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Nota / Note

Crossing Borders: The Dominican Frontier

Robert H. McCormick, Jr.

Franklin College Switzerland

Kyrstin Mallon Andrews

University of Tulane

Introduction

Hispaniola has a border running down its spinal column. Separating the Dominican Republic from Haiti, that border is 193 miles (275 kilometers) long. It starts near Monte Cristi in the north and ends near Pedernales in the southwestern edge of the Dominican Republic. There are six major border crossings. On the Dominican side, they are called Pedernales, Jimaní, Elías Piña, Bánica, Pedro Santana and Dajabón. Moreover, illegal crossings take place at various points between the monitored crossings and even in plain sight of the border authorities, in Dajabón, for example. This article describes the physical, geographical and social uniqueness of those crossing points. The border crossings, except Jimaní, will also be discussed with respect to the transit of goods and

people across them. The attempt will be to provide objective, as well as anecdotal, observations made on the Dominican side, primarily, of the border. The authors, however, do not pretend to be social scientists. There are some problems with method: we visited and conducted our interviews primarily with Dominicans predominantly on one side of the border. A second research stint would allow us to do the same kind of research on the Haitian side. With respect to method, we should add that all names have been changed. It is our hope, though, that in discussing the most significant differences and similarities of the various border crossings that we will elucidate the nature of the dynamics that animate these borderland areas and the uniqueness of the individuals who inhabit them.



Pedernales

Pedernales is the southern-most border crossing in the Dominican Republic, and it is not discussed much in travel literature. It took us two long, rather uncomfortable mini-bus rides from Santo Domingo since we were routed through Barahona. The inhabitants of Santo Domingo are generally unfamiliar with this part of their country, and it is referred to by them as the *frontera* (frontier). In fact, more than more one person in

Santo Domingo told us: *Cuidate!* (Be careful!), when we told them we were going there. Nonetheless, Pedernales has decent hotel facilities and is experiencing a mild upswing in tourism if one can judge by the number of non-Dominicans seen on its streets. The Bahía of las Aguilas, virgin terrain, is one of the country's most beautiful littoral areas and is, for the most part, undeveloped. That will, no doubt, change in the near future.



I. Arrival/entrance The border crossing to the Haitian town of Anse-à-Pitre is situated on the edge of Pedernales at the end of a straight, runway-like asphalt road initiated by a green and white sign reading “Mercado Internacional.” The four-kilometer long road is characterized by both the quantity of litter strewn and the number of Haitians working in construction sites along it. In the early morning of market days, Monday and Friday, the road is alive with speeding *motoconchos* (motorbikes) and over-loaded pick-up trucks. A camouflage-colored container, manned by CESFRONT, serves as a border control point. The container is situated close to the border and just beyond a brand new Customs building, which

had a car parked in front, but it appeared that no one was going in or coming out. We also noticed a brand new Customs house in Dajabón, which seems not to be in use. From these two examples, we deduced that the government, having modified its policies, is dedicating more importance to its Customs' facilities.

Although we had been informed the previous day by someone named Roberto that crossing the border into Anse-à-Pitre was free, we were asked to step into the container office by a soldier who ostensibly wanted to set up the appropriate conditions for a bribe. We stopped at the edge of the steps leading into the container and hesitated to go in. Finally, we were waved on towards the border with the words, "If Roberto says..." We want to indicate here that, at no point during the trip did we give any money as an incentive, nor did we pay anyone, other than guides, for an interview or for information.



II. The Crossing Itself and Its Geography

There are several unique physical aspects of the border crossing at Pedernales. For one, it provides two entrances into Haiti. A rock-filled road descends down the slope of a dry riverbed only to rise again as one

approaches the metallic mesh of wire gate on the Dominican side. This slope, and resultant rise, seems part of a moto-cross rally, and it was only negotiated by *motoconchos* and a few pick-up trucks. It seems not to have been crossed by semis. Parallel to it only a few meters away, and guarded by one soldier, the second entrance was a concrete bridge used primarily by pedestrians although there were a couple of motor bikes trying to fend their way through the throngs of people. One side of a fenced-in market area along the dried out river functioned as the border. The first thing we saw on the other side of the border was a MINUSTAH (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti) stockade, like in the Wild West, with a very large picture of Macchu Picchu on its front wall. There was also a sign in Kreyol about how to prevent malaria, another utilizing the word, “konbit,” (a Kreyol word meaning “collective work” made famous by Jacques Roumain’s novel, *Masters of the Dew*) and still another put up by U.S. A.I.D. Two Peruvians in civilian dress, stationed at the fortress, picked us up and drove us back to town after we had visited the market.



III. Who and What Crosses

The border was patrolled by two soldiers, one opening the gate for the motor vehicles and another standing at the entrance to the pedestrian bridge. There seemed to be no passport checks, going or coming, and we

made no payments when we entered Haiti, nor did we see payments being made although Jean, a Haitian from Anse-à-Pitre whom we interviewed, said Haitians had to pay something to go to the market most of the time.

Thanks to Jean's thirteen year-old cousin who lead us there on his bicycle, we were directed to a Sadhana Forest project on the back edge of Anse-à-Pitre. There we met the Englishman in charge of the project as well as a Canadian student volunteer and an American one who were helping him out. They were installing a well and planting Mayan nut trees—which they thought were indigenous—as part of a large-scale reforestation project on land behind the main streets of Anse-à-Pitre. They said the land had been bought with Sadhana Forest capital provided by its Indian headquarters. Haitian laborers were employed, but the specialist in charge of the installation of the well was a Dominican from Pedernales. With all these governmental and non-governmental organizations around, we wondered about the role of Haitians in their own town. In that regard, Paul Farmer calls Haiti the "...Republic of NGOs..." (99) because of their abundance. With respect to the functioning of the crowded market, most agricultural products, such as manioc, eggplant, rice, parsley, bananas, onions, coconuts as well as most goods, such as shoes, stereos, firewood, brooms, and plastic wash basins, which we saw later were used to sell such products as rice, etc., seemed to be going from the Dominican Republic to Haiti.





IV. Anecdotal Information from Three Encounters

We had three significant interactions in Pedernales, only the first of which, with Jean, we recorded. Our first interview was done in French on the Haitian side of the border in his shop. Jean worked out of a small, austere store with a chair, a table and a counter. He had yelled out to us in English as we were walking along the main street of Anse-à-Pitre; so, we took advantage of that to turn the tables and ask him for an interview.

Jean is eighteen years old and speaks French, Kreyol, and some English. I didn't ask him if he spoke Spanish, but he probably speaks some. Most Dominicans acknowledge that Haitians are good at languages. Jean sold lottery tickets and had frequent customers dropping in during and after the interview even though, as he explained, perhaps even to his clients, that their chances of winning the lottery were minimal, especially since the lottery was not state-owned. The basic lottery ticket, Jean explained, cost "50 gourdes." If you won, you got 2500 gourdes or 500 Haitian dollars since 5 gourdes equals one Haitian dollar. Besides the semantic similarity, there is no link between a nominal Haitian dollar, which exists only in Haitian parlance, and the tangible American bill.



With respect to his crossing of the border, Jean said that he crossed the border “quinze fois” (15 times) a month since he went into the Dominican Republic practically every Monday and every Friday. He said he went on foot and was never asked for papers. Arbitrarily, though, he could be asked for “50 gourdes” by the Dominican border guards. If he didn’t pay, he would not be allowed to cross. He also mentioned that the border could be closed if the Dominicans were unhappy with Haitians or Haiti. This was the case after the recent outbreak of cholera. At the covered market in Pedernales, he bought such things as sandals (He lifted his feet to show us the ones he was wearing.), clothes, appliances and fruit. He said Dominicans came to Haiti to get “clairin,” a type of inexpensive rum, besides fruit such as bananas, mangoes, avocados, etc.

We observed an interesting interaction when an older Haitian in what seemed to be a soldier’s uniform entered Jean’s shop to buy a lottery ticket. While he was waiting, he told a younger Haitian, very interested in my tape recorder and ostensibly a friend of Jean, to put his shirt back on. That authoritarian admonition was seconded by a middle-aged woman there; so, the young man covered his bare torso by putting his shirt back on. Afterwards, we bought Jean a lukewarm Coca Cola from another stand for 25 gourdes, or 25 Dominican pesos, since, in Anse-à-Pitre, gourdes and Dominican pesos have the same value. When we took it back to him, he

asked us how much we had paid. He told us that we had paid the correct price.

The second encounter was brief and more important for what it suggested rather than for what was said. This encounter was all the more interesting because of the way it came about. Kyrstin was cooling off her feet in the pool of our hotel on the edge of town late one afternoon when she started to talk to a man cleaning the pool. Later when we saw him again that evening, he was parking his very large, tinted-window SUV in the hotel's covered garage to protect it from vandalism or theft. When we bumped into him there, he explained that he was a border inspector and that he was going to the new Customs house, mentioned above, the next day. We were hopeful, without saying as much, that he would take us with him, but that hope was never realized.

Licenciado Emanuel Martínez García's card indicated his title to be the following: *Encargado Departamento Supervisión Aduanas Fronterizas*. He explained that he was a border supervisor, that he was in charge, as a government official, of supervising the border, the standardization of the various crossing points and the procedures for the transportation of goods, especially those crossing in ever-increasing quantities. When, in passing, he said he was a lawyer, we couldn't help but ask why he was cleaning the pool. He answered that he was helping out because he wanted to go in himself that afternoon. In fact, he spent most of the late afternoon immersed up to his neck in the pool that he had helped clean earlier.

We would have loved to have spoken with him in more detail. We had hoped to meet him for breakfast, but that did not happen. When we returned from our visit to the market, he was gone and we never saw him again at any of the other crossing points we stopped at.

We met Rafael, a teacher, when we asked his daughter, Roberta, at their *cafetería*, if there weren't a place we could get a Coke as we'd been exploring the hot city for quite a long while. At first she said "No." So, we left, but when we returned back along the same street not having found anything to drink, she brought a fully frozen Pepsi out of the freezer for us and sat us down at one of the outdoor tables of their small cafeteria. That

brought about a long conversation during which Rafael arrived on a seemingly new, black motorcycle.

Rafael was quite voluble. In fact, he was active in politics, not in the party of President Leonel Fernández, and told us he liked to give political speeches. He also talked about his life as a teacher, about the low pay, given his large family, and about how hard it was just to correct homework at his school because there were three different school sessions per day. One of his students came by that evening, when we returned to the cafeteria for dinner, to pick up her grades.

We asked Rafael, given the location of Pedernales, whether he could ever envision island unity. He said that, even with common governance, the respective Haitian and Dominican leaders would cater to their clans; thus, the situation wouldn't be that much different than the present one. He added, though, that, in spite of the difference in the two cultures, he organized joint sessions with his Haitian colleagues about teaching and their respective curricula. He added two final points in that regard. For one, he said that the Dominican Republic cannot even solve its own problems let alone those of Haiti. Finally, he noted, making reference to the Mexican border that the United States seems to see the problems of other nations clearly without, however, being able to solve its own. The ultimate episode in our interaction with Rafael was to take place the following day on the way to Elías Piña.

V. An Extensive Border

On the *guagua* (The Dominican word for mini-bus) ride to Elías Piña the next morning, we saw the most overt exploitation of Haitians, even bearers of Haitian passports that we would see on the entire trip. Our experience of those border controls, along with our last encounter with Rafael, will be recounted in the next section on Elías Piña.

Elías Piña: Beyond the Border

“Dèyè mòn gen mòn”
 (“Beyond the mountain is another mountain”)
 Haitian proverb

I. Arrival in Elías Piña from Pedernales

Our arrival in Elías Piña and subsequent departure from Elías Piña for Bánica made clear that the border and border controls are mobile, that the border is more extensive than a thin line on a map separating the two nations of Hispaniola. It was dark when we left our hotel at 5:30 in the morning and dragged our wheeled suitcases noisily across Pedernales' irregular asphalt roads, thus incurring the early-morning wrath of the canine brethren of Cerberus. Since we didn't miss any turns, we arrived well in time to get the 6:00 *guagua* we had been informed about the previous day. All went as planned; we were early and got good seats. Always important for *guaguas*!

Although we did actually leave at about 6:00, the driver was proceeding slowly trolling for additional passengers. It was only later, when we pulled into the long driveway of a fort-like military barracks, that we realized there was a stop there, too. Rafael, our interlocutor the previous evening at the *cafetería* his family had opened to make ends meet, got on there. He was accompanying a young relative back to her family in Barahona. He waved, sat on an uncomfortable center aisle seat near us for a while, then got off, made some comments I didn't understand when the Haitians were asked to step off the bus and then resurfaced later in the front seat where he talked with the driver during the entire trip to Barahona. When he got off, he didn't wave or make any sign of acknowledgment to us. His lack of an acknowledgment seemed to undermine his loquacious sociability of the previous evening. We assumed that he was surprised to see us on a *guagua*.

We pulled up to the entrance of the military barracks and stopped. That is where the driver, who was putting on his tie, got on since apparently it was a regular stop. The previous driver was actually the *cobrador*, the person who collects the fares and handles the baggage. At that point, everyone got out of the bus although we had only been on it for about 15 minutes. Then our documents were checked, and we were asked to unzip our hand luggage. A bit later, the driver asked Robert to get out again and motioned him toward the back to open our suitcases, which had been shoved in behind the last seat of the mini-van. The door had been "locked"

with a rope. Two soldiers, the *cobrador* and the new driver watched Robert open our bags. Then one of the soldiers ran his hand through our well-packed clothes as if he were looking for drugs before waving him back on the bus.

This was the first of many check points where soldiers, sometimes in uniform and sometimes in civilian dress, usually with guns, stepped onto the first step of the bus, scrutinized the passengers and sometimes asked people, mostly Haitians, to step off and behind the bus. Those men who, after yanking open the sliding door, stepped up onto the steps seemed to immediately look at the back of the bus and, in the ritual we witnessed repeatedly, always addressed those spoken to with the word *moreno* (brown one), which meant, in this case, Haitian. It was also clear that, since, as soon as they ducked their heads into the bus, they almost immediately glanced at the Haitians in the back of the bus, that the *cobrador* or the driver had already told them where the Haitians were seated.

Once we had finally left the barracks and reached the outskirts of the town, beyond the major military checkpoint, we witnessed another revealing phenomenon. The *guagua* pulled up and stopped behind a large car. Since the windows of the SUV were tinted, we could not see who was driving, nor anyone inside. A Haitian man and woman got out of that car and climbed into our bus in what seemed to be a well-coordinated transfer. We realized their nationality only when they spoke. Perhaps, because the mini-van was crowded, the man did not sit next to the relatively young woman at first. Later, he wanted to sit down beside her, but she refused his overture. He even offered her a transparent plastic bag of pretzel-like snacks sold on Dominican buses. When she refused that, too, he deposited the plastic bag on the seat next to her and returned to his seat at the back of the bus. After a rest stop to eat, we noticed he was sitting next to her and that they were eating pieces of chicken out of a white styrofoam take-home container although neither one seemed to be saying very much.

We remember three distinct control stops like the one at the barracks although there could even have been more. We were not asked to get off again nor to open our bags even though our passports were re-

checked. The most significant incident on this ride out of Pedernales, away from the border crossing, again involved Haitians. At least twice, three Haitians, with Haitian passports in hand, were told to get off the bus. When they got back on after a few minutes, they explained to their fellow passengers, after one of those episodes, that they had had to pay 200 Dominican pesos apiece. That is the largest amount we heard about during our discussions of shakedowns. For the most part, people mentioned payments of from 25 to 50 Dominican pesos.

After several of these military control points, that slowed the trip down considerably, we realized that these control points were non-existent when we had traveled west to Pedernales from the capital. The searches, virtual border checks far from the border, only take place from the border going inland and indicate that the system of border control in place at the border doesn't function adequately. Thus, there are more checks inland than there are at the border, and the mobile border seemed to move in an easterly direction. Caribbean scholar Maria Cristina Fumagalli even maintains that besides filling the pockets of the soldiers of CESFRONT, an all-too-autonomous branch of the military, this tactic of repeated extortion can also serve to exhaust the funds of Haitians and force them to turn back.

As the term, CESFRONT, will come up again, its meaning, and significance, should be explained. It is an abbreviation for *Cuerpo Especializado en Seguridad Fronteriza Terrestre*. Its primary obligations, indicated in the decree authorizing it (Franco, "Labor de CESFRONT") are to control the movement of people without papers, drugs and contraband across the border, and its mandate includes the establishment of military checkpoints distant from the border but only along main roads.

Finally, in our particular case, this was all a bit ironic as we were trying to go to Bánica, another border crossing to the north of Elías Piña. However, to get there we had to backtrack toward Santo Domingo first and then catch a second guagua going back in a northwesterly direction. In other words, we were going from one border crossing to another and not back east towards the capital. Thus, we would necessarily encounter the same network of border checks when we headed from Bánica back to Santo Domingo.

It was on the second leg of our trip to Elías Piña that we had our most cramped guagua. To get us seated, they provided us with folding plastic seats strong enough to support the weight of someone sitting in the aisle between two rows of seats. These were not the metallic, fold-down auxiliary variety already installed in the aisle on the right hand side of most mini-buses. Thus, we were both, partially hidden under our carry-ons, in the center aisle on the legless, folding plastics seats that actually supported our weight. We stopped a couple of times and thought that someone in front of us would get out so that we could move into less cramped quarters. In fact, the people who wanted to get out were behind us; so, we had to move down the aisle and off the bus to let them out. Then we settled down on our plastic aisle seats again and repositioned our carry-ons in our laps. When one man in the very back wanted to get out, the other passengers suggested he leave through the back window. It was at the Azua stop, Cruce 15, waiting for that crowded bus to Elías Piña that we saw a motorbike shoved vertically into the open doorway of a *guagua* for transport to its destination, hopefully in the vicinity.

II. The Border Crossing at Elías Piña

Sandwiched between our illuminating arrival in a guagua and our



Sunday morning departure on the back of a red pick-up truck was our stay in Elías Piña and our visit to the border there.

A. The Entrance

Unlike Pedernales, Elías Piña has more than a runway since the border is about four miles out of town. There are houses lining the route, and they are most probably owned by Dominicans. As you approach the metallic gate that separates the two countries, one finds a large concentration of ship containers that can hold, according to the specifications painted in white on two of them, thousands of pounds of goods. Two blue ones had insignia on them reading “American Board of Shipping.” Thus, the traffic, if the market had been open that day, would have been composed of the ever-present *motococho*s, but also of large semis. We also saw a peasant on a donkey that was trotting along at a good clip to the side of the asphalt road leading away from the market area. Just inside the border gate, there was a Customs house and a painted section for



CESFRONT, adorned with its characteristic rust and mustard-colored amoeba-like decorations. In front of that colorful background, a soldier in camouflage was busy yanking on a tree branch trying to make its mangoes fall. In front of the Customs house, a large white truck, canopied in back for the transport of soldiers, was parked. We noticed the letters “UN”

painted in black upon its cab door. We saw U.N. vehicles at three of the five border crossings we observed.

The town of Elías Piña, also called Comendador, may have surreal associations to all those familiar with Philoctète's beautiful novel, *Massacre River*, but its reality is prosaic. A town of some 25,000 inhabitants, it has, judging from the Internet, three hotels, one of which appeared to be for



transient Haitians and a second where we were able to stay although we were advised to stay outside of town. There seemed to be no welcoming café, with the possible exception of one in the bus station, nor any savory places to eat. We ate in an unfriendly Chinese restaurant endowed with a hyperactive fly population and a vulturous young beggar to whom we gestured that he should take the leftover food off our table as we were leaving. Something that his eyes, and his gestures, indicated he was getting ready to do anyway.

Elías Piña is not at all prepared for tourism. A Dominican tour guide told me it was as if Elías Piña had been forgotten, left out of the processes of change other border towns in the Dominican Republic seem to be undergoing. It was here that women were most harassed with those stares, far from subtle, and the omnipresent “shsst” noises. We did see an

outdoor boxing ring with lots of spectators in the bleachers and a massive herd of *motoconchos* parked on the street outside.

B. The Crossing Itself and Its Geography

We arrived early on a Saturday afternoon and were told that the gate was closed to vehicular traffic at about noon. Thus, we saw a closed gate rather than the hustle and bustle of traffic on market day as we had seen at Pedernales. The border crossing is effectuated through an austere iron gate, about ten feet high, which was painted green but is covered with rust. It is perforated with large rectangular holes big enough for a human head. Humans could pass through a slender vertical opening on the far right-hand side of the entrance way. Peeking through the gate's holes, we saw three Haitians sitting on pastel-colored plastic chairs. One looked as if he might have been a border guard, given his proximity to the gate, but he wasn't in uniform. Someone from the Haitian side put his face into one of the cutout rectangles perhaps as a kind of a joke, perhaps to look around. As he was looking the other way, we were able to snap a picture.



C. Who and What Crosses

The crossing at Elías Piña was more difficult to interpret because it wasn't market day and the gate was already closed to vehicular traffic. As for those who crossed, we saw a few young men cross from the Haitian side, but we weren't permitted to cross going the other way. There were no other foreigners at the border, and there was only one *buscón* volunteering to usher us across if we could get permission from the Customs' officers. At the border, we were told that if we were to go back to the Customs building, they might be able to give us a pass to cross on foot since we would be returning the same day. Thus, we retraced our steps back to the rather large edifice housing Customs in front of which the UN truck was parked.

By the time we entered that building, we had an entourage of two shoeshine boys, who used our bureaucratic stasis as a business opportunity, and a young man who ostensibly, although he had not said anything yet, wanted to be our guide and helper. We were told that we had to relinquish our passports, which we did, to a government official, who gave them to another official that we couldn't see, who gave them, in turn, to a third woman, who came out and told us we could cross, but that if they stamped out passports, we would have to pay 20 dollars to get back into the country. So, we left our entourage in the Customs house, which by that time had reached six people, and walked the four miles in the other direction back to town.



D. Personal and Local Anecdotes

We didn't do any interviews in Elías Piña; so, the only anecdotes we have concern the local whose flatbed truck we hired for 100 pesos to take us and our two suitcases to what we hoped would be our hotel since there were, it seemed, no taxis in town. The second anecdote concerns the hotel proprietress who accused Kyrstin of smoking in her room until the landlady's precipitous peregrinations in the hallway led her to the discovery that it was only the smell of burning green coils, the function of which is to keep mosquitoes away.

This section ends, as it began, with our observations of, and experiences with, military checkpoints. Our being checked on the road far from Elías Piña again illustrates the flexibility of the concept of border, or at least the border controls effectuated by CESFRONT. Robert was riding in the back of Alberto's red pickup truck with the two suitcases, while Kyrstin, riding shotgun in the front seat, was talking to Alberto, our driver. On the street, he had asked us if we needed a ride since we were pacing impatiently in front of our hotel that Sunday morning and had been waiting for some type of bus to come for more than half an hour.

The central bus station was too far away. Besides, our omniscient proprietress had assured us that there was a bus stop right in front of her hotel. After quickly talking it over, we agreed on a price and climbed aboard. Alberto needed a down payment beforehand, though, to purchase the necessary gas; so, having given it to him, we returned to Elías Piña to find a gas station that was open on Sundays. The owner of the filling station had been a limousine driver in Connecticut. When that line of work became less lucrative, he returned to Elías Piña and bought the gas station as an investment. He gave us a thimble-full of coffee, with sugar, in a plastic cup to drink while they transferred some gas from a large tank to the pump. We took a picture of Alberto and a friend of his in front of the red pickup truck, and then we headed off for Bánica where we were to meet our guide.

We were on the main road that heads back to Santo Domingo, and approaching Matayaya where one turns left and heads back up, in a northwesterly direction, toward Bánica when we were stopped at a check

point by someone who seemed to be a soldier, in civilian dress, with a rifle. He beckoned to us with his gun to get down off the truck and spat out the word, "Passports!" without attaching a verb. After examining them, and seeing that we had valid entry stamps, he said that we didn't have a stamp that allowed us to enter what was apparently, according to him in any case, a different province. This was a blatantly absurd idea, and we tried to talk him out of it in a tactful way. Finally, he beckoned for his *jefe* to come over. In the meantime, Alberto had come back to join the two of us with a frightened look on his face. Perhaps he was hoping we didn't have to pay or perhaps he was fearful that they were going to slap some kind of fine on him for transporting us.

When the soldier's uniformed superior came over, Robert held out his hand and introduced himself by name. Somehow, it seemed that the blatant irregularity of the civilian soldier's assertion would be obvious to his more experienced boss. The soldier, who was toting a rifle as well, looked over our passports and asked us a couple of questions about the nature of the research we were doing in the area. After reflecting briefly on what we said, he finally beckoned, by moving the tip of his rifle, for us to get back in the truck. Needless to say, we immediately did just that and were sped off towards Bánica without risking a look back at the civilian soldier who had tried to intimidate us before being overruled. His superior, too, must have felt that the trumped up charge was just too absurd to be enforced. Besides, we had passports, and we weren't Haitian.

Finally we arrived in Bánica, where we learned, interestingly, that Elías Piña was named after a hero in the first Dominican war of independence against the Haitians. Colonel Elías Piña was born near Comendador and died in 1845 attacking a fortified position, Haitian I assume, near Bánica.

Bánica

"A paradise with poverty"
—the father of Roberto, a Dominican merchant

We arrived in Bánica, a town of some 7,000 inhabitants, on a Sunday morning in Alberto's red pickup truck. We noticed when he dropped us off that its hood was covered with swirly black stripes that looked like spiders' legs. He was wearing white cut-off shorts and a white baseball hat. It should be noted in passing that the original name of Bánica was San Francisco de Bánica and that it was founded in 1504 by Diego Velázquez. Rather than drop us off at the last stop in town as a guagua would have done, Alberto asked around and ultimately found the house of the proprietor of our lodging. The latter called our contact in Bánica, Wilfredo, who is related to the proprietor.



Wilfredo is a tailor who has his own shop, "Sastrería Wilfredo." It is a blue wooden one-story building with white shutters and trim. His shop is also the place where he lives. His primary source of income is ostensibly sewing. With his pedal-driven all black "KOYO" sewing machine, he stitches the hems of curtains as well as his friends' pants, designs some pants, and even re-stitches empty rice bags. He also raises chickens with his

father and is interested in cockfighting. Born in Bánica, he worked in Santiago for several years before returning. He has helped guide religious groups to Haiti, to the Cave of Saint Francis of Assisi near Pedro Santana, and served as a “research assistant” for an American scholar, who indicated that he is proud of his white-collar role of facilitator. He seems to not write particularly well judging from several words we asked him to write down in Spanish. Although, when we questioned him once about the nature of the writing he was doing one afternoon, he said he meant that he had been sending a lot of email. Both of us had trouble deciphering his Spanish over the phone, but our interview with him was easy to understand. In Bánica, he was our guide, took us everywhere and introduced us to a wide cross-section of people in the community, both Dominican and Haitian, including his parents with whom we ate during our sojourn.

Before introducing Wilfredo’s parents, however, we want to describe our lodging. The owner—at least he was the person with the keys—was a teacher. His family had the town play (the Dominican word for a baseball field) named “Liga Deportiva Roberto Ampalle,” as the outfield wall told us, after one of its members. The rooms, with a queen size mattress and bunk beds, were the least expensive rooms we had during our trip. We had a caged-in balcony, a metallic gate which formed one part of an entrance secured with three locks, electricity, a television that we didn’t try out, ventilator fans in each bedroom, and no running water. We only belatedly found the light in the bathroom. We were provided a towel, two candles and a pack of matches in case of power outages. In a spacious washing area, there were three huge plastic containers—about the size of the *pithoi* at Ancient Knossos—full of water containing very few insects. That water was for emptying the toilet as well as for washing dirty clothes and for bathing. A pail was provided for use in the bathroom where another large plastic container had been placed in the non-functional shower stall for our convenience. Robert had only one sheet, but slept relatively well after moving from the bottom bunk to the queen size bed. One goes to bed early in the Dominican Republic (Who stays out late at night in the poorly lit, if at all, streets?) and gets up early; so, we didn’t hear too much from the talkative family across the hall when nightfall came. When you hear a car

on the streets at night in those conditions, you really do wonder what its occupants are doing.

We were curious, too, to see our dining room—I imagined something Spartan—as well as our hosts. Wilfredo, a bachelor who wore a pony tail and a baseball hat most of the time, walked us over to the house of his father, Diego, who had fathered fifteen children and, now eighty, was living with his second wife, Alejandra. His family had a baseball league named after it, *Liga Deportiva Roberto Ampalle*, as the outfield wall of the baseball field indicated to us. The newer section was painted white and had, although we never used it, a *galería*, an open, airy porch that serves as the entrance into many Dominican homes along the border. The first thing Diego said when we were all seated was that Robert looked like Joaquín Balaguer. Perhaps because he was wearing glasses. In any case, Balaguer was alleged to have been bookish, savvy and intelligent.

Wilfredo ate with us around the main dining room table in the older, wooden section of the house. Diego, who Alejandra said didn't eat very much, ate alone at a small table in the sitting room near the television. We supposed Alejandra ate in the kitchen, at least when we were there, where she cooked. Before one meal, she told us proudly that she had raised four daughters on water from the nearby Artibonite River and that they had all become doctors. She had pictures of two of them in graduation garb mounted on the wall above three large burlap sacks of rice stacked up there next to the dining room table. She gave the impression that no one would even consider swimming in that river these days.

Since he thought Robert looked like Balaguer, Diego considered it appropriate to ask him some rather philosophical questions. He asked him why he thought people were greedy, why they couldn't be satisfied with their share of the pie. Robert said he didn't know exactly, but had known people that had worked very hard to pull themselves out of difficult economic situations and that, once they had, they weren't able to modify the attitudes formed during the previous, more difficult phase of their lives. It was only reflecting on this question later that we wondered if his question was a purely philosophical one or if he understood Robert to be a representative of American, or even Swiss, culture. Diego had been the

mayor of Bánica for about five years; so, he knew something about political life. He was partial to the memory of Trujillo because of the sense of “order”—perhaps not law!—the generalissimo created and because he embodied authority, a quality Diego saw lacking in contemporary politicians.



When we saw him the following day, he was wearing a clean white *guayabera* and a Panama hat since he was taking the *guagua* to Las Matas de Farfan on business. Again on a slightly more philosophical note, because Robert looked like Balaguer and because he didn’t have any kids, Diego asked him what he was going to do with his inheritance. The implication behind his rather direct question was that he, Diego, wouldn’t be able to provide a comfortable living for his progeny because he had already given his “inheritance” to them during his lifetime. That was what was on the back of his eighty year-old mind. Of course, this question came as a bit of a shock to a Robert who, just like Diego’s bachelor son, sitting there as well, hadn’t married and didn’t have kids. He did, however, manage to quip, “My sister will be a rich woman.” That made them all smile. We also had a collective, good-natured laugh when Robert, the non-Dominican, came up first with *Patria*, the name of the third dead Mirabal sister, which had escaped us earlier in our conversation.

I. The Entrance

At Bánica, to get to the border, much like in Dajabón, one generally goes through the Dominican market. Open Thursdays and Sundays, the Dominican market has an entrance gate, somewhat like the one at



Pedernales, that is locked on non-market days. The blue writing on the arched entrance way into the market reads: Mercado Municipal de Bánica: Gestión 2006-2010. To the right of the market is a new blue basketball court as if to point out that the city government was doing something. The Dominican market in Bánica is divided into specialized areas. There are numbered stalls, Number 06 and 07, for example. There is a painted sign indicating that one of the areas is a meat market (*carnicería*); a second is denominated *cocina*. With respect to the products sold, the Bánica market seemed much the same as that in Pedernales although there were more machetes for sale and a lot of pasta. The number of vendors is too great for the space; so, there is market activity, under canopies, in front of the caged-in area and on the street. Right in front of the entrance, for example, we saw a vast selection of DVDs on display. We remembered Jean, in Pedernales, saying Haitians went into the Dominican Republic to buy appliances, to get “entertainment.” A gauntlet of vendors and customers leads away from the enclosed market, located on the edge of the city, towards a dirt path that descends to the Artibonite River, which separates the Dominican Republic from Haiti.

II. The Crossing and Its Geography

At Bánica, the border is the river. From the Dominican market, which is situated on the edge of the city, one passes through an informal control, one soldier only, it appeared, in civilian clothes, who was surrounded by a group of men so as to make him indistinguishable except for the fact that he was sitting on a plastic chair that functioned something like a throne. The dirt road then descends, rather steeply, and we walked casually past two border guards not far from the riverbank. They only called us back, telling us we couldn't cross, when we were about to kneel on the bottoms of the dugout canoes. Our guide had to back track and talk the two CESFRONT soldiers out of their attempted extortion so that we could finally cross.

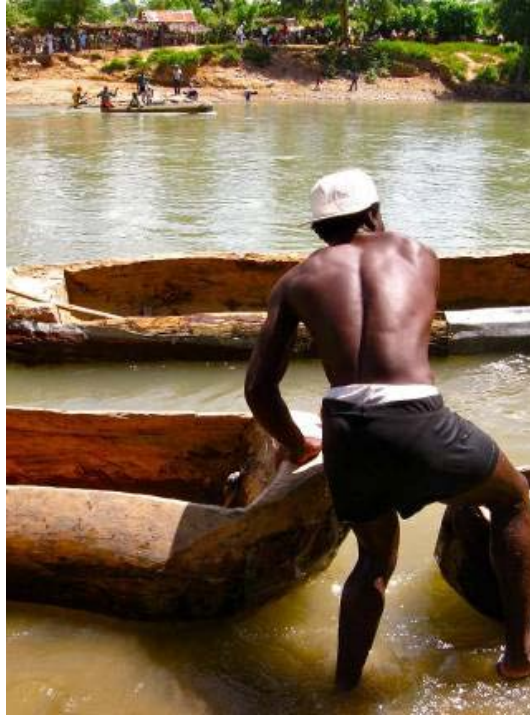


As the crossing is a river, unlike all the other border crossings, there is no vehicular traffic. *Motoconchos* can be seen on the banks, but they weren't ferried across when we were there. The Haitian market is readily visible on the other bank of the river. To get across, one wades across or takes a wooden dugout canoe reinforced with squares of corrugated iron probably taken from the roofs of old, makeshift lodging places. We paid 25 Dominican pesos each, but the cost can vary depending on the depth of the river. One Dominican businessman, who crossed frequently, said he never paid since he was well known. A Haitian merchant told us there was a time when she had to wade across because there were no boats. When the river is high, the boats don't cross and the market is closed. On the Haitian side, the most common mode of transport is a mule. Unburdened, they are tethered on hedges just outside the market area. They are then loaded back up with merchandise, wooden poles and their owners at the end of the day when the rural population returns, over the numerous donkey paths, to their various points of departure.



The market on the Haitian side of the river is makeshift; there is no town. The nearby towns are Thomassique, a town of some 42,000 inhabitants, and Los Cacaos. We were told by the mayor that Dominican money, provided in part by the mayor's office as well as by the merchants in Bánica, and Haitian labor, were used to construct an asphalt road from the riverbank market on the Haitian side to Thomassique, some 30 kilometers away, so that its inhabitants would have better access to the market for their products. There is a fair amount of trans-fluvial traffic. The many canoes keep moving and women generally take them. Some men cross the river on foot. Some lead hesitant donkeys across while others wade against the fast-moving current with 125 pound bags of rice on their shoulders. The Artibonite, the longest river on the island of Hispaniola, is much wider, stronger and faster in Bánica than the Massacre River that we would see in Dajabón

On Thursdays and Sundays as well, thanks to a bi-national agreement, the tradespeople on the Haitian side set up shop atop the bank on the opposite side of the river. Their commercial activities were lodged in temporary stalls, without walls, propped up by wooden poles supporting some sort of roof protection against the sun. We saw the following items for sale there: avocados—grown without chemicals in Haiti and therefore much-appreciated in the Dominican Republic—bananas, rice in small plastic bags, garlic, peppers, potatoes, dirt eaten by pregnant women, as well as soft drinks and ice advertised by the voices of three young male choristers. We tasted Haitian “clairin” offered in a large metallic cup; whereupon, the young salesman, who didn't speak French or Spanish, gave us a fist bump to indicate that we were *pegado*. A gesture with a similar meaning is to make a fist and tap your heart with it thumb first. For the first time at a market place, we saw two men, one young and one older, who were running outdoor gambling games played with cards and dice. As with the lottery in Pedernales, there seemed to be a constant flow of players.



III. Who and What Crosses: Local and Personal Anecdotes

Bánica was very enlightening in this regard because it gave us a global view of how the complex rice trading cycle works, for one, and some idea, too, of how Haitians and Dominicans work together there. It should be reiterated that there was no vehicular traffic at the Bánica crossing (motor vehicles cross at Pedro Santana) and that there were no foreigners besides us. It was a non-vehicular crossing animated by people with dark skin. The majority of the people crossing, in both directions, were Haitians. Amongst them, by far the greatest number of them was male. Because of the current, we saw few children crossing. Thanks to the intervention of Wilfredo, we had the good fortune to interview many people who had just crossed the river into the Dominican Republic.

One tradeswoman we interviewed, Estelle, was related to our guide. He called her *prima* (cousin). She lives in Thomassique with her husband, who works the land there, and her eight children. A saleswoman, she bought foreign clothes—pants, for example—and sheets in Thomassique and sold them in the Dominican market in Bánica.

With respect to her nationality and her movement, Estelle related that she crosses the river every day. The day of the interview was not a

market day, but she was going to sell her merchandise on the street since, as the mayor said in Bánica, selling on the street is *libre* (free). To get from the bank of the Artibonite to the market, she generally had to pay 25 pesos to the soldiers of the CESFRONT. To cross the river by dugout canoe, she generally paid 10 pesos each way, but the fare could be as much as 50 Dominican pesos if the river was exceptionally high. When asked about her nationality, she said she was both Haitian and Dominican. She said she had neither a Haitian passport nor a *cedula* (Dominican I.D. card). When asked if she went to the capital and how, she said she went by *guagua* from time to time. In response to our follow up question, she replied that she generally had to pay something to the soldiers. “There are *negocios* (negotiations),” she said with a smile when asked how much, “negotiations between Haitians and Dominicans.”

Ti-Cirique was the name of a second trader we interviewed on the bank of the Artibonite River after he had crossed it. He was 32 years old and lived in a nearby Haitian village. Another villager told us that, on foot, it took him about 30 minutes to reach the border from his home. Ti-Cirique bought tamarinds, corn (maize) and avocados, and he sold them in the Dominican market. Asked if he paid to enter the market, he said one gives 25 pesos, or whatever one has in one’s pocket, to the *jefe*. Ti-Cirique was especially interesting because of his multiple money-making activities. He bought and sold Haitian produce, and he cultivated his fields himself as well. He was carrying a handful of pesos and gourdes that he showed us and explained that he exchanged currencies for profit. He said for every 100 pesos that changed hands he earned one Dominican peso for himself. In regard to his fourth money-making activity, he taught us a new Dominican Spanish verb, *conchar*, which is linked to the *motoconcho*. Essentially, it means transport by a motorized vehicle. He told us he *conchaba* before he sold his Toyota pick-up truck. He mentioned something about a *guagua* as well. Perhaps he drove one; perhaps he used his Toyota *camioneta* as one.

We also interviewed two *comerciantes* (vendors), Roberto and Juan, who lived in Bánica and were involved in trans-fluvial trade. Both dealt primarily in rice. The first never crossed the river, while the second

crossed every day. Together, through their explanations, they gave us a good overview of how the trans-border rice trade worked, which, in turn, allowed us to better understand the dynamics of Haitian-Dominican interaction along the frontier.

Roberto's niche market was *puntilla* or *arroz partido*. Arroz partido, we learned, was a smaller grain of rice that was significantly cheaper than *arroz grande*. It was a particular favorite of "our Haitian brothers," Roberto explained, because it was *más barato* (cheaper). He explained that the frontier area doesn't produce enough rice. Thus, the rice comes from the more fertile rice-producing areas of the Dominican Republic, i.e., from rice fields in the vicinity of Santiago, La Vega, Cotui, etc. So, Roberto goes to the rice-producing areas with trucks, and he then takes the rice to a mill in Sabana Cruz that separates the rice, as is done, for example, with coffee beans, according to the size of the grain. Whereas the large-grain rice is sold to grocery store chains or destined for exportation, Roberto brings the smaller-grained rice to the market in Bánica and sells it. He sells it there only to Haitian clients who, in turn, take it across the river by animal, or upon their backs, and then by truck to sell in Haitian markets, for example, in Thomassique or Hinche. Robert never crosses the river himself and doesn't sell to Dominicans or send arroz partido back into the central and eastern parts of the Dominican Republic since, as we later learned, in the words of Juan, very few Dominicans ("muy pocas personas") eat arroz partido in the Dominican Republic.

Juan, a second Dominican *comerciante* in Bánica, crosses the river every day without having to pay and doesn't have to carry a passport. That is because he knows a lot civilians in Haiti, and he has relatives there, too. He said he would have the exactly the same business whether there is a border or not. In Haiti, he buys such products as tamarinds, corn, *guandules* (a type of bean used in Dominican moro, "rice and beans") and forage. He also explained a few more things about the rice trade. For one, if Haitians didn't have to pay to go to the market, more would cross to do business there. Moreover, he mentioned a third size of rice grain called *medio grande*. He explained that a 125 pound bag of the largest grain of rice costs about 1150 Dominican pesos, depending on the quality; however,

the same bag of *arroz partido* costs about 700. Thus, its use by the Haitian population is explained simply by its cost. Haiti needs the rice because they don't produce enough of their own. They import about 50 per cent of the rice they need. Much of that comes from the United States, as we noticed from the large sacks in the various marketplaces, but they also import rice, according to Juan, from Europe, especially Spain, and from Argentina.



In addition, Juan provided more information about the “famosa” CESFRONT. Juan maintained that the recently created CESFRONT was not a governmental organization but a semi-autonomous branch of the military. Most Dominicans we spoke to decry their manipulative practices, generally directed toward Haitians, but the relative autonomy of CESFRONT makes it hard to reign in the overt extortion of Haitians, whose difficult situation Juan seemed quite sympathetic with.



IV. The Significance of Bánica

Rather amazingly, and perhaps it is only a facade, but Bánica gives the impression of a pacific and harmonious community, a community where Haitians and Dominicans, even at manipulative border crossings, seem to trade frequently and get along well. This is the borderland harmony evoked in Philoctète's novel, *Massacre River (Le Peuple des Terres Mêlées)*. Our Dominican guide has relatives of the same name in Haiti, one of whom, Estelle, comes to the Dominican Republic every day to sell her merchandise both in the Bánica market and on the street. Wilfredo pointed out the location of the Haitian population in town. He knew where they lived and talked with them in a friendly manner. The mayor said he and his Haitian counterparts in Thomassique and Los Cacaos meet regularly to discuss—He understands Kreyol--their respective agendas. Wilfredo led us inside a house where we were shown the sawed-off *poteau* (pole) of a *poto mitan* that was part of an altar still maintained and used in ceremonies of *santería* in the community named after Saint Francis.



The streets of the town are clean, we saw no overt signs of harassment, the market is orderly and, with a phone call, the *guagua* for Santo Domingo will even pick passengers up at home. In spite of the systematic extortion by the CESFRONT of 25 pesos we witnessed harmonious border interactions between the Dominicans from the community and their Haitian counterparts in spite of the obvious poverty

of the latter. In our short stay there, we saw no overt signs of oppression outside those of the CESFRONT. Can it really be a “paradise with poverty” as Roberto’s father put it? The inhabitants of Bánica are people who have reflected a lot on these borders issues and have taken concrete steps to create a climate of harmony in their community. For the most part, it seems they have succeeded.

Pedro Santana and Los Cacaos

The border crossing at Pedro Santana does not have a gleaming Customs house or a constant flow of transnational traffic. In fact, Pedro Santana is not usually listed as a town, which qualifies as a border-crossing site. We happened upon this crossing, which lies four kilometers north of Bánica, because we had asked about the lack of a bridge. Since vehicles cannot cross at Bánica, our guide explained, the fastest way for trucks and semis to get there was to go through Pedro Santana. Our curiosity about this place was enhanced by the mayor of Bánica, who, bombarding us with a speech regarding the history of cooperation with Haitians and the Haitian government while we were attempting to interview him, mentioned in his list of collaborative projects the construction of the Carretera Internacional. The closest entrance to this international highway was Pedro Santana, where there is also a border crossing, and, curious to see the Haitian market at Los Cacaos, we were able to convince someone to take us there. Our driver was a school teacher, who we first saw reclining on a mat in the middle of a sidewalk. A first offer of 100 pesos for the trip was refused. He agreed, however, to our guide’s second offer of 200 pesos later in the day. He, too, told us gas was very expensive. An Italian later told us that gas was more expensive in the Dominican Republic than in Italy.



We were driven to Pedro Santana by the school teacher, with Kyrstin riding in the front, and Wilfredo, Robert, and our driver's friend sitting in the truck bed. The crossing itself was a cement bridge, wide enough for a semi to pass, over the Artibonite River. We asked about the rainy season, when the river rose, and again our guide explained that when the water was high one could not pass through this crossing. Pedro Santana was a town smaller than Bánica, and the site of crossing seemed slightly removed from the town. It hid on the bank of the Artibonite down the hill from the location of the majority of the houses. We saw empty shipping containers on the side of the road as we approached the bridge, and at the bank of the river at the front of the bridge, there was a sign, with a large Brugal Rum logo, reading in small text below, "Río Artibonito." Brugal Rum seemed to have a monopoly on these highway markers. There were people wading in the muddy water near the shores, but the river seemed to be flowing too fast for anyone to swim in.

As we approached the bridge, and upon seeing that there were two foreigners in the car, the guards, dressed in military garb and sporting rifles, perked up. There didn't seem to be any problem with us crossing due to the fact that our driver was on friendly terms with the guards, but one guard called out half-heartedly, "And if something happens to that Americana?" We had heard this kind of *faux* concern before, which we interpreted as a weak attempt to make us pay, incite some fear, or cover their backs in case something did happen. As we were approaching the bridge, our car stalled, and when the driver got out to readjust something under the hood, a soldier sauntered over toward the passenger door hissing cat calls just loud enough so that his companions could hear some fifty yards away. Our passports weren't asked for at any point. Nor did we pay anything or see anyone else cross there besides our truck. Certainly no foreigners.

With the car running again, we officially entered the Carretera Internacional. It could be inferred that the highway was built as a part of Trujillo's campaign to strengthen the border since it was constructed in 1939 at the height of his unification program. In fact, there are green watch towers every few kilometers rising out of the Dominican landscape along the road. An article from *Diario Libre* claims that the Carretera Internacional was recently reopened and rejuvenated by la Oficina de Desarrollo Fronteriza (The Office of Borderland Development). Although its title gives the highway an official air, the road itself was not paved; it is mostly gravel and dust stretching 65 kilometers from Pedro Santana to Dajabón, one of the only north-south routes of the region (Centro de Información Gubernamental). As we swerved along this highway, made twice as long by our efforts to avoid potholes, we passed Haitians walking along the side of the road, some with mules, some carrying their belongings. The landscape on one side of the road was barren with few trees and some knee-high shrubbery. In comparison, the Dominican side looked more forested for desert standards, seeming to highlight the fact that Haiti suffers from deforestation in that region.



Four kilometers up the Carretera Internacional lies Los Cacaos, a village, surrounded by verdant hills, on the eastern side of the highway, the Haitian side. Los Cacaos is known for its market, which is part of the reason that we were so anxious to get there that particular day. The majority of the market-goers were Haitian, and the only Dominicans that we saw were the three we came with. People arrived at the market mostly on mules, with their characteristic handcrafted saddles, and on horses, which they tied up in the periphery of the marketplace. From a hill the landscape seemed dotted with donkeys. The market itself was a crowded, dusty place, stretching around the side of a hill with vendors sitting on the ground measuring out portions of rice that could not last for more than the day. This seemed to reinforce the notion of the hand-to-mouth economy that the community was living in. There was also food cooking on open fires: yucca, plantains, potatoes, and some meat, as well as livestock for sale. This was the first market in which we had seen live goats, or livestock of any sort, for sale.



The market of Los Cacaos did not seem to be a place that many Dominicans or foreigners frequented based on the looks that we received from people there. We asked our driver if he ever went there, and he claimed that he sometimes went to drink. Wilfredo, who looked quite uncomfortable the whole time we were there, said that he only went to take tourists. He rushed us through the market, giving us the sense that he was much less comfortable in Los Cacaos than with the Haitian community in Bánica. Our driver's friend bought a reused plastic water bottle full of "clairin" while we were there, and, waving to his acquaintances, he passed it to the driver from the truck bed as we were making our way back to Pedro Santana. It is perhaps noteworthy that our guide, when we were going to throw plastic water bottles into the trash bins in Bánica, took them and threw them over the fence into a yard that we now assume belonged to a Haitian family, for reuse. Upon passing back over the bridge into Pedro Santana, we did not even slow down for the border guard, who simply raised a hand in a lazy wave as we passed.



Dajabón

“It is the necessary...consequence of a certain propensity in human nature...to truck, barter and exchange one thing for another”
—Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Book One, Chapter Two



I. The Entrance

Dajabón is the northernmost border crossing and the one that serves the fertile northern part of the country; thus, it is the most elaborate and most important in the Dominican Republic. The salient fact about the border crossing at Dajabón is that there are two points of access: the old entrance and the newer one about two hundred meters east along the border, which is the Massacre River. Both are dynamic sites that serve the needs of the people in the area. The old entrance takes the form of a Roman arch adorned with multi-colored pseudo-Islamic tiles and the words “Republica Dominicana” written above it. Its bridge demarcates, by color, the Haitian side of the bridge from the Dominican one. Like the new entrance, the older arch, seemingly built during the time of Trujillo, is an extension of one of the principal streets of Dajabón. The new entrance, preceded by a brand new resplendently white, and seemingly unpenetrated, Customs house, is a broad road across the second bridge about two hundred meters to the east of the first. Towering billboards indicate graphically that this complex border undertaking is being constructed by the Dominican government but funded by the European Union. It should be noted that, sometime after 2008, as a response to the cholera outbreak, the market, once situated on the edge of river to the right of the old entrance has been shifted to the east of the new entrance and now sits on

the edge of town next to a large, unfinished covered market building that betokens the importance of the commercial exchanges that take place now in this town of some 65,000 inhabitants, and that will take place, to an even greater degree, in the future.



II. The Crossing Itself and Its Geography

It is significant that the border crossing is two bridges across the Massacre River, a river that acquired notoriety because of the Trujillo-initiated killing of some 20,000 Haitians in 1937. For that symbolic reason, it has been brilliantly described, and put at the epicenter of their work, by such gifted novelists as Jacques Stephen Alexis and Edwidge Danticat to name a few.

There is less to say about the new crossing because we weren't able to cross and because the soldiers posted at the gate there told us not to take pictures. We foresaw that restriction and snapped as many pictures as we could before they stopped us. Once again, the flow of human traffic was from the market in Dajabón across the bridge and toward the edge of the Haitian border town, Ouanaminthe, which is clearly visible from both bridges. Its population is somewhat less than Dajabón's. There was no doubt an entrance onto the bridge's road issuing from the backside of the relocated market, which we might have seen had we been able to penetrate further into the crowded market on the Dominican side of the river. We left the jam-packed Dominican market, just after passing the guarded

entranceway, a fence, when an overzealous driver rolled his *motoconcho* into the back of Robert's leg. We were told by Father Regino Martínez, among others, that the large multi-storied structure to the right of the bridge on the Dominican side, which has been under construction since at least 2008, only had enough stalls to rent for about twenty-five per cent of the expected demand once it does open. Thus, he provided us with still another indicator of the commercial vitality of Dajabón.



With respect to crossing the border, the old bridge is more significant. The cement bridge is painted in three colors: the Dominican side is a chipped yellow while the Haitian side is painted in its national colors, red and blue. Where the national colors meet there is a metal gate that can swing open for motorized vehicles. One photo Robert took of the old bridge in 2008 shows clearly a man straddling the facade of the elevated bridge in an attempt to circumvent the gate and Dominican border control. At the far right hand side of the bridge, there is a second metallic gate, painted red and blue, for entrance into Haiti. People of all ages were

crossing the river on foot, spreading their freshly washed clothes all over the river bank, sunbathing and even waving up to us while picnicking on the river bed below. One naked boy held up five fish for us to buy. It is noteworthy that both times we have seen the Massacre River in Dajabón, it was so shallow that one could easily wade across. Moreover, the many people who did so went unhindered by the authorities on the bridge above.



At this border site, probably since the cholera outbreak, allegedly caused by Nepalese members of the MINUSTAH in Haiti, one now finds a three foot high yellow-framed portable metallic fence that was set up atop the riverbank on the Dominican side. It runs from the old bridge to the new one along the site of the 2008 market. That fence is ostensibly there to keep Haitians out. Nonetheless, several Haitian kids approached the fence to ask us for money. One hopped over it as we were walking along on the other side. The fence was nonchalantly guarded by two soldiers. One was asleep on a chair on the ground floor of an abandoned cement building with a rifle across his knees. The other was talking to Haitian kids. Sitting atop the yellow fence, a young Dominican girl of nine told us, when asked if she crossed the river that she never did because it was too deep.

On the old bridge in the No Man's Land between the gate indicating the exit from Dominican territory and the red and blue gate signifying entrance into Haiti, we saw three American members of MINUSTAH (very obvious from the insignia on their uniforms and their speech) and four soldiers wearing the traditional blue helmets of the U.N. with the word



“Uruguay” stitched onto the left sleeve of their combat fatigues. The American spokesperson was very circumspect and seemed more intent on asking us questions than on answering ours about their role in the U.N.

mandated MINUSTAH. It was clear that our curiosity was not well received. The group's spokesperson, who we learned was a police officer, also told the Uruguayans, as he was leaving, to make sure that we left the bridge when our allotted ten minutes were up.

III. Who and What Crosses

On the new bridge, we observed a heavy flow of people traveling with their goods from the market on the Dominican side across the wide bridge to Ouanaminthe. Here, we were more watchers than participants since the CESFRONT soldiers would not allow us on the bridge. From a distant point between the two entrances, we could observe, above the single file flow of people proceeding along a dirt path into Ouanaminthe, a long row of motorbikes lining the Haitian entrance to the bridge, a sort of taxi stop, where drivers were waiting for work amongst commuters laden with goods.



With respect to who crosses, the old bridge seems significantly different than the new one. It was the most regulated and had the largest quantity of heavy-duty vehicular traffic we saw along the Dominican border. Foreigners cross via the old bridge while we were not allowed to cross the new one. We saw a woman with a Bible coming from Haiti during the few minutes we were on the old entrance bridge. A Haitian man, who

had lived in New Jersey, was transporting sacks of plastic in the back of his pick-up into Haiti. He was waiting for a friend and his turn to cross. He explained to us the system of payments and how it depended on the mood, or the economic situation, of the border guard. If it was September and the beginning of the school year, he explained, the guard probably needed extra money for his kids. He admonished us for taking pictures and asked us if we wouldn't be offended if he took pictures of junk in the States. We also noticed a Red Cross car, with what seemed to be four doctors in it, drive onto the bridge heading into Haiti. That reminded us of the very large Red Cross building we had seen on the edge of Elías Piña and the cholera posters in Pedernales.

The crossing at Dajabón was the most regulated we experienced. This includes both the number of surveillance personnel on the bridge itself and the codification of the fees for crossing. The officials and numerous Haitian *buscones* explain to you at a Customs booth before you approach passport control, that the cost to leave the Dominican Republic, enter Haiti and then re-enter the Dominican Republic is 41 U.S. dollars. The charge of twenty-five dollars to leave the Dominican Republic from the old entrance has remained the same over the last three years. Among the various border crossings we observed, only Elías Piña, besides Dajabón, has such a hefty fee.

With respect to who crosses, one should cite the obvious results of the, for the most part, illicit crossings in the vicinity of Dajabón. One overt manifestation can be found at the bus stop for buses from out of town, especially those of Caribe Tours. Three years ago there was a massive throng, somewhat frightening actually, of poorly dressed men, assumed Haitian, mobbing the exit door of the bus trying to grab the bags from passengers' hands as they tried to step down off the bus. In August 2011, there was a wire fence that allowed the bus in, but not the want-to-be porters. As soon as the bus had entered the parking lot, a man with a large wooden stick about the size of a baseball bat shut the metallic gate after pushing most of the men back out that had snuck through the opening with the bus. We saw a similar bat-like stick being used in exactly the same way at the entrance to the crowded market next to the new bridge. In spite of

those precautionary measures, as soon as the first of our suitcases was unloaded by the cobrador, someone grabbed its handle and started away with it before we grabbed it and told him we didn't need a porter.

Of all the border communities we visited, by far the most begging we saw by young children took place in Dajabón. In fact, although we knew the name of our hotel and where it was, two young boys, one with a shoeshine box, followed us on foot along the sidewalk pretending to be leading us to our hotel. When we arrived, and after we had checked in, they stayed outside the door and indicated they were hungry by patting their stomachs until the receptionist came over from across the street, pushed them away and told us they were Haitians. The one with the shoeshine box even dared to flail back at her with his shoeshine box before finally leaving albeit reluctantly. Later, when we sat out in a public park after having gone to an ATM, at least four young, disheveled kids, one of which was female, begged us for money indicating, again by rubbing their stomachs, that they were hungry. They didn't ask for much. The most frequent request was: "Dame 5 pesos!" (Give me 5 pesos!)

This type of situation has repercussions at the national level. For example, José Ricardo Taveras, the Director of Immigration in the Dominican Republic, recently "...lashed out at the United Nations for failing to slow the influx" (Archibold 2) of Haitians. He is reported, in the New York Times, to have cited estimates of the " 500,000 or more Haitians" in the Dominican Republic, and he opined that "nobody can resist an invasion of that nature" (qtd. in Archibold 2). Such rhetoric is the preamble and justification for massive deportations.

IV. An Interview with Father Regino Martínez Bréton of Solidaridad Fronteriza in Dajabón

Our most significant interaction in Dajabón was our hour-long interview with Father Regino Martínez Bretón, Director of Solidaridad Fronteriza. As the name of the organization he directs indicates, he has a wealth of knowledge about the border communities along the Massacre River and experience in facilitating Haitian-Dominican relations. Solidaridad Fronteriza is the "fruit" of the work of Jesuits who settled in

Dajabón in 1936. Father Martínez has been a clergyman in the border region since 1974 and in Dajabón since 1988.

Like many others along the border region, Rafael in Pedernales, for example, Father Martínez has thought long and hard about the past—He credits, to cite one example, the nineteenth-century Haitian occupation of Hispaniola with bringing about land reform in the Dominican Republic—and the present. At the beginning of the interview, he outlined the progressive shift in orientation of the Jesuit mission in Dajabón. In 1936, its function was almost purely internal and ecclesiastical. In fact, he indicated that there was virtually no institutional response to the Trujillo-initiated Massacre of 1937. From that isolationism, he maintains that they adopted a more educational function toward the middle of the 1960s which, in turn, was transformed into a sort of socio-political activism in the 1970s.



Father Martínez continued by outlining the goals of Solidaridad Fronteriza. He started by evoking the commercial relations amongst the island's inhabitants going all the way back to the time of the settlements of the Spanish and the French. Much later, he added, Haitian and Dominican farm workers realized that they needed each other in their "lucha por la tierra," their struggle for ownership of the land. Among the recent concrete measures that have been taken for Haitians at the center is the bringing together of some 6,000 workers into a collective organization called Asomilin. He mentioned, too, the issuance of a kind of ersatz *cedula* (the Dominican I.D. card) which provides Haitian workers possessing these ersatz cards with something to fall back on when confronted with acts of overt injustice. Although it is not a government-issued document, it does give the CESFRONT soldiers at the numerous control points important information about the card-carrier including his/her profession and the number of years he/she has spent in the Dominican Republic. This awareness of the acute vulnerability of Haitians in the Dominican Republic, and the corresponding efforts to help them, make Solidaridad Fronteriza seem like a beacon that could serve as a model for nationwide reflection on these matters. Thinking in terms of bi-national co-operation was also manifest in another local organization that is located not far from Solidaridad Fronteriza. Centro Puente is a center that sells handcrafted goods, mostly jewelry, made by a co-operative of Haitian and Dominican women. They also offer courses in Kreyol.

In one area, however, Father Martínez responded just like every other Dominican we met on the trip. He, too, made the "two cultures" argument when asked if Hispaniola would not be better off as a whole if the border were to be abolished. He said the two countries had two languages, two religions, two histories, in short, two cultures. Basically, he argued, much like Rafael in Pedernales, that, because of those differences, unification would not bring unity. He explained that the hypothetical unification would be much more difficult to bring about than was the unification of East and West Germany, for example. He also argued, without giving much explanation, that the situation was different, too, from that of the border separating the United States from Mexico. He countered

with the notion of bi-nationality, the working together of citizens of both nations, and pointed out that some of the bi-national activities being carried out at Solidaridad Fronteriza could possibly be seen as nationwide models although he evoked the ever-present tension between local and national authorities.

He closed with a few comments on the ambivalent nature of the attitude of the two respective governments toward the border. He pointed out that the government in Santo Domingo was willing to let Haitians in to do certain types of low-paying labor, but was equally capable, primarily as a political diversion from more serious issues, like urban sanitation or the failing electrical grid, of mass expulsions and of closing an eye to the human trafficking of Haitian workers, for example. He also listed the various beneficiaries of the status quo. Thus, the driver of the vehicle, the soldier engaged in the extortion, the employer of low cost laborers, Customs officials, and the government itself all benefit from a border situation that was, he argued, far from arbitrary. In fact, it is willed and tolerated because of the many people whose interests it serves.

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