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To Matthew, whose unconditional love supported me to fulfill this dream.
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Haitians often rely on a wealth of proverbs to communicate profound wisdom. As I reflect on the culmination of this arduous, yet wonderful journey, there is one proverb that stands out above the rest: *Men anpil, chay pa lou* (Many hands make the load lighter.) This dissertation could not have been possible without the many hands that lifted and uplifted me as I worked towards this lifelong dream.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CESFRONT  Cuerpo Especializado de Seguridad Fronteriza de Estado de Salud Pública y Asistencia Social (Specialized Corps for Terrestrial Border Security)

DNCD  Dirección Nacional de Control de Drogas (National Drug Control Agency)

DNI  Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia (National Inteligence Agency)

MINUSTAH  Mission des Nations Unies por la Stabilisation en Haiti (United Nations Stabilization Mission in Haiti)

UNICEF  United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund

USAID  United States Agency for International Development

UNDP  United Nations Development Programme
The January 12th earthquake in Haiti ranks among the most devastating catastrophes in over a century. Prominent among the media reports of the devastation were concerns over the impact of the earthquake on Haitian children, particularly on those involved in the informal practice of child fosterage. Prior to the earthquake, these children often lived in settings of virtual child servitude and relied on weak family networks and social ties for support. The earthquake, however, effectively threw these networks and ties into chaos.

This dissertation sheds light on this issue by examining the effects of the earthquake on the Haitian practice of child fosterage. This research focuses on the practice as it occurred amongst a community of earthquake-displaced Haitians living in the Haitian-Dominican border town of Comendador (also known as Elías Piña), Dominican Republic. The main research questions addressed are: Q1. In what ways has the earthquake affected the lives of Haitian and Dominican families living in the area? Q2. In what ways has the earthquake affected families that are involved in fosterage arrangements? Q3. What are the post-earthquake sociocultural processes
involved in the placement of Haitian children with Dominican families? Q4. What are the initial post-earthquake reactions to fosterage practices from institutions external to the decision-making families? Data were collected using a combination of ethnographic field research methods that included focus groups, participant observation, semi-structured and structured interviews.

Research findings indicate that child fosterage practices changed in two general ways: increased prevalence and increased child risk. Displaced families turned to fosterage to adapt to post-earthquake conditions. The decline in post-earthquake solidarity, the post-earthquake economy, lack of aid, and the cholera epidemic helped create the conditions that led families to place their children with others. Findings also indicate that post-earthquake fosterage arrangements were carried out under conditions of increased child risk. The arrangement’s inherent reciprocities became nearly impossible to fulfill in post-earthquake conditions. Also, changes in Dominican border policy and the increased attention to the transborder movement of children made it difficult for parents to implement the arrangement’s wellbeing processes. In the end, post-earthquake child protection measures succeeded in isolating biological families from their children.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The United Nations calls the January 12th earthquake the worst disaster it has faced in its history (Agence France-Presse 2010). Although exact numbers will perhaps never be known, the 7.0 earthquake claimed over 217,000 lives, destroyed 70% of the structures in the Port-au-Prince area and left 1.9 million homeless (United Nations 2010). The earthquake also generated a subsequent massive movement of people out of the areas of direct impact into the countryside. Estimates place the number of residents that have since fled towards rural areas at 500,000, generating a destabilizing reverse migration flow that had serious effects on the development and stability of the countryside (International Organization for Migration 2010).

Within the generalized post-earthquake crisis, Haitian children were amongst the most vulnerable. Although exact numbers are unknown, early estimates suggested that the earthquake created 15,000 new orphans and left 17,000 new unaccompanied children (United States Agency for International Development 2010). Prominent among the media reports on Haitian children were those involved in the informal practice of child fosterage, where poorer Haitian families from rural areas place one or more of their children with an economically better-off household in the city (Cohen 2010, Paul 2010). Prior to the earthquake, reports suggested that these children often lived in settings of virtual child servitude and relied on weak family networks and social ties for support (Pan American Development Foundation 2009). After the earthquake, concern about this particular population of children increased as the disaster effectively threw these networks and ties into chaos (Cohen 2010). Thus, in the days and weeks that followed the earthquake, concerns over the well-being of foster children abounded
among policy makers, non-governmental organizations, the media and aid workers alike. What would become of these children? Could Haitian society, so severely impacted by the earthquake, take care of them? How would the informal institution of child fosterage in Haiti respond to the extreme changes brought about by the earthquake (Cohen 2010)?

In this dissertation, I attempt to shed light on these and other questions by examining the effects of the earthquake on the Haitian practice of child fosterage. I focus on these changes as they occurred along the Haitian-Dominican border town of Elías Piña, an area where the traditional practice of placing Haitian children with Haitian and Dominican-Haitian families operates alongside the practice of placing children with Dominican families. Prior to the earthquake, these bi-ethnic and informal arrangements provoked concerns of child labor, smuggling, trafficking, racism and child abuse (Smucker and Murray 2004, Kulstad 2006). After the earthquake, these concerns increased tenfold. Specifically, this dissertation focuses on the fosterage decision-making process of a group of earthquake Haitians in Elías Piña.

An Unexpected Topic

I had not initially intended to conduct my dissertation research on child fosterage and disasters. In fact, prior to the earthquake I was working on a National Science Foundation grant proposal to study issues of race-based discrimination in hiring processes in the Dominican Republic. However, the wave of events that were triggered by the tectonic shifts of plates on the island of Hispaniola compelled me to forego this topic. On that day, I became a serendipitous witness to the earthquake’s effects throughout Hispaniola. I was in Santo Domingo on January 12, 2010. Like many other Hispaniolan residents did on that day, I too felt the very same tremors that destroyed
Port-au-Prince, albeit in a much, much diminished way. While those of us in the Dominican Republic felt what the United States Geological Survey (2010) described as light to moderate shaking and no loss of life or property damage was reported, the earthquake and its aftermath impacted our national and personal lives in significant ways. In fact, in the days and weeks that followed the event, I witnessed major changes in inter-ethnic and inter-government relationships. I saw how Haiti and Haitians went from being seen as a problematic, failed country, a source of unwanted immigrants to becoming the country of kin. In the days and weeks that followed, I witnessed how Dominicans of all walks of life became involved in the rescue process in an unprecedented fashion. Rich, poor, young and old, Dominicans responded en masse to help their neighbor in need. In the days that followed, Haitians became “nuestros hermanos” [our brothers]. Throughout the city, I witnessed, mesmerized, as Dominicans mourned for Haiti and for the very same people they had rejected for so many years.

While I was transfixed by the events that unfolded in the Dominican Republic, it was not until the international media turned its attention towards the plight of Haitian children that I made the decision to change research topics. Throughout the earthquake coverage, it seemed as if Haitian children had become the face of the earthquake victim. Over and over, the international media reported on the plight of defenseless Haitian children, particularly orphaned and abandoned children. The media honed in even more so on restavèks or on children involved in abusive fosterage arrangements. Whether it was CNN’s Soledad O’Brien’s (2010) special report “Rescued” or the international focus on the group of American missionaries caught
trying to enter the Dominican Republic with orphans that were not really orphans (Thompson 2010, Associated Press 2010), the international media was presenting a picture of Haitian family life I found disconcerting. As the media spoke of orphans whose parents were very much alive, but that had chosen to put them up for adoption, or as they spoke of child slaves whose parents had willingly placed them in quasi-child slavery arrangements, Haitian parents were being represented in a less than positive light. In contrast, non-profits and orphanages that rescued these children, “out of their childhood bondage” (O’Brien 2010) were presented as heroic.

The media’s efforts to bring attention to the plight of the children involved in abusive fosterage arrangements are certainly commendable. Restavèks deserved attention and immediate action, particularly after the earthquake. However, I was troubled by the fact that this reporting also put forth other implicit, yet equally powerful, messages. First, I was concerned that they presented Haitian children as passive victims that need to be rescued from the overall chaos that is Haiti. Second, these reports implicitly vilified Haitian parents. By only scantily addressing the role that extreme poverty played in the decision to give up a child, Haitian parents were in many ways as neglectful and unfit. Third, the orphanages, people and organizations that rescued the children involved in these arrangements were inevitably seen a heroes or quasi-saints. In the end, I could not help but feel that Haitian parenting was being added to the long list of bizarre and obscure traits that make up what Farmer (2006) calls the American folk model of Haitians.

I had conducted research on child fosterage arrangements on the border in 2004 for my M.A. (Kulstad 2004). Certainly, I was far from being an expert on the topic. I
knew, however, that the problem was not as simple as it was portrayed to the generalized public. While child fosterage might have been new to many of the reporters and to the viewers transfixed on Haitian-related events, I knew that this practice was not new, bizarre, or exclusive to Haitians, and it did not necessarily involve negligent parents and passive children in need of rescuing. Child fosterage is a widespread practice that occurs in varied regions of the world (Alber, 2004; Bledsoe & Isiugo-Abanihe, 1989; Desai, 1992, 1995; Goody, 1973; Zimmerman, 2003), including on the island of Hispaniola where approximately 14.2% of Dominican children under the age of 15 (Centro de Estudios Sociales y Demograficos [CESDM] 2003) and 32% of Haitian children living in the Port-au-Prince area alone (Pan American Development Foundation and US Agency for International Development 2009) are estimated to be involved in these arrangements. Parents in both countries voluntarily give up one or more of their offspring to relatives or non-relatives in an informal, yet culturally-sanctioned agreement that requires that the receiving family provide the child with food, clothing, nurturing, shelter and schooling in exchange for labor from the child.

In general, families in both countries view this arrangement as a valuable parenting strategy. It helps children and parents by providing otherwise unavailable schooling opportunities for rural children. It also alleviates the economic burden of childrearing for poor families and helps families during crisis situations (Smucker and Murray 2004, Kulstad 2006). Moreover, these arrangements are based on a generalized view of family that does not necessarily define parenting in biological terms. Rather, it is based on both biological and social notions of parenting. In other words, you can be a parent without having birthed the child. While it is unfortunately true that
many children involved in fosterage arrangements in Haiti have been abused and while it is certainly a problem that receiving parents often fail to send foster children to school, treating them as second-class members of the household, this is far from being a phenomena applicable to all fosterage arrangements. While pre-earthquake estimates place the number of *restavèks* between 90,000 and 300,000 (Pan American Development Foundation 2009), many, many others are involved in fosterage arrangements that are beneficial to all parties involved. To criminalize the practice of fosterage, as it appeared many of these organizations and reporters were doing, seemed inaccurate because they were only presenting a small part of the story.

Not only was I troubled by the media’s representation of foster arrangements, but I grew increasingly concerned that post-earthquake intervention strategies would be framed around these negative images. I was concerned that the underlying notion that Haitians-are-bad-parents or that biological parents are best, would permeate projects. After the earthquake, there was much talk about returning foster children to their biological households, usually in the countryside, particularly among international nonprofits (Nunan 2010). While this strategy might have been adequate in many cases, the assumption that children are necessarily better off with their biological parents in the rural areas is false. Often, children do not have an affective relationship with their parents. Also, parents would undoubtedly struggle with an additional mouth to feed. Most importantly, however, as a plethora of non-profit institutions flocked to the Haitian-Dominican border to supervise, regulate and observe the trans-border movement of children, I became even more concerned about the fate of children involved in trans-border fosterage arrangements. As border restrictions intensified as a result of the
American missionary crisis, these organizations started to require birth certificates and other related documentation to allow regulate the trans-border movement of children across the border into the Dominican Republic. Often, neither Haitian parents nor their children had birth certificates or any other type of state-issued documentation. How, then, were these policies going to be enforced? To complicate matters even further, these arrangements are informal, unwritten. It is not as if foster parents have powers of attorney. Yet, they constitute de facto transfers of child custody from the biological to the foster parent. If a foster parent cannot provide legal documentation, does this mean that they cannot travel across the border with the foster child? Finally, I was concerned that the underlying issues behind the decision to give up children were hardly being addressed. Most Haitian parents give up their children because they have no choice. Extreme poverty and the inability to support children are the main reasons that are driving parents to this decision. Why was there little discussion of the matter?

In the end, while my race-related research was highly important, I felt compelled to re-take my trans-border fosterage project once again. I could not forego the opportunity of making important applied and theoretical contributions on a matter of such humanitarian relevance. An anthropological approach, I thought, would be useful in such a complex matter. Its core holistic approach would be helpful to policy makers and development agencies alike in effectively addressing the post-earthquake needs of Haitian foster children and their families. Similarly, I felt that results could be used to anticipate and better deal with the specific issues foster children and their parents face in the aftermath of disasters in other regions of the world. But above all, given my
previous research experience on trans-border fosterage arrangements, I was in a unique position to provide a pre- and post-earthquake perspective on child fosterage.

This new topic also has the potential to make important contributions to anthropological theory. Anthropologists have paid close attention to disasters because they shed light on the relationships and interrelationships between social, technological and natural systems (Oliver-Smith 1996). Disasters provide a rare look into how humans adapt to the natural world. They reveal how individuals and groups “reinvent their cultural systems” (Oliver-Smith 1992:6) after societal structures are destroyed. While cultural change takes place all the time, disasters allow anthropologists a rare, sudden glimpse into a process that is gradual and difficult to observe. Thus, my work had the potential of addressing how humans reconstitute relatedness in the wake of utter devastation. Moreover, this work could contribute towards the available literature on the anthropology of disaster by assisting in constructing more exhaustive theories and models that not only address the experiences of adults in disasters, but of children, too (Peek 2008). Although much research had been conducted regarding the effects of disasters on children, most of it has focused on post-disaster mental health issues and much remains to be learned about how children in general, and foster children in particular, experience disasters. More specifically, it could assist in understanding how children that already live in chronic states of disaster experience these catastrophic events.

Thus, my husband, Matthew Kaye, and I headed to Elías Piña, Dominican Republic to carry out our respective doctoral dissertation research. We commenced our research in June 21, 2010, and were in the field through December 31st of the same
year. I embarked on this project with the aim of answering the following research questions:

Q1. In what ways has the earthquake affected the lives of Haitian and Dominican families living in the area?

Q2. In what ways has the earthquake affected families that are involved, to some varying degrees, with fosterage arrangements?

Q3. What are the post-earthquake sociocultural processes involved in the placement of Haitian children with Dominican families?

Q4. What are the initial post-earthquake reactions to fosterage practices from institutions external to the decision-making families: namely, the Haitian and Dominican governments, international organizations such as UNICEF, and the NGO community?

Situating Elías Piña within the Hispaniolan Context

To understand life in Elías Piña we must first situate it within the geography of the island of Hispaniola. The Haitian-Dominican border is two hundred and seventy five kilometers in length and runs north-south, dividing the island of Hispaniola. The province of Elías Piña is one of five Dominican provinces that share a border with the neighboring country of Haiti; the others are Dajabón, Monte Cristi, Independencia, and Pedernales. Elías Piña province occupies 1,426.20 square kilometers in the central part of the border region, commonly referred to by outsiders in the Dominican Republic as “la frontera.” It is bordered by Dajabón province to its north, and Independencia and Bahoruco provinces to its south. To the east, lies San Juan de la Maguana and to the west, of course, lies Haiti. More specifically, Elías Piña shares 154 kilometers with five Haitian communes or municipalities –Savanette, Belladère, Thomonde, Thomassique and Cerca-La-Source. All five are part of Haiti’s Département du Centre.

Despite sharing borders with several provinces, Elías Piña is in many ways fragmented internally and isolated from its fellow Dominican border neighbors.
Hispaniola’s geographical features have much to do with this isolation. Two mountain ranges create a formidable barrier between its neighbors to the north and south. To the north, lies the island’s largest and tallest mountain range. This range, which runs in a northeast-southeast direction, cross-cuts both countries. Although one mountain range, it has two names. In Haiti, this mountain range is the Chaine de Vallieres. But when it reaches the border, this mountain range ceases to be Haitian and becomes Dominican. At the border, the Chaine de Vallieres becomes the Cordillera Central. Towards the southern border lies another smaller mountain range that also serves as a barrier; it is known as the Sierra de Neyba in the Dominican Republic and the Chaine des Mattheux in Haiti.

While geography has isolated Elías Piña from its Dominican northern and southern neighbors, it has done the opposite with those to the east and west. The valley has served as a geographical conduit through which long-lasting social, economic and political relationships have been forged. Elías Piña shares a vast Hispaniolan valley with San Juan de la Maguana in the Dominican Republic, and with the Département du Centre in Haiti. As is the case with the northern and southern mountain ranges, this valley also has two identities. In the Dominican Republic, it is the Valle de San Juan. In Haiti it is the Plateau Central. Regardless, this beautiful and lush valley is of central importance on both sides of the border. In fact, on the Dominican side, the Valle de San Juan is “el centro que organiza el territorio” [the center that organizes the territory] (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano República Dominicana 2010:11-2). The San Juan Valley gives the region its name. In Haiti, this valley constitutes the largest and most important stretch of flat land in what is, in effect, a mostly mountainous country. With
high quality fertile soils, this valley is central to agricultural production on both sides of the border. While Hispaniolan mountains and valleys undergo a name change as they cross the international border, one shared key environmental feature remains somewhat the same. Born in the mountains of the Cordillera Central in the Dominican Republic, the Río Artibonito, the longest river on the island of Hispaniola, simply becomes the Artibonite when it crosses into Haiti. Although it is central to life on both sides, the Artibonite is vital to Haiti. It is essential to the irrigation of the country’s largest agricultural plain and it feeds the Peligre Hydroelectric Dam. Although the Artibonite River is central to Haitian life, it has lately been the source of much death. Since late 2010, the Artibonite has become infamous as it is believed to be the initial site of contamination in the cholera epidemic (Ivers 2013).

Even as Elías Piña has access to some of the most fertile lands in the country, life in this town is far from productive. In fact, Elías Piña is the poorest province in the Dominican Republic. According to the Oficina de Desarrollo Humano República Dominicana (2010) report, Elías Piña has the lowest human development index in the entire country. It has the lowest educational index, the lowest per capita income and is 27th out of 32 in its health index ranking. As a result the people of Elías Piña have been leaving the province en masse for years, making it one of the less densely populated regions in the country.

While Elías Piña is mostly a rural province, I conducted my research in the urban area of Comendador, its capital. Better known as Elías Piña, this town has recently experienced a population increase. With 11,390 residents, it has the highest population and population density in the province (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano República
Dominicana 2010). In the last decades, this town has attracted people from both sides of the border in search for income opportunities. They come because the town of Elías Piña has a binational market. Twice a week, thousands of Haitians and Dominicans congregate to buy and sell a wide variety of goods that range from food, to used clothes, to pots and pans. On Fridays and Mondays, this market attracts people from all over the island in search of bargains and business opportunities.

Elías Piña is also attractive to many because of its role as a border town. It is in Elías Piña that one of the official border crossings into Haiti is located. Given its function as an official Dominican border crossing point, the Dominican state has a formidable presence in this town. Whether it is the border enforcement corps (CESFRONT), the Dominican military, the Policía Nacional (National Police), the Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia (National Intelligence Agency), or the Dirección Nacional de Control de Drogas (National Agency for Drug Control), to name a few, the agents of the state are ubiquitous. More importantly, their influence permeates all realms of life in the town.

While their official role is to keep order and protect the population, they are more often than not involved in illegal activity. Whether it is gun contraband, drug or human trafficking, the Dominican military has a heavy hand in organized crime in the region. But while locals fear and disapprove of the military’s actions, most cannot wait to have their children enter the ranks of these organizations. In Elías Piña, the military is one of the few ways to rise out of poverty. Also, although drug kingpin behavior is looked down upon, they are the only benefactors in the area.

Conducting Research in Challenging Environments

Although I had previously conducted research on fosterage in the border area in 2004, the heavy Dominican law enforcement presence and the high level of illicit activity
in the town, presented unexpected challenges. The most important was related to a scandal surrounding Quirino Paulino, a captain in the Dominican military. The first Dominican to be extradited to the United States on major drug trafficking charges, Quirino Paulino is accused of operating a multi-million dollar cocaine trafficking ring that distributed drugs from Colombia through Haiti and the Dominican Republic, and then on to New York City. Linked to a shipment of cocaine worth over twenty six-million dollars, Quirino was accused of bringing drugs from Haiti into the Dominican Republic through the Elías Piña border. Arrested in 2004, locals mourned the arrest of a beloved benefactor. While the Dominican state consistently ignored Elías Piña, Quirino helped the local population. As a result, the fact that Quirino was caught by undercover United States Drug Enforcement Agents created an environment of suspicion, particularly towards outsiders. Consequently, people were suspicious of outsiders asking questions.

Locals were also somewhat bitter towards outsiders asking about Haitian-related issues. “Ustedes de los derechos humanos nada más les gusta hablar que aquí se maltrata a los haitianos, pero nadie viene a ayudarnos con nuestros problemas con ellos,” or “You human rights people only like to talk about how we mistreat Haitians, but nobody comes here to help us with our problems with them!” Manito yelled at us one afternoon in his restaurant when he caught a Haitian man stealing food from his warehouse. Although I was explicit about the purpose of my stay and my professional affiliation, I felt that people had difficulty believing my husband and I. If I was with the University of Florida, an American institution, why was I living in such poor conditions? Also, why didn’t I have a 4x4 vehicle with a UF logo painted on the door at my disposal?
Given this unique research context, conducting ethnographic research on a sensitive topic like fosterage required some re-adjusting. While I had initially planned to use semi-structured interviews and participant observation as the method of collecting information and while I had initially planned to use the chain referral sampling method, I soon realized that they would not be appropriate. For one, Dominicans felt uncomfortable and grew suspicious of the loosely structured, iterative style of these interviews. People expected, and trusted, more highly structured survey instruments, with bubbles, boxes and blanks. As a result, I developed a structured survey form that I used as a general framework and conversation starting point. I piloted the instrument first, and later did readjustments. With the final version, I interviewed informants on their families and on their fosterage experiences. This instrument made informants feel more at ease with the interview as it made me seem more official and more institutional. As informants felt more at ease with the interview and with the process, I interjected open-ended questions from my interview schedule. In this manner, informants felt as if these questions were asked in relationship to the survey instrument, rather than me snooping into their lives.

Given the high levels of mistrust, I used a modified snowball sampling method instead of the chain referral sampling to pick informants. I hired and trained ten local research assistants to administer the interview instrument among their own contacts. These assistants were selected through contacts I developed at the local internet and computer training center. Since the assistants were interviewing people they knew, informants were more likely to speak candidly about fosterage arrangements with them than if I had conducted the interviews myself. In an effort to ensure that the sample
would capture the heterogeneity of the Elías Piña community, I selected research assistants that lived and had friends in a wide variety of neighborhoods. While the sample is far from being representative, it includes data from households in military neighborhoods, upper-middle and lower class neighborhoods, Haitian neighborhoods, market neighborhoods and border-crossing areas. In the end, I collected qualitative and quantitative data on 250 household throughout the town.

As research assistants turned in their surveys, I reviewed them in extensive detail. In these debriefing sessions, I checked for errors and inconsistencies. Also, since the people they surveyed were well-known to them, they were able to provide additional information about them as well. Also, in the debriefing process, I identified potential families, willing to participate in additional interviews with me. I tape recorded and took notes during the debriefing sessions.

As time went by, however, my husband and I developed relationships with neighbors and others throughout the town. As people got used to seeing us around the town, in the market, at church, at the nonprofits, people slowly opened up to us. Yet, while we might have gained their trust, people remained suspicious of tape-recorded interviews. While some agreed to interview sessions, many others did not. Moreover, they would also be uncomfortable if I would take notes during our conversations. As such, I refrained from doing so. Cognizant that memory is not a reliable means of collecting data, I would write notes on the conversations and on my observations as quickly as I could.

While interviewing Dominicans was challenging, working with Haitians was a completely different matter. While Dominicans were at first reluctant to speak to me,
Haitians were open and cooperative. After making initial contacts with a local women’s non-profit working with displaced Haitians, I was able to locate and interview over one hundred earthquake-displaced families. For consistency, I used the same structured interview I employed with Dominican families. However, they were translated into Creole. I tape-recorded these interviews, when given verbal permission to do so. I also organized five focus groups with displaced families and participated in their daily lives. While my research assistants focused on Dominicans, I interviewed the Haitian displaced families myself.

**Data Analysis**

Since the grounded theory approach involves an iterative data collection and analysis process, I analyzed data early on and made adjustments to interview questions and sampling strategies, as needed (Strauss and Corbin 1990). I did a word-for-word transcription of my tape recorded interviews. As will become clear later, analysis of exact words of people opens the door to cultural construals and cultural distinctions that might not be obvious to an outsider. Subsequently, I identified and analyzed the relevant categories and themes. Due to time and space limitations, I selected excerpts from only a few interviews. During transcription, qualitative data were analyzed using the grounded theory approach, assisted by the MAXQDA data analysis program.

**Conclusion**

As we will see throughout this dissertation, the earthquake that took place on January 12th, 2010 transformed life on the island of Hispaniola. While the earthquake’s effects were catastrophic in Haiti, where it killed hundreds of thousands and destroyed the capital city of Port-au-Prince, its waves of change were felt throughout the entire island, including my hometown of Santo Domingo. Although I lived permanently in
Gainesville, I was in Santo Domingo on the day of the earthquake. By pure chance, I became witness to the complex changes that the earthquake set in motion on the Dominican side of Hispaniola. These changes included my dissertation topic.

While I had previous experience conducting research on the topic, I faced many challenges in Elías Piña. I encountered a population very leery of outsiders, especially when asking questions about Haitians and about children. Yet, while they were skeptical about speaking to outsiders, they were familiar and comfortable with census-like survey instruments, with close-ended questions. As a result, I quickly readjusted my research strategy and adapted it to my particular milieu.

These adjustments worked and the following sections focus on the research results. Throughout this dissertation, I argue that while the earthquake has often been conceptualized as “Haitian”, research findings suggest that it was a Hispaniolan phenomenon. Fieldwork shows that the earthquake and its aftermath impacted, in one way or another, the lives of many throughout the entire island. While the destruction and death were certainly concentrated in Port-au-Prince, there were earthquake victims throughout the entire island, including in Elías Piña. For instance, many Elíaspiñenses, as the people of Elías Piña are commonly referred to, lost family members and friends in Port-au-Prince. Even more lost their livelihoods. Most importantly, however, many in this small town were impacted by the waves of displaced Haitians that strained the town’s resources and social relationships. This issue is explored in depth in Chapter 2.

It is important to reiterate that while the earthquake’s effects spanned the entire island, aid and reconstruction projects were based on the notion that the earthquake’s effects stopped at the international border. In Chapter three, I argue that Elías Piña was
greatly affected because the earthquake was a Hispaniolan, not a Haitian, event. As I situate this research within the broader literature on disasters, I conclude that the framing of the earthquake as a Haitian disaster was influenced by the way that Haitians, Dominicans and outsiders have conceptualized life on the island, as well as disasters themselves. Although both countries share a small land mass, and residents’ lives are intimately inter-connected and inter-dependent, it is assumed that life in Haiti and life in the Dominican Republic are separate and disjointed, beginning and ending abruptly at the border. These notions are also influenced by particular definitions of the term “disaster victim”. It is often believed that disaster victims are only those that are present at the actual event. As will be explained subsequently, this is far from being the case. Sadly, these notions often inform national and international policy and often have detrimental consequences.

The cholera epidemic is addressed in Chapter seven. However, although the earthquake certainly had transformative effects on the lives of the residents in this town, it was the subsequent cholera epidemic that was the most traumatic. As the Dominican government enacted public health measures to prevent and treat the disease, it sacrificed the livelihoods of border residents to do so. Dominicans dealt with the imminent threat of a previously unknown, highly deadly and contagious, disease by making the border the country’s area of defense and weakness. As a result, the border, including Elías Piña, became a pathological, filthy, region that needed to be sanitized and separated from the rest of the population. In the end, the Dominican government sealed the border, impeding the trans-border movement of people and goods that the Elías Piña society depended on.
These major changes, affected, of course, family life in the region. As people struggled to reestablish a certain degree of normality in challenging new contexts, family arrangements and relationships were transformed. As families searched for homes and jobs in an environment of high instability, they often relied on fosterage as a viable childrearing strategy. As parents left the Port-au-Prince area and headed towards the rural areas of Haiti, and/or the Dominican Republic, they took other people’s children with them. Others left their own children behind. Post-earthquake fosterage arrangements were also characterized by frequent change and instability. In the days, weeks and months after the earthquake, many of these newly-created arrangements were short-lived due to frequently changing living arrangements. As a result, there was a substantial circulation of children back and forth across the border between both countries. Also, as families struggled to make a living and support their children while establishing their networks in the Elías Piña area, many families subsequently gave up their children to Dominican families both in Elías Piña and in other parts of the Dominican Republic. However, as outside multilateral organizations and non-profits focused on the border area, and international attention was placed on the trans-border movement of children, the flow of children and their parents was hindered. These efforts to control the movement of children across borders ended up hindering, instead of helping child wellbeing. This topic is addressed in Chapter eight.

But to understand why life in Elías Piña was so affected by the events that took place in Haiti, it is important that we understand the region’s historical, sociocultural and political background and its links to Haiti. Throughout its history, Elías Piña has had close familial, political, economic and cultural ties with neighboring Haiti. In fact, at
certain times during its history, its residents have had more ties across the border than they did with their own country. As a result, the region has developed unique relationships with Haitians and with Haiti. While the rest of the Dominican Republic is troubled by Haiti and Haitians, Elíaspiñenses depend on them for their livelihoods. I examine these issues in depth, in Chapter four. But despite these close relationships and interrepaltionships, notions that assume that Haiti and the Dominican Republic end neatly at the border prevail. I start by addressing notions of border life, Haitian-Dominican relationships, and their relationship to the January 12th disaster.
“Meet me at the Liceo, 2nd floor, room 210,” said Gabriella, my 19-year old research assistant, over the phone, on the night of October 25th. Gabriella was part of my household composition survey team, working in several neighborhoods of Elías Piña. The night before, she called to say she had run out of surveys, and needed more. Although I usually met Gabriella at her home, that night she suggested we meet at her school, the Liceo Juan Pablo Duarte. So, the next day I found myself walking through the noisy, dirty and chaotic halls of this high school in search of room 210.

Near the stairs, leading to the second floor, something unexpected caught my attention. On the liceo’s west-facing wall was a mural that had a large map of the island of Hispaniola. On this map, the eastern part of the island, corresponding to the Dominican Republic, was painted in extensive detail. Each province was labeled and painted in different, bright colors. Elías Piña was painted a bright red. The Distrito Nacional, where I was born and raised, was painted an equally bright green. This detailed representation, however, did not cover the entire map. The details, names, and colors ended suddenly at the Haitian-Dominican border. The western third of the island, the portion occupied by Haiti, had no details or names and was only painted a drab tan. Not even Belladère, the Haitian town a few kilometers across the border from Elías Piña, was represented.

Having grown up and gone to school in the Dominican Republic, I was very familiar with this particular representation of Hispaniola. In fact, it was one of two basic depictions I recall seeing in history and geography textbooks, as well as in other school-related material. The island was represented in vivid detail on the Dominican side, and
then turning to gray at the border. The other option eliminated Haiti altogether. In this depiction, cartographers amputated the western third of the island right at the border, choosing to change the shape and size of the island altogether.

Given my familiarity with this map, I should not have looked twice at it. However, that particular day and place, this mural stopped me in my tracks and I took a picture of it. After my personal and field work experiences throughout 2010, the messages embedded in this particular representation of the island jumped out at me more than ever before. It dawned on me that this mural represented the perplexing way in which many Dominicans, myself included, perceive our relationship with Haiti. With its contrasting representation, this map was implicitly presenting both countries almost in terms of ying and yang. The Dominican Republic is prosperous, vibrant, and full of places worth naming. In contrast, Haiti, in its drabness, was poor, backward, with nothing worth depicting. It was as if Haiti and the Dominican Republic occupied two different worlds; as if we did not even share an island. Above all, though, I felt that this map represented our notions of the Dominican/Haitian border. The drastic change of color, implied that everything, including mountain ranges, rivers, valleys, relationships, commercial exchanges, political influence and families, ended at the border. It represented our belief that the Dominican Republic and Dominicanness, for that matter, ends with surgical precision along neat, clear-cut edges at the international border.

After snapping a shot of the mural, I continued to room 210 to find Gabriella. Once I arrived and gave her the surveys, I could not help but think about her life within the context of the ideas represented on the map. Contrary to what the map suggested, Gabriella’s life did not end at the international border. In fact, her life extended well
beyond the border gates into Belladère, and Haiti extended well into her life in Elías Piña. In Belladère, she has half-siblings and cousins that she sees often. Similarly, Gabriella’s little foster sister, Edwidge, is Haitian. She is the daughter of her mother’s close business associate in Haiti. Although not a biological relative, Gabriella’s family has been raising her as such. Moreover, unlike the map would suggest, Dominicanness or Haitianess does not suddenly end at the border. For instance, Gabriella speaks both Spanish fluently and Creole as well, although she is sometimes reluctant to speak Creole in all contexts. She also feels at ease in both cultures. “How inappropriate and out of place this map is. How does Gabriella reconcile her own life within these notions of Haitian-Dominican separation and difference? What is border life like within these inaccurate ideas? How does Gabriella, as well as many others in Elías Piña just like her, interpret these representations?” I wrote that evening. “Everything in Elías Piña depends on and is affected by what transpires beyond the border gates, yet Belladère is not even represented on this map.”

Dominicans have long held notions of Haitian-Dominican separation and difference portrayed in the map at the Liceo. Both countries are considered mutually exclusive. The independence that is celebrated in the Dominican Republic is from Haiti, not Spain. In fact, part of Dominican national identity has been constructed in direct opposition to everything considered to be “Haitian” (Howard 2001, Candelario 2007). In addition, these notions have been present in Dominican governmental policy. Throughout the years, various Dominican governments, particularly during the Trujillo and Balaguer regimes, have enacted policies to create, promote and enforce this sense of separation and difference. Many of these policies had a direct impact on border
Obviously, for border residents like Gabriella, who have Haitian relatives, these policies and hegemonic notions of Dominican national identity prove to be quite conflictive. As we will see in Chapter 6, border residents struggle as they try to find their place within a nation that strongly rejects a part of who they are.

**Changing Perspectives**

Despite these widely held images of difference, Dominicans were suddenly forced to re-think them on January 12th, 2010. At 5:53 pm, Dominicans throughout the country felt the tremors of the 7.0 magnitude earthquake that destroyed Port-au-Prince. As the dust settled and initial images revealed the catastrophic magnitude of the event, Dominicans could not help but feel connected to Haitians. Although the shaking was far less severe on the eastern side of the island, Dominicans were still traumatized and transformed by the events of that day. The Haitian earthquake altered Dominicans’ relationship with their natural environment, as well as with their neighbors to the west. The ideas of difference and separation represented in that map were suddenly replaced by a sense of unity, of shared risk and shared vulnerability. “It could have been us,” was frequently repeated in the days that followed. Most notably, this sense of shared unity was accompanied by what Oliver Smith 1992 calls “a sense of brotherhood, bonded in pain and grief” (158). As images of the destruction flooded the media, a sense of kinship between Haitians and Dominicans soon followed. Dominicans displayed solidarity, compassion and empathy in ways never been seen before.

Dominicans were forced into a sense of unity by tectonic plates and by the immediate rescue process that followed. The Dominican Republic played a central role in both the national and international rescue process. As such, it could no longer deny that both countries shared the same island. The country’s obvious connections and
interconnections with Haiti were brought to the forefront. In fact, in the days and weeks that followed the earthquake, the border was opened to facilitate the transit of the wounded and allow rescue crews and aid to enter Haiti. In the end, the tremors and the rescue process unearthed centuries of buried connections, interconnections, and transborder and cross-national unity between Haitians and Dominicans. A major element of the present research will be to document the impact of the earthquake on Dominican / Haitian relations.

This new sense of unity, however, was short-lived. As outside aid started to flow through the Dominican Republic and into Haiti and as floods of earthquake-displaced Haitians started to cross the border, tensions ensued. This came to a head almost eleven months later, with the news of another cataclysmic event in Haiti, abruptly bringing back the ideas of separation so clearly delineated on the Liceo Juan Pablo Duarte map. Like the earthquake, the October 21st announcement of cholera in Haiti transformed life on Hispaniola. As fear of the disease gripped the country, Dominican government officials and public health authorities forced a return to ideas of separation with their policies. The wave of events that followed this announcement, purposefully ignored the myriad of connections and interconnections that exist between both nations, particularly along the border. In fact, cholera prevention measures sacrificed them altogether.

**The Border and Haitian Disasters**

Although the January 12th earthquake and the subsequent cholera epidemic’s effects were experienced throughout the Dominican Republic, it was perhaps in the towns along the Haitian-Dominican border that their effects were most evident. As the geopolitical, symbolic and ideological barrier between these two countries, the towns
along the Haitian-Dominican border have become the frontline of response to both disasters. It was in these towns where the earthquake and the cholera epidemic’s subsequent sociocultural, political, and economic effects found their most visible and immediate expression. In the hours and days following the earthquake, the Haitian-Dominican border became the physical space where the local, the regional, the national, the international, and the multinational intersected during the subsequent relief and reconstruction (or lack thereof) processes of the earthquake-stricken areas in and around Port-au-Prince. After the news of cholera in Haiti broke, the Dominican border became the Dominican Republic’s line of defense against the deadly disease. As a result, the border and many of its residents became a pathological region and an area of vulnerability.

In Comendador, better known as Elías Piña, residents were affected by both the earthquake and the cholera epidemic. While in Santo Domingo, Dominicans only felt minor tremors and watched the unfolding of events from afar, in Elías Piña the experiences were more dramatic. People lost relatives and friends. Residents participated directly in the rescue and aid process in Port-au-Prince. The town became an important staging ground for a significant portion of the international aid and non-profit apparatus. Perhaps most importantly, Elías Piña permanently and temporarily harbored thousands of earthquake-displaced victims from Haiti. In fact, the earthquake also exposed Elías Piña’s long history of sociocultural, economic, political and personal connections with Haiti.

Although the earthquake had significant effects on life in Elías Piña, it was with the cholera epidemic that stretched it to its fragile limits. The public health measures and
the local and national government policies put in place to combat the disease set in motion a series of events and processes that had profound effects, particularly for families in the area. For individuals like Gabriella, whose life transpires on both sides of the border, these measures were devastating. For months, she could not visit her family and friends in Belladère. Her mother could not sell at the binational market. Her foster sister could not go to Haiti to visit her family. In sum, the earthquake and the cholera epidemic transformed life in Comendador.

**Unexpected Witness**

I was in Santo Domingo on January 12th, the day of the earthquake, and I was in Elías Piña on October 21st, when cholera was announced in Haiti. I arrived in the Dominican Republic on June 26th, 2010, so all events previous to this date come from informant accounts. Thus, in order to document events as they occurred there, I had informants recollect the series of events that followed. Since I was physically present in Elías Piña when news of the cholera outbreak broke, I will be able to provide firsthand data drawn from participant observation and observing participant methods. I also was able to gather other ethnographic data from interviews, informal conversations and focus groups conducted during these tumultuous times. Through it all, it became more than evident that the entire island was affected by both disasters. In fact, it is my overall conclusion that most residents on the Dominican side of the island could be classified as *peripheral* victims, to use Dudasik’s (1980) terminology, that is, “being near the community, but not suffering loss (Hoffman 1992: 139).

In contrast, in Elías Piña, where residents lost friends, livelihoods and property, residents could, and should be, considered *context* victims because they were affected by the disruption of “established sociocultural patterns to such a degree that the local
system fails to operate effectively” (Dudasik 1980:332). Yet, in practice, Elias Piña residents were systematically ignored by the billion dollar aid efforts that followed both disasters. As non-profits swarmed into the area, residents watched as resources sidestepped them. Underlying this exclusion was the aid community’s notion that these disasters were Haitian, rather than Hispaniolan, in nature. Most importantly, this idea came from the non-profit community’s ethnic profiling of aid recipients. In the mad scramble for donation and aid dollars that followed, serving Haitians, not Dominicans, became the way to attract donor funds. So in the end, within the fierce competition for donor funds, Haiti-related and Haiti-centered projects had the competitive edge. As a result, intervention strategies were implemented almost exclusively on Haitian territory, to the exclusion of needy and affected communities on the Dominican side of the border. Of the few projects that did incorporate a Dominican component, resources were reserved wholly for ethnic Haitians living in the region because the guiding assumption among nonprofit communities was that only Haitians in Haiti were truly victims of these disasters.

In the end, these approaches reflect the very same notions of Haitian-Dominican difference and separation on the Liceo Juan Pablo Duarte map. By designing Haiti-exclusive, instead of Hispaniolan-wide intervention projects, rescue and aid agencies assumed and promoted the idea that both countries live in disjointed worlds. They assumed that the disaster’s waves of destruction and disruption stopped at the international border. In doing so, they ignored the dense ties that exist between both peoples. Moreover, they deepened pre-existing notions of difference between both groups. They ignored that people on both sides of the border live lives that defy the
international border. As my experience in Elías Piña will reveal, this particular perspective had life and death and multi-million dollar implications. By ignoring Elías Piña, the aid community generated a disaster that was, perhaps, even worse than the hazards themselves.

**Thinking Disasters**

Beneath the designation of these events as Haitian is a particular theoretical perspective on the nature of disasters. By using the international border as a way to define the boundaries of intervention strategies, and by ignoring the many ramifications of both catastrophes, practitioners approached disasters from the perspective that these are single, punctuated and confined events and that they are natural in origin. This framework, which Perry (2007) calls the hazards-disaster paradigm, considers disasters “as an extreme event that arises when a hazard agent intersects with a human system” (Perry 2007:9). The hazard agent, according to this view, is the exclusive cause for the destruction and the disruption (Hewitt 1983). Within this frame of thought, disasters are deemed to be exclusively natural, or a product of nature. Most significantly, it also ignores the chain of events that follow.

According to Hewitt (1983), this is the paradigm within which most of the aid, relief, government and development organizations operate. As such, attention is centered on the hazard itself, and its naturally-occurring and unpredictable cycle. In the same sense, Drabek (2010) believes most are “quick fix” (21) approaches. Since discourses within the hazards-disaster paradigm are framed within scientific narratives that rely upon graphs, statistics and flow charts, human suffering is de-personalized and de-humanized. The lived experiences and the personal suffering are secondary and somewhat ignored (Hewitt 1983).
Alternative Perspectives

While this perspective might be prevalent among non-profit organizations, many disaster theorists have advocated for alternative viewpoints. Although January 12th can be considered a turning point in Hispaniolan natural and social history, the perception that its effects were caused exclusively by the movement of tectonic plates can be deceiving. This perspective might mislead observers to believe that disasters are single, isolated events. This dissertation will present how these effects were felt well beyond this date.

Important theorists in the field of disaster anthropology offer a different perspective on the matter. In order to understand these events holistically, one must examine these destructive occurrences not as natural, fortuitous or punctuated events. Instead, they must be understood as “multidimensional because they are both physical and social events/processes” (Oliver Smith 2004:25) and they impact society in multiple ways. Most importantly, disasters are processual events starting years and even centuries prior to the actual event, and its effects are felt well beyond them as well. Central to this idea is that these events result from “historically-produced pattern[s] of vulnerability” (Oliver-Smith 1992:3).

In his work “Interpretations of Calamity”, Hewitt (1983) was the first to articulate the vulnerability perspective within disasters. According to Hewitt (1983), vulnerability is not created by individual ignorance and irrationality. Disasters are caused by the environmental hazard itself and as such, are not natural. He interprets disasters as unnatural processes in which society; individual human action and the environment together play a direct role in the process. In other words, rather than viewing disasters simply as outside agents that disrupt the natural order of society, it is a society’s
sociocultural structure that in the end exacerbates the negative human impacts by creating differential levels of risk. The insertion of a hazard within a social group does not necessarily create a disaster. It is the historically-generated risk situation that determines the seriousness of the impact on a human population. Humans’ role in disaster creation includes their “adaptations to their physical underpinnings, to the human manipulation and elaboration of physical surroundings, to the construction of sociocultural institutions, beliefs and ethos” (Oliver-Smith 1999:2). More specifically, “subsistence methods, use of resources, construction of shelter, invention of tools, dictates of social structure, distribution of power, attachment to place, mores, and many other sociocultural elements were entangled within the vortex of catastrophe” (Oliver-Smith 1999:2). Along these lines, Blaikie and Perry (1994) conclude that disasters are caused by “ideologies of political and economic systems as they affect the allocation and distribution of resources in society” (24).

In his seminal work on the 1970 Peru earthquake, Oliver-Smith (2001) noted that destruction lies “more in society than in nature” (27), and vulnerability is not the result of individual ignorance and irrationality. Rather, the causes lie in “the structural imbalances between rich and poor countries” (Oliver-Smith 1999:74) and the “nation’s historic underdevelopment that created the conditions of vulnerability” (Oliver-Smith 1999:74). In the case of the 1970 Peruvian earthquake, Oliver-Smith (1999) states that the disaster, in fact, started five centuries prior to the actual event. “The conquest of Peru and its consequent insertion as a colony into the developing world economic system which has resulted in severe underdevelopment of the entire region” (Oliver-Smith 1999:75) is, in the end, the ultimate vulnerability generator. Elías Piña’s disaster
vulnerability is the result of a similar centuries-old process. In fact, Elías Piña’s vulnerability cannot be disentangled from the complex border-delimitation processes that started with Spanish and French colonization of the island of Hispaniola. In the end, Elías Piña holds an unequal and disadvantaged position within the island because, to most, it is little more than a town on a line that divides both countries. It is on the line where Haitians are to be kept out, where both countries are to be kept completely apart. Moreover, the widely held notion that life in both countries ends neatly at the border further reifies the region’s risk. Above all, though, Elías Piña’s risk results from Dominicans’ systematic rejection of Elíaspiñenses because they do not follow hegemonic notions of “Dominicanness”.

How do “ideologies of political economic systems” (Blaikie and Perry 1994:24) cause disasters exactly? Establishing a causal link between disasters and ideologies is not an easy task. Disasters take place in a “hybrid space” between the material and the social worlds (Oliver-Smith 2001). They are both natural and human-induced phenomena; material as well as social. As such, direct links are not easy to establish (Oliver-Smith 1999, 2001; Hewitt 1986). In disasters, nature provides the hazard, but society distributes the effects. “Both materially and socially constructed effects of disasters are channeled and distributed within the society according to political, social and economic practices and institutions” (Oliver-Smith 2001:24).

Central to linking disasters to ideologies, Oliver-Smith (2001) argues, is adaptation, a concept that is central to anthropological inquiry. In their pursuit of social and biological reproduction, humans act upon and change their environment through a group of ideas, activities and technologies that enable them to extract the resources
needed to survive and thrive. At the same time, the environment acts upon and changes humans, forcing them to adapt and change their ideas, activities and practices. These changes, in turn, are made “according to environmental stimuli, social organizational forms and ideological mandates” (Oliver-Smith 2001:8). As natural, cyclical features of environments, hazards constitute a visible and clear example of the environment acting on people or forcing them to adapt.

Thus, disasters can be seen as a product of both nature and culture from an anthropological perspective. Disasters can be perceived as “a function of social orders as they overlie physical environments.” (Oliver-Smith 1999:6). Disasters are social, but they are also embedded in the materiality of the world (Oliver-Smith 1999:111). Thus to summarize, Oliver-Smith defines disasters as

a process / event combining a potentially destructive agent / force from the natural, modified, or built environment and a population in a socially and economically produced condition of vulnerability, resulting in a perceived disruption of the customary relative satisfactions of individual and social needs for physical survival, social order, and meaning [2002:27].

**Disaster Phases**

Although every disaster is in itself unique and its causes and effects context-dependent, social scientists have noted a pattern of individual and group behavior that is evident throughout different cultural settings and disaster types. Human behavior before, during, and after, disasters is complex and contradictory and varies widely (Hoffman 1999; Oliver-Smith 1992). However, despite these contradictions and variations, anthropologists have identified certain patterns of behavior that appear to repeat themselves throughout all disaster contexts (Oliver Smith 1992; 2002; Hoffman 1999). Hoffman (1999), a disaster anthropologist and disaster survivor, identified and described three general behavioral phases that seem to be present throughout all types:
(1) the crisis; (2) the secondary phase or aftermath nexus; and (3) passage to closure. These three phases, she warns, constitute a “general scheme of disaster recovery” (Hoffman 1999:135), and not a strict predictive formula of behavior. The length of each phase will vary according to the specific contextual elements, and the order of events will not necessarily occur in the same way. Moreover, these phases do not occur in a linear fashion and will most likely overlap. Research conducted within the context of the January 12th earthquake in Port-au-Prince has presented evidence of these three phases. My findings strongly suggest that these phases were evident across the border in the Dominican Republic, too, further supporting my conclusion that Dominicans, and the people of Elías Piña in particular, were victims of these disasters, as well.

The crisis

The crisis phase can start immediately after the event in sudden onset hazards, and after the signs of the first evidence of damage in slow onset ones. It is set in motion when the hazard reduces society to its bare essentials (Hoffman 1999). In its destruction, the hazard obliterates all “social form and fabric” (Hoffman 1999:137) and forces survivors into an “atomized” or “extreme individuation” state (Hoffman 1992:139) in which the focus becomes self-preservation (Hoffman 1992; Oliver-Smith 1992). Moreover, it is a self-preservation in which survivors are bereft of any type of structure or social support.

At this point, a collective confusion takes hold. Survivors are submerged into daze or shock, unable to grasp what has taken place (Hoffman 1992; Oliver-Smith 1992). “We were all on our own to save ourselves. Then it was over, people wandered back like solitary ghosts, not knowing what to do,” (Hoffman 1992:137), one of Hoffman’s (1992) informants noted after the Oakland firestorm of 1991. Oliver-Smith
1992 shares similar accounts of speechless survivors overcome by confusion in the moments after the 1970 earthquake and avalanche in Yungay, Peru. In Haiti, Farmer 2011 describes the frame of mind of a Haitian he encountered just a few days after the January 12th earthquake as “being in a fog of grief” (2011:13).

This collective confusion, Hoffman argues, is an indication that survivors have entered into a state of “liminality” (1992:138). The hazard has forced individuals into a societal vacuum, in which individuals “have little sociocultural context and little identity” (Hoffman 1992:138). Society, in many ways, has momentarily ceased to exist, including the division of labor (Oliver-Smith 1992). Everyone’s previous identity has collapsed and has become that of a survivor (Hoffman 1992, Oliver-Smith 1992). The disaster has forced individuals into a changed sense of self, in which victims “have been violently separated from their previous social, economic, and political identities” (Hoffman 1992:167).

Soon after this state of shock, individuals initiate a transition “from atomized to community” (Hoffman 1992:139), in which they are re-incorporated into social life. This rebirth, however, takes place in stages. Society does not immediately return to its pre-hazard state. Rather, individuals first enter into an egalitarian community, in which communal behavior, cooperation, intense emotion and altruism prevails (Oliver-Smith 1992; Hoffman 1992). Individuals start helping and rescuing one another, regardless of any pre-existing differences that might have existed. Incredible acts of heroism are common (Drabek 2010). “Resources are used differently and with more generosity towards others” (Douty 1972:580). Supply and demand rules fail to take hold and prices do not rise (Douty 1972). “Apparently, a disaster motivates persons within the disaster
zone who have retained undestroyed stocks of necessities to increase their charity” (Douty 1972:581).

Not only do people share selflessly, but individuals reconstitute their relationship with one another in terms that are quite distinct from those which prevailed before the hazard. In Peru, for instance, Oliver-Smith noted that “a sense of brotherhood, bonded in pain and grief with little reference to class or ethnicity prevailed” (1992:158). Everyone referred to each other as kin. In Haiti, Stam (2010) noted how a similar mindset prevailed in post-earthquake Port-au-Prince, as did Farmer who described the ubiquitous presence of “good Samaritans” (2010:12) throughout the city.

These expressions of solidarity and selflessness are not necessarily limited to the area of impact. This selfless sense can also invade peripheral communities, or those “being near the community but not suffering loss” (Dubasik 1980). However, despite outside help, the most important assistance victims receive is from each other. At this stage, individuals experience an altered and sublime sense of self. Fritz labeled this stage as “euphoria” (1961:139), Oliver-Smith as “a state of purity” (1992:253), Wolfenstein as “utopic” (1957:35). Hoffman (1992), who experienced it firsthand during the Oakland firestorms, described it as “hallowedness,” “exultation” and as being “the best of times” (1992:139).

Soon after this sense of elation, a sense of group identity brings victims together. Together, they acquire a steadfast sense of purpose, “a drive for recovery combined with a sense of validity and deservedness” (Hoffman 1992:160). Also, individuals acquire a distinct perspective that life is fragile and that social and natural environments are untrustworthy (Oliver-Smith 1999; Hoffman 1999; Erikson 1976).
Explaining post-disaster solidarity

Why do disaster victims exhibit such selflessness during times of extreme distress? Although some have attempted to explain post-disaster solidarity as being the result of rational choice (Douty 1972), Oliver-Smith (1999) asserts that self-interest alone cannot account for the totality and complexity of behaviors that are exhibited in a post-disaster context. Although a lot of the prosocial, altruistic behavior that takes place after a disaster can be explained through rational choice, these explanations do not take into consideration the quality of the relationships that ensue. Rational choice might explain why individuals in post-disaster situations help each other, but it cannot explain why they “become brothers” (Oliver-Smith 1992:160). Moreover, disasters are emotion-filled, emotion-dominated, emotion-generating events, and as such individuals experience them through emotions, not rationality. Thus, “rational choice may provide the reason for solidarity, but reason may not move people to action” (Oliver-Smith 1992:162). It is the individual’s shared sense of identity and their emotions that moves their actions (Oliver-Smith 1999).

Post-disaster solidarity happens when societies are stripped down to their most basic elements, to their foundations (Oliver-Smith 1992). Regardless of a person’s previous status, in a disaster everyone is reduced to a struggle for survival. Divisions of labor are stripped, differentiation ceases, and society returns to a state in which everyone shares a common cultural identity, a state of “mechanical solidarity,” according to Durkeim. Society returns to a place where everyone is “reduced […] to one relevant status, that of victim, and in many instances this sudden equality of status is reflected in a great deal of assistance and rescue activities rendered across class, ethnic, and other boundaries” (Oliver-Smith 1992:165).
Secondary phase

In the secondary or, aftermath nexus phase, this egalitarianism and sense of brotherhood eventually dissipates. In their place, structure, differentiation and conflict gradually take over (Hoffman 1999; Oliver-Smith 1999). The beginning signs of this fragmentation become evident with the creation of survivor groups. Sharing a sense of martyrdom, as well as altered senses of self, survivors come together to form groups that are separate from individuals that might not have been affected by the disaster. Victim groups perceive themselves as different from non-victims, and this difference fuels the group’s sense of cohesion. Moreover, the group convenes to plan and work towards the pursuit of their common group goals (Hoffman 1999; Oliver-Smith 1999; Erikson 1976).

Not only does differentiation surface between survivors and the unaffected community, but it also develops within the group itself, marking a return to traditional social relations (Oliver-Smith 1999). Within the group, members are no longer simply survivors, but other qualifiers to establish otherness surface. Among Oakland fire survivors, status within the group was established on the basis of whether individual homes had been partially or totally destroyed. Those who had lost their homes entirely held a higher status within the group (Hoffman 1999). In Peru, differentiation was made on the basis of whether individuals were refugees or survivors (Oliver-Smith 1999).

Despite these distinctions, group cohesion is strong, and reconstruction starts full force. However, tension and conflict become an intrinsic part of this process (Hoffman 1999; Oliver-Smith 1999). Survivors struggle with, and fiercely resist, change. A strong, common purpose of returning to the way things were prior to the disaster takes hold. Communities cling to their past to re-organize and give meaning to the newly-
transformed physical, social, cultural and economic world in what Oliver-Smith calls a “negotiated traditionalism” (1992:187). Thus, in the face of absolute disaster, “many of [the victims’] actions appear to be attempts to reconstitute the social patterns and institutions of the past” (Oliver-Smith 1992:16). In negotiating change, communities tap into what they know, or their own traditional networks and knowledge for support (Oliver Smith 2001). For instance, in Peru, Oakland, and in Haiti, survivors relied on their own kin groups for assistance in getting food and other resources. More specifically, in Haiti, networks of kin were fundamental in securing medical care and temporary places to live (Farmer 2010). Among the earthquake-displaced communities in Elías Piña, Dominican Republic, individuals had tapped into their kin networks to migrate out of the devastated areas and into the neighboring country. They also relied on traditional kin fosterage arrangements as strategies to assist them with child care.

**Outside aid arrives**

Soon after reconstruction efforts commence, the community faces yet another major challenge – the consequences of the arrival of outside aid. Often termed the second disaster after the disaster, the arrival of external groups generates conflict and complicates the recovery process (Schuller 2008, Oliver-Smith 1999; Hoffman 1999; De Waal 2008). Outside aid agencies often lack the expertise required to carry out effective and coordinated rescue and relief efforts. Recounting his experiences in post-earthquake Haiti, Farmer (2011) noted how he and his group of doctors kept waiting for “experts” to arrive and take control of what became an overwhelmingly, uncoordinated, rescue and relief effort. According to Farmer, not even the United States military had the expertise to effectively coordinate the complexities of the earthquake rescue and relief efforts. Also, outside agencies, which arrive with “everything from doughnuts to
dogma on their relief trays” (Hoffman 1999:144), often have reconstruction goals that not only are quite different from those of the community, but also hinder traditional adaptation strategies. For instance, in Peru, Oliver-Smith (1999) pointed out how the government arrived to the community with the goal of re-locating victims to safer ground. However, displaced communities refused to leave. On the Haitian-Dominican border, the arrival of UNICEF and other child welfare organizations, made the normal, trans-border movement of Haitian and Dominican undocumented children and families across the border criminal, difficult, riskier and more dangerous.

Secondly, not only do outside agencies bring their own agendas, but they often fail to incorporate those they intend to serve into their decision-making processes. Consequently, victims’ needs are frequently overlooked, and as such, reconstruction ends up reproducing previous inequalities (Hartman and Squires 2006; Schuller 2007). For instance, within the context of hurricane Katrina, Button and Oliver-Smith (2008) note that external reconstruction efforts generated labor opportunities for outsiders, rather than for the displaced New Orleans population. Thus, rather than improving the lives of New Orleans residents, outside agencies in effect contributed towards a “decline in their socioeconomic status, suffer increased vulnerability, and even fail to regain their predisaster living status” (Button and Oliver-Smith 2008:125). In Haiti, the failure to listen to local voices has long been a critique raised in regards to non-profits in Haiti. Schuller, one of the most vocal critics, warned of the fact that both national and international non-profits “have been running the show in terms of development” (2007:113), without any accountability to the Haitian people.
Finally, with the arrival of aid, a new economy develops. Long gone are the days in which private property cease to exist. With the flow of goods, “every economic principle in the textbook - true and false scarcity, formal and informal markets, […] discord over and between production and distribution, reciprocity, redistribution, and exchange -- crops up” (Hoffman 1999:148). In this new economy, victims are transformed into opportunities for economic gain for outsiders (Hoffman 1999). Local merchants make money off victims. Also, the disaster area is flooded with outside professionals that arrive “to take advantage of the destruction” (Hoffman 1999:147). Unfortunately, these efforts are often left unfinished as new employment opportunities surface elsewhere (Hoffman 1999). Moreover, within this new disaster economy, “prior rules of inequality, alliance and allegiance come back into play” (Hoffman 1999:137). Pre-existing patterns of inequalities are exacerbated and traditional patterns of cooperation and solidarity are hindered (Hoffman 1999; Oliver-Smith 1999; Button & Oliver-Smith 2008; De Waal 2008; Schuller 2008).

Within this environment of inequality, conflict and fraction spreads rapidly. Victims and outsiders enter into “name calling, categorizations, social isolation, resistance and combative actions to produce segmentary opposition by everyone” (Hoffman 1999:151). Victims focus these sentiments towards the entity or group that represents “and consequently controls, restricts or denies restitution” (Hoffman 1999:137). In Yungay, it was the Peruvian government and its plan for relocation that became the adversary. In Haiti, particularly after the cholera outbreak, the adversary has become the MINUSTAH, or the United Nations security forces. In the Dominican
Republic in general, the border area and its residents became the area of vulnerability. In Elías Piña, it was the Haitians.

Among victims themselves, divisions also surface, particularly when it involves the distribution of outside aid. In Peru, conflict arose along racial and ethnic lines between mestizos and indios. For instance, when the government arrived and distributed temporary housing, mestizos refused to be assigned homes next to indios. Their statements of “No somos iguales,” or “We are not equal,” (Oliver-Smith 1999: 75) which they repeated throughout the distribution process, lies in stark contrast to the previous brotherhood that had engulfed them all.

Passage to closure

Although this phase can take decades and might never be reached, normality returns to everyday life. In fact, it is a return to a relative normality because, for many, the disaster transformed their existence forever. Nonetheless, during this phase, life resumes a somewhat regular pattern. People return to their permanent homes or achieve some degree of permanent residence. Outside aid leaves the impact area. Victims return to their jobs. The economic channels that were generated by the disaster become regular routine and practice. Most importantly, the common, binding victim identity dissipates. Survivors no longer share a common sense of purpose, nor do they find refuge with each other. Rather, individuals re-integrate into broader society, coming to terms with calamity.

Conclusion

Disaster anthropology research has revealed that disasters are complex phenomena. Unlike common notions that portray them as having natural causes, and are time and space-framed events, anthropologists have argued that these are
processual in nature. Disasters start long before the actual hazard event takes place, and its wave of devastation extends way beyond its end. They must be understood as having both natural and human causes. As Oliver-Smith (2002) noted, nature provides the hazard, but society is in charge of choosing who gets devastated and who gets spared. In other words, it is society that creates the vulnerable conditions that generate the destruction. Research in post-disaster phases also suggests that much of the destruction and disruption is human-induced, and it takes place long after the actual hazard event. The moment that outside aid and intervention takes place is the moment that life is most transformed.

Throughout this dissertation, I argue against the common notion that the January 12th earthquake and the subsequent cholera epidemic were catastrophes that took place exclusively in Haiti, as they had devastating effects on both sides of the border. In adopting disaster anthropology’s more nuanced perspective on disasters it is easy to see how these events spanned both nations. What happened in the Dominican Republic certainly pales in comparison to what transpired in Haiti. Nonetheless, the chain reaction that followed spanned both sides of the island. As we will see throughout this dissertation, this was particularly so in the border town of Elías Piña, where daily life was severely altered. Although many Elíaspiñenses were affected directly by the actual events, it was the earthquake’s aftermath that devastated life in the town. The fact that the Dominican government and international aid programs adopted a more limited perspective on this disaster had devastating effects for the people of Elías Piña. By ignoring the plight of the average person from Elías Piña and focusing only on ethnic Haitians in Haiti, the disaster’s effects were exacerbated. Moreover, the announcement
of cholera in Haiti and the Dominican government measures that followed, forever transformed this small town.

Although this dissertation will attempt to present a holistic picture of what occurred within the context of these events, its main focus will be on family life. More specifically, it will examine how these events affected the longstanding practice of child circulation, whereby families give up, or take in, other people’s children in informal adoption arrangements. These arrangements, which are common throughout the island of Hispaniola, as well as the rest of the Caribbean, are an essential component of family life in the region. However, after the earthquake and cholera epidemic, many of these arrangements, particularly those that involved cross-border families, were in effect criminalized as the normally-occurring cross-border movement of children was impaired. As we will see, many of the post-earthquake measures put into place to protect Haitian children, had exact opposite effects.

Consistent with the theoretical tenets of disaster anthropology, my findings suggest that life in Elías Piña was devastated because of its vulnerability. As will be presented throughout this research, Elías Piña was vulnerable to these disasters because it holds an unequal and disadvantaged position within the Dominican nation. The border’s long history of stigmatization and rejection by Dominican society created the conditions that made it so vulnerable to the January 12th earthquake and the cholera epidemic. For years, the Dominican government has rejected, discriminated and ignored bi-ethnic border culture. To outsiders, Elíaspiñenses sometimes do not fit hegemonic definitions of Dominicanness. Sadly, these notions have continually shaped national policy. For example, Trujillo’s government embarked on a systematic and
brutal Dominicanization project in which it tried to eliminate the aspects of the culture it deemed not Dominican enough. Moreover, it has excluded and neglected the region from nearly all national development endeavors. In the context of the cholera epidemic, the Dominican government’s policies were once again consistent with these ideas.

The international aid community adopted similar perspectives by ignoring Elíaspiñenses’ bicultural lives. Their policies were also guided by the ideas that both countries have neat, clear-cut borders. Their programs ignored the fact that Elíaspiñenses live lives that are intimately connected to Haiti, particularly to Port-au-Prince. The use of ethnic profiling and international borders to determine who deserved aid not only excluded thousands of needy individuals, but also exacerbated tensions between Haitians and Dominicans. In the end, post-earthquake interventions were guided by the notions of separation and difference that were evident on the Liceo Juan Pablo Duarte map.

In Chapter 3, I recount the events of January 12th. If there is a lesson that I hope will be learned from these descriptions is that to assist communities properly, both within and outside the disaster’s immediate impact area, we must not limit our understandings of who victims are or where they might be by abiding to international boundaries. The experience of Haitians and Dominicans on the Haitian-Dominican border demonstrates that the interdependent and interconnected lives of Haitians and Dominicans made for a disaster that transcended the hazard’s immediate geographical and material impact area. Hopefully, my descriptions will prompt a rethinking of how practitioners and theorists tend to understand, conceptualize and construct disasters.
Hopefully, from these descriptions, we will rethink the ways in which we define where disasters start or end.
An article in the January 13th edition of the Listín Diario included a statement that I am sure many people on Hispaniola find to be very true. “Nadie olvida qué hacía cuando el suelo se sacudió bajo nuestros pies este martes 12 de enero, una fecha que, lamentablemente, ya quedó grabada en la memoria” [“No one forgets what they were doing when the earth shook underneath our feet, on Tuesday, January 12th. It is a day that will unfortunately be etched in our memory] (Listín Diario 2010b). Although I do not frequently recall events with such precision, I can remember exactly where I was and what I was doing at 5:53 pm on January 12, 2010. I was trying on a black pair of dress pants I wanted to wear the next day for my mother’s funeral. I clearly recall that at exactly 5:53 pm, as I was placing one foot into one pant sleeve, I lost my balance. Had I not quickly placed my hand against the wall, I would have probably fallen down. I did not immediately think that this had been an earthquake. In fact, I initially dismissed it as stress and fatigue-induced dizziness. But once I stepped out into the living room, where the rest of my family was sitting, I learned what had just happened. My sister, pointing to the still-swaying hanging lamp said, “¿Lo sentiste? Tembló la tierra. Mira,” [Did you feel it? There was a tremor. Look].

Growing up in the Dominican Republic, tremors are commonplace. So, at the time, this one did not seem particularly strong or memorable. So, we just talked about it briefly and then continued hemming my pants, as well as with my mother’s funeral preparations. However, it did not take long for us to learn that this was no ordinary earthquake. A few minutes later, our neighbor called us to say that international news networks had issued tsunami warnings for Haiti. How odd, I recall thinking, the
earthquake was not that strong. But, soon thereafter, while I was picking up my brother at his hotel, I caught a glimpse of the television screen in the lobby. The CNN caption read something to the effect of “Tragedy in Haiti. Massive 7.0 earthquake hits the island nation.” As news of what had transpired in Haiti spread, I witnessed the start of a massive transformative wave sweep through the entire island.

While most of the international attention focused on the earthquake’s effects within Haiti, its consequences on the Dominican side of the island have rarely, if ever, been addressed. In Chapter 1, I argue that the January 12th earthquake was a Hispaniolan disaster that had far-reaching, border-defying consequences. However, the press and international aid apparatus assumed that this disaster stopped abruptly at the international border. I am certainly not implying that the Dominican Republic should have received equally weighted attention. The level of devastation in Haiti certainly merited the attention and focus it received. In fact, I argue it has not received enough. However, the Haiti-exclusive post-earthquake policies and interventions had a detrimental impact, particularly for the people in the border town of Elías Piña. These policies ignored the dense sociocultural and socioeconomic ties Elías Piña has with Haiti in general and with Port-au-Prince, in particular. It also overlooked the fact that Elías Piña is particularly vulnerable to Haitian-related events. These approaches had serious and detrimental consequences to family life in this town.

In Chapter 1, we also reviewed disaster anthropology research that effectively warns against adopting these narrow-focused approaches. Disasters are multi-dimensional and complex phenomena, and must be addressed as such. Contrary to the widespread idea that disasters are “natural,” research suggests that it is the human-
induced vulnerability patterns that are responsible for most of the destruction and disruption. In addition, theorists warn against conceptualizing disasters as “events” in the sense that they begin and end according to the duration of the hazard itself. Rather, anthropological approaches suggest that these need be looked at as “processes” that start long before the actual hazard event and end long afterwards. As will be explained later, in the January 2010 earthquake case, the turmoil did not end with the end of the tectonic plate movement. Rather, it continued for months.

**Who Are the Victims?**

Central to how the January earthquake was approached is the question, “Who are the victims?” Dudasik’s (1980) work on victimization within the context of the 1970 earthquake in Peru raises issues that are very relevant in the Hispaniolan scenario. Dudasik concluded that relief organizations involved in the 1970 earthquake defined the disaster and its victims via the tangible, and by the geographical area of impact. That is, they used the magnitude of the event, the number of people killed and the property destroyed. As such, aid was “generally offered only to persons who experienced the disaster event” (Dudasik 1980:336). They also assumed that in order for someone to be defined as a disaster victim, they must necessarily have been present at the hazard event site. This logic overlooks other less obvious, but no less affected, victims. For instance, it “overlook[s] those that were impacted by the disruption of pre-existing sociocultural patterns” (Dudasik 1980:336) and it ignores the potential psychological effects on these victims. Disasters can affect people in multiple ways and in far away locations.

To ensure a more effective distribution of aid, Dudasik (1980) encourages outsiders to apply a more nuanced victimization framework. He suggests a perspective
that allows for different degrees and types of victims, as well as one that “recognize[s] as possible victims persons outside the area of impact” (190:329). In this more nuanced approach, Dubasik identifies four types of disaster victims – (1) event; (2) context, (3) peripheral; and (4) entry victims. In the Peruvian earthquake case, event victims were those “directly affected by the earthquake and in part include[d] all persons killed or injured during the few moments of destruction” (1980:331). Event victims, according to Dubasik’s framework, should also include those that suffer from the “emotional trauma derived from [experiencing] the actual event” (1980:331). Context victims, in turn, involve those that are affected by the disruption of “established sociocultural patterns to such a degree that the local system fails to operate effectively” (1980:332). Amongst context victims, one should include those that “face social disorganization and loss of the cultural framework within which to deal with personal and collective needs” (1980:332). Those affected by disaster-related diseases should also be included. Peripheral victims are those “with more direct links, and perhaps the most readily identified were the individuals who had family and friends in the earthquake zone” (1980:334). Finally, entry victims include those that went into the direct impact area during the moment of crisis. These individuals suffer from extreme emotional distress, and are often exposed to disease and deprivation.

The purpose Chapter 3 is to recount some of the earthquake experiences of people in Elías Piña. Although the earthquake affected the lives of many of us in Santo Domingo, its effects were even stronger along the border. In Elias Piña, the impact was much, much stronger, as life in this town is intricately connected to what occurs in Haiti. Although the January 12th earthquake and the subsequent cholera epidemic’s effects
were experienced throughout the entire country, albeit to varying degrees, it was perhaps in the towns along the Haitian-Dominican border that it’s effects were most evident. As the geopolitical, symbolic and ideological barrier between these two nation-states, the towns along the Haitian-Dominican border became the frontline of responses to these disasters. Although I collected hundreds of stories, I have chosen to re-tell the experiences of five people: David, Elda, Mari Terèz, Madam Nerlande, and Sonia. I chose them because I believe they are representative of a wide-range of circumstances experienced by Elías Piña residents. David, Elda, and Sonia are permanent Elías Piña residents. Madam Nerlande is a madam sara, an itinerant Haitian market woman that travels back and forth between Port-au-Prince and Elías Piña. Mari Terèz is one of thousands of earthquake-displaced Haitians that arrived in Elías Piña soon after the earthquake. Hopefully their stories will bring to light the complex ways in which the earthquake transcended the border and impacted the Dominican Republic.

In using Dudasik’s (1980) framework, which allows for a much more nuanced perspective on victimization, the earthquake’s border-defying web of consequences will become clearly evident. It will help present a more accurate picture of how this disaster altered the lives throughout Hispaniola, not just Haiti. However, Dudasik’s victimization framework does not quite fit the Hispaniolan context. For instance, Dudasik defines an event victim as one who must be directly impacted by the event, either through injury, death, or through the emotional trauma of a direct experience. But although there was no loss of life, or any major property damage, Dominicans also experienced the psychological impacts of the earthquake because they also felt the tectonic forces, albeit to a much lesser degree. They knew that what happened in Port-au-Prince could
have easily happened on the Dominican side of the island. As a result, Dominicans became fearful of the natural environment and distrustful of the quality of man-made edifices. Moreover, many Dominicans could also be considered entry victims in that many experienced the “death imprint” (Dudasik 1980:330) firsthand during the rescue and relief process. Dominicans were the first outsiders to enter the earthquake devastation in Port-au-Prince. But they also did so too through the mainstream press and social media. In the end, I hope to show that Dominicans, particularly those along the border, constitute peripheral, context, entry and event victims of this disaster, as well.

Although the focus of Chapter 3 is on the Elías Piña experience, it is pertinent to start by recounting certain key events that took place further east, in Santo Domingo. These are relevant because they help illustrate the full scale of the events that took place on Hispaniola. More importantly, as the economic and political center of the country, it was in Santo Domingo that many of the rescue-related decisions were made.

**Island-Wide Fear**

To some, it might seem odd that I can remember exactly what I was doing at 5:53 pm, on January 12th. What can be so unforgettable about momentary dizziness? It was just a tremor, some might argue; nothing really happened in the Dominican Republic. However, I am not alone. Many others in the Dominican Republic remember what they were doing as well. In fact, the Listin Diario (2010b) article I referenced in the introduction compiled earthquake-related accounts of people throughout different parts of the country. Below is a selection of some of these stories from Santo Domingo, Puerto Plata, Gaspar Hernandez and Barahona. Common to them all, is the sense of dizziness, panic and fear. I start with Maryorie Nin, an employee in Santo Domingo.
Estaba parada en el lobby del edificio donde laboro y de pronto, siento como el suelo se mueve debajo de mí. Mi primera impresión era que me estaba dando un mareo, pero luego a mis espaldas, noto que muchas personas bajaron enloquecidas por las escaleras de emergencia [I was standing in the lobby of the building where I work and suddenly, I feel as if the ground is moving underneath me. At first, I thought that I was having a dizzy spell. But afterwards, behind me, I notice that there are many people that ran down the stairs like crazy]. [Listín Diario 2010]

Sofía, from Gaspar Hernandez, describes her experience in this north coast beach community in somewhat more detail. Although there was no visible destruction, she talks about the emotional scars to her community. Below, she describes how the earthquake and the subsequent tsunami warnings caused such fear in her small town that she called for a simultaneous prayer chain asking for God’s protection.

Mi provincia queda muy lejos de los hechos pero pudimos ser parte de las ondas que llegaron hasta aquí y fuimos sacudidos por mas de 30 segundos, al principio era algo leve, luego corno violento y ya al terminar se suavizo otra vez, pero gracias al señor no sufrimos ningún daño físico pero si emocional. En estos momentos nuestra provincia y mas el municipio de Gaspar Hernández en uno de los que están en alerta roja para la posibilidad de un tsunami, roguemos al señor para que nos ayude y vamos a formar una cadena de oración para que todo salga bien con Dios por delante que todo lo puede [My province is far away from the scene of the events, but we could have been part of it. The waves were felt here, and we were shaken for more than 30 seconds. At first, it was kind of light, but then it became violent, an then at the end it was light again, but thank the Lord that we did not suffer any physical damage, but we did emotionally. At this moment, our province, and primarily the municipality of Gaspar Hernández, is one of the ones on red alert whenever there is possibility of a tsunami. We ask the Lord to help us, and we are going to start a prayer chain so that everything turns out fine. With God leading us, everything is possible]. [Listín Diario 2010]

In the southwest, in Barahona, Amaris Gómez was in school when it happened. Below, she recounts how many there, and at the private clinic across the street, panicked when they felt the much more violent shaking. Her account is also insightful in that she places her experience within the context of seismic activity in the Dominican
Republic. Although Amaris had felt earthquakes prior to that day, Amaris speaks of this
tremor as being unlike any other.

Why did this earthquake stand out in Amaris mind? What was it that made this
one of greater consequence than the rest? Andrea Concepción, in Santo Domingo,
provides some insight, below.

Estaba recostada en la cama con mi hija, y las dos sentimos mareos, y mi
hija vio cuando la cama se movía de un lado a otro. Luego pensamos
tembló la tierra? y luego vimos en las noticias principales del país la
notificación de que en Haití había ocurrido un temblor de 7.3 epicentro. y
entonces así comprendimos el por qué del mareo instantáneo de repente
que duro unos segundos. [I was lying in bed with my daughter and both of
us felt dizzy, and my daughter saw how the bed moved from side to side.
We then thought, is the earth shaking? Then we saw the main national
news and the report that in Haití there had been a earthquake with a 7.3
epicenter. And then we understood why we had felt the momentary, sudden illness that lasted a few seconds]. [Listín Diario 2010]

Sonia’s quote is helpful in understanding what made this tremor so significant. It becomes evident that it was not the shaking itself that made it memorable. Rather, it acquired social meaning the moment she learned what had happened in Haiti. Dominicans could not help but feel a shared sense of risk and vulnerability. Francisco and Walquiris below articulate this shared sense of fear below:

A manifestar solidaridad y suplicar al Altísimo, recuérdese que estamos en el llamado cinturón de fuego sísmico, quien sabe si lo de Dominicana esta muy próximo a suceder. [Let us display solidarity and implore the Most High, remember that we are in the so-called seismic ring of fire; who knows if what is going to happen in the Dominican will happen soon]. [Listín Diario 2010]

Fue un momento de terror los minutos que duro el temblor, mi hija de 12 año esta que no puede dormir y esta muy asustada [It was a moment of terror during the minutes the earthquake lasted; my 12 year old daughter cannot sleep and she is very frightened]. [Listín Diario 2010]

**A Haitian Catastrophe Above All Others**

While the January 12th earthquake has not been the first disaster to impact Haitians, this one generated an unprecedent response from Dominicans. “No one remembers an outpouring like this before, not even when Haiti got hit by four tropical storms in 2008 and its flooded towns begged for assistance,” Burnett (2010) wrote in a piece for National Public Radio. While disasters like deadly hurricanes and landslides occur frequently in Haiti, these hazards do not appear to have immediate and tangible repercussions on Dominican soil. But on January 12th, Dominicans had felt the same terrifying forces of nature that had destroyed the Port-au-Prince area. The tremors we felt that afternoon made many of us realize that Haitians and Dominicans share the same seismic risk and are vulnerable to the same forces of destruction. Dominicans
were forced into the realization that they share the same land, with the same hazard risks. As Francisco articulated in his comment above, “A manifestar solidaridad. Quien sabe si lo de Dominicana esta muy próximo a suceder” [Let’s display solidarity. Who knows if the same thing is going to happen to the Dominican Republic soon] (Listín Diario 2010).

But perhaps most importantly, this disaster was different in that Dominicans were directly involved in the process. Haiti’s unprecedented level of devastation presented major logistical challenges during the rescue and relief process. Thus, the Dominican Republic became strategic in the entire post-hazard process. In the end, although Dominicans had only felt a slight tremor, signs of the earthquake were visible throughout the country. The Dominican Republic found itself center stage throughout this entire process.

Although there were no visible signs of damage in Santo Domingo, the earthquake’s effects were still obvious throughout the city. For one, it was almost immediately covered by the press. In the moments and days that followed, earthquake coverage was ubiquitous and constant. Individuals were bombarded with disturbing and heartbreaking images of the devastation in Port-au-Prince. As we witnessed the dead bodies being unearthed and mothers wailing for dead, buried children, one could not help but feel gut-wrenching emotions that, in the end, created bonds between the viewer and the victims. I experienced these emotions firsthand as I watched the coverage. However, I also witnessed them in many others too. I remember well how Maura, my hairdresser, wept at the images on the small, black and white television placed towards the back of the beauty parlor. “Esto no tiene comparación,” [This is like
nothing I have ever seen], she whimpered when she saw the piles of haphazardly piled dead bodies lining the streets of Port-au-Prince. “Dios los ampare,” [May God have mercy on them], she ended as she wiped tears from her eyes. That same evening, I witnessed similar emotional reactions at Payano’s Restaurant, a fast-food sandwich shop. As I walked in, I immediately noticed that all of its employees were watching the news on TV rather than tending the counter. The cashier turned to us and said, “It could’ve been us.”

Not only did Dominicans experience the earthquake through media images, but they felt connected to Haiti through the less obvious messages embedded in them- the earthquake story could not be told without Dominican assistance and participation. In the days that followed January 12th, the Dominican press was one of the first to inform the world what had happened. Thus, as CNN, UNIVISION and other international broadcast media outlets indicated “Images courtesy of the Listin Diario,” “Our Dominican sources” and “Report courtesy of Color Vision”, Dominicans became, in a way, the storytellers and protagonists in the earthquake story. Even when outsiders were eventually able to reach Port-au-Prince, the Dominican Republic still held a prominent role, because they were only able to reach Haiti through the Dominican border. Consequently, prominent reporters from around the globe, and from many major news organizations, descended upon the Dominican Republic to reach Haiti.

Not only did the earthquake story take over the traditional press, but it also trended heavily in social media channels like Facebook and Twitter. As thousands of Haitians in the Dominican Republic and abroad struggled to locate family members, these sites became crucial for these means. For example, my Haitian friends, Christel
and Monique in Santo Domingo, circulated pictures of a cousin they had been unable to contact. Some of my Haitian-American students at the University of Florida did the same. As lists of injured patients in Dominican hospitals became public, they were distributed far through social media channels. These websites, however, did not only serve as a means to share information. They also became a way in which Dominicans could participate directly in the rescue and aid process themselves. Facebook and Twitter became crucial in the coordination of rescue logistics, and channeling aid requests.

On January 13th, the day after the earthquake, evidence of the subsequent international rescue and relief apparatus became readily apparent in Santo Domingo. Since Port-au-Prince’s air and sea ports were either destroyed or overcrowded, the logistics of getting rescue teams, relief workers and aid to the area became quite challenging. Thus, the Dominican Republic became central to these means. The Las Américas International Airport in Santo Domingo, as well as other airports throughout the country, became the necessary first stop in their trip. Upon their arrival by air into the Dominican Republic, they got to Haiti, through the Haitian-Dominican border town of Jimaní.

One did not need to be a direct participant to witness the flurry of rescue and aid workers. Evidence of their activities were everywhere to be seen. At Hotel Embajador, where my brother was staying, I saw a team of ten men dressed in fluorescent orange uniforms walking in the lobby with two German shepherd dogs. They had just arrived from South Korea and were waiting for a bus that would take them to Port-au-Prince, via the border town of Jimaní. Santo Domingo not only became a transit point into Haiti,
but also became the center of operations for these efforts. The International Red Cross, for instance, established its center in the Dominican Republic due to the severe logistical challenges in Haiti itself.

Not only were the earthquake’s effects evident in Santo Domingo with the increase in international relief and aid workers going to Haiti, but there was an inflow of people coming from Haiti to the Dominican Republic. As early as 8:00 AM on January 13th, the online editions of the local newspaper posted reports of Santo Domingo hospitals admitting the earthquake-related injuries (Listín Diario 2010c). The Hospital Plaza de la Salud, for instance, had admitted 17 victims, including the Ambassador of Taiwan in Haiti, high ranking MINUSTAH officials, as well as the wife of the former Haitian ambassador to the Dominican Republic. In fact, as the hours and days after the earthquake transpired, the number of earthquake-related victims treated in Santo Domingo hospitals increased substantially, pushing local hospitals to their maximum operating capacity.

Santo Domingo also saw an inflow of non-injured Haitians from Port-au-Prince. Diplomats and other high-ranking nongovernmental organization workers flooded hotels all throughout the city. I spoke to Marie, one evacuee at the Hotel Embajador. The spouse of a Haiti-United Nations official, she had arrived in the night before, on a Dominican military helicopter, with her two small children. “How is it over there?”, I recall asking. “Bad,” was all she answered, “We still don’t know where my husband is.” Later in June, a UNICEF-Port-au-Prince officer recounted a somewhat similar evacuation experience. Amelie and her family had been evacuated from Port-au-Prince and taken to Santo Domingo three days after the earthquake. Once she arrived, she
was quickly relocated to the Dominican UNICEF office, where she now works on a permanent basis.

**They Are Our Brothers**

The earthquake’s consequences were not only limited to the increased presence of rescue workers, the injured, and evacuees. It was also evident in the people’s collective emotions. Throughout Santo Domingo, a very palpable sense of loss was evident. As I interacted with people in grocery stores, flower shops, beauty salons, and even in traffic lights, I could not help but notice a sense of sadness in the faces of nearly everyone I saw. People seemed sad, forlorn, and scared; as if they had lost someone close. Maura, my hairdresser, articulated these emotions best as she tried to explain the tears I saw her shed at the beauty salon. “Es que son nuestros hermanos” [They are our brothers]. Thus, Maura was not weeping for the loss of strangers. Rather, she was weeping for the loss of kin.

While my perceptions were likely influenced by my own personal grief, others noticed similar changes in Dominican attitudes as well. “We share an island. They are our brothers,” is what a Dominican doctor volunteering in a makeshift clinic told Erica Pearson (2010) from the New York Daily News. Like Maura had done at the beauty salon, this doctor, spoke of Haitians as family members, rather than as strangers. In his statement, he also reaffirmed a sense of shared insularity, closeness and union.

In fact, these notions became a common theme in the days that followed the earthquake. In fact, in the days after the earthquake, Dominicans repeatedly referred to Haiti in kinship terms, a big leap from the previously antagonistic references that prevailed in the past. Thus, in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake, it seemed, Haitians were no longer the evil, African, black, diametrically opposed population on the
other side of the island. Nor were Dominicans the white, Spanish, Catholic inhabitants of the east. The inhabitants of Hispaniola had become kin. Kinship terminology, compassion and a sense of unity were evident in the Listin Diario’s editorial of January 13th. “Son hermanos, más que simples vecinos, los que hoy necesitan de nuestro consuelo, de nuestra mano amiga, no solo para acelerar la vuelta a la recuperación, sino para ir un poco más allá de los apretados límites en que ese pueblo subsiste” [They are our brothers, more than simple neighbors, the ones that today need our support for their loss, our friendly hand, not only to speed up their return to recuperation, but also to go beyond the narrow limits within which these people live] (Editorial 2010). Similarly, Myrna Pichardo, a renowned journalist also employed kinship terminology in her opinion piece published in the Listín Diario (2010). “Aunque el terremoto se sintió en todo el Caribe, y a pesar de compartir una misma isla, los efectos no fueron los mismos para los dominicanos, que siendo hermanos siameses de los haitianos, el destino ha tratado de mejor forma librándolo de esta catástrofe, lo que debería provocar en cada dominicano sentimientos de compasión y de humanidad para con sus hermanos afectados” [Although the earthquake was felt throughout the Caribbean, and in spite of sharing the same island, the effects were not the same on Dominicans, who are Siamese twins of Haitians. Destiny has treated them better, freeing them from this catastrophe, and this should inspire feelings of compassion and humanity in Dominicans for our affected brethren] (Pichardo 2010).

Helping Family

These feelings of shared kinship transcended rhetoric and became action. Dominicans from all walks of life in Santo Domingo and throughout the country responded en masse to contribute towards the Haitian rescue and aid effort in any way
possible. Donation centers were quickly established throughout the country to collect much needed items like food and medicine. Members of the entertainment industry organized fundraisers for the victims. Private businesses coordinated donation drives and facilitated other types of aid. In a local public hospital, a Dominican woman volunteered to breastfeed over twenty motherless Haitian infant patients. In fact, Dominicans became so actively involved in the earthquake rescue and relief activities that it warranted the attention of the international press (CNN 2010).

Soon after the earthquake, the Dominican government assumed a prominent and proactive leadership role in the subsequent rescue, relief and reconstruction. In fact, the Dominican government was the first to send aid to Haiti. Shortly after the earthquake, President Fernández sent airplanes and rescue dogs to Port-au-Prince. He also formed a special government commission including the Secretary of Armed Forces, and the Secretary of Public Health which would coordinate the Dominican government’s multi-level response. This coordination included sending doctors, nurses, and mobile medical units from the Ministry of Public Health to treat the wounded. Mobile kitchens capable of feeding 100,000 meals a day were also sent. The country’s main hospitals were prepared for the arrival of the wounded. Makeshift clinics were set up along the border to tend to the wounded.

Since Port-au-Prince’s air and seaports were effectively crippled, getting aid to Haiti became a logistical nightmare. The Dominican Republic soon became the most feasible way to get to the devastated areas. Thus, the border area, customs and other immigration-related issues acquired strategic importance. Hence, President Fernandez made several temporary changes in national policy. To facilitate the transit of rescue
and aid-related material, he ordered the temporary elimination of tariffs and an expedited customs process for all materials that entered the country for Haitian earthquake relief purposes. Meanwhile, three measures addressed the movement of Haitian people. The first measure decreed that immigration offices throughout the country, but particularly those in the border region, were to ease visa requirements for Haitians seeking medical treatment in Dominican hospitals. The second measure had to do with undocumented Haitians already living in the Dominican Republic. The Oficina Nacional de Migración (National Immigration Office) temporarily ceased the deportation of all undocumented Haitians. Finally, in order for the movement of people back and forth across the border to occur in a controlled fashion, the President ordered an increase in the military's border presence at two border crossings—Jimaní, and in Dajabon.

Not only did the Dominican government take swift actions to assist in the humanitarian efforts, but it also changed the way in which it spoke about the Dominican Republic’s relationship with Haiti. In a manner similar to the way my hairdresser referred to Haitian victims of the earthquake, government officials spoke about their particular government office’s efforts using metaphors of kinship. This was evident, for instance, in the following statement by a government official:

Ayer, a la medianoche, el presidente Fernández nos convocó de urgencia al Palacio Nacional y de inmediato trazó el programa de asistencia para los damnificados haitianos, nuestros hermanos sacudidos por una gran tragedia, y en nosotros recayó la responsabilidad de coordinar lo que tiene que ver con el suministro de agua potable, lo que inmediatamente estamos llevando a cabo para reducir el impacto de la tragedia en esa nación vecina [Yesterday, at midnight, President Fernández called an urgent meeting at the National Palace and immediately laid out an assistance program for the Haitian victims, our brethren shaken by a great tragedy, and the responsibility fell on us to coordinate all things related to clean water]
supply, which we are immediately carrying out to reduce the impact of this tragedy on this neighboring country]. [Listín Diario 2010a]

The Dominican government’s quick, comprehensive response as well as its change in attitude was also noted by the international press, as stated in the following excerpt of a CNN report:

On the face of it, the quick reaction from Haiti’s neighbor may not seem surprising given their proximity. But historically, a much wider gap in relations has existed between Haiti and the Dominican Republic since colonial times. The Dominican Republic's outpouring of support to Haiti is a reminder of how the less-than-friendly legacy between the two nations has been buried even deeper. [CNN 2010]

Similarly, the American Embassy issued an official statement commending the humanitarian efforts of private citizens and companies, as well as the swift efforts of the Dominican government, who immediately after the earthquake adopted a prominent role in the aftermath of this disaster (Hoy Digital 2010).

These changes in government-level behavior are not unusual in disaster contexts. In fact, this noteworthy improvement in Haitian-Dominican governmental relations seems to follow patterns of post-disaster inter-governmental behavior observed between other countries. Research in the field of disaster diplomacy indicates that a “rapprochement” (Akcinaroglu et al. 2010: 1) between rival governments usually takes place because disasters act as sudden and drastic agents of change in the political and economic environment between both nations. This transformation allows governments to “counteract the inertia in interstate rivalries” (Akcinaroglu, DiCicco and Radziszewski 2010: 2) allowing them to take actions that would otherwise be impossible and unpopular. An important element of this new post-disaster political environment involves the behavior and attitudinal shifts among ordinary citizens (Akcinaroglu,
DiCicco and Radziszewski 2010). In post-disaster situations, political leaders must exhibit behaviors that satisfy its constituency’s new perspective towards its former enemies. As Akcinaroglu, DiCicco and Radziszewski articulated so well,

Disasters move people to experience feelings of empathy, and disaster-related activities can demonstrate the rival’s humanity. Enemy images may diminish most readily in cases where rescue efforts involve individuals from both states working side by side, such as the freeing of survivors from rubble or the reconstruction of a hospital or school. Indeed, experimental evidence shows that hostile groups will set aside resentment if they share a mutual interest in achieving a superordinate goal that requires the cooperation of both sides (Sherif 1966). By breaking down the perception of social-psychological opposition and creating in its place a more inclusive “us” (sans “them”), disaster-related activities may create not only an opportunity but also a willingness among the people to work toward a reduction of tensions (Akcinaroglu, DiCicco and Radziszewski 2010:4)

The Border

Although evidence of the January 12th earthquake was readily evident throughout Santo Domingo, it was perhaps in the towns along the Haitian-Dominican border that its effects were most obvious. As the geopolitical, symbolic and ideological barrier between these two nation-states, the towns along the Haitian-Dominican border became the frontline in the responses to this disaster. It was also in the Dominican border towns that the earthquake’s subsequent sociocultural, political, and economic effects found their most visible and immediate expression. In the hours and days following the earthquake, the Haitian-Dominican border became the physical space where the local, the regional, the national, the international, and the multinational intersected during the subsequent relief and reconstruction (or lack thereof) processes of the earthquake-stricken areas in and around Port-au-Prince.

Although the city of Santo Domingo saw much post-earthquake related activity, it was in the Dominican border towns that most of the action, took place. In fact, in the
days, weeks and months following the earthquake, the Dominican border gained prominence both nationally and internationally. The Dominican border town of Jimaní, located on the southern portion of the border, 100 km from Port-au-Prince, became the most high-profile border town during the post-earthquake rescue and relief process. For one, Jimaní was essential to the logistics of delivering aid to the affected areas as it was the only safe way into the country since Haiti’s air and sea ports were congested or destroyed. This was especially true for international rescue and relief groups and the international press. Hundreds of flatbed trucks carrying relief material passed through this small town on its way to Port-au-Prince.

In addition, important health treatment centers, like the one run by the Harvard Humanitarian Initiative (2010), were established in Fond Parisien, the Haitian town across the border from Jimaní, which served over 2,000 Haitians. For the Dominican government, Jimaní became the center and main depository of its major rescue and aid operation efforts. In fact, the day after the earthquake, President Fernández visited this small town to directly oversee the earthquake rescue and aid operations. More importantly, it was in Jimaní’s hospitals that thousands of wounded Haitians were treated. In the end, the Haitian-Dominican border, represented by the town of Jimaní, became a symbol of what both ordinary Dominicans and its government had done for Haitians after the earthquake. This town became a source of pride for the entire country and was thus named Ciudad de la Solidaridad Domínico Haitiana (Dominican-Haitian Solidarity City) by the local and national government, as is indicated in the quote below.

Jimani se convirtió a principio de año en un campo fértil de solidaridad desde donde emanaron las más variadas formas de colaboración, cuando los haitianos víctimas del terremoto requirieron ayuda [Jimani became, at the beginning of the year, a fertile field of solidarity from which the most
diverse forms of collaboration emerged when the Haitian earthquake victims required help]. [Hoy 2010b]

**Elías Piña in the Earthquake’s Aftermath**

Although Jimaní was in the spotlight during the earthquake’s rescue and relief process, other areas along the border experienced a flurry of post-earthquake activity as well. Although Elías Piña was hardly mentioned in the national and international press regarding its role in the relief efforts, this small town underwent similar events and processes as had Jimaní, although on a much smaller scale. In fact, the earthquake had a profound effect on the town of Elías Piña and on the relationship between Haitians and Dominican residents of the town.

Although the earthquake did not cause physical destruction in Elías Piña itself, the events and processes that followed, had profound effects on the town. As Schuller (2008) notes of the role of NGOs in the aftermath of disasters, the national and international aid and reconstruction process taking place through Elías Piña, but destined to the Port-au-Prince area were, in fact, just as transformative for the community as the event itself (Schuller 2008). The residents of the city of Comendador, better known as Elías Piña, located along the south-central portion of the Haitian-Dominican border, experienced all these sudden social, political and economic transformative processes.

**Personal experiences**

In this section, I recount Saori, Elda, Marlene, Sonia and Madam Nerlande’s January 12th experiences. Although their stories vary a great deal, they all had one thing in common: it was an unforgettable day, gripped by panic and fear. I start with Saori, a Japan International Cooperation Agency volunteer stationed in Elías Piña. At
the time, Saori was in Elías Piña working on a variety of projects that ranged from economic development, recycling, and nutrition. However, on January 12th, Saori found herself in the midst of the whirlwind of rescue and aid that ensued in the hours and days after the earthquake. I start with Saori because not only did she provide a valuable outside perspective of the events of that day, but she also comes from one of the most seismically affected countries in the world. Not only did Saori’s account of the earthquake provide valuable insight, on the events that followed the earthquake but she inadvertently contrasted earthquake preparedness and awareness between Elías Piña and Japan.

I interviewed Saori about her experiences during and after the Haitian earthquake one afternoon at her office at the Oficina de Desarrollo Fronterizo (Border Development Office.) Like so many others, Saori remembered exactly what she was doing. At exactly 5:53pm, she was checking her email at her host family’s home when she first felt the shaking. “Yo estaba en la casa y yo llamé a mamá de aquí. ¡Sonia terremoto! ¡Temblor!” [I was in the house and I called my Dominican mother. Sonia, earthquake! Tremor!] Growing up in Japan, a country with great earthquake preparedness, Saori was somewhat of an expert in regards to how one should behave during an earthquake. So, as soon as she felt the earth shake, Saori followed the sequence of steps she had memorized since she was a young girl. “Yo pensaba tengo que apagar gas […] según educación terremoto de allá. No empuja, no habla y no corre” [I thought, I have to turn off the gas […] according to earthquake education from there. Don’t push, don’t speak, and don’t run], she explained in a tone that reflected rote memory. “Were you scared?” I asked. “Para mí no es nada […] Ese nivel de
temblores siempre ocurren” [It was nothing for me [...] That level of earthquake always happen], she answered unemotionally. “Pero dura un poco, para mí fue largo” [But it lasted a while, I thought it lasted a long time], she said, wanting to qualify this one as somehow different from the rest.

Contrary to Saori’s methodic and almost second nature emergency preparedness behavior, her host family and her neighbors did the exact opposite. This earthquake caught everyone by surprise. Everyone in the household was gripped by panic. “Cuando yo llamé ella entró. ‘¡Uay!’ Moviendo y ella juyendo para llamar la niña que estaba jugando afuera y después la gente se dio cuenta y salió...la gente juyendo, primero lo que no puede...Yo sorprendí porque ellos salieron juyendo, porque educación de Japón, no corre. Pero ellos no entienden juyendo, juyendo, gritando, ‘¿Qué fue? ¿Qué fue?’ Ellos no están educados para terremoto. La gente estaba asustada corriendo y saliendo” [When I called out, she came inside. ‘Oh my!’ She moved around and she ran to call the girl who was playing outside and then people realized what was happening and went outside...people running frantically, the first thing they are not supposed to do...I was surprised when they ran out frantically because, according to Japanese education, you are not supposed to run. But they didn't understand, and they kept running frantically saying, ‘What happened? What happened?’ They are not educated for earthquakes... People were scared, running and getting outside].

The fear and disorder Saori witnessed within her host family was far from unique. In fact, on January 12th a wave of panic gripped the town of Elías Piña. Elda, a post office clerk, described her own behavior in somewhat similar terms. On that day, she
had just returned home from work and was sitting in her second-story apartment in the Los Guandules government housing project, where she lives with her three children. She was sitting in a rocking chair, when she first felt the strong shaking. “What did you do?”, I inquired. “Yo agarré al chiquito mío y bajé por ahí corriendo pa’ la calle, lejos de los edificios” [I grabbed my little one and went downstairs running, out to the street, away from the buildings], she recounted putting her hand on her chest to emphasize how scared she had been. “Yo agarré a mi muchacho y le apreté la mano duuuuuro ha’ta que pasara” [I grabbed my boy and held his hand REALLY hard until it was over], she added. “Yo di’que para que el no se asu’tara, pero mentira. Era yo la que ‘taba asu’tá” [I did that to supposedly keep him from getting scared, but that’s not true. I was the one who was scared. I latched on to my son’s hand and squeezed it haaaard! I wanted to keep him calm, but I was just as scared as he was].

Andrea, an unmarried retired school psychologist in her fifties, had a similar traumatic experience. She also lives in a second story apartment, but in the more affluent Barrio Patriótico. Despite her normally monotone voice and cool demeanor, Sonia inserted some emotion to her response. “Fue fuerte. Fue bien fuerte. Yo veía las escaleras y todo, todo, todo moviéndose. Aquí se movían y sonaban los cristales fuertemente” [It was strong, really strong. I saw the stairs, everything moving. The windows were moving and making a loud sound]. Unlike Elda and Saori’s host family who ran frantically outside, Sonia reacted by becoming inmobile. As the caretaker of her elderly, bedridden father, Sonia did not know what to do. “Yo sólo pensaba en mi papá que está ahí acostado. Como el está ahí acostado y no se puede mover, yo me quedé con él aquí. Si nos íbamos a morir, nos íbamos a tener que morir los dos. Yo le
I just thought about my father lying. Since he was lying there and could not move, I stayed with him here. If we were going to die, both of us would die together. I prayed to God that it would be over quickly], she recounted. While Sonia stayed in her apartment, her Haitian maid, Selami, lost all composure and self control. “¡Ella salió como una loca de la cocina para afuera gritando! Hasta una cortada grandísima se hizo con el cristal de la mesa en una pierna” [She ran out of the kitchen like a crazy woman! She even cut herself on her leg from the tabletop].

Although Selami's injury was minor and required no medical attention, this was not the case for other Elías Piña residents. Marlenne, who also lives in the Barrio Patriótico apartment complex and is a nurse at the local public hospital, was at work at the Hospital Rosa Duarte on January 12th. While there were no earthquake-related physical injuries, the hospital tended to several people that day that were brought in for severe emotional distress. “Tú sabe, por lo nervio’ y por lo mareo del terremoto, gente que sufre de la presión” [You know, because of the nervousness and the dizziness after the earthquake; people that suffer from high blood pressure].

While Saori, Elda, Sonia and Marlenne recount the day's events in a manner similar to what was recounted by Santo Domingo residents, their experiences were far more intense. In Elías Piña, the shaking was much more violent. According to the United States Geological Survey shake map of the Haitian earthquake what I and others had felt in Santo Domingo was labeled as “light” in intensity. The Elías Piña experience was considered moderate (United States Geological Survey 2010).

But while these women experienced the earthquake in Elías Piña itself, others were within the United States Geological Survey's “extreme” perceived shaking areas of
the map, that is, in Port-au-Prince itself. Such was the case of Madam Nerlande, a Haitian *pepè* (used clothes) vendor in her mid- to late fifties. For seven years, Madam Nerlande has spent three out of four weeks of the month selling used clothes at the binational market. The fourth week she returns home to Port-au-Prince to re-stock merchandise and check on her house in the Delmas district.

Ironically, on January 12th, Madam Nerlande was on one of her week-long Port-au-Prince re-stocking trips. It had been an especially difficult trip back, Madam Nerlande recounted. The bus had broken down on the way. So, she had returned later than usual. As soon as she arrived home, she greeted her family, and settled down for the meal her daughter had prepared for her. At around 4:30 pm, she bathed, dressed and left to visit her good friend, Milenn. At 4:53 pm, she was sitting in Milenn’s living room when the violent shaking commenced. The shaking was so violent that it was nearly impossible to remain standing, or even run out of the house for that matter. The violent movement of the earth knocked Madam Nerlande to the floor over and over. Luckily, she and her friend were able to get out of the house before it crumbled to the ground in mounds of dust and rubble. Immediately after the shaking subsided, Madam Nerlande ran down the street in a panic, frantically trying to get to her house to check on her family’s well-being. On the way, she told me she witnessed utter destruction and devastation. “M wè anpil kadav,” [I saw many dead bodies]. As soon as she arrived at her home, and verified that her son and daughter had made it out of the house safely, she knelt on the crumbled concrete-filled ground, lifted her hands up in the air and fervently thanked Bondye for sparing her children’s lives. Her house, however, was another story. One side of the structure, the side where her room was, was completely
destroyed. “Si mwen nan lakay mwen, mwen mouri! Bondye mesi!” [If I had been in my house, I would have died! Thank you God!] she said as she raised her hands and head up to heaven. Had she not gone to visit her friend that day, she would have been following her normal routine while in Port-au-Prince. That is, she would have been taking a bath in the part of the house that had crumbled to the ground. Throughout our conversation, Madam Nerlande fervently credited her survival to Bondye or God, who had sent her to her to visit her friend that day.

Not only did many of the transnational Elías Piña residents, like Madam Nerlande, find themselves in Port-au-Prince that day, but others were also impacted because they had family members that lived in the affected region. Although David, the 19-year old son of a Dominican father and a Haitian mother, travels to Port-au-Prince and Belladère from his permanent home in Elías Piña to visit family and friends on a regular basis, he was in Elías Piña on January 12th. His mother, stepfather and half-siblings, however, were in the midst of the destruction. David’s mother lives and works in a hospital in Mirebalais, Haiti, but travels to Port-au-Prince frequently. David and his three other sisters were “sin sitio” [distraught], as David put it, when they found out about the earthquake. It took them three days to know whether their mother was all right. They hardly ate or slept, worrying about their mother’s and sister’s well-being. “¡Yo me quería morir!” [I wanted to die!], he told me. Fortunately, everyone in David’s family survived.

Sadly, Mari Terez had not been as lucky. Although she now lives permanently in Elías Piña, at the time she lived in Delmas, a Port-au-Prince neighborhood. While David’s story above had a happy ending, Mari Terez’s was a nightmare. Only her
triplets and her mother survived. Her husband, Jan Pye, her father Jaky, her stepfather Disonn, and her nieces, Nadeja and Natasha, all perished. Having experienced so much death, Mari Terez is now hyper aware of her own mortality. She said she, too, would have been inside the crumbled edifice, had she not gone to her aunt’s house on that day. “Nan tranblemandete a, kay la kraze. Ni kay manman m, ni kay mwen, yo tout kraze. Mwen… sa k sove m paske se… bon matant mwen ki pou kote m ale, chak semenn m toujou fe ofis lakay li. Kounyeya la m pran de timoun yo piti, mwen pran de piti yo, m ale fe ofis lakay matant mwen. M al ede l. Se sa k sove m! M pral mouri tou!” [In the earthquake, the house crumbled. Both my mother’s house and my house crumbled completely. Myself….what saved me…because its…well, my aunt, I would go to my aunt’s every week to do housework at her house. I took the two small children, I took the children and I went to do housework at my aunt’s house. I went to help her. That’s what saved me! I was going to die, too!].

Aware that Mari Terez was still experiencing tremendous levels of emotional distress, I did not want to prober her any further. Nonetheless, she continued, “Kay la kraze. Tout bagay kraze!” “Ou pa ka mache. Ou ap mache…se konsa ou prale…se konsa ou prale” [The house crumbled. Everything crumbled! You couldn’t walk. You are walking, you were walking like this, like this], she said as she stood up from her green, plastic chair and ran from side to side to reenact the violent shaking. “Tout bagay ap tranble. Tout bagay tonbe sou li. Pandan y ap soti. Ou pa konn te a tranble, tout bagay ap vire, tout bagay ap vire” [Everything was shaking. Everything was falling on you. You’re not used to having the earth shake, everything is tipping over, everything was tipping over!].
Mari Terez, her triplets and her mother slept on the street that night, away from any trees or buildings. Curious about how people fared in the hours after the quake, I asked her how she got food and water. “It was the Dominicans that got there first with these necessities,” she quickly replied. However, Mari Terez clarified that water and food were not, at first, pressing concerns. Everyone was in an initial altered state of being; fright, confusion, and disbelief that suppressed any sense of thirst or hunger:

Mari Terez: Tout moun...tout moun pè. Lè ou pe ou pa gen grangou. Depi ou pè ou pa grangou [Everybody...everybody was afraid. When you’re afraid, you don’t feel hunger. If you’re afraid, you’re not hungry].

Tess: Epi ou pa bwe dlo? [Didn’t you drink any water, either?]

Mari Terez: Non, depi ou pe ou pa grangou ou pa vle anyen. Ou rete la. Tout moun rete la paske ou tande anpil moun mouri, men ou pa ta renmen ou mouri [No. If you’re afraid, you’re not hungry. You don’t want anything. You just stand there. Everyone just stands there].

Mari Terez’ stupor, however, did not last long. On Wednesday, the day after the earthquake, she called her close friend, Marianna, in Elías Piña, and told her she was leaving the death and destruction behind, and heading towards the Dominican Republic. Mari Terez, her triplets and her elderly mother boarded the bus, and made their way to the Haitian-Dominican border. Once there, Mari Terez struggled to enter the country. Although President Fernandez had temporarily eased the immigration restrictions, these only applied to the visibly injured. Given that Mari Terez, her mother and children had no visible, physical injuries, the Dominican military did not let her through. In the end, they had to “pase anraje” [forgo the official border crossings and take the back roads]. Below, she describes her ordeal:

Tess: Ki sa ki te pase nan aduana? Lè ou rive, eske yo mande ou papye? [What happened at the customs office? Did they ask you for papers when you arrived?]
Mari Terez: Ay wi! Yo mande ou papye. M pase anpil mize pou m antre. Lè m rive aduana, yo pa vle kite m pase. Yo di m m pa t pase; m pa antre. M pase anpil mize, anpil mize. Lè m kanpe, m kanpe, m pale, m pa gen lajan pou peye dwann. M pale, m pale, m pale [Oh yes! They asked you for papers. I went through many problems to enter. When I arrived at the border, they didn’t want to let me through. They told me I couldn’t go through, that I couldn’t enter. I went through so much trouble, so much trouble. I stood there and stood there and spoke, and spoke. I didn’t have money to pay the border officers. I spoke and spoke and spoke].

Tess: Men, mwen panse Dominikani ouvri fwontye yo pou ayisyen. Se pa vre? [But I thought that the Dominican Republic opened its border for Haitians. Is that not true?]

Mari Terez: Non, se pa vre. Yo ouvri, y al pran ayisyen yo ki mal, ki blese grav, ki mal, pou ale lopital Sannwann [No, it’s not true. They opened it and took Haitians that were ill, wounded, near death, to go to the hospital and San Juan].

Tess: O! Men si ou pa blese ou pa ka vini [Oh! So if you weren’t wounded, you couldn’t go through].

Mari Terez: Non, ou blese oubyen ou vin rache rad nan machin pou al lopital. [No, if you were injured or if you came injured badly in a car to go to the hospital].

Tess: Ki sa ou fe pou ou pase? [What did you do to go through?].

Mari Terez: Nou vin anraje [We came anraje].

Tess: Ki sa sa vle di? [What does that mean?].

Mari Terez: Kote ou ka pase kote pa gen polisy. Apre sa, si ou pa gen anyen konsa, ou p ap pase [You go through a place where there are no police officers. After that, if you don’t have anything, you are not passing].

After entering through the back roads, Mari Terez, her mother and her children were taken in by her friend, Marianna. About a month later, she found a job as a maid in the home of a local politician. She rented a tiny room in a house in Barrio Nuevo, the poorest part of the city, and moved in with her mother and children. “Do you plan to return to Port-au-Prince?” I asked. “No. Yo me quedá aquí” [No, I will stay here], she replied with her heavy Haitian accent. “M kraze tout afe m! M vle ale kapital oubyen
Baní, men m pa gen kòb” [I lost all of my things! I want to go to the capital or to Baní, but I don’t have any money].

As Sonia, David, Mari Terez, Madam Nerlande’s stories reveal, the January 12th earthquake’s effects had profound and long-term consequences throughout Elías Piña. Although the United States Geological Survey shake map qualified the shaking as “moderate”, Elíaspiñenses spoke about their experiences in a manner that surpasses their sterile characterization. To them, the earthquake was truly a life changing moment. Fortunately, most of the stories were triumphant stories of survival. Many others like Mari Terez, were truly heartbreaking.

**Border solidarity**

As these stories illustrate, Elíaspiñenses were impacted intensely and directly. Not only was the shaking more violent, but the town’s sociocultural and socioeconomic ties with Haiti made for many Dubasik’s (1980) peripheral, event, context and entry victims. But not only were their experiences much more direct, but the solidarity and compassion they exhibited was truly remarkable. The people of the poorest province in the Dominican Republic embarked on a city-wide fundraiser to help Port-au-Prince. The headline in the local online paper is illustrative of this collective sense solidarity of concern, “Comendador acude masivamente para brindar su apoyo a los hermanos haitianos afectados por la catástrofe...no ha importado la clase social” [Comendador goes to Haiti en masse to lend its support to our Haitian brothers affected by this catastrophe, regardless of social class] (Chenchen de Comendador (January 14, 2010).

The first day I stepped foot in Elías Piña, I heard of the town’s admirable efforts. Elda, the post office worker, told me about the town’s participation in the rescue and aid process. Soon after the earthquake, the local radio station organized *Solidaridad con*
Haiti (Solidarity with Haiti), a fundraiser to collect money and goods for earthquake victims. The entire town, it seemed to Elda, donated a wide variety of items ranging from clothes, drinking water, rice, cooking oil or money. The rich, the poor, the indigent, everyone participated in any way they could. “Es que Elías Piña es un pueblo solidario y humano. Es que ante una tragedia así, todos dimos algo” [Elías Piña is a humane town and one that displays solidarity. Faced with a tragedy like that, we all contributed something].

The Solidaridad con Haití (Solidarity with Haiti) fund drive quickly gained momentum and drew the attention of local government officials, who also contributed to the fund drive. The mayor, senator, representatives and city councilmen and women all contributed to this cause. In the end, the Solidaridad con Haití fund drive raised over RD$1,250,000 (approximately thirty eight thousand American dollars) in donations. In fact, there were so many donations that the television and radio station did not have enough room to store them. The overflow was sent to the offices of Desarrollo Fronterizo (Border Development), the government agency where Saori, the Japanese volunteer, worked. She couldn’t believe what the people of this town had accomplished. “Me encantó mucho. ¡Ay qué lindo Comendador!” [I really liked this. How nice Comendador!].

On January 18th, after Solidaridad con Haití (Solidarity with Haiti) concluded its drive, the Elías Piña mayor organized, and led, a convoy of six big trucks stocked with the town’s donations to deliver to Port-au-Prince. What on a regular day would be a difficult, four-hour trip, this time it was a nightmare. Chaos was everywhere. Getting there took twice the amount of time.
Andrés, a local reporter from Chenchen de Comendador was also part of the Solidaridad con Haití (Solidarity with Haiti) caravan. One evening, we spoke about what he experienced in post-earthquake Port-au-Prince. “El bajo no se aguantaba. Por donde quiera que tu mirabas, habían cadáveres” [The stench was horrible. There were dead bodies everywhere you looked]. The situation was truly unimaginable and he was completely unprepared for, what to him, was an end-of-the world scene. “Parecía el fin del mundo” [It looked like the end of the world]. Upon his return to Elías Piña, Andrés reported on his experience on the Chenchen de Comendador his online news blog. The headline read, “LAS COSAS NO SON COMO LAS PRESENTAN...ES PEOR,” [THINGS ARE NOT AS THEY PORTRAY THEM TO BE...THEY ARE WORSE] (January 14, 2010).

Although small in scale, local grassroots community efforts, like Solidaridad con Haití, were crucial in the days immediately after the earthquake. In fact, border response was crucial in the hours and days that followed January 12th. As the outside world scrambled to access Port-au-Prince, local community groups and religious organizations with habitual contacts and partner organizations in Port-au-Prince were able to provide first aid quickly and efficiently (Santos Hernández 2010).

The wounded, foreign aid and the displaced through Elías Piña

While the six-truck convoy was in Haiti, Elíaspiñenses soon started to witness a flurry of earthquake-related activity in the town. On January 14th, two days after the earthquake, the Dominican Defensa Civil (Civil Defense) and the Dominican Red Cross brought in the first wounded to the Rosa Duarte Hospital in Elías Piña. People could see and hear many ambulances travelling on the city’s main road, making trips back and forth from Haiti to Elías Piña, and from the Elías Piña hospital to the larger hospital
in San Juan de la Maguana. Andrea, my informant from the Barrio Patriótico, witnessed this from her second story apartment window facing the Rosa Duarte hospital. “Eso era ambulancia y ambulancia” [It was ambulance after ambulance], she said. “El hospital estaba lleno, lleno, lleno. Yo veía el patio del hospital afuera lleno de gente y de familiares de los heridos. No había capacidad para un dominicano que quisiera irse a atender” [The hospital was full, full, full. I would see the patio’s hospital full of people and full of the family members of the wounded. There was not enough capacity to treat sick Dominicans]. Rafaela, who lives in the apartment below, said random people from the community cared for the family members of the wounded as well by taking them meals and fresh clothes.

In fact, as more and more rescue forces were able to reach the wounded in the earthquake-affected areas, and as Jimani’s main hospital overflowed with patients, other border towns took in patients (Santos Hernández 2010). As such, Elías Piña’s deficient health facilities started to play a more prominent role in earthquake relief. In fact, the Rosa Duarte Hospital was stretched far beyond its capacity. To address this sudden increase, the Ministry of Health sent personnel, ambulances and equipment to reinforce the local hospital’s meager resources. For instance, since Elías Piña lacks an orthopedic doctor, the Ministry of Health sent a temporary team of specialists to help treat the wounded Haitians. The local private clinic also admitted earthquake victims. “Aquí vinieron muchos, muchos” [We had many come here, a lot], the clinic’s owner told me.

As more and more wounded were brought in to Elías Piña and the flow of people and aid congested the border, immigration restrictions eventually subsided. Unlike Mari
Terez, who was forced to enter the country through the un-official back roads, many others had a far easier time getting through. As Jimaní, the closest border crossing point to Port-au-Prince became congested, more and more people and aid started to travel through the Elías Piña border crossing, known as Carrizal. As a result, border enforcement was temporarily eased. According to my neighbor, Compa, “La frontera estaba abierta. Ahí no paraban a nadie” [The border was open. They didn’t stop anybody]. In fact, no passports, visas or documents of any sort were required to enter the country, particularly if it was for medical care. Although exact numbers are unknown, particularly in regards to how many wounded Haitians were cared for in the Elías Piña hospital, estimates place the number of earthquake-related patients that crossed the border for the purposes of receiving care in Dominican hospitals in the thousands (Santos Hernández 2010).

While many of the Haitians that came to the Dominican Republic crossed the border for medical care purposes, many like Mari Terez, did not. As will be explained in Chapter 8, the earthquake generated two types of migration: a massive reverse migration of people from Port-au-Prince and other affected areas to both rural Haiti; and an international migration to the Dominican Republic. Subsequent studies estimated that the number of people that left Port-au-Prince after the earthquake was of 570,000 (Bengtsson et al. 2010). Meanwhile, although exact numbers are unknown, thousands travelled to Elías Piña both on a temporary and permanent basis. We will also see how Elías Piña was unprepared to handle this sudden, massive migration.

**Non-profit funding**

Finally, as non-profit organizations received funding to execute a wide variety of earthquake-related projects, many institutions re-located to border towns on the
Dominican side of the border. The non-profit’s logo-clad four by four vehicles made their way through the town’s roads on a daily basis. Strange, white, and foreign-looking faces dotted local restaurants and bars. In the months that followed, Elías Piña became a small hub of international aid organizations. However, their projects rarely included local, Dominican components. Their employees worked in Haiti, and served earthquake-related event victims only.

Conclusion

In Chapter 3, I shared several of the earthquake experiences I collected throughout the island of Hispaniola, including my own. For many of us, life on Hispaniola changed after we felt the tremors on the afternoon of January 12th. Although we had felt similar tremors before, this earthquake was different. The moment we associated the shaking we had felt with the end-of-the-world scenes in Haiti, this seismic event acquired important social meaning. Although those of us in the Dominican Republic did not experience destruction, we suffered from the psychological and emotional consequences of feeling a similar destructive event that could take place on our side of the island. Not only did we feel the earthquake, but the events that soon followed made many of us feel connected to the Haitian tragedy on a very personal level. Evidence of the earthquake was everywhere to be seen. The press, international rescue and aid workers descended on the Dominican Republic trying to get to Haiti. This shared sense of risk and the protagonist role the country played throughout the rescue process forced many Dominicans to re-think their notions of Haitian separation and difference.

Very soon after the earthquake, Dominicans exhibited solidarity and compassion towards Haitians in an unprecedented way. Dominicans grieved and spoke of Haitians
as if they were kin. According to Hoffman (1999) and Oliver-Smith (1999a), this type of post-disaster behavior is typical. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, before any outside help arrives, victims, both immediate and peripheral, enter a liminal state as the societal order and structure has effectively collapsed. It is within this liminality that individuals help each other, regardless of the pre-existing differences that might have occurred (Hoffman 1999). During this phase, ideas of private property are abandoned and a sense of brotherhood bonded in pain and grief with little reference to class or ethnicity prevailed” (Oliver Smith 1999b:158).

While the earthquake and its subsequent processes were felt throughout the entire country, it was in the Dominican border towns that these were most palpable. Elda, Marlenne and Sonia’s stories illustrate the terror many felt with the violent shaking. Most importantly, many Elíaspiñenses experienced it more closely due to their personal ties to many of the earthquake-ravaged areas in Haiti. Unfortunately, these traumatic experiences were just the beginning of what would be a long, difficult process. The earthquake set in motion a long chain of events that transformed the town in dramatic ways, family life in particular.

Why were Elías Piña’s experiences so intense? It would be easy to conclude that it is the town’s geographical proximity to Haiti that is the sole cause. In other words, the fact that the town lies within the moderate shake region of the United States Geological Survey shake map (2010) should explain why many of us in Santo Domingo only felt somewhat of a dizziness, while Elíaspiñenses felt much more extreme rattling. However, the map fails to illustrate the many other ways in which the January 12th earthquake impacted life in this town. Thus, in order to understand how the earthquake
and its aftermath impacted Elíaspíñenses like David, Mari Terez and Madam Nerlande
we must examine the area’s complex sociocultural and socioeconomic ties to Haiti. As
Dudasik (1980) argued, disasters and their long aftermath alter the pre-existing
sociocultural ties in regions that transcend the area of impact. To understand Mari
Terez and Madam Nerlande’s earthquake experience, we must frame it within the
town’s long history of shared cultural, economic, political and historic ties with Haiti.
These interconnections have long been part of the Elíás Piña’s socio-cultural fabric. In
fact, Elíás Piña has often been characterized as being a unique socioeconomic and
sociocultural area within the Dominican Republic (Despradel 2005, Dilla Alfonso 2010).
As a result, what happens in Haiti, whether good or bad, has eminent repercussions in
Elíás Piña.

Although this connection with Haiti has given Elíás Piña a rich and complex
culture and benefitted the area economically, it has also been the source of much
conflict. Throughout the region’s history, the Dominican government’s relationship with
Elíás Piña and the border area in general has been shaped by the state’s intense and
hyper-focused efforts to regulate and intervene in this relationship. It has also been
categorized by alternate periods of complete oblivion. Thus, Elíaspíñenses have
grown accustomed to historical cycles of Haitian-related attention and inattention. The
January earthquake triggered yet another wave of border attention and control. In
Chapter 4, I will attempt to place Elíás Piña within its historical context. As we will see,
a pattern of hyper-attention and oblivion on the part of the Dominican government will
become evident. In fact, these waves of attention and inattention are one of the major
forces that have contributed to the vulnerability of life in this border town.
It was a hot, muggy afternoon in August and my husband and I were in our second story apartment in the Barrio Patriótico of Elías Piña. It was around one o’clock and we were sitting in our dining room, eating our rice and beans lunch. Although we were alone and our front door was closed, we could not help but feel that we were also eating with our downstairs neighbors, Santica and Compa. Nearly everything they said and did in their downstairs apartment travelled uninterrupted to ours. So, as we sat in the dining room I unwillingly learned that Compa had thoroughly enjoyed the yuca he had brought that morning from his farm in Hondo Valle. I also learned that exactly fifteen minutes after we had started eating, they were getting ready to play dominoes with our other neighbor, Santana, and the utilities company watchman. Even if we were in our own apartment, we felt that we, too, were participants in their game. While they played, we could not help but feel like we were with them, too. We laughed at their jokes and winced at the continuous slamming of dominoes on the wooden table.

While this forced intimacy bothered me at first, I soon grew accustomed and even enjoyed listening to their exchanges. In fact, I learned a lot about Elías Piña life by listening to my neighborhood’s daily dominoes conversations. That afternoon in July was no exception. On that day, as all three men reminisced about their days serving in the Dominican military, I learned a lot about the changing policies and ethos of the institution. It was quite enlightening because military life is central to this border town. All three men had served at different times in recent Elías Piña history. So I felt as if I was getting a first-hand historical account.
As I listened in on their conversation, I learned that at times, the Dominican state’s policy had been to overlook and ignore the border region altogether. Such was the case during Balaguer’s twelve-year regime, when Compa was a sergeant serving on the border. Back then, he said, “No se jugaba. Si había que limpiale el pico a un cabeza caliente, se le limpiaba” [There was no playing around. If we had to kill a hot head, we did], he said as he admittedly participated in the torture. Thus, political dissent during Balaguer’s regime was nearly impossible. Despite this, Compa recalled his time serving under Balaguer fondly. It was one of the few times when being a border officer had been a profitable career. During this time, Balaguer conveniently ignored what was bought and sold to Haiti. His blind-eye policy allowed many in the Dominican military to sell gasoline to Haitians during the international trade embargo against Haiti in the nineties.

While Balaguer had strategically ignored the border, this region became the center of national attention and policy during Santana’s service. During Trujillo’s regime the border became an area of strategic national focus. In fact, Dominicanizing the border became a national policy. Thus, it was Santana’s job to keep Haitians out of Elías Piña and keep Elíaspiñenses from interacting with Haitians. “¡No se veía un haitiano por ningun la’ol!” [One would not see a Haitian anywhere!], he exclaimed. In effect, Trujillo had brought under control what Santana perceived had been a chaotic and massive Haitian immigration because “¡To’ el mundo sabe que to’ e’to aquí era Haití! ” [Everyone knows that all of this used to be Haiti!].

As I ate my lunch and listened, I could not help but think about how so much of daily life in Elías Piña has been influenced and affected by the Dominican state’s
changing policy towards the border. I thought of how Balaguer’s blind eye had eventually led to the emergence of the binational market, the backbone of this town’s economy. I also thought of how Trujillo’s Dominicanization border policies had effectively forced individuals and families to redraw kinship lines (Derby 1994).

Compa and Santana’s stories of changing border policy and enforcement are, in fact, indicative of a broader historical trend. While certain governments like Trujillo hyper-focused on the border area to rid it of its Haitianness, others strategically ignored the region altogether. In fact, Dilla (2010) argues that this waxing and waning of attention is characteristic of the region’s history; even long before there was even a Haiti or a Dominican Republic. Through it all, the state’s efforts to delineate and enforce the geographical, cultural and personal borders between these two groups have had significant impacts in the lives of people in the region.

In Chapter 4, I will attempt to provide an overview of Elías Piña history. In it, we will be able to see how the colonial and state governments have enacted policies that have had major consequences to those living in this region. In many ways, the border has been used and sacrificed. As a result, life in this region is characterized by a constant struggle to adapt to these outside policies. Whether it was adapting to Spain or France’s commercial policies, Trujillo’s Dominicanization efforts or the United States’ occupation of customs houses, Elíaspiñenses have had to rework their livelihoods, families and identities to keep up with these changing policies. As we will see throughout this dissertation, the Dominican government and the international community’s post-earthquake policies fit into this consistent pattern of outside intervention. To help illustrate the state’s ever-changing approach to border
management and control, I will adapt Dilla’s (2010) historical framework. In it, he divides border history into several stages that illustrate several important stages. I start with Dilla’s first stage in border development, the one he refers to as the período formativo (the formative period) but which I will refer to as the stage when the border emerges.

**Border Stages**

**The Emergence of the Border**

According to Dilla (2010), the first apparent stage in the Dominican-Haitian border formation process spans a period of one century, starting from the XVII century, when the beginnings of an unofficial border emerge. This period ends with the official creation of an international border between Spain and France. The unofficial border process starts, however, not along the border itself, but with an apparently unrelated event. It starts with the discovery and subsequent colonization of the resource-rich areas of current Central and South America. The establishment of colonies in these far away places caused a reevaluation and reorganization of the Spanish colonial project in the Americas.

Santo Domingo, which had once been Spain’s prized colonial possession, became a low priority. Thus, it was towards the XVIIIth century that the downward spiral that culminated in neglect and backwardness went into full force. With its new and more profitable colonial projects, Spain no longer invested in La Española. But most importantly, trade opportunities to sell the few goods it produced on the island were few and far in between, as trade routes from South and Central America to Spain bypassed Santo Domingo ports altogether (Moya Pons 1980, Peguero and de los Santos 1983).
Spain’s shift in priorities also had far-reaching social, economic and demographic consequences. Spain’s neglect of La Española forced an exodus of its residents towards the more prosperous colonies in Central and South America. Those that stayed, however, endured the consequences of Spain’s neglect and suffocating economic policies. Not only was it nearly impossible to subsist from unsupported minor cattle ranching and minor agricultural endeavors, but Spain restricted the colonists’ trade opportunities of the few goods it was able to produce. Spain only allowed the sale of goods to Spanish ships, which would only make sporadic and infrequent visits to the island’s ports (Moya Pons 2010). As a result, La Española residents took advantage of other incipient trade opportunities. They sold their goods in the illegal and much more profitable trade with the Dutch, the English and above all, the French. These new trade partners not only extended more profitable terms of trade, but they also offered consistent and more frequent opportunities for exchange (Dilla et al. 2010, Moya Pons 1980, Peguero and de los Santos 2000).

These new avenues of trade quickly burgeoned and provided a much needed stimulus to the neglected and stagnant economy. The majority of trade, however, was carried out with the French, who had slowly but surely begun to occupy the poorly populated and defended areas of the western part of the island. These unregulated and illegal exchanges with the French were strongly discouraged by the Spanish Crown, as they were not reaping any of the benefits of this increasingly lucrative trade. As a result, in an effort to bring the population within a geographical area that could be more effectively controlled, the Spanish crown ordered the depopulation of the areas that were furthest away from Santo Domingo and where trade with the French was taking
place. However, this measure would, in the end, only further promote further French incursion into Spanish territory (Dilla et al. 2010, Moya Pons 1980, Peguero and de los Santos 1983).

Although the Spanish authorities implemented other significant efforts to stave off the French incursion on the island, they were unsuccessful. Trade with the French continued and flourished. Spain’s inability to control it, as well as events that took place in Europe, forced the Spanish to recognize the French presence on the western part of the island. With the signing of the Ryswick treaty in 1697 and subsequently the Aranjuez treaty in 1777 between France and Spain, the official sharing of the island and the official beginnings of the present day border commenced (Dilla et al. 2010, Moya Pons 1980, Peguero and de los Santos 1983).

However, the dividing line established by these treaties was quite different from what it looks like today. For one, the Aranjuez treaty did not establish a clear border between the Spanish and the French territories. But also, the Spanish colony included territory in what is the present day Plateau Central of Haiti, an area with close cultural and economic connections with present-day Elías Piña (Dilla et al. 2010, Despradel Cabral 2005).

The official recognition of the French on the island prompted changes in Spain’s governing approach. While before, its strategy had been to depopulate to prevent trade, it now wanted to establish a firm presence in the border areas. For one, it wanted to prevent any further French incursions into Spanish territory. Thus, it ordered the repopulation of the same areas it had once ordered to disappear. Bánica, a small town in present-day Elías Piña province, was established as a result of this measure in 1664.
So were San Rafael de la Angostura, San Miguel de la Atalaya, Hincha and Las Caobas, all in present day Haiti. But more importantly, Spain also changed its approach in order to capitalize on these new trading opportunities. Although the Spanish portion of the island remained in a state of backwardness, trade between the Spanish colony and the thriving sugar cane plantation-based French colony persisted and grew. The other towns also became thriving centers of cattle trade with the French. Bánica a town that was, at the time, strategically located in commercial routes to Port-au-Prince, thrived due to its cattle trade (Derby 1994). The other newly established towns would also become thriving centers of trade with the French (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano República Dominicana 2010).

These newly established border towns, however, became a problem for both the Spanish and the French authorities and planters. They became areas difficult to control and came to be viewed by outsiders as problematic, an image that still persists today. The Spanish could not effectively control this trade, nor could it collect any revenue from the active trade that took place in these towns. French authorities and planters, on the other hand, disliked the fact that these Spanish border towns became safe havens for escaped plantation slaves (Hoetink 1985). In fact, these towns were in their majority, populated by marooned slaves who had escaped the brutal working conditions on the French sugar cane plantations. Slaves would escape to these poorly populated and developed towns and would subsequently establish their own cattle ranches in the freely available land (Derby 1994), leaving behind a life of brutal slavery.

**The Border Disappears**

Although the border between the Spanish and the French portions of the island had been firmly established with the Aranjuez and Ryswick treaties and its subsequent
repopulation of the Spanish towns, during the second phase of border development, the official border effectively disappeared (Dilla et al. 2010). With the signing of the Peace of Basel in 1795, Spain effectively ceded their portion of Hispaniola to France, thus ending the existence of an official international border on the island (Moya Pons 2010, Peguero and de los Santos 1983, Dilla et al. 2010). What had once been an island shared by both countries, now was entirely French. Residents on the Spanish portion unwittingly found themselves under French rule. France, however, would not be able to take advantage of this newly acquired territory. Events in Saint Domingue, on the French side of the island prevented their de facto occupation of the Spanish portion. Saint Domingue was in the midst of a major slave revolt which would subsequently culminate in the establishment of the first independent black republic and the expulsion of French colonial rule (Moya Pons 2010, Peguero and de los Santos 1983, Dilla et al. 2010).

The newly formed independent Haitian Republic’s troops, however, did effectively capitalize on the Basel treaty, which established the unification of the entire island under French rule. In 1795, Haitian troops encroached into what had previously been Spanish territory and occupied what were then the important Spanish trade towns of Hincha, Las Caobas, San Miguel de la Atalaya and San Rafael de la Angostura along the central portion of the border, approximately sixty kilometers from present day Elías Piña (Dilla et al. 2010, Despradel 2005). Haitian incursions into what had previously been Spanish land did not stop with these towns. Both Toussaint Louverture and Jean Jacques Dessalines, major leaders of the Haitian Revolution repeatedly tried to occupy the Spanish towns. However, the ever-impending threat of outside invasions and
reoccupation by France made these efforts unsuccessful. It was finally with Haitian President Boyer that Haiti succeeded in taking over the Spanish side of the island in 1822, an occupation that would continue until 1844. With this occupation, the de jure international border effectively ceased to exist. Thus, the border was effectively erased.

Although Dominican historiography often mentions the negative aspects of the Haitian occupation, it often leaves out the positive contributions Haitians made toward the advancement of society during this time. Among the most notable was the end of slavery and the “social and juridical equality of whites, mulattos, and blacks” (Moya Pons 2010:111).

**The Political Border Reappears and Its Limits Are Tested**

Despite these positive contributions, there were those within the occupied society that were fiercely opposed to Haitian presence. In fact, a diversity of groups were working to end Haitian rule (Moya Pons 1995). However, it was the Santo Domingo, white elite-led group that would successfully organize and lead an independence movement that succeeded in ending Haitian rule in 1844 (Moya Pons 2010, Dilla et al. 2010). This victory would reinstate, yet once again, an international border. The newly formed Dominican Republic, however, adhered to the 1777 Aranjuez treaty to establish its political boundaries. Thus, it demanded the return of the towns of Las Caobas, San Miguel de la Atalaya, Hincha, and San Michel which had been the first to be annexed by the Haitian troops. Thus, in 1844 Dominican troops in present day Elías Piña made their way into the present-day Plateau Central of Haiti to reclaim this region. This incursion to reclaim these towns, however, were only temporarily successful since Haitian troops eventually defended and kept this (Despradel 2005). The confrontations between both armies did not stop there. The Haitian army continued
its repeated attempts to reoccupy the eastern half of the island. Many of these conflagrations would also take place in present-day Elías Piña. These Haitian reoccupation attempts, however, were repeatedly warded off by Dominican troops (Despradel).

These events gave the border region an additional layer of meaning. The border was not only the place where “hitos que marcan de manera clara y precisa dónde comienzan ambos Estados, dónde se inician las zonas de hegemonía de los dos pueblos…” [milestones that clearly defined where both states started or where the zones of hegemony of both peoples was] (Despradel 2005:46). But, the border became “una línea divisoria mitológica entre ‘ellos y ‘nosotros’, entre ‘barbarie’ y ‘civilización’” [a mythological line between ‘them’ and ‘us’, between ‘barbarism’ and ‘civilization’] (Baud 1996:6). It was at the border that images of Dominican nationality and fears of Haitian invasions were represented and articulated (Baud 1996). The Elías Piña area in particular held an important place in this symbolism, as many of the Dominican victories over Haitian troops took place in this town (Despradel 2005).

Dominican independence, however, did not last long. Driven by the continuous threats of Haitian reoccupation, certain factions in Dominican society successfully pursued a reanexation to Spain. Thus, this recently formed independent state returned to its previous status of Spanish colony (Moya Pons 2010, Dilla et al. 2010). So, although the border had remained, it became a border between Haiti and a European colonial power. This return to colonial status, however, did not come without resistance. This presented a great threat for Haiti, who lived under constant fear of reoccupation by European colonial powers. For Dominicans, not only did this mean a loss of
sovereignty. It also signified a possible return to slavery (Despradel 2005, Moya Pons 2010). Despite a long history of Haitian-Dominican military antagonism, the Haitian government helped Dominicans overthrow the Spanish from the eastern part of the island, returning independence to the country. In 1867, Haiti finally recognized the independence of its neighbor and a period of relative peace followed. However, both nations lacked a clearly delimited border, particularly in the present day Elías Piña and Independencia provinces (Dilla et al. 2010).

A Sociocultural Region That Defies Border Demarcations

Despite all these changes, border society did not necessarily fit neatly into this long series of colonial or state-imposed transformations. In fact, “the practice of everyday life belied the international boundary” (Derby 1994:491). It was effectively useless to talk about sides of the Haitian-Dominican border because of the fluid, biethnic, and autonomous nature of border society (Baud 1996) and because the border had not yet been officially established, particularly in the central region. Despite the border area’s symbolism and significance for the nationalistic project, its residents did not necessarily become stalwarts of the new nation. Allegiances, kinship ties, community exchanges, and language use did not correspond with the changes that took place politically and militarily. Although the towns of Hincha, San Rafael, San Michel and Lascahobas had been part of Haiti for over 40 years, town residents felt political and nationalist allegiances to the newly formed Dominican Republic, rather than to Haiti. In fact, Despradel (2005) reports that a group from the area travelled to San Cristóbal, Dominican Republic to participate in in the drafting of the Dominican Republic’s first constitution. Conversely, although the town of present day Elías Piña had been the site of key military victories against Haitian incursions, certain segments of
society seemed more reluctant to express their allegiance to the Dominican independence movement (Despradel 2005). In fact, some Elías Piña residents had fought against Dominican troops alongside the Haitians during the Dominican battle of independence against Haiti. According to Moya Pons (2010), this was not an exclusively Elías Piña phenomenon. Residents of other border towns found themselves living on the wrong side of the border. The northern border towns of Dajabón and Montecristi actually declared their official allegiance to the Republic of Haiti, rather than to the newly formed Dominican Republic. This ambivalence, some scholars have argued, had a strong racial component (Moya Pons 2010, Dilla et al. 2010). The black and mulatto population mistrusted the white-led Dominican separatist groups for fear of a possible return to (Despradel 2010). Others posit that the border region’s relative geographic, political and economic isolation had a major role in this ambivalence. These towns had commercial relations with Port-au-Prince, rather than with Santo Domingo. Also, Haiti was seen as being the more prosperous of the two countries. So in the end, these towns that had more political and economic connections to Haiti, rather than to the Dominican Republic (Baud 1996, Derby 1994).

But most importantly, the arm of the fledgling, anti-Haitian Dominican state was virtually absent in these areas. It did not have the wherewithal to make its authority felt in these distant towns. In fact, for some time, the Dominican state would only make its presence felt during times of political tensions, but would almost disappear in times of relative peace (Baud 1996), a pattern that seems to persist today (Dilla et al. 2010).

Thus, the enforcement of the previously ill-established border demarcations between both countries was not only sporadic, but feeble. Despite the many battles
fought to establish a clear border between both nations, border residents continued with their cross-border social and economic networks (Baud 1996, Derby 1994). But most importantly, border residents were not the constant recipients of the state-sponsored nationalistic ideologies, as was the rest of the country. Border residents, whether Haitian or Dominican, shared “mutual ties of area” (Derby 1994:494-495) and understood themselves as being part of an alternate socioeconomic, cultural and kin community that defied the prevalent political demarcations and ideological understandings. Moreover, the border area was also characteristically independentist, defiant and unwilling to come under the control of the Santo Domingo elite-led state (Moya Pons 2010, Despradel 2005, Dilla et al. 2010).

After the Guerra de Restauración (War of Restoration) to oust the Spaniards, a time of relative peace between both countries ensued. It was during this time that commercial exchanges between both nations flourished and back and forth border crossings became even more prevalent. Border residents chose to sell their produce in Haiti, rather than in the Dominican Republic, because it was closer, they got better prices and they could evade taxation by the Dominican state. Haitian women would regularly cross the border and sell their goods throughout the Dominican Republic (Derby 1994). Such was the degree of the exchange that Haitian Creole became the lingua franca of the region and Haitian currency was widely within Dominican territory (Moya Pons 2010, Peguero and de los Santos 1983, Despradel 2005, Dilla et al. 2010).

This new “open” period affected other aspects of people’s lives. Contact between Haitians and Dominicans went beyond the buying and selling of goods and services. Despite the independence battles and the state-dominated anti-Haitian
rhetoric that prevailed in other areas of the country, Haitians and Dominicans frequently and freely married and reinforced an already preexisting multiethnic society. Such intermixing occurred that it was virtually impossible to distinguish Dominicans, who are in general, lighter-skinned, from the darker-pigmented Haitians (Baud 1996, Derby 1994, Dilla et al. 2010). In addition, the border area became a refuge for both Haitian and Dominican political dissidents, prompting elites in both countries to view the area as problematic and unruly (Derby and Turits 1993). Dominican political dissidents found refuge across the border in Haiti. Conversely, Haitians, including those that opposed the Haitian government, would live on the Dominican side (Moya Pons 2010, Baud 1996).

**Reification and Enforcement of the Border**

Despite these increased commercial and personal exchanges between Haitians and Dominicans, the burgeoning Dominican state started making initial incursions into regulating rural society in general, and border society in particular. Among their first measures was to change land tenure practices (Derby 1994, Turits 2003). But it wasn’t until 1907, when the United States took over all Dominican custom houses, that border activity was brought under outside control. The United States, in its efforts to guarantee the repayment of loans from the Dominican government, took over and established new custom houses throughout the country (Derby 1994, Moya Pons 1980, Despradel 2005). In doing so, the U.S. customs receivership “imposed for the first time effective accounting on Haitian-Dominican trade, with high fines exacted for contraband violations” (Derby 1994:499). This became, in effect, the first major step in limiting and regularizing Haitian-Dominican interactions along the border.
Once the U.S. left the Dominican Republic, the Dominican state continued with border life regulation. Using the infrastructure left behind by the Americans, the Dominican government continued to collect taxes from trans-border commerce. In addition, it sought to clearly delimit the Haitian-Dominican border. As a result, the long standing dispute over Hincha and Las Cahobas was officially settled in 1929, when both towns were officially recognized as being on Haitian territory (Moya Pons 2010). A few years later, in 1931, Trujillo, the Dominican president, intensified border control efforts. In Elías Piña, Trujillo further strengthened state presence by establishing a Dominican consulate in the Haitian town of Belladère, directly across from present day Elías Piña.

Despite these attempts to regulate border society, individuals continued to defy them. To government elite ideologues, the border area was far from being what they thought it should be. The area didn’t look Dominican, sound Dominican, nor did it succumb under state authority. Traders continuously defied state regulation and contraband flourished. Haitian currency continued to circulate freely and bilingualism thrived (Moya Pons 2010, Dilla et al. 2010, Derby and Turits 1993). Moreover, the area continued to be inhabited by autonomous political factions that had traditionally opposed state control and had challenged state and Santo Domingo elite (Derby 1994, Derby and Turits 1993). But most importantly, the area continued to be populated by thousands of Haitians, and Afro-Dominicans (Vega 1988, Dilla et al. 2010).

As a result, the government enforced several measures to ‘fix’ the border. For one, government officials initiated an anti-Haitian propaganda campaign in which they urged Dominicans to put a stop to a pathologized Haitian immigration (Derby 1994, Derby and Turits 1993, Vega 1988, Sagás 2000). They also enacted new and stricter
immigration laws, the made Spanish the official language of the country and increased military presence in the border. However, on October 4, 1937, Trujillo ordered the massacre of thousands of Haitians living on the border (Moya Pons 2010, Vega 1988). Although the bulk of the estimated 20,000 deaths occurred in the Dajabón region, the killings started in Bánica, located in present day Elías Piña province (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano República Dominicana 2010).

After the massacre, Trujillo started a systematic program to Dominicanize the border region. The project’s ultimate goal, as Peña Battle noted, was to “erect a human shield against Haitian migration; an absolutely impassable social, ethnic, economic and religious fence” (Sagás 2000:108). As a result, the Trujillo government pushed efforts to repopulate the region with Dominicans, as well as establish military outposts throughout the region. He ordered the establishment of new towns and provinces, including Elías Piña province and its capital, Comendador. In addition, the government significantly escalated its presence and influence by building schools, hospitals, roads, post offices, public health offices, and irrigation canals (Sagás 2000, Vega 1988, Derby and Turits 1993).

The Dominicanization of the border project also had important ideological components. It sought to brainwash Dominicans on the borderlands, “to act as preservers of language, customs, and patriotic sentiments (Sagás 2000:3). Thus, border schools became an important component of the state Dominicanization project as they promoted and taught nationalist, pro-Dominican and anti-Haitian ideals. This included divulging propaganda that presented Haitians as inferior, pathological, dirty and black. In contrast, they presented Dominicans as superior, non-black, Catholic and
clean. In order to create a religious barrier against what were considered Haitian religious practices like Vodou, the Catholic Church increased its presence along border regions through its Border Missions Program (Sagas 2000, Derby 1994). In addition, the government enacted laws that criminalized and penalized Vodou-related rituals (Sagas 1940).

Trujillo’s Dominicanization efforts reached the private lives of border residents. Haitian-Dominican interactions were penalized, thus limiting interactions with Haitian friends and kin. “No se podía bajar al río (Artibonito), si encontraban a alguien hablando con un haitiano lo llevaban preso” [You couldn’t go down to the river (the Artibonito). If they found someone talking to a Haitian, you would go to jail] (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010: 9). As a result, Haitian presence on the Dominican side of the border diminished drastically. At the time, “no se veía un haitiano ni de lejos” [you wouldn’t see a Haitian, not even from far away], María a retired teacher from Elías Piña revealed.

In the end, the 1937 massacre and the subsequent Dominicanization project forcefully transformed border society (Derby and Turits 1993). In effect, the state successfully incorporated what had been a separatist, independent region into the Dominican national project (Moya Pons 2010, Derby and Turits 1993). What had once been a fluid, multiethnic, independent, isolated region, with an informal commercially-based economy, had now effectively become an area whose main purpose was to defend the nation against a people that included friends, commercial partners and kinfolk (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010). Trujillo’s measures forced a remapping of “the division between neighbors and blood kin” (Derby 1994:489). Moreover, it
transformed the meaning of race by juxtaposing the image of Dominican whiteness, Hispanic, cleanliness, and Catholicism with the blackness, Africanness, Vodou-practicing, filthy image of Haitians (Derby 1994, Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010, Sagás 2000). Consequently, border residents adopted the anti-Haitian rhetoric that the government forced upon them. However, despite the adoption of anti-Haitian rhetoric, border residents' actions belied their rhetoric (Derby 1994).

After Trujillo’s assassination, the Dominican government’s border policies changed in important ways. For one, it relaxed the enforcement of Trujillo’s Haitian-Dominican interaction policies. Dominicans were no longer thrown into jail for talking to Haitians. This border policy relaxation, however, also went hand in hand with state neglect. The government rarely invested in the region. When it did, it implemented ill-designed development projects (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010, Dilla 2010). While government neglect characterizes the entire border region, the Elías Piña case seems to be the most extreme (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010, Dilla 2010). In the post-Trujillo years, Elías Piña has been nearly absent from government investment and development plans. In fact, no major infrastructure investments have been made in the province since Trujillo’s Dominicanization project. For example, the province’s irrigation system is barely functional and its capacity is limited. As a result, agricultural production has declined rapidly (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010).

Post-Trujillo border policies (or lack thereof) have had a significant impact on the lives of the people of Elías Piña. In fact, these new policies have prompted a notable population shift in the region. The demise of agriculture and the lack of alternative means of employment have forced rural residents to leave the area en masse to find
employment elsewhere in the Dominican Republic. In contrast, as Dominicans have left the border, Haitians have flocked to the region. Haiti’s political upheavals, economic collapse, as well as the relaxation of border enforcement measures have prompted Haitians to migrate to Elías Piña (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010, Dilla 2010). Although exact numbers are unknown, the common local perception is that in Elías Piña’s population (and the rest of the border for that matter) is more Haitian than Dominican. “Aquí hay más haitiano’ que dominicano” [There are more Dominicans than Haitians here], is what I heard over and over again throughout my fieldwork in Elías Piña.

**Political Unrest in Haiti and the Market**

Events in Haiti prompted further demographic transformations in the region. The fall of Jean Claude Duvalier in 1986 set forth many years of political instability that resulted in the weakening of the Haitian state. This is particularly evident along the Haitian side of the border, where the once ubiquitous Haitian military and state officials are now barely seen. With less state and military regulation from Haitian authorities, crossing the border became a lot easier (Dilla et al. 2010). Moreover, Haiti’s political volatility and its subsequent economic contraction has created important push-factors that have prompted Haitians to migrate to the Dominican Republic for employment and to buy and sell their products and merchandise. Given the less-regulated border crossing process, slowly, but surely, trans-border trade began to once again gain importance in the local economy. But most importantly, this regular, persistent trade and Haitian presence on the Dominican side prompted renewed and increased interactions between Haitians and Dominicans (Dilla et al. 2010).
Despite this increased contact, it was not until the military coup against President Jean Bertrand Aristide, in 1991, and the subsequent United States-led economic embargo against Raoul Cedras' military government that the Elías Piña economy was transformed (Dilla et al. 2010). Although the embargo forbid any trade with Haiti, some border residents, including military and government officials, defied the embargo and sold goods to Haitians. Thus, once again, border residents turned to contraband, as they had done so repeatedly in the past. They consistently defied the international community's orders and engaged in what would become a very lucrative sale of goods, including guns, drugs and fuel (Dilla et al. 2010, Oficina de Desarrollo Humano República Dominicana 2010). When the trade embargo ended in 1994, the cross-border commercial networks were allowed to continue. Although no bilateral agreements were officially drafted to institutionalize these commercial exchanges, biweekly binational markets were established, once again, throughout the border region and continue to this day. In present day Elías Piña, the border is opened and Haitians are allowed to enter a circumscribed area in Elías Piña to buy and sell a variety of products in the biweekly mercados (markets) (Dilla, PADF).

Today, binational border markets are held held in different border cities and towns throughout the region. Elíás Piña, in fact, has the second largest binational market in the country (Dilla et al. 2010). Every Monday and Friday, the border gate is opened and thousands of Haitians are allowed to enter the town to participate in what often seems a chaotic flood of people, merchandise, trucks, cars, motorcycles, horses and donkeys. Twice a week nearly 2,000 vendors, both Haitians and Dominicans alike, set up their small stands to sell a wide range of products that range from agricultural
products, to food, shoes, used clothes, used pots and pans, Vodou potions, amongst many others (Dilla et al. 2010). This biweekly flood of people and goods attracts thousands of people from all over the Dominican Republic and Haiti, transforming this otherwise “sleepy town, where nothing goes on”, as the local Catholic priest stated, into a place teeming with people and economic activity.

The Elías Piña market has become indispensable to the area’s economy. It generates income for sellers, provides affordable merchandise for buyers, but most importantly, creates the much needed jobs, both formal and informal, in a town that would otherwise not have any sources of income. The market also generates income to the city through the collection of market taxes (Dilla et al. 2010). In addition, the market has prompted the establishment of several small hotels and restaurants, warehouses, transportation services, house rentals, micro-enterprises, etc. (Dilla et al. 2010, Oficina de Desarrollo Humano República Dominicana 2010). But while the small-scale, retail transactions between individuals are the most obvious feature of the market, it includes another important dimension that involves the large-scale export and import of goods and services to and from Haiti. Today’s binational market involves major corporations throughout the entire Dominican Republic and Haiti. Dominican companies such as Induveca and Mabrano send semi-trucks overloaded with merchandise to sell to Haitians (Dilla et al. 2010).

The Dominican state plays a decisive role in today’s binational market. While in the past, the Dominican government was barely successful in regulating transborder commerce, today the Dominican state exerts tremendous influence on what happens at the market. The Dominican state’s apparatus is firmly in place and exercises a wide
range of roles. For one, the Dominican military, in all its branches, has a formidable presence in the area. Whether it is the *Cuerpo Especializado en Seguridad Fronteriza Terrestre* or CESFRONT (Specialized Corps for Terrestrial Border Security) or Immigration control, the Dominican state has many agents whose role is to regulate and control the border. CESFRONT’s mission is to control the traffic of people and goods across the Haitian-Dominican border. CESFRONT officers carry out deportations, inspect for contraband and prevent border-related crime. Moreover, other Dominican government offices like the *Aduana* (Customs), *Secretaría de Agricultura* (Agricultural Ministry) and Inmigración (Immigration) are in full use of several terrestrial ports in several border towns to regulate trade and most importantly, collect taxes. Elías Piña is one such town, where the state’s customs office, located in the Carrizal area, is used by major Dominican companies as a terrestrial port to process their multimillion dollar exports to the Haitian market. Huge semi-trucks stocked mostly with construction materials, greña (broken rice) and processed foods make their way from major production centers throughout the country, including San Juan, Santiago and Santo Domingo, to their final destinations of Las Caobas, Hinche and Mirebalais, as well as other locations in in the Artibonite Valley, and Port-au-Prince. Similarly, Haitians also use this point of entry into the Dominican Republic to sell agricultural products such as mangoes, coconuts, avocados. In addition, they sell pepè or used clothes. Such is the volume of exchange that gets processed through the Carrizal port that it has, in fact, become the third terrestrial port of importance in the country (Dilla et al. 2010).

**Quirino**

Despite the state’s increased presence and influence, the government is far from having a foothold on the exchanges that take place across the border. Contraband, in
general, and drug trafficking, in particular, are a major source of wealth for Haitians and Dominicans of the border (Dilla et al. 2010). In recent years, the Haitian-Dominican border has become key in the international drug trafficking trade. In Elías Piña, Captain Quirino Ernesto Paulino Castillo, one of the most notorious drug traffickers in the Dominican Republic, and a high-ranking officer of the Dominican military, would traffic drugs from South America, through Haiti into the Dominican Republic and then into the United States. Although everyone in Elías Piña knew or suspected the nature of Quirino’s business, he was viewed as a town leader and benefactor and as the only source of investment in the town. Such was the volume of Quirino’s business that the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) became involved in his capture. Thus, Quirino became the first Dominican to be extradited to the United States on drug trafficking charges (Hoy Digital 2005). His arrest shook Elías Piña society to the core (Santiago Real Time 2008).

Quirino’s capture brought about another shift in national border policy. Normally absent from national discourse, Quirino’s case brought the border to the forefront of both the national and international psyche. In national terms, the border region was viewed as lawless, porous and vulnerable. Internationally, the border also became an area of concern for the United States government. Recent U.S. Embassy confidential communications released by Wikileaks indicate the U.S. government’s concern over the border regions’ role in international drug trafficking rings (Dominican Today 2011).

According to some, the Quirino scandal prompted significant changes in the Dominican government’s national border policy. For one, the scandal prompted the government to increase its presence and control of the border. In fact, one day before
the earthquake, the Dominican military announced a 22% increase in its CESFRONT budget allocation (Listín Diario 2010d). These funds were to be used to combat drug trafficking, terrorism, deforestation, arms smuggling, illegal immigration, and contraband along the Haitian-Dominican border. Among the planned measures, was an 80% increase in military presence, and the purchase of electronic surveillance equipment. This announced increase in the Dominican state’s control also involved increasing tax revenue. CESFRONT was to continue the upward trend in tax revenue collection in customs offices throughout the border, including in Elías Piña. Thus, the Dominican state was set to have more control than over the border than it had ever had (Listín Diario 2010d).

The Market and Present Day Elías Piña Society

Despite the many changes brought about by the Quirino case, the market continues to be central to Elías Piña life. The biweekly markets have undoubtedly become the raison d'etre of the town and a source of pride. Elías Piña is no longer circumscribed to being the final outpost of the Dominican nation and the protective barrier against the invading neighbor. Unlike before, when Haitian presence was a problem, it is precisely the Haitians and their affordable and attractive merchandise that come to Elías Piña that gives prominence and value to this otherwise ignored and forgotten town. Each week, thousands of buyers from all over come to purchase merchandise at prices that are only available on the border. Elías Piña, in fact, rebranded itself to reflect the increasingly important role of the market. Elías Piña is now the “Ciudad Mercado” a motto that is prominently displayed as one enters the town.
This new open border era has also prompted sociocultural and demographic changes in the region. Contrary to what had occurred during the Trujillo regime, when it was very rare to find a Haitian in Elías Piña, there is a substantial permanent Haitian population in Elías Piña, along with the itinerant population that travels back and forth from Haiti. Haitian-Dominican interactions, which were once punishable during Trujillo’s time, are now commonplace. Creole use is widespread and biethnic families abound. Haitians receive Dominican social services on a regular basis, including schools and hospitals. Local businesses play Haitian and Dominican music. Haitian Vodou practitioners practice openly and freely. Thus, Haitians have undoubtedly become, once again, an intrinsic part of the social fabric of the region.

The changes brought about by the market and loosened border policies have not all been positive. For one, the city of Elías Piña has not been able to keep up with the increase in the Haitian population and the weekly flood of market vendors and buyers. Although market transactions have increased, no investments have been made in the city’s infrastructure and services (Dilla et al. 2010). In Elías Piña, sewage runs freely in the streets, even in areas where food and produce are expended, making water-borne diseases rampant (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano República Dominicana 2010). The city’s aqueduct is in shambles. Water is not only scarce, but it is turbid and contaminated. In fact, local technical experts have concluded that “la ciudad se encuentra en una situación de particular vulnerabilidad ante un fenómeno natural de alguna envergadura” [the city … is in a particularly vulnerable situation were it to face any natural phenomenon of considerable size] (Dilla et al. 2010:178).
Conclusion

In Chapter 4, I provided a historical overview of the Haitian-Dominican border region in general and of Elías Piña in particular. As we have seen, this region’s history has been characterized by two overall patterns. First, life in Elías Piña has been dependent on and affected by what transpires in Haiti. Throughout its history, much of what has taken place across the border has had significant impacts on the local population. The Aristide coup and the subsequent international trade embargo that eventually led to the reestablishment of the binational markets is a good example.

Second, Elías Piña’s history has been characterized by inconsistent border policies that have rarely had the interest of the local population in mind. Whether it was the Spanish colonial powers struggling to keep local residents from trading with the French, or whether it was the Dominican government’s efforts to Dominicanize a population that looked, sounded and acted Haitian, the powers that be have discriminated against Elías Piña and its people. As we will see in this dissertation, this overall historical pattern continued with the January 12th earthquake. This catastrophe had a direct impact on the lives of the people of Elías Piña. The manner in which the Dominican government responded reflected, once again, the aforementioned patterns.

But first, we will see how this historical pattern has impacted the lives of the people today. Eliaspiñeses occupy the lowest echelon in nearly all national indicators of wellbeing in the Dominican Republic (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano República Dominicana 2010a). According to Pavel Isa Contreras it is the Dominican government’s perception of and policies towards Elías Piña’s purpose within the nation that has contributed to making it so. “Elías Piña is an abandoned province. From the capital, where all the decisions are made, where all the checks are written, the province is only
seen as a dividing line. It is not seen as a place where people with rights live and it is not seen as a place where people who have the right to lead a dignified life live” (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010b). In the end, Elías Piña’s present-day purpose continues to be that of keeping Haitians out. But, they also occupy a stigmatized position within the Dominican nation. In Chapter 5, I will address how this long history of neglect has had an impact on the lives of local people.
CHAPTER 5
PEOPLE THINK THAT THIS IS HAITI: OUTSIDER PERCEPTIONS OF THE BORDER

In Chapter 4, we saw how throughout history, the people of Elías Piña have found themselves at the center of a struggle for territory on Hispaniola. Whether it was the Spanish colonial powers de-populating, and later repopulating, the area to thwart off French incursions and trade, the Republic of Haiti’s decision to take over the entire island, or Trujillo’s draconian efforts to Dominicanize the region, border residents have been forced to adapt their lifestyles and identities to colonial, and nation-building, hyper-attention and inattention. Throughout this process, the border region, including Elías Piña, has been viewed as a line that is meant to divide “us” from “them.” It has been seen as an unruly society that must be brought under control. What we also documented was the manner in which the emergence of a binational market, now the central element in Elías Piña’s economy, has led to the re-emergence of a biethnic and bilingual society that Dictator Trujillo and President Balaguer had momentarily managed to extinguish.

While many have tried to put an end to Elías Piña’s ties to the western part of Hispaniola, material and ideological elements have exerted pressure in the opposite direction. Although these nation building and colonialist measures effectively transformed border societies, locals continuously defied them. Despite the many measures imposed upon them, local residents continued to live their lives in spite of the border. For instance, the Spanish were never able to effectively end trade with the French. Similarly, the young Dominican State attempted to regulate border commerce and trans-border movement of people, but was unsuccessful. Equally as important was the fact that this region developed a unique sociocultural identity that defied outside
cultural politics. Border residents did not fit neatly into outside definitions of “Spanish” or “French” or “Haitian” or “Dominican.” For example, border residents today speak both Creole and Spanish, and families often include members from both groups. In the end, nobody has been successful at dividing Dominican life or Haitian life neatly at the border.

The biggest effort to control this ambiguity came during Trujillo’s regime. As we saw in Chapter 4, Trujillo’s genocidal and cultural suppression measures imposed geographical, political, cultural and biological borders in the region. In the end, this traumatic process transformed the border from a multi-ethnic, autonomous, pastoralist and trade-based society to an agricultural, mono-ethnic one. Most importantly, Trujillo successfully subjugated the people of the border and incorporated them into the Dominican nation (Turits 2003). The border’s function was to be the Dominican Republic’s physical, cultural and biological barrier against the very people that had once been family members and friends (Derby 1994).

The border’s barrier function with regards to Haiti continues to this day. However, many things have changed since Trujillo’s time. In Chapter 5 we will look at how these changes have transformed the Elías Piña region. In many ways, present-day Elías Piña has returned to its pre-Trujillo multi-cultural practices. With Trujillo’s death, the repressive border-enforcement measures that criminalized Haitian-Dominican interactions ended. Thus, these relationships, although never entirely absent, slowly re-started. At the same time, however, Trujillo’s death has eliminated the substantial government investments and subsidies to the local economy. In effect, in the years following his death, the very way of life he forced upon them became unsustainable.
Government investment in Elías Piña has only focused on its border-related functions, and its agriculture infrastructure has been mostly forgotten. As a result, Elías Piña’s agriculturally-based economy has entered a gradual, yet consistent decline. While this is certainly a national phenomenon, Elías Piña has been particularly disadvantaged in the process. Today, Elías Piña is the poorest province in the region and it consistently lies at the bottom or near the bottom of all of quality of life indicator rankings (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010a).

In Chapter 5, I explore some of the many causes behind Elías Piña’s disadvantaged insertion within the Dominican nation. I also examine how these factors impact the lives of its residents. The 2010 Oficina de Desarrollo Humano report argues that Elías Piña’s poverty is the result of two separate, yet interconnected factors – its low political priority and the fact that it is a border province. I explore these and other structural factors that surfaced during my fieldwork. As we will see, Elías Piña’s lack of political clout and its assigned role as a dividing line has permeated the Dominican government’s responses to the earthquake and the cholera epidemic. The needs of Elíaspiñenses were, once again, disregarded throughout the post-earthquake process.

I start Chapter 5 by addressing the reasons for Elías Piña’s low priority within the Dominican government’s national investment agenda. According to the Oficina de Desarrollo Humano study, “Elías Piña es invisible a las políticas públicas” [Elías Piña is invisible in public policy] (2010a:199). It is consistently placed at the end of the line when funding allocations are decided. According to this report, this is, in part, a result of the province’s virtual absence from the national imagination and the generalized
negative perception that exists about it. I, too, found this to be true throughout my fieldwork and during my own personal interactions. I start Chapter 5 with several conversations I had with my own family and friends, regarding my fieldwork in Elías Piña. These conversations describe some of the prevailing images about Elías Piña and its people in the general Dominican culture. These notions include images about its ecology and natural resource base that are quite removed from reality. Subsequently, I examine how national and global processes transformed Elías Piña. To do so, I selected the stories of Cuca and Amarilys to illustrate how these changes impacted local lives.

**Why Are You Going There? Elías Piña Within the National Imagination**

Everyone in my family was thrilled. My research grant had come through and I was returning to the Dominican Republic for six months to do my dissertation fieldwork. “¡Qué bueno! ¡Gracias a Dios! ¡Yo le pedí mucho a Dios que se te diera!” [Great! Thank God! I prayed a lot to God so that this would happen!] my aunt Magaly said over the phone with relief and gratitude in her voice. “¡Qué chulo! ¡Ya voy a planear la juntadera de primos!” [Cool! I am going to plan a cousin get-together!] my cousin Yoani wrote in a Facebook message. My trip came at a particularly important point in my family’s life. In January 2010, my mother, Norma, the eldest of the five González Santana siblings had died of cancer. Although it had been six months since her death, my family’s collective pain was still very fresh, very real. My teaching and academic commitments in Florida had made my trip to her funeral all too brief. So, everyone was looking forward to this trip as an opportunity to reminisce, grieve and heal with me. However, when I told them that I would be living “en la frontera” [on the border], in Elías Piña, several family members were quick to voice their disapproval of my travel plans.
“¿Qué tú vas a buscar para allá?” [What are you seeking there?], my grandmother, aunt, and cousins all asked in varying permutations. Quickly, the initial hope and excitement over my extended return dissipated and turned into disappointment and concern. They were disappointed because in going to la frontera (the border), I wasn’t really returning at all. Although I was coming back to the same island, to the same country, to them I might as well be going to another country entirely. I wasn’t going to the Dominican Republic, I was going to “la frontera.” To make matters worse, I was going to Elías Piña, a place so obscure that few of them had even been there. Although they knew that Elías Piña lies within the nation’s political boundaries, in their minds, it lies outside what constitutes the Dominican Republic within the national geographical imaginary. At the same time, my aunt, grandmother and cousins were very concerned, even fearful, for my safety. I was going to live in what they imagined as a dangerous, lawless, isolated and desolate place. I was, in fact, going to the equivalent of the Wild West - a place no one like me should visit, let alone live in for six months. A middle-class capitaleña (from the Capital) does not go to la frontera.

Trying to force some sense into me, my family subjected me to several sessions of intense interrogation and persuasion, complete with guilt, and most of all, fear. “Eso ‘tá peligroso pa’ llá” [It is dangerous over there], “¡Ahí hay muchas enfermedades!” [There are a lot of illnesses there!], “¡Eso ‘tá muy complicado después del terremoto!” [It is very complicated over there after the earthquake!]. In spite of repeated efforts to explain the purpose of my trip, they could not comprehend the reasons. Finally, I ended their assault in the best way I knew how – by blaming my advisor. “Dr. Murray sent me there and I have to go where he sends me.” To this, one
family member replied, “¡A losamericanossi les gusta inventar y pasar trabajosin necesidad!” [Americans sure like to cook up unnecessary hardship!].

**Just a Line: The border within the National Imagination**

Prior to my first trip to la frontera during my master’s degree fieldwork in 2004, I too, held grim visions and complex ideas about the border similar to those held by my family. I imagined the region as inhospitable, arid, deserted ecological zone, punished by unrelenting sun. It was treeless, shadeless, and unproductive. Water was scarce and only dust was abundant. The area’s residents were backward and lived in subhuman conditions. Dotting the arid and lifeless landscape were shabby stick and mud homes, full of sick, crying, naked children with dirty noses and swollen bellies. It was a place where disease was rampant and germs thrived uncontrolled, making it inherently dirty and pathological.

These negative images are, unfortunately, quite pervasive in Dominican society. In an interview on the Z101 radio station morning show, Isa Contreras, a researcher at the United Nations Development Programme spoke against the stigmatized image most people in Santo Domingo have of Elías Piña. “Pensamos que es una provincia polvorienta, pero es tremendamente verde,” [We think that it is a dusty, dry province but it is very green] (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010b). Contrary to the prevailing image, it is not a worthless, hopeless place, he continued. “Hay base para construir desarrollo humano” [There is a base to build human development], he clarified. Elías Piña “is not seen as a place where people with rights live, and it is not seen as a place where people who have the right to lead a dignified life live,” he continued. This negative image is so pervasive, he stated, that it has affected government policy, and has had serious material consequences for the region. “Elías Piña is an abandoned
province. For the Capital, where all the decisions are made, where all the checks are written, this province is only seen as a dividing line.” Echoing Isa Conteras, the Oficina de Desarrollo Humano (2010a) report stated the problem in similar terms. The prevailing image that the border is the place “donde termina la República” [where the Republic ends] (2010a:1), rather than where it starts, has shaped government policy.

The UNDP report continues:

Es la provincia del abandono, de la pobreza, de la falta de oportunidades, de la exclusión y la marginalidad. Es una provincia donde el Estado Dominicano ha estado poco presente para crear libertades, desmontar privaciones y desencadenar procesos de desarrollo, aunque sí ha estado más presente, cuando se trata de acciones de fuerza en materia de frontera. La sociedad dominicana en general, ha sido poco solidaria con esta provincia, a pesar de que está estratégicamente situada en la frontera haitiana. [It is the province of abandonment, poverty, lack of opportunity, exclusion and marginality. It is a province where the Dominican State has not been present often enough to create liberty, dismantle hardships and trigger development processes, although it has been more present when it comes to shows of force related to the border. Dominican society in general has shown little solidarity with this province, in spite of the fact that it is strategically situated on the Haitian border]. [Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010a:1]

This perspective, unfortunately, is longstanding. Historically, investment in the border region has been focused around this purpose. In other words, its purpose within the Dominican national project has only been to keep Haitians out. Peña Battle, one of dictator Trujillo’s main ideologues, stated this vision clearly in a speech he gave in the city of Comendador. According to him, the region’s role was to “…erect a human shield against Haitian migration; an absolutely impassable social, ethnic, economic and religious fence…to keep out diseases and physiological deficiencies that are endemic in that society” (Sagás 2000:108). Outside this, the border serves no other purpose.

Not only is it seen as the confines of the country, Elías Piña is seen as more Haitian than Dominican. “¡E’ que la gente cree que to’ e’to de San Juan pa’ cá e’ Haití!”
[People think that everything from San Juan to here is Haiti!], I heard David, my informant and long time Elías Piña resident, complain one day. The Oficina de Desarrollo Humano (2010a) reported similar findings. Quoting a local informant, they stated, “Lo que pasa es que cuando vienen de otras comunicades piensan que somos haitianos, nos ven negritos y creen que somos haitianos” [What happens is that when people from other communities come here, they think we are Haitian. They see that we have black skin and they think that we are Haitian] (2010:192). As the region closest to Haiti, the border area and the Región del Valle in particular, are seen as having many of the same characteristics associated with the neighboring country. Thus, images of poverty, witchcraft, political unrest, ecological devastation, natural disasters and disease are also associated with this region. If Haiti is imagined as a dustbowl, then Elías Piña is one as well. If Haiti is considered poor, then so is Elías Piña. If Haiti is thought to be the land of witchcraft, the adjoining regions are too. The list goes on. This is particularly the case with the Región del Valle, which includes Elías Piña and San Juan. This region is commonly associated with brujos (witch doctors), brujería (witchcraft) and superstition. Even the geographical space is thought to have special spiritual and mystical qualities. Although there are brujos (witch doctors) throughout the Dominican Republic, sanjuaneros (the people of San Juan) are thought to have stronger spiritual connections than those from other regions of the country. Its people are also believed to share some of the personal qualities associated with Haitians. For instance, the women from the region are thought to have low moral character. Altagracia, an informant from San José de Ocoa, criticized their sexual practices. "Las mujeres de por allá son calientes, tienen fogaraté" [The women over there are promiscuous]. Given
these negative constructions, border residents often feel discriminated by outsiders. “La gente de Elías Piña se siente discriminado porque son de frontera. Ser de la frontera y ser de Elías Piña es sentirse discriminado.” [The people of Elías Piña feel discriminated against because they are from the border. People from the border and from Elías Piña feel discriminated against] (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010b).

Not only are the border area and its residents discriminated against because of their Haitian-like qualities, but the area is seen as the country’s area of weakness. Although its purpose is to keep Haiti, Haitians and “Haitianness” out of Dominican territory, the border is perceived at failing at this purpose. The border is constantly an area of concern and is often present in the national political discourse. The increasing number of Haitians on the streets of major cities and towns throughout the country, and increasing reports of drug and arms trafficking through the border is sufficient proof that Haiti and its negative qualities are in effect bleeding into, and tainting, the Dominican Republic. It is through the border that Haiti, Haitians and Haitianness seep into Dominican space. Thus, the border is also seen as a place that needs to be controlled.

**Creeping Images**

Although I once had shared similar visions of the border when I lived in the Dominican Republic, my mindset was quite different in 2010, when I undertook my dissertation fieldwork. I knew from personal visits and research experiences (Kulstad González 2006) that the border was a very diverse, vibrant region that defies these national stereotypes.

At the time, however, I had trouble replacing the old pre-conceived notions of danger, aridness and disease regarding Elías Piña with my recent experiences. Not only had I never been there before, but I could not recall ever knowing anyone from
Elías Piña nor heard anyone saying they were going to Elías Piña. Trying to find ways of entry into Elías Piña, both my husband and I tapped into our personal connections. “We’re going to Elías Piña. Do you know anyone there?” We inquired amongst friends and family to no avail. I was having trouble finding someone other than my advisor and a fellow graduate student who were in Gainesville with present day connections to the place. It was almost as if Elías Piña did not exist.

**Hidden Region**

Why has Elías Piña been absent from national discourse? Why has it been absent from the national geographic imagination, I wondered. Although the question has not been addressed in depth, some authors offer valuable insights into this complex matter. Dilla (2010) argues that most Dominicans imagine the border as a single, unified region. This monolithic perspective keeps most Dominicans from imagining the area as a place of incredible cultural and geographical diversity. When thinking *frontera* (border), Dominicans rarely think of Elías Piña or any other border province. Rather, they focus almost exclusively on Dajabón. This town, Derby (1994) argues, holds a paradigmatic position within the national border imagination. Dajabón has been the setting of several prominent works in classic Dominican literature. For instance, the classic novel, *El Masacre se pasa a pie* by Freddy Prestol Castillo is set in this town (Prestol Castillo 1977). Moreover, the press often uses images of the Dajabón border crossing to illustrate border-related stories. Others have suggested that part of the problem might have to do with Dominican folk spatial orientation system. The way Dominicans organize and speak of space makes it difficult to situate Elías Piña within the national geographic imagination. Rafael Lorenzo, an NGO worker and long-time Barahona resident, explains, “Los puntos cardinales del imaginario dominicano, son
ttes: este, norte y sur. Cuando vas a Elías Piña, o Pedernales dices que vas al sur. [Pero] Elías Piña no está en el sur, está en el oeste” [In the Dominican imaginary construct, there are three compass points: East, North and South. When you are going to Elías Piña or Pedernales you say you are going to the South. Elías Piña is not in the South, it is in the West] (personal communication, November 5, 2012). Dominicans, he continued, rarely speak of Dominican space using the “oeste” or “West” reference point. The United Nations Development Program’s human development index report (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010a) made a somewhat similar observation. Elías Piña, they note, is frequently subsumed in the region often referred to as the sur profundo or the deep South. Why do Dominicans have such an aversion to organizing the national space in western terms? Lorenzo has a theory. “Pero como el oeste es un punto cardinal que [se] refiere a Haití, el lugar inexistente, es preferible hablar del sur,” [But because the west is a compass point related to Haiti, a non-existent place, people prefer to talk about the South] (personal communication, November 5, 2012).

Elías Piña’s rare mention within national discourse and our inability to establish personal connections with the place did little to displace the stereotypical images of la frontera into my mind. My predissertation research also seemed to lend support to these images. In fact, preliminary library research repeated and gave and internet-based inquiries lent credence to these notions. Elías Piña was placed at the bottom of almost every national development indicator (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010a).

More Than a Line

However, on June 26th, as I rode into Elías Piña for the first time, I was surprised by what I saw. Unlike the arid, desolate scenes I expected, the landscape on Carretera Sánchez or Highway Sanchez from Las Matas de Farfán, past the entrance to
Matayaya, El Llano and Guayabo, was bright green, lush and full of life. It was similar to the Dionisio Blanco or Candido Bido’s farming landscapes, whose reproductions often hang proudly in many Dominican living rooms. Along both sides of the Carretera Sánchez, we passed kilometer after kilometer of beautiful greens that only rice fields can produce. In my field notes I recall thinking that the landscape reminded me of a friend’s green patchwork quilt, with different shades of emerald, lime and moss green, stitched together by the dark black straight water canals between the patties. Standing tall and dotting the landscape are the royal palms with their fronds swaying gently to the will of the cool tropical breeze. Dotting the green patchwork quilt were the bright pink, blues and greens of the campesino wooden homes.

As my fieldwork progressed, I experienced many, many more surprises like the one described above. I learned that contrary to what many Dominicans believe, Elías Piña is more than just a barren line, whose exclusive purpose is to keep Haitians out. Elías Piña is green and lush and rich in natural resources. Moreover, Elías Piña is home for thousands of people. It is the place where people live their lives and it is the place where people draw their meaning to their existences. In Elías Piña, people fall in love, form families, go to work and also die. Also, far from being the barren isolated, distant line many imagine, Elías Piña is firmly integrated into both the Dominican, Haitian and global economies.

Although not as desolate or arid as I had imagined, there was ample evidence to support Elías Piña’s position at the bottom rung of nearly every development indicator. Why is Elías Piña so poor when it is far from being the barren land so many imagine it to be? The United Nations Development Program’s Human Development Index report
(Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010a) argue that while other regions have faced similar challenges, Elías Piña has been intentionally ignored and discriminated against for being a border province and research gathered for this dissertation concurs. There are further factors, however, that have shaped life in the region and contributed to its poverty. To fully grasp how the ideological and material factors come into play, we must situate Elías Piña within its geographical and socioeconomic context. First, I will briefly describe Elías Piña’s natural environment. Day-to-day existence and daily life choices in Elías Piña are shaped and influenced by an individual’s relationship to the natural resource base in the region. As part of the Región del Valle, Elías Piña residents have access to one of the most fertile regions on the island - the Valle de San Juan, albeit to varying degrees. However, national images and attitudes about Elías Piña, as well as global political and economic forces, have kept Elías Piña from benefitting from this vast resource.

**Situating Elías Piña Within Hispaniola**

To understand life in Elías Piña we must first situate it within the geography of the island of Hispaniola. The Haitian Dominican border is 275 kilometers in length and runs north-south on the island of Hispaniola. The province of Elías Piña is one of five Dominican provinces that share a border with the neighboring country of Haiti. Along with Dajabón, Monte Cristi, Independencia, and Pedernales, Elías Piña occupies 1,426.20 square kilometers of the central part of a long stretch of land commonly referred to by outsiders as *la frontera* (the border). It is bordered by Dajabón province to the north and Independencia and Bahoruco provinces to the south. To the east, lies San Juan de la Maguana, and to the west, of course, lies Haiti. More specifically, Elías Piña shares 154 kilometers with five Haitian communes or municipalities – Savanette,
Belladère, Thomonde, Thomassique and Cerca-La-Source. All five are part of Haiti’s Département du Centre.

Despite sharing borders with several provinces, Elías Piña is in many ways fragmented internally and isolated from its fellow Dominican border neighbors. Hispaniola’s geographical features have much to do with this isolation. Two mountain ranges create a formidable barrier between its neighbors to the north and south. To the north, lies the island’s largest and tallest mountain range. This range, which runs in a northeast-southwest direction, cross-cuts both countries. Although one mountain range, it has two names. In Haiti, this mountain range is the Chaine de Vallieres. But when it reaches the border, this mountain range ceases to be Haitian and becomes Dominican. At the border, the Chaine de Vallieres becomes the Cordillera Central. Towards the southern border lies another smaller mountain range that also serves as a barrier—the Sierra de Neyba in the Dominican Republic and the Chaine des Mattheux in Haiti.

While geography has isolated Elías Piña from its Dominican northern and southern neighbors, it has done the opposite with its neighbors to the east and west. The valley has served as a geographical conduit through which long-lasting social, economic and political relationships have been forged. Elías Piña shares a vast Hispaniolan valley with San Juan de la Maguana in the Dominican Republic and with the Département du Centre in Haiti. As is the case with the northern and southern mountain ranges, this valley also has two identities. In the Dominican Republic, it is the Valle de San Juan. In Haiti it is the Plateau Central. Regardless, this beautiful and lush valley is of central importance on both sides of the border. In fact, on the Dominican side, the Valle de San Juan is “el centro que organiza el territorio” [the center that
organizes the territory] (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010a: 11-2). The San Juan Valley gives the region its name. In Haiti, this valley constitutes the largest and most important stretch of flat land in what is, in effect, a mostly mountainous country. With high quality, fertile soils, this valley is central to agricultural production on both sides of the border. While Hispaniolan mountains and valleys undergo a name change as they cross the international border, one shared key environmental feature remains somewhat the same. Born in the mountains of the Cordillera Central in the Dominican Republic, the Río Artibonito, the longest river on the island of Hispaniola, simply becomes the Artibonite when it crosses into Haiti. Although it is central to life on both sides, the Artibonite is vital to Haiti. It is essential to the irrigation of the country’s largest agricultural plain and feeds the Peligre Hydroelectric Dam. Although the Artibonite River is central to Haitian life, it has lately been the source of much death. Since late 2010, the Artibonite has become infamous as it is believed to be the initial site of contamination in the cholera epidemic (Ivers 2013).

Región del Valle – Two Worlds

With some of the highest peaks on the island and a vast, fertile valley, subsistence strategies and quality of life vary widely. In effect, two different worlds exist. In the San Juan Valley, agriculture, the mainstay of the local economy, flourishes. In the mountains, farmers struggle to live. Farming is much easier and more profitable in the valley than in the mountains. In fact, the Valle de San Juan boasts some of the most fertile soils in the country. Along with an abundance of water sources and the existence of irrigation, this region is responsible for a sizable portion of the Dominican Republic’s bean, rice, corn, yuca, onions and rice (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010a). Unlike the valley, mountain farming is difficult. Although temperate
and with more rainfall, the region’s mountainous regions have poor soil quality. Irrigation systems are almost non-existent. Moreover, whatever is produced is difficult to get to local markets as transportation to and from these isolated communities on dilapidated roads and mountain trails is precarious. Although the mountainous regions are rich in forest products, Dominican environmental law has criminalized their use (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010a).

As a result, life for mountain dwellers is precarious. In fact, according to the PNUD, living in a mountain community is in itself a predetermining factor for poverty. “Vivir en la montaña es un determinante de la situación de pobreza” [Living in the mountains determines poverty] (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010a:II-2) Mountain dwellers are 1.6 more likely to be indigent and 1.28 times more likely to be poor than valley residents. The likelihood of having a toilet, running water and electricity decrease substantially when one lives in the mountains. Given that 60% of Elías Piña territory ranges from 400 and 2,000 meters above sea level and that 51% of the province’s population lives at higher elevations contributes to Elías Piña’s position as the poorest province in the nation (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010a).

Although living in the lowlands of Elías Piña is preferable to life in the mountains, it is far from ideal. Living off the land is no longer viable in Elías Piña. In fact, the agricultural sector in Elías Piña is in severe crisis. The Dominican government’s neglect of Elías Piña province in favor of the neighboring San Juan province is much to blame (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010a, Dilla et al. 2010). Although both Elías Piña and San Juan farmers have partial access to the fertile Valle de San Juan, Elíaspiñenses are at a serious disadvantage. While San Juan farmers rely on extensive irrigation
systems, only 20% of Elías Piña farmland is irrigated. Thus, despite the availability of hydrological resources, 80% of all cultivated land in Elías Piña relies exclusively on rainfall and rainfall levels have been on a consistently downward trend (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010a).

Not only do Elías Piña farmers not have irrigation, but land tenure patterns also present problems. In Elías Piña, most plots are less than 50 square tareas (one tarea is the equivalent of 628.86 square meters). Most importantly, most farmers do not hold legal title to their land. Although these are major obstacles, the final, fatal blow came from changes in Dominican trade policy. In a process that started in the 1970’s and 1980’s, changes in the Dominican and United States trade policies made it easier and cheaper to import food than to produce it nationally. “Esto se tradujo en una competencia que la producción de Elías Piña no pudo resistir” [This translated into competition that Elías Piña producers could not survive] (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010a:75).

**Structural Change**

The loosening of trade restrictions and the opening up of Dominican markets to outside competitors delivered fatal blows to the local economy. Prior to these measures, in the 1960-1970s, nearly everyone in Comendador cultivated or processed peanuts for two Dominican peanut oil processing companies – *Sociedad Industrial Dominicana* (also known as La Manicera) and *Lavador*, known as “Las Maniceras”.

Protected by import substitution industrialization policies, these companies financed, purchased and processed, local peanut production. So, at the time, nearly everyone in the Comendador region was connected to peanuts in some way. Not only did these companies finance and purchase the local peanut production, but they also established
processing plants in the town itself. Throughout the planting, harvesting and processing cycle, Lavador and La Manicera hired local women. Cuca, a long-time Comendador resident in her early seventies, and her younger sister, Nereyda, reminisced about their days working for “las maniceras.” Although it was hard work and it didn’t pay well, Cuca told me, it was work. It gave women a supplemental source of income, beyond cleaning houses and washing clothes for the military. As a female head of a household without any type of spousal support and 3 young children to raise, Cuca was very grateful for the manicera’s income.

Tess: ¿Usted trabajaba en la manicera? [You worked at La Manicera?]
Nereyda: Si, y ella [Cuca] también [Yes, and so did she [Cuca].
Tess: ¿Y qué usted hacía? [And what did you do?]
Nereyda: Limpia mani pa’ sembra. ¡Yo he pasao mucho! [Clean peanuts for planting. I have gone through a lot!]
Tess: ¿Usted ha limpia’o maní también? [You've cleaned peanuts too?]
Cuca ¡Oye! (laughter). Un saco, todo lo día, diario [You hear that? (laugher) A sack, a day, daily].
Tess: ¿Y cómo...ellos se lo daban a ustedes, ustedes lo limpiaban y ustedes se lo llevaban pa’ lla? [And how...they gave it to you, you cleaned it and then you took it over there?].
Cuca: ¡Allá! En una mesa para nosotros’. [We had to clean it there! There was a table for us].
Tess: ¿De qué hora a qué hora? [From what time to what time?].
Cuca: Entrabamo’ a las ocho y salíamo’ a la doce. Entrabamo’ a la una y a la do’ y salíamo a la cinco y a la sei’ [We started at eight and we left at 12. We returned at 1 and at 2 and got out at 5 and 6].
Tess: Entonces ellos no sólo le daban trabajo al agricultor, pero le daban trabajo... [So they not only gave producers's jobs, but also gave work ...].
Cuca: A nosotros’ la mujere’ [To us women].
Tess: ¿Qué otro trabajo le daban a las mujeres? [What other work did women get?]

Cuca: Na’ má limpiá. Ycuando uno tenía su rato libre, uno limpiaba su saco en el suelo. Le sacaba uno la tierra, y lo podrió [Cleaning only. And when you had free time, you cleaned your sack on the floor. You took out the dirt and the ones that were rotten].

Tess: Entonce’ la manicera y Lavador le daba a los agricultore’ pa’ sembrá. O sea que el agricultor ante’ era mejor porque no pagaba [Then La Manicera and Lavador gave peanuts to the producers for the planting. In other words, the producer was better off before because he didn't have to pay].

Cuca: ¡Ante’ había má’ trabajo! Porque no daba, no dio mucha ayuda a nosotros’. Hay que hablía la veldá [There was more work before! Because they gave us. They gave us a lot of help. We have to speak the truth].

Nereyda: Sí, sí, sí [Yes, yes, yes].

As this interview excerpt reveals, Cuca and Nereyda recall their time working in the peanut oil industry as a time when they, and others, could make ends meet. Not only did Las Maniceras provide local farmers with financing and guaranteed access to their products, but their presence generated income for women as well.

However, as protective tariffs were lifted and local markets opened up to foreign competition, the Comendador economy was devastated. As both maniceras closed their plants, farmers were forced to compete in the global marketplace at a great disadvantage. Severely hindered by the lack of irrigation and unable to pay for agricultural inputs that sky-rocketed in price, many local farmers abandoned their fields and found work elsewhere. I spoke to Milady, a sixty-eight year old Comendador woman, about how she and her husband handled this transition. Left without any viable means to continue farming his land, he found work selling lottery tickets.

“Mi e’poso era agricultor. Pero de’pué que se fue La Manicera…imagínate. Sobreviviendo. Lo que el vendía era billete y quiniela. Ya eso cadeció. Ante’ eso se podía. Y se ganaba la vida, pero eso calló” [My husband was a farmer. But after the Manicera left…imagine. Surviving. What he did was
sell lottery tickets. But that ended. Before, you could subsist on that. But that has gone down hill].

For Cuca, the Manicera’s departure was even more devastating. Without the additional Manicera income, Cuca was only left with her underpaid laundry and cleaning jobs.

Mira, primero, yo tenía siete lava’o de guardia. Depué’ ya me sentia cansá’ de la plancha. Y le dije, ‘Misijo, ‘toy cansá’ de la plancha, yo me voy pa’ la capital a trabajá’. Y me fui y lo dejé a ello. Yo trabajé en la Santiago Rodríguez #1. Yo me iba a trabajá a la Capital en casa de familia pa’ mantené mis hijo’. Yo trabajé en Alma Rosa, yo trabajé en mucho’ sitio’ que ya ni me recuerdo. Yo hacía todo, lavaba, planchaba, cocinaba, limpiaba la casa. Fajá, fajá, mija” [Look, first, I washed clothes for seven guards in the military. Afterwards, I was tired of ironing. And I said, ‘Children, I’m tired of ironing. I’m leaving to the Capital to work. And I headed over there and left them alone. I would go to the Capital to work in people’s homes in order to support my children. I worked in the home at Santiago Rodríguez #1, I worked in Alma Rosa, I worked in so many places I can’t even remember. I would do everything, wash, iron, cook, clean the house. I worked hard, my dear, I worked hard].

Irrigation for San Juan; None for Elías Piña

As Miladys and Cuca’s examples reveal, the Maniceras’ departure forced a major transformation of Elías Piña society. Although Comendador area farmers tried to adapt to the loss of this preferential market by shifting production to other crops like manioc, corn and different varieties of beans, they were still unable to compete with farmers in other regions. To this day, agriculture in Elías Piña is amongst the least productive in the nation (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010). At the core of this lag in agricultural is the province’s lack of irrigation. According to the Oficina de Desarrollo Humano Human Development Index Report (2010), Elías Piña has been systematically rejected and ignored by the Dominican government. Instead, they have favored producers in the neighboring San Juan province area. In an analysis of the Ministerio de Agricultura’s
(Agriculture Ministry) efforts in Elías Piña, the Oficina de Desarrollo Humano concludes the following:

Es muy notable la extremadamente inequitativa distribución de los recursos de esa dependencia en la Región El Valle a favor de la provincia de San Juan y en contra de Elías Piña, en especial en contra de áreas retiradas o de producción en secano.[…] Es al parecer una cadena donde Elías Piña y en particular sus zonas más retiradas son el último eslabón y los últimos en recibir recursos a lo largo de dicha cadena. [The extremely inequitable distribution of the resources of this institution in the Región El Valle in favor of San Juan province, as opposed to Elías Piña, is very obvious, specially in isolated areas or of rain-fed agriculture.[…] It is as if there is a chain of production in which Elías Piña, and particularly its more isolated zones are the last link, and they are the last to receive resources along this chain] [2010:95].

The Maniceras’ departure and the Dominican government’s abandonment in Elías Piña still persists today (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010). Bereft of support, both mountain and valley farmers were forced to abandon farming altogether and look for alternative means of subsistence. This caused a major shift in the province’s socioeconomic and demographic structure. Although agriculture continues to be the most important means of production, it is in rapid decline (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010). Many farmers sold their land at very low prices. Others, like Milady and her husband, mentioned above, kept their land, but no longer depend on it for survival.

Lo poco que se produce e’ solamente para la comida. Yuca, platano, rulo, guineo, molondrone’, maíz. Eso e’ lo que producimo’ porque e’ tierra seca. Aquí en Elías Piña nadie tiene reguío. Solamente en El Llano, que hay un pedacito y por aquí en Hato Viejo que hay otro pedacito. Poca la cosa que nosotros’ podemo’ producer [What little is produced is only for food. Manioc, plantains, rulo [a type of plantain], bananas, okra, corn. This is what we produce because the land is dry. Here in Elías Piña no one has irrigation. There is only a little bit in El Llano, and over here by Hato Viejo there is another little bit. We can only produce a few things].
**Depopulation and Urbanization**

These changes forced a major demographic shift. The Maniceras’ departure and the Dominican government’s failure to invest in agriculture-supporting infrastructure set forth two general migration patterns that still persist today. Cuca’s example illustrates the first, most important one – the depopulation of Elías Piña. Miladys and her husband’s case illustrate the second pattern – the urbanization and commercialization of Elias Piña (Dilla et al. 2010). Although Elías Piña has never been a highly populated, the demise of agriculture forced a massive exodus from this region. Unable to support her children without the Maniceras’ job, Cuca left Elías Piña and headed to Santo Domingo to find work. But Cuca was far from being alone. Like her, thousands of Elíaspiñenses also left and headed to major urban centers throughout the country. The biggest outflow took place between 1981-1993, during the Maniceras crisis. During those years, 26% of the entire population left the region (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010).

Cuca’s case also reveals other important characteristics of this demographic transformation. In Elías Piña, the women left and the men stayed behind. The shift from an agriculturally-based economy to a service and commercially-based one produced a notable feminization of the Dominican labor market. As men lost their farming jobs, national and global worldwide economic trends created labor opportunities for women (Safa 1995). Thus, many Elías Piña women, regardless of socioeconomic class, left their homes to enter the labor force. The poorest and uneducated, like Cuca, went to large urban centers, like Santo Domingo to make a living cleaning, cooking and washing clothes. Others, with more education, sought work in the growing garment industry (Dilla et al. 2010, Safa 1995). For instance, Mileysis left Elías Piña in the
nineties to work in the garment industry in La Romana. For eight hours a day, she worked in an assembly line attaching zippers to pants. Others, with international connections and the money to pay for the visa application, left the country to find work. Such was the case of Marisa, who left Elías Piña and headed to Madrid, Spain, also to work in domestic service. There, she worked taking care of an elderly couple.

The majority of women left Elías Piña without their families. Cuca, a single mother of two, headed to Santo Domingo and left her boys. Mileysis, who was single at the time of her departure to La Romana, left her parents and siblings in Elías Piña. Marisa’s 3 young children stayed with her parents. Her husband moved into his mother’s home. Households have had to adapt to these new and challenging circumstances. The feminization of the Dominican labor market had transformative effects on family life. Families have found new ways of caring for, and supporting children.

**Depopulation**

This continuous outflow of people has profound impacts on the present-day population. This outmigration, whether to national or international destinations, has depopulated Elías Piña (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010, Dilla et al. 2010). Despite having the highest fertility rates in the country, 4.49 births per woman, Elías Piña falls below the national average population growth rate. In 2010, the province only had 72,000 inhabitants; 0.7% of the entire Dominican population. It also has one of the lowest population densities in the entire country (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010). Elda, one of my informants said it best, “E’ que en Elía’ Piña, no hay ná’ que bu’cá’” [In Elías Piña there is nothing to find]. The exodus is such that in 2007, nearly half (49.5%)
of individuals born in Elías Piña lived elsewhere in the country (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010.)

Also, these patterns have left Elías Piña with a unique population. Elías Piña has “más niños y niñas, menos jóvenes y menos mujeres […] predomina la población adulta y envejeciente” [More boys and girls and less young people and women […] and the adult and elderly population prevails] (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010:158). More specifically, in present-day Elías Piña, only 48.4% of the population is female, a ratio well below the national average (Dilla et al. 2010). Second, Elías Piña has a high proportion of children and adolescents. Today, 49.2% of the population is under 17 years old (Dilla et al. 2010). While 24.8% of the national population is in the 20-35 year old bracket, only 16.4% of Elíaspiñenses fall within this range (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010). In other words, Elías Piña cannot retain its strongest, most productive and most educated population. “La frontera no satifica las expectativas de ascenso social de la población joven más calificada” [The border does not fill the social ascent expectations of the qualified youth population] (Dilla et al. 2010:164).

Urbanization and commercialization

While thousands have left Elías Piña, many others have stayed behind. And although agriculture continues to be the most important element of the Elías Piña economy, its relevance is in rapid decline (Dilla et al. 2010). A key question that arises, then, is how have the people that stayed in Elías Piña adapted to this change? While strategies vary widely, Dilla et al. (2010) argue that there is an overall trend towards urbanization and commercialization. Miladys’ example helps illustrate this transition. No longer able to farm for a living, Miladys, her husband and children left rural Hato Viejo and moved to Comendador (Elías Piña). Like them, thousands left the smaller, rural
communities and settled in the larger, urban areas of the province. In fact, Comendador was the only municipality that experienced a positive population growth. Between the years of 1993 and 2000, the population grew by 1.54% (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010:18). Today, 40% of the entire province’s population lives in the Comendador municipality. More specifically, 18% of the total population lives within the urban area of this municipality (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano2010:16), making it the most densely populated area.

Once there, what did individuals do, considering the lack of major businesses or industries? Where did they work? Once again, Miladys’ family example is illustrative. In Elías Piña, individuals undertook more informal, commercial occupations. Like Miladys’s husband, who sold lottery tickets, men took on other occupations. The Oficina de Desarrollo Humano described this process in its report.

A raíz de los problemas en la agricultura, en los años ochenta y noventa, gran parte de la población pasó a ocuparse en actividades informales. En efecto, según testimonios recogidos: “Los agricultores han dejado de producir para meterse a motoconchistas […] Otros se dedicaron a poner colmados y negocios” [Due to the agricultural problems of the 1980s and 1990s, a large portion of the population began to work informal activities. In effect, according to testimonials collected, “Producers have stopped working in agriculture and now work transporting people on motorcycles […] Others have started small food stores and small businesses” [2010:11].

While some were able to make a living from these informal service and commercial occupations, most of these occupations do not pay enough to sustain a family. Thus, they turned to the Dominican government for jobs. As the province’s capital, several national and local level government dependencies hold offices here. For instance, the city of Elías Piña has a post office, a hospital, a court, a jail, and a police force where many can find work in different capacities. However, it is Elías
Piña’s place as a border town that has made it so attractive. As a border town with a terrestrial port and a customs office, Comendador has an important border control and enforcement apparatus. This requires a formidable presence from the Dominican military, Office of Migration, Customs, the Dirección Nacional de Inteligencia (Dominican Intelligence Agency), Dirección Nacional de Control de Drogas (Dominican Drug Control Agency), Cuerpo Especializado de Seguridad Fronteriza Terrestre (Terrestrial Border Security Corps), the Policía Nacional (National Police), among others. As a result, the armed forces are an important source of employment, particularly for men. In fact, Mela, a small corner store owner and mother of a fourteen year-old boy, is already making plans for her son to enter the service. “Yo luchó para que el se haga bachiller y de’pué’ se enganche, porque imaginéte en Elia’ Piña no hay má ná pa’ lo muchacho” [I am working hard so that he can graduate from high school and then enlist. You can see there is nothing else in Elías Piña for young men].

But while the Dominican government and the military are important sources of employment, they are far from being ideal. Not only are government jobs poorly paid, but they are highly unstable. Getting a government job in Elías Piña is closely linked to political party affiliation. While serving in the armed forces might provide more stability, positions are poorly paid. Only the high-level positions provide better income opportunities. These, in turn, are also closely linked to politics and are usually occupied by outsiders.

Political Unrest and the Emergence of the Market

With the ongoing collapse of agricultural production and the limited availability of government and military jobs, making a living in Elías Piña became harder and harder. But while Elíaspiñenses were leaving the province in search of city jobs, important
events in Haitian politics forced Haitians to head to the Belladère area in search of opportunities in the Dominican Republic. These events eventually led to the creation of alternative income opportunities for some sectors in Elíás Piña. According to Dilla et al. (2010), it was the fall of Jean Claude Duvalier in 1986 and the subsequent era of political and economic upheaval in Haiti that set in motion a many changes in the overall socioeconomic structure on both sides of the border. These events reignited old economic opportunities and transformed the area’s demographic composition.

After the fall of Duvalier in 1986, Haiti struggled through a long series of short-lived governments and the concomitant economic collapse. Although most of these events took place in Port-au-Prince, these changes had profound effects on the Haitian side of the border. The Haitian State’s presence along the border all but disappeared. Once a highly controlled region, the Haitian side was left with little, if any, oversight (Dilla et al. 2010). Belladère was left with an obsolete, miniscule, corrupt and self-serving police and military force. In the virtual absence of law enforcement, the Belladère region underwent an increase in criminal activity that persists today. “Gen anpil vole. Anpil, anpil, anpil!” [There are a lot of thieves. Many, many, many!], is how Lovly, a Haitian used-clothes vendor from Belladère described the situation. Every time she has to cross the border into Belladère, she fears for her safety and wellbeing. David, who has family in Belladère, also told me that “¡Allá se anda como chivo sin ley!” [Over there, they don’t have laws!]. Haitian communities also lack the most basic social services, like schools and hospitals. For years, Belladère residents that can afford them, rely on both public and private Elíás Piña health and educational services.
The virtual disappearance of the Haitian State from the border regions had important economic and demographic consequences. The border became a place where Haitians could buy and sell all sorts of products to Dominicans. It became easier to cross into the Dominican Republic in search for jobs. Thus, as more and more Haitians headed to the border for business and more and more Haitians crossed into the Dominican Republic, trans-border relationships began to once again gain relevance for both sides. So, while the Dominican side of the border was undergoing a de-population, the Haitian side was becoming a more viable place to live. Today, the population density on the Haitian side is 4.5 times higher than the Dominican one (Dilla et al. 2010).

The collapse of the Haitian state brought about new income opportunities on both sides of the border. Miladys’ family serves, once again, to illustrate this process. Having left their farm in Hato Viejo, they headed to Elías Piña where her husband, Ramon, tried to provide for them by selling lottery tickets. This source of income, however, soon became insufficient. But although Ramon never found viable alternatives, Miladys did. “Yo era la que producía” [I was the one that made the money]. The renewal of Haitian-Dominican commercial exchanges along the border provided Miladys with an opportunity to make money to support her children. In the early stages, Miladys bought used clothes in Haiti to sell in the Dominican Republic. After the establishment of the binational market in Elías Piña, she and her daughter turned to the sale of greña (broken rice) in the market. Below, Miladys recounts these changes.

Pero nosotros' siempre hemo vivido del comercio, en el mercado. Eso de la paca comenzó…de'de la época de Balaguer, la segunda vez. Que nosotros'
no tra'ladábamos a Haití escondidas, y por ahí nosotros' la traíamo’, corriendo por lo monte’ a un rie’go. Pero que teníamos que hacerlo porque aquí no había nada con que vivir. Si u'té no se arrie’gaba, aquí ha’ta hambre se pasa. […] Depué’ tuve que meté mi hija, que ella tiene buen valor, la tuve que meté’ al mercado a vendé la que le llaman la puntilla…la greña. La metí al Mercado [But we have always lived from commerce in the market. The sale of used clothes started…since the times of Balaguer, the second time. We would go hidden into Haiti, and there we would bring it, running through the hills at our own risk. But we had to do it because there was nothing to live on here. If you did not take the risk, you would even go hungry […]. Later I had to get my daughter involved, since she is not scared, and I had to get her into the market to sell what they call puntilla, greña (broken rice). I got her involved in the market].

Although she was very aware of the dangers her business venture involved,

Miladys had no choice but to risk her life and go to Haiti to buy used clothes. Otherwise, she would not be able to support her family. Once the binational market was regularized, she stopped going to Haiti to buy used clothes. Rather, she stayed in Elías Piña, where she and her daughter have a broken rice selling business that still exists today.

In order to fully understand how these political and economic changes affected Miladys’ life and Elías Piña society in general, it is important that we address what happened with the family’s farm in Hato Viejo. As I mentioned above, unlike many other families who completely abandoned their plots of land, Miladys and her husband kept theirs and used it for small-scale subsistence farming. So, if they had left their fifteen tareas of land in Hato Viejo and moved to the town of Comendador to sell lottery tickets, who was cultivating the land?

Nosotro’ temo uno’ haitiano en la propiedá. Nosotro’ siempre teme’ una mano amiga. Yo tengo tres año’ que no voy por ahí porque me enfermé. Pero la hija mía, ese e’ un hombre y mujer. Ella paga su trabajadore’, ella visita su conuco. Tiene una’ quince tarea. No produce para vender [We have some Haitians on the property. We always have a helping hand. I haven't been there for three years because I got sick. But my daughter, she is like a man and a woman. She pays for her workers,
she visits her plot of land. She has about fifteen tareas. She doesn't produce enough to sell.

Miladys' example illustrates one aspect of an overall Haitianization of Elías Piña. While Miladys and her family left for a life in the urban areas, their plot of land was taken over by migrant Haitian workers from nearby Belladère. Throughout the region, and the entire country for that matter, Haitians provide the labor in Dominican-owned farmland. Haitian presence, however, is not limited to farming. Haitian men perform construction work and other occasional, manual jobs. Haitian women, on the other hand, dominate the domestic service. Most domestic workers in Elías Piña are Haitian. It is the market, however, that has generated the most employment opportunities. Haitian men are often the *cargadores* (haulers) that load and unload merchandise from trucks. Yet, it is the women that have benefited the most from the market. Like Madam Nerlande, the madam sara I mentioned in Chapter 2, Haitian women live transnational lives, traveling back and forth between their homes in Haiti and in Elías Piña. In fact, Dilla et al. describes the majority of Haitian migration to Elías Piña as “migración pendular” (2010:170) or “back-and-forth migration.” Though many Haitians live in Elías Piña most of the year, the majority of them move back and forth from Elías Piña to Haiti and back throughout the year.

**Conclusion**

In the last fifty years or so, Elías Piña society has gone through many important changes. Upon Trujillo’s death, government policy towards the border changed significantly; border enforcement became less severe. At the same time, however, Elías Piña fell into a sort of abyss. Not only is it still somewhat absent from the national imagination and discourse, but it has been consistently absent from any type of national
investment priority. As the Oficina de Desarrollo Humano (2010) report indicated, no
government has invested resources in the region since Trujillo. Consequently, Elías
Piña is the poorest province in the Dominican Republic. Its agriculturally-based
economy has nose-dived. While other regions have experienced similar downturns,
Elías Piña’s has been worse. San Juan de la Maguana farmers, for instance, have
been able to buffer these effects somewhat thanks to the extensive infrastructure
investment by Dominican governments. Elías Piña farmers, in turn, cannot compete
due to lack of irrigation systems. Left without the means to make a living, many
Elíaspiñenses left Elías Piña in search for jobs. Many, like Cuca, went to Santo
 Domingo to find work. Others, like Miladys, left their farms and moved to the urban
regions in search for other work. As a result, Elías Piña underwent an extensive
depopulation and an urbanization process.

At the same time, events in Haiti also led to significant changes in Elías Piña
society. As political instability and economic collapse took hold, the Haitian State’s
presence on the Haitian side of the border dwindled and the movement of people and
goods became easier. Also, as more and more Haitians were left without work,
thousands of Haitians headed to the border in search for employment in the Dominican
Republic. While many left for the big cities like Santo Domingo, San Juan and
Santiago, many others stayed in Elías Piña working as farmers, domestic servants or
buying and selling products. It was, however, Aristide’s coup d’état and the subsequent
trade embargo that firmly cemented commercial exchanges between Haitians and
Dominicans. Soon after the U.S.- led embargo ended, the binational markets were
regularized. Today, these markets are central to the local economy and culture. In fact, Elías Piña is now called Ciudad Mercado or Market City.

Today, Elías Piña’s economy and society depend on Haiti and on Haitians. Unlike Trujillo’s time, when “one would not see a Haitian”, today Haitians are not only everywhere but they are a fundamental part of local society. In fact, Elías Piña has is many ways regained many of the qualities that Trujillo and his anti-Haitianist policies sought to correct. To many, Elías Piña’s poverty is not the result of systematic governmental neglect. Rather, it is the Haitian influence that is the cause. The Oficina de Desarrollo Humano’s (2010) report assert that Elías Piña’s poverty is very much the result of a generalized discrimination against the border area in general and of Elías Piña in particular. The data in this research supports this idea. While images of arid and barren regions circulate among the population and as many continue to perceive the border as more Haitian than Dominican, attention and investment in the region will continue to focus exclusively on the border’s role as a line, rather than as a place “where people who have the right to lead a dignified life live” (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano 2010b).

In the end, the very same factors that contributed to Elías Piña’s disadvantaged position within the Dominican economy also led to the town’s vulnerability to the earthquake and the cholera epidemic in Haiti. The town’s heavy dependence on trans-border commercial exchanges, its systematic neglect by the governing elites, the perception that it is just a line, the people’s lack of political clout and the absence of the province from the national imaginary all worked together to create the conditions that led to the disaster’s heavy impact on the town. While Elíaspiñenses were far away from
the earthquake’s epicenter, these factors led to the transformation of daily life in this town, particularly in regards to families and childrearing.
In Chapter 5, we examined how multi-scaled forces, both political and economic, have led to major changes in Elías Piña society. In the last fifty years, this town has undergone a gradual, yet steady process in which agriculture has slowly lost its stronghold, and commercial exchange with Haiti now dominates local life. Although farming continues to be relevant, nearly every aspect of Elías Piña life revolves around the biweekly markets. While in years past, Haitians were nowhere to be seen, today, they occupy all levels of Elías Piña society.

However, while Haitians and Dominicans interact frequently throughout Elías Piña society, they are far from being equals. Haitians in Elías Piña face inordinately more challenges than Dominicans. In the poorest province of the country, it is Haitians that are the poorest of the poor. In the market, Haitians pay more market taxes than Dominicans and are frequently subjected to exploitative practices (Murray 2010). Moreover, they are usually paid less and face constant threat of deportation from the Dominican military. In fact, nearly all aspects of Elías Piña life – family, economic activity, the distribution of economic aid, health care, how much taxes one pays at the market, a child’s ability to go to high school, one’s ability to walk down the street and one’s ability to leave Elías Piña in search for economic opportunities – is impacted to some degree by whether one is perceived as being a member of one nationality or another. In the end, whether one is a Haitian or a Dominican ultimately determines one’s place in society.

Thus, in Elías Piña society, knowing who is Haitian and who is Dominican is essential. In Chapter 6, I will focus on answering the following fundamental question-
Who is Haitian and who is Dominican in Elías Piña? Despite this question’s apparent simplicity, the establishment of Haitian-Dominican difference in Elías Piña is a very complex, and often contradictory process. We will explore how Elíaspiñenses have developed their own unique system of difference. Although Eliaspiñenses are certainly influenced by the outside, hegemonic, perspective prevalent in the rest of the country, difference is constructed in a particular way at the border. While in Santo Domingo, where I grew up, phenotype is the predominant way in which Haitians are identified, in Elías Piña, cultural and behavioral differences are more significant. To be labeled as a Haitian or as a Dominican, one must act as a Haitian or as a Dominican. This means, among other things, that one must speak like a Dominican, one must dress like a Dominican, move like a Dominican, earn like a Dominican to be considered one. Thus, in many ways, Dominicanness and Haitianness are achievable attributes, as opposed to assigned.

Despite this emphasis on behavior, biology is also a decisive component. The physical body constitutes an important marker of Haitian-Dominican difference, albeit in much more nuanced ways. Difference in Elias Piña is also interpreted through a racial lens. Haitians and Dominicans are understood as being of completely different stock. Haitians, in particular, are conceptualized as having a heritable, intrinsic essence that makes them fundamentally different from Dominicans. Thus, ancestry becomes an important factor as well. In Elías Piña, one is Haitian if one has a traceable, direct, Haitian ancestor.

While racial thinking abounds, and Dominicans and Haitians are understood as being inherently different, the people of Elías Piña also see themselves as being
esturados or of mixed Dominican and Haitian heritage. Everyone is cognizant of having a Haitian ancestor or relative. The argument that ancestry is a determining factor of ethnicity is simultaneously espoused and rendered invalid. The most important criteria used to establish Haitianess or Dominicanness is wealth. It is money that ultimately establishes on which side of the border one belongs. In Elías Piña, money does not necessarily whiten. But having money certainly Dominicanizes. Finally, when all of these factors are taken into account, the Dominican State is the ultimate determiner of nationality. The possession of papeles or citizenship documents, regardless of what means were used to obtain them, override any other impediment to being Dominican. I start Chapter 6 with a conversation I had with my neighbor, Compa. It was in this exchange that I first learned that Elíaspiñenses have their own, unique system of difference that does not necessarily fit with the notions outsiders, like I have.

Dominicano de Pura Cepa or Dominican of Pure Stock

The oppressive mid-afternoon heat in Elías Piña sets the daily rhythm for the people of the Barrio Patriótico. At around 2 pm, the residents of the apartment complex exit their apartments to escape the heat. Gradually, one by one, people close their doors and walk out to the common patio area to sit in the shade under the fruit tree to escape the heat that radiates from the concrete walls of the apartments. This communal search for the lower temperatures also serves important social functions for the approximately twenty five residents of this apartment block. It is here that deep friendships have emerged and have been nurtured over endless games of dominoes.

The shade under the fruit tree in the Barrio Patriótico also became an important place for me. Every day, after lunch, I would join my neighbors in search for the fruit tree’s shade. In doing so, I got to know the people that lived in these apartments well.
They eventually became an important source of support and stability during my husband and my challenging fieldwork experience. Most importantly, these afternoon discussions became invaluable for my research. They were crucial opportunities to listen, observe, and ask questions about daily life in Elías Piña.

One afternoon, Compa and I found ourselves alone talking under the fruit tree as the others had not yet exited their apartments. I liked talking to Compa, a retired sargento (sergeant) from the Dominican army who lived in the apartment directly beneath mine. Compa and I had developed a measured fondness and trust of each other. I felt he spoke with candor and honesty and would answer just about any question I had about Elías Piña life. That particular afternoon, we spoke about a man I had casually met that very morning, known to everyone in Elías Piña as El Santo. During our conversation, I paused and asked Compa a final question about his friend. “Compa, ¿El Santo es haitiano o dominicano?” [Compa, is El Santo Haitian or Dominican?] “¡El Santo es dominicano de pura cepa!” [El Santo is Dominican of pure stock!], he responded in the loud and staccato-like manner of speech he adopted when he wanted to be assertive. “El Santo es 100% dominicano! El es un capitan retirado del ejército” [El Santo is 100% Dominican! He is a retired captain of the military], he added.

At the time, I was confounded by Compa’s response. In Compa’s mind El Santo was as Dominican as it gets. He was the son of Dominican parents, born and raised on Dominican soil, and had served his country honorably in the military. In his mind, El Santo could not be more Dominican. However, El Santo did not fit my previous frame of reference for Dominicanness. Everything I had learned about El Santo that day had led
me to conclude a priori that he was a Haitian. For one, El Santo owns approximately 25 homes that he rents mostly to Haitians living in Elías Piña. Many of his Haitian tenants think highly of him, and he of them. His close relationship to Haitians led me to conclude that El Santo had to be a Haitian. El Santo’s other line of business also led me to a similar conclusion about his nationality. El Santo is a well-known brujo (witch doctor) in Elías Piña. He is a practitioner of a Dominican variant of Vodou. In fact, he owns two centros de brujería (witch craft centers) situated in prominent areas of town, where one can seek his services to improve one’s chances in love, ensure economic prosperity and even zombification. These religious practices surely made him a Haitian, I had concluded. Most importantly, El Santo seemed to be a Haitian due to his physical features. El Santo is very black, too black to be a Dominican. His facial features, particularly his nose and lips, were too ordinarias (coarse) to be a Dominican. However, despite my perceptions, El Santo was, in all effects, “domincano de pura cepa” [Dominican of pure stock].

“Documents, Please”

Unfortunately, my misconception regarding very dark-skinned Dominicans like El Santo is not that uncommon. In fact, it happens regularly in Elías Piña. While people like El Santo might be considered of pure Dominican stock in Elías Piña, they are often perceived as Haitian when they leave the unique ethno- and racialscape (Harrison 1995) of the region. As one boards a bus due east, towards San Juan or Santo Domingo, passengers are forced into a process in which dark-skinned Elíaspiñenses are often suspected of being Haitians, perhaps without documents. Between Elías Piña and Azua, a 147 kilometer journey, buses must stop for repeated immigration and customs inspections. Buses are checked an average of twelve separate times during
this four-hour trip. Each time, a Dominican State or military representative boards the bus to make sure undocumented Haitians are not on board. During these inspections, agents board and visually scan all passengers. If a passenger looks Dominican, they are ignored. But if they do not, the situation is entirely different. “Documentos, hágame el favor” [Documents, please] is heard over and over. People that have been identified as non-Dominican looking are asked to present their cédulas (national identification cards) or passports with the necessary visa. Thus, in a process that often takes under a minute, bodies and faces are evaluated, profiled and compared against each officer’s mental prototypes of Haitianess and Dominicanness.

Apparently, the military is very good at profiling bus passengers. According to Sonia and Rafaela, two of my informants, the military more often than not get it right. “Ellos saben” [They know] they said as they explained the process. Pucho, a guagua pitcher (bus driver assistant) from Las Matas de Farfán said something similar. “Ellos se dan cuenta. Lo’ haitiano ‘tan nervioso. ¡Ademá’ son má feo!” [They can tell. Haitians look nervous. Besides, they are uglier!], he laughed. However, despite the military’s apparent success rate, they often make mistakes. The military frequently mis-identifies Haitians as Dominicans and Dominicans as Haitians. Although I never witnessed one of these instances myself, I repeatedly heard stories of light skinned, undocumented Haitians slipping by while dark-skinned Dominicans were forced to show documentation. “Si tú ere’ muy prieto, aunque tú sea’ dominicano, te piden los papeles. A Juana, una gorda bien morena, amiga mía, le pidieron lo’ papele’ una ve’ en un chequeo de’pué de La’ Mata y ella e’ dominicana” [“If you are too black, even if you’re a Dominican, they’ll ask you for your papers. Juana, a fat, very black friend of mine, was
asked for her papers at a checkpoint after Las Matas. And she’s a Dominican], Rafaela shared.

Having lived in the Dominican Republic for most of my life, I knew well that being called a Haitian is perhaps the worst insult one can receive. Thus, I was curious at how Juana, Rafaela’s friend had reacted to the military officer’s mistake. “¿Y qué ella hizo?” [What did she do?], I asked. As Rafaela continued recounting the story, she told me that Juana was enraged. “¡Mira, muchacha, ella mandó a ese guardia a la mierda!” [Look, girl, she sent that guard to hell!]. Then, Juana threw her cédula or identification card at his face and bellowed, “¡Tú eres más haitiano que yo!” [You are more of a Haitian than I am!], Rafaela recounted.

While Juana, a Dominican, had been mistaken as a Haitian, the opposite also occurs. According to Rafaela and Andrea, light-skinned, undocumented Haitians frequently slip through the immigration cracks. This is what happened with Jessica, the 18-year-old, light-skinned Haitian that currently works in the apartment below Andrea’s. “Jessica antes trabajaba en la Capital y ella iba y venía y nadie la paraba” [Jessica used to work in the Capital and she would come and go and no one would stop her], Rafaela added. So, although everyone in Elías Piña knew that Jessica was a Haitian, in the eyes of the military, Jessica was a Dominican because she had light skin.

These errors, I argue, expose the fundamental distinctions between Elías Piña and outside definitions of Haitianess and Dominicanness. While outsiders might use phenotype to define Haitianess and Dominicanness, in Elías Piña other factors come into play. As my conversation with Compa, Sonia, and Rafaela reveals the Elías Piña definition of Haitianess and Dominicanness is idiosyncratic to the border region. In
fact, throughout my fieldwork, I came to learn that although Elíaspiñenses share elements of the prevalent ethno-racial ideology, they have developed local classificatory strategies of establishing difference. While Juana was a Haitian at the military checkpoint near Las Matas, she was a Dominican in Elías Piña. Similarly, while Jessica was a Dominican on the bus, everyone considered her a Haitian in Elías Piña.

**Unique Ideologies of Difference**

Evidence of ideological discontinuities like the ones I observed in Elías Piña have been previously pointed out in the literature on Dominican racial and ethnic relations. For instance, Turits (2003) notes how the colonial Spanish racist views prevalent in Santo Domingo did not hold true in the more isolated, peasant societies in the countryside. During colonial times, the peasantry, made up of escaped or manumitted slaves, lived independently and autonomously from the white, governing elites in the cities. As such, these societies developed unique notions of difference because the “weak state and urban society [was] unable to impose their norms, in particular racial hierarchy and slavery, on most of the countryside” (Turits 2003:14). More recently, Martinez 2003; Torres-Saillant 1998; Murray 2012; Candelario 2007; Baud 1996; Turits 2003; Derby 1993) all argue that Dominican ethnic and racial perceptions today also vary widely today. While the views of the white political elite are undoubtedly racist, these authors warn against the assumption that these racist ideas are espoused by the entire population (Torres-Saillant 1998; Martínez 2003; Candelario 2007). They document how many Dominicans do not necessarily share, or do they passively accept the white elite’s racist and anti-Haitian worldviews (Dore Cabral 1995; Martinez 2003; Baud 1996; Murray 2012; Torres-Saillant 1995). Furthermore, a nation-wide survey
conducted by Dore Cabral also revealed regional and class-based variations in certain elements of ethnoracial ideologies (1995).

The internal complexities within the Dominican ethno-racial worldview are even more accentuated when examining the border region. As we saw in Chapter 4, border residents have, throughout its history, displayed national and ethnic ambivalence and autonomy. Despite the border area’s symbolism and importance during the independence struggle against Haiti, its residents did not necessarily become stalwarts of the Dominican nation. The border region's relative geographic, political and economic isolation made it hard for the fledgling, anti-Haitian Dominican State to enforce its views and policies. But most importantly, border residents were not constant recipients of the State-sponsored nationalistic ideologies. Border residents, whether Haitian or Dominican, shared “mutual ties of area” (Derby 1996:494-495) and understood themselves as being part of an alternate socio-economic, cultural and kin community that defied the prevalent political demarcations and ideological understandings. In her analysis of early 20th century border society, Derby asserts that “along either one of these axes, border Dominicans did not hold an univocal set of negative stereotypes related to Haiti and Haitians” (1994:513). “In the Dominican capital, Santo Domingo, notions of Haitian alterity have always been more extreme, categorical, and radical than in the borderlands, due to the lack of contact between groups” (Derby 1994:12).

Although the border region was eventually brought under state control and its residents forced to take on Trujillo’s anti-Haitian ideologies and policies, my research suggests that Elíaspiñenses today have developed notions of Haitianness and
Dominicanness that differ from those that are prevalent in other parts of the country. However, before delving into the constructions of difference present in Elías Piña, it is pertinent to contextualize these local ideas within the broader manner in which “Dominicanness” and “Haitianness” are understood in the rest of the country. While I have argued that there is much internal variation in the Dominican socioracial ideology, there is still a prevailing, dominant perspective. These elite-held definitions of Haitianess and Dominicanness were effectively spread throughout the country. As controllers of the State and other culture-promoting and producing institutions, light-skinned Santo Domingo elites used a multi-faceted strategy to put forth a particular national image that highlighted its white, Hispanic past (Candelario 2007; Turits 2003; Torres-Saillant 1995; Deive 1999). This strategy included, for instance, the imposition of particular racial and color terms to define the population (Murray 2012; Candelario 2007), the promotion of biased versions of Dominican history and the promotion of Hispanicity in the national educational curriculum (Perez Saba 2011). With varying success, the elites have taken deliberate measures to impose their views on the rest of the population. Although these measures were not all successful, these biased and racist representations have had “hegemonic influence over the country and its social-identity norms,” (Candelario 2007:9).

Although there is much disagreement among observers, analyses of the prevalent Dominican ethno-racial ideology almost invariably arrive at two overall conclusions: (1) Dominicans are uneasy about their blackness and (2) Dominicans have negative perceptions of Haitians. Dominicans have often been characterized as Negrophobic, anti-Haitian and living in a racial self-denial (Howard 2001; Sagás 2000;
Fennema Lowenthal 1989). Although many contend that these generalizations cannot be made on towards the entire population, these elements have become, to varying degrees, generalized throughout the population (Candelario 2007; Howard 2001).

Thus, it is necessary at this point to briefly review the way in which outsiders, like myself and the military officer on the bus, construct Haitian-Dominican difference. I will do so by briefly reviewing relevant literature on the matter. First, I will describe how Dominicans view themselves. Dominicans have a tripartite socio-racial structure similar to what has been observed in other regions of Latin America and the Caribbean (Gravlee 2002, Hoetink 1985; Harris 1964). It is one that emphasizes phenotype, rather than ancestry. It is also a structure in which blackness is rejected. Secondly, Haitians will be situated within the overall Dominican socio-racial structure. As will be shown, Haitians occupy a stigmatized position within Dominican society.

**Dominican Socio-Racial Structure**

Hoetink (1967,1985), one of the first to analyze race and ethnic relations in the Dominican Republic. He described Dominican society as exhibiting the characteristics of the Iberian somatic norm. Contrary to the bipolar configuration of the United States racial system, which is organized around two categories, black and white, the Dominican Republic has a different socio-racial structure. Dominicans use an abundance of terms that are based on racialized physical features to classify what is a widely-mixed, white, African and Amerindian population. Several studies have noted the existence of 13 skin color terms and 15 hair types that can be grouped within 3 general racial categories – *blanco* (white), *indio* (brown) and *negro* (black) (Guzman 1974; Murray 2010). Of the three, the *negro* category is stigmatized and avoided (Murray 2010).
The Dominican tripartite socioracial structure has several characteristics. First, the system uses phenotype, rather than ancestry, to assign individuals to each one of these categories. Certain combinations of skin color, hair texture and facial features are used to place individuals into the *blanco* (white), *indio* (brown) or *negro* (black) (Candelario 2007, Murray 2012). Hair texture, however, has recently acquired the most importance (Murray 2012, Candelario 2007), particularly among women with darker skin (Candelario 2007). Murray (2012) provides further insight into the cognitive processes that come into play in determining how individuals get placed in each category. Making reference to the one drop rule, or rule of hypodescent in the United States, where one drop of black ancestry makes a person black, Murray (2012) asserts that a similar sociocultural mechanism is used in the Dominican Republic. Dominicans also have a “one-drop rule” but it applies to phenotype, rather than ancestry. If an individual has “una gota visible de ‘sangre mixta’ – color pardo, nariz fina, pelo lacio, lo que sea – ya no caes en la categoría negro […] La regla dominicana […] enfoca más bien la ‘gota no-negra’” [if there is a visible sign of mixed blood – light colored skin, fine nose, straight hair – whatever, then you don’t get placed in the black category […] The Dominican rule […] emphasizes the non-black drop of blood] (Murray 2012:27).

Thus, in this system one can ascend to the non-black, less stigmatized category with relative ease. In addition, there seems to be ambiguity in regards to how these terms are used. In other words, rather than having clear-cut boundaries between each category, there is disagreement in terms of what combination of traits a person must possess in order to belong to a particular category (Guzmán 1974; Hoetink 1985;
Charles 1992; Candelario 2007). For instance, an individual might be placed in the “*indio*” (brown) category by one person and as a “*blanco*” (white) by another.

Finally, social class is a fundamental component of racial identity. In fact, some have argued that class often overrides race as a factor in social mobility (Bosch 1986). Wealth allows individuals to move up and down the socioracial structure (Candelario 2007; Murray 2012). Thus, money (or lack thereof) can effectively change a person’s race (Hoetink 1982; Bosch 1986; Candelario 2007). Given these characteristics, the creation of strict and tense social divisions between members of these three categories is unlikely (Hoetink 1985). Tension between these social groups is even less likely because there is no strict endogamy between members of different groups. Thus, there are no groups “striving after (or succeeding in) the maintenance of strict endogamy, which might have created a clear separation from all others” (Hoetink 1985:61).

**Negrophobia and Anti-Haitianism**

Although there is no strict social tension between the groups, underlying this socioracial structure is the fact that blackness, as Dominicans conceive it, is undoubtedly at the bottom of the socioracial structure. In what has often been called Negrophobia (Howard 2001; Candelario 2007), Dominicans reject blackness because they consider it to be undesirable and unattractive. The Dominican “normative somatic image” (Hoetink 1985: 187), or beauty ideal, leans away from the phenotypes associated with blackness and towards those linked with the intermediate *indio* (brown) and *blanco* (white) categories. Along with their rejection of blackness, some argue that Dominicans prefer anything and everything associated with whiteness (Hoetink 1967; Fennema and Lowenthal 1989). This phenotype is “favored and preferred creating an aspiration in those who do not have white coloring to acquire it, in those who almost...
possess it to improve it; and in those who form the small groups of white ancestral stock, that of conserving that gift” (Hoetink 1985:11). However, other more recent studies contradict these conclusions. The white phenotype is no longer favored. Rather, it is the intermediate \textit{indio} phenotype that is considered the most attractive (Candelario 2007; Murray 2012). Regardless of whether white or brown phenotypes are preferred, the point remains the same. The \textit{negro} phenotype remains the stigmatized category.

These anti-black normative somatic images are even more relevant among women. Considered the embodiment of the non-black nation, Candelario (2007) argues that a Dominican woman’s body has an important place in the expression of Dominican identity. Women play a prominent role “as symbols, icons, producers, and reproducers of Dominican identity” (Candelario 2007:18). In particular, it is women’s hair that is the quintessential site of Dominican identity embodiment. It is through hair that socioracial and ethnoracial boundaries are established. In other words, hair texture is what marks membership in the black or non-black categories (Candelario 2007).

Not only is Dominican Negrophobia expressed in beauty ideals, but it is also said to be expressed in linguistic terms. Contrary to the non-Hispanic Caribbean that self-identifies as black and who associate the term mulatto with prestige and wealth, these terms have acquired negative meanings in the Dominican Spanish dialect (Charles 1992). \textit{Negro} (black) is not just a term used to describe a particular phenotype. Rather, it is associated with barbarism and ugliness (Murray 2012). It is also a term used to refer to Haitians. \textit{Mulato}, used to describe the intermediate racial category in other places, is also rejected because it openly acknowledges African ancestry (Charles
Instead, Dominicans prefer to use the term *indio* to describe intermediate physical features without acknowledging African ancestry. Some analysts contend that in using *indio*, Dominicans are in fact professing their Spanish and Taino Indian ancestry, an ethnic group that has long been extinct on the island (Deive 1975; Fennema and Loewenthal 1989; Charles 1992; Moya Pons 1996; Safa 1998; Sagas 2000; Howard 2001; Candelario 2007).

Although many attribute the use of the term *indio* to describe the intermediate racial group as evidence of Dominican Negrophobia, recent studies reveal that the term is not used to denote Taino ancestry. Rather, it is used to describe the intermediate non-black and non-white socioracial category (Turits 2003; Murray 2012). Dominicans are well aware that they are of African, not Taino, descent, Murray (2012) finds. Similarly, Turits adds that “the term ‘indio’ has generally been used in everyday conversation as an adjective with virtually no indigenous genealogical referent in mind (beyond the metaphorical) for a somatic and skin color range within a continuum of racial appearances – namely, somewhat lighter-skinned than the mean but still clearly non-white. And it has not served as a substitute for ‘black’” (2004: 311).

**Dominican Folk Models of Haitians**

But, where do Haitians lie within this tripartite structure that emphasizes phenotype and rejects blackness? Haitians, unfortunately, occupy the lowest category of all because they are black, but because they are also a stigmatized ethnic group. As such, Haitians are understood as being fundamentally different from Dominicans who are non-black and citizens (Fennema and Loewenthal 1989; Candelario 2007). Phenotypically, Haitians are believed to exhibit the characteristics associated with the stigmatized, *negro* (black) category (Candelario 2007). Murray’s (2012) one-drop
analysis mentioned earlier is a useful construct to elucidate this contrast. As non-blacks, Dominicans have at least one-drop of perceived whiteness. In other words, the Dominican always displays at least one of the phenotypical indicators associated with non-blackness, whether it is straight hair, small nose and lips, etc. While the prototypical Dominican is a member of the indio or intermediate racial category (Candelario 2007), the Haitian body is stereotypically black. No degree of whiteness can ever be discerned on the Haitian body. In fact, Haitians are believed to be the exemplifiers of blackness; the parameters against which Dominican non-blackness is measured. But while Haitians embody all the characteristics of the negro, they are not necessarily assigned to this category. Rather, they are placed within the ethnic haitiano or Haitian category. In doing so, they are relegated to the category of stigmatized foreignness.

When distinguishing between the stereotypical images of the Haitian and Dominican body, the most important factor is skin color. While the skin of the prototypical Dominican lies within a wide range of browns (Candelario 2007), Haitian skin is believed to lie outside this range, within the much darker and less desirable end of the skin color continuum. Other physical features are also important, particularly those on the face. Haitians are thought to have prominent lips, flared noses and coarse hair.

Not only do Dominicans believe that Haitians embody blackness, but Dominican social thought has linked negative biological and behavioral characteristics to the Haitian phenotype. Not only do Dominicans have specific views about the Haitian body, they hold particular attitudes towards them. In fact, Dominicans have specific ideas,
attitudes and beliefs regarding Haiti and Haitians that are very similar to the way many in the United States perceive Haitians. In Aids and Accusation, Farmer describes what he calls the “American folk model of Haitians” (2006:4). Throughout the onset and proliferation of the AIDS epidemic, Haiti came to be viewed by people in the United States “as a strange and hopelessly diseased country remarkable chiefly for its extreme isolation from the rest of the civilized world” (2006:4). Glick-Schiller and Fouron also describe how in the minds of many, Haitians were “ragged, wretched, and pathetic and were said to be illiterate, superstitious, disease-ridden and backward peasants” (Farmer 1990:337).

Dominicans, in turn, hold similar views. However, these very same notions are referred to as anti-Haitianism in the literature when espoused by Dominicans. Similar to the U.S. folk model of Haitians (Farmer 2006), Dominicans consider the Haitian body to hold inherent negative and inferior qualities and their customs are considered pernicious (Balaguer 1983; Fennema and Loewental 1989; Derby 1994; Sagas 2000; Candelario 2007). Haitian bodies are believed to be overly fertile, sexually violent, diseased, and famished (Candelario 2007). In terms of their personal qualities, they are often portrayed “in gross caricature as embodying evil [...] savage, animalistic, [...] and devilish” (Candelario 2007:3). Grotesque and bizarre behaviors are also believed to be common. As Moscoso Puello noted, “men eat people, speak a French patois, and papalwa [Vodou priests] abound” (Turits 2003:150). These behaviors and beliefs, if not considered necessarily heritable, were considered pathological and contagious. Thus, the mixing of Dominicans with Haitians, particularly as it occurred on the border, was believed to weaken the Dominican nation (Balaguer 1983). Finally and perhaps most
importantly, Haitians are associated with poverty. “[M]ost Haitians [in the Dominican Republic] are poorer than the poorest Dominican. They have terrible houses, and are easily identifiable by their way of living” (Human Rights Watch 2002:3). Thus, in the Dominican Republic, the poorest of the poor, those living in squalor are considered to be Haitians.

According to Derby (1994) these overall negative notions towards Haitians are embodied in the sugar cane worker. She argues that “today the dominant image of Haitians in the Dominican Republic is the indigent cane cutter because Haitians after the turn of the century have been employed as contract laborers in the sugar industry. Haitian cane cutters, viewed with loathing and disgust, are perceived as diseased, smelly savages” (1994:512). However, more recent structural changes in the Dominican economy have likely altered the dominant image Derby presents. Today, the prototypical Haitian also includes images of construction workers and street vendors, as well women and children beggars, as they become more visible, particularly in urban areas. Regardless of this change, the fundamental components remain the same. Throughout the country, Dominicans view Haitians as inferior in both cultural and biological terms, they fear them and are threatened by them (Murray 2010).

As members of the dually stigmatized categories of negro (black) and foreignness, Haitians occupy the lowest echelon in Dominican society. The prevailing image, then, is that Haitians are viewed as poor, inferior and black, while Dominicans are non-black and superior. However, as we have seen, this schema does not necessarily hold in Elías Piña. As El Santo, Juana and Jessica reveal, Dominicans in Elías Piña often look like Haitians, speak like Haitians and act like Haitians.
Conversely, Haitians look like Dominicans, act like Dominicans and speak like Dominicans.

We now turn to address the central question of Chapter 6: How do Elíaspiñenses define difference? Throughout my fieldwork, I learned that Elíaspiñenses establish difference in multiple, sometimes conflicting, ways. The most important criteria used to establish ethnic difference is language. I first learned this with Leyda, one of my informants from the Barrio Patriótico.

**Sounding Haitian: Language as a Marker of Difference**

It was a hot morning in July and I was walking through the market with Leyda, my neighbor from the Barrio Patriótico. I had only been in Elías Piña a week or so, so I was still getting acquainted with the physical layout of the town and of the market, in particular. It was market day, so Leyda had offered to take me there and show me around. It was a short walk, as the market starts just a few blocks from where we live. Already at the intersection of the carretera Sánchez and María Trinidad Sánchez the *pepe* or used clothes and shoes section starts.

As we walked in front of the parada or bus stop, one used clothes vendor in particular caught my attention. Her outfit made her hard to miss. She was wearing a tight, fluorescent pink spandex shirt with skin-tight jeans and stiletto heels. I was amazed at how she could look so poised and at ease dressed in that way in the sweltering heat. I noticed that she was deftly laying out her merchandise – t-shirts and jeans – on her portable table. I also couldn’t help but notice her very light skin color. “Oh, I didn’t know that Dominicans also sold in the market,” I commented to Leyda. At the time, I automatically assumed that the used clothes vendor was a Dominican because of her lighter skin color. “Sí, hay dominicano” [Yes, there are Dominicans],
Leyda stated. “Pero ella no. Ella no e’ dominicana” [But not her. She’s not Dominican], she clarified. “Ella e’ haitiana” [She’s Haitian]. “But she looks like a Dominican!” I replied surprised. She was too light-skinned to be a Dominican, I thought. “Sí, hay haitiano que son indio” [Yes, there are Haitians that are indios].

Just like my conversation with Compa about El Santo had revealed, some Dominicans in Elías Piña look “Haitian” in that they have darker skin and “Haitian features”, Leyda’s clarification about the used clothes vendor shed light into the opposite side of the coin. To many outsiders like myself, there are Haitians in Elías Piña that look Dominican. Haitians and Dominicans in Elías Piña do not fit neatly into the prescriptive images of Haitian and Dominican physical bodies. The identification of Haitians as the darker-skinned inhabitants of the island of Hispaniola and Dominicans as the brown skinned or indio ones is inapplicable in a place like Elías Piña.

“Dominicans are darker-skinned here and Haitians are lighter skinned,” Padre Miguel, the local Catholic priest told me. As my fieldwork progressed and I interacted with more and more Dominicans and Haitians, I couldn’t help but agree.

How can you tell she is a Haitian, I asked Leyda, trying to uncover the criteria she had used to assign her to that category. “Uno sabe por el hablar” [One knows through speech]. “Ella habla haitiano” [She speaks Haitian], Leyda continued. Thus, according to Leyda, the fact that the used clothes vendor spoke Creole made her a Haitian. Although one might initially concluded from Leyda’s comment that speaking Creole makes one a Haitian, I quickly learned that the matter is not as simple as Leyda had initially posited. Leyda was right in pointing out that language is an important
element in establishing ethnic membership. However, the complex linguistic context of Elías Piña requires a more nuanced examination.

**Assymetrical Bilingualism**

In Elías Piña, the simple fact that a person speaks Creole does not necessarily make someone a Haitian. In fact, bilingualism in Spanish and Haitian Creole is not uncommon in the region (Murray 2010). Although most Creole speakers are Haitian, many Dominicans speak Creole as well. Although Spanish occupies the highest position in Elías Piña’s linguistic hierarchy, Haitian Creole is evident in most social contexts. It is most obvious in the binational market. Haitian Creole can be heard alongside Spanish, during business transactions, in arguments, and in the Evangelical coming-of-Christ messages that blare from loudspeakers set up in the central park. At Carrizal, the border crossing, Creole is most manifest on market days but can also be heard on other days as well. For instance, Martin and Juan, two Dominican immigration control agents at the border gate, are fluent Creole speakers. They use their Creole on a daily basis as they communicate with Haitians wanting to enter the Dominican Republic.

Even outside the market context, under the big fruit tree of my predominantly Dominican military neighborhood, I heard Creole throughout. I heard it every time Compa’s daughter’s cell phone rang. Her ring tone was set to one of Sweet Micky’s, the current Haitian president’s, most popular *konpa* songs. I heard Creole daily at 6 in the morning, when Gelda and Marilynn, two Haitian maids, greeted each other under my bedroom window as they arrived to their respective places of employment. I heard it mixed into Dominican Spanish, as Elíaspiñenses often borrow lexical elements from Creole and insert them into Spanish constructions. For instance, I heard people
sometimes say “¿Como ‘ta la bagay?” instead of “¿Cómo ‘ta la cosa?” [How are things] to greet each other. “Te compraste unos pepesitos nuevos?” instead of “Did you buy yourself some new, second-hand clothes?” I also heard my neighbor Francisco insert Creole words into his Spanish. On a daily basis, Francisco, a 14-year-old, would bellow insults at his friends in both Spanish and Creole. “Masisi, ven aca!” instead of “Maricón, ven acá!” [Faggot, come here].

Not only are Dominican Eliaspiñenses quite familiar with Haitian Creole, but many are fully bilingual. Over and over I witnessed individuals switch seamlessly from Spanish to Haitian Creole and vice versa. David, the son of a Dominican man and Haitian woman, is a fluent Creole and Spanish speaker. Not only did he learn to speak Creole at home with his mother, but he even lived and went to school in Port-au-Prince for several years before returning to Elías Piña. These linguistic skills were very useful in his translating job at a local women’s NGO. I recall hearing David switch back and forth from Dominican Spanish to Haitian Creole with ease as he translated during the organization’s mental health counseling sessions for Haitian earthquake victims. The same was the case with Ana, a Dominican nonprofit translator. But, unlike David she did not learn Creole at home, she told me. “En mi casa se hablaba el español” [We spoke Spanish in my house]. She learned Creole through her neighbors and friends in school. Ana, it turns out, is from the nearby agricultural village of Macacías, where “todo el mundo habla haitiano” [everyone speaks Haitian]. In school, although formal instruction was carried out in Spanish, a lot of the socializing is done in Creole as most of her classmates were Haitian. Thus, she learned to speak Creole through contact with Haitians.
Despite the coexistence of both languages, Spanish and Haitian Creole are not on equal footing. While Spanish is the dominant language, Haitian Creole is stigmatized and relegated to the lower rung of the linguistic hierarchy. Spanish is the language of the powerful. Most importantly, it is the language of the Dominican state. Government proceedings and dealings are all carried out in Spanish. Public school instruction is too. It is also dominant in the market and in hospitals. It is even indispensable for religious worship in the Catholic Church. Though a sizeable portion of the local Catholic Church’s congregation are Creole speakers, mass is never offered in Creole. According to Padre Miguel, the local Catholic priest, there is a generalized rejection to offer services in Creole. For one, the upper echelons of the Church are very anti-Haitian, he confided. The Church hierarchy would look down on a Creole mass at the border. But also, his congregation would not support this initiative either. Even the Creole-speaking members, he surmised, would not back it. “I asked some of the Creole-speaking members to sing church hymns in Creole, but they didn’t want to,” he told me.

Consequently, though many Elíaspiñenses are fully bilingual, the use of Haitian Creole is limited and strategic. Murray described the present day border’s linguistic context as having a “bilingüismo asimétrico y clandestino” [asymmetrical or clandestine bilingualism] (2010:251). It is the Haitians that are forced to learn Spanish; not the other way around. Moreover, there are bilingual Haitians who are reluctant to advertise their knowledge of Creole. Rather, they may limit their use of Creole to the private realm, within their homes.
This reluctance to speak Creole, Murray asserts, is not unfounded. This pattern of language use is the result of a long history of negative consequences associated with its usage. For example, during the 1937 massacre, it was through language that the Dominican military determined who was Haitian and who was Dominican; which in the end determined who lived and who died. As it turned out, a person’s inability to trill their r’s was used to establish ethnic difference. Now infamous, it was the Spanish word *perejil* (parsley) that was used to determine who lived or who died.

Although Haitian Creole indeed holds a subordinate position in the Dominican Republic as a whole, it has a somewhat of a more favorable position within the area’s sociolinguistic context. Although Spanish is dominant throughout, Creole is not necessarily clandestine in Elías Piña, nor is it limited to Haitian speakers. In fact, my ethnographic data suggests that many Dominicans, like David and Ana, are fluent speakers and are not afraid nor embarrassed to speak it in public spaces. In fact, Creole has been gaining ground in particular contexts. For example, speaking Creole is a definite advantage in obtaining some of the few, but prized, non-profit jobs available in the area. As more and more non-profit organizations started post earthquake projects in the area, they increasingly require bilingual Creole-Spanish speakers. Thus, within this context, Creole has become an advantage. Eliana, for example, got her job as in the Canadian government’s trans-border development project not only because of her previous work experience but most also for because of her bilingualism in Creole and Spanish. Her job required that she travel back and forth between Elías Piña and Belladère fostering and coordinating intermunicipality cooperation and development projects.
Creole proficiency amongst Dominicans is also common in other contexts, particularly within the binational market. Whether it is buying used clothes or selling a wide range of agricultural products, Dominicans make a living by doing business with Haitians. Although the Spanish-Creole asymmetry forces Haitians to learn Spanish (Murray 2010), I learned that Dominicans also conduct business in Haitian Creole. Such was the case of Andrea Teresa Merán and her daughter, Ingrid. Both have a long history of doing business across the border. One of the pioneers of the now booming used clothes industry, Andrea Teresa used to travel regularly to Port-au-Prince to buy used clothes. Nowadays, it is her daughter, Ingrid, that supports their household by selling greña (broken rice) in bulk to Haitians.

I asked Andrea Teresa about the linguistic aspects of her business in Haiti. “Allá hay mucha gente que habla el español” [Over there, there are a lot of people that speak Spanish], she explained. “Pero yo cono’co el dinero y más o meno’. Y yo sé lo que me dicen y sé sacá toda la cuenta” [But I also am familiar with their money and I more or less know what they say to me and I know how to total up the bill]. Although Andrea Teresa’s Creole was limited to the business context, her daughter, Ingrid, was fluent. “Ella aprendió a hablá. Ella sabe” [She learned to speak. She knows].

I was also surprised to find Dominican Elíaspiñenses speaking Creole in Santo Domingo. I was at the bus stop, sitting on a bus heading towards Elías Piña, when one of the bus employees opened the bus door and yelled to some potential passengers that had just arrived at the bus station. “Eske ou ale nan Eliaspin? Se Ayisyen mwen ye!” [Are you going to Elías Piña? I’m Haitian!], he hollered. Trying to sell every seat on his bus, the pitcher was using Haitian Creole to convince this group of Haitians to board
his bus. By using Creole, the pitcher was asserting his Haitianness and trying to create trust with these passengers.

So, while individuals like David, Ana, Eliana, Andrea Teresa, Ingrid and the bus employee are fluent Creole speakers they are not necessarily considered Haitian. In the eyes of Elíaspiñenses, all of these individuals are considered Dominican. Thus, contrary to what I had initially concluded from Leyda’s comment that the used clothes market vendor was Haitian because “she spoke Haitian”, it was actually her Spanish that qualified her as a Haitian. It was the used clothes vendor’s limited vocabulary that defined her as such. This vendor, I later verified, only knew a handful of stock phrases; the ones needed for pleasantries, negotiating prices, or finalizing or refusing a sale. Outside of the market context, she could not carry out any other conversation. Not only did her limited vocabulary make her a Haitian, but above all it was her pronunciation that made her so. The vendor spoke Spanish with a thick, Haitian accent. So the moment she spoke Spanish, it became evident to all that she was a Haitian. So, to be considered a Dominican in Elías Piña you must grasp Dominican Spanish phonology effortlessly and no trace of an accent can be evident.

Dominican phonology’s centrality in the ethnic definition process in Elías Piña also surfaced on another occasion in a conversation I had with Compa’s daughter, Leslie, a medical student in Santo Domingo. I was in Santo Domingo on a brief visit and decided to visit her there. As we shared a soda together, we chatted about Elías Piña in general and about our neighbors in the Barrio Patriótico. Our conversation unintentionally drifted towards one person in particular – Santana, one of the regular players of the daily dominoes evening games. Santana, a retired, high-ranking officer of
the Dominican military, is one of the wealthiest men in Elías Piña. He lives with his wife and two step-daughters in a fancy home close to our much humbler apartment complex. His house is very much out of place in the Barrio Patriótico. Thus, I asked Leslie how they had made their money. “Por Sonia, su mujer” [Through Sonia, his wife], she answered. “Ella tiene un almacén de pacas” [She has a used clothes warehouse]. In a somewhat confessional tone, she revealed, “Su esposa, Sonia, es haitiana” [His wife, Sonia, is a Haitian]. Although I had only seen Sonia sporadically and had never spoken to her, I had always assumed she was a Dominican. For one, I thought Sonia was a Dominican because of her light skin tone. In fact, Sonia’s skin was lighter than Leslie’s. Moreover, I thought she was Dominican because she was wealthy and married to an ex-member of the Dominican military.

“Ella no parece haitiana” [She doesn’t look Haitian], I said a bit surprised. “Sí, pero ella es haitiana. Fíjate cuando tú la oiga’ hablar, que ella no pronuncia bien la’ palabra”” [Yes, but she is a Haitian. Pay attention when you hear her speak; she doesn’t pronounce words well]. In this short statement, Leslie brought to light the role that Dominican phonology plays in the ethnic distinction process in Elías Piña. Although she did not look Haitian, nor did she live like a Haitian, Leslie explained Sonia’s Haitianess by the way she pronounced her Spanish.

A few weeks later, I had the opportunity to this indicator to the test. Recalling my conversation with Leslie in Santo Domingo, I paid close attention to her pronunciation. While Sonia’s vocabulary and colloquialisms were extensive and that her phrasing and intonation was very Dominican, I too, detected the subtle, yet undeniable signs of her Haitianess. It was when I heard the way that Sonia rolled her r’s, in a way that made
them sound a little like l’s, that I concluded that Leslie was right. Although Sonia spoke excellent Spanish, her inability to roll her r’s correctly became an indicator of her Haitianess. So, in multilingual Elías Piña, where Spanish-Creole bilingualism is not that uncommon, one’s ability to speak Spanish in accordance to Dominican phonological and lexical rules is in essence, the most important indicator of belonging.

My observations, however, are not new. The centrality of language and more specifically, Dominican phonology, in the creation of difference on the border has been previously documented. In her description of turn-of-the century border society, Derby (1994) noted that language was fundamental in distinguishing who was who. A few decades after, during Trujillo’s Dominicanization campaign, it acquired an even more relevance. During the 1937 ethnic cleansing of Haitians, the Dominican military used language to determine who lived and who died. According to historical accounts, a person’s inability to correctly roll their r’s when ordered to say the word perejil (parsley) or tijera (scissors) signaled that the individual was a Haitian. Those that were unable to trill their r’s were killed (Moya Pons 1980, Vega 1988).

But while language is a fundamental element in establishing Haitian-Dominican difference, it is not the only indicator. In fact, throughout my time in Elías Piña, I met many individuals that spoke flawless, Dominican Spanish, yet they were not necessarily considered Dominicans. There are other determinants that come into play too. The physical body is also used to display and interpret difference in Elías Piña. While Elíaspíñenses are aware that Dominicans and Haitians in the region share many physical traits and that a system of difference based on skin color, hair type or body structure is untenable, they still rely on the physical body to display and interpret
difference. In fact, Elíaspiñenses use a combination of factors like hair, dress, and hygiene to determine who is who. David, the son of a Haitian woman and Dominican father, summarized this ethnic interpretation code one stormy afternoon at the post office’s internet center. He told me that “las dominicanas tienen más flow” [Dominican women have more flow].

**Presentation of Self in the Haitian-Dominican Differentiation Process**

It was a muggy August afternoon and David and I were stuck at the post office internet center. It was after 5 pm and we had places to go and people to see. However, the sudden deluge and the almost instantaneous flooding of the streets rendered us immobile for over an hour. So, as we waited for the rain to subside, we pulled a couple of white, plastic chairs from the computer lab and sat down in the hall to chat.

Frustrated at not being able to stick to my schedule, I decided to make the best of this delay and talk to David about his work at the women’s health nonprofit. This nonprofit was, at the time, providing mental health counseling to displaced Haitian women. It was David’s job to help the organization identify and recruit Haitians into their programs. Earlier that day, I had accompanied David on one of his searches. As we walked down the nameless street in the Paso Marco area, I was surprised at how David had easily spotted and identified several Haitian women. Over and over again, David’s accuracy identifying Haitians was right on. He had never seen them and he had never spoken to them before. Yet, he was still able to spot them.

Curious, I asked him how he knew they were Haitian. “La’ dominicana tienen má flow” [Dominican women have more flow], he responded. Not sure what he meant by this statement, I asked him to clarify. “Qué se yo, que la’ dominicana’ no sale como sea
a la calle” [I don’t know, that the Dominican woman doesn’t go out into the street looking just like anything], he explained. So, to have more flow meant that Dominican women paid closer attention to their appearance than a Haitian. I had a somewhat of a similar conversation with Cristina, a psychologist who was born and raised in Elías Piña. We also had a conversation about the Haitian-Dominican differentiation process. She explained the overall differences in the following statement, “E’ que la dominicana’ son má’ coqueta. Tú sabe’ que a la dominicana le gu’ta andá arreglá” [You know, the Dominican woman is coquette. They like to be all made up]. As I conversed with both David and Cristina, I learned that these distinctions had a lot to do with both hairstyles and the manner of dress. In fact, David told me that “Por los cabellos uno se da cuenta” [You can tell by their hair]. Thus, I start first, with the role of hair.

The fact that hair is an important marker of ethnicity in Elías Piña is not a surprise. Hair is an important racial marker throughout the Dominican Republic (Murray 2012; Candelario 2007). Just like in the rest of the country, in Elías Piña, pelo bueno (good hair), that is, straight, silky hair is considered more desirable, whereas, kinky, natural hair is rejected, as it is considered aesthetically undesirable. However, in David’s statement “Por los cabellos uno se da cuenta” [You can tell by their hair], David wasn’t necessarily referring to a pelo bueno or pelo malo issue. It wasn’t an issue of ‘Haitians have bad hair, Dominicans have good hair’ because most Dominican women in Elías Piña would qualify as having pelo malo (bad hair). So, I probed further and asked “What do you mean by their hair?” “Las haitianas se peinan de una manera y las dominicana de otra” [Haitian women do their hair in one way and Dominican women do it another way], he stated. So it is the hairstyle, not the hair type that is key in the
differentiation process. As I spent more and more time in Elías Piña, I learned that certain hairstyles have been marked. There are Haitian ways to wear one’s hair and Dominican ways of doing so.

Central to understanding Haitian and Dominican hairstyle differences is the Dominican salón (beauty parlor). Cristina, the psychologist from Elías Piña I mentioned earlier, explained this in depth. When I asked her to articulate the differences between Haitian and Dominicans, she answered, “La’ dominicana’ van a su salón” [Dominican women go to the beauty parlor]. “La’ dominicana ‘tá arreglá” [Dominicans are well-coiffed], she continued. Being well-coiffed involves regular visits to the beauty parlor. Going to a beauty parlor regularly is an important part of Dominican women beauty rituals not only in Elías Piña, but throughout the country as well (Murray 2012). There is a strong cultural expectation that Dominican women go to the beauty parlor to keep their hair well kept. Not only is it a part of the beauty routine, but it is a fundamental part of the hygienic routine. A woman that goes to a salón is not only a beautiful woman, but she is a clean woman as well. One that does not could easily be considered “descuidá” [careless], Cristina explained.

At the salón in Elías Piña, women undergo a variety of beauty processes. They range from having one’s hair washed and blow dried, set in curlers, cut, among many others processes. But the most important one, particularly in regards to Haitian-Dominican difference involves getting a desrizado (perm), that is, the chemical treatment of hair to rid it of its natural, tight curl. Periodically, Dominican women with kinky hair will either go to local beauty salons to get their hair straightened or they will apply the straightening product at home. This process allows them to have long,
straight hair, which is usually worn long and loose. Given the strong cultural imperative to wear chemically-treated, loose, long hair, certain hairstyles have become unacceptable or are only acceptable under certain contexts. The use of hats and scarves, for example, is acceptable only as a temporary, emergency hair-style. That is, if a woman has not had time to set her hair or is in the process of doing so, she may wear a headscarf over curlers while she waits for them to air-dry. But, while she is wearing the scarf she will most likely avoid going out into public spaces.

Although this reluctance to wear these accessories might indicate the importance of grooming in Dominican culture, these accessories have become marked in regards to Haitian-Dominican difference. In general, Dominican women will avoid wearing scarves for fear of “looking like a Haitian.” This became clear to me one Saturday afternoon in a conversation I had with my Dominican neighbor, Norys. It was around 3:00 p.m. in the afternoon and Norys had a red scarf tied tightly over her head, covering her hair. Earlier that very morning, Norys had started her weekly hair routine that involved washing, setting her hair in curlers, and styling it. However, on this particular Saturday, Norys’ regular routine had been interrupted. She had not had the time to set it in curlers or style it. So, to cover her unfinished hair, she put on the red scarf and stepped outside her apartment to talk with her friends and neighbors. After about an hour, however, Norys abruptly got up from her chair and turned in the direction of her apartment. “¡Déjame i’me a quitá e’te pañuelo, no vayan a cree’ que yo soy una haitiana!” [Let me go take this headscarf off so that people don’t think that I’m a Haitian!], she stated as she walked away. Although Nory’s comment was said in jest and mostly as a way of indicating that she needed to finish her hair, she had unequivocally established a
dividing line between Haitian and Dominican hairstyles. As she stood up, Norys made explicit that the red headscarf she was wearing was a Haitian, not a Dominican hairstyle. The same distinctions, I learned, hold for hats and braids. Hats are thought to be Haitian hair accessories as are braids, dreads or buns. Although Dominicans also wear moñitos (little buns), it is a hairstyle that is reserved for young girls, not for adolescents or adult women. Once a young woman is considered old enough to get a perm, moñitos become unacceptable.

So, while Dominican women choose from a list of culturally-acceptable hairstyles, Haitian women usually wear the hairstyles that Dominicans avoid. While most Dominican women straighten their hair, Haitian women tend to not do so. While Dominican women avoid scarves and hats, it is common to find Haitian women wearing them. While only Dominican girls wear buns and braids, these hairstyles are very common among Haitian adult women.

But when Dominicans avoid scarves, hats and braids to avoid looking like Haitian women, they are trying not to look like a particular subset of Haitian women. In fact, not all Haitian women wear their hair in these styles. It is the poor, rural Haitian woman that comes to Elías Piña to buy and sell at the binational market that people try to avoid. The more affluent ones like Madam Nerlande, the used clothes vendor, and Sonia, Santana’s wife, wear their hair in the very same ways that Dominican Elíaspiñenses do. In fact, the overall pattern I noticed was that most affluent madanm saras (itinerant Haitian market women) also hold similar hairstyle notions as Dominican Elíaspiñenses. More affluent Haitian women will also avoid these hairstyles because they, too, want to avoid looking like the rural poor Haitian woman. Thus, these hairstyles are also strong
indicators of social class amongst Haitian women themselves. It also might be indicative that class also influences the Dominican Eliaspinense perspective on Haitians.

Haitian women are aware of the role that hairstyles and overall presentation of self play in the Haitian-Dominican differentiation process. Thus, they use their hairstyles strategically when they need to look more Dominican, like when they are dealing with Dominican immigration matters. One morning, I was Carrizal, the border crossing point, sitting on the Haitian side of the gate, when I first learned of the ways that Haitian women use hair and overall presentation of self to facilitate the immigration process. I overheard a conversation between a young Haitian woman and two Haitian non-profit workers that shed light on the role that presentation of self plays in the immigration process. They were talking about the trials and tribulations of crossing the Haitian-Dominican border and of travelling to Santo Domingo on Dominican buses. Both NGO workers had faced problems as they tried to get to Santo Domingo. Yet, the young Haitian woman had never faced any issues. “Mwen pa janm gen pwoblem ak panyol!” [I never have a problem with Dominicans!], she stated confidently. If you are clean, well-dressed and your hair is done right, she explained, the “Panyol pa pran ou” [Dominicans wont grab you]. Her hair, I noted, was permed. She wasn't wearing a hat or a scarf. But most importantly, although her hair was up in a ponytail, it was relaxed. As I looked her over, I couldn’t help but agree with her statement. She did, indeed, look like a Dominican. She was dressed like one. But I could not help but notice that she was also india (brown-skinned) too.
This particular exchange at the border also brought forth two other important ways in which the physical body is used as a site of Haitian-Dominican differentiation. As the woman at the border-crossing articulated, not only was having a particular hairstyle important, but so are clothing and hygiene fundamental elements as well. These factors were repeated to me over and over by both Haitians and Dominicans. I now return to my conversation with David at the post office internet center. Like the Haitian lady had done so, he too, spoke of the importance of dress and personal hygiene.

**Dressing and Smelling Like a Dominican**

During my conversation with David, I asked him to give me further detail regarding the Haitian-Dominican differentiation process. How else can you tell who is Haitian and who is Dominican, I inquired. “Se visten diferente. Las haitiana siempre usan falda” [They dress differently. Haitian women always use a skirt], he explained. According to David, Haitian women have a preference for skirts, whereas Dominican women have a preference for pants; skin-tight jeans at that. “Tú sabe’, la’ dominicana’ se ponen su’ jean apreta’o y su cosa” [You know, Dominican women wear their tight jeans and things], he added. “La’ dominicana’ tienen má flow” [Dominican women have more flow], he repeated. After having hear from David about Haitian women’s penchant for skirts, I paid closer attention to these fashion choices. As I went to the market, the border-crossing point and other places throughout the community, I noticed that there was, indeed, a skirt versus pants Dominican-Haitian distinction. Although I cannot make a statistically based generalization, I would also have to concur with David’s observations.
Curious as to why Haitian women prefer skirts, I continued my inquiries on the matter. So I asked David to elaborate further. Why do they wear skirts? “E’ que mucha son cri’tiana y tú sabe que ella no se ponen pantalone” [Many of them are Evangelical Christians and you know that they can’t wear pants], he explained. As Protestant Churches have expanded both in Haiti and in the Dominican Republic, many women have adopted a dress code that discourages them from wearing pants. Milenn, a Haitian member of the Bra Ouve Evangelical Christian Congregation in Elías Piña only wears skirts. When I asked her why, she told me pants were a sign of vanity. Also, women use pants to sexually entice males. Skirts below the knee, in turn, are symbols of modesty. I attended one of the church services in July. All the women members of the congregation wore below-the-knee skirts.

Although religion seemed to be a key factor in the Haitian woman’s preference for skirts, others explained it through a completely different line of reasoning. Rafaela, who works at Agriculture Department’s inspection point at the border crossing, had a much different explanation. “Las haitiana’ se ponen falda pa’ podese oriná donde quiera. ¡Ella’ no tienen que vé!” [Haitian women wear skirts so that they can urinate wherever they want. They don’t care!], she said in a matter of fact way. “Mira, ella se ponen falda pa’ ella nada má agacha’se y mea’se ahí mi’smo,” [Look, they wear skirts so that they can squat down and pee right there], she explained with obvious disapproval.

I spent several days at the border crossing point myself and witnessed several women urinate in the gutter right in front of Rafaela’s station. I also saw several do so on sidewalks on market days. In his study of Haitian-Dominican border conflicts,
Murray (2010) noted how different cultural standards in this regard lead to tension between both groups. While in Haiti, it is acceptable for women to relieve themselves in public as long as the female genitals are not exposed, in the Dominican Republic women must do so entirely in private. So, when Haitian women go to the market, they follow Haitian rules, a fact that generates much shock and disgust to Dominicans, who only find this practice acceptable in men. Regardless of these different customs, Haitian women do not have a choice but to urinate in the streets as no functional bathrooms are available (Murray 2010).

Another related feature that dominates Haitian-Dominican difference has to do with hygienic practices. Cristina, the Elías Piña psychologist I mentioned earlier, was very clear about how Haitians and Dominicans are different in this regard. “Mira, lo’ dominicano’ siempre andamo’ bañaito y perfuma’o” [Look, us Dominicans always go out freshly bathed and wearing perfume], she explained. “¿Lo’ haitiano? ¡Uay mi mai!” [Haitians? Oh my God!], she exclaimed half laughing, half serious. In her statement, Cristina contrasted what many believe to be a hygienic dichotomy between both groups. While Dominicans are clean and wear perfume, Haitians are understood as the opposite. They are believed to not bathe and that they do not wear deodorant. Murray (2010) also wrote about how these differences are a source of distinction between both groups. Dominicans, he notes, “could be classified anthropologically as a culture that is highly concerned with personal hygiene” (Murray 2010:29). Hygienic practices, at least among most of the poor Haitians that come to Elías Piña for the market are not as stringent. Thus, in general, Dominicans perceive Haitians as being filthy and foul-smelling. This perception, however, is also shared by many educated Haitians as well.
(Murray 2010). In Elías Piña, the same is also true. Affluent Haitians follow hygiene practices that are similar to those of Dominicans and are embarrassed by and reject the practices of the poor, rural Haitians that come to the market.

While hairstyles, clothing and hygienic practices are used as markers of distinction, there are other ways in which the physical body is used as a site of Haitian and Dominican difference. Although Elíaspiñenses might look physically similar to Haitians, many continue to believe that the Haitian physical body is inherently different from the Dominican one. The source of this difference lies in religion. In Elías Piña, Haitians are believed to have an innate connection with the supernatural world. It is thus, through the spiritual realm that Haitian and Dominican physical bodies are considered to be intrinsically different. It is in this religiously-linked distinction that racial thinking amongst Elíaspiñenses abound. These distinctions have become biologized. While these physical differences might not be necessarily visible to the naked eye, the Haitian body has unique qualities that a Dominican one will never be able to achieve. I start this section with a conversation I had with Daddy and Yayi.

**Religion as a System of Racial and Ethnic Distinction**

In Elías Piña, if one is in need of improving one’s chances in love, is experiencing inordinate amounts of bad luck, or is in need of divination or needs to increase sales, one can turn to the supernatural for intervention. Whether it is a Haitian *manbo* (female Haitian Vodou priestess) or an *oungan* (male Haitian Vodou priest) or a Dominican *brujo* (Dominican Vodou-like priest) or *bruja* (Dominican Vodou-like priestess) these religious specialists can contact the *lwa*, the *misterios* or *seres* (spirits) for help. In Elías Piña, one can turn to Ybelio, a Haitian *oungan*, or to Janet, a Haitian *manbo*, for relief. El Santo, a Dominican *brujo*, and Reyes, a Dominican *bruja*, also offer related services to
needy customers. All of them, whether Dominican or Haitian, will perform rituals and prescribe remedies for a fee.

Although one can seek the services of both Haitian and Dominican practitioners, there are clear distinctions between their spiritual abilities. Going to a Dominican *brujo* or *bruja* is very different from seeking the services of a Haitian *oungan* or *mambo*. In Elías Piña, a clear and insurmountable boundary is believed to exist between the power and the abilities of both groups. In the spiritual realm, the Haitians have a competitive advantage over Dominicans. Only Haitians control the spirit world. Dominicans, on the other hand, do not. Both Dominicans and Haitians believe that Dominican practitioners are fakes. Thus, in order to summon and unleash the powers of the *lwa* (spirits), Haitianness is required.

I first learned of the spirit world’s ethnic predilections in a conversation I had with doña Yayi and her son Daddy. It was Monday morning on a market day, and the three of us were talking about the day’s commercial activities. We were sitting in doña Yayi’s *colmado* (convenience store), when the topic of conversation organically shifted from the market to the supernatural. At the time, we were talking about a particular Haitian market vendor everyone refers to as “*la haitiana de la culebra*” [the Haitian snake woman]. This used clothes vendor, I learned, gets her name because she invariably sits in her regular market spot, across from the Dominican police headquarters, with a live snake curled around her neck, hidden under her clothes. Curious about this reptilian accessory, I asked doña Yayi and Daddy why “*la haitiana de la culebra*” [the Haitian snake woman] had this accessory. “¡O, di’que pa’ vendé má!” [Supposedly to sell more!] doña Yayi explained as she and Daddy’s laughed at my obvious surprise.
Taking advantage of this segue, I decided to dig deeper into the topic of the supernatural. I was certain that these practices were an important structural component of Elías Piña society. These spiritual centers dot the landscape and constitute prominent landmarks in town. But, despite their obvious centrality, I found it hard to address the topic in interviews. In general, I found Elíaspiñenses to be closed-lipped about their lives. So I was weary of bringing up this somewhat sensitive topic of conversation myself. Thus, I felt lucky when moments like this one, with doña Yayi and Daddy, surfaced seamlessly and effortlessly. Hoping to learn about local folk religious practices, I probed doña Yayi and Daddy. “But there are brujos and things like that here,” I stated. To my surprise, my query generated a surprisingly emphatic response from both of them. As the exchange below reveals, while they admitted that there were Dominican folk religious practitioners in Elías Piña, they were quick to differentiate them from Haitian ones. In this exchange, doña Yayi and Daddy established an insurmountable boundary; one that lies within the supernatural world.

Tess: Pero aquí hay brujo y cosa [But there are witches and things here].

Daddy: ¡Aquí no hay ná! ¡Eso son allante! [There’s nothing here! That is a scam!]

Yayi: ¡Aquí no hay ná! ¡Eso e’ compra’o! [There’s nothing here! That’s all bought!]

Daddy: ¡Eso e’ compra’o de por ahi. Preguntan primero y después que van donde el brujo y le dicen qué e’ lo que le pasa. Depué le dan su cosita. Aquí hay brujo de Haití. Ahí se comen ha’ta la gente vivo [That’s bought over there. They ask first and then they go see the brujo and then he tells them what is going on. Then they give them something. There are brujos from Haiti here. They eat people alive over there].

Pupa: ¡Aquí lo que hay son avivato’! ¡Yo no creo en eso! [What you have here are scammers. I don’t believe in that!]

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Underlying this brief exchange, doña Yayi and Daddy articulate commonly-held notions of difference within the spiritual realm that have implications on how Haitian and Dominican bodies are understood. These notions of difference assume an exclusive connection between the Haitian body and the spirit world. Doña Yayi and Daddy do so in two fundamental ways: (1) by delegitimizing Dominican Vodou practitioners and establishing an inherent, intrinsic link of brujería to Haitianess (2) and by establishing that brujería in Elías Piña is an exclusively Haitian import.

Yayi and Daddy distance Dominicans and link Haitians to Vodou by presenting a contrasting picture of Haitian and Dominican folk religious practitioners. Underlying this juxtaposition are subtle indications of racial thinking. On the one hand, they portray Dominican practitioners as having to pay for their religious expertise. Haitians, on the other hand, do not. They present Dominican practitioners as having to rely on human intermediaries for their divinations, while Haitians do not. It is in this unspoken contrast that notions of a connection between the Haitian physical body and the spirit world are established. The fact that Haitians do not have to buy this knowledge is an indication that they possess an inherent knowledge, connection and true calling to serve the spirit world. In other words, this type of wisdom is innate to Haitians, not to Dominicans.

Doña Yayi and Daddy further distance Dominicans by characterizing Dominican practices as scams. By disclosing that Dominicans rely on human intermediaries to conduct their divinations, Daddy is unequivocally stating that even if a Dominican pays for spiritual knowledge, the Dominican brujo-spirit connection is still untenable. Underlying this revelation is the notion that brujería is somehow an ascribed, rather than achieved quality. Thus, no matter how much money a Dominican pays for this
knowledge, they will not be able to divinate without cheating. Also, in revealing Dominican trickery and by calling them “avivatos” (phonies), Yayi and Bomper expose what many believe lies at the heart of the Dominican brujo or brujas apparent devotion to the spirits- the bottom line. Dominican brujos and brujas are spiritual retailers. That is, they have purchased a product that they will later sell to naïve customers.

These notions of difference transcend discourse and are actually put into practice. When Elíaspiñenses are in need of authentic and reliable spiritual services, they will most likely turn to a Haitian practitioner, instead of a Dominican. This is what Marlenne, a nurse at the public hospital, did when she and her husband, a retired officer from the Dominican military, lost his government-issued gun. “Yo no creo en eso. ¡Pero yo ‘taba deseperá!” [I don’t believe in those things. But I was desperate!]. Frantic to find the lost gun, Marlenne and her husband turned to “un haitiano que hay por allá abajo” [a Haitian that lives down there]. Rather than go to a Dominican brujo or bruja, she sought the services of a Haitian oungan to help her find it. “Why didn’t you go to El Santo or another Dominican?” I asked. “Muchacha, eso son uno tiguere na ma! Son uno avivato” [Girl, they are scammers; plain and simple. They are phonies!]. If they are in need of stronger services, not only are they likely to choose a Haitian practitioner but they will choose one that resides within Haitian territory.

While Elíaspiñenses describe Haitian oungans and manbos as authentic spiritual practitioners and Dominican brujos and brujas as scammers, they also contrast them in less favorable terms. Dominican brujos and brujas are viewed as harmless figures. Aside from cheating outsiders of their money, they are innocuous. In stark contrast, the Haitian oungan and the mambo are very feared and they are viewed with much
suspicion. Haitian oungans and manbos are believed to be knowledgeable in all things evil and dark. Oungans and manbos are believed to be able to control the supernatural to inflict harm and even death to others. Not only are they thought to have the ability to tap into the underworld, but they will eagerly do so. “¡Los haitianos son malo’, malo’, malo’!” [Haitians are evil, evil, evil], the post office director told me. “Hacen maldade” [They do evil things], Rafaela my neighbor told me. Among their many evil deeds is the ability to conjure bacas or shape shifting evil creatures. They also shape shift themselves. Guaroa, one of my informants, believes that Emelinn, a Haitian woman that lives next to his place of work, frequently transforms herself into an evil bizango or a Haitian Vodou mythical figure. Haitians also sell people, I learned. When Elda, a post office clerk, was putting all the paperwork together to enroll her son in school, she took special care to not misplace the 2x2 pictures of her son. “¡Ay! ¡Déjame guardá’la bien no vaya a ser que un haitiano la coja y me venda al muchacho!” [Oh! Let me put them away carefully, just in case a Haitian gets it and sells my son!” What do you mean, sell him, I inquired. “O! En Haití ¿Tú no ha oído hablá’ de lo sombí? ¡Di’que te cojen la foto y te hacen una cosa y te llevan pa’ Haití y tu familia ni nadie te vuelve a ve’ má!’” [Have you not heard of zombies? Supposedly they take your picture, they do something to it, then they take you to Haiti to work and your family never sees you again], she warned.

Underlying this ethnically-determined perception of spiritual services is an issue that is indicative of the way that Elíaspiñenses construct difference. Central to the issue that Dominican brujos or brujas purchase their knowledge and that their services are hoaxes, whereas Haitians are perceived as having a genuine connection to the gods, is the fact that there is an innate Haitian essence that makes the Haitian physical body
different from the Dominican one. In other words, Haitianess is biologized through religion.

In her article on pre-massacre border society, Derby (1994) also noted the role of religion in racial thought. As doña Yayi, Daddy and Marlenne had stated about present day border society, back then Haitians and Dominican bodies constituted different types of beings in terms of their ability to conjure the spirits of the Vodou pantheon. Derby wrote that these differences created “an invisible but nonetheless real boundary between Haitians and Dominicans, […] distinguishing the two groups from one another” (1994:517). Although Dominicans certainly engaged in this and other similar religious practices, Derby’s research suggest that Dominican practitioners were seen as fakes since Haitians have a “monopoly on the sacred and access to it” (1994:517). In other words, only Haitianness allows for an authentic connection to the spiritual world. This exclusive and secret knowledge conferred value upon it and turned it into a property that only Haitians, by their very essence, could possess.

A Haitian’s intrinsic religious abilities generated fear among Dominicans. While Dominicans were circumscribed by the natural laws of the physical body, Haitians had the ability to defy them. As Guaroa had said about his neighbor Emelinn, Derby also noted that Haitians were thought to be able to transmogrify into dangerous beings that fly in the night and they could resurrect people from the dead by turning them into zombies (1994). But Dominicans feared Haitians because they believed that Haitians used these supernatural abilities to inflict harm on others.

Derby (1994) also argues that border folk biological models constructed two distinct Haitian and Dominican bodies in other ways. Haitians and Dominican bodies
diverged in terms of their bodies’ physical boundaries. Dominican bodies were bound by their bodily limits, they were self contained, obedient, tame. The Haitian body, on the other hand, was wild, sexual and limitless. They were not bound by their physicality. It can extend itself into the outside world, beyond itself. For instance, the Haitian body has the ability to transfer its inherent religious and economic qualities onto the outside world. They can transfer their magical and monetary selves onto whatever they touched and whatever they produced. In this regard, Derby states:

The boundaries of the Dominican body were different. Dominican bodies were closed, orderly and domesticated, the bodies of the civilized. In contrast, Haitians had ‘carnival bodies’ which stress their orifices and organs, their fertility, over their upper regions, which connote reason and control. [...] Haitian bodies are porous, open, and seemed to seep onto whatever they touched, especially onto what they produced [1994:521].

While the fact that the Haitian body was conceived as being of a different quality than the Dominican one might indicate racial logic, Derby (1994) argues that these qualities were not conceived as being heritable. Rather, one becomes a Haitian or a Dominican through the socialization process. So, one can learn to be Haitian or a Dominican. To be a Haitian or to be a Dominican one had to behave like one. A Dominican could potentially become Haitianized by living in Haiti. A Haitian could become Dominicanized, as well, and loose these abilities. Cultural distinctions like “eating, procreating, washing, walking, sitting, and speaking (accent)” (1994:521) were used to establish cultural boundaries between both groups. Thus, Haitianness and Dominicanness were understood as achieved and achievable quality.

**Conclusion**

In the last section, we saw how many of the elements of Dominican and Haitian distinction Derby (1994) described in turn-of-the-century border society are present in
Elías Piña today. Like before, the supernatural continues to be one of the realms in which Haitian and Dominican difference are established. As Derby (1994) described and my various ethnographic examples indicate, the ethnic lines of distinction in the supernatural Vodou spirit world translate into biologized views of the Haitian body. For example, there is a generalized belief that Haitians can fly and transform into other beings. Also, while Dominican religious practitioners claim to be privy to supernatural knowledge, the overall conclusion is that they are fakes. In the Elías Piña worldview, there is a Haitian essence that allows for these supernatural distinctions.

While local beliefs tend to biologize religious differences between Haitians and Dominicans, indication of the distinctions is based on behavioral cues. Present day Elías Piña notions of Haitian-Dominican difference are based on several achievable factors: language, religion, dress or hygiene, or a combination of all. In Elías Piña difference is enacted. To be a Dominican, one must speak like a Dominican dress like a Dominican and smell like a Dominican to be considered one. Thus, in many ways, Dominicanness is achievable.

Although today’s society still retains a lot of the characteristics Derby (1994) described, there is one factor that has transformed the process entirely – the role of the Dominican State. Prior to Trujillo’s Dominicanization of the border project, the Dominican State played a minor role in overall society. Today the state is present in almost every realm of life, including the definition of Haitianess and Dominicanness. In fact, the Dominican State, through the issuance of birth certificates and cédulas (identification cards), has the final say in who is Haitian and who is Dominican. Regardless of language, skin color, hygiene or dress, if a person does not have official
government documentation, they cannot be a Dominican. In the end, the government is the one who decides.

Having a Dominican birth certificate for children and having a cédula (identification card) for those older than 16 is of central importance. In fact, it will determine a lot about a person’s quality of life. For instance, having a cédula on hand when the border enforcement truck stops you will prevent deportation. Also, as Juana’s example indicates having a cédula will allow you to travel to Santo Domingo undisturbed. A cédula also allows a person to cash checks, work in the formal economy, and receive government benefits such as free health care and other government-sponsored social programs. For children, having a birth certificate allows a child to continue school beyond the 8th grade and attend a university.

Despite the centrality of papeles (papers), many in Elías Piña lack these documents. In effect, according to the Oficina de Desarrollo Humano (2010) report, Elías Piña is the province with the highest rate of individuals without birth certificates or cédulas – 13.6% of the population lacks a birth certificate, while 20.3% does not have a cédula; as compared to 5.2% and 11.4% nationally. While many different factors – distance, isolation to government offices and cost – are part of the reason why many do not have documentation, a lot has to do with the fact that they are likely undocumented Haitians or children of undocumented Haitians. Although Dominican law mandates that all children born on Dominican soil be awarded a birth certificate, these laws are circumvented when it comes to Haitians (Murray 2010). While many Haitian women give birth in Dominican hospitals, their children are not necessarily issued Dominican citizenship. “In justifying this denial the argument is put forward that Haitians are
‘temporary visitors’ and that their status in the country is ‘illegal’” (Wooding et al. 2004:33). However, underlying this exclusion is a long history of state-led anti-Haitian policies (Wooding and Moseley Williams 2004).

The large number of undocumented adults and children in Elías Piña creates a large vulnerable population (Murray 2004). He states, “despite close ties in border areas, undocumented Haitians inside the Dominican border – including long-term residents in border localities – retain an ambiguous social status with few or no legal rights. In principle, they are subject to deportation, including resident Haitian women in conjugal unions with Dominican men” (2004:45).

There are, however, caveats to this generalized policy. There are some individuals that successfully attain their documents. The children of bi-ethnic unions are one such example. Although not written in formal law, the de facto practice is that if the father is a Haitian and the mother a Dominican, the offspring will gain the right to Dominican citizenship. Hence, it is the mother that determines Dominican nationality. In contrast, if the mother is Haitian and the father is Dominican (the most prevalent bi-ethnic union type), the child will not be conferred Dominican citizenship.

There are other means to circumvent official and non-official Dominican citizenship. Regardless of where a person is born or who their parents are, more affluent Haitians can purchase Dominican citizenship. Wealthy Haitians can buy their Dominican citizenship by paying off government officials. I often encountered Haitians that had paid ten thousand pesos to get a cédula or a Dominican birth certificate for children. While the state trumps folk measures of difference, wealth overwhelmingly
trumps the state official practices. In the end, in Elías Piña, wealth has transformed many Haitians to Dominicans. Wealth is the Haitian escape hatch in Dominican society.

There are other ways in which Haitians, particularly children, can attain Dominican citizenship. These strategies involve childrearing strategies, more specifically, child fosterage. It is to this topic that we now turn in Chapter 7.
In Chapter 6, we explored the idiosyncratic ways in which Eliaspiñenses establish Haitian-Dominican difference. We saw how people have developed alternative criteria to determine who is a Haitian and who is a Dominican. Unlike the rest of the country, where skin hues and facial features seem to be the most important features of distinction, in the Elías Piña context speech, dress, hairstyles and religion are the more salient factors. As a result, Dominicanness in Elías Piña is considered an achievable, rather than an ascribed quality. While biologized notions of Haitianess persist, particularly in regards to religion, if one presents oneself in a Dominican way, one will be in general considered as such.

Still, while Dominicanness is achievable in Elias Piña, there are formidable obstacles to obtaining this classification. With its focus on papeles or legal documentation, the Dominican State overrides the local criteria of distinction. While someone of Haitian descent might look Dominican and sound Dominican, they will not be considered legal Dominicans until they can fit the State’s citizen criteria – be the child of parents who were legally in the country at the time of birth or the offspring of Haitian father and Dominican mother. As a result, the Dominican State’s citizenship policy has created a large, vulnerable and disadvantaged population that lives in a legal limbo. Many individuals in Elías Piña consider themselves Dominican because they were born and raised in the Dominican Republic, yet the State does not recognize them as such. The Dominican government allows them to attend school until the eighth grade, but not high school or university. They cannot travel throughout the country for fear of deportation, among other limitations.
Despite these measures, many have found ways to circumvent these exclusionist policies. With wealth, one can become a legal Dominican with relative ease. While the State excludes many Dominicans of Haitian descent, it grants citizenship to those that have the money to pay the required *macuteo* (bribes) to pay off local government officials to get their documents. At the time of my fieldwork, the running price for a birth certificate or for an identification card was approximately ten thousand pesos or three hundred and thirty American dollars. Over and over, I heard stories of people that pay off local government officials to get their documents. So, in practice, the Dominican state only excludes the poor and indigent Dominicans of Haitian descent.

While wealth is one of the means through which Dominicans of Haitian descent circumvent the State-imposed restrictions to citizenship, there are other means of overcoming them as well. Child fosterage, a common parenting strategy on Hispaniola, where poorer families from rural areas place one or more of their children with an economically better-off household in the city, has become one of the ways through which many children, both Dominican of Haitian descent and Haitian, have obtained Dominican citizenship through this system. Such was the case of Rafaela Santana, one of my neighbors in the Barrio Patriótico. Her example illustrates how family, the State and identity frequently intersect in Elías Piña. Rafaela, the biological daughter of undocumented Haitian workers, would have probably had a very difficult time obtaining her Dominican birth certificate on her own. But because her parents gave her to the Santana family, who adopted her, she enjoys all the rights and benefits of Dominican citizenship. Through fosterage, Rafaela not only became a member of the Santana family, but she became a Dominican. While nearly everyone in the Elías Piña
community knows her background, she has been fully dominicanized and is fully accepted as a Dominican in both sociocultural and legal terms. The fact that Rafaela is the biological daughter of Haitians, has not kept her from ascending in local society. Today, Rafaela is one of the most prominent residents in Elías Piña.

**Rafaela**

Rafaela’s connections and her influence have made her a very wealthy woman. She owns a clinic and a pharmacy. She is also in the real estate and lending business. She also has an import-export business to Haiti. As a result, Rafaela lives in one of the nicest homes in town. Only the State senator’s home is larger than hers. She also owns two brand new Lexus SUVs, and an apartment in one of the most expensive neighborhoods in Santo Domingo.

Given Rafaela’s elevated standing and influence in the community, I was surprised to learn she was of Haitian origin. I first learned this in an interview with Juan, a native Eliaspiñense who runs a local NGO with his wife Amarilys. Rafaela came up as a topic of conversation when I mentioned I lived in the Barrio Patriótico, near Rafaela’s clinic. “¿Rafaela? Ella e’ haitiana. ¿Tú no lo sabía?” [Rafaela? She is a Haitian. Didn’t you know that?] he said. I also learned of Rafaela’s Haitian origins from others as well. Edwidge, a Haitian who had worked washing clothes for one of Rafaela’s neighbors, also mentioned that Rafaela was a Haitian. “Li se ayisyen” [She is a Haitian]. The same occurred with Lolo, one of my most trusted Haitian informants. “Ella e’ ayisyen” [She is a Haitian].

How could Rafaela be a Haitian? There seemed to belittle “Haitian” about her. Given her wealth, her standing in the local Dominican military and medical communities, Rafaela had to be a Dominican. Above all, her name, Rafaela Santana, was a very
Dominican-sounding name. If she was a Haitian, she should have a Haitian name, I gathered. It was Compa, once again, that helped me make sense of the matter. As it became customary, we were sitting under the fruit tree when he explained Rafaela’s family history. Lowering his voice, he enlightened me, "E' que ese no e' el apellido que le corre'ponde" [That is not the last name that she should have]. He continued, "A Rafaela la criaron en una casa de una gente de aquí, de Elía' Piña. Y esa familia la declararon como hija suya. Pero su papá y su mamá son haitiano, haitiano" [Rafaela was raised in the home of some people from Elías Piña. And that family registered her as if she were their own. But her mother and father are Haitian, Haitian], he revealed. When Rafaela was a little girl, around forty two years ago, her biological parents would come to Elías Piña regularly to sell plates, Compa explained. The Santanas, a local Dominican family, was one of their regular customers. “Tu sabe’ que como en Haití la gente ‘tá pasando hambre, ello le dieron a Franci'ca a esa familia y ello la criaron como si fueran de ello’. Ello’ la declararon y tó. Y mírala ahí como ella ‘tá” [You know that since people in Haiti are going hungry, they gave Rafaela to that family and they raised her as if she was their own. They registered her and everything. And look at her now. Look at how she is doing.” Thus, when the Santanas took Rafaela in, raised her and adopted her, she acquired Dominican citizenship and a Dominican-sounding name. The Santana family, Compa told me, raised Rafaela “como si fuera una hija” [as if she was a daughter].

There are many other cases of Haitian children, like Rafaela, being raised by Dominican families in Elías Piña, and in other regions of the country. Perhaps the most well-known case involves Jose Francisco Peña Gómez, who ran for president of the
country in 1994 and 1996. Like Rafaela, Peña Gómez was the son of Haitian parents and was raised by a Dominican family in the Dominican Republic. He, too, became Dominican in both legal and sociocultural terms via the fosterage process. But, while these two examples took place decades ago the practice is still common today. During my research in 2004 and again in 2010, I encountered many cases of families involved in these arrangements. I also encountered Haitian families raising Haitian foster children and Dominican families raising Dominican foster children. In fact, as Haitian and Dominican families have faced the socioeconomic and political changes that I described in Chapters 4 and 5, they often turned to fosterage as a means of adaptation. The purpose of Chapter 7 is to provide the reader with background information on this practice. In doing so, I hope to provide a pre-earthquake picture of this important aspect of Hispaniolan family life.

To understand child fosterage in Elías Piña, or anywhere for that matter, we must first contextualize these parenting strategies within other similar arrangements that take place in other regions of Hispaniola, the Caribbean, Latin America and the world. Thus, in Chapter 7 I will also review the available literature on the topic. As we examine this material, we will see that what transpires in Elías Piña is not exclusive to the border region. We will see that the bi-ethnic fosterage of children is a sub-modality of a broader practice on the island, in which Haitian parents place children with Haitian foster families and Dominican families place children with Dominican foster families. Moreover, we will see that this parenting strategy is also common throughout the Caribbean, Latin America, and Africa. In the end, I hope that it will become evident to the reader that fosterage of children in Elías Piña is not unusual and that it shares
features with arrangements conducted in other places. For instance we will see that fosterage is often viewed as a valuable parenting strategy that helps both children and both sets of parents by providing otherwise unavailable schooling opportunities for rural children, by alleviating the economic burden of childrearing for poor families and by helping families during crisis situations. Also, in societies where fosterage is prevalent, the separation of children from their biological parent is not necessarily viewed as dysfunctional and risky. Moreover, Elías Piña fosterage shares the fact that economic hardship and parent migration seem to be a major driving force in the decision to enter into a fosterage arrangement.

While many find that biethnic fosterage arrangements like Rafaela’s share many similarities with those that take place in other regions, they have several local particularities. As Rafaela’s example above illustrates, citizenship and identity often play an important role in the fosterage process. Also, in Elías Piña these arrangements take place across international borders and they take place between two different ethnic groups that share a conflictive past. As a result, these arrangements have relatively recently been the focus of international concern. I start the contextualization of bi-ethnic arrangements in Elías Piña with a review of the available literature on fosterage around the globe.

Adoptions, Fosterage, Relocation and Circulation

While many outsiders find the practice of raising other people’s children questionable, it is very common worldwide (Alber 2003, 2004; Bledsoe & Isiugo-Abanihe, 1989; Desai, 1992, 1995; Goody, 1973; Zimmerman, 2003). Despite its wide range occurrence, most research efforts seem to have focused on the practice as it occurs in West Africa (Alber, 2004, 2003; Bass, 2004; Bledsoe & Isiugo-Abanihe, 1989;
Desai 1992, 1995; Eloundou-Enyegue & Stokes 2002; Goody 1973; Isiugo-Abanihe 1985; Page 1989; Silk 1987; Zimmerman 2003) where it "seems to be more common than in other parts of the world" (Alber 2003:487). In West Africa, children are placed with other families informally without state involvement, in accordance with cultural norms that allow the placement of children permanently or temporarily outside the home. Families place children with others in order to provide schooling opportunities, to create alliances, to provide domestic labor, as a result of the death of family members (Zimmerman 2003; Desai 1992; Eloundou-Enyengue & Stokes 2002; Goody 1973). At a societal level, fosterage is in many families essential for the mitigation of child-bearing costs (Desai 1992; Eloundou-Enyengue & Stokes 2002; Zimmerman 2003). It allows parents to distribute childrearing burdens by placing offspring in other homes. Similarly, fosterage practices diminish the child's risk of not attending school by relocating children from rural areas with low school availability to more urban locations with increased schooling opportunities (Desai 1992; Eloundou-Enyengue & Stokes 2002; Zimmerman 2003). Most importantly, the placement of children with others is perceived as a positive practice, it is not necessarily understood as anomalous and problematic, and it is not necessarily a result of a crisis situation. It is perceived so positively in some locations that parents are encouraged to give up their children. Thus, social parenting can actually be favored in certain circumstances over biological parenting (Alber 2004).

**An exchange of parenting duties.** Given these differences in fosterage and adoption practices and in the social construction of parenting, the cross-cultural study of fosterage and adoptions becomes a challenge. How can we compare practices that are so different? More importantly, how can the outside researcher study fosterage and
adoptions without imposing his or her own perspectives on family, parenting and childrearing? Central to the cross-cultural study of fosterage is the use of an analytical framework that solves “the problem of a universally applicable definition of parenthood” (Goody 1973:19). In Goody’s seminal work among the Gonja in Ghana she identified and disaggregated social reproduction into “critical tasks” (1973:6): nurturance, kinship identity, preparation of children for an adult role, and sponsorship into the adult community (Goody, 1973). Although these tasks were universal, the key to the cross-cultural study of parenting is an understanding that not all societies carry out these duties in the same way. In some societies and cultural groups, biological parents carry out all these duties, whereas in societies where fosterage is prevalent, these activities can be carried out by others. In other words, parenting duties are not necessarily ascribed, that is, they are not tied to biological relationships. In fosterage societies, Goody suggests, children receive all of these essential services from social parents, rather than just from their biological parents (1973). Thus, child relocation arrangements can involve the complete or partial exchange or transmission of these essentials of social reproduction essentials between different parties. When the need arises, biological parents will transfer some, or all, of these critical tasks to the foster parent who will fulfill them in their entirety.

**Family and Fosterage in Latin America and the Caribbean**

Although the bulk of the research on child fosterage has been carried out within the geographic scope of Africa, fosterage is also prevalent in Latin America (Fonseca 2004; Leinaweaver 2008). Leinaweaver’s (2008) extensive study of child circulation and international adoptions in Peru, where the placement of offspring outside the biological home is not only a common practice, but a longstanding one, is quite
informative. Leinaweaver (2008) provides a rich description of child circulation from the point of view of those involved in the arrangement, focusing on the local understandings of family and childrearing. As will be presented below, these understandings are similar to those observed during this research.

Child circulation in Peru takes place within a distinctive understanding of family, one in which relatedness can be created, as well as engendered. In this sense, Leinaweaver (2008) likens child circulation to compadrazgo (godparenthood) in the sense that in relocation a new, familial relationship is created between two sets of parents and a child. However, unlike compadrazgo, where child custody remains with the biological parents, in circulation the child lives with the receiving family. With this physical relocation, a new relationship that affects the “material, moral, and relational responsibilities” (Leinaweaver 2008:25) between the sets of parents is initiated. Families will enter into these relationships to provide children “with access to instruction, education, shelter, or affection” (Leinaweaver 2008:25). Receiving families, on the other hand, usually take children in to help with the elderly, mostly to keep them company. In entering into this new familial relationship, both households start treating each other as family. This created kinship relationship, however, can often be vertical in the sense that the receiving family is usually better off than the sending family. It is often strategic in the sense that it allows biological parents to create or facilitate the creation of relationships between higher and lower class families. However, the relationships can also be horizontal, that is, between families that have similar socioeconomic backgrounds (Leinaweaver 2008).
Informal child circulation in Peru, Leinaweaver (2008) argues, takes place alongside formal adoption practices regulated by the Peruvian State. As a result, the practice has been greatly stigmatized. While local Peruvian circulation practices are carried out informally, thousands of children are also being relocated in the formal, transnational adoption circuit, where orphanages and the State are much more involved. In this context, children are also being relocated within a legal framework that is based on international law that requires a documented procedure and State involvement. Unlike the Dominican Republic, transnational adoptions in Peru are very common. As a result, Peruvian circulation practices have recently come under the purview and attack of non-profits and the Peruvian State. Informally, relocated children are now being considered abandoned and their parents accused of neglect. Consequently, the Peruvian State has assumed the role of removing relocated children and placing them in orphanages that later place these children in international adoptions. Thus, a conflict between local and national and international practices has ensued- one in which the Eurocentric and biocentric views of family are being imposed on local families.

**The Caribbean Family and Fosterage**

While child relocation is also common throughout the Caribbean region, the practice itself has only received tangential attention, and it has been done within the broader context of Caribbean family literature (Barrow 1999; Smith 1984). Thus, in order to understand the nature of the practice, it is pertinent to first address the familial context within which children in the Caribbean are placed with other families. The Caribbean family has been the object of considerable scholarly attention. Most of the focus, however, has been on the family in the Anglophone Caribbean societies,
especially Afro-Caribbean families on the lower socioeconomic range of the spectrum (Barrow 1996). Thus, the available information is unfortunately skewed in this regard. In spite of this, the data provide valuable insights for the Dominican Republic as kinship systems share similar characteristics. Initially studied mostly by American and British anthropologists, family life in the Caribbean defied the researcher’s and social practitioner’s understandings that “…the co-resident nuclear family is natural, universal…” (Barrow 1996: X). In the Caribbean, religious or legal marriages were unusual, relationships between men and women were casual and short-lived (Simey 1946; Clarke 1957; Smith 1957), having multiple sexual partners was common, and informal fostering of children is widespread (Simey 1946). Moreover, males hold a marginal role within the household, particularly in regards to childrearing (Simey 1946) and households are matrifocal or centered on women (Smith 1971; Gonzalez 1970; Clarke 1957). “The family was seen to play a crucial role in the socialization process, molding and training young children to take over the society as responsible adults” (Barrow 1996: 24). Thus, these initial studies blamed most of society’s ills, particularly those that had to do with youth, on these observed family patterns (Clarke 1957; Simey 1946).

Much effort went into examining the role that parents play or (do not play) within households, particularly in regards to childrearing. Overall, childrearing in the Caribbean is viewed as a positive and welcome life event. Offspring are perceived as the ultimate proof of masculinity for men, and as a life-defining event for women (Barrow 1996; Olwig 1993; Henriques 1973; Clarke 1957). There is an implicit, fundamental parent-child bond that requires that parents provide the child with food, clothing, and
care (Olwig 1993). In return, the child provides labor in the household and care in old age (Olwig 1993; Clarke 1957).

However, childcare and household sustenance responsibilities are not necessarily shared equally between the mother and the father. Childrearing tasks are frequently performed exclusively by the mother, whereas fathers are mostly marginal to the process. For instance, among the low socioeconomic status Afro-Caribbean population in British Guiana, Smith (1971) described households where fathers were often physically absent from the household, and if present, were detached and uninvolved in childrearing. In Jamaica, similar male non-involvement was described. Clarke (1957) described households where mothers performed both maternal and paternal childrearing roles. Throughout the Caribbean, fathers rarely, or only occasionally, provide child support (Gordon 1987), and when they do they must do so across multiple households where they might have other children with other women (Olwig 1993). If the child is the offspring of a non-residential union, fathers are even less likely to contribute with support (Rubenstein 1980). In the event that the sexual relationship between the father and mother ceases, child support is likely to stop altogether (Olwig 1993; Rubenstein 1980). Thus, male authority in the household, particularly in regards to childrearing, is minimal, and can only be exerted if the male is able to contribute to the household. Consequently, in places with little employment opportunities, men are unlikely to become the center of the household (Smith 1971).

**The mother-child relationship**

Given that women in the Caribbean carry most of the childrearing burden, the child-mother relationship is central to the Caribbean kinship system. Throughout the region (in both the Anglophone and Hispanic Caribbean), descriptions of what Smith
(1971) termed to be matrifocal households comprising of multiple generations economically-active and independent females abound (Barrow 1996; Safa 1995; Henriques 1973; Smith 1971; Clarke 1957). Households comprised of grandmothers, their daughters and grandchildren are common and their prevalence seems to be increasing in the last decades as a result of industrialization (Safa 1995). Since fathers cannot be counted on for child support, women often rely on their “tight networks of exchanges and support” (Olwig 1993:153) to survive. These households often transcend the domestic unit and include individuals (both kin and non-kin) that live in other towns, or even countries (Olwig 1993; Gordon 1987), and their members can be part of more than one household at a time (Gonzalez 1970).

Contrary to the transitory nature of the husband-wife bond and male’s minimal participation in childrearing, the mother-child bond is durable and central to Caribbean family life (Clarke 1957). A mother’s authority and influence on her children is solid. Children are supposed to reciprocate the love and dedication their mother conferred unto them with obedience, respect, help around the house, and care in old age. In Jamaica, for instance, “…the authority of the mother is never questioned any more than the child’s duty of obedience to her” (Clarke 1957:107). In Guyana, “when a woman’s children grow up she can always depend on them for help, in the form of money or presents of food, and they will make sure that she has a roof over her head as long as she lives” (Smith 1971:65). Thus, women’s dependency on children for financial support in old age gives women many reasons to rear children well. Not only does she receive social recognition for a job well done (Clarke 1957), but it ensures that the child will reciprocate with care in old age (Olwig 1993).
**Fosterage**

Despite the centrality of the mother-child relationship to the Caribbean family organization, residential separation is widespread and common. Although the placement of children in other homes has been widely reported throughout the region (Barrow and Ince 2008; Russel-Brown et al. 1997; Barrow 1996; Oligw 1993; Gordon 1987; Powell 1986; Rubenstein 1980; Roberts and Sinclair 1978; Clarke 1957), this topic has been somewhat neglected in Caribbean family literature. It has only been in the last decade that researchers have started to make children the main focus of research in the Caribbean (Barrow and Ince 2008). Within the limited research focusing on children, child fosterage or child shifting, as it is referred to in most Caribbean-related literature, is even more obscure. Although the practice is readily recognized as common throughout the region, researchers have failed to address the topic in much depth (Ramkissoon 2006).

Although not much detail is available in regards to the sociocultural processes involved in the arrangements, the literature does provide some insight into the matter. For example, given that women carry the heaviest childrearing burden, they are the ones usually initiating fosterage arrangements. Although fosterage is perceived as an acceptable childrearing strategy, it is also viewed as a measure of last resort (Barrow and Ince 2008). Since women cannot always rely on men for child support, they will rely on their extended kin and non-kin networks to help with childrearing, and with many other problems encountered (Russel-Brown et al. 1997; Rodman 1971). “In a context in which an individual has little control over economic vagaries” (Gordon 1987:135), fosterage allows women to accommodate household size and redistribute resources. Among the most mentioned reasons that prompt relocation are those related to the
economy, national and international migration (Safa 1995; Olwig 1993) and lack of paternal financial support (Gordon 1987). In addition, changes in family status, such as divorce, separation, remarriage, death of a parent and infertility were also mentioned (Olwig 1993; Safa 1995; Gordon 1987). Finally, children were also relocated to fulfill labor needs. In regards to the characteristics of those that are involved in fosterage arrangements, some patterns have been noted. Foster children can be both boys and girls, most are given up in early childhood, and are the offspring of young mothers involved in visiting unions. Also, foster children usually come from less affluent households and go to better-off families (Gordon 1987). Although children can be placed with any relative or with friends, foster children are usually placed with maternal grandmothers, or with other members of the mother’s female kin group (Rubenstein 1980; Roberts and Sinclair 1978). If the mother’s mother can take the children, “the anxiety is less because women feel that the grandmother will provide the love and care young ones are thought to require. No one else […] can really be trusted to adequately look after your children” (Gussler 1980:196).

In regards to how the cultural arrangement operates, Rubenstein’s (1980) study in St. Vincent provides some information. Usually initiated by the children’s mother, fosterage arrangements involve the permanent or temporary, partial or complete, transfer of maternal rights and duties. Children are perceived as full members in the receiving household and, as such, the “day to day nurture and training [of the child] rests with the fosterer, who also acquires the right to discipline the child and to expect help with household chores” (Rubeinstein 1980:335). The biological mother sometimes contributes with the financial upbringing of the child, whereas on other occasions, she
does not. In Antigua, Gordon (1987) adds that, aside from providing labor, the foster child also assumes the responsibility of providing the caretaker with support in old age.

**Fosterage in Haiti**

Contrary to the relative obscurity of fosterage in the current literature on family in the rest of the Caribbean, fosterage in Haiti has received relatively more attention. In early accounts of Haitian family life, child relocation was noted as being a prominent feature of family organization. In Herskovitz’s (1937) ethnography of rural life in Mirebalais, Haiti, the *timoun* (children) system, whereby parents place their children with friends or acquaintances in Port-au-Prince is briefly described. Similarly, Simpson’s (1942) account of Haitian family life also examines the practice, albeit from a historical perspective. Both Herskovitz (1937) and Simpson (1942) portray child relocation in Haiti as having several important characteristics. Children were relocated without Haitian State involvement and there appeared to be cultural norms in place to regulate its operation. For instance, when a child was placed with a foster family, the receiving family assumed all childrearing costs, with the exception of schooling, which needed to be paid for by the sending parents. The foster family, in return, received the benefits of the foster child’s labor. Fostered children contributed with different types of labor in the household, which varied according to the gender of the child. Furthermore, fosterage arrangements were carried out on a mostly temporary basis, as children would often return to their hometowns after they grew up. Finally, fosterage arrangements were mostly carried out between poor rural families and better-off families in the cities.

Although fosterage arrangements at the time of Herskovitz (1937) and Simpson’s (1942) publications were perceived as a positive and beneficial element, they were sometimes the source of controversy among Haitians themselves. On the one hand,
some Haitians defended the arrangement because it provided positive, life-improving opportunities for poor parents and children, and because it created sincere affective bonds between all the parties involved. On the other hand, others perceived the practice as negative and abusive. Individuals would frequently recount stories of exploited children being treated as second-class members of households, and many stated that these children would eventually end up as prostitutes and vagrants. These differences were attributed to “the character of the adopting families” (Simpson 1942: 667).

In more recent times, negative images surrounding Haitian fosterage arrangements seem to have practically eclipsed any positive connotations that the arrangement might have had in the past. Jean-Robert Cadet’s (1998) autobiographical work Rèstavek: From Haitian Slave Child to Middle-Class American brought to light the disturbingly cruel and abusive realities of his life as a foster child. This book contributed significantly towards calling attention to this abusive form of fosterage and child labor, particularly within the international community. Present-day fosterage arrangements in Haiti have been accused of abuse so frequently that the practice itself is now labeled as “child slavery” (Smucker et al. 2009). Unfortunately, the problem of abused, relocated children seems to have reached epidemic proportions, where current estimates place the number of children in abusive arrangements between 90,000-300,000 (Smucker and Murray 2006). Currently, recent reports indicate that receiving parents fail to send foster children to school, and treat them as second-class members of the household. So much so, that it has prompted more in-depth attention from the national and international NGO community, as well as from the international press (Cohen 2010,
Smucker and Murray 2004, Aristide 2003). Consequently, international agencies and non-governmental organizations have not only taken note of the increasing problem of abusive fosterage arrangements, but have initiated several programs to combat the practice (Panamerican Development Foundation & USAID Haiti 2009).

Not only has the perception of the practice changed since Herskovitz (1937) and Simpson’s (1942) descriptions, but an examination of more recent reports reveals that the context within which the practice takes place, as well as the cultural processes that surround it have gone through significant transformations as well. Unlike previous times when child relocation patterns were almost exclusively carried out between rural to urban and poor to rich households (Herskovitz 1937), current child movement patterns also include rural to rural and urban to urban migration patterns. Similarly, the prevalent demographic movement of children involves the placement of children from poor to less poor households. Today, rich urban families refrain from a practice that they now perceive as negative. Another important change in the practice has to do with the role schooling plays in the arrangement. Unlike before, providing schooling opportunities for children is currently a central feature in the decision to place a child outside the home (Smucker & Murray 2004). Similarly, the need for unpaid domestic labor seems to play a more significant role as well (Schwartz 2008). Finally, Simpson (1942) and Herskovitz (1937), the lexical distinction of restavèk is now widely used both nationally and internationally to describe the severely abused children (Smucker & Murray 2004).

Another fundamental change in the way Haitians relocate their children has to do with the increased presence and role of orphanages in the country. As Leinaweaver (2008) noted in Peru, two child relocation systems operate simultaneously in Haiti – one
that is based on local and traditional customs, and another that operates through orphanages linked to the international adoption circuit. These orphanages, however, often house children whose parents are not dead. Rather, they place their children in these institutions on a temporary basis in order to find better opportunities for them. Parents will do so on the assumption that they will be able to visit children. This, however, often conflicts with the orphanage’s idea that the relinquishment of parental guardianship is permanent and definite and that all contact with the biological parents must end (Schwartz 2008). Contrary to what occurs in Peru, where the State has been able to more forcefully regulate informal relocation, the Haitian State has been ineffective at regulating the more traditional child circulation arrangements. For this reason, this role has been assumed by the non-governmental organizations, who are taking an increasingly strong role, if not in combatting, at least in critiquing child placement outside the home (Smucker & Murray 2004).

Despite the increasing critiques against fosterage, some have warned against categorizing all fosterage arrangements as detrimental and abusive. Not all fosterage arrangements are equal and thus, not all children living away from their biological parents are necessarily abused (Smucker & Murray 2004). As in the rest of the Caribbean, Haitian households and families are not necessarily co-terminous. Consequently, family members can live in different households, towns, cities or even countries, and as such, distribute parenting duties between different localities. Thus, some of these arrangements cannot, and should not, be considered as restavèk arrangements. Moreover, others have questioned statistics on the prevalence of the restavèk problem as nongovernmental organizations use the restavèk, or child slavery
issue, as a way of attracting donor funds (Schwartz 2008). “The cry slavery was founded on sensationalist claims, extreme cases, and shoddy journalism and research,” (Schwartz 2011).

Assuming that not all fosterage arrangements are necessarily abusive, Smucker and Murray (2004) identified five basic ways in which Haitian children are placed outside the biological parent’s home. The first type involves the *restavèk* child, that is, the “unpaid child servant living and working away from home” (Murray 2004:27). A relocated child can live with either relatives or non-relatives; if they are considered outsiders in the home and are treated in an abusive and inhumane manner, they are referred to pejoratively as *restavèks*. Although the receiving family is, in theory, responsible for sending the child to school, they more often than not fail to fulfill this important responsibility. So, in order to be labelled as a *restavèk* in current Haitian terminology, a child has to live away from the biological home and be abused. On the other extreme, Smucker and Murray identify the *pitit adoptif*, or child that has been informally and non-legally adopted into the household. Unlike the *restavèk*, the *pitit adoptif* is considered a member of the household and receives equal treatment as others. If the other children are sent to school, the *pitit adoptif* is sent as well. Thirdly, there is the *pitit kay* or the child living with relatives in other households. Fourth, are the children placed in orphanages. Orphanages in Haiti recruit children, regardless of whether they are orphans or not, as a way of attracting outside international funds (Schwartz 2008). Finally, the last arrangement involves children living with others as a way of gaining access to lodging while attending school. In these instances, the sending parents are required to pay for schooling.
Smucker and Murray’s (2004) categorization of Haitian child fosterage arrangements suggests that there is a spectrum of possibilities regarding the treatment of children living outside the home in Haiti. This continuum ranges from the abusive restavèk arrangement to the fully integrated pitit adoptif. The question regarding why some children become restavèks, while others become pitit adoptifs merits further analysis at a later time.

Fosterage in the Dominican Republic

Although many questions remain about fosterage in Haiti, there is an even greater research void with regards to fosterage arrangements in the Dominican Republic. While in Elías Piña, bi-ethnic fosterage abound, mono-ethnic arrangements are more common throughout the country. In fact, according to the Centro de Estudios Sociales y Demograficos [CESDM] (2003) 14.2% of Dominican children under the age of 15 live in these types of families. Despite its prevalence, the topic has only been addressed tangentially within studies on other topics. However, there are some studies that provide glimpses into the sociocultural and socioeconomic process that surround child circulation or child fosterage (Levitt 2001; Safa 1995). For instance, although Safa’s (1995) work focuses on the effects of national and international development strategies on male and female participation in labor markets and on household gender roles, it provides valuable insights on the matter, particularly in regards to the structural forces that might be at play in child relocation. According to Safa (1995), the shift from an agriculturally-based economy to a service and commercially-based one has had significant effects throughout Dominican society, particularly in regards to childrearing. These economic changes have not only produced a notable feminization of the Dominican labor market, where female participation increased from 9.3% in 1960 to
38% in 1990, but it has also generated a significant rural to urban migration flow. Many of these rural women migrants sought employment in the garment manufacturing industry, where Safa focuses her study. In fact, 75% of the women in her sample were rural migrants under the age of 30.

The transformation of the Dominican economy had profound consequences at the household level as well. While young rural women were entering the labor force en masse, the shift away from agriculture left many men jobless, or underemployed at best. This change led to transformations in the household as the traditional patriarchal structure was challenged. Safa suggests, “The inability of men to fulfill their role as economic provider may be contributing to marital instability” (1995:24). Female-headed households in the Dominican Republic increased from 24.1% in 1984 to 29.5% in 1991. Many women became “the principal or sole economic provider” (Safa 1995:24).

However, among the garment industry workers in her study, Safa (1995) notes that their meager wages and poor working conditions made it nearly impossible for these women to support their households on their own and/or care for their children. “Young children are a burden to working women because paid child care in the free trade zones is very expensive, and many women complain that their children are not well taken care of” (Safa 1995:119). This was particularly the case with women in consensual unions, who were more financially vulnerable and burdened than their legally married counterparts. More importantly, childcare and support was even more of a problem for women who had children from previous marriages. Not only do women have difficulty getting ex-husbands to pay child support, but current partners won’t likely contribute to the upbringing of children from other marriages.
Given these challenges, women developed different strategies to support their households and care for their children. Among single women in Safa’s sample, 80% of them pooled resources “with parents, siblings or other relatives” (1995:111). For instance, although parents living in rural areas did not have the financial means to contribute much, they did occasionally send foodstuffs to their daughters in the city. But perhaps the most significant contribution came in the form of childcare. While mothers work in the city, parents in rural areas often raise their grandchildren. Although mothers send money regularly to assist in their upbringing and will visit children occasionally, the overall care and supervision of these children is in the hands of the grandparents.

The shift away from an agriculturally-based economy not only prompted a massive rural to urban female migration within the country, but it drove a wave of young female migrants outside of the country as well (Ramírez de Haro et al. 2007; Levitt 2001). Although many of these women were married or in unions and had children, they left the country alone. Rather than leave their children in the care of their husbands, they chose to leave them in the care of their mothers and sisters. Rather than sending remittances to their husbands, female migrants sent money to their mothers, grandmothers or sisters (Ramírez de Haro et al. 2007).

Despite the fact that child circulation in the Dominican Republic has rarely been addressed directly, three exceptions, however, are evident: Smucker and Murray’s (2004) work on child trafficking, the Oficina Internacional del Trabajo: Programa Internacional para la Erradicación del Trabajo Infantil (2002), an office of the International Labor Organization (ILO), report on child domestic labor, and my own work on child fosterage (Kulstad 2006). The ILO report presents Dominican fosterage as
nothing more than child domestic labor veiled in kinship terms, as is evident in the report's title, “Trabajo Infantil Doméstico en Hogares de Terceros” [Child Domestic Labor in Third Party Homes]. Underlying this study is the premise that children are best raised by their biological parents. According to the report, a child living with someone other than a biological parent and is carrying out domestic labor tasks in that household is necessarily understood as being a victim of child labor. Thus, the International Labor Organization frames these third-party homes as being places of employment and understands foster children to be unpaid employees. In essence, they are getting cheated out of payment via family terminology euphemisms. The International Labor Organization and the Dominican Secretaría de Trabajo (Ministry of Labor), a co-sponsor of the report, subsequently labeled having an hijo de crianza as one of the worst forms of child labor (2002).

Smucker and Murray’s (2004) work on Haitian child trafficking to the Dominican Republic presents Dominican fosterage in a much different light. In order to understand the context within which the movement of Haitian children is taking place, Smucker and Murray (2004) first examine child relocation as it occurs in the Dominican Republic, with Dominican children and families. According to them, Dominican families understand child relocation to be a viable, benevolent, and accepted, parenting strategy. Unlike Haiti, where the restavèk system holds a negative reputation and where abused children are more common, the Dominican relocation system, overall, tends to be more benevolent and is perceived in a positive light. Central to Dominican fosterage arrangements is schooling. Parents in rural areas send their children to live with relatives or non-relatives in the city to provide their offspring with educational
opportunities that would otherwise be unavailable. The receiving families must provide food, shelter and clothing in exchange for labor on the part of the child. But most importantly, they must provide the foster child with an opportunity to attend school. This means that not only must they allow the child to attend school, but that they must provide him or her with the resources they might need for these purposes. Contrary to the Haitian restavèk experience, the terms of the arrangement are more often than not upheld, particularly the schooling component. Although differential treatment was reported, children are treated in a humane manner. Thus, outright abusive situations were rare exceptions, not the rule.

Such stark differences between Haitian and Dominican relocation practices have to do with long-term and short-term calculations foster parents make in regards to foster children. In Haiti, foster parents rely more on the short term labor benefits that the foster child might provide in the home. In the Dominican Republic, however, receiving parents invest in the long term. A foster child that is treated better today is more likely to care for a foster parent in old age than one that is mistreated (Smucker and Murray 2004).

As mentioned earlier, I conducted research on the topic in 2004. My findings corroborate much of what Smucker and Murray indicate. Rather than a haphazard placement of children, the existence of meaningful and culturally-relevant kinship arrangement surfaced, based on the understanding that relatedness can be created, as well as engendered. Moreover, despite the mother-child residential separation, the mother-child bond that is central to the Dominican family organization is perpetuated in fosterage arrangements. Although there has been a separation of the mother-child
residential unit, it is only a separation of the biological mother and child. An equally meaningful one is created in fosterage because the mothering tasks are transferred to the receiving mother. Child relocation takes place within a clearly defined cultural system that has rules, responsibilities and rights that have the child’s wellbeing as its ultimate goal.

**Parental rights and duties**

An understanding of Dominican child fosterage pre-supposes an understanding of two core elements: (1) the parent-child normative relationship and (2) the cultural construction of relatedness. The Dominican parent-child normative relationship is a relationship between a parent and its offspring that involves long-term and short-term reciprocities. In this relationship, there is an expectation that parents provide offspring with food, clothing, shelter, kinship identity, education and sponsorship into adulthood. As explained above, in Caribbean matrifocal societies, most of these responsibilities frequently fall exclusively on the mother. The child, on the other hand, is expected to reciprocate the love, resources and affection he or she has received from the parent, or parents, in two different ways. In the short-term, the child must reciprocate with labor in the household, for which he or she will not expect, nor will he or she be likely to receive, any payment. But most importantly, in the long-term, the child is expected to provide the parent with care and support in old age. Given these reciprocities, foster parenting, particularly as done in the Dominican Republic, is seen as somewhat of a retirement plan in which the more a parent invests in the present, the more the payoff will be in the future. In other words, the better the parent is today, the more indebted and grateful the child will be in the future and thus, the more committed he or she will be to provide financial support in old age.
Secondly, Dominican notions of family are based on the idea that relatedness is both engendered and created. Although sexual reproduction is considered to be the basic building block of family, there is also a clear understanding that genetic relatedness alone does not constitute family. It is based on the idea that people must act like family to be considered family. One can be genetically related to someone, but if that person does not act like a family member, their status as kin will be criticized and even called into question. Concomitantly, if one acts like family, one will be considered family. This is particularly the case with mothers. Although giving birth is considered the fundamental way of becoming a mother, behaving like a mother is perhaps held at an even higher standard, as the common adage “madre es la que cria” [mother is the one that rears you] reveals. This saying indicates that giving birth does not automatically qualify one as a mother because anyone can get pregnant and give birth. But to be a true mother, you must act like a mother. Thus, if a woman carries out the tasks associated with motherhood, then she will be considered a mother. If the child considers her as mother, then she will receive both the short-term (labor and love) and the long-term (care in old age) benefits associated with this role.

At the same time, the disaggregation of the biological and behavioral parenting components is also indicative of an understanding in which children can have more than one mother and father at a time. Parenting duties can be and are shared between individuals. For example, when I asked a former foster child who her mother was, she replied, “Juana me parió, pero Amarilys fue la que crió” [Juana gave birth to me but Amarilys raised me]. Similarly, when I asked Amparo, a foster mother, who the mother of her foster child she was, she replied, “She has her mother and her father. Her
mother that brought her to this world, and her father that bore her. But mother is the person that rears you.”

Not only is there a powerful cultural principle that distinguishes between the biological and the behavioral parenting roles, but the behavioral aspects of parenting can be shared between different individuals. For instance, in female headed households, the tasks of raising children can be shared between the grandmother and the children’s mother. In the case of Ana in Elías Piña, the daughter provided the financial support of the household through her job at the local post office. The grandmother stayed home and cared for her 3 year-old grandson. Thus, in effect, the 3 year-old boy had two mothers, in the sense that he is being raised and educated by both simultaneously. As soon as the child is old enough, he will recognize and acknowledge both individuals as mothers.

This particular cultural understanding of family, very deeply rooted in the Dominican Republic, facilitates fosterage arrangements. The idea that behavior, not biology, is the fundamental way in which the parental role is established, and the fact that these behavioral roles can be partially and temporarily shared, facilitates the transference of the parent-child normative relationship from one family to the next. For example, when a mother decides to migrate for employment purposes and cannot take her child with her, this understanding of family allows her to transfer the parent-child normative relationship to someone in her network of kin and non-kin network. Thus, when a family takes a foster child in, a familial relationship is being created because the receiving parent and the child have established a relationship in which a new parent-child normative relationship prevails. In the end, what is taking place is that both
families are establishing a new kin relationship that affects the “material, moral and relational responsibilities” (Leinaweaver 2008:15) between both sets of parents and between each towards the child.

**Fosterage typology**

As mentioned earlier, fosterage or circulation is context-dependent and as such, varies widely. In fosterage, the transference of the parent-child normative relationship can occur in three basic ways. First, if the child is being raised in another household (usually with the maternal grandmother), but the mother continues to financially support the child by sending them money, then the arrangement constitutes what can be referred to as *transhousehold parenting*. Thus, although the mother and child do not live in the same residential unit, they continue to live in what is functionally and economically the same household, albeit a residentially stretched one. In the transhousehold parenting model, then, what has taken place is a partial and temporary transfer of *parts* of the parenting component of the parent-child normative relationship. That is, the nurturance and education component of parenting has been transferred to the foster parent, while the biological parent retains the sustenance and kinship identity elements. For instance, a mother who migrates to the city for work and leaves her child behind with her mother, yet continues to send money to support the child constitutes transhousehold parenting. By providing child support, the mother continues to have a voice in how the child should be raised, is an active participant in the childrearing process, and has an active voice in any child-related decision making. The child’s grandmother, on the other hand, is responsible for the day-to-day chores related with the child. In turn, the child will recognize two different mothers, and as such, will be expected to provide labor and care in old age to both of them.
The second and third type of fosterage arrangement differs from the transhousehold parenting in that the biological parents do not make financial contributions to the foster household. In this regard, two different lexical distinctions have surfaced to indicate two different trajectories, and two contrasting clusters of rules and practices that assign rights and responsibilities and possess checks and balances to ensure child welfare. Children can be *prestados* (loaned out) or they can be *regalados* (given away). Both arrangements involve a physical relocation of the child. They both require that the receiving family provide the child with food, clothing, shelter and education. They both require that the child perform domestic labor tasks in the receiving home, as would a biological child. However, both arrangements discourage material contributions from the biological family as they are thought to blur the lines of parental authority and rights over the child’s labor, and because it compromises the foster parent’s moral responsibility towards the foster child. But most importantly, if money is involved, they can no longer be treated “como si fuera una hija o hijo” [as if they were a son or daughter].

The difference between both arrangements lies in the degree to which the biological parent relinquishes these rights and duties to the foster parent. In *prestado* (loaned out) arrangements, the transfer is temporary and partial and the biological parent continues to be an active participant in the childrearing process. This participation involves making unannounced visits at the foster home to ensure that the child is being treated as another member of the family. It also requires that the foster parent allow that the foster child visit the biological home. Most importantly, in a
prestado arrangement, the biological parent can choose to terminate the arrangement at any time, without explanation.

This is not the case in regalado (given away) arrangements. Biological parents cease to have any participation whatsoever in the childrearing process, and they do so in a permanent fashion. In regalado arrangements, biological parents do not visit the foster household, they do not supervise the childrearing process, nor do they have the right to terminate the arrangement. Thus, these arrangements constitute what are, in essence, permanent parental guardianship transfers or adoptions that take place outside the law.

Deviations from the rule

As we have seen, the child-mother separation in the Dominican Republic takes place within a context that disaggregates the biological and the behavioral components of parenting. This understanding allows for the partial or complete transference of the parenting components of the parent-child normative relationship, and as such, fosterage arrangements can take place in three general ways, and that these arrangements constitute familial arrangements, not employment ones. Common to all three arrangements is the cultural mandate that the receiving family assume the social parenting role fully and that they treat the child “como si fuera un(a) hijo(a)” [as if they were a son or daughter].

As mentioned, in general, Dominican families perceive hijo de crianza arrangements as positive and normal, something that Smucker and Murray (2004) have also asserted. My research suggests that overall, the general pattern in the Dominican Republic is that foster children are treated benevolently. This is perhaps reflected in the fact that this type of childrearing strategy, according to comments which were repeatedly
heard from different individuals during interviews and informal conversations, continues to have a positive image among the population. Fosterage is viewed as an acceptable parenting strategy that helps parents provide children with schooling and resources that would otherwise be unavailable. However, my research also revealed a less rosy dimension, as biological and foster parents, as well as former foster children themselves, speak of the practice in less favorable terms. The image of the abused and differentially treated foster child, a Cinderella of sorts, was constantly brought forth in conversations on the matter. Furthermore, when asked, individuals responded negatively to the question of giving up their children to another family. “Yo prefiero comer tierra antes de dar a mi hijo” [I would rather eat dirt before I gave my children to someone else], Nancy, an informant stated. Does this indicate that cases of differential treatment do indeed occur? If there is such a strong cultural mandate to treat children “como si fuera una hija(o)”, why, do some parents fail to fulfill this while others do so to the fullest extent?

**The Cinderella Effect**

The question of the differential, or even abusive, treatment of foster, adopted and step-children has been a topic of much interest among scholars and social practitioners. Although much of the focus on fosterage arrangements throughout the world has centered on the overall functionality of fosterage, reports of differential treatment that range from differences in health outcomes (Oni 1995; Bledsoe and Brandon 1992), to infanticide (Daly and Wilson 1999) have caught the attention of researchers, particularly of those involved in the field of evolutionary psychology.

For evolutionary psychologists, who believe that natural selection is the main driving force behind human behavior and social organization (Silk 1987), the unrelated
adopted child constitutes a child at risk of abuse because a step-parents’ drive to ensure his or her own genetic and inclusive fitness, rather than that of the unrelated child’s parents, drives negative behavior towards stepchildren. Using evidence from a large-scale study of Canadian and United States households, Daly and Wilson (1999) concluded that step-parents are more likely to mistreat their step-children and that “having a step-parent has turned out to be the most powerful epidemiological risk factors for severe child maltreatment yet discovered” (Daly and Wilson 1999:7).

But, is a step-parent situation the same as an *hijo de crianza* arrangement? Can we apply these conclusions to the Dominican Republic and to the rest of the Caribbean, for that matter? Moreover, how does one explain the thousands of cases of foster children living with non-relatives that are being treated equally and benevolently? How does one explain the abuse of children at the hands of their own biological parents (Bledsoe and Brandon 1992)? Rather than blame the fosterage arrangement itself, we need to consider the economic and social context within which the arrangement is taking place because it is this context that has a direct effect on the nature of the reciprocities between both sets of parents and the child, not the presence or absence of biological relatedness (Madhavan 2004; Castle 1996; Bledsoe and Brandon 1992). In her analysis of fosterage in the post-AIDS era in South Africa, Madhavan (2004) identified three key elements that must be considered when establishing whether a foster child is at risk for maltreatment: (1) the type of arrangement (whether it is voluntary or crisis-led fostering); (2) the kinship relationship between the foster and biological parent; (3) contextual elements, such as food shortages or outside factors. Similar types of considerations can be done in regards to Dominican fosterage.
Conclusion

As we have seen from this brief literature review, the relocation of children is a common practice worldwide. The causes of this arrangement vary widely, from economic reasons to labor, infertility and family crisis. As we have seen from cases in different parts of the world, the separation of a child from its biological parent(s) is not necessarily considered a negative or abnormal childrearing situation. In fact, in some places it is even an encouraged parenting strategy. The child-biological parent separation can involve both a temporary or permanent transfer of childrearing duties and rights from the biological family to the foster family. It requires that the receiving family provide the child with food, clothing, shelter and an education. In return, the child contributes by performing domestic labor chores in the household and/or the sending family can contribute with resources to help with the childrearing costs. These arrangements take place in a context in which relatedness is enacted as well as engendered.

Similar understandings of family are held throughout the Caribbean. However, within the Caribbean family context, an additional component must be taken into consideration – matrifocality. The phenomenon of the absent father, and the subsequent strength of the mother-child bond, is much more frequent in the Caribbean than in many other world areas and is consequently central to Caribbean family organization. For women, motherhood and childrearing are life-defining roles. At the same time, there is a strong expectation that children be devoted and loyal to their mothers and provide them with care and love in old age, particularly as their old age may be spent without a male partner. This focus on women also means that men play a marginal role, particularly from an economic standpoint, in the childrearing process.
Consequently, women carry most of the childrearing burden. Thus, when a young, poor mother, particularly one involved in a visiting union, does not have consistent and dependable financial support from the child’s father, they rely more on their kin and non-kin network to help in the upbringing of her children. Often times, this means transferring childrearing rights and duties to others. Although the child-mother bond is fundamental to Caribbean family organization, the separation of a mother and child is not necessarily viewed negatively nor is the biological mother seen as being negligent or irresponsible. However, the decision to separate a child and a mother is not necessarily an easy one and is usually one carried out as a measure of last resort.

In the Dominican context, similar dynamics come into play. Consistent with the patterns observed in the rest of the Caribbean, mothers are central to the Dominican family and fathers are marginal to childrearing. Thus, often times, women only rely on their kin and non-kin networks for assistance with childrearing. The reliance on networks for these purposes seems to have increased with the increased job-related migration of women that followed the transformation of the Dominican economy from agricultural to service-based. Often times, they migrated alone, without their families, to both national and international destinations. This demographic transformation prompted many women to place their offspring in other residential units (mostly with maternal grandmothers) to assist them with childrearing. As in the rest of the Caribbean (with the exception of Haiti) fosterage or hijos de crianza arrangements are viewed as acceptable parenting strategies, particularly because they help parents provide children with otherwise unavailable resources, the most important of which is schooling.
In the Haitian context, the circulation of children occurs under very different conditions. While the fundamentals of the system operate in very similar ways as in the Dominican Republic, and is driven by similar desires to find better living conditions for children, the system has diverged in a very different direction. While in the Dominican Republic the relocation of children is usually viewed in positive terms and abusive living conditions are generally the exception to the rule, in Haiti the arrangements have acquired a negative reputation. Fosterage has been abused so frequently that the practice itself is now labeled as “child slavery” (Pan American Development Foundation and USAID 2009) and one of the worst forms of child labor (International Labor Organization Programme on the Elimination of Child Labour 2003). Receiving parents often fail to send foster children to school and treat them as second-class members of the household. Although much more research is needed to fully understand why this occurs so frequently in Haiti, Madhavan’s (2004) conclusions regarding the fosterage in AIDS-stricken countries are perhaps useful. The fact that Haitian families have had to place their children with others as a result of crisis situations and also the fact that these arrangements take place within a context of generalized and almost perpetual resource shortages certainly has to impinge upon the reciprocities that are expected in the arrangement.

The other key distinction with Dominican fosterage involves the role of the international adoption circuit in Haiti. While in the Dominican Republic, orphanages are few and Dominican children rarely end up in these institutions, they are much more common in Haiti. As such, two parallel systems operate at the same time – the culturally sanctioned, informal fosterage and the formal, international process.
Moreover, nonprofit organizations that deal in child welfare in general as well as those that deal with orphans in particular have started to put forth important efforts to eliminate and discourage the informal circulation of children. In the end, the circulation of children in Haiti has been stigmatized in very much the same way as Leinaweeaver (2008) described in Peru. Despite its stigmatization, Haitian families still continue to rely on it as a viable parenting strategy.

Fosterage among families living on the Haitian-Dominican border region has been common for years. As Haitian and Dominican families have been forced to migrate in search for jobs, families have repeatedly turned to this childrearing strategy as a means of adaptation. This is particularly true for single mothers without father support. As Dominicans and Haitians have increased their interactions, particularly in regards to the binational market, it is also common for Haitians to place their children in Dominican households. These bi-ethnic arrangements, however, often require that individuals, including children, cross an international border. Also, underlying these arrangements is the fact that they are carried out between two ethnic groups with unequal socioeconomic standing in Elías Piña society. While previous research suggests that Haitian foster children in Dominican households are treated well (Kulstad 2006; Smucker and Murray 2004), these arrangements have an additional degree of child risk.

In the Chapter 8, we continue addressing the topic of fosterage along the Haitian-Dominican border. But we do so from the post-earthquake perspective. The January 12th earthquake and the events that followed changed the overall context within which these arrangements took place. For one, the practice appears to have increased in the
region. Soon after the earthquake Elías Piña received an inflow of earthquake-displaced Haitians. Throughout the process, families turned to fosterage as a childrearing strategy during these challenging and unstable times. As we will see, earthquake displaced families placed their children in fosterage arrangements in Haiti. Others took on Haitian foster children. Others placed them with families in Elías Piña. While these post-January 12th arrangements held many similarities with those before the earthquake, the earthquake and the events that followed it caused important changes in the overall context within which the arrangement is carried out. Sadly, the earthquake forced Haitian families to place their children in situations of increased risk.
CHAPTER 8
POST-EARTHQUAKE FOSTERAGE OF CHILDREN

In Chapter 7, we reviewed relevant literature on child fosterage and we saw how the practice is common throughout the globe. We also saw how on Hispaniola, both Haitian and Dominican parents regularly do so in extra-legal, yet culturally-sanctioned arrangements in which parental guardianship is temporarily and partially transferred from one family to another. Underlying this practice are important ideological and material components. Ideologically, the practice is based on the notion that parentage can be simultaneously defined in both biological and behavioral terms and that these two functions do not need to be carried out by the same person. Also, it is based on the notion that sometimes biological parents are not necessarily the best people to raise children. There are important material factors that underlie this parenting strategy. As socioeconomic and political changes have swept through both Haiti and the Dominican Republic, parents have faced important obstacles in trying to meet their childrearing obligations. As a result, they have turned to fosterage as a means of redistributing childrearing obligations between different households. Thus, while fosterage is in general viewed as an acceptable parenting strategy, parents often turn to fosterage as a measure of last resort.

Although fosterage practices are not new on Hispaniola, the practice seems to have increased in recent decades. As structural changes have prompted Dominicans and Haitians to migrate in search of alternative means of subsistence, Dominicans have turned to child relocation as a parenting strategy. This was particularly the case for female heads of household, like Cuca, whose story I told in Chapter 5. In the Dominican Republic, as agriculture and the jobs associated with it declined, many
women, like Cuca, left Elías Piña in search for low-wage jobs in Santo Domingo. So, Cuca could not take her two young sons with her. Thus, she had no choice but to leave her children behind with family members and friends.

Facing somewhat similar but much more severe dilemmas, Haitians also turned to fosterage. As Haitians relocated in search for jobs in major Haitian cities and in the Dominican Republic, they too have had to place their children with family and friends. But while Haitian and Dominican fosterage might be similar in this regard, there are important distinctions between them. For one, the context within which the Haitian arrangements take place is different. While in Dominican arrangements the needs of children are in general met in the foster home (Kulstad 2006, Smucker & Murray), in Haiti there is a sizeable subgroup of children that is abused (Smucker & Murray 2004). As a result, these arrangements have raised major concerns among many human and child rights organizations and the practice has become marked. As a result, intervention and educational programs have been put into place in several parts of the country, including in towns across the border from Elías Piña to discourage child relocation (Stam 2010). Another important distinction has to do with fosterage arrangements that take place along the border region. Haitian families not only place children with others in Haiti, but they do so across the border in the Dominican Republic. As commercial exchanges have brought about increased contact and familiarity between people on both sides of the border, Haitian parents have placed their children with families, both Haitian and Dominican, across the border. This trans-border movement of children has also raised concerns of child trafficking for domestic labor purposes (Smucker & Murray 2004). While no major programs were set into place to
thwart trans-border fosterage arrangements in Elías Piña, concerns over these arrangements still remain, particularly among non-profit organizations working along the border.

**The Earthquake**

The overall context within which fosterage took place in both countries changed, however, after January 12th. The destruction, the foreign aid, the wave of displaced Haitians, the international attention on the trans-border movement of children, and the changes in border policy caused important changes to this parenting strategy. The purpose of Chapter 8 is to examine the ways in which these processes altered fosterage practices in the Elías Piña area. In my analysis, I identified two broad areas of transformation – increased prevalence and increased child risk. We will see how in the post-earthquake context many families turned to fosterage arrangements in the border area. Sadly, they had to do so in ways in which children were placed in arrangements with greater levels of risk. First, I will address the two general processes by which families came to rely on fosterage more and more after the earthquake. I will describe how the earthquake displacement process generated many new fosterage arrangements. As families headed to the Haitian countryside and / or to the Dominican Republic, families were created and recreated over and over again and they relied on fosterage throughout this process. Most of the new fosterage arrangements were carried out between Haitian families living in both Haiti and the Dominican Republic. But as situations changed and newly displaced families established contacts with Dominicans in Elías Piña and throughout the country, they placed the children in Dominican households as well.
We will also explore how a combination of factors in the post-earthquake context led to the creation of more fosterage arrangements. The decline of post-earthquake solidarity, the post-earthquake economy and lack of aid helped create the conditions that led families to give up their children. Without jobs and aid, families had no viable means of subsistence and parents could no longer support their children. After cholera and the closure of the market, conditions only worsened.

While more and more families turned to fosterage, they did so under conditions of increased child risk. I describe how two separate, yet interconnected factors contributed towards the creation of conditions that were detrimental to foster child wellbeing, the first of which is the disruption of the arrangement’s inherent reciprocities. As we saw in Chapter 7, fosterage arrangements in both countries are based on the fulfillment of a series of reciprocities between all parties involved: child, biological parents and foster parents. But in the post-earthquake context, children were often relocated under conditions within which these reciprocities became impossible to fulfill. Many foster parents were unable to provide foster children with the material elements the arrangement prescribes. While many might argue that this was already the case in pre-earthquake Haiti, I argue that post-January 12th arrangements these conditions became worse.

The second factor involves the inability to carry out some of the arrangement’s inherent child wellbeing processes. In Chapter 7, I described how child wellbeing is verified and the childrearing process is supervised through the supervision and visitation processes. Also, we saw how biological parents can choose to terminate the fosterage arrangement at any moment in the process, particularly if they deem that the child is not
being treated well. These child safety elements, however, became nearly impossible to carry out within the context of post-earthquake Elías Piña. For one, without jobs or any type of outside aid, foster parents were forced to accept the inadequate conditions their children might be living in because they could not support the children themselves. Furthermore, biological mothers and fathers were unable to travel back and forth to verify their child’s wellbeing because most of them were undocumented and as such faced deportation when travelling. While the Dominican government initially loosened its border and immigration control policies after January 12th, it changed its border policies drastically, particularly after the announcement of the cholera epidemic in Haiti.

Finally, child risk was further intensified as a result of the increased worldwide attention that befell on the trans-border movement of children. When a group of American missionaries was apprehended by Haitian authorities as they tried to take a group of Haitian children to an orphanage in the Dominican Republic, the international gaze turned to the movement of children from Haiti to the Dominican Republic. Although this incident took place far from Elías Piña, it had serious repercussions for families in the town. For one, it increased the presence of child rights and nonprofit organizations on the Elías Piña border. But, while their role was to protect Haitian children from trafficking, their efforts had unintended consequences. As we will see, they were unsuccessful at thwarting child or any other form of trafficking. Rather, they made the previously existing trans-border flow of children upon which fosterage arrangements depend on more difficult and more dangerous. As a result, biological parents and foster children became isolated and incommunicated.
At first glance, the causal links between these structural factors and increased fosterage prevalence and risk might not be readily evident. But, long-term ethnographic research allows these complex relationships to emerge. During my fieldwork, I carried out in-depth interviews and participant observation in one hundred separate earthquake displaced households in Elías Piña. While it was impossible to develop close ties with all of these households, I became very close with ten of these families. Throughout our interactions, I came to better understand why families turned to fosterage so frequently and why they did so in conditions in which their children were under risk. While each one of these families faced a unique set of challenges, I was able to identify how these factors were common to all their experiences.

**Increased Fosterage- Displacement**

I start my post-earthquake fosterage analysis by addressing the first of two general areas of fosterage transformation: increased prevalence. In this section, I will first focus on the role that displacement played in generating new fosterage arrangements. Driven by the desire to flee the generalized chaos and encouraged by Haitian authorities to do so, hundreds of thousands of people left the city and headed towards different parts of the country. Although exact numbers are unknown, estimates based on cell phone data indicate that in the first nineteen days after the earthquake approximately 20% of Port-au-Prince’s pre-earthquake population or 630,000 people left the city. This initial post-earthquake population movement, however, was not a long lasting one. As soon as a few weeks after the earthquake, Port-au-Prince started to experience a gradual, yet consistent return of its residents (Bengtsoon et al. 2011).

Most post-earthquake reports and estimates, however, are based on population movements within Haiti itself. Few considered the possible impacts of this wave on the
Dominican Republic. While the exact number remains a mystery, Dominican
government officials have since then estimated that approximately 200,000 Haitians
migrated to the Dominican Republic after the earthquake (Hoy 2011). Local
government officials and local nonprofit workers in Elías Piña estimate that the town
received approximately two thousand individuals, although the basis of these estimates
is also unclear.

While exact numbers still remain a mystery, my interviews within the displaced
community suggest that Elías Piña saw several multidirectional migration waves. As
early as the day after the earthquake, Haitians started to make their way into the town.
Encouraged by the relaxation of Dominican border policies, but driven mostly by the
existence of kin-based and other social networks, many people left the earthquake’s
impact area and headed straight to Elías Piña. This initial wave included people of all
backgrounds. In general, the more affluent and educated only remained in Elías Piña
for a short period of time. Many of them soon made their way to Santo Domingo and to
other major cities in the Dominican Republic. Others returned to Port-au-Prince. The
mobility of the poor and unskilled, in contrast, was a lot more limited. Most were
confined to Elías Piña since they could not afford the travel expenses to return to Port-
au-Prince. But most importantly, many did not return as they had lost everything and
had little to return to. Also, while many might have wanted to go to other major
Dominican cities, they could not do so as they lacked the necessary funds, travel
documents, or the social networks to find work.

About three to four weeks after the earthquake, two subsequent migratory waves
commenced. However, these population flows did not necessarily involve people
coming from the earthquake’s direct impact area. Rather, it involved displaced Haitians that had gone from Port-au-Prince to the rural areas prior to heading to Elías Piña. While this second rural wave was in progress, a third simultaneous movement was underway. As people were trickling in from the rural areas, a small minority was also making its way to the major cities and towns in the Dominican Republic in search for better jobs.

These multi-destination, back-and-forth population movements had important impacts on childrearing. As displaced families travelled between Port-au-Prince, rural Haiti, Santo Domingo and Elías Piña, they faced conditions that made carrying out day to day activities and child care tasks very challenging. In fact, as families moved from one place to another they struggled to regain some degree of stability in their lives. For example, families relocated often from one household to another. They struggled to find a place to live or find sources of income. They also had to reorganize their households and find new ways to carry out basic household tasks. For many, giving up or taking in other people’s children became the only way to deal with the instability and insecurity that characterized their post-earthquake lives. To illustrate this complex process, I present the experiences of Mari Terez and Edwidge. Each one of their stories illustrates the different ways in which they used fosterage in the displacement process. Edwidge, for instance, gave up her children to others. Mari Terèz took in someone else’s child, as well as gave up one of her own. Although each story is unique, they all have one element in common – the inevitability of their fosterage decision. I start with Mari Terèz, whose story I introduced in Chapter 3. She came to Elías Piña in the first wave of displaced migrants. Having lost her home, her husband, brothers and sisters,
Mari Terèz left Port-au-Prince the day after the earthquake. She arrived in Elías Piña with her mother, her triplets, and Tata, a seven-year-old foster daughter she took on along the way. In the end, not only did Mari Terez become displaced, a widow and the sole breadwinner of her household, she also became a foster mother, as well.

**Mari Terèz**

The first time I interviewed Mari Terèz was in July 2010. We spoke in her home in *Barrio Nuevo*, located in one of the poorest parts of town. When I first arrived, I could not help but be shocked at how Mari Terèz, her mother and her three children lived. The five of them lived in a tiny hut made of tin paneled walls and roof. Mari Terèz slept on the dirt floor, on pieces of cardboard. Her mother and three children slept on a small mattress and a piece of foam strewn out on the floor. On that day, it was raining. So the construction material of her home presented her with an unfortunately common dilemma. When it rained outside, it also rained inside her house. So on that day, Mari Terèz laid out several buckets throughout the house to collect the water that came in from her leaky roof to keep her dirt floor from turning into mud.

While Mari Terèz' living conditions were dismal, she was doing much better than she would have been were she still in Port-au-Prince. “Moun anba tant!” [People are living in tents!]. So while her house was small and had a leaky roof, she preferred her life in Elías Piña, rather than living in a tent city. As I recounted in Chapter 3, Mari Terèz had lost her husband, nephews, nieces, and brother in the earthquake. Her mother had lost her husband and several children, too. Both their homes in the Delmas section of Port-au-Prince were destroyed. As a result, soon after the earthquake, Mari Terèz got on a bus with her mother and children on a bus and fled the city. But rather than head to the Haitian countryside, like thousands of other Haitians did after the
quake, they headed to Elías Piña. Curious as to why she had chosen this town in particular and how they had coped with the many hardships, I asked her to explain the logic behind her choice. Why did you decide to come here, I asked. “Poutèt m pa ale kapital. M pa al Baní poutét m pa gen kòb” [Because I couldn’t go to the Capital (Santo Domingo). I didn’t go to Baní because I didn’t have money].

As Mari Terèz had stated in her response, she would have preferred to go to Baní or Santo Domingo instead of Elías Piña. But she did not have the resources to get there. Thus, for her and for many other displaced Haitians, Elías Piña constituted a second-choice destination. But given her lack of resources, she went to Elías Piña, where her friend Maryanna, a used clothes vendor at the market, had been living for many years. The day after the earthquake she called her friend Maryanna on the phone and told her they were coming. “Lè ou rive, premye jou, ki kote ou desann?” [When you arrived, on the first day, where did you stay?], I asked her. "Kay Maryanna, yon zanmi anba. Paske m rive, m pa gen lajan pou peye kay” [Maryanna’s house, a friend of mine that lives down there. Because I arrived and I didn’t have money to pay rent]. When they arrived, Maryanna welcomed them into her home, where they stayed for over three weeks. During this time, Maryanna gave them food and let them live there for free. As soon as Mari Terèz found a cooking and cleaning job, she left Maryanna’s house and rented the house she lives in today.

Mari Terèz and her family faced many challenges in Elías Piña. One of their biggest difficulties was that Mari Terèz’ mother, Ann Wòz, had serious health issues. “Li vin soud aprè tranblemandetè a. Li pa tande. Li tande anvan tranblemandetè a” [She went deaf after the earthquake. She can’t hear. She used to be able to hear before the
earthquake]. She also has serious heart issues, too. As a result, Ann Wòz could not work, nor could she be the exclusive caretaker of her three young grandchildren. This presented a serious challenge for Mari Terèz, who had to go to work to support all of them. If her mother could not take care of them, then who would watch them while she was away at work? So, the solution lay with Tata, the seven-year-old daughter of a Port-au-Prince friend. Mari Terèz took Tata with her to Elías Piña so that she could help her take care of her triplets. Tata’s biological parents stayed behind in Port-au-Prince.

Curious about Tata’s background and the nature of this hasty fosterage arrangement, I asked Mari Terèz to elaborate on what happened that day. “Se yon pitit yon zanmi m. Li ban mwen pou li ka vinn la, pou ede m ansanm avek timoun yo, poutet manman m pa tande” [She’s the daughter of a friend of mine. She gave her to me so she could come here, to help me take care of the children because my mother can’t hear]. So as Mari Terèz provided me with further background, she was also laying out the motivations both parties had of becoming involved in this arrangement. Not only did Tata’s parents give her up so she could help Mari Terèz with her children, they also benefited because it provided Tata an opportunity to migrate to the Dominican Republic. Also, while I am unaware of Tata’s family’s situation in Port-au-Prince, it was most likely not easy for them there. So, perhaps Tata’s parents viewed Mari Terèz taking Tata as a relief, as well.

After a few visits to Mari Terez’s house, it became obvious that Tata played an essential role in the household. The triplets required constant supervision and attention. They needed someone to bathe and feed them. They were just starting to walk, so they also needed someone to keep them out of harm’s way. Mari Terez’s deaf and ill mother
was unable to carry out these tasks with one child, let alone three toddlers. As the sole breadwinner of the household, Mari Terez was out of the house every day of the week, from six thirty in the morning until six in the evening. Earning only one thousand pesos a month (thirty American dollars), she could not afford to pay someone to care for them, either. This meant that Tata, the seven-year-old foster daughter, was the only person Mari Terez could count on to watch her children.

Mari Terez’s use of fosterage during the displacement process was not limited to taking children into her home. She also gave up one of her children in the process. A few months after their arrival in Elías Piña, Sonya, Mari Terez’s sister came from Port-au-Prince for a brief visit. Upon her return, she took Disonn, one of the triplets with her back to Port-au-Prince. While Sonya’s situation in Port-au-Prince was far from ideal, she did not have any children of her own and she had a relatively stable living situation. In taking Disonn, Sonya was helping her sister and her mother out.

Edwidge

While, Mari Terez had taken on a foster child in the post-earthquake displacement process, Edwidge, another one of my informants, had been forced to leave her three children behind. Prior to January 12th, Edwidge lived with her sister, niece, nephew and three kids in a small house in Leogane, located near the epicenter of the earthquake. As single mothers without any type of child support, Edwidge and her sister sold orange juice in the local market and also held occasional domestic service jobs to support their children. While neither one of them made enough money individually, they were able to survive by pooling their resources and helping each other out.
While Edwidge’s life was certainly difficult before the earthquake, it became even more so afterwards. Though they were very grateful that no one in their family had died, they lost everything – their house, their few possessions, and their livelihoods. As a result, Edwidge and her sister could no longer live together. Edwidge’s sister, niece and nephew went to live with the youngest child’s father. Edwidge, on the other hand, returned to her parent’s home in Thomonde, a small town about eighty kilometers to the west of Elías Piña. Because Edwidge’s parents are very, very poor, Edwidge could not bring all her children with her. So, she left her nine-year-old daughter, Emeline, with her friend Lovly and her son Jeysonn with her friend Jessyka, in Port-au-Prince. Having found a place for her two eldest children, Edwidge and her daughter Lorèt headed to Thomonde to live with her parents.

Life in Thomonde, however, soon became untenable. After only a couple of weeks, it became evident that Edwidge could not stay with her parents much longer. Unable to find a job and with resources running out, Edwidge felt pressured to search for opportunities elsewhere. Thus, approximately three weeks after the earthquake, she left her daughter Lorèt with her parents in Thomonde and headed to Elías Piña. Upon her arrival, Edwidge went to live with Selami, a ninety-year-old Dominican woman who gave her a room in her small wooden home. In exchange, Edwidge helped Selami with some of the household chores. A few weeks after her arrival, Edwidge found a job washing clothes for a Dominican doctor in town. But while Edwidge’s intention was to send her three children money, she could not do so. Even though she had a rent-free place to live, she could not send her children any money. Her five hundred peso (sixteen US Dollars) a month salary was insufficient to cover her own living expenses,
let alone send them anything. Thus, the families that took her children in were forced to cover her children’s expenses themselves.

Thus, like Mari Terèz, Edwidge had also been left with no other option than to turn to fosterage as a way of dealing with the complexities of post-earthquake life. But, while Mari Terèz had been able to keep two of her children, Edwidge had been forced to place her children in three different households. In the end, the earthquake had forced a change in the life of Edwidge and of her children. They had gone from living together under one roof, to living in three different cities and in two different countries.

**Economic Difficulties, Loss of Support and Aid**

Mari Terèz and Edwidge’s examples above illustrate how and why some families turned to fosterage during the initial stages of the displacement process. As families left Haiti and headed to Elías Piña, they did so in a context of rapid change and constant uncertainty. Throughout this process, people had to find new places to live and new livelihoods. Families had to reconstitute their households, redistribute tasks and roles within the home. In doing so, they fostered other people’s children and / or gave up their own.

While at first, it was the migration process itself that led families to turn to fosterage; it was life in Elías Piña, the poorest province in the Dominican Republic, which led families to do so afterwards. The difficult economic conditions, lack of opportunities and the absence of aid led many Haitian families to enter into these arrangements. As months went by, the initial solidarity and overall sense of brotherhood that I described in Chapter 3 started to wane. Local families could no longer support the displaced. People felt pressured to find jobs and move out. This, however, was not an easy task in Elías Piña. Jobs were scarce and wages were
miniscule. Rent was high and food was expensive. In addition, the market, the town’s central economic activity, was stagnant. “El mercado ‘tá lento” [The market is slow], is what I heard throughout town soon after my arrival in June. Dominican vendors complained that Haitians had no money to buy. Customers complained that Haitians had nothing to sell. Many of the market’s peripheral jobs, like street cleaners and heavy lifters, were in low demand. “Es que la ayuda en Haití se acabó” [The aid in Haiti ran out], is how Jocelyn and Amantina, two Dominican rice vendors explained the phenomena. Dan O’Neil, the director of the Panamerican Development Foundation in Santo Domingo, confirmed their theories in a conversation we had in June 2010. While many countries had quickly pledged support for Haiti’s reconstruction, many governments had yet to disburse the funds. So, when Haitians had no aid, the Elías Piña market felt its consequences.

But even if the resources were available, selling at the binational market was nearly impossible for the recently-arrived, earthquake-displaced Haitian. Without money to start a business or to pay the city taxes, selling in the market was out of reach. The situation only got worse a few months after with the announcement of cholera in Haiti in October 2010. The suspension of all market operations, the closure of the border, and the intensification of deportations only made matters worse. As a result, in November the Elías Piña economy came to a virtual standstill. Not only were conditions getting progressively worse for everyone in Elías Piña, but nonprofit organizations in the area were unable to address the needs of the local population. I start this analysis with Yveline’s story, a Haitian woman who had placed three of her nine children into fosterage, one before the earthquake and two afterwards. Yveline’s
experiences illustrate how the post-earthquake context in Elías Piña forced families to foster their children. To better understand Yveline’s decision-making, however, I start by providing some background on her life before the earthquake.

**Yveline**

Life in Port-au-Prince was hard for Yveline and her husband, Robensonn. With three of nine children still at home, they barely made enough money to subsist. Yveline worked as a maid, six days a week, in a home on Delmas Street where she made approximately fifty American Dollars a month. “M te travay kay moun paske m pa konn li” [I worked in people’s homes because I can’t read or write]. Her husband, Robensonn, was also illiterate and did not have a permanent job. “Si li jwenn algo li fè algo” [If he found something, he did something]. Unfortunately, Robensonn rarely found anything. As a result, it was Yveline that provided the steady income in the household. In 2007, when Yveline’s neighbor asked her if she would be willing to let her fifteen-year-old daughter, Nancy, go live with a Dominican family friend of hers in Santo Domingo, she quickly said yes. They give her food, clothing, and they enrolled her in school, something Yveline and Robennsonn could not do. In exchange, Nancy does the washing and the cleaning in the home.

After the earthquake, life got even worse for Robensonn and Yveline. Yveline’s mother, father, brother and sister perished in the quake. Their home in Port-au-Prince crumbled to the ground, as did her employer’s house. So, Robensonn, Yveline, their daughters Sibelia and Asty left to their hometown in Cas, Haiti. After a few weeks there, they left to Elías Piña, where they stayed with, Toly, a friend. At first, Toly was helpful and very welcoming. She helped Yveline find a job cleaning and cooking in the home of
a well-to-do Haitian in Elías Piña. She earned approximately fifty American dollars a month, the same amount of money she made back in Port-au-Prince.

But three months after their arrival in Elías Piña, life started to get very hard for Yveline, Robensonn, and her two daughters. They no longer felt welcome at Toly’s home. So, they moved out of her friend’s house and moved into a small house she shared with three other displaced families. Soon after they moved in, however, Yveline lost her job. Robensonn, her husband, had not been able to find any work. So, they found themselves without money, in a strange town, undocumented and with two children to feed. So, when the opportunity came to give up her thirteen and fifteen-year-old to a family in Las Matas de Farfán and in San Juan de la Maguana, Yveline did not hesitate to do so.

I asked Yveline why she and her husband had decided to give up their daughters. In her emotional response, Yveline explains below that it was either give up her children or have them die of hunger.

Si mwayen ou pa bon, si ou gen nèf timoun nan men ou, si kay ou pa bon, ou pa gon ed k ap ede ou, e ou menm sèlman, manman ou mouri, papa ou mouri, yon gran fre ou mouri, yon gran se ou mouri, si yon lot mande ou, ou oblije ba li l. Poutet fo ou manje l, men si ou menm, ou pa bon. Ou pa gen bèf pou vann, ou pa gen chwal pou vann, ou a gen tè pou vann. Si ou gen yon moun di, 'Manman m grangou’, pito ou pran yon moun pou rete ave l; lage I lavil. Pou sa. Pase l mouri. Paske si l rete nan men m, m pa ka ba l li manje, epi m gade l mouri epi si m ba yon moun ni, epi yon moun ba l manje, epi si l ba moun nan yon sèvis, epi si li lave pou moun nan, epi moun nan ba l manje, rad, li mete l lekòl, epi si ....nan isit oubyen Ayiti li rete nan mize, pou sa m ba l li. Epi ki moun ki t ap gen yon pitit, pa gen moun ki pa t dako bay yon moun, lavi a di, poutet lavi a pa bon. Men si m mouri, pitit la sove. [If you don’t have any means, if you have nine children under your care, if your house is no good, if you don’t have any aid to help you and you only count on yourself; your mother died, your father died, your older brother died, your older sister died. If someone asks you [for a child], then you are forced to give her up. Because you have to feed them, but if you can’t do so because you are not well; you
don’t have a cow to sell, you don’t have a horse to sell, you don’t have land to sell. If you have someone telling you, ‘Mother, I’m hungry!’ You prefer to have your child live with someone. You send them to the city. Otherwise, they’ll die. Because if they stay with you, you can’t give them food. And I’m watching them die. And if I give them to someone, and that person gives them food, clothes. And if [the child] provides a service for them, if she washes [clothes] for a person and that person puts them in school. And if they stay here or in Haiti and they are living in misery…That’s why I gave her. What person that has a child…there isn’t anyone who wouldn’t agree to give up someone. Life is hard, because life is not good. But, if I die, my child will live].

In her response, Yveline had articulated two important elements that compelled her to place her daughters into fosterage: lack of resources and isolation from support networks. In the phrase, “If you have someone telling you, ‘Mother, I’m hungry!’ You prefer to have your child live with someone. You send them to the city. Otherwise, they’ll die,” she articulated her sense of desperation and the life and death issues that surrounded her decision. Faced by a situation in which she lacked the means to feed her daughters, she was left with no other choice but to place them with families that could do so. In the phrase, she is also implying that her fosterage decision was also a measure of last resort and something she would have preferred not to do.

Secondly, Yveline spoke of the role that the loss of and isolation from support networks, whether personal or institutional, played in her fosterage decision. In the phrase “if you don’t have any aid to help you and you only count on yourself,” Yveline spoke of how they were alone to deal with their post-earthquake reality. Their support networks, both in Haiti and in Elías Piña, had collapsed. With the death of family members, Yveline and her husband had lost their main source of support in Haiti. Also, as feelings of solidarity waned in Elías Piña, Yveline’s support networks in Elías Piña were diminishing, too. While her friend Toly had initially welcomed her family into their
home and had helped her find a job, there were limits to her assistance. So, they eventually had to move and find a place of their own.

Finally, in explaining her fosterage decisions, Yveline also spoke of how her exclusion from social assistance programs had pushed her to giving up her children. All throughout my fieldwork in Elías Piña, Haitians spoke of their sense of exclusion and isolation from local social services, as well as from other nonprofit organization programs. Although displaced Haitians like Yveline had access to local public school education for their children (Kaye 2012), as well as basic to medical attention, they lacked access to programs that helped low-income families like hers buy food and medicine. For example, Yveline and other undocumented Haitians like her did not have access to the Dominican government sponsored Programa de Solidaridad (Solidarity Program) that provided poor Dominican families with a small monthly cash allowance to purchase food. Also, they lacked access to the Dominican government’s program of Seguridad Social (Social Security), which provides financial assistance for the purchase of medicines and other health-related costs. Yveline and others lacked access because these programs are reserved for Dominican citizens. Also, while many longtime Haitian residents in Elías Piña have found ways of getting access to these resources through their social networks and ties with Dominicans in the community, displaced Haitians like Yveline had not been able to develop or nurture the necessary relationships to do so. While the Dominican government demonstrated admirable levels of solidarity and leadership in regards to the earthquake rescue and reconstruction process, their efforts were focused across the border, on Haitian soil. They did not address the direct needs of Haitians on the Dominican side of the border. In the end, the only source of social
services earthquake-displaced Haitians in the Dominican Republic had were those provided by nonprofit organizations. However, in Elías Piña these programs were virtually nonexistent and out of reach.

**Why was there no aid for the displaced in Elías Piña?**

In the weeks and few months that followed the January 12th earthquake, the town of Elías Piña experienced an increase in nonprofit activity and presence. Previously existing institutions saw an upsurge in their activities and in their funding. The local women’s health organization, for example, received additional funds from several of its international donors. They were able to purchase a used pickup truck and hire additional employees. New international nonprofit organizations set up offices in town. Foreign nonprofit workers from France, Germany, Spain, Canada and Uruguay, could be seen throughout the town.

However, despite this increase in nonprofit presence in Elías Piña, its residents saw a decline in the services available to them. After the earthquake, local organizations eliminated or diminished their Dominican-based programmatic components in favor of those implemented on Haitian soil. For instance, the same local women’s health nonprofit I mentioned above lost nearly all of the funding to provide free women’s health screenings for the women of Elías Piña. As a result, when I arrived in June, the nurse, phlebotomist, and cleaning lady, whose salaries were funded by these projects, had not been paid since March. “Es que no han renovado el contrato después del terremoto” [They have not renewed our contract after the earthquake], one of the employees explained. In contrast, the organization received funds for a new mental health counseling program for displaced families. Although their program incorporated a counseling component for displaced communities in Elías Piña, their efforts were
negligible at best. This issue was not exclusive to Elías Piña. Other organizations in
also saw their funding diverted towards Haitian projects. “UNICEF República
Dominicana no tiene dinero. Todo está en Haití” [UNICEF Dominican Republic does
not have any money. It is all in Haiti], an official in Santo Domingo explained during an
interview in June.

Although there was an increase in the physical presence of international
nonprofit organizations in Elías Piña, their projects rarely benefited the local population.
Concerned over the health and security of employees working in Haiti, nonprofit
personnel used Elías Piña as a bedroom community for its workers. Deemed a safer
and cleaner place to live, employees travelled back and forth between Elías Piña and
several locations across the border in Haiti on a daily basis. While their presence
certainly benefited the Elías Piña economy through expenditures in the town, none of
their efforts addressed the needs of the people like Yveline, who were living in Elías
Piña.

According to several people I spoke to in the nonprofit community, this shift
towards Haitian programs also had to do with broader changes in international donor
priorities. In the days, weeks and months that followed the earthquake, individuals,
organizations and governments donated unprecedented amounts of money to help Haiti
and Haitians. But in the competition for these donations, organizations had to
incorporate Haiti-based programmatic components, or else they risked not receiving any
funding. As a result, nonprofit organizations throughout the Dominican Republic
scrambled to include Haiti-based components into their programs. An executive in a
French nonprofit organization based in Santo Domingo but with projects in Elías Piña,
was frustrated at the issue. “Es que después del terremoto, el que no trabajaba Haití, no le daban nada. Todo el mundo tuvo que cambiar sus áreas programáticas hacia Haití para poder seguir” [After the earthquake, if you didn’t work Haiti, you wouldn’t get anything. Everyone had to change their programmatic areas to Haiti in order to continue working]. As a result, earthquake-displaced Haitians like Yveline, who had lost it all in the earthquake, became ineligible for international assistance because they were on the Dominican side of the border.

**Increased Risk**

In the previous section, we examined the first of two areas of post-earthquake fosterage transformation – increased prevalence. As people moved in and out of Port-au-Prince and as they made and remade their households, families gave up or took in children throughout the process. Also, we saw how families turned to fosterage as the overall economic conditions deteriorated, displaced families lost their networks of support and had difficulty getting aid. We now turn to the other key area of change in post-earthquake Elías Piña – increased risk. As more and more children were relocated throughout the region, the generalized context within which these arrangements were taking place was one in which foster children unfortunately became more vulnerable to deprivation, isolation and abuse.

In this section, we will look at three different, but interrelated contextual elements that contributed towards increased foster child vulnerability. First, we will see how receiving families were unable to fulfill the reciprocities these arrangements require. As families took in children, foster parents were unable to provide them with the food, clothing, shelter and education that this cultural arrangement requires. Second, foster children were under increased risk because the child wellbeing mechanisms that are
inherent in these arrangements were obstructed. Under normal circumstances, fosterage arrangements require repeated communication and contact between the foster child and his or her parents. One of the ways in which this is done is through visitation. Biological parents can visit children at the foster home or vice versa. If during one of these visits, the biological parent deems that the child is not being treated well, they can choose to terminate the arrangement. In this manner, the child is removed from potentially abusive situations. For many, this crucial mechanism was nearly impossible to carry out in post-earthquake Elías Piña. As the Dominican government changed its border enforcement and immigration control policies, undocumented biological parents were restricted in their mobility. Fearing deportation and without the money to pay the required bribes, parents could not visit the foster home to verify their child’s living conditions. The third factor, closely related to the second, has to do with restrictions on the Haitian side of the border. When a group of American missionaries was arrested trying to bring a group of children into the Dominican Republic, international attention quickly shifted towards the trans-border movement of children. As a result, international nonprofit organizations established checkpoints on the Haitian side to monitor the movement of Haitian children into the Dominican Republic. While the purpose of these efforts was to prevent child trafficking, they made the trans-border movement of children more difficult and dangerous.

To illustrate how this combination of factors contributed to an increase in child risk, I once again turn to Mari Terèz, Edwidge and Yveline. I start my analysis with Mari Terèz and her foster daughter Tata. In previous sections, we saw how Mari Terèz lost several family members, her home and her livelihood in Port-au-Prince. The day after
the earthquake, she got on a bus to Elías Piña with her triplets, her deaf mother and her seven-year-old foster daughter, Tata. Although this arrangement was decided upon quickly, there were cultural expectations for each of the parties involved. Despite these expectations, Mari Terèz was not fulfilling an important element in the fosterage agreement – sending Tata to school. But, as we will see, Mari Terèz was not intentionally keeping Tata from attending school. It was impossible for her to do so.

**Hindering of reciprocities**

Mari Terez was cognizant of her rights and responsibilities as a foster mother. In the interview excerpt below, she articulates the terms of the fosterage arrangement.

“Li di m, ‘pran li.’ Li di m, ‘men li’. Li di m konsidere l tankou pitit mwen. Konsidere l tankou pitit mwen. Li konn Tata pa pale panyol, li konn manman pa tande nan zorey li. Li di m vinn ave ti fi a paske si timoun yo ap gounmen, li (Ann Wòz, Mari Terèz’s mother) p ap konnen” [She said, ‘Take her.’ She told me, ‘Here she is.’ She told me to consider her as if she were my own child; to consider her as if she were my own child. She knew Tata doesn’t speak Spanish. She knew my mother is deaf. She told me to come with the girl because if the children fight, she (Ann Wòz, Mari Terèz’s mother) cannot tell].

In the previous statement, Mari Terèz articulated the expectations she should fulfill as a foster parent. When she said, “konsidere l tankou pitit mwen” [consider her as if she were my daughter] she was speaking of the cultural rule that she must treat Tata as if she were a biological child. As such, Tata should eat the same food her children eat, she must sleep in the same place her children sleep, she must be loved in the same manner as her own children, and she must send Tata to school. In exchange, Tata would help her with the care of her three toddlers because Mari Terez’s mother could not do so. Thus, every day when Mari Terèz went to work, Tata stayed at the house with the triplets, Gina, Disonn and Jaky. While Mari Terèz’s mother stayed at the house and supervised everything that happened, most of the burden of caring for the
three children fell upon the seven-year-old. Tata had to watch them so they did not get into trouble, bathe, dress and feed them. Mari Terèz’s mother’s job was to cook for them all.

I visited Mari Terez’s home multiple times throughout my fieldwork. Every time I was there, Tata appeared to be a happy, healthy, and energetic girl. Her interactions with Mari Terez, her mother and the children were positive and affectionate. So, in many ways, Mari Terez was indeed fulfilling her commitment of treating Tata as if she was her own. However, Mari Terez was falling short in one important aspect in the arrangement. She was not sending Tata to school.

In general, Haitian children can attend public elementary school in Elías Piña. “En la escuela de Carrizal, de cien estudiantes, ochenta son haitianos” [In the Carrizal school, eighty out of one hundred students are Haitians], an official in an international nonprofit in the area explained. Despite the fact that the majority of Haitians in Elías Piña are undocumented, they are allowed, even actively recruited, by principals and teachers in local schools. Haitian children often receive the free uniforms and textbooks the Dominican government distributes to public school students (Kaye 2012). Thus, it was not access to school and to resources that was keeping Mari Terèz from sending Tata to school. Rather, it was language and childcare issues that were doing so.

“Li poko ale poutet li poko byen konn pale dominicano” [She has not gone to school yet because she still can’t speak Dominican (Spanish) yet], Mari Terez explained. Language was a common barrier for Haitian children attending school in Elías Piña. Parents of recently-arrived migrants often wait for children to learn Spanish with friends before they are enrolled. In Elías Piña, schools lack special programs for
Spanish learners. Teachers do not usually speak Creole and are not trained in multicultural and multilingual education (Kaye 2012). As a result, children often struggle until they become proficient in Spanish.

At seven years of age, Tata’s chances of learning Spanish were excellent. In fact, she was already saying phrases and could carry out small conversations. I was certain that she would become fluent very soon. However, even if Tata reached native speaker proficiency, the prospects of her attending school would still be slim. Her role as main caretaker of the toddlers would inevitably keep her from doing so. Mari Terèz had no choice but to work and she needed someone to care for her children every day of the week for nearly twelve hours each day. As a result, Tata’s childcare duties were essential for their household. Unless Mari Terez found a primary school with evening classes, Tata would never be able to go to school. It wasn’t that Mari Terez was intentionally reneging on her responsibilities as a foster mother. Rather, it was impossible for her to fulfill them. For Tata to go to school, Mari Terez would have to quit her job.

**Obstruction of foster child wellbeing mechanisms**

In order to ensure foster child wellbeing, fosterage arrangements have important cultural mechanisms in place to keep children from being mistreated or abused. Although biological parents have relinquished their child to another family, they retain the right to oversee the childrearing process. This is done by having continued contact either directly or indirectly with the child. Direct contact between the biological parents and the children is done in three ways. Biological parents can carry out unannounced visits at the foster child home. Second, the foster child can spend time with his family by leaving the foster home and visiting his or her biological household. During these
visits, the child must be allowed to spend time alone with the family member so they can feel free to speak candidly about their situation. If the child says that he or she is not being treated well, parents can choose to terminate the arrangement at any time. Doña Juana, a longtime Dominican resident of Elías Piña, has an eleven-year-old Haitian foster daughter, Jessica. Juana has been fostering Jessica for eight years. Jessica’s Haitian mother lives on a farm, up in the mountains of Elías Piña. But every two weeks, when Jessica’s mother comes down the mountain to go to the market, she always stops by Doña Juana’s house to check up on her daughter. When she comes, Jessica and her mother sit in the living room and talk. “Yo las dejo ahí que hablen solas. Yo me voy pa’ la cocina a hacer oficio” [I let them talk there alone. I go to the kitchen to do chores].

Finally, direct contact can be had via cellular phones, which are now relatively cheap and accessible to many people in both Haiti and the Dominican Republic. Also, biological parents and children can also have indirect contact between each other. Through family members or friends biological parents can get news about their children’s wellbeing.

But while this mechanism might work in most circumstances, in post-earthquake Elías Piña it became difficult nearly impossible to do so for earthquake-displaced families. When visitation involves travelling hundreds of kilometers, paying for expensive bus fare, bribes, and crossing an international border, this task became nearly impossible. For example, visitation was out of the question for Tata’s parents. They were in Port-au-Prince and had no money to pay the trip or for the bribes they would likely have to pay at the border. Not only could Tata’s parents not come to the Dominican Republic, but Tata couldn’t go to Port-au-Prince, either. Mari Terez did not
have the money to take Tata to visit her parents. Doing so would also require taking
days off from work and finding someone to care for her young children. Although Mari
Terez and Tata’s parents both had a cellular phone, speaking to Tata’s parents was not
a possibility either. In the interview excerpt below, Mari Terez explains why.

Tess: Tata, eske ou pale ak manman ou? [Tata, do you speak to your mother?]
Tata: Non [No].
Li pa gen siyal, li pa gen siyal. Li menm, li ka rele m. Li ka moute sou têt
monn, pou li rele m. Men, mwen menm, m pa ka rele l. Telefonn pa m
nan se panyol, telefonn pa l se aisyen. Li menm, li pa rele m. Mwen
menm, m pa ka rele l [No, where her mother is, there are no cel phone
signals. I can’t talk to her on the phone. She does not have a signal. She
does not have a signal. She can call me herself. She can climb to the top
of a hill to call me. But me, I can’t call her. My phone is Dominican, her
phone is Haitian. She can call me. But, I can’t call her].

In the end, the incompatibility between Dominican and Haitian cellular phone
services and the lack of a reliable signal had isolated and incommunicated Tata from
her parents and from her family. In fact, Tata had not seen or spoken to her parents in
eight months. Nobody in Tata’s family had come to Elías Piña to ensure she was being
treated well. Thus, they had no way of knowing whether Tata was being treated well or
that she was not being abused. All they really had to go on was the blind trust that Mari
Terez was fulfilling her end of the bargain. Unfortunately, we know that this was not the
case.

**Missionaries, cholera and an intensification of border control**

Child wellbeing checks became even more difficult to carry out with the
intensification of border and immigration control policies in Elías Piña. In Chapter 2, we
saw how the Dominican government ordered the relaxation of border enforcement
immediately after the earthquake in order to facilitate the rescue and aid process. Also,
it ordered a halt in the deportation of undocumented Haitians throughout the Dominican Republic. As a result, it became easier for Haitians to travel back and forth between both countries. But, two subsequent developments would make the relatively ease with which the movement of people and goods across the Haitian-Dominican border change considerably: the arrest of the missionaries trying to bring Haitian children into the Dominican Republic and the announcement of the cholera epidemic in Haiti. Both events further limited the ability of parents to monitor the foster childrearing process in significant ways.

On January 29, 2010, ten American missionaries from the New Life Children’s Refuge organization in Idaho were arrested on the Haitian-Dominican border for allegedly kidnapping thirty three Haitian children (Associated Press 2010). The group claimed, however, that they intended to take these children to an orphanage in the town of Cabarete in the Dominican Republic. However, they had no written permission from the Haitian government or from the children’s parents to do so. To make matters worse, several of the children were not, in fact, orphans, as the group had initially claimed. While the ten American missionaries were subsequently released from prison, this event had far-reaching consequences. “Fearful of the possibility that unscrupulous traffickers would take advantage of Haiti’s sundered justice system to take children from poor families for illegal adoptions, prostitution or slavery, the government had halted all adoptions except those already in motion before the earthquake” (Thompson 2010:1). Also, it shifted the media attention towards the trans-border movement of children from Haiti into the Dominican Republic. As such, international nonprofit organizations like UNICEF and Heartland Alliance, in conjunction with Haitian authorities, established
checkpoints in the key border crossing points to make sure children were not being trafficked into the Dominican Republic. As a result, the back and forth movement of children across the Haitian-Dominican border became much more scrutinized.

I interviewed the members of the UNICEF and Heartland Alliance team in Elías Piña in September 2010. I also observed them as they performed their child monitoring duties at the border. A team of three women and one man was stationed on the Haitian side, close to the border crossing gate. They repeatedly stopped people travelling with children and recorded the name, address and destination of every child they approached. This was a relatively easy and straightforward task for the small number of children with documents travelling with their parents. However, the majority of children that entered into Elías Piña lacked birth certificates, travelled alone or with other people that were not their parents. In these cases, the team had to carry out an extensive interview with both the child and the adult accompanying them. Also, they had to make repeated phone calls to verify information.

For anyone that has witnessed a market day in Elías Piña, the tasks required of this team were daunting. On market days, thousands of Haitians, including children, cross the border into the Dominican Republic. Monitoring the movement of children within this deluge of people is a near impossible task, particularly for four people without armed officers for support. Well aware of these and many other limitations, the group admitted that their presence had not been successful in thwarting the trafficking of children. Not only did they not have the necessary labor force, but they only worked until four o’clock in the afternoon. As a result, nobody monitored the movement of children after that time. Also, UNICEF and Heartland Alliance only had teams at the
official border crossing points. Thus, the unofficial paths through which most of the trafficking was done, were left uncheck. In the end, the team had been successful at increasing profit margins for traffickers. Their presence made the movement of children riskier harder, and costlier.

For families involved in fosterage arrangements in the region, UNICEF and Heartland Alliance’s presence on the border presented major issues. Their scrutiny made it much harder for families in trans-border fosterage arrangements to keep in touch. For example, for parents like Edwidge, who had come to Elías Piña after the earthquake and left her children behind, it became harder for them to visit her. For one, having lost all her children’s birth certificates in the earthquake, she had no way of proving that her children were hers. While she could have eventually done so through an interview process, the risk of having to do so intimidated her. Their presence was also an obstacle for Mari Terèz and Tata because it made it harder for her to send Tata to visit her parents in Port-au-Prince. If she did, she feared that Tata might not be allowed back into Elías Piña.

Foster child supervision mechanisms were also impacted by the Dominican government’s response to the cholera epidemic in Haiti. In the efforts of keeping the disease from making its way into the country, the Dominican government ordered the implementation of a quarantine line at the border. As such, public health officials ordered the immediate suspension of the binational market. The commercial exchanges upon which so many people in the region depended on came to a halt. In addition, the armed forces sealed off the border. Haitians were no longer allowed into the Dominican Republic to buy or sell at the market. They also intensified the
deportation of undocumented Haitians. As a result, undocumented Haitians feared leaving their homes.

In this context of limited mobility and economic collapse, foster children became even more isolated. Families that left children behind in Haiti could not go to see them because if they left they would not be allowed back into the Dominican Republic. Their children could not come to Elías Piña because the government was not allowing anyone to enter from Haiti. The same was the case for families with children in the Dominican Republic. The intensification of deportations within Elías Piña itself limited the movement of Haitians in the town. Deportation vehicles roamed the streets in search for Haitians. As a result, people feared leaving their homes and foster families became more isolated from their children. Edwidge, the mother who had placed three of her children into fosterage summarized the situation best in the following phrase: “Ou pa gen lajan, ou pa gen papye” [You don’t have money, you don’t have papers]. Without income from the market and without documents to move about, it was very difficult for her to follow up with her children.

**Conclusion**

Fosterage arrangements have been a common parenting strategy in both Haiti and the Dominican Republic. For many decades, families have placed children with others to help them adapt to the changes that have impacted the region. But while this practice has been in use for many years, the earthquake and its aftermath changed this sociocultural practice in significant ways. In Chapter 8, we discussed two major areas of transformation: increased prevalence and increased risk. The massive population movements that followed the earthquake generated many new fosterage arrangements. As people faced the many uncertainties of displacement life, they frequently gave up or
took in children to assist them in the process. For example, Edwidge, whose story I detailed above, left her three children behind while she came to Elías Piña for work. Mari Terez, in turn, took in a seven-year-old girl. Haitians also turned to fosterage later on in the displacement process. As post-earthquake solidarity declined, the economic opportunities became scarce and people had difficulty accessing aid, many people were left with no choice but to give up their children.

As more and more families became involved in child fosterage, they were doing so under conditions of increased risk for the children involved. This amplification was the result of two general factors. First, children were placed in arrangements in which the participants could not fulfill the reciprocities upon which the arrangement is based on. As we saw with Mari Terez and Tata’s example, Mari Terez was not fulfilling the expectation that she treat Tata like a daughter because she was not able to send Tata to school. Secondly, we examined how foster child risk was increased through the obstruction of foster child wellbeing mechanisms. Most families lacked the money to visit their children to verify that they were being treated well in the foster home. This important process became even more challenging with the arrest of the ten American missionaries on the Haitian-Dominican border and the announcement of the cholera epidemic in Haiti. Both events were followed by measures that restricted the physical movement of people in Elías Piña and across the border. In the end, these measures did not stop trafficking, nor did they stop cholera from entering the country. Sadly, they succeeded in making biological families isolated from their children.
CHAPTER 9
CONCLUDING REMARKS

The January 12th earthquake that destroyed Port-au-Prince and its surrounding area is likely one of the deadliest catastrophes the world has ever seen. With death tolls at approximately two hundred thousand people, equal number of injured and over a million people homeless this disaster has certainly earned the superlatives “worst” and “deadliest” often associated with its name. Unfortunately, the death and human suffering brought about by the earthquake went beyond the Port-au-Prince area and were felt throughout Haiti. According to the International Organization for Migration (2012), over one and a half million people were displaced by the earthquake. As people fled the devastation, many headed towards the rural areas of the country in search of refuge. As a result, the resources of the very poor, rural areas of the country were severely strained. From one day to the next, the poorest of Haiti were suddenly faced with the daunting task of feeding many, many more mouths. To make matters worse, the cholera outbreak announced in October of that same year, also claimed the lives of thousands more throughout the entire country. To this day, this deadly disease has infected over six hundred thousand Haitians, of which nearly eight thousand of them have not survived (Ivers 2013).

While chaos, devastation, death and suffering affected most, the fate of Haitian children became a primary concern. As it became obvious that the earthquake had stretched Haitian society to its limits, concerns over the impact of the earthquake on Haitian children increased. In particular, many were concerned over children involved in the informal practice of child fosterage, where poorer Haitian families from rural areas place one or more of their children with an economically better-off household in the city
(Cohen 2010, Paul 2010). Prior to the earthquake, these children often lived in settings of virtual child servitude and relied on weak family networks and social ties for support (Pan American Development Foundation 2009). The earthquake, however, effectively threw these networks and ties into chaos (Cohen 2010). Thus, policy makers, non-governmental organizations and aid workers asked: (1) What will happen to current foster children after the crisis and (2) How will the informal institution of child fosterage respond to the changes brought about by the earthquake (Cohen 2010)?

The aim of this dissertation project was to help answer these questions. But, rather than focus on fosterage arrangements within Haiti, my aim was to look at the arrangements that took place along the Haitian-Dominican border, more specifically in the Haitian-Dominican border town of Elías Piña. There, as in other border locations, the traditional practice of placing Haitian children with Haitian families operates alongside the practice of placing children with both Dominican and Haitian families across the border. Prior to the earthquake, these informal arrangements provoked concerns of child labor, smuggling, trafficking, and child abuse (Smucker and Murray 2004, Kulstad 2006). After the earthquake, concerns increased particularly after the scandal that erupted over missionaries’ attempts to bring Haitian children to the Dominican Republic (Associated Press 2010).

I approached this project from the theoretical perspective that disasters are not fortuitous and punctuated events; rather, they are understood as processes that result from the intersection of a hazard with a vulnerable population (Oliver-Smith 1992:3). Thus, disasters occur when socioculturally, politically and economically-created vulnerable populations find themselves in the path of a destructive agent. In addition,
disasters do not stop with the end of the hazard event. Rather, its effects are often long-lasting and its effects far-reaching.

Previous studies have shed light into human behavior in disaster contexts. As individuals are faced with death and devastation, they must quickly adapt to this new context and “reinvent their cultural systems” (Oliver-Smith 1992:6). As humans adapt to the new social and environmental context imposed upon them, humans draw from previous practices and beliefs “to reconstitute the social patterns and institutions of the past” (Oliver-Smith 1992:16). Efforts to return to a certain degree of normalcy, however, are challenged by the subsequent aid and reconstruction process. Outside organizations enter devastated areas with assistance and reconstruction goals that often conflict with those of the community and thus create a situation that can be just as devastating for the community as the disaster itself (Schuller 2008). In addition, the aid and reconstruction process creates a new economy that exacerbates pre-existing inequalities and alters patterns of cooperation and solidarity (De Wall 2008). While the intentions of many in disaster contexts are commendable, many efforts end up doing more harm than good.

Thus, to understand how fosterage practices changed after the January 2010 earthquake, we must approach the issue from two key perspectives: vulnerability and adaptation. From the vulnerability perspective, I addressed several different questions. What factor or factors led to the creation of the vulnerable foster child population? Why do Haitian and Dominican families in the region place their children with others? I addressed these important questions in Chapters 4, 5 and 7. Also, I addressed the issue of vulnerability within the Elías Piña community. The main guiding question was
as follows: Why were Elías Piña residents in general and Haitian migrants in particular, vulnerable to the earthquake and its aftermath? In Chapters 2 through 7, I focused on the complex sociocultural, historical and economic processes that led to making the town of Elías Piña vulnerable. From the adaptation point of view, I examined how families dealt with the myriad of issues their post-earthquake lives presented. In Chapter 8, I described how displaced Haitians turned to child fosterage. I also described how outsider intervention efforts, particularly those related to child fosterage, and the international border’s presence, challenged the entire fosterage process. I summarize these points below.

**Vulnerability**

Throughout its history, the border area has been perceived by outsiders as a problematic region. Whether it was the Spanish colonists, the Trujillo dictatorial regime, or more recent Dominican administrations, state policies towards the border have been frequently shaped by notions that the region is one that needs fixing or that needs to be brought under state control. For example, as early as the 1600s, the Spanish colonial government ordered the depopulation of the region in order to thwart the unauthorized trade with the French buccaneers. Many years later, during Trujillo’s regime, the border region became an area of concern, once again, as its residents were involved in unauthorized commercial activity and interacted with Haitians in ways that made defining where the Dominican Republic ended and Haiti began nearly impossible to do. As a result, the Trujillo government decided upon a series of measures to Dominicanize the border region. These measures included the slaughter of thousands of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent. It also included the forced transformation of a cattle and
commercially-based economy, to one in which exchanges with Haiti were illegal and agriculture prevailed.

After Trujillo’s death, these severe measures to impede Haitian-Dominican interaction slowly eased. People were no longer put in jail for speaking to Haitians. However, life became much, much harder for the residents of this town. With Trujillo gone, border residents were ignored by different governments in Santo Domingo. According to the Oficina de Desarrollo Humano República Dominicana (2010), Elías Piña has received little to none government investment since Trujillo’s government. While subsequent administrations have invested elsewhere, Elías Piña has been overlooked repeatedly. While other nearby regions like San Juan de la Maguana have been benefited by major investments in irrigation infrastructure, in Elías Piña most farmers rely on rainfall to grow their crop. As such, agriculture in Elías Piña is amongst the least productive in the nation. Farmers have been unable to compete effectively with other farming regions, particularly in the newly liberalized agricultural market.

Faced with these challenges, farming was no longer a viable lifestyle for the people in the region. As a result, a mass exodus from Elías Piña soon ensued and continues to this day.

Events across the border, in Haiti, also played a key role in shaping present day Elías Piña. After the ousting of Jean Claude Duvalier in 1986, Haiti entered a seemingly endless period of political instability that left its economy in shambles. As a result, many Haitians abandoned farming and migrated to other locations, including Elías Piña. While this certainly had important consequences for Elías Piña society, the Haitian-related event that had the most transformative effects was the military coup against
President Aristide and the subsequent international trade embargo that followed. It was this event that eventually led to the development of the binational market, the foundation of the city of Elías Piña’s economy.

In a matter of a few years, life in the town of Elías Piña was transformed. While agriculture still remains important to the town, it is the market that determines the rhythm of daily life. Twice a week, the international border gates are opened and thousands of Haitians are allowed to enter the town to buy and sell a wide variety of goods. Dominicans from throughout the country come to participate in the vibrant business that ensues. The market’s centrality has had important consequences for Elías Piña’s socioeconomic and sociocultural structure. For one, commerce with Haitians is what drives the Elías Piña economy. But also, Haitian-Dominican interactions and relationships are a part of everyday life. As a result, Elías Piña has returned, in some way, to the multicultural society Trujillo had sought to do away with. In present day Elías Piña, multiethnic and trans-border families are common. Spanish and Haitian Creole bilingualism is not unusual.

But while there is increased interaction between these groups, the relationship between Haitians and Dominicans is asymmetrical. While the richest individuals in Elías Piña are of Haitian descent, the majority of the Haitian population in this town occupies the bottom rung of the socioeconomic ladder. In fact, the lives of Haitian immigrants, particularly those of recent arrival, are very difficult. Haitian immigrants hold the lowest-paying occupations like cooking and cleaning or hauling heavy loads to sell at the market. Others subsist from their small-scale sales at the market. Moreover, undocumented Haitians in Elías Piña live a life of hiding and fear as they are under near
constant threat of deportation by the border enforcement officers. Also, while Haitians have access to free health care and elementary school education, undocumented children cannot attend school beyond the eighth grade. But perhaps most significantly, poor undocumented Haitians in Elías Piña have difficulty accessing the higher-paid jobs available in other regions of the Dominican Republic. Without official documents and without the money to pay for the necessary Dominican military bribes, poor undocumented Haitians are stuck in the perpetual poverty that Elías Piña has to offer.

Haitian-Dominican difference, thus, is the key element that underlies Elías Piña societal structure. Whether one is considered Haitian or one is considered Dominican determines much of a person’s opportunities and access to resources. For example, a Dominican has the right to transit freely throughout Elías Piña and the entire Dominican Republic, for that matter. Undocumented Haitians do not. Dominican children can finish high school and go on to get a university degree. Undocumented Haitian children cannot. Dominican market vendors pay less market taxes. Haitian vendors pay substantially more. But, while Haitian-Dominican difference is important, Elíaspiñenses have developed an alternative means of doing so. Although outsiders rely heavily on physiognomic characteristics, mostly skin pigmentation and facial features, to establish Haitianness and Dominicanness, Elíaspiñenses rely more on cultural aspects like language and religion. Also, in Elías Piña, Dominicanness is more or less an achievable trait. If one learns to act Dominican, one can be considered to be one. But, the easiest way to attain citizenship is through wealth. With affluence, Haitians can become Dominican and ascend in local society.
These idiosyncratic notions of difference, however, often conflict with the worldviews held by people from outside the region. As Elíaspiñenses leave the safety of their sociocultural space, they are sometimes faced with having to validate their Dominicanness. Someone might be considered Dominican in Elías Piña, but be categorized as a Haitian elsewhere. Such was the case of Juana, who had to show her identification card when military inspectors mistook her for a Haitian because of her dark-skin. The opposite occurred with Jessica, the light-skinned, undocumented Haitian, who slipped through the immigration cracks because her skin color made her fit notions of the Dominican body. Thus, many Elíaspiñenses are forced to maneuver between conflictive definitions of Dominicanness and Haitianness. Dark-skinned Dominicans in particular, struggle as they try to find their place in a society that defines belonging in ways in which they do not fit in.

In the end, the confluence of historical, economic and sociocultural forces has placed Elías Piña and its residents in a disadvantageous position. At this moment, I must, once again, quote Isa Contreras, who articulated the situation best in his radio interview (Oficina de Desarrollo Humano República Dominicana 2010b). “Elías Piña is an abandoned province. From the capital, where all the decisions are made, where all the checks are written, the province is only seen as a dividing line. It is not seen as a place where people with rights live and it is not seen as a place where people who have the right to lead a dignified life live.”

Elías Piña’s long history of systematic neglect, agricultural collapse, the mass exodus that followed, and the influx of poor, Haitian migrants, has left the people of this town with very limited opportunities. As a result, most Elíaspiñenses depend
exclusively on the binational market for their survival. The town’s motto, “Ciudad Mercado” (Market City), which is prominently displayed as one enters town, could not be more accurate. The market not only feeds Elías Piña, but it defines many other aspects of life as well. But while the people in this town depend on the market, the market depends on national border policy. For the market to exist, the Dominican government must continue with its policy of allowing the free, but controlled, entry of Haitians into Elías Piña and of Elíaspiñenses into Haiti. Since its inception, the border has remained opened allowing for the market to operate. However, this does not mean that it will always be the case. The border area has a special significance within the Dominican national psyche. In a country where fears that an invasion of Haitians is slowly but consistently taking place, the border is seen as both the barrier where unwanted invaders must be stopped. It has also been used as a tool to incite or quell national fears. As a result, national policies towards the region and towards the market are more uncertain than might initially appear. This became more than evident after the events and processes set in motion by the earthquake of January 12th. Now, I will address the second theme of this dissertation – adaptation. How did the earthquake impact family life and fosterage arrangements in Elías Piña?

The Earthquake

While the January 12th earthquake is usually thought of as a Haitian event, I have argued throughout this dissertation that this is an inaccurate representation because its effects were felt throughout the entire island. Thus, rather than being Haitian in nature, it is, rather, a Hispaniolan phenomenon. In Chapter 3, I recounted some of the key events and processes I observed on that day in Santo Domingo. As Port-au-Prince was being crushed by the earthquake, Dominicans were simultaneously
feeling the reverberations generated by these tectonic shifts. While Dominicans are used to tremors, when the country learned about its catastrophic consequences in Haiti, it acquired special social meaning and it caused changes in collective behavior. For one, the earthquake generated much fear amongst Dominicans. It also changed the way Dominicans perceived their natural and human environments. In a somewhat less obvious fashion, it also created a sense of connectedness with Haitians. As Dominicans realized that they, too, share in the island’s seismic risk, Dominicans could no longer conceive of themselves as living in a world that is separate and distinct from Haiti. Moreover, the earthquake generated a wave of unprecedented and generalized solidarity amongst the population. As I described in Chapter 3, the earthquake caused Dominicans to redefine their relationship with Haitians, albeit temporarily. In the days that followed January 12th, Dominicans and Haitians became kin; they became “nuestros hermanos” [our brothers]. This notion of solidarity and kinship also reached the government. In fact, the Dominican government became central in the post-earthquake rescue and aid process. Members of the Dominican military were amongst the first to enter the devastated area. Government actions also facilitated the logistics for international rescue and aid organizations. Of particular relevance for Elíás Piña and other border areas was the fact that the government ordered the opening of the border in order to allow for the entry of the wounded into Dominican hospitals. As Compa, my neighbor in Elíás Piña told me, “ahí no paraban a nadie” [they wouldn’t stop anyone over there].

Although the earthquake and its effects were felt all the way in Santo Domingo, Elíás Piña and other border regions felt its consequences much more intensely. For
one, Elíaspiñenses felt a much stronger shaking. According to the United States Geological Survey (2010), Elías Piña experienced moderate shaking, while in Santo Domingo people had only felt shaking that was characterized as light. Also, Elíaspiñenses were much more connected to what had happened in Port-au-Prince. Elíaspiñenses lost family members and the lost friends in the destruction. In addition, Elías Piña received a large wave of earthquake-displaced individuals. As Haitians fled the chaos and destruction in Port-au-Prince and its surrounding areas, many of them reached out to friends and family living in Elías Piña.

The earthquake also affected Elías Piña because it disrupted the intricate social and economic systems that underlie the town’s structure. While many factors certainly came to bear upon this interference, it was the Dominican government’s changing border policies that had the biggest influence. Although the arrival of the displaced to Elías Piña was largely driven by the existence of kin and other social networks, the fact that the Dominican government ordered the opening of the border and the amelioration of the military’s deportation efforts had much to do with this influx as well. When cholera was announced in Haiti, the government changed its policy yet again and it did so in a drastic fashion. As the country feared the entry of a new and deadly disease, different sectors of Dominican society called for the creation of a quarantine line at the border. This involved closing the border completely and not allowing the entry of Haitians or Haitian goods into the country. Also, the government ordered the suspension of the binational markets as many feared that these exchanges would likely lead to cholera contamination. Thus, from one day to the next, Elíaspiñenses woke up without a market and without their principal means of subsistence.
Nonprofits and other aid organizations also had a hand in disrupting life in the region. Much of the disruption had to do with the competition for funds. After January 12th, donor agencies focused their attention almost exclusively on Haiti. Thus, in the days and weeks that followed, local organizations had to quickly change their agendas from Dominican-related issues to Haitian ones. Also, as funds for Haitian projects increased, a flurry of new organizations arrived in Elías Piña. But while their numbers mounted, only a negligible portion of their efforts were destined to help people within the community. Elías Piña became the bedroom community their employees would return to at the end of each day. Thus, every day, Elíaspiñenses witnessed how nonprofit workers and aid travelled across the border, to Haiti, ignoring the need so clearly evident on the Dominican side. Unfortunately, these ethnically-driven definitions of disaster victims ended up having a detrimental effect on Haitian-Dominican relations in the town.

**Maps, Borders and Disasters**

In order to fully comprehend the earthquake’s impact on the region, I must return, once again, to the mural of the island of Hispaniola I saw in the Liceo Juan Pablo Duarte. In Chapter 2, I recounted how this map represents prevalent notions about the relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic. According to this map, both countries are separate, distinct and its people inhabit completely different, disjointed and separate worlds. This map also misrepresents the realities of border life. It assumes that Haitian and Dominican lives end abruptly at the international border. It overlooks the intricate socioeconomic and sociocultural ties that exist between both sides. It ignores that local livelihoods depend on what happens in Haiti and that families span both sides of the border. Thus, to represent life in Elías Piña the dividing line
between both countries would have to be a diffuse and porous one, rather than a stark, solid line.

Unfortunately, the notions of Haitian-Dominican separation and of border life represented on this map also permeated the responses to the January 12th earthquake and its aftermath. This disaster was conceptualized as Haitian in nature and as such responses to it were implemented accordingly. Nonprofit organizations in the area had to shift their areas of focus to Haiti-based projects in order to receive funding. Nonprofits focused their work on the Haitian side of the border, despite the fact that local displaced families in Elías Piña were in need of aid. Underlying these funding policies were the very same notions represented on the map; that is, that the Dominican Republic and Haiti are separate and disjointed. Thus, in the end, earthquake-displaced families were at a disadvantage in accessing certain support services because they were on the wrong side of the border. These Haiti-exclusive policies had major implications for people like Yveline. Without a job and without aid programs in Elías Piña to assist her, she was forced to place her two daughters into fosterage.

The ideas about border life represented on the map were also present in the Dominican government’s cholera prevention measures. In the efforts of keeping the disease from entering the country, the government returned to the historical pattern of attempting to control Haitian and Dominican interactions. In ordering the suspension of the binational market, closing the border and increasing deportations, the government was trying to enforce the notion that Dominican life and Haitian life end at their respective borders. In order to allay the increasing fears towards this new Haitian
threat, the government sacrificed the livelihoods of the people living in this region. In other words, the border was treated as if it was simply a line.

Throughout this process, we must once again return to the seemingly simple, yet fundamental question Dudasik (1980) raised regarding the 1970 earthquake in Peru: Who are the victims? Dudasik observed that relief organizations often defined disaster victims by the geographical area of impact. As such, assistance was offered mostly to event victims or to those that were present at the the hazard event. This framework “overlook[s] those that are impacted by the disruption of pre-existing sociocultural patterns” (Dudasik 1980:329) and it ignores that disasters can affect people in multiple ways and in far away locations. Dudasik suggests, instead, that post-disaster interventions must allow for different degrees and types of victims. He suggested that post-disaster aid efforts must “recognize as possible victims persons outside the area of impact” (1980:329).

Given my findings, I second Dudasik (1980) in his recommendations. Disasters are complex phenomena that have wide-reaching and systemic effects. As such, effective intervention strategies must take into consideration the complex web of relationships between the area of impact and far away locations. While the international community attempted to do just this by focusing on areas outside of Port-au-Prince, they fell short in their efforts by stopping at the border and excluding the needs of individuals across the border in places that have been historically, socioculturally and socioeconomically linked to Port-au-Prince. This relationship was articulated best by a Haitian woman that visited Elías Piña regularly. “Elia spin se lakou nou” [Elías Piña is
our backyard]. Thus, to Dudasik’s recommendations I would add that victimization in disaster contexts cannot be defined or restricted by international borders either.

**Family Life**

Throughout this tumultuous and often unpredictable process, family life was impacted significantly. Parents often turned to fosterage as a way of readjusting to their new lives. This strategy, as we saw in Chapter 7, is certainly not new. Both groups have a long history of turning to fosterage as a means of adjusting to the loss of viable subsistence strategies. For example, as agriculture declined in both countries and people were forced to migrate in search for jobs, fosterage became one of the ways in which people redistributed parenting obligations. Dominican mothers, like Cuca, whose story I shared in Chapter 5, left their children in the care of others as they were forced to go to Santo Domingo. Haitians did the same. As they left different parts of Haiti and headed towards Elías Piña, they left their children behind with families and friends. But even as Haitian and Dominican fosterage patterns share similarities in this regard, there is one important distinction. Haitians also placed children with Dominican families as well. Not only did these arrangements help Haitians redistribute the burden of childrearing with other families, it also provided a mechanism through which Haitian children migrated to the Dominican Republic and gained Dominican citizenship.

Even as Haitians and Dominicans were accustomed to fosterage arrangements, the earthquake changed the practice in the region. For one, as the wave of earthquake-displaced Haitians made its way into Elías Piña, it left many new fosterage arrangements in its wake. In Chapter 8, I described how displaced families placed their children in fosterage arrangements in Haiti as they came to Elías Piña. Families took on other people’s children as well. Such was the case of Mari Terèz who was left
widowed and homeless by the earthquake. Forced to work to support her triplets and her frail mother, Mari Terèz needed someone that could watch her kids when she was at work. Tata, the seven-year-old daughter of a friend in Port-au-Prince, came with her to help her with her childcare needs. Some months later, Mari Terèz also placed her son, Disonn, with her sister, who lived in Port-au-Prince. Not soon after, as the wave of post-earthquake solidarity dwindled, economic conditions worsened and the displaced could not find aid, families turned to fosterage as a solution. As Yveline’s example in the Chapter 9 makes evident, it was either give up her daughters to others or face their potential starvation. In the end, while the back-and-forth and trans-border movement of children between Port-au-Prince, Elías Piña, and Santo Domingo was not new, the earthquake certainly intensified them.

The post-earthquake context also generated conditions of increased risk for foster children. As families adjusted to their new lives, they often could not fulfill the cultural obligations inherent in these arrangements. For example, Mari Terez was unable to send Tata, her foster daughter, to school because she needed someone to care for her children while she was at work. Thus, in the post-earthquake context, foster children were less likely to have their needs met. Also, foster child risk increased as well because important cultural mechanisms that are in place to ensure child wellbeing were obstructed. When the ten American missionaries were arrested on the Haitian-Dominican border, organizations such as UNICEF and Heartland Alliance established an increased presence on the border to monitor and control the trans-border movement of children. But controlling the movement of thousands of children, particularly on market days, proved to be a daunting task. My observations and
interviews with officials revealed that these attempts had little to no real effect on the prevention of child trafficking. Rather, they actually promoted the circulation of children at night and through the unofficial, dangerous back roads. In the end, the UNICEF and Heartland Alliance’s presence succeeded mostly at increasing the profit margins of human traffickers that brought people into the Dominican Republic.

The complex events that followed the announcement of cholera in Haiti also increased foster child risk. Not only did the closure of the border and the suspension of the binational market bring the local economy to a dramatic halt, it also made the visitation element of fosterage arrangements nearly impossible to carry out. With the border closed, how could biological parents like Edwidge, who had left her three children in Haiti, follow up on their wellbeing? In addition, Haitians were afraid to go to Haiti for fear that they would catch the disease. Also, they were afraid that if they travelled to Haiti they would not be let back into the country. With increased deportations, undocumented Haitians were fearful of venturing outside their neighborhoods and even of leaving their homes. As a result, biological families and their children became further isolated from each other and parents had no way of knowing if their children were treated well. In the end, the earthquake and its aftermath exacerbated the pre-existing crisis that has for long been afflicting children on the Haitian-Dominican border region.

Although child fosterage has changed significantly since I first researched the topic in 2004, one thing remains the same. Nonprofit organizations and government officials continue to address the issue by vilifying this parenting strategy and by portraying the parents that are involved in it as irresponsible and unfit. As the
International Labor Organization (2003) did in regards to Dominican *hijos de crianza* in 2003, so has the international nonprofit community done of the Haitian child relocation system. Certainly, the thousands of Haitian children involved in abusive fosterage arrangements is a situation that merits immediate and decisive attention by both the Haitian government and nonprofit organizations. But intervention measures that assume that Haitian parents somehow *choose* to send their children to live with others are destined to fail. It is hard to speak of a choice when parents are dealing with matters of survival. Yveline, the Haitian mother who gave up her daughters into fosterage articulated this point well. “If you have someone telling you, ‘Mother, I’m hungry!’ you prefer to have your child live with someone. You send them to the city. Otherwise, they’ll die.” In the end, fosterage arrangements are a measure of last resort. Until the underlying material causes that drive families to give up their children under these disadvantageous conditions are addressed, Haitian parents will be forced to place their children in fosterage arrangements and they will do so under less than ideal conditions. To tackle the Haitian childhood crisis effectively, we must start by addressing an even greater one – the Haitian parenting crisis. To stop the child *restavèk* crisis, we must address the parent *restavèk* crisis.
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Tess M Kulstad grew up in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic. She graduated magna cum laude from the Instituto Tecnológico de Santo Domingo with a degree in business administration. After working several years in the Dominican financial sector, she pursued a master’s degree in Latin American studies with a concentration in anthropology at the University of Florida. Under the supervision of Professor Gerald F. Murray, her research focused on child fosterage practices in the Dominican Republic. She continued her research on this topic for her doctoral work in anthropology from the University of Florida. She received her Ph.D. from the University of Florida in August 2013. Today, her work focuses on family systems, migration, race and disasters.