

BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Ginetta E.B. Candelario, *Black Behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007, 340 pp. \$US 23.95 paper (978-0-8223-4037-9), \$US 84.95 hardcover (978-0-8223-4037-9)

The Dominican Republic, like other nations in the Hispanic Caribbean, traces its historic roots to the mixing of distinct cultural groups: indigenous Taíno peoples, Spanish colonizers, and Africans primarily brought to the country as slaves. Yet the Dominican nation has long chosen to ignore the African part of its heritage, instead defining itself as “not black,” even as people acknowledge that nearly everyone has some black ancestry, or a little “black behind the ears.” Instead, Dominicans emphasize their Indo-Hispanic roots, in part to distinguish themselves from their Haitian neighbours. This national identity presents particular challenges for Dominican immigrants to the United States, who are often perceived as black by Americans and are forced to negotiate a new ethnoracial landscape.

Ginetta Candelario offers an innovative approach to the issue of Dominican identity formation by focusing on public sites of identity display. She chooses locations where representations of Dominicans’ sense of self are manifested in various ways, in order to better understand how identity is enacted through staged practices and the symbols and codes they rely on. Candelario makes an important contribution to studies of Dominican identity, and to studies of racial identity construction more generally, by focusing attention on the relationship between institutions and individuals, or the way that official discourses and everyday life practices influence one another.

Using a variety of methodological approaches — including discourse analysis, content analysis, ethnography, in-depth interviewing, and photo elicitation — Candelario examines several sites of identity display that span between the Dominican Republic and the United States. She examines early travel narratives, primarily by American authors; museum displays, including the permanent exhibit of the *Museo del Hombre Dominicano* in Santo Domingo and the *Black Mosaic* exhibit in the Anacostia Museum in Washington, DC, which presents Dominicans as part of a larger group of black immigrants to the area; and a Dominican beauty

salon in Washington Heights, NY. Each chapter is thick with historical and contextual detail and presents a comprehensive case study of a different way that Dominican identity is both depicted and transformed by these public displays.

The travel narratives Candelario examines were written by foreign visitors to the island of Hispaniola around the time that the United States was considering annexing the Dominican Republic or select parts of its territory, and later during its military occupations of the nation. She argues that these narratives helped to shape both American impressions of the Dominican character and the Dominican elite's presentation of their own national identity. Indeed, Candelario maintains that these narratives were influential in the texts that later formed the permanent display of Dominican identity in the *Museo del Hombre Dominicano*. While other authors have focused on how Dominicans have crafted their identity to emphasize everything that Haiti is not, Candelario argues that Dominican identity formation must be understood as a triangular geopolitical relationship between the Dominican Republic, Haiti, and the United States. Americans' narrative of Dominicans as *blancos de la tierra* (whites of the land) or as "not black," particularly in contrast to Haitians, helped further their imperialist projects, and was also incorporated into Dominicans' own nationalist discourses. This piece of the historical record has been largely overlooked, and Candelario makes a compelling case for adding these narratives to our understanding of the role of US imperialism in Dominican nation-building.

Candelario's account of two different museum displays presents an intriguing contrast. In the national *Museo del Hombre Dominicano*, Dominicans' indigenous roots are strongly emphasized while their African heritage is barely visible. By contrast, the *Black Mosaic* exhibit places Dominicans within a larger context of blackness. The *Black Mosaic* exhibit was created by African-American curators, and thus presents their perception of Dominicans. But Candelario also notes that Dominicans in Washington, DC are much more likely to identify as black than those in other parts of the United States, and questions whether the Dominican participants in the exhibit illustrate larger patterns of identification in the city. While it is not fully clear what role the exhibit had in influencing or adequately representing Dominicans' sense of self, Candelario's follow-up interviews with the exhibit participants reveal the contextual nature of their willingness to embrace blackness. Their involvement in a city with a large African-American and small Latino population, as well as their higher socioeconomic origins, enable Dominicans in Washington, DC to recognize the situational advantage of presenting themselves as black in order to benefit from the gains of the Civil Rights Movement and Black

Power Movement. Candelario's interviews present a persuasive account of how the local context shapes immigrants' identities, although one gets the sense that the real punchline of this story is less about identity displays and more about individual- and community-level processes.

Two fascinating chapters are devoted to Salon Lamadas, a beauty shop where Candelario conducted ethnography in the Dominican enclave of Washington Heights. The first chapter describes the dynamics of the salon's owners, staff and customers, and the way that the staff promote the gendered and socioracial dynamics of Dominican identity, particularly with regard to concepts of "good" and "bad" (i.e., European vs. African) hair. In the second chapter, Candelario explores Dominicans' racialized concepts of beauty, by showing salon staff and clients photographs from hairstyle books. Intriguingly, despite all the evidence of Dominicans' anti-black preferences and valuation of whiteness, what these women find most attractive is not European appearance per se, but people whom they view as bearing the signs of racial mixture associated with being Hispanic. Candelario complicates the well-established preference for whiteness by showing that different types of whiteness exist, as well as the occasions when those preferences are overlooked.

In some ways, the several case studies that make up *Black Behind the Ears* could stand on their own. The links that draw them together into a coherent narrative are not always as clear as they could be. There is also a slight unevenness between the cases that present Dominicans' narratives about themselves and those presenting narratives told about them by others, in that this difference is not articulated as fully as it deserves. But overall, the book is an important contribution to our understanding of the way that racial and national identities are created and interpreted. Candelario's work shows that these processes occur in numerous public sites and not just in individual experiences.

University of British Columbia

Wendy D. Roth

Wendy D. Roth is Assistant Professor of Sociology at the University of British Columbia. Her research interests include race and ethnicity; multiracial identities; international migration; and Latino studies. Her recent work examines how transnational migration to the mainland US affects the ethnic and racial identities of Dominicans and Puerto Ricans. Among her publications on this topic include "'Latino Before the World': The Transnational Extension of Panethnicity" in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* and "Transnational Racializations: The Extension of Racial Boundaries from Receiving to Sending Societies" in *How the United States Racializes Latinos: White Hegemony and Its Consequences*, edited by José A. Cobas, Jorge Duany, and Joe Feagin.

wroth@interchange.ubc.ca