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OF MORAL ECONOMIES

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Abstract

Drawing upon three research projects in the Dominican Republic and Haiti over the past eight years, this paper examines the utility of a materialist approach to understanding how social relations are negotiated and interpreted among different strata and institutions. Throughout my fieldwork in multiple sites on the island of Hispaniola, materiality repeatedly emerged as a means through which research participants' socio-economic lives are shaped. I demonstrate how factors such as race, class, gender, and nationality intersect with social-material life to create stratifying effects. At the same time, people use material forms in positive ways to develop meanings and values, practice social relations, mitigate the effects of alienation, and obtain socio-economic mobility. I move away from the concept of stratification in favour of the more encompassing term "moral economy," which has two advantages : a) in referring to processes of social formation, it acknowledges power relations without denying agency to less powerful social groups; b) it treats society and economy as intimately tied together, rather than as two separate social spheres, thus allowing discussion of how economic and social values combine in the production of social structure. This intertwining of different kinds of values in the term moral economy complements a material culture approach that examines things as both resources and objects replete with social meanings.

Keywords

Dominican Republic, Haiti, materiality, moral economy, stratification

Biography

Dr. Erin B. Taylor is a Post-doctoral Research Fellow at the Instituto de Ciências Sociais in Lisbon, Portugal. Her research focuses on material culture and financial practices in the Dominican Republic and Haiti. She is the author of *Materializing Poverty: How the Poor Transform their Lives* (2013, AltaMira), and the editor of *Fieldwork Identities* (2010, Caribbean Studies Press). Since 2010, Taylor has been conducting collaborative research on mobile phones, mobile money, markets and migration in Haiti, funded by the Institute for Money, Technology and Financial Inclusion (IMTFI). Taylor is also the Managing Editor of *PopAnth: Hot Buttered Humanity*.

Introduction

Over the past few decades, analyses of material culture have been gaining traction in anthropology. Developing out of archaeological perspectives on the products of human labour, they have sought to understand the complex relationships that human beings have with the things we possess and use (see, for example, Appadurai, 1988; Douglas, 1996). For centuries, archaeology has demonstrated just how much our command over material forms separates humans from other species. Between tools to stimulate economic production, vessels to store foods and liquids, shelters from the elements, and objects of aesthetic beauty with ritual importance, materiality is at the heart of the human experience and a window to understanding our ancestors.

Today, the study of material culture has a vast wealth of objects to draw upon in the study of human relations. As Daniel Miller (1987) has observed, mass production techniques have provided the world with an enormous array of good that we can appropriate to express our personal identities. For Miller, the possibilities of mass consumption are largely positive: the plethora of choices in today's retail outlets grant us a freedom of expression that did not exist before. In objectifying our selves in things, we create lives that are full of personal and social meaning. This is not a shallow kind of consumption, but one that expresses the deep relations we have with each other. The study of material culture, then, encompasses a broad range of human activity, from the economics of resourcing to the morality of human relatedness.

Given this centrality of economic and moral concerns to things, the concept of moral economy is a natural fit to analyses of material culture. It has applications to all three research projects that I have carried out on the island of Hispaniola since I began conducting fieldwork there in 2004. In Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic (2004-2012), I researched the relationship between materiality and poverty in a squatter settlement. There, materiality (particularly the built environment and consumption) are integral to the self-definition of residents people as poor, is implicated in their stigmatization by outsiders, and also provides a way to create a positive community life and transform the future. In Haiti (2010-2012), primarily in Port-au-Prince, I did collaborative research on the use of mobile phones and financial products. The implications of making communication and cash virtual speak to an anti-materiality that involves removing away the physical constraints and speeding up circulation. On the Dominican-Haitian border (2010-

2012), my co-researchers and I looked at how relations between Dominicans and Haitians are defined and practised through material forms.

What I noticed in all three cases is how economic and moral concerns are expressed in material ways. For example, on the Dominican-Haitian border, both economic and cultural differences play a significant role in how Dominicans and Haitians interrelate. Material forms encompass both economic and cultural meanings, and can be a useful lens through which to understand the multifaceted ways in which identity and difference are constructed.

The concept of moral economy complements a material culture approach as it highlights how things are imbued with both economic and symbolic values. In this paper I present examples from my three case studies to show how this analytical combination can assist in our understanding of the construction of social difference.

Moral economy and its materiality

The term “moral economy” is generally used to describe the judgements and values that drive economic behaviour. According to scholars who use the term, and in fact the majority of economic anthropologists, people are not just “rational actors” who make decisions to fulfil their own self-interest. Our economic behaviour is always guided by our roles as social beings.

The idea that morality is tied up with economy is far from new. Adam Smith’s “theory of moral sentiments” (1759) presents the idea that all of our moral concerns for others arise from self-interest. We can only sympathise with other people because we imagine how we would feel ourselves in the same situation. When wealthy people act in their own economic self-interest, it inadvertently benefits the poor as wealth is redistributed by the “invisible hand” of the market. Effectively, market mechanisms automate a morality that fits with normative human values.

Conversely, the sociologist Emile Durkheim (1893) argued that morality does not stem from the self-interest of the individual. Instead, it is based on principles of solidarity that are developed collectively. In 'primitive' societies, morality is formed via mechanical solidarity, people thinking alike. But in 'modern' societies, Durkheim saw the maintenance of peace under global capitalism as difficult to achieve, requiring regulation to maintain peace (organic solidarity). This contrasts with Adam Smith, who viewed expanding global markets as bringing peace between nations, given that the “wealth of nations” depended upon the maintenance of trade relations, which would be

disrupted by war and conflict.

The term “moral economy” has similarities with both of these viewpoints, but it assumes neither the utilitarianism that Smith described, nor the functionalism of Durkheim. The first explicit use of the term “moral economy” is commonly attributed to E.P. Thompson. In his article “The moral economy of the English crowd in the 18th century” (1971), Thompson rebuffed a prevailing view that the poor in eighteenth century England rioted as a matter of utility or spasmodic impulse; that is, they felt hungry and rioted in response to this stimulus. Thompson argues that their response was fuelled by far more than pragmatism or animalistic behaviour. Instead, he argues, the poor had a set of beliefs and ideals around how food should be distributed, and their behaviour reflected those beliefs. That is, the poor had their own moral economy.

A few years after Thompson, James C. Scott popularized the term “moral economy” in his book “The Moral Economy of the Peasant” (1976). Scott argued that peasants resist efforts by authorities to institute change because they prefer their existing patron-client system, in which wealthier peasants protect weaker ones, over free market competition. When traditional forms of solidarity break down due to the introduction of market forces, rebellion is likely to break out. People have strong values, which protect their existing economic system. However, Scott argued, peasants did not act to protect their system because they were conservative, but because they were risk-averse due to their precarious economic position. For both Scott and Thompson, then, the moral economy expresses the relationship between the ethical foundations of societies and their self-interests. This millennium, anthropological interest in the concept has proliferated, perhaps due to concerns about the effects of high finance and new financial products such as derivatives on the global economy (Banks, 2006; Calabrese, 2005; Fourcade and Healy, 2007; Hann, 2010; Sayer, 2000, 2003, 2007).

The term “moral economy” is not just applicable to peasants or the poor. In her ethnography of Wall Street, Karen Ho (2005, 2009) demonstrates how Wall Street bankers make moral judgements about the role that Wall Street plays in global finance. She describes how the bankers view their power as being so ubiquitous that nothing can happen in the world without Wall Street first approving it. They view themselves as legitimately possessing this power because they have the knowledge to make the global economy work. Caitlyn Zaloom (2006) makes similar observations in her work on Chicago traders. By observing the moral behaviour of individual actors in the economy, Ho and Zaloom demonstrate how the global economy at the macro level is not an

abstract, objective thing; it is made by real human beings whose values and judgements affect their economic behaviour. Hence moral economies are observable in all social levels, and within institutions. There is no one over-arching moral economy; rather, moral economy is a process by which values of different kinds are negotiated.

The concept of “value” helps us bridge the gap between ethics and economics. David Graeber (2001) in particular has covered the history of this term's application in anthropology. As price, value has a specific economic meaning: it is simply the quantitative measure of the rate of exchange of two goods in the market. But when it comes to morality, value becomes rather more complex. How can we define human values? Who decides what they are? To some extent, value as a set of human practices and beliefs is undefinable, because the composition of values is always contingent and changing. In fact, outside of abstracted economic models, value as price is also subject to this constant re-negotiation, because human values always underlie decisions about price and market conditions. In Thompson's account, the working classes in eighteenth century England objected to a change in market arrangements whereby agricultural producers stopped granting them preferential rights to buy the produce from their region, instead sending it to urban centres where it fetched higher prices. The rioters would have disagreed wholeheartedly with Adam Smith, who viewed market mechanisms as instituting a kind of fairness by the very act of removing human interference from the mechanisms of resource distribution. Instead, they peasants were arguing for what Hart *et al* have called a “human economy” (2010).

The concept of value is also explicitly present in Miller's work. He draws upon Hegel's ideas of objectification to describe how we incorporate objects into processes of creating and recreating values and meanings. Miller defines objectification as “a series of processes consisting of externalization (self-alienation) and sublation (re-absorption) through which the subject of such a process is created and developed.” (1987, p.12) This rendering is meant to break down the subject/object divide, viewing subjects and objects as co-constitutional rather than oppositional. In Miller's account, we invest objects them with value, and we also define ourselves in relation to those objects that are already invested with value. It is a two-way process.

Miller does not discuss value as price; instead, he views the relationship between people and objects as one single process of the creation of meaning. In doing so, his interpretation provides for the analysis of our relationships with material things without explicit reference to economy. This has certain advantages in a world which at times seems preoccupied with

attributing economic causes to human behaviours. Material culture analysis has tended to move away from Bourdieu's (1984) notion of distinction, in which material goods are used to mark and create social class, towards examining how people use objects for their own, varied purposes (see, for example, Horst, 2004; Rosales, 2010; Woodward, 2007). Their recognition of individual social autonomy grants us a far greater understanding of the diversity of how people use material goods, and their roles in differentiation as well as stratification. In fact, Miller (2001) argues that poverty—a lack of possessions—does not necessarily mean that people do not have agency over material goods. He suggests that material possessions might be of even greater value to people who are poor, because they depend upon the few possessions they have to create social meanings.

In this paper, however, I bring back the idea of economy through the lens of the moral. I do not wish to return to a Bourdieuan perspective, but to understand how specifically economic behaviour combines with the elaboration of personal identities and social status simultaneously. Economic circumstances create both opportunities and limitations: they can circumscribe people's consumption choices, restricting their identity practices, but they can also act as “enabling constraints” (Taylor, 2013) that provide new social and economic possibilities through the very process of limiting options. This is particularly evident when analysing the material culture and moral economy of populations whose power is limited by their socio-economic position. It is simply not the case that the market exists separately to human morality. Nor is it true that the market is intrinsically anti-humanist. At times, market mechanisms, with their fixation on price, may operate against the interests of those who lack the means to pay. But at other moments, the market provides a vehicle through which people with little command over resources can negotiate conditions of exchange (of goods or labour) that are aligned with their personal values, beliefs, and interests. In what follows I present case studies from my three research projects to demonstrate how these processes play out in different contexts.

Case study I: Poverty and immorality in the Dominican Republic (2004-2012)

I first went to Santo Domingo as a graduate student to investigate processes of social transformation. From 1930-1961, the Dominican Republic was under the dictatorship of Rafael Leónidas Trujillo, and subsequently experienced years of “heavy-handed” rule of Joaquín Balaguer,

Trujillo's state historian (1966-1978 and 1986-1996). As a consequence, the Dominican Republic missed many of the key social movements that had taken place in other Caribbean nations. A burgeoning political opposition had never fully recovered since it was suppressed during the 1965 revolution, and the institutions of civil society depended heavily upon the patronage of the Catholic Church (Ferguson 1992). The black consciousness movement that impacted places like Jamaica, Barbados, and even Haiti scarcely caused a ripple in the Dominican Republic during the rule of Trujillo and Balaguer. But after Balaguer's defeat in 1996, signs emerged that things were changing (*ibid.*).

When I arrived in Santo Domingo, however, I quickly gained the impression that people were far more concerned about negative social transformations than they were with productive ones. News media reported escalating rates of crime; *capitaleños* (residents of the capital city) lived in fear, and it seemed as though everyone blamed the poor barrios situated along the banks of the Ozama River for this growing problem. Some people swore to me that, under Trujillo and then Balaguer, there was never any crime at all. Now, they told me, society had become “morally corrupt” and consumer values had overtaken family values, with the result that parents were too busy working to look after their children. As a result, so the story went, adolescents had turned to drug-dealing and theft for easy money to buy consumer goods. People were shocked that I had taken up residence in a squatter settlement, telling me that I would be “murdered for my shoes” there.

There is nothing particularly unusual about these attitudes—every large city in the world has its no-go zones—but I wondered why some poor communities were singled out as the cause of these negative transformations, while others were not. My investigations into crime statistics and media reports suggested that there was no direct correlation between people's attitudes to the barrios and actual crime rates, or even with media representations (Taylor, 2009). La Ciénaga, the barrio in which I lived, was heavily stigmatized by the general public. However, most media reporting over the previous decade focused on its poverty, not its criminality. If neither actual crime nor media sensationalism had caused this negative public opinion, where did it come from?

It was not difficult to isolate the cause. La Ciénaga, meaning “the swamp,” is a squatter settlement built on reclaimed wetlands next to the river dividing Santo Domingo. Its housing stock is of poor quality; at the time, many houses had not yet been converted from tin and wood “ranchitos” (shacks) to concrete block. La Ciénaga is just one of many barrios in Santo Domingo

that has been “autoconstructed” (Holston, 1991), but it is the most visible as it can be clearly seen from the bridge crossing the Ozama River. It is the Dominican equivalent to the famous Brazilian favela that appears to be toppling down a Rio hillside. People refer to La Ciénaga as being “abajo el puente” [sic.] because the main entrance to the barrio is located under the twin bridges that cross the river. The barrio has become so emblematic of poverty that any barrio in Santo Domingo may be referred to as “abajo el puente,” no matter where it is located (Hoffnung-Garskof, 2008).

In other words, the material poverty of La Ciénaga was starkly visible, and it was predominantly this materiality that gave rise to conceptions of the barrio as a source of moral corruption. This materialized morality was also racialized, as colour shade in the barrios was visibly darker. Crime was not only blamed on barrio residents, but also on “morenos” who were widely assumed to be the stereotype of the criminal. On more than one occasion I heard someone who was robbed be asked, “Was it a moreno?” The assumption is often automatic, and it can be self-fulfilling, given the flexibility of Dominican racial categories. It is not difficult to retro-fit the category of “moreno” to the actual perpetrators of crimes, who might ordinarily be referred to as “indio” (light-skinned) in their everyday lives. Crime, and the fear of crime, darken skin.

In Santo Domingo's widespread account of the immorality of the barrios, then, three different kinds of material objects combined to create the elements of the story: objects (housing and consumer goods), space (the geography of the barrio), and bodies (with moralized readings of “race”). In fact, these categories were also mobilized in discourse by barrio residents. Cienigüeros tended to vary between objecting to the total criminalization of the barrio by outsiders (“We're not all delinquents, there are serious people here too!”), and using the very same moral markers to judge each other and position themselves as more moral than others. For example, investing in the construction of one's own home was commonly seen to be a marker of respectability, whereas investing instead in non-durables, such as tennis shoes or large stereos, could be viewed as a sign of delinquency. Houses are respectable because they are the foundation for family life and its reproduction. They represent social values and the continuity of traditions.

Conversely, personal items, which Miller views as central to our processes of identity construction, were often morally problematic because they signal a shift away from the family towards individuation. But whether consumption of personal items is viewed as problematic depends heavily on the characteristics and circumstances of the person who is consuming them. They are most likely to be judged as signalling immorality when purchased by people who are

assumed to lack the legitimate means to pay. Money therefore literally buys morality, because those who can clearly pay to consume are unlikely to have their morality questioned.

In Dominican society, there are two major categories of people who are widely believed to live on immoral gains: the poor, who steal directly from people on the street or rob houses, and politicians, who steal from everybody indirectly. Thus, in the Dominican moral economy, we could say that there are two kinds of material appropriation: a positive kind, in which people reconfigure the meanings of material things to augment their social-moral lives; and a negative kind; in which people achieve this goal by stealing from each other. The morality of materiality in this context is not just a matter of how people deploy things, but also of who has the right to possess things. It is a matter of price and property as well as of self-expression.

Case study II: Mobiles and corporate morality in Haiti (2010-2012)

If Santo Domingo's moral economy is shaped by beliefs and values surrounding poverty and property, then we could expect a similar discourse to prevail in Haiti. The poorest country in the Western hemisphere, Haiti is not renowned for its wealth, democracy, the competence of its governing bodies, or its socio-economic development. Decades of programs by non-profit organizations and multilateral development organizations such as USAID seem, to many observers, to have had relatively little impact upon this nation's overall development. Government-provided social security is scarce. Nor do companies fill the gaps in the provision of social goods via products for the “base of the pyramid” (Hammond *et al*, 2007): Haiti is scattered with micro- and small-businesses, with few large domestic companies, let alone multinational corporations. The exceptions are a national supermarket chain, a national bakery, and the four telecommunications companies, all of which are majority held by overseas capital. In contrast, Santo Domingo boasts a highly developed commercial sphere, which provides ample opportunities for the fulfilment of needs and desires through consumption. What do moral economies look like in a country where poverty is endemic?

Like Santo Domingo, Port-au-Prince has a differentiated urban environment with wealthy areas and slums. However, the sense of moral crisis I felt in Santo Domingo, of negative social transformations whose locus was the urban barrios, is overshadowed in Haiti by other, more pressing, concerns. The abject poverty that prevails throughout the island is not a recent

transformation: rather, it is a crisis that has existed since the nation's formation as a plantation society. Its material effects are visible in the bodies of the hungry and sick (Farmer, 2004), and the post-Duvalier years have witnessed the slow disintegration of once-wealthy down-town Port-au-Prince. The 7.0 magnitude earthquake of January 12, 2010 violently accelerated a process that time and poverty had already begun, resulting in the devastation of wide swathes of the city and surrounding areas, the deaths of between 60,000 and 300,000 people,¹ and the displacement of many more. In comparison, fifteen days later, when a 8.8 magnitude earthquake hit Chile, just over 500 people died.²

The earthquake was a natural crisis, but locals and observers were quick to point to moral failings that resulted in the scale of the devastation. Part of the blame for the devastation in Haiti was attributed to Haiti's governments for not enforcing standards to protect their citizens. Another part of the blame was attributed to the various forces that have ensured that Haiti has remained a poor country, including the reparations that France demanded for the loss of its plantations and slaves after Haiti declared independence on January 1, 1804 (Farmer, 2004). NGOs were blamed for looking after their own interests, wasting large sums of money on comfortable living rather than investing effectively in socio-economic development (Ramachandran and Walsh, 2001; Reitman, 2011). Failure to combat poverty was a moral failure with grave consequences.

The criticism levelled at institutions for the scale of the earthquake's devastation reflects a far deeper distrust of institutions in Haiti. A 2011 report by InterMedia, based on 1,008 face-to-face surveys, found that 43 percent of Haitians trust commercial banks, 42 percent trust the Central Bank of Haiti, 37 percent trust international NGOs, 14 percent trust electronic payment services, and just 8 percent trust the Haitian government. In stark contrast, 65 percent of Haitians surveyed reported that they trust mobile phone operators. This parallels our research findings. During our research, people told us things like "God sent Digicel to save Haiti" and that "Digicel should be President" (Taylor and Horst 2013). The level of trust for mobile phone operators is so high that people will sign up for their products, regardless of whether they understand them or need them. But why should telecommunications companies, who charge for their services, command such a high degree of trust?

The answer seems to lie in how companies like Digicel are perceived to provide consumers

1 Anthropologist Timothy Swartz has contested the number of deaths and displacements resulting from the earthquake: http://open.salon.com/blog/timotuck/2011/05/29/haitis_questionable_earthquake_death_toll.

2 These numbers are taken from Wikipedia and The Huffington Post (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/01/02/chile-earthquake-2011_n_803370.html)

with products they find to be useful and desirable. Until 2007, Haiti had two mobile phone companies, Natcom and Haitel, but mobile penetration was low because handsets and calls were very expensive, and infrastructure was concentrated in the cities and towns. In 2007, Digicel established a nation-wide service in Haiti and completely transformed the market. Just as they had in Jamaica and elsewhere (Horst and Miller, 2006), they provided inexpensive handsets specifically designed for people with low incomes. Their handsets featured long-lasting batteries and even a button right on the front for a torch. They provided calls and texting at a far lower cost, and added services such as free “Call Me” messages so that people who had no money could still use their phones to get in touch.

Today, mobile phone penetration is close to universal, and Digicel command a level of trust that no other institution, whether profit or non-profit, commands in Haiti. In this struggling economy, Digicel are viewed as looking after the poor—a task that governments and NGOs have largely failed. Their corporate social responsibility efforts, carried out by the Digicel Foundation, are also considered to be genuine social efforts, not just a disinterested attempt to increase their customer base. After the earthquake, the first public building to be reconstructed was the iconic *Marche en Fer* (Iron Market) in Port-au-Prince, where market women have plied their wares since 1891. Tellingly, it was rebuilt by Digicel.

Mobile phones possess a special capacity to be central to people's moral economies. Because they enable communication, they accelerate economic and social practices. Sometimes this manifests as the facilitation of trading activities or finding work; at other instances the mobile phone permits family members who live far apart to stay connected. They are incorporated into people's aesthetics (Taylor and Horst, forthcoming 2014). More often than not, the economic and social aspects intertwine. After all, beyond subsistence, the purpose of economic activity is the elaboration of sociality. In Haiti, many people told us that their lives had changed for the better when they obtained their first mobile phone because they could use it to talk to their families regularly, and arrange things they needed to do from afar rather than investing an inordinate amount of time in travelling from place to place. The ability of the phone to act as a proxy for the self—to facilitate movement of material things, including people, money, and goods—meant that it was readily incorporated into Haiti's pre-existing moral economy, which places a high value on mobility (Taylor, 2014). The mobile phone's capacity to connect the household over large distances has been further amplified by the introduction of mobile money in Haiti in November

2010. This service allows people to send money to each other via a mobile handset, thus allowing value as price and value as sociality to be transferred through a single device.

An interesting feature of the mobile phone is that ownership is relatively democratic. Because phones are inexpensive, mobile penetration has grown rapidly in Haiti. The mobile phone is perhaps the quintessential object representing Miller's ideas of appropriation, in which people buy mass-consumed objects and use them for their own ends. Far from seeing themselves as exploited by the commercial interests of a multinational company, Haitians generally view the phone companies as providing value.

The problem, of course, is that while mobile phones facilitate economic and social activities, they are unlikely to broadly transform Haiti's poverty, nor do they necessarily tell us much about how Haitians live with their material circumstances. A single material item can have a massive impact, but it can only tell a fraction of the story about how moral economies operate. To explore a more complex approach to materiality, I turn to my research on the border of Haiti and the Dominican Republic. There, the stark economic and cultural differences between Haitians and Dominicans render a broad range of moral economies visible in material things.

Case study III: Difference on the Dominican-Haitian border (2010-2012)

In the south-western corner of the Dominican Republic lies the region of Pedernales. Despite being replete with natural wonders, such as pristine tropical beaches and national parks, little tourism arrives here due to its distance from major centres and its lack of infrastructure. With a population of approximately 31,000, the region is the poorest in the country. Economic activities primarily consists of agriculture, fishing, imports, and domestic commerce. The town of Pedernales, for which the region is named, is home to half of the region's total population. It is hardly a booming economy, but nor is it desperately poor. It boasts all the features that one would expect to find in a small regional capital, including schools, a hospital, restaurants, hotels, and NGOs. It even has its own, virtually constant electricity supply—a rarity in the Dominican Republic, where rolling blackouts are common. The relative affluence of Pedernales is due to its economic diversification. Apart from being a major centre for agricultural trade, Pedernales houses one of the region's ports, a cement factory, and also a factory that sorts second-hand clothing. Due to its location on the border with Haiti, it has a special economic function as a major hub on a trade

route that connects Santo Domingo with Port-au-Prince via the island's southern towns: Barahona and Pedernales on the Dominican side; Anse-à-Pitres, Marigot and Jacmel on the Haitian side.

Haitians living in Pedernales and across the border in Anse-à-Pitres depend upon access to Dominican markets to undertake economic activities as producers, distributors, and consumers, since Anse-à-Pitres lacks the diverse economic activities and large enterprises of Pedernales (Horst and Taylor, forthcoming 2014). Residents of Anse-à-Pitres walk to Pedernales daily to work, sell, shop, or use services that are not available on the Haitian side of the border. These include accessing some health and education services, obtaining Internet access, paying bills, sending or receiving remittances, buying phone credit, and travelling further afield. These are not merely conveniences: residents suffer economic and social hardship when it is not possible to cross the border. Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the border crossing is open every day from eight o'clock in the morning until five o'clock in the afternoon. No identification is necessary: crossing is simply a matter of walking over the footbridge spanning the river between the two countries. As a result of this porosity, life is administratively, economically, and socially intertwined across the border and it has been so for at least a century. In fact, from an economic perspective, the border is important to both nations. The Dominican Today (2013) reports that annual trade across the entire border amounts to approximately \$1.1 billion in formal transactions, and \$900 million in informal transactions.

An apt metaphor for this moral economy is the 'living fence', described by Sidney Mintz in 1962. "Living fences" are the hedges that demarcate the boundaries of the *lakou* (homestead) in the Haitian countryside as "living fences" that keep out trespassing humans and other animals, provide shade, prevent soil erosion, and are aesthetically pleasing. Their purpose is not only exclusion; they are also decorative, inviting, and often permeable. In key ways, the border region resembles these living fences. At once porous and closed, inclusive and exclusive, the border is far more than a container: it also facilitates productive activities, and it often invites rather than repels visitors. Moreover, the border is constituted as much by the people and objects that cross it daily as much as it is by state regulation.

Issues of nationality, economy, and culture intersect at the border in complicated ways. Relations between Dominicans and Haitians have often been described by scholars in terms of race. During Trujillo's regime, the idea that Dominicans are more Hispanic than African was cemented in official national culture through the production of history and the adoption of a

national colour, indio. Completely unrelated to the island's original indigenous inhabitants, the indio was defined as a Dominican of mixed descent. Scholars claim that the category was deliberately invented by the state to distance the Dominican Republic from Haiti, which was viewed as a black, and backwards, nation (Knight 1990; Torres-Saillant 1998). This brand of national racism lives on today in the treatment of Dominicans of Haitian descent, who are periodically (and increasingly) denied citizenship rights and subject to deportation, even if they were born in the Dominican Republic, possess Dominican identity documents, and have no cultural or administrative affiliation with Haiti.

On the border, things are somewhat different. Racism and discrimination are abundant, but the everyday relationships between Dominicans and Haitians are constituted differently by virtue of the proximity of the two nations, as well as of the two nationalities. Inter-marriage is relatively common, and the border towns are mutually dependent upon each other for trade in goods and labour. Indeed, many border residents—both Dominicans and Haitians—told me that the two towns have good relations “because we have always traded with each other.” Many people also told me that if Haiti and the Dominican Republic were economic equals, racism would cease to exist. Hence the moral relationship between the two peoples is explained by their economic relationship. They appear to closely echo the sentiments of Adam Smith two centuries earlier, when he claimed that nations would cooperate because they benefit from trading with each other. This emphasis on economy contradicts one scholar who has written about moral economy, who claims that people throughout history generally de-emphasize the role of economy in forming their behaviour (Sayer, 2000).

An emphasis on the benefits of market relations does not, however, mean that Haitians and Dominicans have an even deal. The drastically lower wages paid to Haitians working in Pedernales, relative to their Dominican counterparts, is just one example of economic inequality and the limited power of Haitians to negotiate. Striking material difference between the two sides of the border also shape relations in socially symbolic ways. The two towns retain different cultural aesthetics, despite their daily lives having been intermingled for so long. There are plenty of ways in which Haitians materially diverge. Their forms of dress, how they do their hair, the things they carry with them, and the aesthetics of the built environment in Haiti are all symbolic indicators that Haitians are different to Dominicans. These differences signal national identity in a similar fashion to which Bourdieu described “distinction” as signalling class. They are a form of

agency, but they also mark out Haitians for their nationality, and this can lead to discrimination against them, especially by state actors. To counter this discrimination, some Haitians will try to “pass” as Dominican through the clothing they wear, getting fake ID cards, paying bribes, travelling via private car rather than bus. These are not just evasive tactics: people actively use the economic and cultural differences to their own advantage, especially when it comes to making a living.

The primary lesson I took from my research on the border is that it is difficult, and perhaps counter-productive, to pin down one primary mode through which difference is created, enacted, and mobilized to discriminate. Bourdieu's notion of distinction does not sufficiently allow for the kinds of self-creation observed by Miller; nor does it provide sufficient depth to understanding how economic differences between nations contribute to stratification. Instead, the economic and symbolic effects of national difference play out alongside class and other stratifying factors. Paul Farmer (1996) has described the tendency of stratifying factors to converge as “axes” of social difference. The greater number of axes that form a part of a person's identity and circumstances—such as race, nationality, gender, poverty—the greater the likelihood of them meeting with real or structural violence. How are these axes signified? Certainly non-material communication is one avenue, especially through inter-personal contact. But, in the main, our readings of the identities, moralities, and circumstances of the people we meet are first and foremost interpreted from their material appearance – their own bodies, the objects they carry, and the spaces they occupy. Moreover, we actively use these material domains to communicate a sense of ourselves as moral beings who incorporate different kinds of market and non-market values. It is these processes of signification that make up the daily workings of reproducing the moral economy.

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