

Dominican Funnies, Not So Funny: The Representation of Haitians in Dominican Newspaper Comic Strips, After the 2010 Earthquake

by

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Abstract

The Dominican Republic and Haiti share the same island. Both countries have, since colonial times, had a tumultuous inter-relationship. Most of the geopolitical conflict stems from Haitians migrating into the Dominican Republic. The Dominican Republic has been unwelcoming towards the incoming immigrants. Since the colonial era, conservative Dominican nationalists have resorted to denigrating Haitian immigrants; a phenomenon that still permeates all of Dominican society. This paper will demonstrate how one Dominican newspaper, *El Listin Diario*, in the “funnies” section, depicts Haitians in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake. By providing examples of the different pictures¹ published, I will illustrate how racially biased depictions of Haitians and Dominicans are visually reinforced for the reader. In this paper, I present different comic pictures (in individual square form), place them into their appropriate context, and assess how Haitians and Dominicans are illustrated.²

Keywords: Listin Diario, comic Strips, 2010 Earthquake, antihaitianismo, anti-Haitianism, cholera.

As a result of the 2010 earthquake that struck Hispaniola (Haiti and the Dominican Republic), the Dominican Republic responded with mixed-reactions. Immediately after the earthquake, the Dominican Republic responded positively, by providing vast amounts of assistance to Haitian victims. However, not long after the earthquake the Dominican government altered its constitution out of fear that an influx of Haitian immigrants would migrate into the Dominican Republic. Once news about the cholera epidemic in Haiti disseminated, the Dominican government rapidly closed its border to Haitians.

The Dominican government reacted out of fear that Haitians, in their attempt to escape the aftermath of the natural disaster, would immigrate into the Dominican side of the island and spread cholera. According to Robles, “experts worry that the goodwill sown between the two nations in the months since the quake will quickly dissipate, as recovery stalls and more Haitian migrants cross illegally into the Dominican Republic.” In addition, the Dominican Republic’s recent constitution’s amendment has made it increasingly difficult for Haitians to attempt to remain in and/or enter the Dominican Republic.

The Dominican Republic’s resistance towards accepting Haitian immigrants can be attributed to a popular Dominican ideology commonly referred to as antihaitianismo or anti-Haitianism. Anti-Haitianism plays a crucial role in Dominicans’ perceptions of Haitians. Ernesto Sagas supplements this argument by latching history as the cause, suggesting, “Antihaitianismo ideology combines a legacy of racist Spanish colonial mentality, nineteenth-century racial theories, and twentieth-century cultural neoracism into a web of anti-Haitian attitudes, racial stereotypes, and historical distortions” (ix). Pedro San Miguel, on the other hand, extends Anti-Haitianism’s definition by adding that:

Antihaitianismo consists of a hostile, unsympathetic, or derogatory stance towards Haiti, its people, and culture. It is, therefore, a particular kind of bigotry: a prejudice against a specific nation and its citizens. Because of the background of the Haitian population, composed largely of persons of African ancestry, anti-Haitianism is permeated by racism and deprecating notions about people of African descent in general. However, it possesses special manifestations, traceable to the way in which the Haitian nation came to exist and to the specific milieu in which it emerged. (111)

Anti-Haitianism bases Dominican identity by constructing Haiti and Haitians as the Dominican Republic’s natural *other*. According to David Howard, anti-Haitianism contends that Haitians embody Dominicans’ cultural contrast (5). Since, Anti-Haitian Dominicans side with the colonial heritage they inherited from the Spanish, they believe that these cultural contrasts are enough reasons to negate Haitians entry into Dominican society. Anti-Haitian Dominicans wish to preserve their colonial heritage and deem Haitians a threat to the culture that they are trying to preserve.

One of the Dominican Republic’s most well-known national newspaper, *El Listin Diario* holds a comic strip series known as “Doña Mármara y su inofensivo marido Don Chichí”. In the comic series, we see disparities in the ways Haitians are represented in contrast to Dominicans. This paper argues that these disparities serve to reinforce negative racial stereotypes that depict the Haitian and Dominican masses in a generalized manner.

Haitians' physical attributes are deformed; meanwhile Dominicans are erroneously depicted as white people with lesser physical distortions than Haitians. The Dominican media is one of many central venues in which anti-Haitian sentiment is produced (Sagas, 76-77). Sagas argues that:

Political cartoons usually imply feelings that are too strong or controversial to be printed, and in the case of the Dominican media, they offer an interesting and perceptive insight into antihaitianismo. A selection of political cartoons from Dominican newspapers reflects a strong anti-Haitian bias. These political and editorial cartoons speak for themselves and represent a poignant example of the reproduction of antihaitianismo ideology in the Dominican mass media. Moreover, some of these cartoons are blatantly racist, with black characters seemingly taken from the United States' 'Old South.' Haitians are traditionally stereotyped as destitute blacks, whereas Dominicans and the Dominican Republic are portrayed in favorable terms, usually by white figures. The message that these cartoons convey is simple and unequivocal: Haitians are black, Dominicans are not; Haiti is a trouble spot, therefore, the Dominican Republic must always be on the alert regarding Haiti's potential threat. (78)

The depiction of Haitians in the 'funnies' series also resonates with the Dominican masses' self-perception. According to Howard, in the Dominican Republic, "race" is inextricably linked to "aesthetics" to the extent that Dominicans believe that "people have 'fine' or 'bad' hair, a 'clear' or 'burnt' complexion"(Howard, 14). In essence, for Dominican people are described as beautiful (the whiter) or ugly (the blacker) Appearing white continues to be a preference for many Dominicans, for "Social prejudice is frequently phrased in aesthetic terms, and being blanco/a remains a social and aesthetic ideal for many" (Howard, 14). Yet, aside from the physical distortions, this comic series derides Haitian immigration while parodying the cholera epidemic.

The Dominican Republic's tumultuous relationship with its neighbor country, Haiti, has historical roots. One historical anomaly the reader must become aware of is of the Dominican Republic's uniqueness for attaining its independence. Unlike the rest of the Latin American and Caribbean countries, the Dominican Republic did not obtain its independence from a European colonial super power, instead it obtained its 'freedom' from its neighbor-country Haiti.

The Dominican Republic's independence came about as a result of it being occupied by the Haitian army from 1822-1844. This brief 22-year occupation resulted from Haitians wanting to ensure that no colonial power ever set foot on the island.

The Haitian government's goal was to protect the island from any foreign colonial threat that would attempt to re-establish slavery, which the Haitians had permanently abolished as a result of the Haitian Revolution. During the occupation, France had established a deal with President Boyer to repay France for the financial losses that resulted from the 'slave' revolt of the 1800s (Sagas and Inoa, 75). President Boyer, while attempting to pay off the French, obliged the Dominicans to also contribute towards repaying the debt. The Dominicans' objection to this new obligation was also fueled by their disappointment of how Haitians were mismanaging the Dominican economy. The Dominicans also believed that the Haitian occupiers were also mistreating them as if they were Haiti's colonial property. Plus, Dominicans felt undervalued by Haitians since the occupiers disrupted the Spanish culture already established in the Dominican Republic that Dominicans dearly valued.

In 1844, under a Dominican creole named Juan Pablo Duarte and his organization, the Trinitaria, the Dominicans executed a revolt that successfully expelled the Haitian occupiers. At this juncture in time, Santo Domingo, the former Spanish colony on the eastern side of Hispaniola, became the country we know today as the Dominican Republic. This particular historical event is credited for fomenting and establishing anti-Haitian sentiment in the Dominican national identity.

Conservative anti-Haitian Dominican nationalists have used the Dominican independence period, as well as the subsequent Haitian military invasion attempts that lasted into the 1850s, to foment anti-Haitian sentiment amongst the Dominican masses. The Dominican elite has always sought to depict Haiti, since colonial times, as attempting to take over the Dominican Republic, even through immigration. In fact, Dominicans have a term for current Haitian immigration—they call it a 'pacific invasion'. Joaquin Balaguer, one of the Dominican Republic's most well-known anti-Haitianist politician and ideologue, proposed this concept (31) throughout his extensive political career. Pacific invasion refers to Haitians who illegally, but peacefully, (unlike the 19th century when they entered militarily and heavily armed) enter the Dominican Republic under the alleged ulterior motive of denationalizing the country; thus, fulfilling Toussaint L'Overture's goal of making the island one and indivisible under Haiti's dominion.

In 1930, dictator Rafael Trujillo y Molina comes to power. Trujillo, ironically of Haitian ancestry, aimed to present himself as the savior of the Dominican nation with goals of reconstructing the Dominican nation to fit his ideal model of 'nationhood'. His attempt to foment a new nationalism called for a genocidal attack against Haitian immigrants who in 1938 remained in the Dominican Republic after the cane harvest season. This genocidal attack, along with an increasing military presence in the borderlands, and his call for the importation of whites into the Dominican Republic to increase the Dominican Republic's white population, led to a massive halt of Haitian immigration into the Dominican Republic.

Trujillo, was an ardent nationalist, who promoted anti-Haitianism as part of the State ideology (Sagas, 46). The dictator came to power during the time of massive European nationalist dictatorships, such as: Germany's infamous Hitler, who Trujillo befriended, Italy's Mussolini, and Spain's Franco. The Dominican dictator ensured to create a staff of historians to 'whiten' Dominican history. Trujillo's intellectual cronies emphasized Dominicans' Spanish ancestry while de-emphasizing their African heritage. The ardent nationalist politician coupled the intellectual discourse with new legislature that imposed penalties against anyone engaging in any cultural activity that resonated with African culture. In the beginning of the 20th century, Dominican intellectuals studied abroad in Europe, during the era when scientific racism was prevalent in Western academia (Torres-Saillant, 49). The racist theories endorsed by the Dominican intelligentsia of the time, was purposefully utilized to further propagate its political agenda and indoctrinate Dominican citizens.

After Trujillo's assassination in 1961, Haitians felt safe to immigrate into the Dominican Republic in search for work. From this period into the 21st century, the Dominican Republic has found itself struggling to curtail and appropriately address the entrance of vast numbers of undocumented Haitian immigrants. The presence of undocumented immigrants has posed a series of problems for the Dominican Republic.

One of these problems consists of undocumented Haitian immigrants permanently settling in the Dominican Republic. Many of these immigrants give birth to their children there. Since, the children are of Haitian descent, the Dominican government refuses to recognize the Haitian children born in the Dominican Republic as Dominican nationals.

In addition, many Haitians have been deported, despite the fact that some Haitians have been residing in the Dominican Republic for generations at a time. Various institutional barriers have been created to keep Haitians from integrating into the Dominican society (i.e., with lack of legal documents that prove Dominican citizenship, Haitians cannot attain better jobs, attend schools, or live in adequate housing, etc.). Aside from institutional barriers, Dominicans' attitudes have been influenced by the elite and their institutions to enforce anti-Haitian sentiment. Sagas informs that:

Antihaitianismo ideology is part of a set of attitudes that are acquired early in life and reinforced by the socialization process. Family and friends are the first agents of this socialization process. Just as they were taught, they teach children the basic tenets of antihaitianismo ideology. Their actions are a mere reflection of a process that is repeated from generation to generation. [...] Equally important is the role played by public education in this process. Public education, unlike the teachings of family and friends, is not a loose, uncoordinated, and incomplete process.

Public education is a coordinated and formative process. It is institutionalized and supported by the state and has as its main objective the formation of tomorrow's Dominican citizens. (73-74)

The comic strip series, “Doña Mármara y su inofensivo marido Don Chichí”, is a result of the historical process delineated above. The newspaper cartoon series depicts Haitians and Dominicans differently. These differences consist of the following: Haitians rarely speak to Dominicans, an indication that both groups rarely interact (which is untrue) and the possibility that this can be related to linguistic barriers. In the pictorial depictions, erroneous racial disparities are such that all Dominicans are presented as white and all Haitians resemble Sambo³-like images. Moreover, the theme of the comics includes sarcasm and hyperbolic half-truths regarding Haitian immigration in general and the effects of the natural disaster.

The *El Listin Diario's* comic strips portray erroneous racial depictions of Haitians and Dominicans even though the Dominican and Haitian population consists of people with a variety of skin tonalities. The Dominican Republic, for instance, is one of the most phenotypically diverse groups of people in the world. In this country miscegenation between blacks and whites is “the highest in all of Latin America and perhaps the modern world” (Sidanius, Peña, and Sawyer, 845)—even surpassing Brazil in its greater range of skin tones. Similarly to the Haitian population, a great percentage of the Dominican population is also dark-skinned.

Haitians, however, are more phenotypically homogenous and darker-skinned than Dominicans. One can, though, still find some light-skinned Haitians among the Haitian popular class. Suffice it to say, that the Dominican ‘funnies’ does an injustice to the actual reality of what Dominicans and Haitians actually look like.

Depicting Haitians and Dominicans as stark opposites serves a purpose. Presenting Dominicans consistently as white and Haitians as black makes it easier for the reader to determine who belongs to what group. However, a danger lies within the implications of making one group consistently white and the other black. The notion of blackness solely belonging to one side of the island and not the other mistakenly associates Dominicans as being a white people. Furthermore, this suggestion also holds racist implications, indicating that blacks cannot partake in Dominican nationality. When specific groups of people are excluded from a society because of their race, then the society in question is racist.

These comic strips present the Haitian popular class in Sambo-like fashion. During the Jim Crow era, the US South was known for depicting African Americans with large black heads, white eyes, and immense protruding lips. Gender wise, most of the Haitians in the Dominican comic strips are generally male, an indication of a sexist interpretation of the Haitian migratory phenomenon. However, when females are depicted they are generally illustrated as nearly indistinguishable from the males. The female caricatures are often shirtless, similarly to the males, and only wear a triangular skirt. The illustrations blur the gender lines, suggesting that Haitians are viewed and addressed in generalized terms.

Since January 2011 until August 2012 the Dominican newspaper has displayed a total of 44 comic strips that either discuss Haiti and Haitians or display images of Haitians. These pictures are usually published when particular events that address Haitian immigration or politics are discussed in the newspaper. The comic strips serve to bolster what the journalists report on, in addition to symbolically reinforcing the Dominican-Haitian border for the Dominican audience. At this point I will demonstrate a few examples of the pictures that have been published in *El Listin Diario*. Due to space constraints, the most significant images published throughout the months mentioned above will be displayed.

13 Jun 2010



The June 13, 2010 square displays Haitian children in the streets of the Dominican Republic asking Dominicans for charity. A disabled Dominican man with crutches, who crosses the street, complains, “I’m screwed, in order for one to now be able to ask for charity one has to be a Haitian”. The handicapped Dominican believes that he cannot compete with Haitian children for donations. Feeling defeated, he believes that Haitians (undocumented immigrants) have a monopoly over Dominican charity. This picture argues unfairness.

Yet, this square fails to address if this Dominican handicapped citizen is receiving public assistance from the Dominican government. Although, there is a Dominican driving a car (notice that both Dominicans are white and the Haitian children are black) we see that not all Dominicans are poor or are in need of charity. Only because the Dominican is in the car (an indication that he has access to some sort of income) does not mean that the Dominican in the vehicle is going to (or willing to) give the Haitian children charity.

One silent critique however, targets Haitian parents. Haitian parents are not seen in this square, leaving the reader to infer that Haitian parents are bad parents who do not supervise their children and instead prefer to have their semi-nude children (including female children) engage in a sort of informal child labor in the dangerous streets of the Dominican Republic. This square castigates Haitian parents, who are immigrants, as having lesser moral values than Dominicans.

29 August 2010



The left-sided bubble states: "Which has been the biggest Haitian invasion: Toussaint's in 1801 Dessaline's in 1805 or Boyer's in 1822?" The bubble on the right replies: "The 2010 earthquake." This sarcastic image demonstrates how the two white-skinned Dominican males perceive Haiti and Haitians. Their perception of Haitian immigration is tainted with nationalist history emanating from colonial times that depict their Haitian neighbor as a foreign invader country. Clearly, these two men see their country as victimized by Haiti.

This square signifies the geopolitical dilemma standing between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, that when natural disasters occur Haitians are known for migrating into the Dominican Republic for safety. As Sagas stated, cartoon images warn Dominicans to be constantly on the alert of social turmoil occurring in Haiti (8).

28 October 2010



The left-side bubble states: “And why can’t we Dominicans construct a wall on the frontiers the way the Americans do?” The right-side bubble replies: “Because we are not blonde, nor do we have dollars.” Dominicans want to create a wall, signifying that they do not want Haitians to enter the Dominican Republic. Prohibiting a particular group of people for that matter, from entering one’s country suggests exclusivity. Excluding a particular group, particularly in the Dominican-Haitian case, from taking part in a society increases racist sentiment. Dominicans, like the US who constructed a fence to keep Mexicans out, want to imitate the US by constructing a wall to keep out Haitians.

Since, Haitians do the majority of construction work in the Dominican Republic, Dominicans have stigmatized construction labor in the Dominican Republic as Haitian work. The stigmatization of certain labor indicates that ironically Dominicans would most likely hire the same Haitians they are struggling to keep out of the country to build the wall. This picture says nothing of who will build the wall; neither does it indicate if other Dominicans and/or Haitians will express resistance towards building the wall. If Dominicans would be the ones to build the wall, this would signify that Dominicans are more than willing to “take back” their nation by ignoring the Haitian stereotype (of construction work being “Haitian” work), especially if it means restoring the nation. In other words, building the wall for anti-Haitian Dominicans would be a nationalist project.

Although Dominicans are illustrated as white people, they know that they are not blonde. The real whites with the blonde hair are the Americans; thus, the reference to dollars. Despite the fact that Barack Obama is the President of the United States, blondes are still the real Americans! Interestingly, the two Dominicans acknowledge that the US influences Dominican-international relations and they, as Dominicans, feel powerless in attempting to dictate who enters the Dominican Republic.

30 October 2010



The left-side bubble reads: “You Dominicans are mean, with the Haitians”. The right side bubble states: “You have to allow that all of the sick people with cholera enter [your country].” The Pan American Organization of Health, depicted as a white male in a white coat, wearing a black tie, is intervening in Dominica foreign policy. Don Chichí, one of the main characters of the series, represents the Dominican Republic. A black body, with a skull-head, however, represents Haitians, symbolizing death with the word Cholera inscribed on its body. Haitian bodies are contaminated, deadly, and are to be avoided at all costs, even if the international community sees the Dominican Republic as “mean”. Haiti, as a nation, is stereotyped as sickened and international spectators criticize the Dominican Republic for not sympathizing with their Haitian neighbors. For Dominicans to sympathize they would have to open their borders. This square represents defensive nationalism at its finest. This picture relies on Dominicans’ fears that an uncontrolled or unpatrolled border will pave way for diseases and lead to the destruction of Dominicans’ lives.

4 November 2010



The left bubble affirms: “What are cholera’s symptoms?” The right-side bubble angrily replies: “That it gives you cholera!” Cholera in Spanish has double meaning. It can signify the actual disease and it can also mean rage or anger. This square engages in wordplay. These two Dominicans are receiving their information from the Dominican media (TV). The Dominican public is learning how this new disease was imported into their country. We can infer that Haitians are being blamed for this new disease entering the DR, thus leading the Dominican man to react angrily.

14 November 2010



The bubble declares, “Did you notice that the island is indivisible?” This square has historic connotations. In the early 19th century the Haitian constitution proclaimed the island to be one and indivisible. Conservative Dominican Nationalists have used this statement to insinuate that Haitians still want to take over the Dominican Republic and merge both countries. In this square we see two Haitians, a male and female. We know the figure on the left is female because of her skirt. A white Dominican male, however, represents the Dominican Republic. Similar to the previous picture, white Dominican men represent the entire Dominican Republic. Both parties are separated by water, indicating that a natural disaster has taken place, leaving both countries flooded. The metaphor “we’re both in the same boat” aptly applies to this square. Both parties stand on rooftops, implying that each country is symbolic of a home. This square reflects how both countries are subject to the same natural disasters, yet historical metaphors are used to interpret their present circumstances.

5 January 2011



The bubble coming from the TV set says: “Residents of a neighborhood in Santiago threaten to kick out Haitians who defecate in plastic bags and launch them at schools, churches. Causing outbreaks of..”. The old Dominican man, Don Chichi, replies, “Be careful that they can say that they are racist.” This square stereotypes Haitians as lacking hygiene and disrupting Dominican culture. The Dominican media seeks to blame Haitians for not only throwing feces at valued Dominican institutions, but also spreading diseases, providing a subtle and implied reference to cholera. The Dominican couple watching TV fears that the people of Santiago will be regarded as racist. Notice that the Dominican news reporter is also a white male.

The Dominican news does not provide solutions to the country's social problems; only the problems are acknowledged. Don Chichi's comment suggests that Dominicans have been accused of being racist against Haitians. He demonstrates that he is familiar with how the language of political correctness should be spoken. Haitians launching feces is a Dominican stereotype Dominicans have against Haitians. Since Haiti lacks proper indoor irrigation Haitians have been known to launch bags of feces to their rooftops. The Dominican media has taken this stereotype and exploited and publicized it to warn Dominicans of potential Haitians entering their neighborhoods. Instilling fear in Dominicans about the potential for Haitians to launch feces in public places of the Dominican Republic sends out a clear message to the viewer: If you see Haitians beware, protect your neighborhood by ridding them of the Haitian presence. The newscaster subtly justifies xenophobia and generalizations of the Haitians by proving the example of the city of Santiago. We can see a clear example of this sort of news coming from Santiago, Republica Dominicana, "Local residents also said that the Haitians posed a danger of spreading cholera, since they lived in overcrowded quarters with no bathrooms, leading them to defecate in plastic bags that they left on the premises of schools, homes, stores and elsewhere" (EFE, *Latin American Herald Tribune*).



16 January 2011

The Dominican news reporter informs that: "The traditional three wise men will not be able to come this year...The camels caught cholera". The sarcastic Dominican media blames Haitians for ruining the Dominican holidays. It is obvious at this point that these comic pictures rely on converting Haitians into scapegoats for humor effect. The questions that must be asked are: Why must the Dominican media take it to this extreme to denigrate Haitians? Is celebrating the denigration of Haitians, or anti-Haitianism, simply being "Dominican"? Will one stop being Dominican if one refuses to laugh at these jokes?

19 January 2011



The square says, “The same right”. According to this square, the Dominican Republic finds itself deporting Haitians, while receiving Dominicans who have been deported from elsewhere. Similarly to Haitians, Dominicans receive comparable treatment abroad. Yet, this maltreatment from abroad does not mean that Dominicans will treat Haitians any less worst.

28 January 2011



The airplane carries a bag filled with money that the Dominican government is sending to the University of Haiti, thus the dollar signs circling the bag. The Dominican couples holds up a picket sign protesting the 4% the Dominican educational system receives annually from the Dominican national budget.

The Dominicans in the image protest donating Dominican educational funds to Haiti's educational system because they perceive their own institutions being neglected. Dominicans believe that the \$30million dollars donated to the University of Haiti could be better put to use if it were donated to the Dominican Republic's educational system. Besides, the funds being donated to Haiti come from the Dominican people's tax money. These Dominicans resent having their money spent on a people (i.e., Haitians) who they have considered to be a foreign threat for centuries. Anti-Haitian Dominicans consider this a neglect of the Dominican people by the Fernandez presidential administration. To send money to Haiti, is to turn one's back on the Dominican Republic, thus an act of betrayal to the *Patria* (homeland). Similarly to the first square addressed, Dominicans, in the aftermath of the earthquake see Haitians as the only ones in the island receiving financial assistance.



5 March 2011

The left-side bubble says: "How would things be if we merged with Haiti?" The next bubble reads: "Would they be the Dominican Republic of the west and we the Haiti of the east?" This square reflects Dominicans' paranoia and fears that the Dominican Republic would be denationalized through the massive influx of Haitian immigrants. Dominicans fear that their population would be shifted towards Haiti and Haitians would move into the Dominican side of the island. Since the Dominican Republic is less poor than Haiti, Haitians migrate to the Dominican side in search for a better life. Dominicans perceive that they gradually lose their country to Haitians as the Haitian population in the Dominican side grows.

15 July 2011



A line divides Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The line represents the border. The first bubble states: “Haiti gave us the cholera”. The second bubble proclaims, “The Dominican Republic gave us the cholera”. The country furthest to the right is Puerto Rico. Puerto Ricans blame Dominicans and Dominicans blame Haitians for importing cholera into their country. This square represents a ‘blame game’. If Haitians were to have adequately been given a voice, Haitians would then have accurately pointed to the UN’s MINUSTAH who brought cholera to Haiti. According to Lauren Carasik,

As details emerged about the origin of the cholera epidemic, a disease not seen in Haiti in almost a century prior to the outbreak, it became clear that the UN stabilisation force, known by its French acronym, MINUSTAH, was to blame. Yet, as we approach the one-year mark since human rights groups filed a claim against the UN for bringing cholera to Haiti, the UN has failed to respond to the charges leveled against it. (Aljazeera.com)

11 December 2011



A Dominican immigration guard sits by the border. His bubble reads “This is not my problem...This is an issue for the guards”. This image criticizes Dominican immigration guards for not being efficient in guarding the borderlands. The guard looks detached expressing no concern for Haitian immigration, thus the depiction of a lazy man in uniform sitting idly by not doing his duty. The duty of the immigration officer is to secure the border. The immigration officer is refusing to do his job; thus, the happy (the wide smile) Haitian running into the Dominican Republic. Yet, this square remains silent on Haitian authority. It is obvious that Dominicans perceive that this is a problem that they have to handle since they are the affected party.

In conclusion, the comic series portrays Haitians as black and Dominicans as whites with European features. The selected squares depict Haitians as Sambo-looking caricatures and the Dominican people as devoid of any African phenotypical features. Haitians are blamed for bringing cholera into the Dominican Republic. In fact, the cholera epidemic is used to create humor among Dominicans; a way that further ensures Dominican solidarity against the neighbor foreigners. None of the selected comic squares express sympathy for Haitians’ plight. Instead, historicized reactionary nationalist rhetoric is reiterated to interpret Haitian immigration into the Dominican Republic as a result of the 2010 earthquake. Illegal immigration, funds being spent on Haitians and not on Dominicans, natural disaster, disease, Haitian repatriations, are all topics the comic series “Doña Mármara y su inofensivo marido Don Chichí” since the 2010 earthquake addresses.

Notes

¹ The Dominican newspaper *El Listin Diario* in listindiario.com.do publishes their funnies in only one square. Therefore, every day the reader can expect to encounter one square. The comic strips are located on the last pages of this paper.

² If the reader is interested in viewing more comic strips, they can go to *El Listin Diario's* online website listindiario.com.do.

³ Sambo is an old-school caricature used in the US South with large protruding lips and big mouth. He represented the negative stereotypes Whites had of Blacks (e.g., lack of intelligence, ugly, lazy, a person worthy of humiliating for humor's sake).

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