CHAPTER 4

Rayano Consciousness

Remapping the Haiti-DR Border after the Earthquake of 2010

Consider Sonia Marmolejos and understand why, despite everything, I still have hope.

In January 2010, as the world coped with news about one of the most lethal disasters in the history of humanity, Sonia Marmolejos, a Dominican rayana from Bahoruco, became a worldwide celebrity. On January 14, braving the chaos left by the magnitude seven earthquake that shook the island of Hispaniola, killing about 230,000 people, Marmolejos traveled to the capital city of Santo Domingo to seek medical assistance for her two-year-old daughter. The toddler was born with a rare genetic condition and required bone replacement surgery to walk. Marmolejos was hoping to receive aid for her daughter at the public Darío Contreras Hospital, where she had finally been able to secure an appointment after a six-month wait. But when she arrived, the toddler could not be seen because all medical personnel were tending to the hundreds of Haitians in critical condition who had been airlifted to the Darío Contreras Hospital after the disaster.

While waiting for her daughter to be seen, Marmolejos noticed a baby suffering from cranial wounds among the injured Haitians. The baby cried incessantly and seemed dehydrated and hungry. Marmolejos, who had left her own four-month-old baby in Bahoruco in her mother’s care, acted on maternal instinct, picking up the Haitian infant and nursing him to sleep: “Yo lo vi así y actué por impulso, como madre, es lo que podia hacer” (I saw him in that state, and I acted on instinct, as a mother, I did what I could). Days later, Marmolejos continued going to the hospital, eventually nursing twelve injured babies to wellness. The photograph of a smiling Sonia
nursing a wounded baby (figure 4.1) appeared in many publications. She was invited on television programs and was even the subject of a short film. Dominican media and nationalist organizations capitalized on Marmolejos’s story, hoping to diffuse the international rage that had escalated over the last two decades as a result of the inhumane working and living conditions of Haitian immigrants in Dominican bateyes. On June 2, President Leonel Fernández awarded Marmolejos a medal of honor in a public ceremony attended by former US president Bill Clinton and former Haitian president René Préval (figure 4.2).

Following the earthquake, international media continuously brought attention to the disparities between the two nations of Hispaniola. A frequent observation among journalists covering the rapid Dominican response to the Haitian disaster was the contrast between impoverished, deforested Haiti with its black, Creole-speaking, vodou-practicing population and the relatively prosperous Dominican Republic to the east with its mixed-race, Spanish-speaking, Catholic citizenry. This dichotomist discourse obscured the earthquake-affected Línea Fronteriza, where a Dominican-Haitian culture has existed for centuries and where the rayanos, such as Sonia Marmo-
lejos, experience the same poverty and disenfranchisement journalists and scholars tend to associate with Haiti.

Two photographs of Sonia Marmolejos frame this chapter. The first captures the compassionate image of a happy Sonia nursing the wounded baby. The second shows Sonia in an affectionate embrace with the head of the Haitian state, while representatives of the United States and the Dominican Republic physically surround the couple, exhibiting their approval with gestures and smiles (see figure 4.2). The first photo traveled the world, inspiring writers and activists to highlight Sonia’s actions as an example of cooperation and humanity. The second photo also traveled the world, though the focus was different. The second photo served as illustration in news articles about the series of bilateral agreements in which Clinton, as a representative of the United States, was a liaison to the relief efforts.

The second photo of Sonia Marmolejos captures the genealogical borders of dominicanidad this book proposes. The (historicized) body of Sonia appears physically surrounded by the Dominican state (Leonel Fernández), the United States (Bill Clinton) and the Haitian State (René Préval). The
image illuminates the ways in which bodies, particularly the racialized body of the rayana Marmolejos represents, reflect the official discourse of the nation because, as Elizabeth Grosz argues, bodies are never natural but, rather, always “marked by the history and specificity of [their] existence.” The presence of the state-marked body of Marmolejos in an international political event shows us how the three nations that border dominicanidad attempt to co-opt and control racialized bodies through structures of exploitation and social control that continue to sustain economic inequality in Hispaniola.

Returning our gaze to the first photograph, we are also reminded that dominant structures can always be contested through performances of everyday life that often contradict official discourses of the state. Rather than an extraordinary action, nursing another woman’s baby is, in Marmolejos’s own words, simply “what mothers do.” In poor peasant and rayano villages, breastfeeding is a communal endeavor. Poor women often nurse each other’s babies, sharing household chores, childrearing, and farming tasks. All of these things are part of the daily strategy for survival in impoverished communities throughout the Línea Fronteriza. Marmolejos’s decision to nurse the wounded baby did not result solely from an individual instinct, but rather from an understanding of her responsibility to a community in need. At the hands of the Dominican state, and in the wake of the international media frenzy that followed the quake, Marmolejos’s ordinary community performance was depicted as an extraordinary political act of intra-island solidarity. Understood through a dominant Western discourse of childrearing, Marmolejos’s nursing body became a site for negotiating state(s) authority, legitimacy, and control over the territory and the people affected by the earthquake of 2010. The rayano episteme—Marmolejos’s way of understanding motherhood and community—was silenced to make room for the production of an international narrative of Haitian-Dominican reconciliation that could facilitate state and corporate profit (the Fernández-Préval-Clinton union) in the business of postearthquake Haiti reconstruction.

Through their performances of bodily communion, baby and mother contradicted the bordering enterprise Fernández, Préval, and Clinton represented, for the union of the two bodies symbolized the unification of Hispaniola’s people, not the states. The fact that Marmolejos could nourish a “Haitian” baby with her own “Dominican” body proved that Haitians and Dominicans could not be, as Balaguer and others throughout the twentieth century insisted, inherently different. By giving her milk to the child, Marmolejos challenged the Hispanophile rhetoric sustaining Haitian-
Dominican racial antagonism. Her public act of nursing becomes part of a larger performative archive of rayano contradictions this chapter produces through the dialogic analysis of a variety of temporally, linguistically, and formally diverse texts: *Cantos de la frontera*, a poetry collection (1963) by Dominican nationalist writer Manuel Rueda; a series of performances and videos (2005–2010) by David “Karmadavis” Pérez; and “Da pa lo do,” a song and music video (2011) by writer and performer Rita Indiana Hernández.

In her influential book *The Archive and the Repertoire*, Diana Taylor argues that performance in the Americas is a “vital act of transfer,” transmitting social knowledge, cultural memory, and identities.11 For Taylor, both the archive (texts and other documents) and the repertoire (so-called ephemeral social practices, such as spoken language, gestures, and rituals) operate as valued sites of knowledge making and transmission. Following Taylor’s important theorization of the archive and the repertoire, this chapter proposes Marmolejos’s “act of transfer”—the practice of communal nursing—as a framework for understanding what I call rayano consciousness: the multiplicity of performative dictions that make up the transnational, interethnic, and multilingual borders of dominicanidad.

Through rayano consciousness, artists, writers, and the general public are able to confront anti-Haitianism within and beyond the island territory and find communal ways to create and historicize their own everyday realities. Transcending the conceptual limits of the militarized territorial Haitian-Dominican border, my conceptualization of rayano consciousness remaps Hispaniola’s borders on the historicized body of the Dominican racialized subject, bringing attention to the persistent violence of colonial presence, but also to multiple ways of contestations. Rayano consciousness offers the possibility of imagining the rayano body as a site for the performance of political contradiction. This process is evident in the works of David Pérez and the music video by Rita Indiana Hernández that I engage in this chapter, as both artists physically embody the genealogical trauma of the Haitian-Dominican border violence in order to contradict it. But rayano consciousness also evokes a moment prior to the violence and destruction that has marked the narration of Haitian-Dominican relations since 1937—a moment immortalized in the post- Trujillo poetry of nationalist writer Manuel Rueda. This chapter historicizes the multiple ways in which contemporary artists from different traditions and generations have interpellated the hegemonic version of the Haitian-Dominican border through the figure of the rayano and the Línea Fronteriza territory. The works I engage in this chapter produce an
other archive of dominicanidad—one that contradicts the violence that has persistently banished rayanos from the Dominican imagination.

Inviting us to think about the rayano experience as one that includes diasporic Dominicans living in the United States, Silvio Torres-Saillant reminds us that the border is a location where the “the transnational, multicultural, transracial and interethnic” interact naturally, “demonstrating what our planet is becoming.”\(^\text{12}\) Following Torres-Saillant’s analysis, we could read the Línea Fronteriza as an anticipation of the future and as an incredibly valuable analytical structure for the development of critical interventions about the pressing concerns of societies across the planet. I invite the reader to think about the possibility of an alternative narrative of dominicanidad in which the raya, or borderline, dividing the two nations of Hispaniola can serve as a metaphor for understanding the multiplicity of experiences that make up dominicanidad rather than as a place of constant conflict and political struggle.

**Contradicting Hispaniola Borders**

One of the earliest examples of rayano consciousness in Dominican cultural production can be found in the poetic works of Manuel Rueda (1921–99). A native of Monte Cristi, a city located on the northern borderlands (see map 3.1) where the atrocious Massacre of 1937 occurred, Rueda grew up surrounded by a multiethnic community of rayanos and ethnic Haitians.\(^\text{13}\) Many were integrated into the life of the city, often employed as servants, shopkeepers, artisans, doctors, or teachers. Rueda’s poetry was greatly inspired by the multiethnic reality of his native city and by the dramatic landscapes of the northern borderland Artibonito Valley. As an intellectual, Rueda was preoccupied with the environmental, cultural, and political future of the Dominican Republic, as well as by what he perceived to be an “unnatural division” between Haiti and the Dominican Republic.\(^\text{14}\) It is in part these preoccupations that gave rise to his collection of poems, *Cantos de la frontera*, which the poet wrote while living in Chile during the early years of the Trujillo dictatorship (1939–51) and finally published in 1963 as part of a larger compilation, titled *La criatura terrestre*.

Rueda’s rayano consciousness comes through in the poem “Canción del rayano,” in which the lyric voice speaks from the subject position of the borderland subject, summoning a memory of Hispaniola prior to the colonial imposition of territorial borders:
La tierra era pequeña y yo no tenía otro oficio que el de recorrerla. . . . 
y mis espaldas era fuertes como los caminos y las montañas de la tierra.
A veces sucedíanse juegos y locas carreras a lo largo de la costa, 

pero me detenía el mar

Él sólo era mi valla y yo me asemejaba a él en poderío y ansia de lo libre.¹⁵ (emphasis added)

[The land was small and I had no occupation other than that of traversing it . . .
and my back was strong like the roads and the mountains of the land.
Sometimes games and crazy paths would occur along the coast,

but the sea held me back.
The sea alone was my border, and I took after him in the power and longing of freedom.]

One of the most intriguing metaphors of Rueda’s “Canción del rayano” is that of the sea as a border. When thinking about borders as a location for the exercise of colonial and state control, we tend to imagine them as land between two nations. Yet, in the Caribbean and, more recently, in the Mediterranean, the question of bordering the nation inevitably encompasses the sea from which potential threats—in the form of colonial forces or, more recently, undocumented immigrants—can arrive. A contemporary reading of the sea-border metaphor encapsulates the image of “boat people,” to borrow from Mayra Santos-Febres, or yoleros, who risk their lives in homemade rafts to cross the dangerous Mona Canal from Hispaniola to Puerto Rico, or balseros crossing the deathly ninety-mile route from Havana to Florida in search of a better life.¹⁶

For Rueda’s poetic voice, however, the sea is both a valla (fence) keeping him from leaving the island as well as a symbol of freedom. It is the space that marks both the end of the insular territory and the beginning of the endless possibilities of a world beyond. The notion on the Caribbean Sea as a dichotomist barrier/opening dialogues with a larger Caribbean intellectual and literary tradition defining the archipelago. Édouard Glissant, for instance, describes the Caribbean Sea as “the estuary of the Americas” where the three great rivers—the Mississippi, the Orinoco, and the Amazon—flow into the Atlantic.¹⁷ Following Glissant’s articulation, the Carib-
bean island can be read as a gateway to freedom and openness, rather than as a separate “insular” entity, as a symbol of globalization and miscegenation: a place where all the waters mix.

Rueda’s lyric voice intertextually references Glissant’s metaphoric Caribbean global-hybrid sea in all its complexities. The rayano lyric voice recognizes himself in the sea: “Y yo me asemejaba a él en su poderío y ansia de lo libre” (And I took after him in the power and longing of freedom). Such similitude also summons a painful recognition of colonial history—one that resulted in the hybrid nature of the rayano subject. The violence of colonialism, however, the lyric voice explains, is not the cultural-racial miscegenation that engendered rayano subjectivity, but rather the violent imposition of the borderline—la raya—that divided the territory and the humans who inhabit it:

Pero vino el final y no lo supe. Pero vino el final y yo dormido. . . . Y alguien trazando sobre mi esa línea, diciendo, ‘tú serás dividido para siempre.’ Un brazo aquí y el otro allá. A mí, al ambidextro, que hacía arrodillar a un toro mientras acariciaba a una criatura.18

[But the end came and I did not realize it. But the end came and I was asleep. . . . And someone drawing that line upon me, saying, ‘You will be divided forever.’ One arm here and the other there. To me, to the ambidextrous, who brought a bull to its knees while caressing a baby.]

The violence of coloniality, the poem suggests, is present in the state’s efforts to define the rayano as a national subject.

Ruben Silié describes the border conflicts between Haiti and the Dominican Republic as constituting “una situación heredada de la dominación colonial, en la que los intereses metropolitanos tuvieron la isla como escenario” (a situation inherited from colonial domination, in which metropolitan interests used the island as a backdrop).19 Let us remember that the Haitian-Dominican border was defined as a result of a colonial transaction. In 1697, Spain ceded a portion of its colony to France, drawing a line along the Da-jabón River in the northwest of the Dominican Republic (see map 3.1).20 In 1777, the Treaty of Aranjuez, signed between Spain and France after multiple territorial conflicts, attempted to clearly define a border to divide the two colonies, therefore protecting the interests of both colonial powers. By the 1844 independence of the Dominican Republic from Haiti, the frontier as defined in the Treaty of Aranjuez had been redrawn several times through various official and unofficial treaties between the governments of both sides.
of the island. In addition, Haitians had been living on the western part of San Juan (south) and Artibonito (north) for at least a century after the Aranjuez Treaty was signed, knowingly ignoring colonial laws. During the years following the proclamation of independence, Dominican patriots such as Félix María del Monte and Ángel Perdomo sought to restore the “original line” defined in the Treaty of Aranjuez as the legitimate division of the island, an action that, as Silié reminds us, responded to a colonized imagination.

Critiquing the colonial imagination that dominated Dominican politics in the second half of the twentieth century, Rueda’s “Canción del rayano” musters a prepartition Hispaniola, when the rayano inhabited a free (borderless) land. Rueda’s rayano world thus precedes the nation(s), and as such exists beyond the nation in a space that is, according to the poem, its own earth—“La tierra era pequeña . . .” (‘The land [or the earth] was small . . .’). This space was thus more than a nation. Rueda’s depiction of the rayano as indigenous to Hispaniola is incredibly powerful as it contradicts the official narrative of Dominican racial hybridity that nineteenth-century intellectuals and writers had explained through indigenismo. They deployed indios as the “ethnic” element of the national racial makeup, and as the true and only natives to the nation. Yet indios were also narrated as extinct, only surviving in an indefinable space of national elite imagination. Substituting the symbolic (decimated) Indian with the (living) rayano, Rueda contradicts the Archive of Dominicanidad while challenging the persistent Hispanophile rhetoric that renders Haitians and Dominicans as ethnic enemies.

In the opening poem of the collection, “Canto de regreso a la tierra prometida” (Song of Return to the Promised Land), Rueda insists on the raya—the unnatural division of the land and people—rather than the rayano—the people who inhabit the territory now divided by the state—as the evidence of colonial violence:

Medias montañas,
medios ríos,
y hasta la muerte compartida.

El mediodía parte
de lado a lado al hombre
y le parte el descanso,
parte la sombra en dos y
duplica el ardor.
[Half mountains,  
half rivers,  
and even death  
shared.  

Midday divides  
man into two sides,  
and it divides his repose,  
and it divides the shadow in two and  
doubles the heat.]

The visual image the poem depicts is as powerful as it is violent. Everything, even death, is cut in half, except the castigating sun, the suffocating heat that doubles as the mountains and the trees are destroyed. The violent “cutting” of the territory and the people of the Línea Fronteriza in Rueda’s poem symbolizes the Massacre of 1937 in which people were attacked using machetes and knives. Yet, in Rueda’s poem it is not just bodies that are cut, but bodily actions: death, work, and rest. The symbolic cutting of the rayano body in the violent massacre, the lyric voice reminds us, resulted in the cutting of epistemes and histories, in the destruction of both land and people.

Rueda’s depiction of the divided border in “Canto de regreso” laments all that has been lost by the division of the island, while signaling the rayano as a by-product of this unnatural separation. After the first verse, the lyric voice appeals directly to the interlocutor’s rayano consciousness, urging her to act or, at the very least, to react to the realities of the border:

¿Sabes adónde vamos? ¿Sabes qué país es el tuyo?  
tan fragante y que tiene una línea de resacas miserias,  
una pobre corteza resbalando en los ríos  
perdidos, bajo los silenciosos cambronales?26

[Do you know where we are going?  
Do you know which country is yours,  
so fragrant and with a line of dried-up miseries,  
a poor skin that slips through the rivers  
lost underneath the silent cambronales?]

Without directly engaging historical events, Rueda introduces History as an unnatural force that causes the destruction of the island’s natural order and breaks the rayano in two halves. The poet, and more specifically, the border-
land poet, is thus charged with the difficult task of standing on the border hoping to unite this broken island-person into a whole again:

Oye al pobre poeta,
un corazón entero, ¡tan entero!
—cantar en medio de las heridas
sin comprender la marca de la tierra
sin probar de su fruto dividido

[Hear the poor poet,
a whole heart, so complete!
—sing in the midst of wounds
without understanding the lay of the land,
without tasting of its divided fruit]

Literary critic Homi K. Bhabha defines the border as a Third Space where the cultures and values of both the colonizer and the colonized transform into something new. Rueda’s placing of the lyric voice in between Haiti and the Dominican Republic—on the raya—is an important symbolic gesture for transforming and contesting the dominant rhetoric of the nation-state, as suggested by Bhabha. It proposes that borderer, the rayano, has the potential of being both self and other, serving as a translator between languages and cultures. In so doing, the poet proposes rayano consciousness as an antidote to the colonial imagination that dominates and cuts Hispaniola into two antagonistic halves.

Rueda’s divided island became a trope celebrated by both anti- and pro-Haitian writers of the second half of the twentieth century because the metaphor encapsulated a clear, if violent, visual of the destiny of the two peoples inhabiting Hispaniola. Yet, contrary to what anti-Haitian writers imagined, Rueda’s poem is not a geopolitical manifesto of what has come to be known as the “Haitian-Dominican problem.” Rather, the poem visualizes what the rayano, as one who stands in between the two halves of the island, can see from his/her vantage point: “Mira tu paraíso entre dos fuegos, nido de serpientes elásticas” (Look at your paradise between two fires, nest of elastic serpents). The powerful image of the two fires and elastic serpents that destroy the unity of the island poses a strong critique of the political imposition of the two states seeking to control the people and land of the Línea Fronteriza.

Rueda’s poetic voice represents the rayano body as a symbol of anticol-
nial Hispaniola, of “nuestra tierra hasta que el hombre la marcó con el opro-
bio de la raya” (our land until man marked it with the disgrace of the line). The *diction* “ours” destabilizes the hegemonic rhetoric of dominicanidad, uniting Dominicans and Haitians, like the island they inhabit, as one body, a common whole. Though Rueda does not advocate for a political unification of the two nations of Hispaniola, the poet’s rayano consciousness is grounded in what he believes to be a need to acknowledge the history of political cooperation and the existence of an “ambidextrous” rayano subjectivity. In so doing, Rueda’s poetics advocates for rayano consciousness as an alternative to the coloniality that dominates Hispaniola’s politics.

One of the most interesting fundamentals of Rueda’s *Cantos de la fron-
tera* is the duality of the border experience it portrays. On the one hand, the book recovers the landscape, politics, and experiences of the borderlands through a romantic depiction of the rayano. On the other, the author reminds us of his legitimate voice as a native of the Línea Fronteriza, though not as a rayano. Carefully identifying himself as Dominican rather than rayano, Rueda is able to depict the rayano experience without risking backlash from the nationalist intellectuals of the post-Trujillo era. A classical musician and self-defined Latin American *vanguardista* poet, Rueda depended on his ability to work within the Trujillo intelligentsia, avoiding controversial topics while embracing the national intellectual desire for high culture. Thus, using classic poetic forms recognized as “proper,” Rueda secured access to the elite circles. His decision to publish *Cantos de la frontera* in 1963, two years after the death of Trujillo, shows an acute awareness of Dominican politics as linked to the national literary project, while also demonstrating his concern for the dominant national project he was beginning to repre-
sent. Embodying the very *contradictions* of dominicanidad, Rueda offers the rayano as both the heart and soul of Hispaniola identity, as well as a tragic figure caught in the middle of two very different worlds and condemned to exist outside of both.

Writing thirty years prior to Gloria Anzaldúa, and from a very different transnational reality, Rueda describes the Haitian-Dominican border as an open wound, his home located halfway between, “in a highway without return.” But unlike Anzaldúa’s border subject, Rueda’s is ultimately para-
lized, overcome by the horrifying colonial exploitation that after violently breaking their body in two now dictates the inconclusive future of the two halves-nations:
A sense of urgency becomes clearer in the last verse of the poem, warning about the possibility of colonial/imperial intervention, as symbolized by the metaphor of leñadores robustos. Responding to a Latin American social consciousness that very much marked the literary production of the mid-twentieth century, Rueda was acutely aware of US political and military interventions in Latin America. His reading of the border locates Haitian-Dominican relations in a global context, while warning about the dangers of US military interventions in a premonitory tone.

Rueda’s poetry presents the rayano as a symbolic category for explaining the Haitian-Dominican border. In so doing, the author successfully challenges the anti-Haitian nationalist writing machine that was set into full speed during the Trujillo regime. This contesting position was highly criti-
ized by his contemporaries as “frivolous and without historical consciousness,” often raising the suspicion of the dominant political groups.\textsuperscript{35} Eventually, Rueda’s success as a classical music interpreter earned the forgiveness and respect of the elite, who ultimately accepted the author’s early border poetry as an important contribution to “Dominican folkloric history.”\textsuperscript{36} Rueda’s allegiance to national Euro-dominant aesthetics, as well as his impressive accomplishments as a musician, undeniably contributed to his consecration into the elite cultural circles, of which he was a leading figure until his death in 1999.

Despite writer Héctor Incháustegui Cabral’s claims, a careful reading of Rueda’s work establishes that his depiction of the Haitian-Dominican border was historically grounded, though his position differed from that of anti-Haitian nationalist writers.\textsuperscript{37} Rueda’s poem “Canto de la frontera” (1945), the eponymous piece of the collection, comes closest to a critique of nationalism and hegemony, making clear references to the Massacre of 1937 and the politics of the Trujillo state.\textsuperscript{38}

¿En dónde estás, hermano, mi enemigo de tanto tiempo y sangre?
¿Con qué dolor te quedas, pensándome, a lo lejos?
De pronto vi las hoscas huestes que descendían, aullando y arrasando.
Vi la muerte brilladora en la punta de las lanzas.
Vi mi tierra manchada y te vi sobre ella,
Desafador,
La brazada soberbia sobre el cañaveral que enmudece . . .
Y yo supe que nunca habría esperanza para ti o para Nosotros,
Hermano que quedaste una noche, a lo lejos,
Olvidado y dormido junto al agua.\textsuperscript{39}

[Where are you, brother, my enemy of so much time and blood?
With what pain do you remain, thinking of me, from afar?
Suddenly, I saw the unwelcoming armies that descended, howling and destroying.
I saw death shining at the points of the spears.
I saw my land stained, and I saw you upon it,
Defiant,
The proud stroke upon the silencing cane field . . .
And I knew that there would never be hope for you or Us,
Brother who stayed for a night, from afar,
Forgotten and asleep beside the water.

Rueda’s lyric voice laments the attack on the multiethnic rayano communities through genocide and border policies, and through the increasing political and symbolic persecution of border subjects at the hands of nationalist thinkers. Writing from exile in the 1940s, the poet appeals to a humanistic rather than a political reaction, lauding what he perceives as the origin and destiny of the island as a whole. Referring to Haitians as “brothers,” the author laments the genocide of 1937 not only as a human catastrophe, but also as a spiritual destruction that separated siblings. The Massacre of 1937 destroys hope and the possibility of reconciliation, not only for Haitians but also for nosotros, Dominicans. Rueda’s interpretation of the massacre is as a destruction of Dominican essence, and not as an event affecting only Haitian immigrants. Contradicting international depictions of the genocide, Rueda asserts that the Massacre of 1937 happened to all of Hispaniola, avowing the rayano as part of the Dominican nation.

Part IV of “Canto de la frontera” is a critique of the complicity of the Haitian and Dominican states in the destruction of the rayano communities:

IV

It was Sunday, and after hearing the hymns and speeches
after clapping our hands, the presidents embraced. . . .
Then the visiting dignitaries, without overstepping their bounds,
went back to the rhythm of opposing music
reverences and mute arrogances and we went back to give our warnings,
to remain with a sleepy eye upon the rough overgrowth.
And we went back to eating our meager portion, alone, slowly, there where the Artibonito runs spreading the fallen leaves.

Between 1935 and 1936, Trujillo visited the northern borderlands, riding his horse around the Artibonito Valley, home of the largest community of rayanos until 1937. He shook hands with farmers and made many promises to rayanos about his commitment to the area. During this period Trujillo also visited Haiti on several occasions, declaring the Haitian to be his “eternal friend” and Haiti, the “other arm of the Dominican Republic.”

Haitian president Sténio Vincent returned the favor, visiting the neighboring nation for various acts and ceremonies throughout the 1930s. On one of these occasions, Trujillo is said to have kissed the Haitian flag. Vincent compensated such “good faith” by naming one of the main streets in Port-au-Prince after the Dominican ruler. “Canto de la Frontera” brings attention to the hypocrisy of the states—as represented by the iconic memory of Vincent and Trujillo the year before the massacre and the contemporary photo of Sonia Marmolejos, Fernández, Clinton, and Préval during the Summit of 2010—in their claim to protect citizens from “invasion” and “savagery” in which the invasion and savagery are against its own citizens in the name of the nation. The poem summons the long colonial history of Hispaniola oppression perpetuated in the present violence of the state in controlling the racialized body.

Unlike Prestol Castillo, who narrated the border as existing outside the limits of the nation, Rueda’s narrative of contradiction insists on the border’s liminality as an intrinsic category linked to the nation, rather than opposing it. In so doing, “Canto de la frontera” locates the Haitian-Dominican border at the center of dominicanidad, as a place that literally marks the end of the nation while also constituting a barrier to the nation. Perhaps because Rueda was from a border city and must have grown up seeing the fluidity of rayano culture that existed prior to the Massacre of 1937, his poetry exhibits a sensitivity that although not devoid of moments of nationalist contradiction, seeks to liberate the rayano from the national stigma and guilt to which he/she had been relegated throughout the literary history of the nation. Made the scapegoat of the national project, the rayano was perceived as an indecisive subject who could not be trusted. But unlike the Haitian immigrant, who was viewed as a clear enemy of the nation, the rayano had the ability to “pass,” and therefore constituted a greater threat to the national project. Türits argues that the bicultural Haitian-Dominican world that existed in the borderlands had continued to evolve since colonization.
despite all attempts to define the borders. As argued in chapter 3, the Massacre of 1937 was an attack on rayano communities as much as it was on Haitian immigrants living on the borderlands.

Rueda’s recasting of the rayano as intrinsic to the nation is powerful because it confronts the unmentionable truth of the 1937 genocide: that Dominicans killed Dominicans. The common narration of the Massacre of 1937 as an attack of Dominicans against Haitians does not erase its horrific nature. However, the displacement of the genocide as one of Dominicans against Haitians perpetuates the narrative of conflict and hatred that has sustained anti-Haitianism for over a century. The dominant rhetoric of the massacre also led to the further erasure of rayanos from the history of both nations, a fact that has contributed to the continued obliteration of these communities from the national imagination. Rueda’s rayano consciousness reminds the presumed Dominican reader of several points that have been erased by all prior literary depictions of the frontier and of the 1937 destruction: (1) Haiti and the Dominican Republic share the same land, and share a connection that goes deeper than national identity. (2) The rayano is not only Haitian, nor is he only Dominican, but a hybrid subject who is “indigenous” to the borderland and who suffers the great tragedy of having been divided in half, the same way the land was. The rayano’s lack of “national allegiance” is, according to Rueda, also “natural,” and so he/she must be understood and nurtured rather than alienated and persecuted. (3) Both nations need to cooperate and coexist because the ecological future of the island depends on it.

Keeping the concerns that underline Rueda’s Cantos de la frontera in mind, one can see strong correlations between the factors contributing to Rueda’s rayano consciousness and those contributing to a resurgence of a rayano consciousness in contemporary times. The issues raised in Cantos de la frontera illuminate some of the actions and reactions of cultural and political actors in the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, contributing to the dissemination of rayano consciousness in the public sphere. The 2010 tremor literally shook both Hispaniola nations, though only Haiti suffered massive destruction. Writer Junot Díaz, reflecting on the earthquake, says it shook Dominicans to the core, making them contemplate the vulnerability of the island and the tangible possibility of disaster that Rueda warned his compatriots about in 1963. In the days following the quake, the spirit of interdependence and cooperation symbolized in the figure of the rayano, as imagined by Rueda, overcame the general public. Artists, and scholars, began to
work toward a seismic change in attitudes and ideology, destabilizing the structures that have sustained anti-Haitian hegemony for the last few decades.

“Biznis Gouvenman Bénefis Gouvenman”

In his video installation *Línea fronteriza* (*Borderline*; 2008), Dominican artist David “Karmadavis” Pérez depicts the Haitian-Dominican border, as imagined in Rueda’s “Canción del rayano,” as an unnatural, imposed colonial order. The video installation consists of two maps of Hispaniola outlined by lights (see figure 4.3). The first map shows the island as a whole, without national borders. On the second map, the lights outlining the island are bright and fixed, clearly marking the imagined border that divides land from sea. In contrast, thinner intermittent lights outline the Haitian-Dominican border. Read in intertextual dialogue with Rueda’s poetry, *Línea fronteriza* reminds the viewer that the border between Haiti and the Dominican Republic is not static, but rather is a location that exists in a constant state of fluidity, the only “real” border being, as Rueda’s lyric voice also suggested, the ocean.

Pérez is a visual artist and performer whose work exhibits an acute concern for what the artist calls *isla cerrada* (closed island): the tensions that have allowed Dominicans to imagine themselves in contrast with Haiti. As an alternative, Pérez’s works propose the possibility of an *isla abierta* (open island) where Dominicans and Haitians can imagine themselves coexisting and collaborating in peace and unity. His video action, *Línea fronteriza*, is part of a corpus of over a dozen artistic works in which Pérez’s rayano consciousness comes to life, proposing a reflection on daily Haitian-Dominican interactions as part of larger global concerns about equality, migration, borders, and human rights.

Based in Guatemala since 2006, Pérez views himself as a diasporic artist; his social concerns and aesthetics are guided by an acute awareness of the shared challenges facing Latin American nations in a global era. His portrayal of the Dominican experience, and in particular of the Haitian-Dominican conflict, can thus be located within a Latin American socio-political context: “We all carry our borders with us, we internalize them, express them in our own body and transplant them to other national territories. Santo Domingo, Guatemala, Latin America, the body exists beyond borders.” The artist’s ascription locates his work within a growing artistic
tradition that engages the topics of violence, state repression, drug wars, dictatorships, and the presence of coloniality in Latin America. Further, a reading of Pérez’s works places the Haitian-Dominican border conflict beyond the island and in the context of the growing global border violence that has marked the beginning of the twenty-first century.

One of the most powerful critiques of border violence is found in Pérez’s piece Lo que dice la piel (What the Skin Says; 2005). Through a translator, the artist asks an undocumented Haitian immigrant to tell him what he thought was the cause of the Haitian-Dominican conflict. The Haitian man writes his answer on a piece of paper: “biznis gouvenman bénifis gouvenman” (government business benefits governments). The man’s words sum-

4.3 Línea fronteriza. Video still courtesy of David “Karmadavis” Pérez.
mon an acute understanding of the colonial imagination that created the raya, dividing Haitians and Dominicans and sustaining Haitian oppression in present-day Dominican Republic. Pérez, without seeking translation from Kreyòl, then proceeded to tattoo the man’s words on his arm (see figure 4.4). Bringing to the fore the possibility of cross-border dialogue, Lo que dice la piel foregrounds rayano consciousness as a possible antidote to anti-Haitianism, internationalized antiblackness, and xenophobia. The use of his own body as the canvas for the Haitian man’s untranslated words confirms Pérez’s political project, as his skin literally “dice” (says) that “Haitian and Dominican problem” is a conflict of the states; not of the people. What the skin says negates what the states say. The performing body contradicts the archive.

Postmodern feminist theory sustains that tattoos can serve as a way to reclaim the body from the structures that seek to contain it. Becoming a form of text, Elizabeth Grosz argues, the (tattooed) body can be a site of political contestation where messages can be reinscribed. She writes, “This analogy between the body and the text remains a close one: the tools of
body engraving—social, surgical, epistemic, disciplinary—all mark, indeed constitute, bodies in culturally specific ways." Grosz’s theorization of the body-text is particularly helpful in thinking about the political project guiding Pérez’s *Lo que dice la piel*. A light-skinned Dominican from the capital city of Santo Domingo, Pérez’s body contains, as Grosz would argue, the historical (if at first invisible) inscriptions of the Dominican state’s colonial imagination. His light skin and level of education, as well as his privileged position as an artist, serve as a sort of passport, allowing him free passage in the everyday life interactions of urban Dominican Republic. The decision to mark his skin with Kreyòl is a way of both acknowledging and challenging his own privileged position as an heir to (perhaps unwanted) colonial privilege. The incorporation of pain and blood through the act of tattooing Kreyòl, however, also operates as a permanent reminder of the historical violence of Hispaniola’s borders. *Lo que dice la piel* rebukes the ephemeral nature of performance art through the permanent inscription of the Kreyòl message on the artist’s skin. The incorporation of pain and blood, in addition to using the body as Kreyòl text, physically summons recognition of the colonial legacy of the Haitian-Dominican border violence while simultaneously challenging the presence of coloniality on his performative body. Pérez’s permanent performance of Haitian-Dominican solidarity contains a palimpsest of representations: the violent and the communal, the Haitian and the Dominican episteme, and the presence of the linguistic difference-unity of the Línea Fronteriza.

The notion of an island divided by linguistic difference has been an important thread sustaining anti-Haitianism since the early twentieth century. The nationalization of the Spanish language was the most important tool in the process of Dominican national identity formation since the birth of the republic in the nineteenth century. As language historian Juan R. Valdez argues, Spanish was an important way of differentiating Dominicans from their neighbors during colonial times, allowing colonos to maintain cultural ties with Spain. In the period following the Massacre of 1937, the ability to speak Spanish “clearly” became a symbol of national belonging, particularly for dark-skinned Dominicans—a dynamic symbolized in the racist popular phrase “El que sea prieto que hable claro” (If you are black, speak clearly).

During the days of the Massacre of 1937, cultural authenticity—as determined by the ability to speak Spanish—became the deciding factor for survival. One of the methods of identification consisted of asking the potential victim to pronounce the word *perejil* (parsley), the assumption being that
Kreyòl speakers would not be able to reproduce it in “proper Spanish.” Failure to produce the Spanish r and j sounds, often a difficult task for nonnative Spanish speakers, became a death sentence. Thus, the Spanish language, rather than race, was often the deciding factor in the atrocious killings. The necessity for language as a tool of authentication illustrates an acute awareness of Dominican blackness. Pérez’s embodiment of Kreyòl functions as a symbolic embrace of both the linguistic diversity of the island and the paradox that places him, an educated artist, in the vulnerable position of not being able to communicate in his own country, an experience common to migrants across the world. Nelson Maldonado-Torres, in his call for the decolonization of theoretical practices, argues that “while theoretical attitude requires detachment and wonder, the decolonial attitude which Du Bois advances demands responsibility and the willingness to take many perspectives, particularly the perspectives and points of view of those whose very existence is questioned and produced as dispensable and insignificant.”

Pérez’s performance approximates Maldonado-Torres’s decolonial project as the artist enters the racialized, stigmatized subjectivity of the Haitian worker, introducing him/her to a larger audience where dialogue and criticism can emerge. The Haitian man’s acute understanding of the Haitian-Dominican conflict informs the artist’s anticolonial project, suggesting the urgent need for rayano consciousness and intra-island dialogue. The actual words inscribed on Pérez’s body—biznis gouvenman bénéfis gouvenman—once understood, opened doors for Haitian-Dominican solidarity outside of the oppressive official position of the states, a project the artist further develops in his award-winning video *Estructura completa* (2010).

A light-skinned blind Dominican man carrying a physically disabled dark-skinned Haitian woman around the city of Santiago de los Caballeros is the only action of the powerful performance *Estructura completa*. The woman cannot walk, but can see the streets and helps the man navigate the chaos of the city. The man cannot see, but has legs and is physically strong, so he carries her around the city. In order to survive in the heavily transited Santiago, the couple must depend on each other, entrusting the other person with their lives. The woman speaks in Kreyòl, the man responds in Spanish. They communicate through touch and sound; the woman taps him on the right or left shoulder to indicate where to step next or how to avoid traffic, potholes, street vendors, and other major obstacles in the chaos of the city.

The photo (figure 4.5) shows the two people forming a single body—her face is turned toward the viewer, covering part of his, while her torso is
superimposed on his torso. The man’s eyes are closed, while hers are open. The notion of completeness, of a single structure, comes through quite clearly in the still despite the gender and skin differences. Pérez describes Estructura completa as “a complete human structure made of two individuals who form something whole.”51 A strong metaphor for the Dominican and Haitian peoples, Estructura completa interpellates the history of Hispaniola as two fragmented territories sharing “tragedies, particularly that of having been guided by deficient mutilated governments that care very little about the people who sustain them.”52 The performance, which first debuted in the León Jiménez exhibition in Santiago, urges the viewer to think about Haitian-Dominican relations from quotidian observations, away from nationalistic rhetoric, devoid of flags and removed from the imposed territorial border. The author appeals to a sense of urgency of the present reality of two peoples who, crippled by the presence of coloniality, can only make headway through cooperation and interdependency, through a rayano consciousness in which Hispaniola can be imagined as a whole island.53

In her book *Accessible Citizenships*, Julie Minich examines the role of disability images in the construction of political communities and nations. She argues that national sovereignty is often defined as the nation’s right to exclude vulnerable and undesirable bodies (racialized minorities, LGBTQ, and disabled bodies). Metaphoric images of the nation thus tend to imagine it as a healthy, heterosexual, white body; which must in turn be protected from illness and intrusion. Pérez’s *Estructura Completa* interrupts the narrative of the healthy Dominican body-nation while building on notions of solidarity and interdependency that has characterized rayano community and subjectivity. Foregrounding the Dominican and Haitian disabled body as the body of hope, *Estructura Completa* enables the viewer to ask different questions about the Haitian-Dominican border and the subjects who inhabit it. But more than a critique of the nations, the performance poses the possibility of hope and citizenship through collaboration. In that sense, Pérez’s message is twofold: it critiques the states that refuse to accommodate its citizens and shows how these citizens could thrive if they simply worked together.

Minich argues that disability is a social construct that operates to exclude bodies from the nation. Pérez’s video brings attention to the relationship between the construction of the disabled body and the construction of the racialized body in the process of bordering the nation. During the United States intervention of the Dominican Republic (1916–24), images of Haitians as decomposing bodies (zombies), disabled bodies, and malnourished bodies began to circulate the world. These images, as I have argued throughout the book, greatly influenced how Dominicans imagined themselves in relation to the neighboring country. After the 2010 earthquake, photos of imperfect Haitian bodies (people who have lost limbs or otherwise showed major injures) proliferated the international media, reminding us all of the disability of Haitian blackness. Pérez’s performance embodies those images; turning the attention back to the nation-states by highlighting their neglect and failure. Robert McRuer defines a functional society as “not one that simply has ramps and Braille signs on public buildings but one in which our ways of relating to, and depending on, each other have been reconfigured.” Walking as a complete body, the Haitian woman and Dominican man produce, if briefly, the reconfiguration McRuer dreams of.

Building on his artistic commitment to a rayano consciousness, Pérez’s *Estructura completa* offers an incisive comment on postearthquake Hispaniola. Though Pérez’s corpus had always reflected his acute rayano con-
sciousness, offering meaningful explorations of Haitian-Dominican (mis)understandings, *Estructura completa* became the climactic piece of his career, earning a place in the Venice Biennale in 2011. The timing, as the piece was first presented a few months after the earthquake of 2010, was of particular importance at a moment in which Dominicans grappled with their role as partners in the reconstruction of a partially destroyed island. Following the earthquake, Dominican rescue workers were the first to enter Haiti. They arrived within hours of the quake, and in the crucial first days of the crisis, Dominicans offered Haiti urgent aid that saved thousands of victims. Dominican hospitals, for instance, were emptied in order to receive the wounded, and all elective surgeries were canceled for three months. The Dominican government provided generators, mobile kitchens, and clinics on Haitian grounds. In addition, Dominican communities in the US and Europe organized to send supplies and money to the victims. While *Estructura completa* was not actually inspired by the earthquake, as the artist conceived the piece before the tragedy, the video performance came to represent an important metaphor for the mindset and concerns of Dominicans following the tragedy.57

One of the most significant actions of solidarity that emerged as a result of the tragedy came, shockingly, from the Dominican state. President Leonel Fernández, seeing the urgent need of the victims and the slow response of the international community, declared an “open border” policy, allowing Haitians to transit freely to the Dominican Republic without need of documentation.58 The atmosphere, briefly captured in the short film *El seno de la esperanza* (Milk of Hope; 2012), was marked by a steady flow of wounded Haitians walking east on the International Highway while Dominican passersby watched with mixed expressions of horror and sadness.59 Some offered help, water, or food; others just watched in tears. Though there were anti-Haitian reactions in the public sphere, as well as in the media, the majority of Dominicans either actively tried to reach out to Haitians, or at the very least avoided causing them more pain. A few days after the earthquake, a common scene in Santo Domingo included Dominicans giving up their seats for Haitians on crowded buses, or passersby asking Haitian street vendors if everyone in their family was safe. Meditating on this significant shift, author Junot Díaz writes: “In a shocking reversal of decades of toxic enmity, it seemed as if the entire Dominican society mobilized for relief effort. . . . This historic shift must have Trujillo rolling in his grave.”60 As if inspired
by Pérez’s staged performance of solidarity, the actions of postearthquake dominicanidad contradicted decades of anti-Haitian (disabling) discourse.

The open border policy, as well as the physical presence of thousands of wounded and displaced Haitians in Dominican cities, created a significant rupture in the Dominican anti-Haitian narrative. The presidential decree allowed for symbolic yet tangible contestations of the rhetoric that had sustained anti-Haitianism since the birth of the Republic. In the face of tragedy, Dominicans in the public sphere—particularly those coming from poor social strata—had always collaborated with Haitians. Local NGOs and artists have, since the early twentieth century, expressed the need to reach out to the neighboring country, offering aid in times of hurricanes and other natural disasters. Yet, the resulting narratives of the earthquake, and in particular, the government policies that followed, did more than extend an arm of solidarity. They allowed Dominicans to see the possibility of the island as a whole, without borders, restoring, if only briefly, the natural order imagined by both Rueda and Pérez. The biggest fear sustaining anti-Haitianism—the unification of the island through the opening of the border—had become a reality, and Dominicans at all levels of the population could see that the world had not ended because of it.

The most skeptical critics argued that the actions of Dominicans and the reaction of the Dominican state were fear driven, and as such they would pass soon enough so that the order of business—that is, anti-Haitianism—could be back on its course. Although the borders eventually closed, and three years later we have indeed seen the return of anti-Haitian discourse and practices in Dominican state and media, the event allowed for a significant contradictions of anti-Haitianism at the very core of society. First, if Haitians were indeed monsters, as imagined by del Monte and Penson in the nineteenth century, they would be unworthy of compassion even in the face of an earthquake. Second, if the conflict between the two nations of Hispaniola has been about territorial control, as Michelle Wucker and other US critics have argued, the opening of the border would have posed an incredible risk to sovereignty even in the context of a disaster. Thus, the opening of the borders and the actions of solidarity that sprouted up all over the Dominican Republic demonstrate that the “logic of war” that had sustained anti-Haitianism since the birth of the republic, and had institutionalized it since 1937, was finally broken, giving way for an epistemic shift in Dominican rhetoric that could contradict the hegemonic Hispanophile version of dominicanidad.
Trans-Bordering Rayano Consciousness

I have so far investigated several examples of Dominican cultural production before the earthquake of 2010 that began to question, confront, and destabilize long-held nationalist beliefs concerning the permanence of the Haitian-Dominican border by invoking a rayano consciousness. The post-2010 era of Dominican cultural production, however, yields several examples of artists and writers who continue to perform rayano consciousness, further pushing the boundaries of even the definition of “borders,” going beyond a geographical-cultural understanding. One of the most interesting examples of rayano consciousness in post-2010-earthquake cultural production is the work of Rita Indiana Hernández (1977–). A Dominican writer and musical performer based in Puerto Rico, Hernández engages questions of sexuality, language, nationalism, and (trans)national identities in a contemporary urban language that both embodies and pushes the multiple borders of dominicanidad. This analysis concentrates on the artist’s song and controversial music video, “Da pa lo do” (2011), which theorizes the experience of Haitian-Dominican border conflicts, engaging the multiplicity of contradictions and borders of the Dominican experience by deconstructing the traditional gendered and racialized narrative of the nation.

The opening scene of the video performance portrays a majestic ceiba tree, also known in the Caribbean as the tree of life. The ceiba sits in the middle of an arid landscape that resembles the Artibonito Valley. Following this scene, a dark-skinned black man wearing a nineteenth-century Haitian military uniform appears. The Haitian soldier holds a rifle. He is in search of something or someone, but, yielding to the hot sun, stops to rest and drink water from a nearby river. The next scene shows another man, this time a dark-skinned mulato, wearing a Dominican military coat. The Dominican mulato soldier, also feeling the castigating sun, takes off his coat to refresh himself by the river.

The historical (nationalist) scene recalled in the image of the two soldiers is interrupted fifty seconds into the video by the appearance of a motoconcho (motorbike taxi), a contemporary referent for everyday urban life in Hispaniola. Riding on the back of the motoconcho is a brown-skinned Madonna, played by Hernández. She wears a blue, gold, and pink robe: the colors of both the vodou deity Mambo Ezili Freda and the Catholic Virgen de las Mercedes. The Madonna has a large gold chain with a letter M pendant, resembling a vèvè, the ornate religious symbols used in Haitian vodou.
Hernández’s skin, which is naturally light, has been painted golden brown. The mulata Madonna is revealed as an apparition to each of the men, her vevé bling reflecting a beautiful shade of pink and blue on their faces.

At the end of the music video, the two men, convinced by the message of solidarity the Virgen brings, strip off their uniforms and national colors, keeping on only their white pants.⁶⁴ The half-naked men then walk toward each other, meeting face to face in front of the ceiba tree (see figure 4.6). The music video ends with the men dropping their weapons and embracing while the Madonna sings and swings her hips, accompanied by a chorus of black and mulato children. A powerful transhistorical allegory of Haitian-Dominican relations, “Da pa lo do” is packed with symbols and imagery that contradict anti-Haitianism in a language capable of reaching multiple audiences. The richness of the lyrics and video images demand a careful analysis aimed at unpacking the nuances of the five-minute performance.

Literary, intellectual, and public discourse on Haitian-Dominican relations usually looks at the two nations of Hispaniola as irreconcilable enemies. Michelle Wucker’s celebrated book Why the Cocks Fight (2000), for instance, introduces the metaphor of the gallería (cockfighting pit) as a useful tool for understanding Haitian-Dominican conflict. The gallería is suggestive, particularly given that cockfights occupy such an important space in the cultural history of both Haiti and the Dominican Republic and act as symbols of their struggle.⁶⁵ However, it is a heavily problematic symbol because it perpetuates two of the most questionable ideologies about Haiti and the Dominican Republic: that Dominicans and Haitians hate each other and that they are fighting for control over the territory.⁶⁶

Overemphasized and repeated in official Dominican history, nineteenth-century Haitian interventions in the east have been reiterated as justification for the harsh border policies and immigration laws of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Hernández’s music video acknowledges the history of Haitian “invasions” on Dominican soil, allegorized in the Haitian soldier, while presenting us with the counterpoint image of the Dominican peasant-soldier. A powerful and traumatic symbol, the Dominican peasant-soldier carrying a machete alludes to the Massacre of 1937, when the killers were said to have used machetes in order to simulate a conflict among locals, hiding the fact that the killings were orchestrated by the state.⁶⁷ But Hernández’s intervention acknowledges these traumatic moments of Haitian-Dominican conflicts in order to let them go rather than to dwell on the fear they often evoke. The video seems to suggest that while both states—symbolized in the
soldiers—have sponsored death and pain, when stripped of their uniforms and flags, the peoples of both countries simply love each other.

Caribbean scholar M. Jacqui Alexander proposes memory as an “antidote to alienation, separation, and the amnesia that domination produces.” Hernández’s video performance recalls the painful historical moments that have marked the narrative of Haitian-Dominican relations, while seeming to pose the questions: “But where are we now? And more importantly, where do we go from here?” Hernández’s answers to these interrogations, I argue, materialize in the contradicting narratives that the song and video offer. These narratives of contradiction fill in the gaps perpetuated by the dominant scholarship on Haitian-Dominican relations, while also shattering the long silences sustained by the Hispanophile hegemony of the Archive of Dominicanidad. In so doing, the memories created in “Da pa lo do,” as Alexander would suggest, have the potential to become an antidote to the coloniality of power that engendered and sustained anti-Haitianism for over a century.

The first and most significant contradiction to the hegemonic version of dominicanidad “Da pa lo do” presents us with is the metaphor of the Dominican Republic as an orphaned child. Nineteenth-century Dominican intellectuals, battling with their desire for sovereignty and their yearning to maintain a link to “Mother Spain,” lamented the loss of Hispanic cultural values, blaming the challenges of their republican enterprise on that loss. Hernández rescues the metaphor of orphanage that nineteenth-century lettered men repeated, but rather than apply it only to Dominicans, she recasts both siblings as colonial “orphans.”

Without a mother, the two sibling-nations must depend only on the care of an abusive and brutish father: “Habían dos hermanitos compartiendo un pedacito porque eran muy pobrecitos y no tenían ni mamá” (There were two little brothers sharing a little piece because they were so poor, and they didn’t even have a mother). By making both brother-nations orphans, Hernández deconstructs the foundational myth of the Dominican Republic that persisted in casting Haiti as a colonizer-invader, replacing it with a memory of the shared colonial history of the two nations:

Siéntelo
el abrazo del mismo abuelo
Desde Juana Méndez hasta Maimón
Y desde ahí a Dajabón
[Feel it
the embrace of the same grandfather
From Juana Méndez to Maimón
And from there to Dajabón

In so doing, the artist asserts that Haiti is not the enemy of the nation, and that perhaps the problems these nations face were caused by another (foreign) force and not by each other. In this whole-island imaginary, the rivalry between Haiti and the Dominican is equal to a dispute between two loving siblings: “y cuando los dos niños se metían a la mordía el papá le decía la verdad” (and when the two children would get into it, the father would tell the truth).72 As such, the song suggests, the dispute should end as children’s fights often do: in a loving embrace.

With the mother (Spain) gone, the law of the father, who symbolizes the United States, ruled over the two brother-countries. But the father (US) was too busy making money and had no time to deal with the two boys’ constant quarreling: “Su pai se la bucaba trepao en una patana repartiendo plátano y patá y trompá” (Their father worked as a truck driver, delivering plantains, kicks, and punches).73 When the children fought, he would order them to get along and share, unless they wanted a whipping:

Agárrense de ahí, que no hay mán
Pónganse a jugá o la correa voy a sacá
Uno por alante y el otro por atrás
Dio me lo mandó juntico pero utede na de nán.74

[Be happy with what you have, that’s all there is
Go play or I’m going to get the belt
One in front and the other behind
God sent you both together, but you two do not get it.]

Facing the threat of colonial punishment, the children eventually agree to sharing, affirming “da pa lo do”: there is enough for both of us. The orphans must contend with their inherited colonial violence (“pata y trompá”) and the persistence of state violence that forces them to share the territory of Hispaniola.

Historicizing Dominican and Haitian encounters with the US Empire, “Da pa lo do” evokes Roosevelt’s “Big Stick” policies and Wilson’s paternalistic discourse, which resulted in the early twentieth-century interventions in both Haiti and the Dominican Republic.75 Going beyond the shared colo-
nial/imperial history, “Da pa lo do” reminds us that the US continues to be a force in deciding the fate of the two nations. Hispaniola’s survival depends, as Pérez’s performances also suggest, on the two nations’ willingness to work together as one:

Una puerta para do comenjé
Dos números pa juga palé
Un mar de sudor pa to eto pece
alé, alé, alé.\(^{76}\)

[One door for two termites
Two numbers to play the lotto
One ocean of sweat for all these fish
alé, alé, alé.]

If left unaddressed, the inherited violence, Hernández suggests, will turn destructive as the two sibling-nations will slowly, like termites, destroy the island, leaving behind only more violence and dust. Hernández’s historical interpellation of Haitian-Dominican conflicts contradicts the dominant discourse of difference sustaining anti-Haitianism by insisting instead on the two siblings as abandoned orphans living in poverty under the tight grip of an abusive and dominant father.

The image of Haiti and the Dominican Republic as two (contrasting) parts of a whole has been a recurring trope in Dominican Narratives of Solidarity of the twentieth century, as seen in the work of Bosch, as well as in US public and intellectual discourses of difference regarding the two nations of Hispaniola. In the aftermath of the 2010 earthquake, for instance, contrasting views of Haiti and the Dominican Republic resurfaced in US media. Almost every mention of Haiti in the press reiterated that it was “the poorest nation in the western hemisphere,” in comparison with its “prosperous” brother/neighbor.\(^{77}\) Words such as “chaos” and “dysfunction,” as well as a recounting of Haiti’s historical struggle for democracy, almost always accompanied the images of destruction. Through a discourse of pity, Haiti’s misfortunes were racialized as results of the country’s African religiosity and as signs of “barbarism” and “incivility,” a view exemplified in the now-famous broadcast by televangelist Pat Robertson. Robertson opined that Haitians were suffering because “they had made a pact with the devil” and turned their backs on God.\(^{78}\) A few days after Robertson’s remarks, David Brooks published a column in the *New York Times* in which he explained Haiti’s
poverty as a by-product of “progress-resistant cultural influences . . . including the voodoo religion.” Both Robertson’s and Brooks’s interventions returned to the colonial/imperial discourse of Haiti that, as demonstrated in this book, was used to justify military interventions throughout the twentieth century.

Since the birth of the republic in 1804, Haiti has occupied an important space in the US imaginary. Fear of Haiti overtook the slave-driven US nation, and thus myths were constructed and disseminated in order to propagate fear and hatred in the public sphere. US intervention in the Dominican Republic has been, for lack of a better term, more discreet. Although Dominicans are incessantly aware of US influence in national politics, culture, and economy, many US citizens do not know the Dominican Republic exists outside of baseball. In the critical media and US scholarship, Dominicans are mentioned inasmuch as they offer a helpful comparison for explaining “What is wrong with Haiti?” Though in this problematic dichotomy, Dominicans are depicted as prosperous, civilized, and educated, these adjectives are only used in comparison to what is imagined to be the less prosperous, less civilized, less educated Haiti. Like the forgotten sibling in a dysfunctional family, the Dominican Republic thus exists within the US imaginary because of its relationship to Haiti, one that has been narrated as marked only by rivalry and conflict.

Hernández’s song and video performance engage the most prevalent and pervasive discourses of Haitian-Dominican relations—as produced in United States as well as on the island—appealing to the urgent need for a rayano consciousness through which the inherited colonial violence (“patá y trompá”) that is slowly destroying Hispaniola (“do comejé”) can be contradicted. The Madonna on a motoconcho seems to appeal to a rayano consciousness that extends beyond the internal borders of the island. She interrupts the memories of conflict that have dominated the public perception of the island, bringing the audience face to face with the urgency of the present. The image of the Madonna suggests the spirit, not politics, as an antidote to the traumatic memories sustained in the official narratives of the nation. Alexander, pondering the relationship between memory, trauma, and the role of African spirituality, argues that “sacred knowledge comes to be inscribed in the daily lives of women through an examination of work—spiritual work—which, like crossing, is never undertaken once and for all . . . knowledge comes to be embodied and manifest through flesh, an embodiment of the Spirit.” Hernández’s Madonna comes to remind Dominican
and Haitian peoples, allegorized in the two soldiers, that rather than being at the service of the state, their loyalty should be to the spirit, which resides in the soul of the land and the bodies of the people.

Traumatic memories are often marked on the body as the result of state impositions of the colonial order. To get rid of such trauma, the Afro-religious believe, the body must be stripped and washed of traumatic inscriptions so that it can heal, once again becoming a canvas onto which new narratives of truth can be inscribed. In Afro-Dominican religious rituals, *despojos* (cleansings) are often practiced on people living through hardships and sorrows. The *despojado* (person being cleansed) must wear only white clothes during the ritual so that the body can successfully absorb light and goodness, ridding itself of all spiritual ailments. Hernández “transfers,” to borrow from Taylor, the religious performance onto the political realm through the image of the two soldiers who, stripping their uniforms and wearing only white pants, proceed to wash in the river (see figure 4.6). The two men then receive the cleansing from the Madonna, embracing in brotherly peace.

The image of the mulata Madonna (figure 4.7) is the richest and most provocative one in the music video, yet I found it the most difficult with which to engage. Though Hernández’s performances and literary works are known for their stylistic irreverence, the artist’s decision to appear in what, from a US perspective, may be perceived of as “blackface” made me terribly uncomfortable at first. I decided to study the song as soon as I first heard it on the radio. Once the video launched, however, I was drawn to its symbolic richness, and in particular to Hernández’s engagement of Afro-religiosity as an anticolonial praxis. Yet the performance of the mulata Madonna brought me closer to a confrontation with my own contradictions.

Though I am a light-skinned Dominican like Hernández, my encounter with US racism, particularly outside the urban area in which I grew up, led me to identify as black. Still, I am aware—and often reminded—of the fact that in the Dominican Republic, my light complexion and my acquired middle class make me a racially privileged Dominican. My own racial contradictions, combined with my engagement in US race/ethnicity struggles, provoked a discursive dead end in my analysis (commonly known as “writer’s block”) when confronting the mulata Madonna. In order to escape this crisis, I began to ask myself questions about my own discomfort with the image: Why did the Madonna bother me so much? Was I examining the video within its historically specific context? How did the image of the Madonna

change my analysis of the song? Was I influenced by the comments and reactions of other viewers? Asking these and other questions allowed me to confront my own contradictions, an exercise that brought me closer to a new pedagogical and investigative approach: one in which the specificity of the experience being examined superseded my own ontological bias.

Partly as a reaction to the prevalence of anti-Haitian discourse in the Dominican Republic, US scholarly perception of Dominican racial identity often condemns Dominicans for what is perceived as a denial of their African roots, and a resulting racial hatred toward Haitians. In contrast with the demonizing view of Dominicans, race scholars in the United States often portray Haiti as a source of African identity in the Americas, a place where one can locate the roots of black authenticity. In a recent film featured on PBS, for instance, African American scholar Henry Louis Gates Jr. highlights the Massacre of 1937 as a product of “Dominican black denial.” Applying a US racial lens, Gates sees all Dominicans as black or, rather, as what would be considered black in the “one-drop” US racial system. This mode of analysis obscures the possibility for a fruitful comparative analysis of race at the same time that, as social historian Wendy Roth reminds us, it perpetuates an obsolete way of understanding what the racialization process looks like in present-day United States: “The United States no longer has economic or political incentives to enforce such classifications. Even its census has increasingly shifted toward monitoring racial self-identification over classification by enumerators or one’s community, indicating that identification and physical appearance are becoming more important to American classifications than ancestry.”

The question of Dominican racial identity has also dominated current intellectual debates among diasporic Dominican scholars. Silvio Torres-Saillant and Ginetta Candelario, for instance, have been concerned with how migration can shape the way Dominicans view themselves racially. Over the last few years, the topic has also transcended the academic sphere, gaining significant visibility in the mainstream media. In the summer 2007, for instance, important diasporic Dominican scholars found themselves in the middle of a major controversy after being misquoted in an article entitled “Black Denial,” published in the Miami Herald. The article, which was part of the newspaper series “Afro-Latin Americans,” argued that the practice of hair-straightening, which is popular among Dominican women, was proof of the population’s “historical rejection of all things black which makes the
one-drop rule work backwards, so that to have one drop of white blood makes even the darkest Dominican feel like she or he is other than black.”

A couple of weeks after the publication of “Black Denial,” another controversy emerged when a flyer with a picture of Juan Pablo Duarte—the most celebrated Dominican independence leader—with the words “Padre del Racismo” (Father of Racism) written across the page and the caption “Juan Pinga Duarte” (Juan Dick Duarte) appeared posted all over the #1 train, which goes from downtown Manhattan to Washington Heights, the largest Dominican neighborhood in the United States. The flyer was part of a publicity campaign for the upcoming release of a film about Dominican independence from Haiti. The producer, Taína Mirabal, stated that her film Father of Racism (2007) seeks to open eyes and make people understand that “nuestra historia ha sido escrita por las mismas personas que cometieron genocidio en contra de los indios y que esclavizaron a los africanos” (our history has been written by the same people who committed genocide against the native peoples and who enslaved the Africans). The flyer, as well as the film, created a heated debate among Dominicans and Dominicanyorks in which even the descendants of Duarte stepped into the public light to defend the image of the father of the nation. Many Dominicans protested, and some even demanded that the US conduct an investigation, as they considered the flyer to be “a critical offense to the Dominican people.”

Dominican racial identity is rife with contradictions; a fact that often dominates US scholarly and public debate about race in the DR. “Da pa lo do” engages and confronts these racial contradictions with humor. The artist’s irreverent gesture sanctions the so-called Dominican black denial while bringing attention to the intellectual dominance of US scholarship on the island. The video’s director, Engel Leonardo, conceived the mulata Madonna as a political, rather than aesthetic, representation of dominicanidad. Leonardo sought to visually contradict the dominant representation of Dominicans, which, privileging whiteness, means most television programs feature European-looking actors. The prevalent standards of beauty for both Dominicans and Haitians demand the Europeanization of women, a practice evidenced in the use of whitening creams, plastic surgery, and hair straightening. Likewise, Christian religious iconography depicts white deities—a white Virgin Mary, white saints, white Jesus—on an island where the majority of the population is black and mulato. In contrast, Afro-Hispaniola religiosity is inclusive of the racial and cultural diversity of the island, including emblems that encompass all cultures, races, and heritages of Hispaniola.
Leonardo’s virgin was intended as a representation of the racial majority of the population. However, read outside the intended cultural context and through a US-mediated racial lens, the video resulted in another controversy that further condemned Dominicans for what was perceived as a lack of racial consciousness.

Reading multiple reactions to the video posted on YouTube and Facebook, though paralyzing at first, also pushed me to confront my own contradictions about the mulata Madonna in “Da pa lo do.” A culturally specific reading of “Da pa lo do” would not cast Hernández as a performer in “blackface,” as many of the commenters suggested. Instead, it points to the artist’s embodiment of the mulata Madonna as an attempt to make Afro-Hispaniola religiosity an alternative way for understanding the island’s cultures and histories. Arguably, Hernández was not in “blackface”—a term specific to US racial history—but in “brown skin,” a counterhegemonic action in the context of Dominican national ideology and cultural dominance.

The controversial reactions to the video that inundated cyberspace shortly after its international debut raise concerns regarding how scholars, writers, and cultural producers understand and disseminate information regarding sociopolitical and historical processes and their effects on communities. A more just approach thus necessitates the constant and often difficult exercise of entering the cultural specificity of the subject as part of larger transnational intellectual dialogues. While difficult, this practice is the only fruitful way of understanding and engaging complicated topics, such as race, without falling into a “colonizing trick” in which that which we are seeking to deconstruct is reproduced in our work. After pushing through my own contradictions, I was able to approach the mulata Madonna within the cultural context in which she was produced, a process that in turn allowed me to unpack the various meanings she embodied, finding multiple layers of significations beyond the oversimplification of US black-white racial understanding.

The mulata Madonna is also Mambo Ezili Freda, the deity of love and discord, herself an image of contradiction. Ezili Freda is powerful and sensuous, emanating life and beauty, yet she can be vengeful and can be used to divide lovers. Ezili is mulata; her mixed-race ancestry represents power and wealth while also symbolizing the hybrid nature of the island after the colonial encounter. She is a native of Hispaniola and a rayana. In addition to her many attributes, Mambo Ezili Freda is known for her love of jewelry, a sign of her delicate femininity and upper-class status. Leonardo’s version of Ezili
sports a large “M” bling on a gold chain, a marker for an other form of His-paniolan hybridity.

Blings, or large gold chains, are associated with cadenuses, Dominican migrants returning on vacation from the US who often wear large gold jewelry as a sign of success. Made the scapegoat for the rise of crime, the fall of cultura, and the prevalence of what were perceived as “corruptive practices” (drug use, long hair, afros, rock-and-roll music, foreign fashion) on the island, Dominicanyork cadenuses became a target of Dominican and US media during the 1980s. The symbolic mulata Bling Madonna bridges the various borders of Dominican alterity that dominate Hernández’s literary and musical corpus—Dominicanyork, rayano, ethnic Haitian or black—an action that is further clarified in the song lyrics:

Si esta tierra da’ do’ y hasta para diez  
Tira ahí el hoyo en un do’ sale una mata de block  
Si es que ellos tan bien aquí  
Aunque tú no seas de ahí  
Tu no tiene doce tíos en otro país?

[Yes, this land is enough for two and even for ten  
Plant a seed there and soon it’ll grow into a cement tree  
They are fine here  
Even though you are not from there  
Don’t you have twelve uncles living in another country?]

Hernández is an accomplished writer whose work has been published and translated widely, yet she was virtually unknown in mainstream popular culture until the launch of her music album El Juidero in 2010. The innovative style of her music, which draws from merengue and other popular rhythms to create a new fusion, as well as the imaginative lyrics of her songs and the use of current urban Dominican slang, earned her immediate success among the youth. Contradicting national rhetoric, Hernández’s music—and in particular, the cadenú-mulata Madonna she embodies in the “Da pa lo do” video—presents a head-on critique of the structures sustaining the dominant notions of dominicanidad: Hispanic cultural values, whiteness, national frontiers, and heteronormativity.

Through the use of irreverent symbols, such as the mulata Madonna, the artist disidentified—to borrow from performance studies scholar José Esteban Muñoz—with the majoritarian discourse, while also intervening in
mass media forms. The Virgin Mary, in all its variations, is often offered as a sacred image of the nation, as the mother watching over a country. Instead of giving us La Virgen de la Altagracia, the white, pure image of Dominican Christianity, Hernández presents us with a virgin in drag, as Rachel Combs puts it—one that is African, brown, Dominicans, irreverent, and sexual. Similar to the appropriation of the Virgen de Guadalupe by the Chicana feminist artists Combs explores, Hernández’s mulata Madonna crosses a multiplicity of borders, becoming a contact zone for the marginal subjectivities of dominicanidad. Rather than a virgin mother, offering unconditional yet passive love, Hernández’s virgin comes across as a tiguera (woman with street smarts)—a matron whose knowledge is both spiritual and immensely mundane. She understands it all, as she is both the spiritual mother and the immigrant-mother-returnee who has come back to care for her (abandoned) children.

The Dominican returnee virgin is an important metaphor for the social reality of present-day Hispaniola. Migration continually forces the separation of Hispaniola families, as mothers are often obligated to leave their children behind in the care of extended family to go abroad to work caring for children of the privileged. Referred to as los dejados (those left behind), these children often experience feelings of abandonment and resentment. Los dejados are a recurring theme in Hernández’s literary and musical work through which the artist insists on the impact of migration on those who never travel but are as affected by the process. In Hernández’s novel Papi (2004), for instance, the main character, an eight-year-old girl, fantasizes about the return of her father from New York. Though her father’s absence is compensated for by gifts from abroad, the girl’s yearning for her father’s presence drives her into a fantasy world to which she retreats when her father is killed in the Bronx.

A rayano consciousness, as articulated through Hernández’s work, demands an understanding of the triangularity of Hispaniola’s borders and the tangibility of the diasporic rayano experience. Haitians migrating to the Dominican Republic must often leave their children behind to work; Dominican migrants must do the same. Meanwhile, children and loved ones left behind experience the violence of migration in different and complicated ways. Abandonment and the orphanage are both symbolic and real experiences affecting both peoples of Hispaniola. The only way to bear the pain of the reality is, as Hernández insists, through a very tangible form of solidarity and interdependency—one that requires a return to the communal way of
life sharing that Marmolejos’s nursing of the Haitian baby embodies. There is only, after all, one door for two termites:

Una puerta para do’ comején
Dos números para jugar pale
Un mar de sudor para to’ esto peces
Alé, alé, alé, alé
Vinimos todos en el mismo bote.¹⁰²

[One door for two termites
Two numbers to play the lotto
One sea of sweat for all of these fish
Alé, alé, alé, alé
We all came in the same boat.

Sharing the load is the only way to survive the pain. Like Pérez’s proposal for the creation of a complete structure out of two imperfect halves, Hernández’s rayano consciousness proposes communal love, forgiveness, and interdependency as the only possible option for confronting the violent oppression of the state(s)—Haiti, the Dominican Republic, and the United States—that continue to separate people on Hispaniola.

Bearing in mind Torres-Saillant’s invitation to think about the border as an anticipation of the future of our world and Hernández’s depiction of an all-inclusive dominicanidad rayana that comprises Haitian-Dominican and the diaspora(s), let us return to the image of Sonia Marmolejos nursing the Haitian baby. In a television interview a few days after the earthquake of 2010, Marmolejos was asked why she nursed those Haitian babies.¹⁰³ Perplexed, Marmolejos stayed silent for nearly one long television minute, finally responding: “I don’t understand the question.”¹⁰⁴ Inspired by the interview, Dominican American filmmaker Freddy Vargas made El seno de la esperanza (Milk of Hope), a short film that debuted at various international festivals in 2013. The film contextualizes Marmolejos’s actions within the borderlands’ cultures, showing Bahoruco as an impoverished town that, devoid of opportunities, survives only through its commerce with Haiti. Presenting Marmolejos as a heroine and a model Dominicans should strive for, the filmmaker hints at the need for intra-island rayano solidarity. Arguably, the filmmaker locates the rayano experience, embodied in the character Sonia, as the anticipation of the future Torres-Saillant suggests, rather than as the fading memory of a lost glorious past Rueda imagined in his poetry.
Moved by Sonia’s actions, Vargas, a Dominican American whose career was launched in the United States, returned to the island to make the film. In the process, the story the film narrates became intertwined with the filmmaker’s experiences, providing a metaphor for understanding how rayano transnational consciousness is evolving as an integral part of dominicanidad. Though the rayano community that existed in the borders prior to 1937 was indeed violently attacked and destroyed by the Trujillo dictatorship in 1937, rayano consciousness—as exemplified in Marmolejos’s actions, and theorized in this chapter through the analysis of the artistic works of Rueda, Pérez, and Hernández—has survived, gaining strength through the experience of migration(s) and diasporas. The reactions of Dominicans such as Marmolejos following the earthquake allowed for an important epistemic break that inspired cultural, literary, and artistic production, in addition to a heightened sense of awareness at every level of the population. Has anti-Haitianism, xenophobia, discrimination, and intolerance ended in the Dominican Republic? Sadly, it has not. But a more inclusive, fair, and constructive dominicanidad in which the multiplicity of borders, experiences, and identities can be represented has begun to be imagined, allowing for the visualization of a dominicanidad inclusive of a multiplicity of borders, through which more than 150 years of oppression, silences, and hatred can finally be contradicted.
THE BORDERS OF DOMINICANIDAD

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