

Racialization, xenophobia and coloniality in the Dominican Republic: a review of recent literature

Racialización, xenofobia y colonialidad en la República Dominicana: una revisión de la literatura reciente

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Abstract

This article reviews recent literature on racialization, xenophobia and inequality in the Dominican Republic, with emphasis on Haitian and Afro-descendant populations. Its objective is to identify predominant analytical patterns based on a critical review of 115 documents published between 2018 and 2024. Five central axes are examined: structural racism, migration policies, fear-based narratives, decolonial aesthetics, and the coloniality of power. The review draws on thematic and methodological selection criteria, complemented by critical discourse analysis and thematic coding. Findings show that, despite a substantial body of critical scholarship, its influence on public policy remains limited, allowing exclusionary structures to persist. Additionally, the Dominican diaspora—particularly in the United States—has contributed to reshaping understandings of national identity, highlighting inequalities and racist practices both within the country and across migratory contexts.

Keywords: decoloniality, racialization, xenophobia, coloniality of power, structural racism.

Resumen

Este artículo revisa la literatura reciente sobre racialización, xenofobia y desigualdad en la República Dominicana, con énfasis en la población haitiana y afrodescendiente. El objetivo es sistematizar y analizar los patrones analíticos predominantes sobre racialización, xenofobia y colonialidad en la República Dominicana, a partir del análisis crítico de 115 documentos publicados entre 2018 y 2024. Se examinan cinco ejes centrales: racismo estructural, políticas migratorias, narrativas de miedo, estética decolonial y colonialidad del

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poder. La revisión se realizó mediante criterios de selección temáticos y metodológicos, complementados con análisis crítico del discurso y codificación temática. Los hallazgos evidencian que, aunque existe una amplia producción crítica, su influencia en las políticas públicas es limitada, lo que permite la persistencia de estructuras de exclusión. Asimismo, la diáspora dominicana, especialmente en Estados Unidos, ha contribuido a reconfigurar la comprensión de la identidad nacional, visibilizando desigualdades y prácticas racistas tanto en el país como en contextos migratorios.

Palabras clave: decolonialidad, racialización, xenofobia, colonialidad del poder, racismo estructural.

Introduction

This paper presents a review of recent literature exploring the dynamics of racialization, xenophobia and inequality in the Dominican Republic, with a particular focus on the Haitian and Afro-descendant populations. The study seeks to identify critical patterns and debates that reveal how colonial structures have shaped and continue to influence Dominican society. The selection of documents was guided by specific inclusion and exclusion criteria, detailed in the methodology section, to ensure the corpus's thematic relevance and analytical coherence. The literature review identified 108 qualitative studies, which provide an in-depth exploration of the phenomena from contextual and subjective perspectives, using methodologies such as literature reviews, critical analyses and methods from cultural anthropology.

On the other hand, quantitative studies (5) are characterized by rigorous statistical methods and quantitative content analysis. Finally, studies with a mixed approach (2) combine both methods to provide a more holistic and robust view of the topics investigated. The overall objective of this paper is to systematize and analyze the predominant analytical patterns and the main conceptual, empirical and critical contributions on racialization, xenophobia and coloniality in the Dominican Republic, based on a critical analysis of 115 documents published between 2018 and 2024.

The Dominican Republic and Haiti share the island of Hispaniola, one of the few islands in the world divided by an international border. This geographical proximity has given rise to a shared history marked by colonial origins, U.S. occupation and a series of autocratic regimes that have, at various times, coincided in time and space. Nonetheless, as Cassá (2022) points out, over the years, both countries have developed divergent historical processes that have fostered tensions and prejudices among their populations.

The Dominican-Haitian border is not only a physical barrier but also a site of dispute and negotiation, shaped by socioeconomic and cultural differences inherited from colonization. This territorial boundary has become a strategic resource for both states, used to regulate the flow of people, goods and cultural influences, and to reinforce national identities amid increasing globalization (Sainté, 2020). Thus, the border acts as a symbol of state sovereignty, where control policies are exercised and power relations are maintained that perpetuate inequalities.

The dynamics of racialization, xenophobia and inequality have been particularly evident in the Dominican Republic in relation to the Haitian and Afro-descendant populations. These interactions, deeply rooted in colonial ideology, have shaped the

country's social and political structure and continue to manifest themselves in contemporary practices that perpetuate discrimination and exclusion (Palacios Valencia, 2022). Addressing these issues is essential to understanding the roots of these inequalities and exploring possible avenues for social transformation.

This article is structured into five main sections, each addressing a key aspect of the historical, social and political relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and highlighting the factors of racialization, xenophobia and inequality:

1. *Structural racism in the Dominican Republic.* This first section explores how structural racism has been a central element in the construction of Dominican national identity and in the perpetuation of inequalities that mainly affect the Haitian and Dominican-Haitian populations. It analyzes the perspectives of several authors on how this phenomenon has been developed and sustained over time by the dominant elites, shaping politics, culture and social relations in the country.
2. *Migration policies and genocide.* This section examines the implications of racism in shaping Dominican migration policies and in the perpetration of acts that some authors identify as genocide. It explores how these policies reflect the continuity of colonial structures that perpetuate the exclusion and oppression of the Afro-descendant population, particularly those of Haitian descent.
3. *Narrative of fear: sovereignty and external threats.* This section addresses how structural racism manifests itself not only in explicit policies of exclusion but also in narratives that fuel fear and the perception of a threat to national sovereignty. It analyzes the social and political constructs that have been instrumentalized to promote xenophobic and racist discourse against the Haitian and Dominican-Haitian populations.
4. *Self-perception, Bovarism and decolonial aesthetics.* This section explores the complex racial dynamics in the Dominican Republic, influenced by a history of colonialism and racial mixing. It discusses racial perceptions, self-perception and attitudes toward African descent in the country, as well as the tendency to deny blackness and idealize European features. Moreover, an analysis of decolonial aesthetics in the construction of Dominican identity and its association with visuality and the coloniality of power is presented.
5. *Coloniality of power and subaltern resistance.* The fifth and final section explores the concept of coloniality of power in the Dominican Republic, highlighting how colonial structures based on race and gender have persisted even after independence. This section analyzes how these structures continue to operate today, reinforcing hierarchies of power and social exclusion. It also explores the forms of subaltern resistance that have emerged in response to these dynamics and emphasizes the importance of a decolonial approach to addressing contemporary issues.

Through these sections, this paper seeks to provide a comprehensive and critical understanding of the historical and contemporary dynamics that have shaped and continue to influence the relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, and their implications for the perpetuation of inequalities and exclusions within Dominican society.

Methodology

A qualitative-interpretative literature review methodology was implemented to address the paper's aim. A total corpus of 115 documents (100 academic articles and 15 books) was used, selected through a systematic screening process that ensured the relevance and analytical consistency of the set.

In addition to the time frame (2018-2024), key inclusion criteria were applied. First, only texts that explicitly addressed at least one of the study's analytical categories were included: racialization, structural racism, xenophobia, Dominican-Haitian migration policies, African descent or coloniality of power. Second, documents were required to offer conceptual, empirical or critical contributions, and purely descriptive materials or those without analytical articulation were excluded. Third, theoretical and disciplinary diversity was sought, integrating decolonial, anthropological, socio-legal, historical-critical, feminist and intersectional perspectives. Finally, documents whose unit of analysis was not directly linked to the Dominican Republic or the Dominican-Haitian space were excluded.

In the first phase, texts were identified in academic databases and repositories (Scielo, RedALyC, JSTOR, Google Scholar), university publisher catalogs and institutional websites, using combinations of keywords such as Dominican Republic, Haiti, Haitian migration, racism, racialization, xenophobia, coloniality and African descent. Likewise, given the relevance of materials not available in digital format, physical books were consulted in university libraries and documentation centers (Intec, UASD, the General Archive of the Nation and Editorial Bonó), thereby expanding the range of sources and avoiding biases arising from exclusive digital access.

In a second phase, the aforementioned inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to remove duplicates and verify the thematic relevance and analytical depth of each document. This provided a solid and coherent corpus for analysis.

The texts were analyzed using critical discourse analysis procedures (Pardo Abril, 2007), enabling the identification of the conceptual, political and symbolic constructs present in the literature. Citavi, a bibliographic management software, was used to organize the corpus and ensure a systematic approach, allowing the documents to be classified into the main thematic areas. An open coding strategy was applied to identify emerging themes, and axial coding was used to link these themes to broader theoretical trends in the field of study.

The findings were integrated into an analytical narrative that articulates how the dynamics of racialization and xenophobia in the Dominican Republic are related to historical processes of coloniality, migration policies and contemporary practices of resistance. This methodology identified patterns, tensions and gaps in the existing literature, providing a basis for future research, especially studies that integrate quantitative or mixed approaches to complement the qualitative predominance of recent work.

Development

The review identified five central themes in recent academic production. This section examines these themes, highlighting convergences, tensions and conceptual contributions that structure the field of study.

Structural racism in the Dominican Republic

According to Palacios Valencia (2022), structural racism in the Dominican Republic has been a central element in the construction of national identity and in the persistence of inequalities that mainly affect the Haitian and Dominican-Haitian populations. This racism, rooted in a colonial ideology and maintained over time by the dominant elites, has shaped politics, culture and social relations in the country, disproportionately affecting people of Haitian origin (Palacios Valencia, 2022).

Andújar Persinal (2019) states that collective imaginaries about the Haitian migrant population in the Dominican Republic are deeply rooted in a colonial ideology that has rendered the African contribution to Dominican culture invisible, thereby fostering discrimination against Haitians. Tolentino Dipp points out that “racial prejudice is used as an argument for exploitation, of one over another, and uses an evolutionary theoretical basis that explains racial difference as the source of this classification” (cited in Andújar Persinal, 2019, p. 45).

Consistent with this view, Franco (2019) states that racism has been a key tool in constructing a Dominican national identity that excludes and denies African heritage, which is defined in opposition to Haiti. Franco highlights that Haitian migrants have been exploited economically, keeping this population in conditions of illegality and marginalization. Moving toward a more inclusive identity requires confronting these racist structures that have been reproduced throughout history (Franco, 2019).

Delgado Hernández (2020) reinforces this perspective by pointing out that Dominican national identity has historically been constructed in opposition to African heritage and in rejection of Haitian influence. This construction is manifested in Dominican politics, culture and society, which perpetuate an identity based on Hispanophilia and anti-Haitianism. Although there are contemporary attempts to question and subvert this identity, it remains dominant in the collective consciousness. Nevertheless, the Dominican diaspora shows signs of reconciliation with its African heritage, suggesting possible changes in national self-identification in the future (Delgado Hernández, 2020).

Rodrigues Pinto (2018) adds that anti-Haitian sentiment has been exploited by Dominican elites to justify policies of exclusion and violence that have consolidated state racism, which continues to affect Dominican society today. Through the manipulation of the racial category and the exaltation of a white or mestizo identity, a power structure has been maintained that marginalizes the Haitian population and its descendants (Rodrigues Pinto, 2018).

García Peña (2020) offers a critique of the traditional approach that focuses on Rafael Trujillo as the architect of racism and anti-Haitian sentiment, suggesting that the influence of the United States has been more decisive in the perpetuation of racism

through its imperial project and coloniality. The author uses concepts such as contradiction and the analysis of historical interstices to challenge the established racist narrative in the Dominican Republic by emphasizing the role of U.S. imperialism in consolidating these dynamics (García Peña, 2020).

Merritt (2021) and Bermejo Pérez (2018) highlight the implications of these dynamics in Dominican migration policies, which have generated significant tensions in the country's democratic governability. Merritt points out that anti-Haitian sentiment, a legacy of the Trujillo regime, continues to negatively affect Haitians and Dominican-Haitians, who continue to face inequalities in terms of human rights and living conditions. Bermejo Pérez adds that the lack of effective integration of Haitian immigrants and their descendants, together with policies that limit their access to citizenship, has generated a crisis of legitimacy that jeopardizes the social and political stability of the Dominican Republic. Both authors advocate for a review of these policies to bring them into line with democratic and human rights principles (Bermejo Pérez, 2018; Merritt, 2021).

For Dilla Alfonso (2019), xenophobia against Haitians in the Dominican Republic is not only a cultural phenomenon but has been systematically institutionalized through laws and policies that seek to exclude and marginalize this population, which has had a devastating impact on the lives of hundreds of thousands of people, perpetuating inequality and social exclusion (Dilla Alfonso, 2019).

On the other hand, Ferrán (2023) relativizes the existence of structural racism in the Dominican Republic. Although Ferrán acknowledges the presence of problems of racism and exclusion, the author maintains that this does not justify labeling the country as structurally racist. The author argues that, in general, Dominicans are receptive to migration and treat migrants with kindness,¹ except in the case of Haitians, due to the history of invasions and border conflicts. According to the author, this construction of identity has been based on racial and cultural otherness, fueled by fear of a "peaceful invasion" by Haitians (Ferrán, 2023). Ferrán also dismisses the idea that anti-Haitian sentiment is based on skin color, since other groups of African descent, such as the Cocolos or immigrants from the Virgin Islands, do not experience the same mistreatment. "To appeal to the racism of Dominicans in indiscriminate terms is to ignore the fact that a large part of them are undoubtedly black" (Ferrán, 2023, p. 53).

Contrary to Dilla Alfonso (2019), Ferrán claims that xenophobia should not be used in reference to Dominicans, as the term implies aversion or even hatred toward all foreigners, that is, toward any foreigner a person encounters in their own country, and not only toward specific groups of foreigners (Ferrán, 2023).

These works show that structural racism is not an isolated or merely cultural phenomenon, but rather a historical mechanism of power that organizes citizenship, belonging and the unequal distribution of rights in the Dominican Republic. The literature agrees that anti-Haitianism has been a political technology that defines national identity by opposition and reinforces symbolic boundaries between "the Dominican" and "the Haitian". Although there are nuances—especially in authors who relativize this structural nature—the academic field tends to interpret these tensions as part of a broader colonial framework that continues to shape contemporary social life.

¹ Ferrán proposes that "immigrants who have settled in the Dominican Republic, as well as their descendants who are established there, do not necessarily feel or resent being foreigners or strangers, nor do they feel alienated from the social whole that assimilates them. None of them is considered an outcast..." (Ferrán, 2023, p. 35). Nevertheless, Ferrán clarifies that there is one exception, namely Haitian migration, which the author attributes to the history of conflict and the proximity of the border.

Migration policies and genocide

Curiel (2021) suggests that racism in the Dominican Republic has had profound implications for the shaping of migration policies and the perpetration of acts that some authors identify as genocide. These events reflect not only racial discrimination but also the continuity of colonial structures that sustain and renew practices of exclusion and oppression of the Afro-descendant population, particularly those of Haitian descent (Curiel, 2021).

Luján Villar and Luján Villar (2019) claim that racism and racial hierarchies are not merely semantic issues; they have practical and political implications that have shaped contemporary Dominican society. Dominican historiography recognizes three genocides related to the Afro-descendant population. The first of these—the 1937 massacre ordered by the Trujillo regime—was an act of ethnic cleansing motivated by a racist ideology that perceived Haitians as a threat to Dominican national identity. This event not only marked an irreversible turning point in relations between Haiti and the Dominican Republic but also dismantled bicultural coexistence on the border through the use of state violence to establish a sharp division between the two countries and suppress collective memories of this past. Although the official narrative has tended to minimize or justify the massacre, it is crucial to fully acknowledge the facts and their victims in order to move toward reconciliation (Bourgeois, 2023; Herrera, 2018; Pérez Vargas, 2018; Turits, 2018).

Valerio Holguín (2021) highlights a second massacre as a result of racist intolerance, referring to the Palma Sola massacre in San Juan de la Maguana, perpetrated against the Olivorista movement. According to the author, “the magnitude and violence of the attack express the intolerance of the Dominican elites toward the Olivorista semiotics. During the attack, hundreds of peasants and domestic animals were killed, and houses were set on fire” (Valerio Holguín, 2021, p. 84). Valerio Holguín states that the movement not only created the other-neighbor, but also the other-within, which first had to be positioned as different, that is, as the primitive other, black, witch, etcetera, similar to the Haitian, in order to justify the killing of hundreds of Dominican peasants and the destruction of their belongings.²

Belique Delba (2018) introduces the third genocide, represented by Ruling 168-13, which is seen as a modern manifestation of anti-Haitian racism in the Dominican Republic, evidencing both historical continuities and new forms of racial exclusion. This ruling denationalized thousands of people and exacerbated an exclusionary nationalism that reinforces a nation-building project based on racial exclusion and white supremacy (Curiel Pichardo, 2019). For Belique Delba, an activist affected by the ruling, both 168-13 and Law 169/14 have formalized a civil genocide against Dominicans of Haitian descent. These policies have deprived thousands of people of

² The Palma Sola massacre was a tragic event in Dominican history that took place in 1962. This event was the result of the persecution and repression of a religious movement known as Olivorismo or Liborismo, led by brothers Plinio and León Romilio Ventura Rodríguez, also known as *Los Mellizos de Palma Sola* (The Twins of Palma Sola). The movement, which combined elements of traditional religions and social justice, attracted thousands of followers, leading to its persecution by the government of Rafael F. Bonnelly. The massacre, which took place on the Day of the Holy Innocents (December 28), left between 100 and 150 dead, according to estimates based on interviews conducted by researcher Aquiles Castro and other experts from the General Archive of the Nation. This number contrasts with the official figure of 42 dead, which significantly underestimates the magnitude of the tragedy (Castro, 2012).

their nationality and rights, rendering them stateless in their own country. Belique Delba suggests that these measures reflect an institutionalized racist and anti-Haitian ideology in the Dominican Republic (Belique Delba, 2018).

Silva and De Amorim (2019) also describe the statelessness imposed on people of Haitian descent as a clear example of how colonial structures continue to operate today. The authors claim that the denationalization of these individuals reflects structural racism rooted in the coloniality of power. They emphasize that this exclusion is supported by an anti-Haitian ideology, promoted since colonization to justify discrimination and social control (Silva & De Amorim, 2019). Along these lines, Abaunza suggests that, although denationalization does not always imply persecution, in cases that have resulted in forced removals, the situation of those affected fits the definition of refugees under the 1951 Refugee Convention (Abaunza, 2021).

Sénatus (2019) states that Ruling 168-13 of the Dominican Constitutional Court, by reinterpreting the concept of “foreigners in transit”, has led to the denationalization of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian origin, citing the lack of legal immigration status of their parents. This decision is incompatible with the principles of international human rights law, particularly regarding the prohibition of statelessness and racial discrimination. It is claimed that this measure not only violates the right to nationality of the persons affected but has also created a humanitarian and human rights crisis that requires an urgent solution in accordance with international standards (Sénatus, 2019).

Curiel (2021) states that this process of denationalization is a form of civil genocide that seeks to erase these people from the Dominican national project, while maintaining their economic exploitation in conditions of semi-slavery (Curiel, 2021). In this context, Muñiz and Morel assert that these legal restriction policies have an economic dimension, based on a strategy that combines restrictive regulations with practices of institutional illegality. This strategy facilitates the economic exploitation of Haitian immigrants and perpetuates their social and political exclusion. As the authors maintain, “the objective of Dominican immigration regulations was not to prevent or restrict Haitian immigration, but rather to subject it to the specific needs of the sugar cane industry” (Muñiz & Morel, 2019, p. 39).

According to Martínez (2018), xenophobia and racism, expressed in these historical milestones, manifest themselves in everyday life in many places where Haitian migrants or Dominicans of Haitian descent reside. According to the author, women face significant discrimination in accessing health services, especially those who are black or speak Creole as their mother tongue. Martínez identified patterns of discrimination at three levels: institutionalized, personally mediated and internalized, which contribute to their exclusion from the health system.

Similarly, Revuelta Guerrero (2018) reveals that labor discrimination against Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic's sugar industry is a deeply rooted problem that requires more effective interventions, both legal and social. Despite some improvements in certain *bateyes* (“Batey” is the name given to each small village in the middle of sugar cane plantations), most workers continue to live in extreme poverty and face systematic labor exploitation. In the field of higher education, a study conducted by Jayaram (2018) on Haitian students in Dominican universities indicates that they face several challenges, including xenophobia, racial discrimination and legal restrictions imposed by the State. Many of these students express a desire to return to Haiti, reflecting a widespread feeling of rejection and lack of belonging in Dominican society.

The review shows that Dominican migration policies cannot be understood solely as administrative instruments, but rather as mechanisms of racialization that produce and regulate hierarchies of belonging. The triad of the 1937 massacre, Palma Sola and Sentence 168-13 forms a genealogy of violence that inscribes Haitians as a permanent and expellable otherness. These processes, read from the perspective of the coloniality of power, reveal how the state has coordinated legality and illegality to manage a racialized population, generating new forms of exclusion that reproduce historical patterns of dispossession.

Narrative of fear: sovereignty and external threats

Structural racism in the Dominican Republic manifests itself not only in explicit policies of exclusion but also in narratives that fuel fear and the perception of a threat to national sovereignty. These narratives, widely disseminated in the media and supported by certain political groups, are based on the idea of a “peaceful invasion” by Haitians, which has justified the implementation of restrictive and discriminatory policies against the Haitian and Dominican-Haitian population. Below, the perspectives of several authors who have analyzed how these narratives have been used to perpetuate structural racism in the Dominican Republic are reviewed.

Ferrán (2023) proposes that, in the context of instability in Haiti, widespread fear has arisen in the Dominican Republic of a peaceful invasion linked to clandestine and institutionalized immigration of Haitians. This situation has been fueled by a narrative of silent invasion promoted by certain countries in the international community. An example often cited in this narrative is a United Nations (1949) document entitled *Mission to Haiti* (report of the United Nations mission of technical assistance to the Republic of Haiti), which recommends “encouraging emigration as a means of alleviating demographic pressure in Haiti” and suggests the transfer of Haitian families to other Caribbean countries (United Nations, 1949, p. 34).

According to Ferrán (2023), various actors involved in the public debate have expressed concern about the impact of the Haitian crisis on Dominican sovereignty. Among them, the author mentions Pelegrín Castillo, who calls for a unified state position to avoid, in Castillo’s interpretation, any scenario of forced merger or integration with Haiti. Similarly, Ferrán cites the warnings of Eduardo García Michel in *Diario Libre*, who associates Haitian immigration and the lack of state control with a possible process of “denationalization”. These positions, cited by the author, place responsibility for the Haitian crisis on the international community and demand that the Dominican Republic not bear that burden. Their inclusion in the review, rather than validating these claims, illustrates how certain nationalist discourses structure the contemporary public debate on migration and sovereignty.

Ferrán explains that Eduardo García Michel and Pelegrín Castillo, in interviews conducted in 2021 and 2020, respectively, emphasize the threat that mass Haitian immigration poses to Dominican sovereignty. García warns that, without effective control, the country could lose its identity in two decades, while Castillo criticizes international pressure on the Dominican Republic to assume responsibility for the

Haitian crisis and defends the need to protect the country's sovereignty and territorial integrity (Ferrán, 2023). José Luis Taveras, Ferrán continues, reinforces this position by pointing out that the Haitian crisis is the result of centuries of exploitation by Western powers, and that the Dominican Republic should not bear the responsibility for resolving it (Ferrán, 2023).

On the other hand, Dilla Alfonso (2019) criticizes how the press and certain political groups in the Dominican Republic have propagated the idea of a "peaceful invasion" by Haitians, creating a climate of hysteria that justifies xenophobic and racist policies. As mentioned in previous paragraphs, this narrative has been used to justify the mass denationalization of Dominican-Haitians in 2013, with the press playing a crucial role in amplifying these ideas, often by exaggerating figures on the Haitian presence in the country and promoting the idea that they represent a threat to Dominican identity.

In this context, Bidegain Greising (2019) debunks the narrative of a "peaceful invasion" by demonstrating that Haitian migrants represent only 4.9% of the Dominican Republic's total population, based on data from recent censuses and surveys. The author states that the alarming claims of invasion lack a scientific basis and advocates for the regularization of migrants to improve relations between the two countries.

Finally, Bourgeois (2023) addresses the concepts of "Haitianization" and "peaceful invasion" as social and political constructs that have been instrumentalized in the Dominican Republic to promote xenophobic and racist discourse against the Haitian and Dominican-Haitian population. Bourgeois points out that "Haitianization" is perceived as a threat to Dominican national identity, linked to the myth of the "peaceful invasion", which is used to justify restrictive policies and acts of discrimination, such as the denationalization of Dominicans of Haitian descent in 2013. These constructs, the author continues, have perpetuated a deeply rooted anti-Haitianism in Dominican society.

A joint analysis of these narratives shows that the discourse of "invasion" functions as a device for producing fear that legitimizes border control practices, exceptional measures and racialized exclusion policies. Rather than describing actual demographic processes, these narratives construct symbolic threats that reaffirm a defensive national identity. The literature reviewed agrees that these discourses operate as government technologies that shift attention from internal inequalities to a racialized "external other".

Self-perception, Bovarism and decolonial aesthetics

The racial issue in the Dominican Republic is complex and manifests itself both in self-perception and in the dynamics of discrimination. According to Losilla (2020), 80% of the Dominican population was of African descent in 2017. The text addresses the situation of Afro-descendants in the Dominican Republic in a regional context. The document highlights that self-identification as a population of African descent is limited due to historical, political and social factors. It also points to the absence of official data and to insufficient recognition of African descent in public policies and society at large, which hinders the implementation of effective measures to include this population (Losilla, 2020).

Various sources agree that racial self-perception in the Dominican Republic is characterized by low identification with blackness and a high prevalence of categories such as “Indian”, “mestizo” or “mulatto”. Losilla (2020) reports that only 17% of the population identifies as “Black”, while 23% defines itself as “Mulatto” and 39% as “Indian” or “Mestizo”. Similar results appear in the *Latinobarómetro* (2013-2018), where 39% of the Dominican population identifies as “Indian/mestizo”, 23% as “mulatto”, 17% as “black” and 14% as “white”. This convergence of data not only shows a consistent pattern but also reveals a deeply rooted phenomenon: a preference for intermediate categories that allow people to symbolically distance themselves from blackness. This pattern has been widely discussed in the literature on racialization in the country, where it is linked to colonial legacies, state policies of whitening and identity narratives that have privileged ambiguous categories such as “Indian” to avoid Afro-descendant self-identification.

The *Fondo de Población de las Naciones Unidas República Dominicana* (2021) (Dominican Republic’s United Nations Population Fund) emphasizes that these data “are the result of complex historical processes and nation-building projects in a context of particular island dynamics” (p. 9). Lamarche’s work is part of a UNFPA survey that interviewed 1 309 Dominican adults. The study revealed that 45% of respondents consider themselves “Indian”, 18% “white”, 16% “brown”, 9% “mulatto” and only 8% identify as “black”.

Similarly, the National Multi-Purpose Household Survey (Enhogar, Spanish acronym for *Encuesta Nacional de Hogares de Propósitos Múltiples*) conducted in 2021 by the National Statistics Office reported that 50% of the population perceives itself as “Indian”, 27% as “brown” or “mulatto”, 12% as “white”, 5% as “yellow” or “Asian” and only 6% as “black”. This study concludes that racial and ethnic self-perception in the Dominican Republic is diverse and influenced by historical and sociodemographic factors. Despite the rich mix of origins in the population, categorizations persist that seek to distance themselves from blackness and move closer to a more European identity (Oficina Nacional de Estadística, 2022).

The National Statistics Office (Oficina Nacional de Estadística, 2022) also notes that, according to the theoretical concept of African descent, 82% of the Dominican population aged 15 and over is of African descent, which contrasts sharply with the 6% of the population that identifies as “black”. Although this percentage varies by region, such as in the Northwest Cibao (13.3%) and Yuma (10%), these differences are not significant enough to suggest widespread racial awareness nationwide.

Mateo Dicló (2019) uses the categories of whitophilia³ and negrophobia⁴ to explain this phenomenon, arguing that the Dominican Republic is trapped in this dichotomy, a tension that has contributed to perpetuating structural racism and discrimination in Dominican society. Despite the evident African ancestry of the population, there is a tendency to idealize whiteness and reject blackness, which is reflected in social attitudes and public policies. Overcoming these prejudices requires a revaluation of Afro-descendant identity and the implementation of inclusive policies that recognize and celebrate the country’s ethnic and cultural diversity (Mateo Dicló, 2019).

³ Describes the preference and appreciation of white and European phenotypic characteristics within Dominican society.

⁴ Refers to fear, contempt or discrimination toward people with African characteristics or of African descent.

Likewise, López Alterachs (2023) states that systemic racism and xenophobia are deeply rooted in Dominican society, especially in relation to the Haitian population. Despite being a predominantly Afro-descendant society, there is a strong denial of African heritage, influenced by an education system that minimizes or distorts this part of Dominican history. Racist and xenophobic attitudes are reinforced both by educational institutions and by everyday practices, which emphasize the subordination of people with African phenotypes (López Alterachs, 2023).

Torres-Saillant (2019) states that Dominican identity is deeply marked by a complex connection to its African heritage, which has been largely ignored or denied in official narratives. Nonetheless, this heritage remains an integral part of what it means to be Dominican, despite efforts to minimize its importance throughout history. The author calls for a revaluation and recovery of blackness within the Dominican national identity, thereby promoting a more inclusive and honest understanding of the country's history and culture (Torres-Saillant, 2019).

This phenomenon of whiteness, or the tendency to deny blackness and move closer to whiteness in terms of values, is probably what Price-Mars (1953, cited in Ferrán, 2023) refers to when judging this Dominican behavior, which is described as Bovarism. The author uses this term, borrowed from French writer Jules de Gaultier, to describe Dominicans' supposed desire to belong to the white race and, therefore, consider themselves superior to others. Cassá refutes this accusation by arguing that it constitutes an abusive generalization that ignores the historical and social complexity of the Dominican Republic (Cassá, 2022, cited in Ferrán, 2023).

In this regard, Cassá (2022, cited in Ferrán, 2023) argues that Price-Mars' accusation of Bovarism overlooks the historical and cultural complexity of the Dominican Republic, where racial mixing and social integration have been crucial to the construction of national identity. The author states that Dominican identity has been forged through a process of integration, in contrast to the racial and social segregation that prevailed in Haiti. Unlike Haiti's exclusively racial approach, Dominican society developed a sense of common belonging, reflected in categories such as "Indian" or "Dominican race", which integrate people of different skin tones into a unified national identity. According to Cassá, this integrative process is opposed to racism and contrasts with Price-Mars' perception of Dominicans.

The category "Indian" in the Dominican Republic has been analyzed as an identity construct that reflects the country's history and its association with the dominant ideology. This term, applied to various skin tones, has served to create a national identity that eludes African descent and differentiates itself from Haiti, thereby concealing African origins. It has become universalized as a symbol of inclusive national identity, but it also legitimizes oligarchic domination and avoids explicit racial categorizations associated with exclusion and racism (González Valdés, 2021; Lara E., 2020). During the Trujillo regime, terms such as "Indian" and "brown" were promoted instead of "black" or "Afro" as part of a strategy to silence African heritage in a context of negrophobia and anti-Haitianism, and to emphasize a mestizo origin (Lara E., 2020).

A key factor is the concealment of historical traces of blackness, which has led to a disrupted identity and a decolonial aesthetic or visual coloniality, as Carrasquillo (2023) argues. In her book *¿Ojos que no ven? Colonialidad y cimarronaje visual en la República Dominicana* (Eyes That Do Not See? Coloniality and Visual Cimarronage in the Dominican Republic), she examines how visual perceptions, shaped by colonial

power and local elites, have greatly influenced the construction of Dominican national identity. Carrasquillo states that Dominican identity has historically been shaped by visual narratives that seek to differentiate the country from Haiti and conceal its African heritage. Political and cultural elites have used these representations to impose a social and racial order that privileges a mestizo or Hispanic identity over others, excluding and marginalizing aspects of African heritage. This process of identity construction has contributed to a perception of Dominican identity that distances itself from blackness and moves closer to an idealization of European identity, thereby reinforcing oligarchic domination and racial hierarchy in the country (Carrasquillo, 2023).

Studies on racial self-perception in the Dominican Republic reveal a persistent pattern of symbolic distancing from blackness and a preference for ambiguous categories such as "Indian". This tendency, explained by Bovarism, whitephilia and visual coloniality, is not limited to the individual level but reflects historical nation-building projects based on the denial of African origins. The decolonial aesthetic proposed in literature is therefore an attempt to dismantle these visual pedagogies of whitening and propose other ways of seeing and narrating Dominican identity.

Coloniality of power and subaltern resistance

The Dominican Republic is both a victim and a supporter, especially through its elites, of a social phenomenon called coloniality of power. Carrasquillo (2023) points out that colonization, through the use of skin color together with imperial power, hierarchically organized populations globally, positioning Western whiteness, and in particular white men, as the ultimate expression of divine perfection and rationality. This white man proclaimed himself superior within the family structure, which was established as the social foundation, and established what is known as Christian colonial patriarchy. This dualistic system divided the world into categories such as white and black-indigenous, man and woman. These colonial structures, based on race and gender, persisted even after independence (Carrasquillo, 2023).

Eurocentrism, a specific form of racism, has taken particular root, as Aníbal Quijano explains through the concept of "coloniality of power" (Quijano, 2014, cited in Carrasquillo, 2023). Coloniality constitutes a hegemonic epistemic regime in the West that structures and gives meaning to the world and the way it is perceived, based on colonial premises, but that extends beyond traditional historical colonialism in terms of time and space. The coloniality of power was configured in the visual sphere, since colonization implied a social reorganization of how it was considered. Cristian León (2012, cited in Carrasquillo, 2023) points out that "one of the effects of the colonization of power and knowledge was the assimilation of the multiplicity of visual cultures to the binary order of Eurocentrism, which assigns hegemonic and subordinate places to each of them" (p. 31). This view, in addition to the shaping of cities and their heritage sites laden with heroes of colonial origin, coincides with the vision of history reproduced in Dominican textbooks at the elementary and middle school levels, which reinforces the current prejudices of a segment of the Dominican population toward the Haitian population (González Canalda, 2019).

The issue of xenophobia, structural racism and racial self-discrimination in the Dominican Republic has deep roots in the coloniality of power, as evidenced by the various authors analyzed in the previous sections. Cárcamo-Mansilla (2022) highlights that the concept of subaltern silence is, in reality, a false silence imposed by colonial hegemony. Although subaltern groups are systematically marginalized and silenced, they have their own spaces and forms of resistance that challenge this domination. According to Cárcamo-Mansilla, decolonization cannot be achieved without recognizing and empowering these subaltern resistances, which demonstrate that, even in contexts of oppression, subalterns maintain an autonomy that challenges colonial control (Cárcamo-Mansilla, 2022).

Curiel (2021) emphasizes the importance of considering gender, race and sexuality categories in an intersectional manner to understand the multiple forms of oppression that affect people in the Dominican context. Curiel states that the social sciences must adopt a critical and decolonial approach to dismantle the power structures that perpetuate these oppressions. The author highlights the need for an ethical-political commitment in the social sciences to address these problems and promote social change (Curiel, 2021).

Estrada Bayona (2022) analyzes the diversity and cultural resistance of the Caribbean, a region deeply marked by its multi-diasporic heritage and colonial ethnocentrism since the 15th century. Estrada Bayona identifies three key axes: intercultural dialogue, the right to difference and emancipatory education to explore how the region challenges the modern, capitalist and colonial model, revealing an epistemic revolution from the Caribbean. The author discusses how these prejudices become norms within a capitalist, Eurocentric rationality, shaping the identities and resistance of Caribbean peoples. The struggle against this domination involves a redefinition of universality and a resistance that blends tradition and epistemic diversity, challenging Western rationality and seeking to restore the power and dignity of Caribbean communities (Estrada Bayona, 2022).

Finally, Lister (2019) points out that various manifestations of colonial power persist in the Dominican Republic, particularly in the *bateyes*, where communities continue to face marginalization and exploitation, reflecting the continuities of colonial structures. Lister highlights the need to rethink political and social interventions in these spaces by directly addressing these power dynamics that perpetuate inequality and social exclusion (Lister, 2019).

These authors show that the coloniality of power does not operate as a vestige of the past, but rather as an active matrix that structures contemporary inequalities linked to race, gender, class and citizenship. They agree that the roots of xenophobia, structural racism and racial self-discrimination in the Dominican Republic are deeply intertwined with this colonial matrix, which explains the persistence of hierarchies and forms of exclusion that permeate the country's social life. From this perspective, dismantling these structures requires not only institutional reforms but also a broader epistemic transformation that recognizes subaltern resistances and produces knowledge from decolonial and Caribbean perspectives, capable of critically rethinking the historical and symbolic foundations of Dominican identity.

Conclusions

The analysis of the literature reviewed in this study has revealed important findings on racialization, xenophobia and inequality in the Dominican Republic, particularly in relation to the Haitian and Afro-descendant populations. The methodology used, based on an exhaustive review of 115 documents, enabled the identification of recurring patterns and critical debates that reflect how colonial dynamics have shaped and continue to influence Dominican society. One of the main findings of this analysis is that, although there is extensive debate in the media about the Haitian population, xenophobia and racism, academic production tends to be heavily biased toward criticism of more conservative positions. This approach, however, seems to have limited influence on public policy formulation and on the state's behavior toward the most disadvantaged populations, such as Haitian migrants. Despite the abundance of critical academic analyses, public policies in the Dominican Republic continue to reflect colonial and racist structures that perpetuate the exclusion and marginalization of these groups.

The scarcity of quantitative and mixed studies in the literature on racialization and xenophobia in the country is noteworthy. Of the 115 documents reviewed, only five used quantitative methodologies and two adopted mixed approaches. This gap underscores the need to expand the empirical base with research that can offer concrete data and empirical validation to complement and strengthen the predominant qualitative analyses. Greater incorporation of quantitative approaches could provide a more complete and robust picture of the dynamics of discrimination and exclusion in the Dominican Republic.

Structural racism has been a central element in the construction of Dominican national identity, perpetuated by the dominant elites and deeply rooted in colonial ideology. This racism has had a disproportionate impact on the Haitian and Afro-descendant populations, which is reflected in restrictive migration policies and narratives of exclusion that continue to prevail in Dominican society. The coloniality of power manifests itself in racial and gender hierarchies that, although originating during the colonial era, continue to influence current power relations, perpetuating racial discrimination and xenophobia in the country.

Likewise, narratives of fear, such as the idea of a “peaceful invasion” by Haitians, have been used to justify policies that reinforce existing inequalities. These narratives, amplified by the media and certain political sectors, have exacerbated racial tensions, consolidating an exclusionary nationalism that hinders integration and social justice. Furthermore, Dominican national identity has a complex relation to its African heritage, which has been largely ignored or denied in official narratives. Although there are attempts to promote greater inclusion, social and political attitudes that idealize whiteness and reject blackness persist, perpetuating structural racism that prevents reconciliation with African descent.

On the other hand, despite the dominance of these colonial power structures, the literature review also highlights subaltern resistance that emerges in response to these dynamics. These forms of resistance underscore the importance of adopting decolonial approaches that challenge Eurocentric hegemony and promote inclusive and equitable social change in the Dominican Republic. Taken together, these findings highlight the urgent need for a critical reassessment of Dominican social and political

structures, as well as the incorporation of decolonial perspectives into policy analysis and formulation. This approach is essential not only for understanding the roots of current inequalities but also for exploring avenues for effective and sustainable social transformation in the country.

Finally, an important finding is the role of the Dominican diaspora, especially in the United States, in reconfiguring Dominican identity and culture. More than 27% of the documents reviewed were contributed by academics from the diaspora, who have questioned the official narrative of a single identity and promoted a more pluralistic and diverse vision. These scholars have highlighted inequalities and racism, both in the Dominican Republic and abroad, emphasizing the importance of building more inclusive institutions that respect diversity. Their contribution is essential to overcoming narratives of exclusion and moving toward a more equitable and just society.

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