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No te Pierda

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The Dominican Republic is globally portrayed as a paradise. Tourists flock from every corner of the earth to experience the glamorized side of the Dominican Republic. However, few venture out to the reality. The reality that is a two-tier caste system, exemplified by the city of Punta Cana. Security guards and gates separate the two starkly different realities of this nation. Entering a resort in Punta Cana is comparative to a border crossing. Those with the means to stay at a resort are provided the luxury to remain ignorant of the truth of the Dominican Republic.

The ride from Punta Cana International Airport keeps tourists within the aesthetically pleasing confinement of a compound. This is done intentionally to promote and reinforce the one-sided story that is sold to tourists, thus drawing them into the Dominican Republic. This dangerous, biased perspective of the Dominican Republic allows tourists to ignore the dark reality of what exists on the other side of the gate.

The gate serves as divide of where the rich or poor belong. On the other side of that gate, there are people who are living in unacceptable conditions where basic government services are either minimal or nonexistent . Exploring the other side of the gate allows one to see the drastic difference between these two worlds that coexist.

Those who live in these deplorable conditions accept their reality to be permanent, as there seems to be no break in the cycle. In regular Dominican conversation it is common to hear references to God, Jesus, and family. Religion and family are irremovable ideals to those who are impoverished.

A sign in Santo Domingo read “Sin Jesús, Irá Derecho Al Fuego. No te Pierda”. In English, this means: “Without Jesus, I would go straight into the fire. Don’t lose yourself.” To me, this quote emphasizes aspects of Dominican society with the words that were written in red. Those who are impoverished keep God, Jesus, and family close to them to help them get through

their hardship or break the glass ceiling that is stopping them from bettering their circumstances. God, Jesus, and family are stabilizing figures that average Dominicans can look up to in times of need. They turn to religion and family because they cannot rely on their government. A government that does not seem not to care about them. God, Jesus, and family will never discriminate against them and will always be there to help guide them.

The Dominican attitude of individualism is exemplified in the sign with the word “te” in red. As there are only two main ideals that they can hold on to for security, There is no sense of unity in order to work together for a better future. Yet, there is no doubt that God, Jesus, and family will always be there. In order to get through life, they need to be able to do things themselves. The government is not there for them, even in providing basic services such as running water and electricity. Nonetheless, the rampant corruption that exists in every level of Dominican bureaucracy hinders a functioning society and democracy. There is a mass amount of social and economic programs that could transform this nation. One purpose of government is to control resources and make them accessible to the public. However, mismanagement of resources impedes the development of a nation and its citizens.

Structural violence exists in every corner of the world. The government neglects to provide its citizens with basic human necessities. State negligence is not unique to the 'developing world.' It is a global phenomenon. It is not just a matter of people standing up for themselves, but a matter of dismantling systems of oppression. Until that happens, empathy signals that humanity exists.