DOMESTIC VIOLENCE: TRUJILLO, TRUMP AND THE ADDICTION TO POWER

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LET’S START FROM THE BEGINNING.

Three years ago, on Christmas Eve, I drove my father through the winding roads of I-10, heading home to Jacksonville from a family reunion in Tampa that day. As usual, when my dad is with his family, he drinks excessively. One drink turned into many, and the usually gregarious but innocent husband turned into a different person. As he slurred his words, I became angrier and angrier that it was my job to keep the peace—an intermediary between him, the directions home, and my mom. We drove in silence as he grumbled complaints meant to attack my mother, accusing her of making him leave too early, killing the fun, and treating him like a child. Getting closer to home, past the blinding headlights of oncoming traffic, I turned on the Orange Park exit, past the post office and Wendy’s, and finally made it home safe.

These moments were typical of my childhood and now continue with less frequency in my adulthood—my dad is getting better.

When my father drinks, he doesn’t know how to stop. As I’ve grown older, I’ve understood his condition as a disease born out of unchecked mental illness and an even more sinister childhood. Since I was little, I knew of the whispered stories of his alcoholism, watched him terrorize my mother, and saw how generations of my family either ignored the problem or minimized the impact by comparing him to my much more violent grandfather. In a family where it seems like every father has struggled with alcoholism, drug addiction, or worse, one more drunk dad doesn’t seem to shock the conscience.

One week after that Christmas, dad was drunk again, but this time more violent. The worst part was sitting in my brother’s room as my mom blow-dried my hair at the command of my father. There was no rhyme or reason for this degradation. Forcing my mom to fix my hair at 8 p.m. was something he could do, so he did. He knew every button to push and every cruelty to wield to show his dominion over the household. Emasculated that my mom was the one who was really in charge—getting my brother and me to school, coordinating carpools, being the trusted disciplinarian and caretaker of everyone (including my father)—he took every opportunity to show he was the man of the house. Between her cries and the drying blood on their bedroom door, Uncle Ubaldi came by to pick up some tools for his car. I cried and looked at him past the laundry room door, which connected to our garage, and he stood still. He didn’t come in; he didn’t help. He talked to my father, grabbed what he came for, and

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left. I stared in disbelief for a while, went back to the room, and sobbed with my mother.

**Two nights**

Two nights of reflecting off the glass  
And circling the room where it happened.

Back in our apartment, I remember the clean marbled floor  
With a pool of blood by the door.

They didn’t hear me knocking and I walked into  
Something I shouldn’t have.

Rug underneath my toes,  
Hole through the wall and –

Tomorrow we go to school, we go to work, we hide the  
Bruises, the cuts under our shirts.

Me and my mom become one because there’s no room for two.

**WHY THE POEMS, AND HOW TO READ THEM.**

Throughout this piece, my goal is to show how personal narratives and poetry can answer legal and social questions, and more specifically how stories of diaspora, dictators, and domestic abuse can serve as a mirror to self-creating patriarchal and racial systems and inspire revolutionary opposition to those systems. Personal narratives are especially useful when studying marginalized communities, since these narratives often challenge stereotypes. Feminist writer bell hooks notes that “language is a place of struggle,” where radical movement away from domination is possible.¹ Through sharing personal narratives, storytellers create spaces of “radical openness,” which not only helps the author but can elevate forgotten histories.

In sharing my personal narratives and poetry, I embrace this radical openness. Poetry has been a cornerstone of my healing throughout my life. Since I was a teenager and recent migrant to Florida, I used poetry, songs, and writing to digest the world around me. When I felt misunderstood by my parents, angsty about boys, or deeply troubled by the physical and emotional abuse I witnessed at home, I used writing to help me cope. Throughout college, this passion grew as I submitted my work for publication, opened at showcases for other poets, and frequently performed in open mic nights around town. I have always been a private person (a remnant of years of toughening up and laughing through trauma in order to cope). Poetry allows me to share my most private thoughts in a form that seems at least a little bit detached from my reality. Through poems, I choose what stories need to be told and how I respond to them.

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¹. BELL HOOKS, Choosing the Margin as a Space for Radical Openness, in YEARNINGS: RACE, GENDER, AND CULTURAL POLITICS 204 (1989).
In my mission to remain radically open, I also hope to make my poetry as accessible as possible without losing meaning. I invite you to read the poems out loud first, to gather some phonetic meaning, and then again silently to yourself to focus on the words themselves. Academics and authors of Western poetry and have relegated poetry to an art form of the privileged, but many works like Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen* or Aída Cartagena Portalatín’s *Yania Terria* have taken back this form to reveal revolutionary visions of what poetry can mean to everyday people. Leaning on these predecessors, I hope to continue the tradition of radical poetry through an exploration of what it means to be a Dominican daughter of diaspora, with a past of domestic abuse, and what that past says about our political processes.

First, I will trace how the Dominican system of machismo is closely tied to Trujillismo and how what happens in the home creates culture and policy. Then, I will compare the Dominican Republic’s (D.R.) and the United States’ (U.S.) use of political rhetoric to advance racist and anti-immigrant agendas, and how political amnesia threatens organized opposition. Finally, I end with a call to action emboldened by the revolutionary history of the D.R, which is still fraught with problems, but continues to call for an end to government corruption, racism, and oppressive systems. In short, we must remain vigilant: vigilant at home where racism and patriarchy are learned, vigilant in society where these systems are multiplied and normalized, and vigilant of history where we can remember old tactics to solve new issues.

**When the personal becomes systemic and political.**

It wasn’t until relatively recently that I’ve forgiven my mother for staying with him for so many years. I remember the conversation vividly. I was a junior in college, sitting outside my dorm and smoking a cigarette. My mom called—we speak almost every day—and we talked about the day. The conversation turned when I learned that he was back in his old habits again—drinking on the weekends with Uncle Ubaldi, who promptly left as things got out of hand. I remember being so angry at my mother. But, for the first time, she explained why she stayed: she loved him, he loved her, and she loved us enough to know that a family without a father just wasn’t a family to her. My mom had never explained her reasons to me, never admitted that she truly loved him, and thought he loved her too. Two months ago, while passing time at a local laundromat, I asked her what advice she would give me if I was in her situation: “Leave him, he doesn’t love you,” she said. While I was folding my clothes, a middle-aged White woman came up to me, thanked me for trying, and said that her own mother was never able to leave him.

Domestic violence is not just a Dominican issue or an immigrant issue. It crosses cultures and races because it’s so neatly tied to patriarchy. While the Dominican brand of patriarchy is also defined by a colonial past and cultural understandings of machismo, U.S. White male dominance carries many similar traits. Both countries lift the experiences of White men above all else and have deeply entrenched hatred towards blackness and women. These cultural values are so intertwined with everyday life that they are often hard to point out.

I realized very young that no one would save us. Not because they didn’t realize the pain that my mom and I were experiencing, but because they had

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normalized the warning signs and internalized the criticisms against machismo. These systemic cultural understandings of what a father and man should be not only have an individual impact on families, but when replicated and augmented have the power to create patriarchal governments and politicians. Not only had our cousins and uncles internalized these messages, but so had we: my mother didn’t picture a family without a father, even if he was abusive. And I chose to blame her for not making the impossible choice to leave the father of her children.

The D.R.’s own history with paternalistic patriotism is a vivid example of how these patriarchal systems are born out of internalized machismo. One of the worst leaders in its history was Rafael Trujillo, whose reign from 1930 to 1961 relied on anti-Haitian hatred and U.S.-backed “whitening” of the country. Trujillo’s grandparents were Cuban, Dominican, and Haitian, but his mixed identity (which many Dominicans share today) did not stop him from committing the largest genocide in the Western hemisphere: the Perejil Massacre of 1937.

Trujillo’s upbringing was very typical for the time. Trujillo grew up with a middle-class family in San Cristobal, a rural town just west of the capital of Santo Domingo. He and his ten siblings were raised by Spanish, Haitian, and Dominican parents, and attended informal schools in people’s homes. Much of his early childhood history is unknown, since he hired state historians to rewrite his family history when he came into power. Something tells me that he emulated a male figure in his mannerisms and machismo, since it would be cynical to believe that his hatred was purely his own doing.

Rafael Trujillo was in the first class of Dominican officers to graduate from the Haina Military Academy in 1921, a military outpost run by U.S. Marines during U.S. intervention. Before his appointment to lead the national army, Trujillo was acquitted of rape and extortion by a commission of eight Marine officers. Rising quickly up the ranks, Trujillo became the commander of the Dominican National Army in 1924. Trujillo later used his power over the military to stage a coup against the president in 1930, taking the country hostage.

Throughout his reign, Trujillo and his army suppressed political activism and energized a national commitment to the racial cleansing of the Dominican people. Trujillo’s power permeated through all facets of society: schools became indoctrination grounds for nationalist rhetoric, government officials were hired and fired to prevent any internal revolution, and activists and journalists were jailed for printing anti-Trujillo sentiments.

Patriotism was closely tied to patriarchy and worship during the Trujillo years. Beginning in October 1935, the words “Dios y Trujillo” began appearing on official state documents.

Trujillo renamed the capital, Santo Domingo, “Ciudad Trujillo” in 1936, in his attempt to rebuild the social organization of the population after a storm destroyed

5. Id.
6. Id.
7. For example, in the Carta Civica distributed to schools beginning in 1939, the text reflected blind patriotism: “Love your country above all things and obey your government, as the best way of attaining the nation’s happiness, which is your happiness. . . If a man passes by your hour who wants to change the present order, have his arrested. He is the worst of bad men. . . He is your worst enemy.” Id., at 94.
8. ROORDA, supra note 4, at 96.
much of the infrastructure. National monuments, roads, and landscapes were also renamed after Trujillo; for example, the renaming of the highest mountain in the Dominican Republic, Pico Juan Pablo Duarte, to Pico Trujillo. Censorship, by both strictly limiting the press and public discourse and intercepting mail coming in and out of the island, became a tool used by the regime to stop the spread of criticism from local activists and outside commentators. All of these tactics solidified Trujillo’s complete control over the island and created a population loyal to “El Jefe” through fear and veneration. These tactics culminated in what academics and Dominicans themselves now call “Trujillismo”: Trujillo’s cult following and dominion over the social and physical landscape.

Trujillismo called for blind allegiance to his leadership. His stranglehold over the country culminated in 1937, when he ordered the systematic assassination of Haitians on the Dominican border to “purify” the country of the “Haitian problem.” It was dubbed the “Perejil Massacre” because it was rumored that Trujillo’s army determined who was Haitian or Dominican by their pronunciation of the word “Perejil” (the Haitian accent made it hard for some to roll the “r” in the word “perejil”). Conservative estimates calculate that between 1,000 and 30,000 Haitians (both Dominican born and not), were slaughtered during this time.

*El Corte*

Rayanos no are cut from the borders.
We don’t know exactly how many.
Aptly named, the Massacre River turns red for decades.

Two countries divided by imagined difference,
Invented stories of demographic anxiety.

La remedia sigue.

Trujillo dice que Haitianos están robando vacas
They’re coming to our country in hordes,
Getting too close to our women.

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9. Id. at 59.
10. Id. at 96.
11. Id. at 99.
13. A “rayano” is someone with mixed Haitian and Dominican descent and has been used by politicians to cast doubt on people’s nationality. Megan J. Myers, *Dos Rayanos-Americanos Rewrite Hispaniola: Julia Alvarez and Junot Díaz*, CONFLUENCIA: REVISTA HISPÁNICA DE CULTURA Y LITERATURA, FALL 2016, AT 170.
So we rounded them up, women and children,
And sent them to the slaughterhouse.

For a few cows – that didn’t go missing.

Años pasan pero en días.
Nadie está libre del corte.
No importa si eres “Domicancho” o no
Si no como pronuncias “perejil”?

Have you rolled your r’s lately?

La tierra lamenta la sangre que lleva
Le dice al cielo, al río
Ocho noches y días, ya basta.

They carry what they can through the shallow water
Wading through memories and wasting through currents.

How much are 30,000 bodies worth?
To Vincent, half a million would do.15

Still today, they march across the Massacre River
To avoid the Dominican police.
Some make it, and some are deported.
Back to a country they may not know.

La tierra ya harta
De guerra y machete
Respira una vez más
Para deshacerse del lío.

**GENERATIONS OF TRUJILLISMO**

His dictatorship left an indelible mark on Dominican fathers and families for centuries. “The evil of the father lasts,” argued writer Junot Diaz, author of *The Brief and Wonderful Life of Oscar Wao*, in an interview about his book in 2008:

> The consequences of those kinds of patriarchal traumas last to the point where the person no longer has contact with the origins of that evil. I had no concept that I was Trujillo’s son.

Diaz goes on to explain that his father “was a total copy of Trujillo.”16

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up in the military, his father treated the home like a dictatorship: “la dictadura de la casa.”17 Trujillo’s army enlisted fathers, brothers, and cousins that inevitably brought their work back home. While political renegades and activist were clear victims of the regime, the families living through this dictatorship, regardless of class or political leanings, were often also victims of an increasingly patriarchal and domineering way of life.

Sons and daughters of those that lived through this trauma have reflected on this lasting change in Dominican culture. Many recount the ways that their parents and grandparents chose to forget the brutality and focus on the stability and economic prosperity Trujillo brought to the country. Juleyka Lantigua-Williams, a former staff writer for The Atlantic, commented: “Trujillo’s regime had a paternal appeal for many Dominicans and it’s not a surprise that one of his many titles was Benefactor of the Nation.”18 Throughout the regime, families were required to hang pictures of El Jefe as a sign of loyalty to the dictator.19 Many of these families had uncles or grandfathers that worked for Trujillo. Williams later discovered that her grandfather was at some point El Jefe’s personal secretary, often sending invitations to young women to lavish balls in Trujillo’s palace, which often ended in sexual assault—or worse.20 These experiences permeated past the public realm into the private. Patriarchy and deference to El Jefe were baked into the social code for Juleyka: “I was expected to prefer and defer to men for decisions, control, and public leadership[.]”21

The traumas of this generation continue to shape the country’s culture to this day. Since I was young, I knew that my father was supposed to be “el jefe” of the house. While the U.S. has its own form of patriarchy, as do most countries, it’s nothing compared to the machismo that I experienced in the D.R. My father has always been a truck driver. Back in the island, he also often ran for positions in the local union, which my grandfather led in his time. These “old boys’ clubs” included weekend trips to Las Terrenas (the D.R.’s very own touristy, Las Vegas-like party city), long weekday nights in el colmado,22 and god knows what else. All my mother and I knew was that my dad rarely came home. We cherished those nights alone.

The worst insult // the dictator next door23

the worst insult in my house is “Rodriguez”
to be a Rodriguez you must be
ruthless
calculated
and proud

17. Id.
19. Id.
20. Id.
21. Id.
22. Corner store.
23. The Dictator Next Door by Eric Paul Roorda takes a deep dive into U.S. noninterventionist and imperialist policies during Rafael Trujillo’s regime in the 1930s and 40s. In this poem, I argue that the political history of non-intervention and colonial entitlement can also be thought of as an embodiment passed down from generation to generation, linked through patriarchal dominance and racial purification.
to marry a Rodriguez is a long-time tradition
of strong women and even stronger whiskey

sometimes I’m all coat of arms
and colonial fortitude
si tienes orgullo, nadie te toca

and if there’s a slight sinister pull to your breath
the better
quick steps make for a quick mind

la naturaleza del hombre
binds and robs women blind

sometimes I see him in my own movements
whirl of alcohol and temperament
twisting words to make me honest

I threw up on the sidewalk
broke a bottle near a trashcan
and made sure every picture
of our happiness
would taste like rot in your mouth.

sometimes I relish in the fact that I’m a Rodriguez
that I can chose to be vile
I can wait a while
and snake my way around you.

I went to church today
and I cried on the pew
and some old man wouldn’t give me the donation basket
so I took it from him.
and gave it to the too-nice lady behind me

something tells me father john and I
had a connection
and he saw me
and he really saw me

I went to church for two weeks straight
after a year of disillusionment

24. “If you have pride, no one can touch you”
25. “Man’s natural state”
I sobbed a prayer for my mother
and remembered a story my abuela once told me:

when I was young and pure and hopeless
I would ask the father for unblessed host
transubstantiation
made them divine
and I scarfed them down with holy water.

it’s been two weeks since I drove him back and he was drunk on Christmas
we missed the stop because he was slurring his words
all I wanted was to be home
to feel safe
to not hate
myself in what I saw of himself inside me

the worst insult in my house is to be my father
to be loved and love and give up your life
at the same time by taking another

to be my mother
and live your life for another
praying and hoping that this sweet hell will ease the pain of tomorrow
here’s to tomorrow.

TRUJILLO’S DAUGHTERS.

Generational trauma doesn’t end with Trujillo’s sons; it’s replicated by daughters and sustained by mothers. It is well-known that children of alcoholic parents have the highest risk of turning to alcohol themselves as they become adults. 26 My dad’s behavior growing up affected my interpersonal relationships in ways that I have yet to untangle. It also affected my self-worth and penchant for risk-taking. As a teenager and into my adulthood, I struggled with alcohol abuse and other addictions. I learned to deal with problems by ignoring them and forgetting about them. I had a hard time trusting others—and still do—since my trust has been continuously violated by a person that was supposed to be my biggest protector.

Reflecting on my struggles with alcohol abuse, my worst fear was turning into my father. My addiction signaled something larger than my self-mutilation—in my mind it was a catalyst for abusive behavior, linked together by machismo and defined by physical dominance. I noticed—or maybe imagined—that when I drank I became

more violent. I ruined friendships in drunken stupor, I became enraged by the smallest transgression, and I always woke up embarrassed of the person I knew I had become the night before. It took years of therapy—and it’s still an issue—to get a handle on my substance abuse and the underlying insecurities that shaped my relationships.

Addiction to alcohol and other substances is about power: the power to feel invincible and the powerlessness you have over your own actions. At home, I felt powerless against the abuse I witnessed. But I could drink, and I could steal, and I could cut my arms, and no one could take that away from me. This addiction to power has been passed down from as far back as my family can remember: my great-grandfathers on both sides were alcoholics. They just never expected that a daughter could also become an alcoholic.

I noticed early on that my father’s addiction was also about power: power over his household and family. I knew that if you stopped fighting him, if you made him feel like he was right, he would calm down. Over time, his need for power lessened. Maybe he woke up one day and noticed he was all alone. Having migrated himself to the U.S. when my younger brother, Arturo, was born, he had no family or friends here. He just had us. And he pushed us away with his drinking. He’s tried—he drinks less and is rarely violent—but I can’t truthfully say our relationship will ever be fully healed. Years of abuse do not go away with good effort, they take a great deal of undoing that may never finish.

As I reflect on my father, I know now that drinking and violence were the only languages he knew how to speak. His father, like his father’s father, drank in excess, and degraded his wife and children into total submission. His mother never held him and never told him she loved him. He was raised to believe that children were to be disciplined by fear. The fact that my father says, on occasion, that he loves me, is a miracle. It’s also not lost on me that I am incredibly lucky that he has never physically abused me. My father is not a bad man but a product of his circumstances. While his past does not absolve him, it does explain his mindset: if you were born in hell, would you know how to interact with the world?

These are self-creating systems that stem from childhood normalization of patriarchal dominance. The subtle acts of machismo at home, multiplied, have the potential to create lasting power imbalances. Academics, like Rachel Pain of Durham University (UK), have compared everyday terrorism (i.e. domestic violence) to global terrorism.27 In her view, both exert control through fear and can be counteracted through collective recognition of victims’ stories.28 By listening to survivors of domestic abuse, we can more readily identify the little acts of misogyny that lead to abuse, and end them.

About me (24, F, CA)

you turn to addiction
silently, secretly,
when anything goes wrong.
It’s in your blood.

28. Id. at 541.
One addiction was obvious: you didn’t fall,  
It’s too hot to wear your long-sleeved oxfords to school  
In the middle of a Florida Fall.  
The blood spilled from your mother right on your sleeves.  

She took you to a psych and you talked about your problems  
You turned to Jesus and God and cried about how you would never  
Ever hurt yourself if you just ALL GAVE YOUR ALL TO GOD  

I couldn’t be a Eucharistic Minister because I thought about  
Girls like that, but! I could lead the sermon on our yearly retreat.  

Senior year of high school you discover alcohol and the five-finger discount.  
After school you turn to Screwdrivers and Tanning like the white girls.  
You get caught with a PubSub and a facemask by an undercover cop  
Two years later another undercover cop “detains” you for underage drinking in North Carolina.  

And the Judge Orders you to go into “Substance Abuse Counseling”  

You’re all high and mighty when you overdose on  
Coke, alcohol and Advil  
Sent to the looney bin for 3 days without any outside contact  
Because you told the dumb nurse you wanted out.  

I don’t remember showering, but I do remember scratchy gray sweats,  
Group therapy and corn slop.  

You stay up for 3 days straight begging to see the psych who can send you home.  

Before graduating you go out with a bang!  
And get hospitalized for alcohol poisoning after the  
Annual booze cruise that you planned.  

The next day you graduate and barf up your insides.  

Some other addictions are less visible:  
You shop when you’re sad. Except you’re out of money. So you leave the state, you  
leave the country, you stop answering any texts. You’re out of money in fucking Nice,  
France and you realized at your fucking five course meal.  

And you sink into the water and order a beer.  

Unchecked, my addictive and violent behavior could lead (and still can lead)  
to recreating these systems of abuse. Through therapy, and a lot of internal work, I  
have recognized my addictions and fought hard to disentangle them from my identity.  
This personal struggle, however, lead me to realize political realities. To heal myself,
I looked at the history of feminine resilience against patriarchal regimes. These stories reveal that there can be powerful resistance against these regimes, and that it is not inevitable that we will succumb to our father’s illnesses. Instead, we can look back to forge a way forward.

**REVOLUTION IN THE D.R. AND THE MIRABAL SISTERS**

The D.R.’s subsequent revolution against the regime leaves us with lessons to be replicated in this political moment. A movement largely lead by three sisters, the Mirabals, took down the regime. Patria, María Teresa, and Minerva Mirabal were influential leaders of the 14th of June Movement that provoked international backlash against the regime and culminated in the assassination of Trujillo. Minerva, the most outspoken of the three sisters, had an often intimate and turbulent relationship with the dictator, which caused the Mirabal family to be politically blacklisted but encouraged other young revolutionaries to join the movement. During a party at Trujillo’s estate in San Cristóbal, Minerva caught Trujillo’s eye. It was widely known that Trujillo forced himself onto any young woman he deemed attractive and there was little recourse for women. Famously, Minerva rejected his advances at this party by slapping him, bringing her family notoriety and energizing the women’s movement against Trujillo.

In 1953, Trujillo blocked Minerva’s enrollment as a second-year law student until she gave a speech extolling him. After graduating at the top of her class in 1957, Minerva was not allowed to practice law, since authorities informed her that women could attend law school but could not obtain the license required for practice. Johnny Abbes, head of Trujillo’s secret police, commented that Minerva was “sick with radical Leftism, which, spreading during that time, drove her to her death and took her family to tragedy.”

During the 1950s and ‘60s, the Mirabal Sisters joined and became leaders in the underground movement of “leftist youths” against the dictator. Minerva was the first of the sisters to join the movement, then headed by the Popular Socialist Party. The revolutionaries gained momentum after the triumph of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. Roorda, author of *The Dictator Next Door*, commented that Dominican youths, “shamed and chagrined by their parents nauseating surrender to Trujillo” had begun to rebel. On January 6, 1959, María Teresa, Minerva, and their husbands discussed the turn of events: “if in Cuba it has been possible to bring down the dictatorship, then in our country, with so many anti-Trujillo youth, we can do the same.” A plot was devised to blow up Trujillo at a cattle fair in January 21, 1960. One day before the planned assassination, the Servicio de Inteligencia Militar began a systematic roundup of June 14th supporters, including the Mirabal sisters and their husbands. Arrests and torture continued, prompting the August 6, 1960 sanction by the Organization of

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30. Id. at 177.
31. Id.
32. Id.
33. Id.
34. Id. at 178.
35. Id.
36. Id.
Feeling betrayed by the U.S. (which supported the sanctions) and fearful of the continuing June 14 movement, Trujillo acted defensively. On November 25, 1960, Trujillo ordered the assassination of the Mirabal Sisters. Bludgeoned by state officers, the Mirabal sisters became a national icon for the revolutionary power of women against political dictators. The United Nation’s International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women commemorates the sacrifices of these three Dominican heroines that brought down the regime. Trujillo was assassinated less than a year later on May 30, 1961 at the hands of political activists which an internal memo from the CIA in 1973 released “quite extensive Agency involvement with the plotters.” While the U.S. aided in Trujillo’s rise to power through its “good neighbor policy,” it acted against the regime when it became politically beneficial for U.S. interests.

The Mirabal Sisters have been a guiding force for many Dominican women, including me. Last year, I decided to commemorate their legacy on my skin, through a tattoo I designed with my friend, Adriana. Tattoos have been a crucial step in taking back power over my body and addictions. When I decided to tattoo the Sisters on my thigh, I wanted to remind myself everyday of their power against a seemingly invincible threat. They went against society’s pressures to stay silent during one of the most oppressive periods in our history. They organized thousands of similarly-minded youths to stand up against the regime, and won.

Minerva, especially, was one of my biggest heroes growing up. She was the first woman in the D.R. to study law. As the first person in my family to go to law school, I feel a kinship to her. Minerva never got the chance to practice law since Trujillo stopped her from becoming licensed. In her memory, I hope to use my law degree to continue the work she would have done if her life hadn’t been cut so violently.

**Dominican Girls**

Sometimes, I wonder how much I would know
If I had White heritage

Dominican girls lose their curls at 4 and go back to natural at 19
They come from a long line of strong women and even stronger whiskey
Sauntering hips and lips that ask you to not ask about their family
They’re here to work

Dominican dads go in at 3 am to drive a truck and piss in a cup
They scrape the sides of the roads, praying for the night to come home
Dominican moms don’t take your shit and you better clean up your shit
Even when you’re not home

These viejas trajeron chisme del colmado

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37. Id.
38. Id. at 179.
No porque no tienen otras cosas de hablar
But because they would rather forget than
relive the nights their husbands did not come home
Or when they did

Dominican girls grow up to be women when they’re too young to realize what’s
happening
They don’t know how to say no so they stay nice and quiet

They go back to church and tell some perv priest to absolve them from their sins
They eat the jesus cracker and swallow down that sweet, sweet, blood-wine
Waiting for redemption

Estas brujas with their pajones haven’t seen a pincho or a flat iron in years
They’re not here to burn their hair or scrape the sides of their chochas
Tienen vulvas y algunas no, but they’re all girls the same

They’re shipped to America with bright, White hopes and dreams
Only to sit on gum on their brand new jeans the first time they take the bus

They go to school, act white, and are placed in remedial English
Somehow being kinda fluent in two isn’t the same as knowing the language

When I was little I would tell my dad that my brain was split into two:
One in Spanish where I kept my dreams and one in English where they went to sleep
Algunas veces tengo sueños en el campo
Con mis primos jugando y hodiendo
Nadie habla de prisa o movimiento
Morir soñando

But today I woke up to a Trump president
A nightmare that started way before 2016
White supremacists have made themselves clear:
We’re not welcome here, this country is not made for us.

So, let’s hold each other close
Call your mom, dad, tía and prima

40. “These wise old ladies brought gossip from the corner store / Not because they have nothing
else to talk about”
41. “These witches [with their] afros/bad hair [haven’t seen a] hair pin [or flat iron in years]”
42. “Chochas” is a slang term for vaginas. It is generally not seen as a particularly vile word,
but is mostly used in highly informal settings. It could also express lower class and vulgarity to elites.
43. “Some have vulvas and some don’t…”
44. Sometimes I have dreams of the countryside/ With my cousins playing and making trouble /
No one spoke of movement or worries / Wishing to die in our sleep. “Morir soñando” is also a popular drink
in the Dominican Republic, usually consisting of orange juice, milk, and sometimes whiskey that is typically
enjoyed with family during the Christmas holiday.
Tell them how much you love them
Call your fellow luchadoras
Tell them how much they inspire you
Pray for your siblings and those yet to join us
Who don’t have a voice, but will live with the fallout

Crawl out of your misery when you’re ready,
And not sooner.
Because in order to fight back, we need to rebuild
Reshape rediscover our own strength

My grandma once told me of grabbing machete
And cutting down a whole field
Magical realism in the D.R. has truncated dictators before
Butterflies and blood and beauty are our ammunition

Take up arms in this revolution
By any means necessary, in this revolution
Through all doors possible, in this revolution
With love and compassion, in this revolution.

Dominican girls wash the sweat off their back and go back to work
They know when to listen and they know when to scream
They have lost way too much to sit in silence again
They’re ready to fight, and ready to win.

“A chill goes through her, for she feels it in her bones, the future is now beginning. By the time it is over, it will be the past, and she doesn’t want to be the only one left to tell their story.”

TRUJILLISMO AND TRUMPISM AND REVOLUTION.

It’s vital to recognize that while the age of Trump is not normal, it’s also not the first time we have seen similar tactics. One of my favorite comedians, Hari Kondabolu, had a long running joke on Twitter where he reminded us that Trump’s presidency was not normal: “10:45 A.M. – 4 Jan. 2018: REMINDER FOR DAY 349 OF TRUMP PRESIDENCY: THIS IS NOT NORMAL (AND NORMAL WASN’T THAT GREAT EITHER)”.

Pointing out the similarities between Trumpism and Trujillismo is not meant to numb activists and law students from Trump’s ludicrous behavior, and his cabinet’s dangerous propositions, but instead inspire revolutionaries with the knowledge that we have overcome dictators before.

Importantly, we need to recognize that the same racial animus that propelled the Trujillo dictatorship is present today in the conservative right’s move towards white nationalist rhetoric. As we saw in Trump’s election in 2016, Whites across

45. JULIA ALVAREZ, IN THE TIME OF BUTTERFLIES 10 (Algonquin Books 2010).
America have reenergized under a perceived threat of demographic isolation. More alarmingly though, white nationalist rhetoric is seeping back into mainstream conservative politics, and the comforting veil of subtle racism is quickly dissipating.47 From the Tea Party movement during Obama’s first presidency and Steve Bannon being briefly appointed as Chief Strategist for the administration, the U.S. is quickly approaching another turning point in its racist history.

Similarly, the D.R. has a long history of racial segregation which was solidified during the Trujillo years. When African slave labor was introduced into the island during the 16th century, patterns of domination and humiliation lead to an uprising on the west side of the island (now modern Haiti). The Haitian anti-slavery revolution was the largest and most successful slave rebellion in the western hemisphere. Inspired by the concurrent French Revolution and driven by T’Oulessant L’Ouverture’s leadership, Haiti gained independence in 1804.48 Invaded by newly independent Haiti, D.R. gained independence in 1821, then invaded again by Haiti from 1822–1844. To this day, the D.R. celebrates its National Independence Day on the day which it became independent from Haitian rule, not Spanish rule. We Are All Dominican, an online platform for Dominicans both in the D.R. and the U.S. started a campaign to recognize independent from Spain in 1865 as the National Independence Day. In their campaign, organizers commented:

Situar la independencia en 1844 en lugar de 1865 perpetúa una narrativa antihaitiana y sentimientos anti-negro. Nuestra campaña #1865 es para reimaginar la independencia dominicana y construir una identidad dominicana inclusiva y diversa.49

These remnants of anti-Black hatred permeate throughout the D.R. still and shape how lighter-skinned Dominicans treat Black or Haitian-descendant Dominicans.

Since this period, Haitians were and continue to be the primary cheap labor force in sugar cane plantations and other industries. Their seasonal migration patterns mirror, in some ways, that of Latinx migrant workers, especially Mexican field workers, in the U.S. It’s not surprising to see that the rhetoric that fueled the Perejil Massacre of 1937 is similarly employed in discussions of immigration today in both the U.S. and the D.R. When major politicians in the U.S. exclaim that young black kids are “superpredators”⁵⁰ and immigrants are “illegal” or threats to society, they mirror Trujillo’s speeches against Haitians:

To the Dominicans who were complaining of the depredations by Haitians living among them, thefts of cattle, provisions, fruits, etc., and were thus prevented from enjoying in peace the products of their labor, I have responded, ‘I will fix this.’ And we have already begun

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48. ROORDA, supra note 4, at 21.
49. We are All Dominican, FACEBOOK (Aug. 16, 2018), https://www.facebook.com/WeAreAllDominican/photos/a.678228625530104/2105270552825897/?type=3&theater. ("Situating independence in 1844 rather than 1865 perpetuates a narrative of anti-Haitianism and anti-blackness. Our #1865 campaign serves to reimagine Dominican Independence and to construct an inclusive and diverse Dominican identity.")
to remedy the situation. Three hundred Haitians are now dead in Bánica. This remedy will continue.\footnote{Richard Lee Turits, \textit{A World Destroyed: The 1937 Massacre in the Dominican Republic}, 82.3 Hispanic Am. Historical Rev. 589, 613 (2002).}

While the end result of mass genocide has not yet been replicated in the U.S., holding children hostage in cages away from their parents does not put the U.S. far off from this eventuality.

Unsurprisingly, the U.S. legal system fails to admit how white backlash and demographic anxiety has created a void which Trump neatly filled. Most courts have ignored the issue of White backlash and have instead chosen to focus on the harms inflicted on minorities, and not the perpetrators.\footnote{See Terry Smith, supra note 47, at 98.} One example is \textit{Brown v. Board}, where the Court recognized that segregation fostered feelings of inferiority amongst African American students but did not go as far as to say that segregation might have effect on the majority group.\footnote{Id.}

The psychological and social effect of perpetrating of racism and discrimination are well documented. Terry Smith, a distinguished research professor at DePaul University College of Law, and others, have likened the effect of racism on Whites to addiction.\footnote{Id.} When Whites perceive that they are being denied the privilege they are accustomed to they react violently:

\begin{quote}
Habitual access to power... can create an insidious reliance on the source of that power; in seeking to sustain their sense of well-being, individuals in the dominant culture become addicted to the perquisites of power.\footnote{Id., quoting James E. Dobbins & Judith H. Skillings, \textit{Racism as a Clinical Syndrome}, 70 Am. J. Orthopsychiatry 14, 14 (2000).}
\end{quote}

From the Charlottesville riots to Trump’s rallies across the nation, white fragility and addiction to white dominance is in the front seat of American politics.

This addiction will not end gently.

In 2010, the D.R. did away with birthright citizenship, jumpstarting mass deportations and fueling the racist fire that has been burning for centuries.\footnote{Jonathan M. Katz, \textit{What Happened When A Nation Ended Birth Right Citizenship}, The Atlantic (Nov. 12, 2018), https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/11/dominican-republic-erased-birthright-citizenship/575527/?fbclid=IwAR2hbjLeKkhe2fPpShcWc6FzYQy2hAsldTjvRuezZ19geEdgGrS2Izyho.} In 2019, Trump threatened the same humanitarian crisis, albeit lacking a legal path to fulfil his threat. Senators and representatives have introduced strikingly similar proposals. Iowa Representative Steven King infamously introduces bills to end birthright citizenship for anyone who does not have a parent who is a “lawful permanent resident.”\footnote{Id.} This is not normal, and we should not become desensitized to the real dangers of everyday speech. If the D.R. has taught us anything, it’s that some people will chose moral amnesia in exchange for stability any day, and we need to stay vigilant of both our personal interactions and what we read on the news.

The D.R. has taught us that rhetoric and morality are learned, not born. If we continue to let nationalist paternalism run afool our democratic process, through voter...
suppression, racial gerrymandering, etc., we risk returning to a much more violent past. In order to overcome these possibilities, we need to stay vigilant, especially when it comes to political propaganda, popular speech and rhetoric. When our colleges or classmates make off-handed remarks about “illegals” threatening to take “our” jobs, we need to call them out. When our senators or representatives promote legislation that harms immigrant or minority communities, even if they have no real chance of moving forward, we need to organize. When professors deny us the right to talk about how race impacts property law, we need to cause a scene. We cannot be silenced in the name of keeping white people comfortable. Racism and misogyny are uncomfortable, and we have get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

The D.R. has also taught us that the issue is often not black and white, not “us” against “them.” Sometimes it’s “us” against ourselves, them against their own interests. Especially when so much of that society teaches us has been internalized, many of us act against our own self-interest unconsciously.

Five years ago, when I was visiting my abuela over winter break in the D.R., she stopped at the light and a dark-skinned boy started cleaning her windows. She immediately got incensed and shouted: “Maldito negro! Siempre con la agua sucia!” While this comment was ordinary for her and most Dominicans, my fresh liberal arts education couldn’t keep my mouth shut anymore. I asked her why she always made some comment. She explained that Black people are “just like that,” they “litter our streets,” “take up jobs.” God simply loves white people more. I looked at her, and her black skin, and asked: “Do you think God loves me more than He loves you because I’m lighter?” She said yes. At that moment, I felt deeply sad. Here was the woman who helped raise me, who sacrificed everything to move to New York and raise three kids, who endured endless abuse by her husband, who grew up in the fields and was able to lift her family out of poverty. And she thought there was something inherently bad about her. She thought I, a 20-year-old who had accomplished little, was somehow favored by God.

This addiction won’t end gently.

We need to start questioning ourselves, not just politicians and our inner circles. This questioning is ongoing. If you think you’re not racist, you haven’t questioned yourself. Every person who has grown up in the U.S. or the D.R. has at least subconsciously internalized images and rhetoric that color our everyday interactions. Unconscious bias is, in some ways, more insidious than outright racism or misogyny. When we don’t know the processes by which our brains determine if the black kid with the hood up walking home is dangerous, or actually just a kid, we commit violence. When professors listen to white males repeat what a woman of color has just said, but didn’t get credit for, they commit violence. Macroaggressions are like micro-cuts on your skin, if left untreated and repeated they can kill your soul, make you question every interaction, and put people’s lives at risk.

While I recognize that people’s perception of me is often colored by stereotypes of Latinas, I also must struggle with the fact that I interact with other minorities with the same reliance on stereotypes. In my everyday interactions, as simple as choosing a new dentist in my insurance list, I subconsciously make decisions about people’s ability based on their names or appearance. Even as a Latinx myself, I find myself scrolling past the Gonzaleses and Rodriguezes in search for a more suitable Mr. Brown or Ms. Parker. Somehow whiteness in my mind is still equated with competency, cleanliness, and efficiency. To truly create lasting revolution, its apparent that the fight starts internally, continues to our interpersonal relationships,
and ends in lasting social change. Each stage supports and enables the other, and without one, all fail.

The Trump era is not normal, but it’s also not inevitable or unprecedented. The start of any lasting dictatorship is subtle and then not so subtle shifts in rhetoric. As soon as we start normalizing hate speech, we are complicit in violence. Revolution begins with a questioning of ourselves and society around us. It keeps going through vigilance and organizing. It may end with sacrifice, whether personal or physical, and we should prepare for the consequences.

**Oro y azucar (Sugar and Gold)**

Red
Once the Tainos were eliminated from the colonial process. . .
White
Cristopher Columbus could discover the New World, again. . .
Blue
And Trujillo could call an end to the racial impurity of his grandparents.

1924 ended the Red, White and Blue of the U.S. Marines,
Passing land and sea
Unto a much more capable man.

1930 was the year of circle the fields and
Break down resistance
In writing, through words, by stories
3 sisters, united, assassinated.

Two obeliscos stand erect on Avenida Washington
El Macho se trata de la fuerza de Trujillo58
But now artists paint over it with the Sisters
La Hembra se trata de que pagamos nuestra deuda con Estados Unidos
But our debt to the U.S. never felt settled.

Ciudad Trujillo has a nice ring to it.

There’s a caravan of unlikely travelers that have threatened the head so fiercely that he sent 5,200 troops to quell the hungry families.59

Children locked away, threw away the key, not to be seen again.
Reminds the Sisters of their husbands, and fathers – threw away the key.

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58. “The Male Oblisk” as it is commonly called, was designed in 1936 to celebrate the renaming of Santo Domingo as Trujillo City (Ciudad Trujillo). “The Female Oblisk” was constructed in 1994 to celebrate the D.R. paying off its debts to the United States. I can’t seem to do a comment on a fn, but, is this from your own knowledge?

Ghosts in the field haven’t let up for years
You think their blood has anything to do with silence?

La Legion Caribe was sent by Castro to end this regime,60
And maybe we need another Legion.

In 1961 Trujillo was assassinated by a band of ruffians
And something tells me the U.S. reluctantly sent their guns.
Don’t let them trick you into thinking anything more.
What happened was that three sisters sent a message from the grave:

This ends now. This can’t be. We won’t let it.

And the whole world listened, for a while.

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