

Forthcoming in *Critical Philosophy of Race*
Eric Bayruns García
Assistant Professor, McMaster University
Research Associate, African Centre for Epistemology and Philosophy of Science, University of
Johannesburg

Afro-Latinx, Hispanic and Latinx Identity: Understanding the Americas

Abstract

I present three cases which feature the experiences of Afro-Latinx people. The 1992 murder of Dominican man José “Kiko” García by New York Police officer O’Keefe is the first case. The second case is the Washington Heights Uprising that ensued José “Kiko” García’s murder. An instance where a nightclub bouncer in the Dominican Republic denies a Dominican woman entry because of her hair texture composes the third case. I present these cases to motivate a novel position vis-à-vis the views in the Latin American philosophy literature regarding whether subjects more aptly use "Hispanic" or "Latinx" to refer to Hispanic-or-Latinx people. To this end, I will argue that (C) the term "Afro-Latinx" is more apt than "Hispanic" or "Latinx" in a significant number of cases. Three premises support this conclusion. The first premise is that (P1) use of "Afro-Latinx" provides subjects with understanding of how certain events depend on anti-Black racism, US society's racially unjust structure and US colonial policy. The second premise is that (P2) that neither the term "Hispanic" nor the term "Latinx" provide subjects with this understanding of how certain events depend on anti-Black racism, US society's racially unjust structure and US colonial policy. The third premise is that (P3) the term "Afro-Latinx" provides subjects with more understanding of these events than the terms, "Hispanic" and "Latinx.”

Afro-Latinx, Hispanic and Latinx Identity: Understanding the Americas

In the Latin American philosophy literature, there has been a debate over whether US society should use the terms, “Hispanic” or “Latinx” to refer to Hispanic/Latinx people. Jorge J.E. Gracia has argued that the term “Hispanic” is more apt than “Latinx” (Gracia, 2000, 2008). Against this, Linda Martín Alcoff has argued that “Latinx” is more properly used (Alcoff, 2005b). Both sides of this debate ground their views on both political and epistemic reasons.

The debate has evolved over time. The debate began over whether, “Hispanic” and “Latinx,” understood as *ethnic* terms, were descriptively adequate. For Gracia, society should use “Hispanic” because someone is properly understood as Hispanic if she bears a historical-familial relation to the *encuentro* between Spaniards and Indigenous Americans beginning in 1492 (Gracia, 2000, 2008). He calls this the Familial-Historical View. It allows US subjects to include the widely disparate peoples who intuitively fall within the extension of this term. Some of these peoples are descendants of African and Asian peoples and peoples who speak Portuguese, Spanish, Nahuatl and Quechua.

Against this Familial-Historical View, Alcoff argued that “Latinx” is more apt than “Hispanic” because it properly picks out individuals who relate to and suffer US-caused imperialism or colonialism since the Spanish-American war of 1898 (Alcoff, 2005b). That is, the term, “Latinx,” as opposed to “Hispanic” picks out peoples of Latin America in the US and throughout the Americas that suffer anti-Latinx racism and oppression. For Alcoff, this a good feature of the term “Latinx” because Iberians in Europe and Iberians in the US, do not suffer anti-Latinx racism of the kind that, say, Puerto Ricans and Mexicans experience (Alcoff, 2005a). As a result, they are importantly considered different groups.

But this debate’s focus has shifted from (i) a debate about the proper use of “Hispanic” and “Latinx” conceived as ethnic-identity terms to (ii) a debate regarding whether “Hispanic,” as an ethnic term, and “Latinx,” understood as a *racial* term, should be used to refer to “Hispanic/Latinx” people.

The initial debate assumed that “Hispanic/Latinx” people were an ethnicity, but the later iteration of the debate does not involve this assumption.

Alcoff has defended the view that ‘Latinx people’ should be understood as an “ethnorace” because they are neither solely a race nor solely an ethnicity (Alcoff, 2006, 2009). By her lights, Latinx people involve features of both terms. If one wants to understand the comparative lack of Latinx assimilation in the US, and Latinx experience, then one should understand Latinx people as an ethnorace. This view is partly motivated by the fact that Latinx persons from, say, Argentina and the Dominican Republic tend to differ in the kind of anti-Latino racism they suffer where this difference results from how they differ racially.

J. Angelo Corlett has argued that ‘Latinx people’ are best understood as an ethnicity rather than a race (Corlett, 2003, 2018). Although, he prefers to use the term “Latinx” to refer to ‘Latinx people’ to exclude Iberians from its extension. Against all the positions in the literature, Burgos and Arango argue that Latinidad is neither a race, an ethnicity nor an ethnorace (Arango & Burgos, Manuscript). They argue for a deflationary view of Latinidad according to which Latinidad is properly understood as a social affordance.

The identity term “Afro-Latinx” has not only been absent from this debate, but it also has figured quite peripherally in the larger Latin American philosophy literature. The “Afro-Latinx” term’s lack of presence in this debate sits in stark contrast with the term’s burgeoning use amongst Latinx persons primarily in the diaspora but also in Latin America (Charles, 2021; Y. C. Figueroa, 2020; Hordge-Freeman & Veras, 2020; Rodriguez, 2021). The term’s salience for a significant subset of Latinx/Hispanic people was put into sharp relief when many Hispanic/Latinx people in the press and on social media criticized Lin Manuel Miranda for failing to cast enough dark-skinned actors in the film adaptation of his hit Broadway play, *In The Heights* (L. Garcia et al., 2021; M. Garcia et al., 2021;

Marks, 2021). The play is set in the upper Manhattan Dominican neighborhood of Washington Heights which has long largely been populated by Dominicans of African descent.

This criticism lodged against Miranda involves the idea that a failure to represent Dominicans as largely Afro-descendant matters because the experience of Afro-Dominican and thus Afro-Latinx people importantly differs from non-Afro-Latinx-descendant persons in terms of the kind of racism and xenophobia Afro-Latinx people face. The basic idea that motivates this criticism is that Miranda's failure to portray Washington Heights as Afro-Dominican results in a failure to convey what kind of place it is and what its residents undergo. A takeaway from this is that many Hispanic/Latinx people are not content to identify merely as either "Hispanic" or "Latinx" because these terms do not appropriately capture their experience in the Dominican diaspora in particular and the Latinx diaspora in the US in general. Some evidence of this is that according to a recent study up to 24% of Hispanic/Latinx people identify as Afro-Latinx (Hordge-Freeman & Veras, 2020).

US popular culture is not alone in failing to consider Afro-Latinx identity because surprisingly, with a few exceptions (Alcoff, 2009; Anzaldúa, 2012; Y. Figueroa, 2020; Y. C. Figueroa, 2020), the English language Latin American philosophy literature has largely not considered Afro-Latinx identity relative to the number of Hispanic/Latinx people who identify as Afro-Latinx. Consonant with this general lacuna in the Latin American philosophy literature, the debate regarding the aptness of the terms, "Hispanic" and "Latinx" also has not taken up whether the "Afro-Latinx" term should be used to refer to Hispanic/Latinx people rather than merely the terms "Hispanic" or "Latinx." Given (1) the salience of "Afro-Latinx" among a significant number of Hispanic/Latinx people and (2) the lacuna of treatments of Afro-Latinx identity in not only the Latin American philosophy literature but also in this debate regarding the terms "Hispanic" and "Latinx," a goal here is to introduce the "Afro-Latinx" term to this this debate and thus the Latin American philosophy literature.

To introduce the “Afro-Latinx” term, I will present a novel position vis-à-vis the views in the literature regarding whether the terms “Hispanic” or “Latinx” are more apt. To this end, I will argue (C) that the term “Afro-Latinx” is more apt than “Hispanic” or “Latinx” in a significant number of cases. This conclusion is based on three premises. The first premise is (P1) that use of “Afro-Latinx” provides US subjects with understanding of how certain events depend on anti-Black racism, US society’s racially unjust structure and US colonial policy. The second premise is (P2) that neither the term “Hispanic” nor the term “Latinx” provide subjects with this understanding of how certain events depend on anti-Black racism, US society’s racially unjust structure and US colonial policy. The third premise is (P3) that the term “Afro-Latinx” provides subjects with this understanding of these events. The sense of dependence I invoke here is that if either anti-Black racism, US society’s racially unjust structure or US colonial policy had been different or not obtained, then these events would have either not obtained or differed significantly in character (Dellsén, 2018; Grimm, 2017). This argument takes the following form. If (P1), (P2), and (P3), then (C). I show that (P1), (P2) and (P3) are true, thus (C) obtains.

These events consist in (a) the experiences of persons of varying degrees of African descent in the US and Latin America and (b) US neo-colonial relations during the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries. These event kinds range over most, if not all, of Latin America because individuals of African descent exist in every Latin American country in degrees that range from small to large. To motivate this argument, I will present cases in which appeal to the term, “Afro-Latinx” or its cognates results in understanding of Hispanic-Latinx oppression that a similar appeal to either “Hispanic” and “Latinx” does not. And I will explain why invoking the notions of Blackness or African descent can promote this understanding.

One consequence of the argument that I present is that “Latinx” is more apt than “Hispanic” if “Latinx” is understood to involve a commitment to “Latinx” people as not merely an ethnicity, but

rather as in part a race. This argument has this consequence because “Afro-Latinx” is more apt due to its commitment to the idea that racism and *racial* injustice explain Latinx oppression.

But “Latinx” is not as apt in comparison to “Afro-Latinx” vis-à-vis certain kinds of events because it does not as clearly involve content that represents how Black persons relate to White persons in Latin America and the diaspora. That is, they differ in how fully they represent the dependence relations between the experiences of Black persons in Latin America and White persons’ position as the dominant racial group. However, even if “Afro-Latinx” is more apt in certain cases because it yields subjects understanding that “Latinx” does not, “Latinx” will still be apt in many, if not more, cases because “Latinx” will yield understanding that “Afro-Latinx” does not similarly yield. A basic idea here is that whether an identity term is apt will depend on the event, episode or portion of social reality that a subject seeks to explain and thus understand.

The criterion that I will use to judge whether the identity term “Afro-Latinx” is more apt than “Hispanic” or “Latinx” is explanatory value and the understanding that such explanatory value yields subjects. As a consequence, I cash out aptness in terms of its epistemic pay off for subjects. Here I assume that if a subject uses an identity term *x* that has more explanatory value to explain an event than another identity term *y*, then this subject will tend to have deeper understanding of this event than if she had used identity term *y*. In other words, I assume that better explanation of an event tends to result in deeper understanding of this event. And a corollary assumption that I make is that the epistemic utility of an identity term depends on what a subject aims to explain and thus understand.

With respect to Hispanic/Latinx peoples from countries such as the Dominican Republic and Panama, the terms “Hispanic” and “Latinx” do not result in third-party subjects understanding significant portions of their experiences because these countries’ populations largely consist in individuals with some, if not primarily, African descent. I will focus on the case of Dominican experience on the island of Hispaniola and its corresponding diaspora in North America. To this end,

I will propose that “Afro-Dominican” is an identity term that provides subjects with greater explanation and thus deeper understanding of a significant number of important events that compose Dominican experience in comparison to the identity terms “Hispanic” and “Latinx.”

I take the analysis that I present here as compatible with most views of what understanding involves. For example, the analysis I present is compatible with the view that “understanding is directed at a complex of some kind...with parts that depend upon, and relate to, one another” which a subject “grasps or apprehends when [she] understands” (Dellsén, 2018; Greco, 2020; Grimm, 2012, p. 105, 2017). I take my analysis to be compatible with the notion that understanding can involve grasping the relations between ideas and concepts regarding an understanding target (Elgin, 2009), grasping explanatory relations and how things cohere in the domain of understanding (Kvanvig, 2003) and awareness of how the internal bits of the target of understanding relate to each other (Riggs, 2003).¹

I will take up how identity terms such as “Hispanic,” “Latinx,” “Afro-Latinx” and “Afro-Dominican” relate to whether a subject understands a non-trivial number of cases of Hispanic/Latinx experience in particular and the Americas more generally. To this end, I will refer to US subjects who do or do not make appeal to these identity terms. Even though I refer to US subjects in a broad way, I do not assume that the identity of a subject will make no difference to whether a US subject understands this set of cases and the Americas. To the contrary, I will assume that whether a subject is White, Black, Latinx, a man, a woman or non-binary will either elevate or depress the likelihood that

¹ I do not assume that understanding is irreducible to knowledge or some other epistemic state. The basic idea is that there is some good epistemic state that a subject will not be in if she uses one term rather than another term. As a consequence, those who reject that the epistemic state of understanding is reducible to knowledge (Hills, 2009, 2016; Hu, 2019) can accept the argument that I present.

a subject gains this understanding (Alcoff, 1999; Collins, 1990; Du Bois, 1903; Harding, 1995, 2015; Hartsock, 1998; Longino, 1990). And I will assume that a subject's identity, or social location, can affect what degree of understanding a subject has of these phenomena or cases. Here I invoke phenomena such as white ignorance (Mills, 2007, 2015), testimonial and hermeneutical injustice (Fricker, 2007, 2016), testimonial quieting and smothering (Dotson, 2011), epistemic appropriation (Davis, 2018), meta-ignorance (Medina, 2013) and others (Alcoff, 2007; Bayruns García, 2019, 2020; Collins, 1990; Crerar, 2016; Peet, 2017; Pohlhaus, Jr, 2012; Woomer, 2019) as explanans that explain why a subject's membership in a dominant identity group will have this effect vis-à-vis the epistemic state of understanding.

The argument that I present will focus on Afro-Latinx identity even though a very similar argument can be made vis-à-vis the identity term, "Indigenous Latinx." Indigenous Latinx identity has also been absent from this debate over the aptness of the terms "Hispanic" and "Latinx." Indigenous Latinx identity has been featured in the English language Latin American philosophy literature in some measure even though it has not received the attention it merits (Anzaldúa, 2012; Mariátegui, 2004). Even though the argument that I present will take Afro-Latinx identity as its primary target, many of the same considerations that motivate this argument could motivate an argument that takes Indigenous Latinx identity as its primary target. As a result, these considerations could motivate an argument that takes people of varying degrees of Indigenous descent in Mexico, central America and south America as its primary target rather than peoples of varying Afro-descent in the nations of the Spanish speaking Greater Antilles such as Cuba, the Dominican Republic and Puerto Rico, and the Caribbean portions of Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, Honduras and Costa Rica. Even though Afro-Latinx identity has featured most prominently in Spanish speaking countries in and bordering on the Caribbean, communities of Afro-descent continue to and have long existed in countries where

Indigenous and Mestizo identity predominate such as Mexico and Peru (Bennett, 2003, 2009; Sessarego, 2015).

In the first section, I will first present cases in which use of the term “Afro-Latinx” and “Afro-Dominican” allows subjects to understand US society, Dominican society and the Americas in a way that the terms “Hispanic” and “Latinx” do not. In the second section, I will explain why competitor views fall short. In the final section, I will consider some objections to my view.

Section I

In this section, I will present cases in which a subject’s use of “Afro-Dominican” and “Afro-Latinx” allow her to understand (i) instances of anti-Latinx injustice in the US and Latin America and (ii) US-Latin America imperial or colonial relations. Some have argued that race terms such as “Black” and “White” retain their salience for subjects because they help explain the world and as a consequence subjects continue to use them. Satya Mohanty (1997) and Alcoff (2015) argue that these terms’ use provide subjects with understanding of events and the world that they would not otherwise have.

Consider the Birmingham, Alabama, 16th Street Baptist Church bombing (Jones, 2019; McWhorter, 2001). If a speaker tries to explain this event without reference to the fact that the victims were Black and that the bombers were White, then the hearer would not understand the event in important respects. For example, a hearer would not come to grasp that the event was an act of *racist* terror motivated by the encroaching gains of the Civil Rights movement led by Martin Luther King and others. And this hearer would not grasp how this act is a result of White supremacy as a political system in the US (Mills, 1997). Here “Black” and “White” are explanans that explain this event, the explanandum. Mohanty calls these terms and their corresponding ideas small theories because of the explanatory work that they do relative to such events or targets of explanation (Mohanty, 1997).

Here the term, “White,” invokes the dominant-racial group in the US that has for centuries dominated and subjugated Black persons through institutions and practices such as chattel slavery,

Jim Crow and redlining real estate practices (Mills, 1997, p. 199; Omi & Winant, 1994; K.-Y. Taylor, 2019; P. C. Taylor, 2013). The term, “Black,” invokes a non-dominant-racial group in the US which has, through centuries of struggle, increasingly gained rights and recognition in terms of the law and the demands of morality.

Now, take the case of the Washington Heights’ Uprising of 1992. New York police officer Michael O’Keefe shot and killed José ‘Kiko’ García during a struggle in Washington Heights (Regalado, 2018). Kiko García was an undocumented Afro-Dominican from an extremely impoverished part of the Dominican Republic. According to bystanders, Kiko was unarmed. This shooting resulted in the Washington Heights Uprising which involved 14 building fires, 121 burned vehicles, 139 arrests, 90 injuries and 1 death over the course of 9 days (Regalado, 2018). Rudolph Giuliani appealed to this event in his first successful mayoral campaign and he later appealed to it as a justification for a “racialized standard for order and disorder” in New York. Giuliani evoked racial fears and anti-Afro-Latinx animus to (i) aid his mayoral electoral defeat of New York City’s first Black mayor David Dinkins and (ii) to justify unjust and racist police tactics such as stop-and-frisk which focused on non-White communities such as Washington Heights (Regalado, 2018).

If one tries to understand this event using the terms “Hispanic,” then one will not get a full grasp of what kind of events (a) the killing of Kiko García and (b) the ensuing Washington Heights Uprising were. If a speaker appealed to “Hispanic” to explain these events to an unfamiliar hearer, then this hearer could think that Kiko’s murder was motivated by xenophobia or ethnocentrism of some kind. An explanation of this event that involves appeal to “Hispanic” allows a subject to believe that anti-Iberian attitudes motivated Kiko’s murder. This explanation leaves unaddressed how Kiko’s murder depended on (i) anti-Afro-Latinx attitudes and (ii) imperialist US policies that led to Kiko García leaving the Dominican Republic. And such a “Hispanic” involving explanation would leave a

subject without a sense of why this murder led to such an explosive response from the predominately Dominican-and-Latinx community in Washington Heights.

If a subject attempts to understand this event using the term “Latinx,” then this subject may only fare slightly better than a subject who uses the term “Hispanic” because the term “Latinx” includes Italian-or-German-descendant Argentinians or White Costa Ricans in its extension. Even though “Latinx” includes individuals of African descent in its extension, it does not exclude individuals who are not of African descent. As a result, subjects who appeal to “Latinx” will fail to understand (i) why officer O’Keefe murdered Kiko García and (ii) why the community’s reaction to his murder was so intense.

But if a subject uses the term “Afro-Latinx” to understand this event, then she will fare better than if she had used the terms “Hispanic” or “Latinx” because “Afro-Latinx” invokes that this community is a largely Afro-descendant community. This offers a comparatively better explanation of officer O’Keefe’s murder of Kiko García because NYPD officers have a history unjustly killing persons of African descent. That is, explicitly held racial animus or subpersonally harbored anti-Black prejudice likely explains Kiko García’s murder because if he had not been of African descent, then he would likely not have been murdered.

Appeal to the term “Afro-Latinx” provides a comparatively better explanation of the Uprising because Washington Heights as a primarily Dominican-Afro-Latinx community had long experienced indiscriminate violence at the hands of NYPD officers without the recourse that other non-Black communities had. An explanation that involves appeal to “Afro-Latinx” captures how the Uprising’s ferocity depended on how Anglo-dominated US society viewed Dominicans as not only Latin Americans, but also, importantly, as African or Black Latin Americans. This explanation results in subjects grasping how the Uprising’s nature depended on anti-African attitudes in the US.

But appeal to Dominicans' African descent through use of the identity term "Black" does not entirely explain the Uprising's ferocity because US colonial or imperial policy in Latin America partly explains the Uprising's nature. US colonial or imperialist policy explains the Uprising's nature because Dominicans realized that their impoverished circumstance in Washington Heights was a direct result of US interventions and occupations of the Dominican Republic and anti-Black and anti-Latinx US policies such as redlining and stop and frisk policing programs (Alang et al., 2017; Bosch & Lane, 1968; Brunson & Miller, 2006; Mayes, 2014; Moya Pons, 1981; K.-Y. Taylor, 2019). An example of this interventionist colonial policy is the US' first invasion and occupation of the Dominican Republic in the 1920s that resulted in the US grooming and then supporting the 30-year reign of white supremacist authoritarian dictator, Rafael Trujillo. The US' support for Trujillo contributed to depressing social mobility for Afro-Dominicans in the Dominican Republic. This likely explains not only why Kiko García moved to the US in search of greater opportunity, but also why so many Afro-Dominicans left the Dominican Republic to live in impoverished urban US neighborhoods such as Washington Heights.

Another reason why appeal to Dominicans' African descent does not completely explain the Uprising's nature is that Dominicans are in part Latin Americans who not only differ linguistically but also culturally from Euro-Americans (Sanchez Carretero, 2005). That Dominicans differ on this score partly explains why we experienced less immediate social mobility than other waves of immigration to the US from Europe. As a result, the Latinx feature of Dominican identity partly explains the Uprising's nature.

Both the Latinx feature and the African or Black feature of Dominican identity explain the nature of the Uprising. That Dominicans are African descendant does part of the explaining. And that Dominicans are Latinx does part of the explaining. But a subject would have a less full grasp of why the Uprising's response was so strong if she does not appeal to both features of Dominicans' identity.

That is, if a subject uses the term “Afro-Latinx” to explain the nature of the Uprising, then she will have a greater grasp of how (a) its nature depended on both (b) Dominicans experience of anti-Black racism and racial injustice and (c) Dominicans experience of anti-Latinx attitudes and anti-Latinx US foreign policy.

However, a subject’s use of the identity term “Black” might seem to explain Kiko García’s murder at least as well as the term “Afro-Latinx.” It might seem to explain the murder at least as well because the term “Black” invokes content that indeed does explain Kiko García’s murder. Some of the components of this content that explain this murder are anti-Black attitudes that Officer O’Keefe likely harbored (Correll et al., 2007; James, 2018; Paoline et al., 2018), stop-and-frisk-like police tactics that targeted Black persons (White, 2016) and redlining policies that resulted in impoverished Black neighborhoods (K.-Y. Taylor, 2019).

Even though the identity term “Black” invokes content that explains Kiko García’s murder, “Black” does not as fully explain his murder in comparison to the term “Afro-Latinx.” The identity term “Afro-Latinx” more fully explains Kiko García’s murder because “Afro-Latinx” invokes explanatory content that “Black” does not. “Afro-Latinx” invokes US interventionist policy in the Dominican Republic (Bosch, 1989) which explains why Kiko García was in Washington Heights rather than the Dominican Republic on the day Officer O’Keefe murdered him. The US’ instigated coup d’état of reformist Juan Bosch (Bromberg, 2018), and its support of staunch pro-oligarchy conservatives such as Joaquin Balaguer in large measure explain the waves of migration to the US of which Kiko García was a part (Atkins, 1998; Grasmuck, 1991). The identity term “Black” does not invoke this US foreign policy. Another bit of content that “Afro-Latinx” invokes that “Black” does not is the false idea that Rudolph Giuliani helped to propagate, namely that Dominicans are especially prone to criminality in general and drug-dealing in particular (Regalado, 2018). That is, that O’Keefe harbored this false notion of Dominicans partly explained why he murdered him.

So far, I have focused on how the term “Afro-Latinx” explains the events and experiences of Dominicans or “Hispanic/Latinx people in New York City in comparison to the terms “Hispanic” and “Latinx.” That is, I have attended to the varying degrees of explanatory purchase that these terms afford a US subject of Hispanic/Latinx oppression in the US.

I will now attend to how a US subject’s use of “Afro-Latinx” allows for understanding of anti-Blackness in the Dominican Republic that the terms “Hispanic” and “Latinx” do not similarly afford. I submit that a US subject’s use of the term “Afro-Dominican” allows her to understand how anti-Blackness in the Dominican Republic differs from anti-Blackness in the US. Consider what I call the Nightclub Case. I and my friend attempted to enter a nightclub in Santo Domingo, the capital of the Dominican Republic, to join our friends at a table which they had reserved. The bouncer initially denied us entry on the grounds that no such table was reserved. Then he admitted that our friends were inside at this table. But he continued to deny us entry. Although, we were momentarily perplexed, we ultimately judged that we were denied entry because my companion’s hair was in a hairstyle that put her African ancestry on clear display. We later received confirmation of this judgement from individuals who spoke with the bouncer.

As many have pointed out, the meaning of race terms such as “Black,” “White” and “Indigenous” can differ depending on where one uses these terms (Alcoff, 2006, 2015; P. C. Taylor, 2013). The meaning of the term “Black” in the US partly derives its meaning from how the term was used to refer to a group that was enslaved for hundreds of years, not allowed equal formal legal rights in society for generations afterwards under a regime of de jure White supremacy and then denied equal opportunities and life chances under an ongoing regime of de facto White supremacy (Mills, 1997). The material conditions and practices that compose white supremacy in the US partly determine what the term “Black” means (Alcoff, 2006, 2015; Omi & Winant, 1994; Quijano, 2000; P. C. Taylor, 2000).

Similarly, the meaning of the term “Black” depends on how the term was used to refer to persons of African descent in the Dominican Republic who were descendants of enslaved persons. But the material conditions and practices that composed white supremacy in the Dominican Republic differed starkly from the conditions that composed the conditions in the US (Bosch, 1970; Moya Pons, 1981, 2007). As a consequence, attitudes regarding intermarriage were much more lax in the Dominican Republic even if a current of anti-Blackness still ran, and still runs, quite strongly through the Dominican social imaginary (García-Peña, 2016; Mayes, 2014; Moya Pons, 1981; Ramírez, 2018; Torres-Saillant, 1998).

If a US subject attempts to explain the Nightclub Case, appeal to “Hispanic” will not yield a satisfactory explanation because “Hispanic” includes Iberians. Iberians would not receive such treatment because their hair cannot be styled such that a bouncer would deny them entry. An explanation that appeals to “Latinx” identity would suffer a similar problem because the extension of “Latinx” can include subjects who cannot style their hair in a way that would result in the relevant racist treatment. And appeal to “Dominican” will not suffice to explain this treatment because most, if not all, of the club’s entrants were Dominican. So, neither “Hispanic,” “Latinx” nor even “Dominican” will satisfactorily explain this racist treatment that my companion experienced.

But the term, “Afro-Dominicana” will provide a comparatively better explanation of the Nightclub Case because appeal to the fact that Marisol is of African descent and thus can style her hair in a way that clearly put on display that she is Afro-descendant. This explains why the bouncer denied her entry. It explains why she was denied entry because if she had not been of Afro-descent or worn her hair in a way that signaled her Afro-descent, then she would have been allowed entry into the club. That is, that the bouncer denied her entry depended on her Afro-descendent identity.

However, that she was denied does not solely depend on her identity as Afro-descendant, because that she was denied entry also depends on how her gender intersects with her identity as Afro-

Dominican. Many of the woman who were allowed entry straightened their hair in a way that invoked White identity. Had they not straightened their hair, they would have likely also been denied entry into the club. Here Dominican women bear a burden that men typically do not bear vis-à-vis invoking White identity to comport with European standards of acceptability or beauty (García-Peña, 2016; Ramírez, 2018). Dominican men can merely wear their hair short without a need to straighten longer hair as women do in the Dominican Republic.

One might think that a US subject need only use the term “Black” to properly explain this case because that the bouncer denied Marisol entry into the club depends on anti-Blackness. But the term “Black” is used by Dominicans in an importantly different way than it is used in the US. In the Dominican Republic, ninety percent of the population is at least in part Afro-descendent in some measure (Edward Telles & Paschel, 2014). As a consequence, someone can be more or less Black where that covaries with more or less perceived positive aesthetic value. And a significant portion of the population do not conceive of themselves as Black but rather ‘mixed.’ The reverse one-drop rule in some ways sums up how Dominicans like many other Hispanic/Latinx groups, think about race (Gómez, 2021). One drop of White blood will serve to make one not Black. Or one drop of White blood will serve to make one not Haitian where Black is taken be coterminous with Haitian (de Kalaf, 2022).

An upshot of this is that some hairstyles in comparison to others can to a greater or lesser degree display one’s Blackness. A US subject’s use of the term “Afro-Dominican” will more properly invoke Dominican Blackness or Dominican identity in a way that represents how Marisol’s denial depends on a particular Dominican formation of Blackness that differs from Blackness in the US (Omi & Winant, 1994).

I will now consider how the term “Afro-Latinx,” in comparison to “Hispanic” and “Latinx” provides a subject with understanding of the Americas that would otherwise elude her. One domain

in which “Afro-Latinx” will avail subjects with this understanding are power-relations in Latin America. Since the Bolivarian revolution of the 1800s, political leaders and philosophers in Latin America presented Latin American countries as places in which mestizaje had made Anglo North American racial categories explanatorily inapt and politically unhelpful (Gracia, 2000, 2008; Gracia & Millán, 2004; Nuccetelli, 2020). But even though racial categories such as Black, White and Indigenous operate less dichotomously in Latin America, these categories still track groups of people with more or less social status and political power. So, even though political leaders and philosophers such as José Vasconcelos or Juan Bosch emphasize the mixed nature of, say, Mexico or the Dominican Republic, these are countries where either Indigenous people or Afro-descendant people continue to have comparatively little political power and face racism.

If one attempts to explain why the current elites in Latin America hold power without appeal to terms such as “Black” or “Afro-Latinx,” then one would not provide an explanation that results in understanding how holding positions of power depend on racial classification. Many have suggested that Latin America’s social and political hierarchy is a “pigmentocracy” (Edward Telles & Paschel, 2014; Sidanius et al., 2001). For example, in the Spanish speaking island nations of the Greater Antilles, social status and thus the likelihood that one will have a position of political power covaries with the lightness of one’s skin (Edward Telles & Paschel, 2014; Sawyer et al., 2004).

The term “Hispanic” will not provide one understanding of how power relations depend on and relate to the history of race relations in Latin America. It fails to provide this understanding because the extension of “Hispanic” includes White Iberians and Latin American criollos. Understanding power relations in Latin America will require that one distinguish between Afro-descendant, Indigenous-descendant and Euro-descendant persons and groups. And the term “Latinx” will not provide one with this understanding of how power relations depend on and relate to the history of race relations in Latin America because it, like “Hispanic,” similarly does not distinguish

between White, Black and Indigenous persons. As a result, the view that Bolivar and Vasconcelos presented can mislead.

One might think that the term “Afro-Latinx” leaves unaddressed how race relations differ in places such as Mexico, Costa Rica, Cuba and the Dominican Republic because these countries have histories that differ and levels of mestizaje that differ. Even though this is true, use of the term “Afro-Latinx” allows one to understand the relative disadvantage and lower social status that Afro-descendant peoples have uniformly from Mexico to Peru to Cuba.

Although, Afro-descendant peoples experience of racism and racial injustice has similarities with Afro-descendant people in the US, this experience differs in terms of anti-Black racial attitudes and social mobility. For example, in Cuba, after the revolution, Black people’s economic, social and political status improved. But despite this improvement, Black persons are still viewed as occupying a social status lower than White and “Mulattos” (Sawyer et al., 2004). Black Cubans not only do not populate high ranking government positions at the rates that Whites or mixed persons do, but they also have not benefitted from recent US tourism anywhere near how White Cubans have (Sawyer et al., 2004).

Section II

In this section, I will explain why three views fail in the debate about whether “Hispanic” or “Latinx” are apt. The first view involves a commitment to the notion that Hispanic/Latinx people are properly taken as an ethnicity in the US. The second view involves commitment to the idea that Hispanic/Latinx people are not properly understood as an ethnicity, but rather as an ethnorace. The third view involves commitment to the idea that Hispanic/Latinx people are neither an ethnicity nor a race.

Gracia develops the first view according to which subjects should use “Hispanic” to refer to Hispanic/Latinx people in the US because this includes individuals who have a historical connection

to the *encuentro* between Iberians and Indigenous peoples of the Americas beginning in 1492 with Columbus accidentally coming upon the Americas (Gracia, 2000, 2008; Gracia & Millán, 2004). Use of the term “Hispanic” avoids problems in individuating Hispanic/Latinx persons on the basis of physical, linguistic or attitudinal properties. Individuating Hispanic/Latinx persons on this basis includes groups who, for US subjects, intuitively should be included in this group. Hispanic/Latinx persons speak languages that differ, have phenotypes that differ and have varying sets of religious and spiritual commitments. So, “Hispanic” allows subjects to refer to individuals who historically relate through family ties to an important historical event, the *encuentro*.

The inclusivity of the term “Hispanic” is not only a positive feature, but also a negative feature. It is negative feature because it includes Iberians who do not share the experience of colonialism or suffer anti-Hispanic/Latinx oppression as do, say, Mexicans, Puerto Ricans and Guatemalans. As a consequence, this term does not put subjects in a position to explain why these groups suffer this kind of oppression. Gracia is right to appeal to history as a way to individuate Hispanic/Latinx persons from other groups. But his neglect of the role colonial or imperial relations play in creating the Hispanic/Latinx identity group results in his appealing to the wrong historical relations which in turn lead him to include beneficiaries of colonialism in the extension of “Hispanic/Latinx.” And that he includes Spaniards in its extension led him to the view that “Hispanic” understood as an ethnic term is how Hispanic/Latinx people should be referred to.

“Hispanic” might refer to and helpfully distinguish certain kinds of events and individuals in the Americas and worldwide, but it leaves unindividuated and unexplained events such as Kiko García’s murder and the Washington Heights Uprising. As a result, “Hispanic” will leave subjects who seek understanding of such events without the resources they need to grasp these events.

Angelo Corlett argues that Hispanic/Latinx people should be referred to using “Latinx” understood as an ethnicity term (Corlett, 2003, 2018). Even though he argues that that someone is

Latinx due to their genealogical connection to other Latinx persons through their parents, he insists that Latinx people are properly understood as an ethnicity rather than as a race. He so insists because of the phenotypical diversity across Latin America and the US and because this allows for an objective criterion that governments can use when designating the beneficiaries of programs such as affirmative action (Corlett, 2003, 2018).

The identity term “Latinx,” take as Corlett understand it, would fail to yield understanding of events such as Kiko García’s murder and the Uprising’s nature. It would fail to yield understanding of such events because many Criollo or Argentinian persons will count as Latinx. This will leave a subject without the resources to understand how Kiko García’s murder and the Uprising’s intensity depended on anti-Black or racist attitudes and treatment in the US.

Corlett might respond that the fact that “Latinx” does not explain cases such as Kiko Garcia’s is not a strike against his view. According to this objection, this does not undermine his view because his view of Latinx identity understood as an ethnicity does not require that the identity term “Latinx” provide subjects maximal understanding of all cases which feature Latinx persons. So, even though Corlett’s view of “Latinx” seems compatible with the view I present of “Afro-Latinx” as more explanatory in a significant number of important cases, “Latinx” understood as an ethnicity term will often fail to explain in a significant number of important cases precisely because his view involves commitment to the notion that Latinx identity is merely an ethnicity which does not involve a racial component. According to the view I present, the aptness of the identity term “Afro-Latinx” in large measure results from the fact that the term explicitly and clearly invokes a racial component of Latinx identity.

Alcoff has presented a view of Latinx identity and its corresponding identity term “Latinx” that includes this racial component together with an ethnic component. Alcoff argues that Hispanic/Latinx subjects should use the term “Latinx” understood as an ethnorace (Alcoff, 2006,

2009). On her view, if one wants to understand why Latinx experience differs from that of both ethnic groups and racial groups, then one must take into account that the group, Latinx, in the US is composed of groups that experience anti-Latinx treatment because of either anti-ethnic or anti-racial-group-based animus, or both. Light-skinned Argentinians will face anti-Latinx discrimination and treatment because their Spanish accent signals that they are Latinx (Alcoff, 2009). Dominicans, Puerto Ricans and Panamanians will often not only face similar treatment, but also importantly often face anti-Latinx treatment motivated in large measure by anti-Black animus.

Even though Alcoff's proposal involves appeal to and acknowledgement of how race figures into and explains the character of anti-Latinx oppression, this proposal merely involves the suggestion that society should understand Latinx identity to involve racial components in addition to ethnic components. This is a proposal that concerns the semantic content of the term "Latinx." By Alcoff's lights, others have gotten the semantic content wrong or propose semantic content that leaves important elements out of the term's content.

But even if "Latinx" has or comes to have the content that she proposes, the term will not yield an explanation of Kiko García's murder and the ensuing Uprising's intensity that leaves a subject with a grasp of how these events depend on anti-Blackness. Alcoff's proposal suggests how the entire group, Latinx, should be understood. But an explanation that results in a subject's grasp of how racist attitudes and the unjust racial structure of US society bear a dependence relation to these events will involve a specific appeal to Latin American Afro-descendant peoples in particular, apart from other Latinx persons. The content of the term, "Latinx," as Alcoff proposes fails on this score. And evaluating this proposal on this score is fair because Alcoff argues that "Latinx" should be so understood because other senses of Latinx identity leave subjects without an *understanding* of, say, why Latinx persons have not assimilated into US society in the way that ethnic groups such as the Irish, Italians and Greeks have.

However, Alcoff does argue for what she calls identity proliferation (Alcoff, 2006, 2009). Identity proliferation involves using finer grained categories to understand socioeconomic and political reality. She points to the fact that when light-skinned Black persons are disaggregated from dark-skinned Black persons, the gap between Black and White persons is even larger than it seemed (Goldsmith et al., 2006). Thus, explaining Kiko García's murder and the Washington Heights Uprising's intensity by appeal to Afro-Latinx or Afro-Dominican identity is motivated by this notion of the need for identity proliferation.

Section III

I now consider objections to the argument that I have presented. One objection is that emphasizing Afro-Latinx identity will serve to disunite Latinx peoples and thus undermine them politically. The spirit of this objection is political rather than epistemic. It is political because this objection trades on the idea that description of social and political reality can be permissibly delimited by political consequences. Here the political consequence is that if Afro-Latinx identity is emphasized in the US, then this will serve to undermine solidary feeling among all Latinx persons, not merely Afro-Latinx persons, who experience forms of anti-Latinx oppression.

A response to this objection is that if one group's experiences of oppression or injustice are not acknowledged by relevant parties, then this solidary feeling will be undermined (Alcoff, 2006, 2015). Alcoff has argued for this point. She argues that coalitions that do not acknowledge the differing needs that groups have as a result of their different histories of suffering injustice or oppression will find difficulty in maintaining solidarity (Alcoff, 2006, 2015). So, describing the experience of oppression or injustice that a particular group endures can be compatible with and even promote solidarity.

A second objection is that if identity proliferation motivates the use of "Afro-Latinx" to explain Kiko's murder and the Uprising, it is unclear why "Afro-Dominican" is not more apt than

“Afro-Latinx” because Afro-Dominican might more specifically pick out Dominican experience in the US. The idea here is that disaggregating Latinx groups will result in deeper understanding of the oppression and injustice that these groups face. On this view, if we disaggregate Afro-Dominicans from Afro-Cubans and Afro-Boricuas, then we may gain an even firmer and better grip on oppression and injustice than Afro-Dominicans’ experience.

A response to this objection is that there will be instances where appeal to Afro-Latinx persons rather than merely Afro-Dominicans will put into relief features of social reality that would otherwise remain occluded or opaque. In the case of Kiko García’s murder and the Washington Heights Uprising’s intensity, at least two factors weigh in favor of using “Afro-Latinx” rather than “Afro-Dominican” to explain these events. One factor is that even though Washington Heights is a predominantly Dominican neighborhood, it is not entirely Dominican. A significant number of Puerto Rican and Cuban persons have long lived and remain in the neighborhood such that explaining Kiko García’s murder will involve appeal to an Afro-Latinx community that includes Afro-Cuban and Afro-Boricua persons going back one or two generations. So, not only will the interactions between police and Afro-Latinx people of varying origin play into the attitude that motivated O’Keefe’s murder of Kiki, but the intensity of the Uprising will similarly be a result of the treatment that Afro-Cuban, Puerto Rican and Dominican peoples collectively faced in Washington Heights over generations.

A second factor is that Dominicans’ experience of racialization and xenophobia will be of a piece with the treatment that other Afro-descendant persons from the Spanish speaking Antilles will have experienced as Afro-descendant peoples of the Greater Antilles. This treatment will not only have obtained in the US, but it will also have obtained during the US’ military occupations of the Dominican Republic, the US’s colonial policies in Puerto Rico and pre-Cuba-revolution segregationist policies implemented in hotels to appease White Americans tourists used to southern Jim Crow polices (Sawyer et al., 2004). So, the common source of this treatment and the common features of its target

make proper the use of “Afro-Latinx” in comparison to “Afro-Cuban,” “Afro-Puerto Rican” or “Afro-Dominican.”

Conclusion

I have argued that the identity term “Afro-Latinx” is more apt than “Hispanic” and “Latinx” in a significant number of important cases. The criterion I use for aptness is explanatory payoff where this payoff is measured in the degree of understanding that an identity term yields a US subject who uses and identity to explain the world. To motivate this argument, I have presented cases of Afro-Dominican qua Afro-Latinx persons where use of “Afro-Latinx” rather than “Hispanic” or “Latinx” yield the deepest understanding.

I have also presented reasons why “Latinx” and “Hispanic” understood as ethnicity terms and “Latinx” understood as an ethnorace fail to adequately explain the cases I present of Afro-Dominican experience. On the picture that I have painted, “Latinx” and “Hispanic” understood as ethnic terms fail to satisfactorily explain these cases at least partly because they fail to invoke explanatory content that involves reference to how the nature of these cases depends on racial injustice and the racial components of Latinx identity vis-à-vis Latinx peoples of Afro-descent from places such as the Dominica Republic, Cuba, Puerto Rico and the coastal regions of Colombia, Venezuela and Peru. And I have highlighted that even though Alcoff’s view of Latinx identity understood as an ethnorace fares comparatively better in terms of explanation it still fails to adequately explain the cases I present of Afro-Dominican experience because the term includes too much reference to ethnic components of Latinx identity that are not explanatorily at issue.

Acknowledgements

I not only thank the participants at a Fellow-in-Residence workshop, at Harvard University's Edmond and Lily Safra Center, devoted this a draft of this paper, but I also thank Sally Haslanger and Tommie Shelby for providing very thoughtful feedback on it as commentators during this workshop. I also thank audiences at meetings of the Episteme Conference, Caribbean Philosophical Association, Eastern and Central Divisions of the American Philosophical Association, the Latinx Philosophy Conference and an audience at the CUNY Graduate Center's Philosophers of the Pandemic Generation conference for their helpful questions and feedback. And I thank Zoey Lavalée for very helpful feedback on very early draft of this paper.

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