouillot, 1995.

<sup>2</sup> *rubia*: directly translated to blonde, but used to mean ‘white-looking/passing’

<sup>3</sup> *tubi*: a way of wrapping straightened hair so as to protect it from weather and preserve its style. Best completed with a net to keep hair from falling out of the tubi. [Shown here](#)

<sup>4</sup> *mejorar la raza*: directly translated to ‘improve the race’. A common saying used in Latin America and especially the DR in which ‘improving the race’ means marrying and reproducing with someone with European heritage/someone who is whiter than you, so as to make the race less Black.

peers on the island, or even those in New York<sup>5</sup>, I see this Dominican racial turmoil in a unique manner. Whereas my status as a Black woman is regarded as subhuman in the US; as the status of Haitian women is in the DR, I also receive the privileges of being Dominican in DR; as I do being light-skinned within the African-American community.

Through study of particular moments in Dominican and Haitian history, indigenismo and Blackness on the island of Hispaniola, and taking into account my own African-American Blackness, I seek to define the Dominican Black woman outside of traditional norms, confines, and conceptions. My definition will be contextualized non-traditionally, taking the form of a garment which the Dominican Black Woman would not wear, but rather one which represents what the Dominican Black Woman may be. I choose a garment as a vessel to understand the Dominican Black woman in order to emphasize the importance of tangible items in cultural understanding, and to challenge the assumption that the written word is the only legitimate source of scholarly knowledge.

First I will begin with a list of terms, which will define the Dominican Black Woman, as well as terms relevant to her history. Then I will review a series of books alongside relevant time periods, contextualising Dominicanidad, Blackness, and Womanhood, in particular. Next, I will explain my methodology, detailing my research methods and explaining why I went about creating a garment in addition to writing. I will then note my contributions to the field of International Studies, as well the reasons for examining this topic through International Studies. Finally, I will conclude with the analysis of my research, taking physical form in the garment.

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<sup>5</sup> Here I mention New York because of the high concentration of Dominicans in the city. As of 2016, 60% of Dominican immigrants to the US lived in New York. (Batalova, Zong 2021)

## List of Terms

*Dominican Black Woman (DBW)*: My embodiment of the Dominican Black Woman, a representation of Blackness, Womanhood, Dominicanidad, and the Dominican nation as a whole. In researching and analyzing the DBW I do not seek to create a monolith of Dominican Black women (ie. all Dominican Black Women ≠ the Dominican Black Woman), but rather a possibility of what she could be, and how she could be viewed.

*Dominicanidad*: Dominicaness; the essence of being Dominican, as it relates to culture, worldview, ways of being, etc.

*Antillean; Pan-Antillean [as related to the Antilles]*: People hailing from the archipelago, or island group, colloquially referred to as ‘The Carribean’, that which is bordered by the Gulf of Mexico and the Carribean Sea and includes: the Cayman Islands, Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Haiti, Jamaica, and Puerto Rico in the Greater Antilles, and the northerly Leeward Islands, Windward Islands, and the Leeward Antilles in the Lesser Antilles (“Antilles” 2021).

*Mestizaje*: Mixedness; The nature of being racially mixed. Used as a racial identifier throughout Latin America, usually in an effort to erase Blackness and instead align with Indigenous and White roots or ethnic ambiguity.

*Multaje*: Mulatto-ness; The nature of being racially mixed with Black and White.

*Indigenismo*: Indigeneity. Also used frequently throughout Latin America by ethnically ambiguous people, who usually *do not* have direct ties to indigenous peoples, as a racial identifier to avoid aligning with Blackness.

*Jezebel*: One of the caricatures of African-American people created in the US and popularized in minstrel shows, those which include Mammy, Sambo, Uncle Tom, and the Black Buck, among others. The Jezebel was a hypersexualized Black woman with uncontrollable sexual urges, and the antithesis to the proper Victorian woman championed at the time (“Stereotypes” 2021).

*Cimarron*: Runaway slave; Fugitive slave; The living embodiment of resistance and the desire for freedom by any means.

*\*A quick note to readers: For the rest of this thesis, please read the footnotes. They contain valuable information and quotes that are fundamental to the Dominican Black Woman and my argument.*

## On History

Looking for the definition of history, multiple meanings are found. History may be “a chronological record of significant events... often including an explanation of their causes”; the study of what happened, who it happened to, why it happened, and so on. Additionally, history may be a study: “a branch of knowledge that records and explains past events”. In its latter definition, history is based on fact and reliable sources, and so seemingly irrefutable. However, in academic and non-academic settings alike, this idea is questioned. Even in Merriam-Webster’s dictionary, the first definition of history is “[a] tale, [or a] story” (“History” 2021). Remembering the popular quote, “History is written by the victors”, also emphasizes history as a tale.

Therefore, though produced with certainty, we also realize that history is in fact *produced*, and that there is some human component in history. As Michel Rolph-Trouillot argues in *Silencing the Past*, in creating and becoming history, humans act as both actors and narrators, and thus history becomes a dichotomy: the story of “what happened and that which is said to have happened” (Trouillot 1995). If we ourselves are not witnesses to what has happened, we may only rely on what is said, even if it is obscured, or certain voices are silenced. Trouillot also says “At best, history is a story about power, a story about those who won.” If we include this frame of thinking, along with our construction of history as a dichotomy, we may form a different definition of the term. Instead of neutral fact, history then is a production biased in favor of the powerful. If we accept this to be the true definition of history, how then may we reframe our study of history, so as to prioritize those marginalized by gender and race?

In our redefinition of history, history is a production by and in favor of those in power—in the Dominican context: white, male elites. With this figure as an actor and narrator of history, the Dominican Black Woman can never be accurately understood, represented, nor served by history. To overcome this dilemma, then, we must develop a counternarrative. Instead, the Dominican Black Woman must be allowed to be both actor and narrator, not solely subject of the West<sup>1</sup>. In order to reclaim/repossess what white-washed histories have erased, I will center the Dominican Black Woman in my telling of history. I will include schools of thought and time periods that are most relevant to her, instead of those applicable to a greater ‘Western’ understanding. Additionally, I will tell her story as a Dominican Black Woman myself, so as to study “across” or horizontally instead of “down”, as much of Western-biased history has done. My own positionality as a Dominican Black Woman will be important, because no one may know her better than herself. In studying the DBW, I will interrogate different aspects of her identity, specifically *Dominicanidad*, *Blackness*, and *Womanhood*, grounding each in various parts of history. By centering the Dominican Black Woman, then, I will tell not an inaccurate history, but rather a history from one of the voices which has been silenced.

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## How did she come to be?

### *Conceptualizing Dominicanidad, Blackness, and Womanhood in History*

Before creating the embodiment of the Dominican Black Woman, I first must find her:

*Who is she? Where has she come from? What does she practice? What is she scared of? What does she rejoice in? What does she internalize? How are her Dominicanidad and Blackness interrelated? What makes her Dominican, what makes her Black, and how do these identities intertwine? How do her*

*identities oppose each other? How has she been misrepresented, and how has she represented herself? Am I her, and is she me?*



## ***Colonial and Pre-Trujillo Eras [1501-1915]***

### ***Constructions of Womanhood***

**Literature:** *Mujer y Esclavitud* by Celsa Albert Batista (Batista 1990)

Though officially dated to 1518, the presence of Black women in the Antilles, and in particular on the island of Hispaniola, has been noted since 1501. This date comes from reference to a Black woman in a medical clinic, found in *Cultura Africana en Santo Domingo* by Fradique Lizardo (19). Like Black men, Black women were brought to the Dominican Republic as enslaved Africans, and played various roles during the colonial era.

The Black Woman<sup>2</sup> (see endnotes) in the Colonial era was:

- Una ‘Mecanismo de contra insurgencia’ (27): A Mechanism against insurgence. In *Mujer y Esclavitud*, Celsa Albert Batista cites the primary reason for the rise in trafficking of Black women as slaves as a tool in preventing slave insurgence. Spaniards specifically brought women so as to change the temperament of enslaved Africans and to promote marriage and happiness. In this way, Black women were used to perpetuate and strengthen slavocracy and racial capitalism.<sup>3</sup>
- Mecanismo para la insurgencia: A Mechanism for insurgence. Though brought initially to quell possibilities of insurgence on the island, Black women slaves also became important figures in slave uprisings. Batista estimates there were ‘2,335 esclavas cimarronas [female fugitive slaves]’ (51), and in capture, men and women both received the same punishment.<sup>4</sup>
  - The earliest recorded mass *insurgencia*, in which Black women surely took part, was the slave revolt of 1521. For more on this event, see *The Santo Domingo Slave Revolt of 1521 and the Slave Laws of 1522: Black Slavery and Black Resistance in the Early Colonial Americas* by Anthony Stevens-Acevedo
- A tool to reproduce slave labor. This use of Black women, to perpetuate the system of racial capitalism, would continue past the colonial era.
- The basis for Dominican culture and connection to Black diaspora.<sup>5</sup>

**Literature:** *The Mulatto Republic* by April Mayes (Mayes 2015)

The Dominican Black Woman in the pre-Trujillo era was:

- Caregiver to the nation: In the early 1900s the *normalista*, or teacher, was established. She was the ideal woman, educated, “virtuous”, and pure, and took the duties of the home to the workplace, thus not challenging gender norms too much (Mayes 119). Normalistas helped boost the nation during economic depression, and were critical to development as they educated men. Black Dominican women like Evangelina Rodriguez and Petronila

Angélica Gómez were able to rise socially because of this role. Rodriguez would go on to write *Granos de polen*, which outlined the importance of the normalista's role.<sup>6</sup>

### *Constructions of Dominicanidad*

**Literature:** The Mulatto Republic by April Mayes (Mayes 2015)

Slavery was abolished for the final time in 1822, by Haitian President Jean-Pierre Boyer (“Afro-Dominicans” 2021). On July 25, 1865, the last of the Spanish troops left Santo Domingo, annulling its annexation to Spain and establishing the Second Republic. The Second Republic was characterized by continuous warfare as military generals (*caudillos*) established military rule. Across the region, neighboring countries like Cuba achieved political autonomy, while others battled US intervention. Amidst this chaos, the Dominican Republic began to ask itself: *Who am I?* (“Dominican Republic Profile” 2018) (Mayes 18)

As defined by Dominican scholars of the time, Dominicanidad was:

- A race united against tyranny. This thinking was led by Juan Pablo Duarte (1813-1876), a leader in the 1844 revolt against Haitian President Boyer.<sup>7</sup>
- A mixed (mulatto) nation sharing “a bond through Hispanic cultural norms.” Pedro Francisco Bonó (1828-1906), a Dominican politician and scholar, defined this dominicanidad as *multaje*, and specifically differentiated the Dominican Republic and Haiti by their treatment of their respective colonizers and other European countries, calling Dominican foreign policy more “cosmopolitan” (Mayes 25, 27).
- As defined by Dominican writer Manuel de Jesús Galván (1834-1910) in his fictional novel *Enriquillo*, Dominicanidad was characterized as the loyal “Indo-Hispano”; a Taíno accustomed to Hispanic norms, who delivered Santo Domingo back to Spain. Galván emphasizes *mestizaje* and *indigenismo* in his novel, so there is a sense of belonging to the island whilst maintaining a cultural connection, and cultural inferiority vis-à-vis Spain (Mayes 23).
- Gregorio Luperón (1839-1897), former president of DR<sup>8</sup>, and Eugenio María de Hostos (1839-1903), a Puerto Rican scholar and advocate for independence, thought of dominicanidad across borders, as a part of a larger “Pan-Antillean” race united against US foreign occupation. Like other scholars, Luperón was loyal to Spain, and he advocated for upholding Spanish norms like his predecessors. Though Luperón and Hostos’ definition of dominicanidad was transnational, Hostos did not include Haiti in his conceptions of the Antillean Confederation. So although transnational, Dominicanidad still related back to Spain, and distanced itself from Haiti (Mayes 28, 31) (“Eugenio” 2021).

As defined by the US: The United States (US) also had its own definition of Dominicanidad, this definition influenced by its desire to annex the Dominican Republic (DR). In this era, the US believed DR to be a white nation endangered by its neighboring Black nation, Haiti. In addition, US politicians envisioned DR as a nation that could be a haven for Black and White Americans (from the US) to live in racial harmony.<sup>9</sup>

*It is important to highlight conceptions of womanhood and dominicanidad in this period because it was in its first iterations; the first Black woman is documented in 1501, and the first scholarly musings of Dominicanidad occur in the mid-1800s. These happenings and historical conceptions were to become the basis of Black womanhood and Dominicanidad on the island, and they are central to my analysis of the Dominican Black Woman.*

## ***US Occupation [1916-1924]***

### *Constructions of Dominicanidad*

**Literature:** The Mulatto Republic by April Mayes (Mayes 2015)

Beginning in 1916, the United States occupation of the Dominican Republic was justified and maintained in order to keep the white minority in power. As expressed in John C. Calhoun's quote (*see footnote 9*), the US viewed DR as threatened by the presence of Haiti, a free Black nation. In addition, West Indian immigrants in DR, who were followers of Marcus Garvey (Garveyites), and the UNIA (Universal Negro Improvement Association), further strengthened reasons to maintain occupation, as they made the possibility of a Black revolt a reality. It seems the US was projecting its own fears of Black revolt and resistance domestically onto DR. Provost Marshal Kincade, a US military official at the time of occupation said: "While [dominance over the white race] would be impossible in the United States, it is not at all impossible here after the occupation ceases." (Mayes 96)

As **re-defined** by the U.S, who now played a pseudo-colonizer role above the Dominican Republic, Dominicanidad was:

to be 'racially-mixed' or mulatto. This was emphasized further by the presence of Marines on the island, who brought Jim Crow era thinking and categorizations to the island. These categorizations became real on the island with the instating of the census, the first of which was conducted in 1920.

As **re-defined** by the Dominican nationalists, under US occupation/colonization:

- Dominicanidad transformed into latinidad. This was done in an effort to counteract US occupation, with its roots in white supremacy. Maintaining the previous alliance with Spanish norms, latinidad also "emphasized social order, patriarchy, and racial identity." In addition, latinidad, proposed by nationalist, anti-occupation activists, maintained that " 'Latin' people were morally superior to Anglo-Saxons", thus drawing further differences between Dominican white and American white (Mayes 113).
- Along with latinidad, hispanidad was created, this term directly in contrast to Garveyism and the Black male (the former movement emphasized by West Indian immigrants on the island). In this instance, hispanidad created an identity directly tied to Spain which emphasized " 'civilized' patriarchal authority", the opposite of which was the Black male. Thus this idea was anti-Black and anti-immigrant, in that it was perpetuated particularly to differentiate Dominicans from Black, West Indian immigrants. These ideas of a "civilized patriarchy" and anti-Blackness were to be institutionalized during the Trujillo Era (Mayes 115).

### *Constructions of Womanhood*

**Literature:** The Mulatto Republic by April Mayes (Mayes 2015)

As defined by male nationalists, who embraced hispanidad, womanhood was:

- “An affront to Hispanic culture” (Mayes 122). This particular conception came in opposition to the liberalization of womens’ roles in the workplace and style, which were due to US occupation. <sup>10</sup>
- An embodiment of the nation’s sovereignty. In this way of thinking, purity aligned with sovereignty, and dishonoring hispanic culture became conflated with defiling the nation’s purity.<sup>11</sup>

## *the Trujillo Era - the present [1930-1961] – [1978-]*<sup>12</sup>

### *Constructions of Dominicanidad*

**Literature:** The Virility of the Haitian Womb by Daly Guilamo (Guilamo 2019)  
Denationalization and Statelessness in the Dominican Republic by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (“Denationalization” 2021)  
Ugly History: The 1937 Haitian Massacre by Edward Paulino (Paulino 2018)

Pre-Trujillo, conceptions of Dominicanidad were neither anti-Black (except when conflated with hispanidad), nor explicitly anti-Haitian. However, these conceptions of Dominicanidad were not pro-Black, and a clear effort was made to distinguish Haiti, an all-Black nation, from the DR (even when DR was majority non-white). During Trujillo’s 31 year reign, through state-sanctioned violence, anti-Black propaganda, and isolation, Dominicanidad transformed. Trujillo, himself a quarter Haitian and trained by the US military, was an embodiment of the relationship between colonizer and the colonized. His violent regime embodied the colonizer’s fear of insurrection and revolt (that which was made possible by the Haitian revolution) especially in its violence against Haitian people, and its eradication of dissidents. But also, his hatred for his own Blackness is reminiscent of the often-seen self-hatred of the colonized, a hate created when your own being becomes the reason you are kept from freedom.

From henceforth, Dominicanidad is institutionalized anti-Haitianism. As Trujillo had complete control of all aspects of government and society at this time, anti-Haitianism is best seen through governmental policy. In the years following Trujillo’s era, anti-Haitianism is again best tracked through governmental policy, especially as it relates to citizenship laws.

#### *Trujillo-Era Policy*

- 1937 Perejil Massacre/El Corte/Kout Kouto-a: The “ethnic cleansing” of 6,000 - 25,000 Haitian and Dominicans of Haitian descent (or those suspected to be of Haitian descent) on the Northwest border of DR and Haiti (Paulino 2018). Protection of Dominican farmers was used as a political front for the killings, in which ““The majority of dead people were wives, mothers-in-law, sisters, nieces, friends, [and] domestic servants”” (Guilamo 77) – women. To this day there are no official counts of how many lives were lost. Called the ‘perejil (*parsely*)’ massacre because of the use of the pronunciation of the word as a method to distinguish Haitians and Dominicans.<sup>13</sup>
- Re-interpreting history during the Trujillo era so as to deny Black ancestry (Guilamo 78).
- Anti-vodou laws (Guilamo 78).

#### *Post-Trujillo Policy*

- After Trujillo, in constructions of citizenship: Both in the 1990s with Joaquin Balaguer, and then in 2013, there were laws passed prohibiting Dominicans of Haitian descent, or Dominicans with undocumented parents, from obtaining citizenship.<sup>14</sup>

### *Constructions of Womanhood*

**Literature:** The Mulatto Republic by April Mayes (Mayes 2015)

Womanhood, in the case of Evangelina Rodríguez, the Dominican Republic's first medical school graduate, an Afro-Latina doctor, activist, feminist, and strong opponent to the Trujillo regime, is protection and care for all women ("Andrea Evangelina Rodríguez Perozo" 2021). First starting as a *normalista* (see pages 6-7), Rodríguez studied gynecology and obstetric medicine in Europe. Upon returning to DR from Europe, Rodríguez worked in San Pedro with poor women, children, 'fallen women', prostitutes, and Black women [all those women *not* protected under Trujillo-era feminism]. She helped establish the San Pedro Maternity hospital and ran workshops on hygiene and well-being for low-income women. As an outspoken Dominican Black woman, however, her actions were not taken without consequence (Mayes 138).

- "Her African heritage, and single-mindedness positioned her much like the poor women she tended to, as beyond the boundaries of acceptable Dominican womanhood and the emerging Hispanic nation... persecuted by Trujillo's security forces... she suffered a mental breakdown and starved to death on the streets of San Pedro in 1947." (Mayes 138)

As the era of Trujillo completely isolated citizens for 30 years, whilst institutionalizing anti-Blackness and anti-Haitianism as inherent to Dominican identity, the years following saw the birth of a generation of anti-Black Dominicans, regardless of skin color, class or gender. As with any society there are Dominicans who are not anti-Haitian, and these exceptions should also be recognized.

### *Constructions of Blackness*

**Literature:** The Virility of the Haitian Womb by Daly Guilamo (Guilamo 2019)

As defined by anti-Black Dominicans, Blackness is:

- A cultural contagion. In the Virility of the Haitian Womb, Guilamo asserts that the Dominican conservative elite think of Blackness as something distinctly Haitian, in which contact with Haitians can lead to "catching" aspects of Black culture.<sup>15</sup>
- As a literal contagion, with the racist undertone that Haitian Blackness is inherently dirty.<sup>16</sup>
- When gendered, characterized similarly to the Jezebel, in that she is hypersexualized and made the antithesis of the proper woman, in this case, the Dominican woman.<sup>17</sup>

## Methodology

### *Limitations of the Written Word*

For centuries, the written word is what limited the Dominican Black woman in telling her own history. In the colonial era, her masters forbade her from learning to read and write, as knowledge may have freed her. The Dominican white male elite spoke for her, and in effect, silenced her. During US Occupation, though she received greater freedoms as a woman, her Blackness was stifled. Not included in theories of hispanidad, latinidad, or mulataje that defined her other Dominican counterparts, she was still not able to tell her entire story. Later, in the Trujillo era, her role as normalista served to strengthen the men of her nation, and in allowing room for their stories, she was not able to tell her own. In the years after Trujillo, having never been able to tell her story, she became the subject of others', hypersexualized by women and men alike.

In other words, the Dominican Black woman has never been fully understood in history in large part because of the written word, and those who have written history. Though I could try to write so as to replace what is missing, Fanon says this is futile:

*"To speak as the colonized is... to participate in one's own oppression and to reflect the very structures of your alienation..."* (Drabinski 2019)

Conversely, I will speak a language that is inherently ours—for the Taíno language, or the Yoruba language, or the Spanish language is not entirely ours—instead of fitting into an already broken system. In an effort to surpass the boundaries of the written word, and to speak the language of the Dominican Black women—the language of making and creating— I will create a garment.

### *The Language of the Dominican Black Woman: Making and Creating*

Dominican Black Women have been using making and creating as a way to define themselves for centuries. This is seen as early as the era of slavery, where laws forbid Black women from adorning themselves (*see endnote 5, 'Contribuciones estéticas'*). These aesthetic contributions later became the basis for Dominican culture, and served as the first markings by Dominican Black women in history. As normalistas, Dominican women again engaged in making and creating, this time making schoolboys into men. Throughout all of these periods Dominican Black (and non-Black) women made visual art that narrated their daily life, as well as processed themes of motherhood, colonialism, sexuality, and the body. *For more on Dominican female visual artists, please see endnote 18.*<sup>18</sup> More recently, Dominican artists like Firelei Baez and entrepreneurs like Carolina Contreras of Miss Rizos have again been making their mark on history by creating. *To learn more about Firelei Baez, please visit <https://art21.org/artist/firelei-baez/>, to learn more about Carolina Contreras of Miss Rizos, please visit <https://bit.ly/2RdWTZZ>.*

### *Research Methods*

Using this language of making and creating, I will ground my analysis in the idea of arts-based research. Arts-based research is research combined with an awareness of aesthetics that serves as "... an effort to extend beyond the limiting constraints of discursive communication in order to express meanings that would otherwise be ineffable" (Eisner 2012). By researching in this mode then, I will tell history as the Dominican Black woman has always done, as well as break free from the limitations of the written word. Non-reliance on the written word will also make my project more accessible, as it will serve a

purpose outside of the academic institution: to children, those not in academia, to non-English speakers, to those not interested in history, but inclined towards its aesthetics, and others.

### *Why Garment Work*

I will work to create a garment in particular because of its physical and metaphorical meanings. Clothing is embodied knowledge in that it is the manifestation of all the craftsperson knows, values, and cherishes. It may also be used as a physical representation of the times in its aesthetics, materials, and relationship to the body. Drawing on the work of Tsuda Nobuko, I will use clothing because of its ability to speak for those without an [acknowledged] voice, its role in the domestic realm and with women, and again, because it is an embodiment, both physically and psychologically, of knowledge.

In *Our Ancestors' Handprints*, Tsuda Nobuko explains how Ainu culture and cultural advancement may be learned through Ainu clothing where "... Ainu identity is manifest in language, or handiwork, or spirituality, and through affixing this knowhow to the body (Nobuko 155, 2021)." Ainu clothing served as a "record of technical skills and available tools" (Nobuko 153, 2021), a record of passage and interaction with mainland Japanese culture, and also as a cultural artifact in itself; with its unique hand stitches, measuring systems, materials, and patterning systems. In Nobuko's work, clothing was especially important because of the lack of a written Ainu language, and in my work, it will be important because making and creating is the language of the Dominican Black Woman.

### *Contributions to the Field and Why International Studies*

My work will be important to the field of International Studies first in that it challenges the written word as the only legitimate production of knowledge in academia. Though I have cited, researched, and provided the full context of the Dominican Black woman in the traditional way, by analyzing through creation I will challenge academics to understand our language. As we have adapted to their language, so they will attempt to understand ours (that of the Dominican Black woman, but also other marginalized peoples who have consistently spoken through creating, making, and non-traditional sources of knowledge). I will also challenge academics to process artwork as legitimate sources of knowledge, rather than purely aesthetic pieces.

As a Dominican Black woman myself, I will also contribute to the field by writing from a positionality which is marginalized within academia. As a Dominican Black woman, with my Blackness formed outside of the Dominican context, and my Dominicanidad in a white-Dominican family, my status as a Dominican Black Woman stands between worlds. I am able to understand Blackness, Dominicanidad, Womanhood, and the US in such an entangled way that scholars before me have not been able to, and this surely makes my project notable.

I have chosen International Studies to study the Dominican Black woman because she may not be understood sufficiently through other subjects. Arriving in Hispaniola because of slavery, her conception intersects with one of the largest systems of global trade and economy. International law prevented her freedom, war between nations granted it, and then another, more powerful national compromised it. Later a regime would endanger her and laws would threaten her legitimacy. Though not explored thoroughly in this thesis, migration too played a pivotal role in the recreation and developing of the Dominican Black Woman. The racialization of the Dominican Black Woman has been largely dependent on nation-states; the Haitian-Dominican border has been pivotal to the creation and denying of her identity. The Dominican Black Woman is conceptualized by politics, economics, language, anthropology, and more; so she is inherently interdisciplinary. International studies is equally interdisciplinary, and may see her through various ways of thinking and theories, thus it is the discipline which is most appropriate.

## Endnotes – *further evidence and quotes*

1. By saying the West, I am grouping together countries based on culture rather than orientation. Instead of all countries in the West, I am actually referring to those countries and territories believed to be superior because of their ties to European, particularly British, civilization. Thus the Dominican Republic, Haiti, Mexico, Central America and South America are not included, though they reside in the West, but Great Britain may be included. In this definition “The West” closely aligns with the global North.
2. Here I say Black Woman instead of Dominican Black Woman because the Dominican Republic was not yet its own independent state, and those people now considered Dominicans not under one nation.
3. *Relevant Citation*
  - Celsa Batista: “la población femenina fue traída desde los inicios de la colonización, pero su tráfico aumenta paulatinamente en la medida en que urge su presencia... para tratar de modificar el comportamiento de los esclavos, usando como chantaje moral y social...” (17) → the Black women slaves were brought from the initial beginnings of colonization. However, their trafficking increased with the increasing necessity to **change the temperament of slaves**. Black women were used as moral and social blackmail.
  - Taken from a letter written to the King of Spain, in Larrazábal Blanco’s *La Esclavitud del Negro en Santo Domingo*: “... ‘casándose con los esclavos que hay den éstos menos sospecha de alzamientos’.” (26) → marriage within slaves mean less possibility for uprising
  - Taken from colonial law #4, “... ‘una compañera fiel con quien puedan partir sus penas y fatigas, pues es justo hacer lo más llevadera que se pueda su triste suerte y condición por cuantos medios sugiera la humanidad a favor de estos miserables.’” (52) → a loyal companion with whom he [the Black male slave] can share his pain and fatigue, so as to make his sad fate and condition as bearable as possible by whatever means humanity suggests in favor of these most wretched.
  - Fernando Constanzo Ramírez, governor of Santo Domingo in 1717, in a letter to the king: “... también ellas ... y evitar muchos pecados que puede ser sucedan estando sin ellas...” (27)--> also they [Black women slaves] help eliminate all of the sins that could occur without their presence.(“Fernando” 2021)
4. *Relevant Citation*
  - ‘A cualquier negro o negra que haya hecho ausencia del servicio de su amo por menos tiempo de cuatro meses y que no hubiere andado con cimarrones [fugitive slaves]... doscientos azotes por la primera vez y por segunda será desterrado [exiled] de la Isla... si hubiere acompañado con aquéllos ... cien azotes más...’” (50) -> Artículo 31, desde la Corona
  - In addition, Batista cites historical examples of Black women fighting for their freedom.
    - “Evidentes pruebas demuestran dicha actitud por lograr la libertad, como son los casos de las frecuentes muertes de las amas en la primera mitad

del Siglo XVI. Fradique Lizardo dice, que las referidas acciones fueron castigadas con la hoguera.” (52) → Various examples show clear efforts by women to achieve liberty, as in the cases of frequent killings of mistresses (female version of master) in the first half of the 16th century. These doings were punished by being burned at the stake, says Fradique Lizardo.

##### 5. Relevant Citation

- Ritual practice [food and religious practices] :
  - Religion: Ritual practice in religion took the form of *Santería* or *Seres y luaces o loas*, a religious syncretism in which traditions from Dahomey, Yoruba, and Bantu cultures were mixed with Catholic practices. In these practices, African orishas are represented by Catholic Saints, so as to maintain the safety of those practicing the religion. In *Santería* and *Seres y luaces o loas*, Black women play a major role in ceremonies.
  - Food: Nutritional preferences, as well as use of certain foods by Dominican Black women served as the basis of Dominican culture, as well as connection to Blackness across seas. Foods brought from Africa include platanos, bananas, coffee, rice, mango, pork and fish, among others (101). Additionally, Batista credits Black women as the basis for: ‘the cultural preference for white rice’, a tradition from Guinea; regular use of pork to accompany other dishes; common use of platanos, and in particular mangu [which is essentially fufu], among other nutritional preferences (103).
- Labor patterns: The most outstanding of these being *la vendedora*, or *saleswoman*. Batista cites this tradition of women preparing certain foods, and then selling them on the go, as a practice with direct ties to Africa (105). Thus this practice served as connection to the diaspora through labor practice. In addition to this, the position of *la vendedora* created the opportunity for Black women with agency, so in the colonial era it was strictly regulated.
  - Law 4a : “Que ningún negro ni negra pueda vender cosa alguna excepto leña, agua, piedra, tierra, cosa que la traiga a costas como esclavo... si alguna cosa hiciere de sus amos... nadie le puede comprar salvo su propio señor...(52)” → May no Black woman nor man sell anything except firewood, water, rocks, soil, things that a slave can bring in tow.... If any [merchandise] comes from their owners... no one may buy it, save their master himself.
- *Contribuciones estéticas*/ A leading source of aesthetic contributions
  - From Sumptuary Laws 1 and 2 of the colonial era (87):
    - Ley 1: “... renovamos la prohibición de que los negros y pardos primerizos esclavos y libres, pueden usar perlas, esmeraldas u otra piedras preciosas, oro ni plata en metal o bordado, en sus trajes y adornos.”

- Ley 2: “Las negras libres o siervos... no podrán usar mantillas en lugar de pañuel con que deben cubrirse, ni los negros ceñir espada o bastón ni sombrero de galón de oro o plata...”
- “... en lo referente a la estética en el arreglo personal para lucir atractivas: el atuendo, de preferencia, de colores primarios. (100)”
  - *What other things are in primary colors?*
- “Aunque el pañuelo era obligado en los sistemas esclavistas y era de uso común en los campesinos españoles, el estilo de amarre de éste hacia arriba, corresponde a la estética africana...” (100)

6. *Relevant Citation*

- “The Dominican household under the care of the conscientious mother was the nation’s incubator...” (Mayes 121)
  - Evangelina Rodriguez in *Granos de polen*: ““Don’t even think about it [“emasculating” men by showing intelligence], ever... Do not upbraid him because it would be like robbing him of the only thing he has.” (Mayes 121)
  - “As normalistas, women... were primed to help their male counterparts cultivate national progress.” (Mayes 121)
  - Petronila Angélica Gomez: ““The country needs our practical service! ... rise up, Dominican woman, and come to help your companion, the man. Today is the day to cooperate with him in that great work of social improvement!” (Mayes 127)
7. Said Duarte, ““White, blacks/ Browns, Mixed-Bloods / Marching peacefully / United and brave. / Let’s save the fatherland / From vile tyrants, / And show the world / That we are brothers.’” (Mayes 21)
8. Throughout this section, as well as other sections, when using the abbreviation for the Dominican Republic I use “DR” instead of “the DR”. This is custom to do when referring to DR, and I’ve only heard white people say “the DR”, so I know that’s not right.

9. *Relevant Citation*

- John C. Calhoun (1782-1850), former president of the US, said “ ‘ [the] White Republic of St.Domingo, the persecution it endured from the Blacks, the duty of [the United States] to... sustain it in its struggle against the Haitian government.’” (Mayes 19)(“John C. Calhoun” 2021)
- Ulysses S. Grant (1822-1885), 18th president of the US, also said: “ ‘The colored man cannot be spared until his place is supplied, but with a refuge like Santo Domingo his worth... would soon be discovered... if Providence designed that the two races should not live together he would find a home in the Antillas.’” (Mayes 20) (“Ulysses S. Grant” 2021)

10. *Relevant Citation*

- [source anonymous] ““Nine things our women have learned in six years. To show their legs more than they should. To go market, playing the role of servants. To become typists and neglect the kitchen. To go out racing... with whomever they think best... To marry for business... To wear excessively low-cut dresses and to dance in cafes and restaurants.’” (Mayes 123)

11. *Relevant Citation*

- Take special note of the gendered connotations of purity, defiling, and contamination.
- "... the all-male executive committee of the National Dominican Union, founded 'for the purpose of saving the Dominican people from the danger of being prostituted,' ... proclaimed 'The day has already arrived when the Dominican people shall grasp the fruit of their manly resistance...'" (Mayes 123)
- Mexican feminist Elena Arizmendi de Duersch, in *Fémina* magazine: "'Spanish-speaking women [were] to help consolidate the Hispanic spirit [espíritu de la Raza].'" (Mayes 127)

12. The era of Trujillo transformed the Dominican Republic socially, racially, and economically, creating a new era since that of US occupation. Since then, during Balaguer's terms and in recent years, the Dominican Republic has continued to grapple with the legacy of Trujillo. In reproducing the same policies of anti-Blackness, anti-Haitianism, civilized patriarchal authority and state sanctioned violence, then, the Dominican Republic has not yet moved into a new era. Thus the two eras are joined as one.

#### 13. *Relevant Citation*

- US Legation to the Dominican Republic after the Perejil Massacre: "the entire northwest frontier on the Dajabón side is absolutely devoid of Haitians." (Richard 2002)

*For further information on el corte/the perejil massacre/ kout kouto-a please see: A World Destroyed, A Nation Imposed by Richard Turits (Richard 2002), The Farming of Bones by Edwidge Danticat*

#### 14. *Relevant Citation*

Timeline Provided by ("Denationalization" 2021)

- 2004 Immigration Act: Changed citizenship status of those classified as 'non-residents' to 'in-transit'. People considered to be "in transit" resided in the country for 10 days or less, and did not receive Dominican nationality, even if born in DR. Non-residents included "foreign workers, migrants with expired residency visas, undocumented migrant workers, and [those]... unable to prove their lawful residence". Many of these non-residents were Haitian people, and with this new law, once they became children, their children did not receive citizenship (Goris 2021)
- 2005 *Yean and Bosico v. the Dominican Republic*: Supreme Court ruling which further strengthened the rules of the 2004 immigration act so that children and grandchildren of those considered 'in-transit' could not receive citizenship, even if born in the US. For specific detail on this case, as well as its relation to human rights and the Inter-American Court of Human Rights, review source ("Yean and Bosico v. Dominican Republic" 2021)
- 2007 *Resolución No.02-2007*: "*Resolución Para La Puesta en Vigencia Del Libro Registro Del Nacimiento de Niño (a) De Madre Extranjera No Residente En República Dominicana*", *Resolution for the Childbirth Registration Book in the Instance of a Foreign-Born Mother*. Most notably, which gives the government power "to suspend or retain birth certificates of persons whose parents did not have a Dominican residency permit." ("Denationalization" 2021)(Resolución No.02-2007 2007)
- 2010 Dominican National Constitution, Article 18:

- “Dominicans [feminine] and Dominicans [masculine] are: 1. The sons and daughters of a Dominican mother or father; 2. Those who enjoy the Dominican nationality before the entry into effect of this Constitution 3. The persons born in the national territory, with the exception of the sons and daughters of foreign members of diplomatic and consular delegations, and of foreigners in transit or residing illegally in the Dominican territory. Any foreigner [masculine] or foreigner [feminine] defined as such in the Dominican laws is considered a person in transit; 4. Those born abroad, of Dominican father or mother, notwithstanding having acquired, by place of birth, a different nationality from that of their parents. Once having reached the age of eighteen years, they can express their will, before the competent authority, to assume the double nationality or renounce one of them; 5. Those who contract matrimony with a Dominican [masculine] or Dominican [feminine], as long as opting for the nationality of his or her spouse and meet the requirements established by the law; 6. The direct descendants of Dominicans resident abroad; 7. Naturalized persons, in accordance with the conditions and formalities required by law.” (Francisco Valle Velasco 2021)
- 2013 Law 168-13: “Deprivation of Nationality and Statelessness by the Constitutional Court's judgment 168/13. In 2013, the Constitutional Court's judgment 168/13 established that only persons born in the Dominican Republic to Dominican parents or legal residents are considered citizens.” (“Denationalization” 2021)

#### 15. *Relevant Citation*

- “...the conservative elite of the Dominican Republic do not acknowledge cultural blackness but only biological blackness as part of Dominican heritage.” (Guilamo 80)
- “... ultranationalists fear Dominicans’ absorption of Haitian cultural customs, with particular concern for Vodun.” (Guilamo 83)
  - Carlos Cornielle: “ ‘Vodun is literally a ‘negation of God’” (Guilamo 84)
  - Joaquin Balaguer [president after Trujillo] “ ‘[Vodun] in great part demonic...’” (Guilamo 84)

#### 16. *Relevant Citation*

- “ ‘ their [Haitian women’s] bodies are contaminated with illnesses, so I will never date one.’” (Guilamo 87)
- “ ‘Haitians would defecate in plastic bags and launch them over the roofs of their shacks.’” (Guilamo 87)

#### 17. *Relevant Citation*

- “ ‘Haitian women make better lovers than Dominican women... They have been trained since birth to work their vaginal muscles...Dominican men sleep with them, but they marry us’” (Guilamo 87)
- “ ‘It’s true. I too have slept with a few Haitian women. They do make better lovers.’” (Guilamo 87)
- “ ‘Twelve women and two Dominican women can walk by us in a line and Dominican men will only look at the Haitian women.’” (Guilamo 87)

#### 18. *Dominican Female Artists*

- For a comprehensive list of Dominican Female Artists, starting from the 1860s to the present, please visit:  
<https://dominicancult.blogspot.com/2018/08/women-in-dominican-art.html>
- For contemporary artists that focus on motherhood, colonialism, sexuality and the body, in particular, [and those that stood out to me the most] please look at the work of:
  - Raquel Paiewonsky, Scherezade Garcia, Nidia Serra, Clara Ledesma , Celeste Woss y Gil and Rosaly Martinez

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## **In Closing the Written Portion**

Please use this historical context and analysis to understand the latter half of my thesis, the dress also entitled *Muñeca Limé*.



**ASZANA LÓPEZ-BELL**  
**muñeca\_limé\_the\_dress**

Sleeveless princess seam dress in oil-slick fabric, including gathered tiers throughout.

Manufacturer Color: Black and Ivory

Body: slicker [pleather], silk taffeta

Lining: silk chiffon, polyester

Made in Pennsylvania.



ASZANA LÓPEZ-BELL  
**muñeca\_limé\_the\_dress**

details

red polyester topstitching, black polyester topstitching, black invisible zipper (not pictured), hemmed silk taffetta tiers  
pointed bodice sections inspired by 18th century Italian style gowns

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