

Volumen 9, Número 1

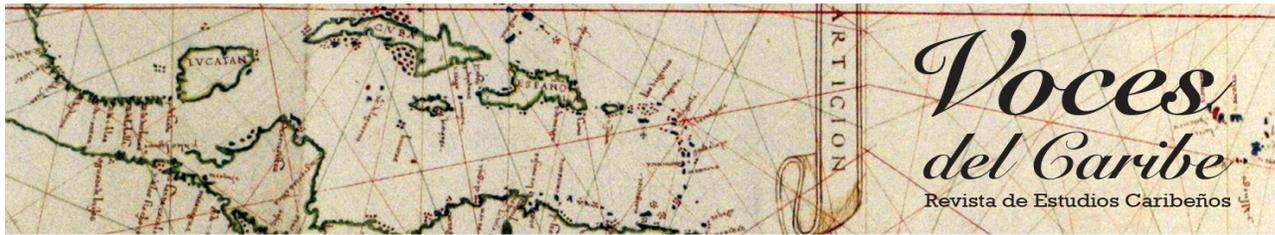
Otoño, 2017

Lorgia García-Peña. *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction*. Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2016 (274pp.).

Lorgia García-Peña's book *The Borders of Dominicanidad: Race, Nation, and Archives of Contradiction* explores those official narratives and histories imposed upon the bodies of Dominicans both on the island and beyond as a means to (re)define and reinforce the nation's frontiers. The text engages existing scholarship within the fields of African Diaspora Studies, Religious Studies, Cultural Studies, and Literature in order to construct an ambitious interdisciplinary vision of *dominicanidad*. In doing so, the author addresses certain stories that are oftentimes erased and – intentionally or not – left outside the official historical archive in a systematic and interconnected erasure of the region's African inheritance. Thus, García-Peña's book is essential to current discussions of race, nation, borders, and post-national conceptualizations of citizenship and belonging.

Specifically, García-Peña constructs her knowledge project as one that must question the ways in which silences and repetitions operate in the erasure of racialized Dominican subjects from the nation and its archive. More radically, it aims to demonstrate how these particular silences are filled with fantasies and imaginaries that reflect colonial desires and fears (1). The book recovers and historicizes these particular knowledge interruptions through what García-Peña calls





Volumen 9, Número 1

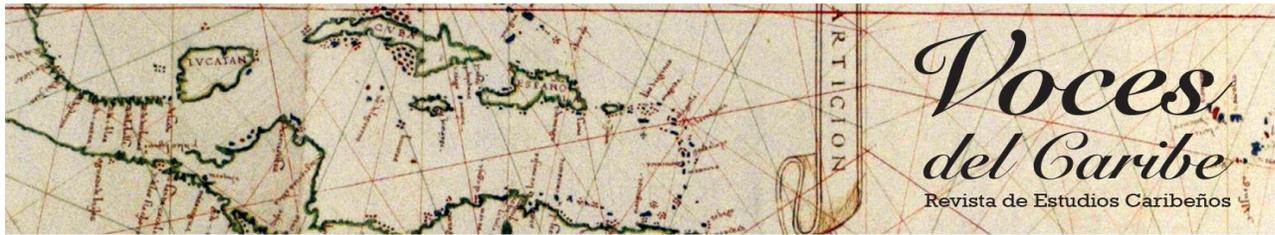
Otoño, 2017

“contradictions.” Throughout the text, the author uses “dictions” to refer to stories, narratives, and speech acts that go against the hegemonic version of national identity and the official “truths” of the nation. In this way the book is concerned with the ways in which dictions are projected and performed on racialized bodies to sustain the exclusionary borders of the modern nation-state.

Chapter one explains the socio-political and economic power struggles between the Dominican Republic and the United States that have altered the Haitian-Dominican border and contributed to a heightened presence of anti-blackness on the island. It also introduces the author’s conceptualization of the border as a space of knowledge and historical recovery, recognizing that this positionality is not unique to the Dominican diasporic experience: Anzaldúa describes it as one of discomfort on barbwire; Luis Rafael Sánchez described Puerto Rico as a *guagua aérea*; Pérez Firmat theorized the Cuban-American condition as living on the hyphen. The author uses these theories to establish El Nié as a type of “transhistorical location” where painful stories of exclusion can be recovered and remembered. Thus, el Nié refers not to the space that the subject inhabits but rather the body that carries the violent borders on its back – a locus from which the histories and stories that perpetuate and sustain the oppressive borders of the nation can be called into question.

Chapter two focuses on how the US occupation of the Dominican Republic (1916-1924) contributed to the criminalization of Dominican blackness. García-Peña uses various letters from





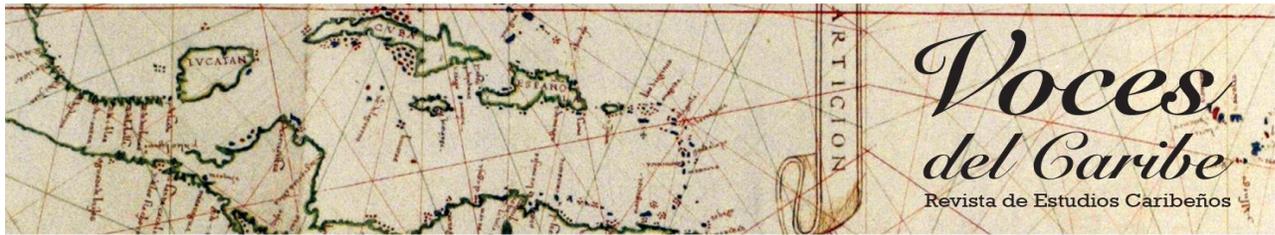
Volumen 9, Número 1

Otoño, 2017

soldiers stationed on the island to discuss how certain Afro-religious practices and practitioners were violently repressed through both official and unofficial channels. The author embraces these Afro-religious practices to argue that such spiritual beliefs contest hegemonic understandings of *dominicanidad* by making visible those racialized subjects, often stripped of their own voices. Chapter three follows this lead looking at narratives that utilize their fictional characters to document the 1937 Parsley Massacre of Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent in the Dominican Republic. Each of the examples from Ramón Marrero Aristy's *Over*, Juan Bosch's *Cuentos escritos en el exilio*, Freddy Prestol Castillo's *El Masacre se pasa a pie*, Jacques Stephen Alexis's *Compère Général Soleil*, and Edwidge Danticat's *The Farming of Bones* brings attention to the violence surrounding the 1937 massacre and the lingering effects that this violence has had on Dominican national and racial identities.

The last two chapters of the text discuss a “rayano consciousness” and the space of El Nié. First, García-Peña utilizes Diana Taylor's concept of the “act of transfer” as a framework for understanding the rayano consciousness as the performative dictions that make up the borders of *dominicanidad*. Not only does this particular concept remap Hispaniola's borders onto the historicized body of the Dominican racialized subject, but it also brings attention to the multiple ways in which these bodies may contest official histories and restrictive national identities. Second, the space of El Nié – literally a neither-here-nor-there – speaks to the condition of those





Volumen 9, Número 1

Otoño, 2017

Dominicans who are expunged from the Dominican nation because of their race yet remain marginalized within the United States for the same reasons. Through an analysis of Josefina Baez's *Dominicanish*, El Nié evolves into an uncomfortable space of belonging from which the contradictions of dominicanidad can perhaps be embraced and defined anew.

Discussing the politicalization of the racialized Dominican body and the inheritance of colonization and US American occupation, García-Peña's book addresses the urgent need to read the genealogy of anti-Haitianism and anti-blackness in the Dominican Republic and its diaspora in the United States as a global force that is intimately linked to the dominant structures of power and oppression that sustained colonial slavery and ongoing systemic racial exclusions. The text suggests that the bodies of racialized immigrants hold the radical potential to speak back to the climate of antiblackness and anti-immigrant rhetoric through the retelling of their stories. This text is an important addition to the realm of border studies in which the space-between becomes a painful, yet necessary locus from which to speak back to violent histories of exclusion and erasure.

*Joshua Deckman*

*Penn State University*

