

# A Patriarchal Rite of Passage:

## Arab Women's Migration to the Dominican Republic and the Gendered Politics of Immigration History

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### Introduction

This article aims to further the understanding of gendered migration practices as well as the complex factors that structure the gendered creation of memory among Arabs in the Dominican Republic. More precisely, we focus on the patriarchal erasure of female migration, racial politics, and the gendered family institution through a critical analysis of oral and archival sources. We will show that the silencing of Arab women as unnamed, though implicitly obedient and subservient wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters, is a product of contemporary tensions over how Arabs integrate and incorporate themselves into the racial landscape of Dominican society.

The first section of this article provides an overview of Arab migration to the Dominican Republic in the nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries with an emphasis on migration as a familial process and strategy. In the second part, we explain the appearance of Arab women in the mid-twentieth century migration archive by situating the archival sources in Trujillo-era politics. In the final section we explain why Arab women disappeared from the historical memory of migration. We will show that their erasure not only addressed the perpetuation of a progress narrative among Arab-descended Dominicans, but that it is also important in the broader, ideological battle over *dominicanidad* and its relationship to citizenship and race.

1. In the Dominican Republic, immigrants from the former Ottoman Empire are referred to as "*árabes*", which we translate here as "Arabs". In other Latin American contexts, they are called *Turcos*, or Turks, a term which identifies them more specifically as coming from the Ottoman (Turkish) realm. In this article, we use the term Arab in general, and then Arab-Dominican or Lebanese in order to better convey the identities and forms of identification expressed by second, third, and fourth generation interviewees.

In the Dominican Republic many descendants of Arab migrants to the country relate a tale similar to the one shared by the Fadul family. According to family lore, the first immigrant to the island of Hispaniola was Benjamín who, in the early twentieth century, arrived in Haiti and then moved to Las Matas de Farfán, located on the Haitian-Dominican border. Family members interviewed for this article recalled Benjamín's trek from the Levant to the Caribbean, one experienced by thousands of "*árabes*" from the last quarter of the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century.<sup>1</sup> Like other immigrant tales we heard, this one transformed Benjamín into an extraordinary, lone actor who took a leap of faith by crossing the Atlantic. When asked, though, if Benjamín was married at the time of his migration, family members remained silent. After phoning other relatives, David Fadul confirmed that, indeed, Benjamín had been married when he migrated and, in fact, his wife and four



Aunt Zarife and Mr. Wadi Nakhle traveling, 1920. Courtesy of The Lebanese Emigration Research Center (LERC).

2. Stephanie Román collected nine oral histories based on interviews conducted in homes, offices, and social spaces across Santo Domingo. All names have been changed in order to protect the privacy of the interviewees and their families.

children accompanied him. It was also revealed that Benjamin's only daughter died before the family finally settled in the Dominican Republic (David Fadul, personal communication, August 3, 2010).

As with other migration stories we collected,<sup>2</sup> the Fadul saga privileged the male immigrant, a fact that is not surprising given the importance of patrilineal descent in Mediterranean cultures. Women's complete erasure from the stories that families shared about their ancestors, however, presents a significant problem to the researcher

who might assume that oral histories provide a more accurate picture of the migration process than what might be gleaned from documentary evidence. In order to name Benjamin's wife, for example, we could not rely on memory alone. Indeed, we found that familial memories left women invisible as migrants.

If our goal is to identify women and analyze their experiences as migrants to the Dominican Republic – to name Benjamin's wife as it were – we found it necessary to combine Arab-Dominican oral histories, where women are absent, with research in local and national archives where Arab women are present. Based on an analysis of immigration records, newspaper accounts, census information, and oral histories, we argue that while Arab migration to the Dominican Republic was a gendered process that privileged males, female migration reveals that family systems and household dynamics shaped men's and women's movements from the Levant to the Caribbean. Women like Benjamin's wife and daughter were as critical to the migration process as their male counterparts, but women's migration has normally been regarded as secondary to men's. We insist, however, that familial demands and gender expectations also informed men's migration and influenced women's migration. Even though Arab women do not emerge in the oral histories as individuated, heroic actors, they played important roles in shaping the migratory and settlement experiences of their men and children.

We insist, however, that we must do more than name Benjamin's wife. Paying attention to the ways in which gender ideals structured the migration process forced us to admit that documentary sources and oral histories were far from gender-neutral data. The archival remnants also revealed, as Aisha Finch (2011) has argued for nineteenth-century Cuba, the "gendered production of historical memory". Historical memory is gendered because the archive privileges certain kinds of actors and events in ways that render women invisible. Building on Finch's insight, we argue that oral histories are a particularly problematic source for accessing Arab women's migration experiences. They erase women and privilege men. Adding to Finch's important contribution,

we will show that women disappear from the familial memories of migration because of Arab-Dominicans' contemporary investments in a linear narrative of progress and masculine heroism to explain and sustain their relatively privileged status in Dominican society.

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The "gendered production of historical memory", moreover, does not end with the oral histories. Arab women gain visibility in archival sources, but as racialized and gendered subjects of the Dominican state. The archival materials we analyzed for the twentieth century were shaped by the racial politics of an authoritarian regime invested in whitening the Dominican population as part of its modernizing efforts. As migrants who were "white on arrival" (Guglielmo, 2004),

Arab-Dominicans conformed to a nationalist identity, elaborated during General Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship (1931-1960), that elevated Europeans, Christianity, and whiteness. While Arabs were not European, their lighter skin and "good hair" facilitated their acceptance as whites. As Ginetta Candelario (2007) argues, "hair is the principle signifier of race [in the Dominican Republic], followed by facial features, skin color, and last, ancestry" (p. 224). Arab women, in particular, embody the Dominican racial ideal; as a result, they are valued as women who contribute to whitening the

Dominican ethno-nation. The silence that pervades Arab-Dominican migration stories, then, emerges from Arab-Dominicans' acceptance of social norms that value whiteness and accord them high status in Dominican society.

To name Benjamín's wife, we examine oral histories, newspapers, family documents, and immigration records to extract women from the shadows. At the same time, to explain Arab women's invisibility in certain sources, we apply gender analysis and consider archives as products of their historical contexts. As a result, we present a

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multi-layered analysis of Arab women's migration in which we shed light on actual people's lives and carefully consider the information we use. We begin this article with a brief overview of Arab migration to the Dominican Republic in the late-nineteenth and early twentieth-centuries. For this period, we relied on both archival sources and oral histories to reconstruct the earliest records of Arab presence in the country. We then turn our attention to Arab migration in the mid-twentieth century. In addition to oral histories, we examine a rich archival base of immigration records housed at the National Archives in Santo Domingo. The last section of this article focuses exclusively on oral histories and on twenty-first century iterations of female erasure from the intimate archives of Arab-Dominican families.

### A Brief History of Arab Migration to the Dominican Republic

It is difficult to find Arab women in the early years of migration from the Levant to the Dominican Republic, which lasted from the last quarter of the nineteenth century until the first decades of the twentieth. In addition to locating them by unearthing the records and memories of the few women who participated in the initial immigrant wave to the Dominican Republic, we will also illuminate the larger, gendered system that renders women invisible in the migration process. The first Arab migrants to the Dominican Republic, like their counterparts in Ecuador and elsewhere in Latin America, were attracted to areas experiencing economic growth. As in Ecuador, the Dominican state encouraged immigration from Europe in order to foster economic modernity, but received Arabs instead (Akmir, et. al, 2009; Almeida, 1996). San Pedro de Macorís, home to most of the Dominican Republic's largest sugar mills, was the early epicenter of Arab migration to the country. By the 1890s, Dominican commentators attacked Arab *buhoneros* (peddlers) who sold their goods in San Pedro's hinterlands and often undercut established prices. As Orlando Inoa found (1992), Arabs dominated local commerce, for which the Dominican press vilified them as "bad immigrants" because, as one newspaper noted in 1909, "the Arab does not devote himself to agricultural work" as the Dominican government would have liked (cited in Inoa, 1999, p. 67). Articles labeled Arab *buhoneros* as 'unscrupulous contrabandists' who '[invaded] the nation and the countryside ... converting our commerce into a desolate and sad cemetery' (cited in Inoa, p. 66). Some Dominicans and foreign sugar estate owners, however, defended Arab peddlers and their business practices as "beneficial" because they sold their wares at low prices that most residents could afford. By 1920, 204 *árabes* lived in San Pedro de Macorís (Inoa, 1999, p. 52). Many of them, like Badui M. Dumit who arrived in Santiago in 1900 from Mount Lebanon, were successful merchants or owned stores on sugar estates, much like their counterparts in Haiti and Honduras (Inoa, 1999, pp. 76-77; Plummer, 1981; Euraque, 1995).

Whether they arrived from Haiti, Cuba, or directly from the Levant, Arab migrants generally emerge in the scholarly literature as young, male, able-bodied, and ambitious. As Hourani and Nadim (1992) wrote, Arab migrants were largely “young men from the Christian villages of the Lebanese mountains, and similar villages in Syria and Palestine” (p. 6). Most of those interviewed for this article shared a linear story that usually began with a founding patriarch’s migration, then described the myriad trials he faced, and ended celebrating his eventual economic success. For example, Sara Basha-Kaussa’s family’s migration history featured men and their upward social mobility (Sara Basha-Kaussa, personal communication, July 28, 2010). Her uncle Juan arrived first and settled in San Pedro de Macorís. Longing to escape the devastation and poverty of World War I-era Lebanon, Basha-Kaussa’s father and another brother followed Juan to San Pedro de Macorís. The men eventually settled in Santo Domingo where they opened a successful store.

This image of the Arab workforce contrasts with what Arab-American scholar Alixa Naff (1985), found among Syrian immigrants in the early twentieth-century United States. In the United States, there is ample oral and documentary evidence of women’s active participation in peddling, but the Dominican record remains exclusively focused on men engaging in these pursuits. Indeed, the Fadul and Basha-Kaussa reflections demonstrate that oral narratives suffered the same biases as the written sources – women were absent in both. In this case, and contrary to what researchers may expect, the oral histories did not highlight Arab women and children as part of the migration process. At the same time, the documentary archive clearly privileged the commercial activities of Arab migrants because the Dominican state hoped Arabs would contribute to the country’s long-term economic development. Following Aisha Finch (2011), then, women’s absence from Dominican documentary sources shows the “gendered production of historical memory” since the archive’s bias towards commerce and economic production rendered Arab women invisible as migrants.

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To address this gender bias, however, it is not enough to simply count women and mix them back into the normative narratives that structure our understanding of migration. Instead, as Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) argues, we need an approach to migration that views migrants as “active participants”, and not simply as pawns in a transnational, global system motivated by personal gain. In order to employ such an approach, the family must be considered as a gendered institution whose members influence the migration process. The family, Hondagneu-Sotelo notes, has the power to shape the prospects, routes, and length of migration for men and women migrants alike, facilitating the movement for some while limiting movement for others. Migration has been historically male-dominated precisely because “patriarchal families hinder young women’s migration, while for the men, they facilitate migration” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1984, p. 83). For some men, then, migration becomes a “patriarchal rite of passage” (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1984, p. 83).

By applying this insight to our analysis, the actions of men become less individuated and, instead, situated within gendered expectations that informed their migration

experiences. Indeed, considering the first wave of Arab migration to areas like San Pedro de Macoris in light of Hondagneu-Sotelo's arguments, it becomes quite apparent that men were also burdened by family duties. For example, Benjamín Fadul, who was well into his sixties when he arrived in the Dominican Republic with his family, seems to have been less motivated by individual gain than by dreams of expanded opportunities for his children. Similarly, the Basha-Kaussa's migration underscores how kinship and household strategies influenced male migration. By transforming these immigrant men into individuated, heroic actors, oral histories erase the significance of familial networks, household demands, and the patriarchal kinship system in the Arab migration process. At the same time, historical memories of migration reinforce the idea of migration as a male activity and male right. By questioning patriarchal assumptions about the migration process, we make visible the gendered logic that influenced Arab migration to Latin America and shaped memories of that movement as a predominately male activity. We can also explain women's exclusion from narratives of migration.

### Finding Arab Women in the Archive

While archival sources and oral history narratives documenting Arab women's migration to the Dominican Republic in the last quarter of the nineteenth century are scarce, even non-existent, a far richer trove of available documents sheds light on Arab women's arrival to and settlement in the Dominican Republic in the mid-twentieth century. Although incomplete, government drafted residency permits, issued between 1941 and 1965, provide ample evidence of female migration to the Dominican Republic from the Levant. When combined with oral histories and published manuscripts, we are able to make more concrete arguments about Arab women's migration to the Dominican Republic and their settlement patterns. Nevertheless, just as we have explained women's absence from some sources, we also need to account for women's archival visibility. What made keeping track of immigrants so important to the Dominican state in the 1940s? We argue that the Dominican state's efforts to modernize the country by encouraging the immigration and settlement of Europeans, Arabs, and Asians shaped the archival evidence. Arab women's visibility is structured by the narrative hegemony of Trujillo's modernizing discourse, grounded in a policy of racial whitening.

The modernization of the Dominican civil bureaucracy, a process begun by the United States military government during its occupation of the country from 1916 until 1924, continued under General Rafael Trujillo's dictatorship (1930-1961), and resulted in the more professional management of state records. Housed in the National Archives in Santo Domingo, these permits were official requests for temporary residency; for desirable, white immigrants, this was the first step in the process of permanent residency and citizenship. Although an incomplete record, extant permits from the 1940s and 1960s include the names, ports, and year of entry for every immigrant, followed by his or her age, race, color, profession, sex, weight, height, nationality, civil status, country of origin, eye color, hair color, place of residence, and a photo. Given space constraints, we limited our analysis of the permits to those issued in 1941, the first year for which we have documentation.<sup>3</sup> Out of the 25,882 granted that year, 507 permits were issued to Arab applicants, or two percent of the total. The state identified Arabs as Lebanese, Palestinian, or Syrian. Lebanese nationals represented 73 percent

3. The residency permits have all been digitized and are available on a series of DVDs. They were acquired largely through the assistance of a fellow researcher, Kiran Jayaram, and Quisqueya Lora. Extant permits include those from 1941, 1941-1943, 1945-1946, 1948, and 1963-1965.

(or 361 applicants) of all Arab residency permit applicants, followed by Palestinians 15 percent (or 74 applicants), and Syrians 11 percent (or 57 applicants). This general proportion of Arabs remains just about the same in contemporary Dominican society (Scheker Hane, 1971).

The residency permits also allow us to reflect on the gendered dimension of Arab migration. In 1941, Arab women made up 15 percent of government-issued residency permits issued to Arab immigrants. Out of these, 83 percent of the women listed “*doméstica*” (domestic) or “*hogar*” (home) as their occupation, and 13 percent listed their occupation as, “*comerciante*” (merchant) or “*estudiante*” (student). Meanwhile, Arab men were overwhelmingly represented as “*comerciantes*” (merchants), with over 80 percent of men’s permits indicating trade as their occupation. Interestingly, civil status appears to have been important in differentiating between those women who identified themselves as “*comerciantes*” and those who said they were “*domésticas*”. While only 11 percent of the women under the housewife category were single or widowed, 60 percent of the women listed as “*comerciante*” were either single or widowed, among them two hotel owners (*dueñas de hoteles*). Perhaps out of economic need, the women in the latter category were able to bend the gender norms that regulated their lives. Yet these gender norms were very strict, especially among the first generation of Arab immigrants. As Beatriz Yapur de Basha, the daughter of Lebanese immigrants, recalled: “my mother always told me that in Lebanon there was a very strong division between men and women. Women didn’t sit to eat with the men, the woman was an instrument of work within the home; cooking the food, complying with her husband’s demands – absolute obedience was expected” (Beatriz Yapur de Basha, personal communication, July 28, 2010). This gender ideal, however, was circumstantial. After her husband’s death, Beatriz’s mother opened her own store on Mella Street with the assistance of her brother-in-law. Reflecting on her mother’s tireless work as both a widow and shop owner, Beatriz remembered that “those were years of intense struggle, my mother was a woman with a lot of courage” (Beatriz Yapur de Basha, personal communication, July 28, 2010).

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Beatriz Yapur de Basha’s recollections suggest that Arab women in the Dominican Republic, like their counterparts in the United States, expanded their wifely duties and transformed them into income-generating activities that contributed to the success of their families and communities. Alixa Naff (1985) argues that “the economic participation of women, irrespective of religion or sect, contributed significantly to the general economic satisfaction of Syrian immigrants and thus to the impetus to settle permanently. Relatively few families succeeded without the help of one or more women” (p. 178). Quite tellingly, just as the absence of men presented a noteworthy difference that affected Arab women’s occupations in 1941, Beatriz Yapur de Basha’s reflections illustrate a similar pattern in the oral histories wherein some women became dynamic and visible actors due to the absence of men.

We argue, too, that Arab women’s (and men’s) visibility in Trujillo-era archives was the product of the Trujillo regime’s financial and ideological investment in a

modernization project that involved whitening the Dominican population. A systematic documentation of race and color in residency permits was necessary in order to assess the number of white immigrants who were expected to promote *cultura* and *progreso* (culture and progress) through whitening. Trujillo and his intellectual supporters considered Arab migrants white enough to “slow the spread of Haitian influence” among Dominicans and “counteract the ‘vegetative’ growth of African blacks” (Peguero, 2008, p. 50). As a result, Trujillo embraced immigration projects that ranged from the (near) humanitarian to the ridiculous. In the wake of the Haitian massacre in October of 1937, when Dominican troops slaughtered tens of thousands of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian ancestry, Trujillo opened the country to Jewish refugees and, later, proposed a Japanese colony along the Haitian-Dominican border (Wells, 2009). Residency permits, then, were embedded in Trujillo’s discriminatory immigration policies that favored whites. As a result, the state transformed Arabs from “bad immigrants” into necessary migrants who could whiten the country.

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The residency permits give evidence of the fluidity of whiteness during Trujillo’s rule, at least for non-African descended migrants. In 1941 most Arabs were officially classified as “white.” Specifically, 91 percent of Arabs fell under *Blanco* (white) in the “Color” section of the document while only 5 percent were identified as *Indio* (Indian), and 3 percent as *Trigueño* (brown). Despite these few exceptions, the documents clearly demonstrate that the Trujillo state granted most Arabs “whiteness”. Arabs were considered white because they fit the “somatic norm image” of Dominican whiteness. Harry Hoetink defined somatic norm image as “the complex of physical (somatic) characteristics that are accepted by a group as its norm and ideal” (cited in Howard, p. 23). Hoetink argued that the somatic norm image for whiteness is appreciably darker among Mediterranean peoples than Northern Europeans (Candelario, p. 224). Arabs assimilated into Dominican society because they met the requirements for Iberian whiteness. As a result, Arabs achieved high social and economic status within a largely African-descended society.

Trujillo’s modernizing discourse shaped the archival sources during the regime and continues to structure oral history narratives in the present. Arab-Dominican oral histories unquestionably accept a narrative of progress, one that fits well within Trujillo-era, nationalist ideology, but one that effectively erases the unfavorable, early perceptions of Arab migrants and women as historical actors. Women were visible in oral histories when men were absent. This tendency complements the Dominican archive wherein Arab women’s historical significance was tied to their potential role in whitening the Dominican population. Arab women’s visibility/invisibility suggests a gendered logic at play: both the narrative of progress and Trujillo-era nationalism burdened women with particular responsibilities towards Arab and Dominican communities.

### **Erasing Women: Twenty-first Century Iterations of Dominican-Arab Identities**

The Trujillo era ideology of *cultura y progreso*, which tied modernity and progress

to racial whitening, continues to shape how Arab-Dominicans understand their past and situate themselves in the present. When we elicited information about their contemporary lives, it remained difficult to acquire specific details about women's experiences. Arab women are absent from the oral histories because their presence threatens the progress narrative of male-centered Arab success.

Although race is everywhere present in the Dominican Republic and remains central to the daily lives of many Dominicans, it remains embedded within a specific, and restrictive, economy of discourse such as the idea of a "*raza Dominicana*." Women's hair, according to Ginetta Candelario (2007), is the most important signifier of race, status, and membership within the Dominican body politic. Hair, in particular, externalizes the somatic norm image of Dominican whiteness. Therefore, in addition to skin color, Arabs achieve whiteness in the Dominican Republic because of their "good hair," i.e., it closely resembles straight, European hair. Most important, as Candelario argues, because hair plays such an important role in assigning race and social status, the Dominican ethno-racial ideal implicates women differently than men

and is thus structured by a gendered logic. Women, not men, bear the burden of styling their hair in ways that conform to the norm. We contend that Arab women have easier access to citizenship claims based on their desirable somatic norm image (straight hair and light skin). Dominican-Lebanese women, in particular, have experienced social mobility within elite Dominican society and have successfully parlayed their social acceptance into various signifiers of social prominence – like high-ranking occupations, political visibility, and marriages with light-skinned Dominicans. As Candelario argues, "Dominican whiteness [is] an explicitly achieved (and achievable) status with connotations of social, political, and economic privilege" (p. 5).

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Race, then, braided through the narrative of progress and modernity, becomes an important site through which Arab-Dominicans access and practice citizenship. For instance, one informant, a grandchild of immigrants, noted that he found a job in the capital because, "I was good looking, I was light skinned" (David Fadul, personal communication, August 3, 2010). Another descendent of Lebanese immigrants also admitted accepting the dominant mythology of cultural *mestizaje* while acknowledging anti-Haitianism when she explained the following: "the Dominican Republic is like a melting pot because in reality we are not something pure, we are a mix of so many things that it is difficult to be closed off. The Haitian culture is the only one that it does not want to accept, but besides that it accepts everything" (Gabriela Rodriguez, personal communication, August 4, 2010).

Arab-Dominicans often explain their success in the Dominican Republic in ethno-racial terms articulated through the discourse of having "good culture." For example, Venessa Fadul remarked: "Dominicans look favorably on Arabs because they have done well in many areas; in education and medicine...I would say that it is a race that has worked very hard here, it is very strong, and it has a very good position because of its work and for this reason people respect them" (Venessa Fadul, personal communication, August, 3, 2010).

Whereas the acceptance of racial norms and ideologies has ingratiated Arabs to Dominican society, Arab foremothers present a problem because their experiences run counter to the narrative of progress Arab-Dominicans consciously and unconsciously deploy to justify their privileged position in society. Some Arab women, for instance, refused assimilation to Dominican norms. For her part, Beatriz Yapur de Basha described feeling “a lot of discrimination” because her mother spoke Arabic with her children and fed them “lots of vegetables”, a culinary habit that led Dominican children to accuse her of “[eating] grass.” Indeed, Beatriz’s mother rejected certain Dominican mainstays and traditions, including the national dish, *sancocho*: “My mother died without ever having tried *sancocho*. She didn’t like it” (Beatriz Yapur de Basha, personal communication, July 28, 2010).

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### Conclusion

There is little doubt that the Dominican Republic’s Arab population is an “influential ethnic minority who began migrating to the Dominican Republic towards the end of the 19th century, and who have firmly established themselves in the political, economic, and social spheres of national life” (Howard, 2001, p. 23). We contend, however, that the collective memory of migration has been revised to include only the positive aspects of the community’s role in the Dominican Republic without reference to race or gender as mediating factors that shaped migration, social acceptance, and integration. This is evidenced, we insist, in the general erasure of Arab women from the oral histories of migration and in their visibility in official records. Women have always played an integral role in the success and integration of the Arab community even though these activities have often remained at the margins of the oral record in order to sustain and buttress the patriarchal narrative of Arab progress and success. Benjamin’s wife, whose migration was as much defined by gender ideologies and

household strategies as her husband’s, had a name: Sofia.

As we have argued from the beginning, however, it is not enough to name Sofia and make her visible. As Laura Briggs (2002) reminds us, “recovering ‘real women’ or ‘the oppressed’ is not always possible, nor is it always a good thing” (p. 205). We have emphasized, following Briggs, that silence and visibility can serve racist and gendered politics that reproduce profound inequalities. As a result, this article has tried to shed light on a larger system of interlocking, gendered logics that inform dominant narratives about race, history, and citizenship in the Dominican Republic. In other words, explaining why Sofia disappeared from familial memory is probably more important than naming her and locating her as a historical actor.

To be sure, the overwhelming presence of men as immigrants may explain why the historical memory of migration has privileged men as individualistic pioneers. This argument becomes less tenable, however, in the twentieth century when Arab women become highly visible in residency permits. We insisted that migration followed a gender logic in which the patriarchal family influenced men’s and women’s mobility. By assuming that migration is a result of push/pull factors that shape individual choice and agency, scholars perpetuate a bias that silences and erases women from the

archives and from migration itself. As our research shifts into the twenty-first century, we argue that the absence of women from oral history narratives evidenced Arab-Dominicans' investment in a linear narrative of progress and racial superiority in order to explain their contemporary, social dominance. The development and deployment of Dominican-Arab identity is inextricably connected to Arabs' racial intelligibility as white, cultured, and modern. Arab women fit uncomfortably within this narrative of progress.

As a result, then, women's disappearance from the familial and collective narratives of Arab migration to the Dominican Republic helps sustain the larger ideological structure of whiteness and anti-black racism. Ideas about whiteness and anti-black, anti-Haitian discourse and practice perpetuate Dominicans' investment in an identity many believe is non-racial and anti-racist even as it privileges whiteness against blackness. By refusing to name Arab women, *árabes* provide implicit support for the racial, gender, and class hierarchy in Dominican society. Dominant elites perceive and argue that race and ethnicity do not influence the practice of Dominican citizenship nor do they determine who can claim *dominicanidad*. Dominicans are a "melting pot," a *mestizo* society. Erasing Arab women from the migration narrative and silencing their resistance to assimilation allows Dominican-Lebanese to believe that their integration into Dominican society is a result of their collective and individual success rather than the class and racial hierarchies that privilege Arabs as whites. The absence of Arab women from oral histories has nothing to do with the historical record, which, as we have shown here, is filled with women migrants. Instead, the erasure of Arab women from the collective memory of migration has more to do with the present. It is specifically related to the problematic ways that Arab women are doubly situated to be maintainers of both Arab cultural authenticity and Dominican whiteness through marriage and raising children. By addressing the silences regarding Arab women in migration, we reveal the racist-gendered logic of contemporary Dominican nationalism, a more profound legacy of Trujillo.

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