

## **CERS Working Paper**

### **A critical analysis of the processes of racialization in the Dominican Republic and Haiti.**

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Racial discrimination stimulated by social constructions of identity has been forced to the centre of discussion in current debates. The World Conference Against Racism, held in Durban in 2001 in particular, addressed the complex origins in which the racialization of the globe has become a 'sobering reality' (January-Bardill 2005:22). Worldwide, the issue of race as an 'ongoing power' (Law 2012:2) has become noticed and continues to affect individuals on a social, political and cultural level. The Dominican Republic is a great example that supports the claim that racism is irreducible to one specific time or context as their cultural roots are historically bound. The relationship between Haiti and the Dominican Republic has been a continuum of marked aggression. The countries vast differences in economy, language and general culture encourage the mobilisation of Anti-Haitian ideologies and attitudes supporting black inferiority. This essay will focus on four significant dimensions of racism and racialization in the Dominican Republic; it will explore segregation of Haitians in Dominican society. After a brief history, discussion into racial identity will be made as it is key to understanding racist attitudes across the nation; it can be seen in areas such as everyday language, interpersonal relationships and literature. By using David Goldberg's concept of a 'rhetoric of descent' (Goldberg 1992:557) and theories of the interactive approach, this essay aims to explain how racist belief systems based on languages of science are used to justify racist violence and marginalisation (Dikotter 2008). Furthermore, the racialization of education in the Dominican Republic is the second dimension. Despite the 'syncretic nature' (Torres-Saillant 2003:278) of Dominican culture, legacies of its black African heritage are manipulated in school textbooks. Discriminatorily, this denial of legacy is present in many aspects of society proving the claim that they are a racist nation. The third dimension will analyse the effects of politics and nationalism on Dominican-Haitian relations; this will show examples of racialized governmentality. Debatably, the legalisation of imposed laws 'in the name of national self-consciousness' are in the case of the Dominican Republic explicitly 'racialized' (Goldberg 1992:557). Therefore, it will discuss the Trujillo Dictatorship and the 1937 massacre specifically, to highlight how power based on racial superiority can activate mass hatred and violence. Lastly, and arguably the most important dimension of racialization is migration, as it is said to 'reconstruct the cultural conceptions of racial identity' (Duany 1998:3). Due to high levels of movement across the border, migration has become 'increasingly irregular and undocumented' (Ferguson 2003:6) leaving many citizens stateless having their citizenship questioned on the basis of racial discrimination. Poverty, illiteracy, disease and violence are just some of the experiences faced by Haitian migrants. In a globalised world, even the most advanced of societies cannot 'insulate itself from racism' (January-Bardill: 22). Therefore, this essay will evaluate 'influential' (Law 2012:61) theories of sociologists like David Theo Goldberg to explain how racism in the region of the Caribbean is built upon inescapable factors of lineage and common descent.

Rarely amicable, the relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti has for centuries been defined by colonial and political struggle. Both countries involvement in the slave trade deems their historical roots inevitably conflicting. In a social and economic manner, they are intrinsically bound by their culture of racial hierarchies and discrimination. It can be argued, that racism as a 'global reality' (Boyle 2005:1) has become an inherent part of Dominican society when looking retrospectively at the pre-abolition period of the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. The countries known today as the Dominican Republic and Haiti once coexisted on the island of Hispaniola as part of the Greater Antilles of the Caribbean. Colonial rivalries between European powers over the occupation of land were immanent; French forces on the western side on the island competed with Spanish opposition.

Increased regional tensions reached a peak in 1804 with the conclusion of the Haitian revolution; it was known as the most effective slave rebellion ever to have occurred in the Americas. Although it seemed prosperous, slavery was not yet over as the revolts marked success was followed by western control of eastern regions. Haitian occupation from 1822 caused extreme difficulties in Dominican-Haitian relations causing 'deep scars in the Dominican psyche' according to Blanca Antoni (2012:4). The Dominican war of independence 1844 is still celebrated today and is highly significant in representing a clear division in the island. The unavoidable separation left the Dominican Republic extremely prosperous as a newly established nation; it consisted of individuals of Spanish descent mixed with indigenous Taino populations. In comparison, Haitian residents or otherwise known as Creoles of Black African lineage were overcome by economic turmoil.

The divide signified more than linguistic and economical dissimilarities. It highlighted how race had become the defining factor of Dominican-Haitian relations; cultural history was developing foundations built upon radicalised identities and the importance of colour was becoming more prevalent. The circumstance of the Dominican Republic echoes rhetoric of the Durban Conference 2001, it stated that 'racism can be found in all parts of the world' (Boyle 2005:1). The meet was specifically convened in order to form a better understanding of how racist 'evils' are expressed. In addition to this, it attempted to create intellectual strategies to combat them. They emphasise the fact that all societies are shaped by their historical contexts, therefore making racism in the Dominican Republic an inherent manifestation. Many critics have argued that in this specific case there are integral projections of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia, adding to our understanding on a global level. This statement is one explicitly expressed by the United Nations in their General assembly of Human Rights (2008). In their report of the special rapporteur following visits to the Dominican Republic, minority expert Gay McDougall stated that a 'profound and entrenched problem of racism and discrimination' was 'affecting blacks and particularly...black Dominicans, Dominicans of Haitian descent and Haitians' (Human Rights Commission 2008:2). In order to successfully analyse these interrelated concerns of racialization, it is important to look to several sectors of society. Racism does not necessarily exist so openly as many deem it an 'invisible' issue, therefore, in order to eradicate it from society a deep exploration is needed into its roots and motives (Human Rights Commission 2008:2). Although a seemingly difficult task, unearthing racism and racial discrimination in the Dominican Republic is of great importance. According to Human rights initiatives, recognition of the existence of such a phenomenon is required as 'all human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights' (Universal declaration of human rights 1948); the racist prejudices inflicted upon the Haitian populations in the Dominican Republic defy this.

As the first dimension of racialization, it can be stated that Dominican society places great importance on identity. David Howard in his 'Colouring the nation...' explores this idea by arguing that when constructing identities there is an incorporation of 'a racism that is more insidious than overt' (Espina 2003:15). In everyday life, an individual is ranked on the social class ladder based on phenotype; usually meaning that the colour of their skin defines them as who they are in the social world. Ultimately, this racist prejudice limits Haitians as their usually darker skin tones deems them inferior to lighter skinned Dominican citizens. This cultural resistance to blackness which has been labelled as Anti-Haitianism combines a legacy of Spanish colonial mentality with racial stereotypes and historical distortions. It is present in several aspects of Dominican life and is used as an ideological weapon to pacify the black and mulatto Dominican lower classes. By sustaining their political quiescence, elites are able to maintain control. When you look closely at some examples from the Dominican Republic, it becomes quite clear how dominant racism really is in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

Everyday language can be seen as the first example which has always been highly racialized, allowing for the racial discrimination of minority groups. Following a visit to the Dominican Republic by Human Rights officials, the general assembly (2008) expressed the opinions of intellectuals and academics that stated that racism was 'embedded' within 'actual interactions' (Cabanatuan 2010) on a daily basis. The existence of insulting and aggressive expressions during societal interactions were seen to openly 'stigmatize and negatively stereotype' (Human Rights Commission 2008:13) people of Haitian descent or simply just black people. The word 'black' is used as an insult and colloquial terms such as 'pig feed' is used to associate Haitians with a lack of cleanliness. A constant resistance to blackness is present as black individuals of Haitian descent, are labelled as criminals or illegal citizens.

Additionally, Anti-Haitianism is present in interpersonal relationships in the Dominican Republic. Racism not only forms routine conversations but debatably controls individual freedom surrounding the choice of social affiliations. Social constructs dictate citizens, encouraging them to reject blackness as part of the national identity. As stated in the Human Rights Commission (2008) 'even

black mothers say they want their daughters to marry a white man to improve the blood line' (Human Rights Commission 2008:14). A high importance is placed on the significance of 'whiteness' as the ideal conception of beauty in the Dominican Republic. It is possible to link this idea to the racialized beauty industry of Japan which has arguably been 'influenced by Western popular culture' (Ishiguro, J. 2009:3).

Resistance to blackness is also present in the writing of historic and recent literature, either circulated in the Dominican Republic or about the nation on a whole. The grounding for literary creation is formed from 'a writer's particular experience of life' (Howard 2003:120), therefore racism or ideas of racial superiority can be seen as one of its inherent characteristics. David Howard (2003) discusses literary work as a key aspect of racialization, emphasising how its contents plays a large role in outlining the national culture and values. He uses the Négritude movement, which believed in celebrating black identity and heritage, as an example of how mainstream culture in the Dominican Republic is dominated by elites. He states that the 'progressive black literary movement failed to emerge in the Dominican Republic as a result of the 'negation of African descent and ongoing Hispanic bias among intellectuals' (Howard 2003:121). In addition to this, the texts that are distributed in the Dominican Republic hold strong favouritism towards Dominican identity, portraying Dominican women for example, as submissive and virginal. Reversibly, racial metaphors and images reproduce negative stereotypes of blackness, tying it to sin and promiscuity. The interactive approach described by Dikotter (2008), can be used to support this idea that Dominican Republic is inherently racist. He states that the 'theory of common descent is constructed by scientific knowledge' (Dikotter 2008:1493) therefore, racial prejudice within literature is justified by a cultural belief system that argues black inferiority is a biological fact.

As a global assessment, it can be noted that 'the colour line' as well as multiple other forms of divisions within society exist, continuing to 'divide the world' (January-Bardill 2005:22). Following the third decade (1993-2003) of exploration into racism worldwide after countless years of research, it became apparent that the problem of racial discrimination was still an intrinsic characteristic of most nations; both hidden and overt. It can be noted that 21<sup>st</sup> Century analysis narrowed its agenda to study the roots of racism in order to prevent the many violent conflicts that potentially could occur. The Dominican Republic in particular is a great example of a nation that highlights this virulent prejudice, adding to our understanding of xenophobia on a whole. When specific attention is played to the education system as the second dimension of racialization in the Caribbean island, it becomes clear that the question of Dominican's African heritage is an 'unsettled, contested issue' (Torres-Saillant 2003:282). It can be argued that education is a vulnerable site for manipulation that has in the past, and debatably still to this day is used by the ruling elite to permeate ideology of anti-Haitianism. This anti-haitianist behaviour arguably transforms into a strong resistance to blackness consequently marginalising and discriminating against ethnic minority groups in particular; an evolving trait noticeable of other forms of racism globally.

According to civil society actors that were interviewed by Gay McDougall in the 2008 Human Rights Commission, there is still 'prejudices and stereotypes against Haitians in school textbooks' (Human Rights Commission 2008:15). They argued along with many others that this negative stereotyping could be seen as racism; consequently leading to a strong encouragement of intolerance. Not only does this create a feeling of fear and resistance to blackness amongst Dominicans, but also makes the problem of racism culturally bound to the next generation. To be specific, education in the Dominican Republic shows how 'racism remains a harsh fact based on theoretical fiction' (Howard 2003:4). The National Curriculum is influenced by racial hierarchies of national identity; Spanish Dominican culture is portrayed as the most dominant and intellectual race. In 1944, scholars were hired specifically to create modernised textbooks on the legacies of colonial times to educate children on their linguistic and religious heritage solely originating from the Dominican perspective (Torres-Saillant 2003). Although not explicit, racism is still a huge part of Haitian-Dominican affairs in relation to education. The rejection of blackness in the form of denying any lineage to African culture is present throughout Dominican society (Cabanatuan 2010). As a nation, it may seem impossible to erode the presence of slavery from a social consciousness; however, they successfully negate any affiliation with their true roots. They deem Creole culture and traditional African customs as sub-standard of Hispanic traditions.

Despite this, the denial by government officials is a popular trend in the Dominican Republic, refuting any existence of racial favouring. The Human Rights Commission (2008) found in their Special Rapporteur that both representatives from the Ministry of Education and the National Council for Childhood and Adolescence (CONANI) argued that several acts are existent in order to emphasise the importance of every child's right to education with no discrimination. It is extremely interesting

therefore, to investigate further into the potential racism of the state considering the government's tendency to reject them.

The 30 year period of Dictatorship under the Dominican born Rafael Trujillo, can be used to exemplify how racism in the Dominican Republic was in the recent past discreetly racist under the surface. The 'broad nationalist agenda' (Turtis 2003:144) of Trujillo can be seen in the period of his ruling, specifically in the ways in which the education system evolved in order to aid the Anti-Haitian programme; in order to preserve a pure and 'nationalist identity' (Augelli 1980:19). Between the years of 1936 and 1960 the number of schools in the provinces bordering with Haiti severely increased. In addition to this, supervision of teachers became a standardisation of school life. Not only were educational professionals watched during lessons on a daily basis, they also had to meet strict criteria when applying for the job in the first place. Moreover, there was a nation wide provision of free textbooks for schools initiated by the government hand in hand with 'absolute...rigid governmental control of the curriculum' (Augelli 1980:32). This example of state control of the education system by Trujillo meant he could instil anti-Haitianism into the national consensus creating the resistance of black identity as a norm in the Dominican Republic. Priority was given to the teaching of the Spanish language and culture with no importance given to the African traditions clearly a key contributor to Dominican society. The playing of radio broadcasts of propaganda from the capital and flag ceremonies were introduced to increase a sense of national pride within the education system from the 1930s. All of the tools used, emphasise the reality that governments and political parties have dangerous and daunting access to power. Although not necessarily violent in respect to the education system, racist propaganda is distributed by Trujillo in a subtle and almost devious manner. This form of racial discrimination can be comparable to that of Nazi Germany right across the globe.

Explicitly linking to this idea of discrimination within education is the third dimension of racialization in the Dominican Republic; Politics and the importance of nationalism. The political system and the disputably 'xenophobic' (Duany 1998:150) ideological construction of identity are founded on the basis of national pride. The relationship between politics and nationalism in the case of the Dominican Republic according to Fiegal (2014) and other critics is dangerous territory. As inherently favourable to Dominican identity, nationalism has been 'coloured by a pervasive racism, centred on the rejection of African ancestry and blackness' (Howard 2003:2). Therefore for governments to base their policies on such a concept is extremely unorthodox and some critics would argue 'fundamentally racist and inhumane' (Fiegal 2014).

The racialization of government law enforcement in the Dominican Republic therefore can be seen as a result of the rise in nation states and a formation of modernity according to Goldberg (2008) and his theories of global racisms. The belief in a nation state or otherwise known as nationalism is arguably racist in the case of the Dominican Republic holding a strong presence within society. Despite creating solidarity among its citizens, national identity is linked closely to tensions of the post-slavery period, highly influencing the activities of politics. To a great extent, national political parties have the ability to express their racist attitudes on a platform; this is a consequence of their power over ethnic minority groups to permeate fear.

Frank Dikotter (2008), infers that 'politics is a key component of racism' supporting the idea that the Dominican-Haitian relations are a contemporary sight for the expression of xenophobic beliefs. Political ideologies of the Trujillo dictatorship from the 1930s onwards projected a romantic symbol of authentic Dominican culture (Hoetink 1994). The 'Culturalist and racist fantasies' (Turtis 2003:145) of the era are the precise reasons why racist tendencies escalated to a major extreme, concluding with the bloody massacre of 15000 ethnic Haitians. The Parsley Massacre of 1937 is direct proof that the Dominican Republic is a discriminatory country, acting overtly violent on the grounds of racism in order to ethnically cleanse their rightful supposed territory. Haitian migrants or Dominicans with Haitian descent were 'slain even as they attempted to escape', (Turtis 2002:589) highlighting this poignant event in history as a vehement attack fortified by racist attitudes.

Moreover, the racialization of government acts can be seen as the most important aspect of Caribbean society that contributes to our understanding of racism on a global scale. This is because the political domain is arguably the most influential of institutions of the world; not restricted to a regional or local level. Therefore, if racism is inherent within its structures racial discrimination and xenophobic attitudes can be widely spread generating 'political controversy' (Boyle 2005:8). The effort of reducing discrimination on a social and cultural level is made impossible when political strategies are not in place to do so. The Human Rights Commission (2008) emphasises this point by underlining the lack of anti-racist laws within Dominican legislation. They detected that there was no policy or 'programme addressed directly at fighting these phenomena, be it political...or cultural' (Human

Rights Commission 2008:12). They went further to point out that marginalized communities were discriminated against, whether directly or indirectly by politics because of their skin colour.

Although all of the indicators arguing that racism is 'entrenched' (Human Rights Commission: 2) on all levels of society in the Dominican Republic, it can be argued that critics do not investigate into individual experiences adequately in order to claim that racism exists everywhere. According to some sociologists, in-depth investigation into the everyday personal attitudes of Haitians is needed before assumptions are made on an entire country. Weber in his *Economy and Society* (1992) uses the argument of increased rationalisation to emphasise the role of individualised free will in a modernised world. Although several institutions in the Dominican Republic show racist tendencies, it is possible to argue that this cannot be reducible to all individuals. In agreement, Baud (1996) asserts that 'Popular anti-Haitianism in the Dominican Republic might well be a great deal less virulent than...many foreign observers want us to believe' (Burden 1996:145).

Nevertheless, this does not distract from the fact that racism does exist, whether the estimates are over exaggerated or not. According to discussions at the World Conference Against Racism (2001), 'mutual respect and mediate relations across differences' (January-Bardill 2005:26) need to be installed in states like the Dominican Republic with high levels of multiculturalism. Globalisation of the modern world has made it extremely easy and quick to cross borders in search for a better quality of life. This movement to a new country inescapably fuses together many different identities', placing them in a 'new social stratification by class, race, ethnicity and gender' (Duany 1998:2). This mixing of sometimes incompatible cultures by migration often does not often coincide, creating tensions to a high degree.

Haitian migrants to the Dominican Republic in particular can be used as an example that supports the concepts brought to light by discussions in the Durban Conference (2001) surrounding racism as a 'global phenomena' (Boyle 2005:1); acting as the final dimension of racialization within this essay. Stuart Hall's (1990) theory of inferential racism in particular, shows how societal views on migration are justified by ruling elites as not inherently xenophobic. Although the treatment of Haitian migrants in the Dominican Republic are quite clearly based on racial biases, an apparent 'naturalized representation of race based on the premise of unquestioned assumptions' (Hall 1990:12) is given. To many governments, rejecting migration is a natural and reasonable response meaning that they cannot be labelled as racist. They are simply protecting their national identity in attempt to hold onto the cultural customs and traditions that give them significance and value as a country.

For many critics however, the naturalised response does not justify the ill treatment of Haitian workers in the Dominican Republic. Additionally, it does not give sufficient reasoning as to why rightful citizens of the country are denied access to their official birth certificate or their identity card simply due to the colour of their skin. Without these two documents Haitian workers cannot establish nationality or gain access to the wide range of 'civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights' (Human rights Commission 2008:16). Although the exact rate of migrant workers in the Dominican Republic is difficult to calculate, all migrants arguably experience some form of racial discrimination during their time in the Dominican Republic; most in extreme poverty. The inter-American commission on Human Rights (IACHR) estimated a figure of 500,000 to 700,000 Haitian migrants just in the year of 1990 (Ferguson 2003:8); this figure has multiplied over the recent years.

James Ferguson (2003) carries out an in-depth exploration into migration on the whole and looks directly at the working and living conditions of Haitian migrants. It is accurate to state that migration across the border to the Dominican Republic is intensely racialized in a negative way. This can be seen when attention is paid to the 'systematic abuse' (Ferguson 2003:11) that migrants experience on a daily basis. Underpayment, denial of health care, physical violence and unjust imprisonment are just a few examples. The migration law no. 285-043 passed in 2004 specifically, discriminates against Haitians with its introduction of a 'non-resident' identity category (Human Rights Commission 2008, Ferguson2003). Individuals who are undocumented workers are considered in transit and 'stateless' (Buschscluter 2013). Additionally to this, their children consequently are 'stripped of their citizenship' (Kurlansky 2014) making them lose rights on all levels of society based on their racial identity. Ironically, Haitians aim to escape a 'stagnant economy and...chronic political instability' yet are met with confrontation of 'brutal means' (Ferguson2003:18); in 1997 alone it was said that 25,000 deportations were carried out resulting in the separation of many families.

This racialization is not just a feature of previous years; it is an inherent problem at the forefront of political debate in the media today. As recent as September 2013, issues of racism are still occurring, and Dominicans of Haitian descent are still being denied rightful citizenship. This therefore makes the circumstance in the Dominican Republic a highly influential one, thus bettering our understanding of

the racialization of the globe. If racism can still exist to such a violent and discriminatory level in one place there is nothing to stop it prevailing in all parts of the world.

After extensive discussion, it is accurate to conclude that the Dominican Republic does have an issue of racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia within everyday interactions of language, general cultural norms and its education system. It is correct to also argue that they cannot escape accusations of institutionalising racist beliefs as part of its political system and ideology. The four thematic dimensions of racialization explored significantly maintaining the idea that the Dominican Republic is a racist nation; supporting the general view at the World Conference Against Racism held in Durban in 2001. Representatives of all manners emphasised an international problem of racism that was to be solved in prevailing years. This 'Global phenomenon' (Boyle 2005:1) has to be eradicated to boost equality for all which is rightfully deserved based on basic human rights.

By using Goldberg's theory of 'rhetoric of descent' (Goldberg 1992:157), we can see a distinct divide in the Dominican-Haitian relations based on post colonial times of war and tension. Racism cannot escape its historical roots; racialized constructions of identity are unavoidable therefore discrimination and marginalisation are present on multiple levels of society. They are expressed through everyday language and interpersonal relationships; even academic literature holds pervasive projections of racial favouring. This discrete and hidden quality of racism worryingly supports the idea that racial prejudices exist everywhere. Some critics would argue that due to the cultural, linguistic and economical differences between the Dominican Republic and Haiti, like any other nation, racism cannot be eroded. As stated by Dikotter (2008), racist belief systems based on a language of science are used to give reason for racist violence and marginalisation; this inherently makes the problem more difficult to solve.

As stated by Gay McDougall in the 2008 Human Rights Commission, there is still 'prejudices and stereotypes against Haitians in school textbooks' (Human Rights Commission 2008:15). This in conclusion highlights that without being explicit or overt, the Dominican Republic is able to express racist beliefs and indoctrinate the younger generations. Nevertheless, this negative stereotyping can be seen as racism; consequently leading to a strong encouragement of intolerance nationally.

The relationship between politics and nationalism thirdly, and the idea that the two are inseparable, can be used to highlight how the Dominican Republic is undeniably racist towards individuals of black individuals with Haitian descent. The escalation of Trujillo's romanticised racialized fantasies, led to the Parsley Massacre of 1937 specifically showing how powerful the ideologies of political dictatorships are.

When looking at migration and violence of Haitians workers in particular, it cannot be denied that the inevitable consequences of cultural mixing during migration are a major sight for racism and ethnic tensions. It is accurate to conclude that xenophobic attitudes and behaviours are expressed by Dominicans whether it be examples of deportations, ill treatment or outright aggression. Therefore as a final conclusion it is accurate to state that racism in violent, passive or simply just naturalised tones is existent within the cultural norms of Dominican society. Dominican-Haitian relations in particular and the strong resistance to blackness stimulates unequal racial hierarchies, aiding our understanding of how such entrenched forms of racism can exist globally. A truthful summary has been made emphasising the worrying reality that inequality is majorly prevalent in all societies even if it is not identifiable from the surface.

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