

La ciguapa y el ciguapeo: Dominican Myth, Metaphor, and Method

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Santo Domingo—and, by extension, the Hispanic Caribbean—is the birthplace of modernity’s paradox personified. Modernity’s central historical innovations in ideas of freedom, humanity, and citizenship are bound together with their antitheses, and the Hispanic Caribbean was the cradle of this conflicted coherence. It was in Santo Domingo that the first European colony was established in the Americas, and it is in Puerto Rico that the last American colony remains.¹ It was in Santo Domingo that both the first and the briefest, and in Cuba where the last and the longest lasting, slave society and economy were established.² It was in Santo Domingo that the first, and in Cuba that the last, revolts of the enslaved occurred.³ Santo Domingo was home to the first, and Cuba to the last, official withdrawal from the transatlantic slave trade; Santo Domingo was the first, and Cuba the next to last, to abolish slavery in the Americas.⁴

- 1 Santo Domingo was the first Iberian colonial settlement in the Americas. Admittedly, Puerto Rico and Hawaii could both be considered US colonies in the hemisphere; however, Hawaii is incorporated as a state of the United States while Puerto Rico is not.
- 2 Chattel slavery was established in Santo Domingo by 1501 and abolished by decree of Toussaint Louverture on 1 January 1801. It was initiated in Cuba in 1513, with the importation of enslaved workers from Hispaniola, and officially abolished there in October 1886.
- 3 The first documented uprising of enslaved peoples occurred on Hispaniola in 1522, and one could consider the *Mambises* of Cuba enslaved people fighting for abolition, freedom, and independence.
- 4 Abolition and withdrawal from the transatlantic slave trade occurred simultaneously on the entire island of Hispaniola as a result of the Haitian Revolution and Toussaint’s decade-long authority over the formerly Spanish part of Santo Domingo.

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Santo Domingo was home to one of the first, and Cuba to the youngest, nation-state to be established in the Americas.⁵

Santo Domingo was the “nucleus of the Antillean system” from which exiles and dissidents from Cuba and Puerto Rico fomented abolition and independence in their homelands, often with the direct participation of Dominicans.⁶ Currently, the Hispanic Caribbean offers three models of relationship to US imperial power: independent Cuba, neocolonial Dominican Republic, and colonized Puerto Rico. The Hispanic Caribbean is also home to some of the most territorially contained *and* the most globally dispersed populations in the hemisphere.⁷ In other words, the Hispanic Caribbean is home to constant, contradictory, and contested struggles over colonialism past and present, and over racism and humanism, enslavement and freedom, sovereignty and imperialism, nationalism and diasporic consciousness. Like the mythical *ciguapa* of folklore, in Santo Domingo repression and resistance face, point, and move together in divergent directions at once. This has become exceedingly clear to me over the past decade as I have been tracking and mapping the latest iteration of anti-Haitianism and negrophobia in the Dominican Republic and the simultaneous spirit of queer antiracist feminist organizing against it.⁸

Beginning with her difficult parturition, in the one hundred and fifty years since her birth the *ciguapa* has moved from a quasi-colonial myth of coherence in contradiction⁹ to a vernacular metaphor for power and conflict in Dominican society to a method of being and knowing in Dominican society. Despite indigenist claims to the contrary, the *ciguapa* is not a legend of Taíno origins that predates Spanish colonialization of the island. As I have argued at length elsewhere, during Santo Domingo’s “Second Republic” indigenism appeared as a central strategy for Dominicans to simultaneously reject Haitian, Spanish, and the ongoing US designs for authority over the entire island by asserting their right to “native” self-rule, although, according to Frank Moya Pons, doing so required that they account for “their ‘color’

- 5 Established in 1804, Haiti was the second nation-state created in the Americas, and, ephemeral though it was, José Nuñez de Cáceres declared an independent *Haití español* in 1821 in Santo Domingo before the establishment of Haitian Unification governance in 1822. Meanwhile, independence continues to be part of the Puerto Rico status debate.
- 6 Javier Angulo Guridi, *La ciguapa* (Santo Domingo: Imprenta de García Hermanos, 1866); reprinted in Emilio Rodríguez Demorizi, *Tradiciones y cuentos dominicanos* (Santo Domingo: Julio D. Postigo e Hijos, 1969), 86. In addition, Puerto Rican Ramón Emeterio Betances had heritage ties to Santo Domingo, while fellow Puerto Rican Eugenio María de Hostos and Cuban José Martí developed deep ties to the country, and Cuban liberator Máximo Gómez was a Dominican from Monte Cristi.
- 7 The Cuban government’s policy of limiting emigration since the 1959 revolution means that the vast majority of Cubans reside in Cuba, while the 2010 census counts more Puerto Ricans living outside of Puerto Rico than in.
- 8 A recent collaborative film project documents the “*cimarrón* spirit” of Afro-Dominican cultural practices established five hundred years ago by people who escaped bondage, established free communities within colonial Santo Domingo, and sustained their contestatory identities after the establishment of the Dominican Republic. Despite being in the midst of an increasingly white supremacist nation-state, black-identified communities and people sustained, adapted, and passed along black ontologies and epistemologies on the island. They have done so even amid indigenist ideologies that work to efface and erase both the African and Haitian ancestries inherent to *Dominicanidad*, including the 1937 massacre. *Cimarrón Spirit: A Documentary on Afro-Dominican Maroon Culture*, dir. Rubén Durán and Donna Pinnick, 2015.
- 9 Anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss argued half a century ago that studying the “deep structure” of myths elucidates the central contradicting values of a given culture and its attempts to mediate those contradictions. Undoubtedly, had he known of her, Lévi-Strauss would have considered the *ciguapa* proof positive of his theorization. See Claude Lévi-Strauss, “The Structural Study of Myth,” *Journal of American Folklore*, no. 270 (October–December 1955): 428–44; and *Myth and Meaning: Cracking the Code of Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978).

while denying their ‘race.’”¹⁰ Carlos Esteban Deive, historian of colonial Santo Domingo, puts it thus:

The Taino’s spiritual world barely left traces on creole culture, and the few examples we have of that world are deeply syncretized with Afro-Christian beliefs and rituals. In that regard we could cite the consecration of certain Taino caciques who have been elevated to the status of *luases* or divinities in the Vodun pantheon, the superstitions about indigenous hatchets, popularly known as “lighting rocks,” and the myth of the Ciguapa, a female being that walks with her feet pointing backwards.¹¹

From those sectors of Dominican society that courted and supported Spanish recolonization of Santo Domingo in the 1860s, to those in Cuba and Puerto Rico that worked to sustain Spanish authority and slavery there decades after the Gritos de Yara y Lares, the *ciguapa* was understood to be “a creature . . . with a soul like [theirs that] desire[d] only [their] extermination.”¹² With backward-pointing feet offering a built-in mechanism for misleading those who follow, pursue, or attempt to grasp her, the *ciguapa* signals that Dominican social facts are often two opposite things at once, *progreso* (progress) and *regreso* (return), a *con/tradición* (contradiction *within* tradition) and *contra/dición* (against and counter diction).¹³ The *ciguapa* can be understood as embodying the simultaneously progressive and regressive sovereignty strategies and sentiments of a people whose ancestors were both colonizers and colonized, enslavers and enslaved, (im)migrants and native born, navigating landscapes ruled by caudillos jostling for personal power in a nation born “beneath the United States.”¹⁴

The *ciguapa* was narrated into Dominican life and lore by poet, novelist, essayist, playwright, and journalist Francisco Javier Angulo Guridi (1816–84), author of the eponymous novella *La ciguapa* published in 1866. The particulars of Angulo Guridi’s biography illuminate the broader circumstances of the *ciguapa*’s appearance on the Hispanic Caribbean scene. Angulo Guridi was born in Santo Domingo, but his family left the island when the Haitian Unification period began in 1822. He spent the next thirty years, from age six to thirty-six,

10 Frank Moya Pons, *The Dominican Republic: A National History* (New York: Hispaniola Books, 1995), 6; quoted in Ginetta E. B. Candelario, *Black behind the Ears: Dominican Racial Identity from Museums to Beauty Shops* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 38. From the late nineteenth through the twentieth centuries, *indigenismo* became manifest in literature, legislation protecting the nation’s archaeological and architectural patrimony, museography, historiography, national curricula, and, eventually, popular culture.

11 “El mundo espiritual del taíno apenas dejó huellas en la cultura criolla, y las pocas muestras de ese mundo se hallan fuertemente sincretizadas con las creencias y ritos cristiano-africanos. Podemos citar, al respecto, la sacralización de ciertos caciques taínos, elevados a la categoría de *luases* o divinidades del panteón vodúista; las supersticiones relativas a las hachas indígenas, popularmente conocidas como ‘piedras de rayo,’ y el mito de la *ciguapa*, entidad femenina que camina con los pies al revés”; Carlos Esteban Deive, “Notas sobre la cultura dominicana,” *Boletín del Museo del Hombre Dominicano* 7, no. 12 (1979), www.jmarcano.com/mipais/cultura/deive.html, para. 7. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are mine.

12 “Una criatura . . . con un alma como nosotros alientas sólo per el exterminio de nosotros mismos”; Angulo Guridi, *La ciguapa*, 89.

13 Although *ciguapas* are said to be both male and female “creatures,” it is the female *ciguapa* that predominates in the folklore as in Guridi’s story.

14 Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of US Policy toward Latin America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

in Cuba—the other Caribbean island with a ciguapa myth.¹⁵ In 1853 he returned to a Santo Domingo that was now the capital of the Dominican Republic, remaining there only until 1855, when he returned to Cuba.

Angulo Guridi was again drawn back to Santo Domingo when it was recolonized by Spain in 1861; he became a colonel with the Dominican armed forces in the successful War of Restoration (1863–65) that expelled the Spanish once and for all and established the *liberales* as political vanguard. Angulo Guridi quickly established himself as a key contributor to the liberals' postwar political, intellectual, and cultural projects, including serving as senator for Santiago and then as secretary of the Senate during one of President Buenaventura Báez's terms. He cofounded *El Progreso* and *El Tiempo*, was the managing editor of *El Sol* and the government's *Boletín Oficial*, and wrote columns for *El Laborante* and *El Dominicano*—all periodicals that fostered a liberal nationalism.¹⁶ In addition, he published the country's first geography text, its first book of verse, and what is considered the first Dominican novel, and he opened a school for boys in Puerto Plata in 1865.¹⁷ In other words, Angulo Guridi was explicitly invested in narrating and influencing the course of history, society, culture, and politics in the Dominican Republic after its split from Haiti and in the context of a building sentiment in favor of sovereignty and abolition in the Hispanic Caribbean. Perhaps the most important thread in Angulo Guridi's biographical tapestry, however, is that he is considered a founding father of indigenism in the Dominican Republic. By 1884, when Guridi died, the mythical ciguapa had entered the national folklore as if she were part of the island's indigenous cultural legacy rather than the invention of a nationalist navigating the Dominican Republic's contradictory racial demographics, political economy, and geopolitics.¹⁸

The ciguapa's appearance in Angulo Guridi's eponymous story presages a deadly disturbance in the love affair the self-proclaimed innocent *cibaeños* (people from El Cibao, or the central mountains and plains region) had among themselves; they were intent on peopling “the land Columbus loved best” with other *colonos*, rural settlers who came to be known as *campesinos* (peasants).¹⁹ As in Cuba and Puerto Rico, the *campesinos* of the Dominican Republic's Cibao coffee-growing region considered themselves to be (predominantly) white,

15 It is possible that Angulo Guridi imported the ciguapa from Cuba, where the Cuban folklorist Antonio Bachiller y Morales wrote about the ciguapa in 1848. La Ciguapa is also the name of a town in Cuba's Oriente region, the locus of anticolonial and antislavery resistance and rebellion on the island. The town's name predates Bachiller y Morales's writing, as is referenced in Mary Gardner Lowell's 1831–32 travel narrative, *New Year in Cuba* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003), 88.

16 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

17 Javier Angulo Guridi, *Elementos de geografía físico-histórica antigua y moderna de la isla de Santo Domingo* (Santo Domingo: Imprenta de García Hermanos, 1866); *Ensayos poéticos* (Puerto Príncipe, Cuba: Imprenta de Gobierno y Real Hacienda, 1843); and *La fantasma de Hígüey* (Havana: Imprenta de A. M. Dávila, 1857).

18 See Emilio Jorge Rodríguez, “Encroachment of Creole Culture on the Written and Oral Discourses of Hispaniola,” in Gordon Collier and Ulrich Fleischman, eds., *A Pepper-Pot of Cultures: Aspects of Creolization in the Caribbean* (New York: Rodopi, 2003), 109–35.

19 “The land Columbus loved best” was an advertising slogan developed by the Dominican government in the 1970s and 1980s as part of its strategy to grow the tourism economy. Although the etymology of “colonize” dates back to the fourteenth century, and the Latin *colonus* means “to husband or cultivate land,” it is fascinating to note that Columbus in Spanish is Colón, and that *colonos* are colonial settlers.

Hispanic, and progressive creoles, but the colonizing Iberian *peninsulares* saw them as mixed race, hot tempered, backward, and politically suspect. Thus, the hidden presence of disruptive *and* captivating indigenous others is inherently subversive of the colonial project. Angulo Guridi's narrator, not coincidentally a man from the iconic center of the Cibao, Santiago de los Treinta Caballeros (Santiago of the Thirty Gentlemen), comes across a young man on the path as he is heading to Puerto Plata by horse in order to sail for Havana in June of 1860.²⁰ The young man, "baptized Jacinto" by the unnamed narrator, is the nephew of the caballero's hired guide through the sierra.²¹ Jacinto specifically seeks out the traveler in order to go with him to Cuba, at the time an uncontested Spanish colony. Jacinto's desire to leave a still-independent if politically turbulent Santo Domingo of 1860 for a still-colonized Spanish Cuba is a product of the ciguapa's capacity to unsettle the promise of racial progress, even in the Cibao. This becomes clear when Jacinto tells the traveler the story of how the ciguapa was responsible for the death of his dream of marriage and family formation.

Jacinto's father had been a "good man" exiled because of his political opinions, leaving his son essentially "orphaned" at age twelve.²² "Old man Andrés," who had felt indebted to Jacinto's unnamed father, took the boy in, adding him to his already large family. Andrés's daughter, Marcelina, had become especially fond of Jacinto, and after several years of living under the same roof, Jacinto had begun to desire Marcelina as his bride, with Andrés's blessing. Marcelina, of course, had been innocent and unaware of these intentions, even as the months passed and Jacinto became increasingly besotted. One morning, Jacinto and Marcelina walked to the river's side, where he declared his love for her and, happily, she concurred. They spent several idyllic hours chastely planning their future union and family. Suddenly, as dusk began to fall, Marcelina laid eyes on the ciguapa and was so terrified that she fainted and fell into a feverish state, dying three days later. According to our narrator, this "being" whose mere cursory appearance could frighten to death a bride-to-be

20 Angulo Guridi explicitly dates the story to the period during which the caudillo General Pedro Santana ruled the country and negotiated the Spanish annexation of Santo Domingo, which took effect the following May, in 1861, under his governorship. Among Santana's motivations was a preference for Spanish over Haitian or US colonization. The caudillo Angulo Guridi supported, Buenaventura Báez, was the *hijo reconocido* (legitimate son) of a formerly enslaved woman (Juana Méndez) and a wealthy landowner from Azua (Pablo Báez) who had been a legislator under the Haitian Unification government. Báez was no more adverse than Santana to the Dominican Republic's annexation to a foreign power, including France, Haiti, and the United States, so long as his personal wealth and power were increased. Nonetheless, he was a founding member of the Azules (the Blue Ones), which despite being a largely inchoate conglomeration of ideologically disparate actors hewed strongly to the progressive liberal principles of men like Gregorio Luperón. See Frank Moya Pons, *The Dominican Republic: A National History* (New Rochelle, NY: Hispaniola, 1995).

21 Angulo Guridi, *La ciguapa*, 90.

22 At the time of his storytelling, Jacinto would have been about sixteen years old, so his father would have been exiled during the revolution of 1857, when a group of Cibao planters tried to oust Báez with the help of Santana. Again, there was a lack of ideological consistency on either side of the conflict, evidenced by the fact that it was under the Santana government set up in the Cibao to contest Báez's government in Santo Domingo that the *Constitución de Moca* was ratified in 1858, even though the liberal principles of governance and citizenship it enshrined stood in marked contrast to Santana's interests. Thus, as soon as Santana was able to oust Báez, he promptly rescinded the authority of the Santiago government and nullified the 1858 Constitution in favor of the more authoritarian Constitution of 1854. Thus it is not clear which political ideology or what role Jacinto's exiled father had played in the Revolution, leaving the significance of his (politically) orphaned state ambiguous.

is a creature that is just three feet tall, but this does not lead one to think that it suffers from the deformity that in Europe they call dwarfism. . . . Far from it, its muscles and extremities exist in perfect harmony with one another; it has a marvelously beautiful face and movements full of such agility, spontaneity, and grace that they captivate the attention of all who see it. It has the golden skin of the authentic Indian, black almond-shaped eyes, soft, lustrous, and abundant hair that on females falls down their gorgeous backs all the way to the knees. . . . It has no language other than howling, and it runs like a hare through the mountains, or leaps like a bird among the trees' branches as soon as it comes across a being from a different race.²³

The ciguapa's appearance signaled her undeniable presence in the landscape, and thus summarily ended the prospective good Hispanic marriage and family formation.²⁴ The family is central to the myth that the nation is born of love and nature. This romantic mythology deflects attention away from the state that (re)produces the nation through structuring power over the body.²⁵ The nation-state explicitly manages life and death; wombs and women; race and ethnicity; past, present, and future. All this is central to the power of the vernacular metaphor that emerges from myth of the ciguapa.²⁶

It is telling that the ciguapa first appeared in Dominican society when Guridi published this novella in 1866 as the country was grappling with the wake of having been born of a twenty-two-year-long period of Haitian Unification governance of Hispaniola (1822–44), followed by the establishment of the Dominican Republic governed by competing caudillos (1844–61), the invited recolonization by Spain (1861–63), a War of Restoration (1863–65), the birth of its Second Republic (1865), and the looming possibility of annexation to the United States (1866–71).²⁷ Meanwhile, Ramón Emeterio Betances and Segundo Ruiz Belvis, both Puerto

23 "Es una criatura que solo levanta una vara de talla, sin que por tanto se crea que en sus proporciones hay la deformidad de los llamados enanos en Europa. . . . Lejos de eso, existe una exacta armonía en todos sus músculos y miembros, una belleza maravillosa en su rostro, y una agilidad en sus movimientos tan llenos de espontaneidad y de gracia que deja absorto al que la ve. Tiene la piel dorada del verdadero indio, los ojos negros y rasgados, el pelo suave, lustroso y abundante, rodando el de la hembra por sus bellísimas espaldas hasta la misma pantorrilla. . . . No tiene otro lenguaje que el aullido, y corre como una liebre por las sierras, o salta como un pájaro por las ramas de los árboles tan luego como descubre a otro ser distinto de su raza"; Angulo Guridi, *La ciguapa*, 95.

24 Although Guridi's original iteration describes the ciguapas as similar in coloring to "Indians" because of their "golden skin," in later iterations ciguapas are also said to be blue tinged or hued. Interestingly, the Azules (the Blue Ones) was the party of the liberals who were largely but not exclusively concentrated in the Cibao and were a product of the tobacco and coffee-growing economy in which *La ciguapa* takes place, while the Rojos (the Red Ones) was the party of the conservatives who were largely but not exclusively part of the cattle ranching and sugar cane economy. We must note also that although the language used to describe this creature clearly signals the ciguapa's femininity and thus lends itself easily to the archetype of natural conflict between women, particularly women of different races, given the story's explicit dating and the timing of its publication, the language used to describe the ciguapa's movements and body also strikingly presages the language used at the turn of the twentieth century to describe the fighting cocks that were the symbols for the two major political factions of the epoch, the Azules (*bolos*) and the Rojos (*coludos*). "At the time, the national sport was cockfighting, and these parties were also popularly referred to as the two types of cocks: the [supporters of liberal Juan Isidro Jimenes known as] Jimenistas were called *bolos* (without tail feathers) and the [supporters of conservative Horacio Vasquez known as] Horacistas were called *coludos* (long tail feathers)." Moya Pons, *The Dominican Republic*, 284.

25 For a fuller discussion of these connections between gender, race, sexuality, citizenship, and nation-state formation, see Jacqueline Stevens, *Reproducing the State* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

26 "You have built a lovely home, myth assures us. But, whispers parable, you are right above an earthquake fault." John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval* (Sonoma, CA: Polebridge, 1988), 38.

27 William Javier Nelson, *Almost a Territory: America's Attempt to Annex the Dominican Republic* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991).

Rican²⁸ exiles in the Dominican Republic, founded the Comité Revolucionario de Puerto Rico, which launched the Grito de Lares, Puerto Rico's failed 1868 insurrection against Spain. At the same time, in Cuba a growing independence and abolitionist movement launched with the Grito de Yara became the Ten Years' War (1868–78). The mythical tale of an unconsummated love affair between Jacinto and Marcelina, *campesinos* from “good”—that is, Hispanic creole—Cibao families, can be understood as a parable for a Hispanic Caribbean grappling with colonialism and independence, slavery and abolition, imperialism and sovereignty, nation and state.

If to the chagrin of some black diaspora experts from the United States signifying monkeys have not often been sighted on Hispaniola, then ciguapas most certainly have.²⁹ Though not unlike the trickster figures throughout the black diaspora in the Americas that “symboliz[e] the essence of [indigenous and black] rebellion,” the ciguapa metaphor moves beyond rebellion to signal the embodied contradictions of Dominican disidentification.³⁰ As Cuban queer theorist José Muñoz elucidates,

Disidentification is about recycling and rethinking encoded meaning. The process of disidentification scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message's universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identifications. Thus, disidentification is a step further than cracking open the code of the majority; it proceeds to use this code as raw material for representing a disempowered politics or positionality that has been rendered unthinkable by the dominant culture.³¹

The ciguapa as metaphor navigates the contradictions, tensions, and complex desires surrounding the past/present/future of race, gender, sex, sovereignty, *progreso*, and *regreso* in the Dominican Republic and its diaspora.³² What is more, if the monkey signifies its liberation and belonging specifically within the United States' understandings of diasporic blackness, then

28 Betances was of Dominican descent.

29 There is a long history of African American studies scholarship in the United States simplistically pathologizing Dominican racial identity formation as only internalized racism because it does not align with US racial ideologies, schemas, history, or politics. Yet it fails to account for the particularities and consequences of settler colonialism, chattel slavery, white supremacy, and US imperialism in the Dominican context even when Dominican studies scholars signal these necessary interpretive frameworks. Thus, in these culturally jingoist accounts, African Americans stand as the arbiters of true blackness and black liberation. See Henry Louis Gates Jr., “Haiti and the Dominican Republic: An Island Divided,” 12 April 2011, *Black in Latin America* series, Public Broadcast Service, www.pbs.org/wnet/black-in-latin-america/about. At the same time, those same scholars offer complex theorizations of African Americans' navigations, negotiations, and contestations of white supremacy and racial violence. See Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey: A Theory of African American Literary Criticism* (Cambridge: Oxford University Press, 1988).

30 Manuel Mora Serrano, “Indias, vien-vienes y ciguapas: Noticias sobre tres tradiciones dominicanas,” *Eme-Eme*, Santiago de los Caballeros, 19 (July–August 1975): 66–67; quoted in Rodríguez, “Encroachment of Creole Culture,” 128.

31 José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 31.

32 *Progreso* (progress) is a core Dominican leitmotif and value, “an idea of cultural change: over time, things get better.” Jesse Hoffnung-Garskof, *A Tale of Two Cities: Santo Domingo and New York after 1950* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2010), 11.

the ciguapa enters the diaspora's transnational field.³³ But she does not do that in a single or necessarily unidirectional trajectory arching toward freedom and liberation.

Luisa Castillo Guzmán, lead singer for the Dominican alternative music ensemble Ciguapiando, offers an insightful articulation of the shift from metaphor to practice:

So *ciguapear* (as a verb) could be considered a liberation strategy that has endured in our collective wisdom through oral transmission, overcoming educational, social, and religious structures over time, like a message preserved in a clay pot from El Cibao. There have been more than a few—as my wise grandmother doña Casilda used to say—Dominican male and female artists who have found inspiration in the mysterious magical woman with the backward feet in order to create important works. Literature, painting, sculpture, music, dance, theater, and film; all art forms have recreated the legend. I invite you to seek out information, to interpret, create, and dream of a better country since it is here, in the conjugation of these verbs, where one finds the strength to change the political, social, economic milieus of our country and those of the region.³⁴

As Castillo Guzmán's final words signal, to *ciguapear* is to act, to call into being a method for political, intellectual, and cultural strategies of undoing imperialism and racism throughout the hemisphere.³⁵ To *ciguapear* often entails rejecting the seductive perils and pitfalls of nationalism in a distinctly Dominican way. To *ciguapear* is to simultaneously enact and discern disidentification and dissemblance in Dominican history, society, culture, and politics. Accordingly, *el ciguapeo* is inherently progressive and regressive at once. The myth of the ciguapa was born of these contradictions; the ciguapa metaphor elucidates them; a ciguapa method addresses them.

Perhaps the best contemporary example of *ciguapeo* as myth, metaphor, and method is the most recent history of negrophobic and misogynistic nationalism in the Dominican Republic. In 2010 legislators approved “a constitutional amendment that excludes Dominican-born children of those in the country illegally, including seasonal and temporary workers, from Dominican citizenship.”³⁶ This amendment was a response to the case successfully brought

33 Josefina Báez, “A 1 2 3 Portrait of a Legend,” *Callaloo* 23, no. 3 (2000): 1038–40.

34 “Así que *ciguapear* (así como un verbo) podría tratarse de una estrategia para la liberación, que ha perdurado en nuestro saber colectivo por la transmisión oral, superando las estructuras educativas, sociales y religiosas en el tiempo, como un mensaje conservado en una potiza de barro del Cibao. Los y las artistas dominicanos-as que han encontrado en la misteriosa mujer mágica de los pies al revés inspiración para crear obras de importancia no han sido uno ni dos, como decía doña Casilda (mi sabia abuela). Literatura, pintura, escultura música, danza, teatro, y cine, Todas las formas del arte han recreado la leyenda. Les invito a buscar información, a interpretar, crear y soñar con un país mejor ya que es ahí, en la conjugación de estos verbos donde habita la fuerza para hacer los cambios en los ámbitos: político, social, económico, de nuestro país y los de la región”; *Ciguapiando* (blog), Saturday, 23 June 2012, ciguapiando.blogspot.com/2012/06/ciguapa-aremitos-aqui-ahora-en-costa.html?pref=bl. Formed in 2012, Ciguapiando is a soulful jazz-fusion group that forms part of a growing Afro-queer feminist cultural milieu in the Dominican Republic. Comprised of lead singer Luisa Castillo Guzmán, percussionist Jaen Carlos López, guitarist Samy Kiquez, saxophonist Marcos Angeles, bassist Sebastian Mieses, and backup vocalists Ricardo Hernández and Micael López, the group routinely performs at feminist and social justice events.

35 Although not referencing the ciguapa at all, media studies scholar Keara K. Goin's recent analysis of Zoe Saldana's navigation of race and celebrity in the United States could be said to be an example of *ciguapiando* around US racism and sexism. See Keara K. Goin, “Zoe Saldana or Zoë Saldaña? Cinematic *Dominicanidad* and the Hollywood Star,” *Celebrity Studies*, April 2016.

36 Randal C. Archibold, “Dominicans of Haitian Descent Cast into Legal Limbo by Court,” *New York Times*, 24 October 2013. Notably, the two dissenting justices were women: Katia Miguelina Jiménez Martínez and Ana Isabel Bonilla.

on behalf of two girls, Dilcia Yean and Violeta Bosico, by their mothers against the Dominican Republic in the Inter-American Court of Human Rights (IACHR).³⁷ The court ruled in favor of Yean and Bosico in 2005, but the Dominican government refused to accept the decision and opted instead to amend its constitution in 2010. In response, Juliana Deguis Pierre, a twenty-nine-year-old housekeeper born in the Dominican Republic to parents who had worked on a sugar plantation and never returned to Haiti, brought a second case. Despite her parents having been labor migrants contracted by the Dominican government to work in the nationalized sugar cane *ingenios* (factories), and Deguis Pierre's fully documented birth in the Dominican Republic, the court ruled on 23 September 2013 in Judgment 168-13 that Deguis Pierre's parents were migrants "in transit" rather than legal residents.³⁸ Therefore, Deguis Pierre was ineligible for citizenship, despite having been born and raised in the Dominican Republic. So, too, were her four children, also born in the Dominican Republic.³⁹

The court's decision relied on the 1929 Constitution that explicitly supported birthright citizenship for children of foreigners born in the Dominican Republic but excluded people "in transit." The "in transit" clause was intended to exclude the children born to Haitian sugar cane workers whose labor migration had been organized by the US military government for nearly two decades.⁴⁰ As migrants in transit, they were explicitly barred from claiming birthright citizenship for their children born in the Dominican Republic. This clause was developed four years after the United States withdrew from the Dominican Republic but while it was still occupying Haiti. When the clause was developed, the rationale was broadly supported political sovereignty principles that rejected the inherent white supremacy of the occupation rather than the racist negrophobic ideology that would subsequently become fully institutionalized under the Trujillo regime.⁴¹ Judgment 168-13 did not simply ratify the 2010 constitutional amendment; it went "a step further by ordering officials to audit the nation's birth records, compile a list of people who should not qualify for citizenship and notify the embassies a

37 With the support of Movimiento de Mujeres Dominico Haitianas (MUDHA), the Centro por la Justicia y el Derecho Internacional, and the International Human Rights Law Clinic, School of Law (Boalt Hall), University of California, Berkeley, Yean's and Bosico's mothers challenged the increasingly routine practice of denying children of Haitian descent born in the Dominican Republic their birth certificates. Without this critical documentation of their birth in the Dominican Republic, Dominicans of Haitian descent cannot assert the civil and political rights that birthright citizenship automatically confers, nor can they access the public resources that the most economically vulnerable members of Dominican society rely on, most importantly, public education and health care. *Niñas Dilcia Yean y Violeta Bosico Cofi v. República Dominicana*, 8 September 2005.

38 The nationalized Igenio Río Haina opened in 1950, becoming the largest *central azucarero* in the world. In the aftermath of Trujillo's assassination, the Dominican government went on to open twelve *ingenios* operated by the Consejo Estatal del Azúcar from 1961 to 1998. During this period, the state directly engaged in Haitian labor migration contracting, which together with the increasing reliance on Haitian laborers in the construction and tourism industries, accounts for the steady increase in the Haitian and Dominico-Haitian population. With the rise of neoliberalism, the Partido Liberal Dominicano's president, Leonel Fernández, began to privatize the *ingenios* and most closed not long after. Today only five CEA *ingenios* remain.

39 Ms. Deguis Pierre was ultimately granted her *cédula* (national identity card) on 1 August 2014, largely the result of the advocacy of national and international human rights groups and projects. See www.obmica.org/index.php/actualidad/23-derecho-a-nacionalidad/96-aplicando-la-ley-de-naturalizacion-169-14-retos-y-avances.

40 The US military governance of Santo Domingo ran eight years, from 1916 to 1924, but since the occupation began in Haiti in 1915 and remained until 1934, US-backed Haitian labor migration to the Dominican Republic continued as well.

41 See Candelario, *Black behind the Ears*, chaps. 1 and 2.

person's nationality is in question."⁴² The ruling had the potential to denationalize hundreds of thousands of people, many of them children.

This was followed in May 2014 by Law 169-14, which established "(a) a special system that benefits children who were born in the national territory to non-resident foreigners during the period between June 16, 1929, and April 18, 2007, and were listed in the Dominican Civil Registry because the current norms did not recognize the use of their documents for these purposes at the time of registration; and (b) the registration of children born in the Dominican Republic to foreigners in irregular situations who do not appear in the Civil Registry."⁴³ Four months later, on 28 August 2014, the IACHR ruled on *Personas Dominicanas y Haitianas expulsadas v. República Dominicana*, finding once again in favor of the plaintiffs, twenty-seven Haitians and Dominicans of Haitian descent, including seventeen children who were arbitrarily detained and removed during massive deportations between 1999 and 2000.⁴⁴ This proved to be the tipping point that the Dominican authorities would claim drove it to withdraw from the IACHR in November 2014.

Despite deploying the discourse of sovereignty to reject the authority of the IACHR and justify its withdrawal, the Dominican Republic was not operating in a context in which national sovereignty was even remotely at risk. Thus whether on the face of it or paying attention to the backward tracks laid out by the ruling, Judgment 168-13, Law 169-14, and the Plan Nacional de Regularización de Extranjeros en Situación Migratoria Irregular (PNRE) appear to be nothing more than racist anti-Haitianism. Indeed, deploying a Dominican version of the rule of hypodescent's "logic of an infinite regress," the rulings and PNRE "effectively mak[e one's] parents' migration status an inheritable trait."⁴⁵ As has been amply documented, Dominican anti-Haitianism has been fostered by elite Dominicans in urban centers and institutionalized via state bureaucracies and popular culture since the early twentieth century. Its most dramatic manifestation has undeniably been the massacre of thousands of Haitians, Dominicans of Haitian descent, and black Dominicans organized by Rafael Trujillo over several weeks in the fall of 1937. This state-organized genocide violently asserted the nation-state's rules for belonging in the Dominican body politic.

Yet a frequently overlooked but definitely not minor point is that the majority of the massacre's victims were women and children. Some have claimed that this was because of

42 Archibold, "Dominicans of Haitian Descent."

43 "a) un régimen especial en beneficio de hijos de padres y madres extranjeros no residentes, nacidos en el territorio nacional durante el período comprendido entre el 16 de junio de 1929 al 18 de abril de 2007, inscritos en los libros del Registro Civil dominicano en base a documentos no reconocidos por las normas vigentes para esos fines al momento de inscripción; y b) el registro de hijos de padres extranjeros en situación irregular nacidos en la República Dominicana y que no figuran inscritos en el Registro Civil." Congreso Nacional, Ley No. 169-14, "Ley que establece un régimen especial para personas nacidas en el territorio nacional inscritas irregularmente en el Registro Civil dominicano y sobre naturalización," *Capítulo I: Del régimen especial*, 5, presidencia.gob.do/haitianossinpapeles/docs/Ley-No-169-14.pdf.

44 *Corte Interamericana de Derechos Humanos, Caso de Personas Dominicanas y Haitianas Expulsadas v. República Dominicana*, 28 August 2014, www.corteidh.or.cr/docs/casos/articulos/seriec_282_esp.pdf.

45 Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993), 19; Scott Freeman, "Historical 'Anti-Haitianism' and the Rulings of the Dominican Constitutional Court," *Focus on Haiti*, 21 October 2013, www.focusonhaiti.org/2013/10/21/historical-anti-haitianism-and-the-rulings-of-the-dominican-constitutional-court, para. 2.

women's inability to defend themselves to the same degree as their male counterparts, many of whom were afforded the protection of their sugar plantation employers.⁴⁶ Keeping in mind *ciguapeo* as method, however, I would argue that black-identified women and children were primary targets of the Trujillo state for reasons that were as much about misogynistic phallogracy as they were nationalist anti-Haitianism. Vulnerable yet free black-identified women and children embodied a future the patriarchal state wanted to purge from the Hispanic, Catholic, and administratively indigenized body politic or, at the very least, terrorize into docility and withdrawal into the country's recesses.⁴⁷ Likewise, today women and children are the primary targets and victims of what activists have described as a *genocidio administrativo* (administrative genocide), a bloodless but nonetheless violent bureaucratic disappearing of bodies (re)produced as vulnerable labor born *in* but not *of* the nation yet subject to the state's power to recognize their (birth)rights or not.⁴⁸ Precisely this is a critical juncture where *ciguapeo* moves from vernacular metaphor to method.

Reconoci.do is one of the leading groups currently addressing the birthright citizenship crisis; the name is a complex play on *reconocer* (to recognize) that signals simultaneously a demand that the state recognize birthright citizenship for all those born in the Dominican Republic and that these Dominicans of Haitian descent recognize themselves as Dominican (expressed by the ".do" that signals Dominican Internet domain). More pointed still, acknowledging paternity in the Dominican Republic is expressed in terms of recognition: to "recognize a child" is to acknowledge that she or he is yours. In a patriarchal state, only fathers are in a position to deny or affirm their kinship with the children they engender: *los padres pueden sacar pie* (fathers can walk away). Thus, Reconoci.do activists are affirming in every way that they know they were born of the Dominican fatherland even if it turns its face, refuses to acknowledge them, and denies its responsibilities for their health, education, and welfare.

The same government followed Judgment 168-13, Law 169-14, and the PRNE with a revision to the Penal Code that decrees a total ban on abortion, including in cases of incest, rape, and endangerment of the mother's life.⁴⁹ The power of the state resides in its right to kill or let live as it sees fit. Further, it is not coincidental that in this context expressions of homophobia in the public sphere, from the unabashed gay-bashing pronouncements of Archbishop Nicolás de Jesús López Rodríguez to everyday violence against queer folk, have become increasingly overt, while heteronormative femicide is a fact of life and death for women in the Dominican

46 Richard Turits, *Foundations of Despotism: Peasants, the Trujillo Regime, and Modernity in Dominican History* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004).

47 Robin Derby, *The Dictator's Seduction: Politics and the Popular Imagination in the Era of Trujillo* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009).

48 Also at the forefront are Dominican@s por Derecho, and MUDHA, while international organizations such as Observatorio de Migración en el Caribe and Amnesty International in Santo Domingo play a key research-based advocacy role. See Bridge, Wooding and Richard Moseley-Williams, *Needed but Unwanted* (London: Catholic Institute for International Relations, 2004).

49 "Cámara de Diputados aprueba nuevo Código Penal; dispone penalizar el aborto," *Hoy*, 19 July 2016, www.hoy.com.do/camara-de-diputados-aprueba-el-nuevo-codigo-penal.

Republic.⁵⁰ When observers of social facts in the Dominican Republic are captivated primarily by the screeching racism of anti-Haitianist agendas, as ciguapeo regresivo would have, they fail to grasp its regressive *and* forward-looking coherence with misogyny, homophobia, and neoliberalism.⁵¹ For “what is tacit is neither secret nor silent.”⁵² A September 2014 Gallup-Hoy opinion poll in the Dominican Republic found that 73 percent of those surveyed thought the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) population to be the most discriminated against, followed by what they perceived to be almost equally high levels of discrimination against Haitians, the poor, and women.⁵³ Not surprisingly, these generally recognized targets of discrimination are also the people who are becoming increasingly organized against the hegemony of the ruling elites.

From the natural hair movement to unblinking *miradas desencadenantes* (observation that unfetters) to transnational organizing, black-identified, antiracist, and queer feminists are coming out not screeching in the night but clearly affirming their ways of being and knowing in broad daylight.⁵⁴ They are also affirming a vision of sovereignty they enact in their embodied lives. Whether exclaiming, “My body is mine! Mine, mine, mine! I am the one who births. I am the one who chooses!”; *testimoniando* via Facebook about the minister of education’s attempt to deny funding for graduate study abroad to a political science student who wears her hair natural; or organizing an LGBTQ march in Santo Domingo in solidarity with the families and victims of Orlando’s Pulse nightclub massacre, there is as much evidence in Dominican transnational society of autochthonous commitment to justice, freedom, and liberation as there is of well-laid tracks of repressive regimes.⁵⁵ If we look only at the “face”

- 50 “Nuevo arzobispo de Santo Domingo pone fin a controvertido episcopado,” Agencia EFE, 4 July 2016, www.efe.com/efe/america/sociedad/nuevo-arzobispo-de-santo-domingo-pone-fin-a-controvertido-episcopado/20000013-2976342. “República Dominicana es tercer país de la región con mayor tasa feminicidios,” *El Nuevo Diario*, Santo Domingo, 4 August 2016, www.elnuevodiario.com.do/app/article.aspx?id=453979.
- 51 Although this could not have been more clearly argued than M. Jacqui Alexander did over twenty years ago, it continues to elude observers, particularly though not exclusively those not firmly grounded in the Caribbean. M. Jacqui Alexander, “Not Just (Any) Body Can Be a Citizen: The Politics of Law, Sexuality, and Postcoloniality in Trinidad and Tobago and the Bahamas,” *Feminist Review*, no. 48 (Autumn 1994): 5–23.
- 52 Carlos Ulises Decena, *Tacit Subjects: Belonging and Same-Sex Desire among Dominican Immigrant Men* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011), 19.
- 53 Servicios de Acento.do, “CEG-INTEC: resultados encuesta Gallup-HOY evidencian violencia contra la Mujer y crímenes de odio,” Acento.do, 15 September 2014, www.acento.com.do/2014/actualidad/8174145-ceg-intec-resultados-encuesta-gallup-hoy-evidencian-violencia-contra-la-mujer-y-crimenes-de-odio.
- 54 See Kate Kilpatrick, “Curly-Centric Hair Salon Teaches Dominican Women to Love Their Pajón: Miss Rizos Uses African and African-American Hairstyles to Affirm Blackness in Straight-Hair-Obsessed Country,” *Al Jazeera America*, 23 February 2016, www.america.aljazeera.com/articles/2016/2/23/curly-centric-hair-salon-teaches-dominican-women-to-love-their-pajon.html. In 2003, the Centro de Estudios de Género (CEG) of the Instituto Tecnológico in Santo Domingo began holding gender studies conferences and publishing the proceedings, beginning with my edited volume *Miradas desencadenantes: Los estudios de género en la República Dominicana al inicio del tercer milenio* (Santo Domingo: FLACSCO and INTEC, 2005). CEG has also been transmitting *Miradas desencadenantes*, a radio program focused on feminism and women’s rights; see www.radio.intec.edu.do/miradas. Dominicans in the diaspora, in addition to collaborating with and supporting movements such as Reconoci.do and Dominican@s por Derecho, have organized transnational groups such as Coalition of Dominicans Against Racism, and internationally recognized intellectuals such as Junot Díaz are using their celebrity to speak out against the rulings. New York-based Dominican artist Firelei Báez, whose work appears within and on the cover of this issue of *Small Axe*, often features the ciguapa in her work in ways that could certainly be considered exemplary of ciguapeo progresivo.
- 55 “¡Mi cuerpo es mio! ¡Mio, mio, mio! ¡Yo soy la que paró! ¡Yo soy la que decido!” I heard this chant throughout the International Women’s Day event organized by civil society organizations that marched from El Parque de la Independencia to the Palacio Nacional in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic, on 8 March 2016. On 26 July 2016, Nicky González Méndez

of hispanophone Caribbean history, politics, culture, and society, we may be led away from what is often hidden in plain sight: the ciguapa and el ciguapeo as autochthonous Hispanic Caribbean myth, metaphor, and method.

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posted on Facebook about her experience with the minister of higher education, Ligia Amada Melo, who openly refused to approve the fellowship González Méndez applied for to study in Paris. Support for González Méndez was swift and unequivocal and quickly resulted in Amada Melo approving the funding. Servicios de Acento.do, “Polítologa denuncia ministra le negó beca de posgrado por tener pelo afro,” Acento.do, 26 July 2016, www.acento.com.do/2016/actualidad/8367971-politologa-denuncia-ministra-le-nego-beca-pos-grado-pelo-afro. On the Dominican response to the events in Orlando, see Yoranni Santiago, “Una Veitena de Manifestantes LGBT Protestan Frente a la Cancillería, Previo Asamblea OEA,” *Listín Diario*, 14 June 2016, www.listindiario.com/la-republica/2016/06/14/422948/una-veintena-de-manifestantes-lgbt-protestan-frente-a-la-cancilleria-previo-asamblea-oea. Although I focus here on the last ten years, there is evidence of what I have sketched out all throughout the twentieth century, as my colleagues and I have documented. See Ginetta E. B. Candelario, Elizabeth S. Manley, and April J. Mayes, eds., *Cien años de feminismos dominicanos: Una colección de documentos y escrituras clave en la formación y evolución del pensamiento y el movimiento feminista en la República Dominicana, 1865–1965* (Santo Domingo: Archivo General de la Nación, 2016).