

Memories, Dangerous Narratives, and Disruption in an African, European, Creole, and Latin Nationhood: The Haitian Experience in the Dominican Republic

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Abstract: *Haitian migration to the Dominican Republic dates to the early twentieth century, consisting mainly of Haitians working in the sugar industry, agriculture, construction, and tourism. Despite the geographic connection between the two countries, their relationships have been fraught with violence and discord, leading to anti-haitianismo (anti-Haitian sentiment), the exclusion of people of Haitian descent based on racial identity and nationhood formation, and their disenfranchisement through the adoption of discriminatory laws and decrees that have marginalized them and removed them from the country. In 2013, the Dominican Republic adopted a constitutional amendment that revoked the birthright citizenship of children born to undocumented Haitian parents and, at the same time, rendered tens of thousands of Haitian-Dominicans stateless and forced them out of the country. In 2015, about 2, 200 people of Haitian background arrived in the small border city of Anse-à-Pitres, Haiti. Over fourteen months (2016-2017), I conducted research fieldwork with these displaced people to investigate their life experiences. While in this paper, I adopt a broad historical and anthropological framework to understand the Haitian experience in the Dominican Republic, narratives from my research participants also help us understand the complexities of living in and integrating with Dominican society, where the past and current events are always in conversation as evidenced in political actions, discourses, and de facto practices that have shaped the Haitian experience. The combination of these factors and others has led me to examine how historical relationships, colonial experiences, current social and economic developments in the Dominican Republic, and dangerous narratives have contributed to hindering the integration of people of Haitian background into the country and marginalizing them in ways that have made them undesirable and unwelcome. This article contributes to the Anthropology of the Caribbean, interdisciplinary studies of migration, and African diaspora studies.*

Key words: *Haitians; anti-haitianismo; nationhood; race; identity; Dominican Republic.*

INTRODUCTION

Haitians have been emigrating to the Dominican Republic since the twentieth century. The two people who share the same island and a history of colonialism maintain

Journal of African Community and Development, Volume 1, Issue 1, Spring 2025

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important cultural and economic connections. However, the historical relationship between the Dominican Republic and Haiti is also fraught with violence that has resulted in the disenfranchisement of people of Haitian background. This disenfranchisement has taken many forms, including a state-sponsored genocide of thousands of Haitians in 1937 and legal actions to render Haitian-Dominicans stateless and remove them from the country through massive deportation. Indeed, one of the saddest events that marked the history of the two countries was the massacre of at least 15,000 Haitians and Haitian-Dominicans perceived as a threat to Dominican nationhood by the dictator Rafael Leónidas Trujillo (Clammer et al 2012). More recently, anti-immigration discourses by government officials, political leaders, and Dominican nationalists have incited violence against Haitians. For instance, in February 2015, a Haitian was lynched and hanged in a Dominican public park by a crowd of Dominicans acting as a nationalist group. This event occurred within the context of a protest by Haitians and Human Rights Organizations against a 2013 law passed by the Dominican state that revoked birthright citizenship to children born to undocumented Haitian parents and rendered tens of thousands of Dominicans of Haitian descent stateless.

In connection with the adoption of this law, many Dominican citizens broke into Haitians' houses in the Dominican Republic. They destroyed their material goods, sometimes amidst police indifference or with the support of Dominican soldiers and immigration agents. In the summer of 2015, the Dominican authorities expelled thousands of Haitian-Dominicans alongside other undocumented Haitian migrants. Dominican officials said this population varied widely from 40,000 (Tracy, 2015) to 66,000 (Martin, 2015). Many became displaced in various Haitian border cities, though some have joined families, relatives, and friends in other places of the country. In 2015, about 2,200 of these people arrived in the small border city of Anse-à-Pitres. In 2024, current Dominican President Luis Abinader vowed to continue the mass deportation of Haitians in an issued Decree (668-22) in 2022, giving power to a specialized policing unit to investigate foreign-born persons living in the Dominican Republic without documentation (Childers, 2023, p. 108). In this article, I examine how historical relationships and colonial experiences, along with current social and economic developments in the Dominican Republic supplemented by dangerous narratives, have contributed to hindering the integration of people of Haitian background into the country and marginalizing them in ways that have made them undesirable and unwelcome. I argue that violence against Haitians, such as the lynching of Tulile 2015, a young Haitian national, by so-called Dominican nationalists, and the massive deportation of people of Haitian descent, relates to cultural differences between Haiti and the Dominican Republic due to distinct colonial history and neoliberal processes that created both opportunities and impoverishment.

In 2016-2017, I conducted research fieldwork with a cross-section of the Haitian migrant population who was forced out of the Dominican Republic following the enactment of the 2013 constitutional amendment and who became displaced in the

Haitian border city of Anse-à-Pitres. I conducted 86 semi-structured interviews with 45 males and 41 females, all at least eighteen years old, and organized focus groups with them, which taught me about the underlying factors of their displacement and forced migration. I connected with the displaced people by volunteering at the *Service Jésuite aux Migrants (SJM) (Jesuit Refugee Service)*, which had been working with refugees and migrants in the region since 2013, and participating in community-based and outreach activities. For this article, I use a broad framework to understand Haitians' experiences in the Dominican Republic and built upon my fieldwork and specifically my interviewees' stories that grant inside perspectives of Haitians' challenges in the Dominican Republic.

In what follows, I examine first the historical connection and disconnection between Haiti and the Dominican Republic; second, the foundation of Dominican identity and nation-building; third, I show how hostilities against Haitians are tied with race and violence that are bolstered by anti-Haitian ideology and dangerous narratives held by Dominican nationalists. Members of the displaced population report those narratives. Finally, I show the impact of neoliberal processes and political discourses in scapegoating Haitians for social and economic problems in the country.

HAITI AND THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC: HISTORICAL CONNECTION AND DISCONNECTION

Haiti and the Dominican Republic have a long history of interconnection. The two countries share the same island called "Haiti" for Haitians and "Hispaniola" for Dominicans but have two distinct colonial experiences. The island was controlled by Spain during the colonial period, beginning with the arrival of Christopher Columbus. Still, in a 1697 treaty, Spain conceded the western part to France, forming the colony of Saint-Domingue, which is now Haiti, and retained the eastern part, which is now the Dominican Republic. They are separated by a land border with four juxtaposed Haitian-Dominican towns that are official entry points for migration and traffic. The four Haitian border towns are coupled with four Dominican sister cities: Malpasse (western Haiti)/Jimaní (Dominican Republic), Anse-à-Pitres (southeast Haiti) /Pedernales (Dominican Republic), Belladère (central Haiti) /Elias Pinas (Dominican Republic), and Ouanaminthe (northeast Haiti)/Dajabón (Dominican Republic). These four border towns constitute an important gateway for potential migrants. They are busy commercial sites where the exchange of staple products and currency trade between the two countries' inhabitants occur. Haiti is the second largest trading partner of the Dominican Republic after the United States (Pauyo, 2011). Another facet of this shared history deals with Haitian participation in and contribution to the Dominican Republic through, for example, their labor force in the agricultural economies. Indeed, before the Dominican Republic had developed infrastructure and integrated provinces into Dominican towns, Haitians constituted the very center of economic life in the various Dominican border

economies, which were rooted in agriculture and pastoralism (Derby 1994: 516). This historical relationship, however, has also been politically complicated.

Soon after Haiti obtained its independence from France in 1804, the Haitian president, Jean-Pierre Boyer, ruled the entire island for twenty-two years from 1822 to 1844. During that time, he reunified the two countries by ending Spain's colonization of the Dominican Republic. While this reunification was seen as a way for Haiti to prevent the French from using Dominican territory to reconquer Haiti after they defeated the French army (Childers, 2023), this Haitian occupation is long remembered in Dominican history as "the Haitian Domination" (Martinez-Vergne, 2005) and has led to the development of a sentiment of 'antihaitianismo' (anti-haitianism), which is conceived of as a manifestation of the long-term evolution of racial prejudices, the selective interpretation of historical facts, and the creation of a nationalist Dominican "false consciousness" (Sagas, 2000; Simmons, 2010). This anti-*haitianismo* served as a state ideology during the creation of Dominican nationhood in the 1930s (Sagas, 2000).

Indeed in 1937, Dominican dictator Rafael Trujillo used this 'antihaitianismo' to get rid of poor Haitian migrants and create an official nationhood (Sagas, 2000, p. 45), undermining the relations between the two countries. Rafael Trujillo declared war on Haitians who lived around the border and established the national guard to police the movements of Afro-Caribbean immigrants, particularly Haitians (Martinez, 1999, p. 69). An estimated 15,000 to 35,000 Haitians were tracked down and executed by the Dominican regime (Clammer et al., 2012). The border became a wall of blood (Paulino, 2016, p. 9) transformed from a border that was once a refuge from persecution into a memory to forget and to flee (Wucker, 1999). State discrimination and forms of institutionalized violence continue in the Dominican Republic, so much so that in 2013, the Dominican state upheld a constitutional amendment that denationalized tens of thousands of people of Haitian origin and forced them to leave the country. The Court made this decision, called *la sentencia*, retroactive to 1929 (Mahoney & Nolan, 2015). Not only did it denationalize Haitian children born when it was adopted, but the Dominican state also decided to apply it against those who were born of undocumented parents who had entered the country since 1929 (Andreopoulos & Arat, 2014). As a result, thousands of Dominicans born of Haitian parents were rendered stateless. Haitian-Dominicans, even those who were part of families that had resided in the country for many generations, were no longer considered Dominican by the state. Being stateless meant they were not legally authorized to participate in Dominican society; they could no longer vote, attend schools at a certain level, or work in the formal economy. Haitians' protests this law have caused violence including, in February 2015, the lynching of a young Haitian known by the nickname "Tulile". His body was found hanging with his hands and feet bound in a park in the city of Santiago.

Tulile was described as a young man who worked shining shoes around the area of the park (Planas, 2015). The killing caused controversy in the media as well as among activists and Dominican authorities, particularly police. Non-official voices were

missing in favor of the police, who generally have an interest in keeping such an issue out of the news (Lawrence, 2000). The police presented different and scripted narratives that fostered ambiguity and confusion. At first sight, police talked about the young man taking part in a robbery, but this version later changed to finally maintain that he was killed to prevent him from testifying in a court case. This dual language shows not only the lack of professionalism displayed by the police in control of information but also the lack of police accountability. This further demonstrates indifference towards Haitians in the Dominican Republic, where policing seems much akin to making Haitians feel insecure. This lack of concern for people of Haitian ancestry mirrors practices that establish the unsafety of indigenous, black, and brown individuals as the basis for the notion of safety (Cooper, 2015). Finally, none of these police versions were kept when an investigation revealed that the horrible act seems to have been perpetrated by many people, a sort of Dominican vigilante mob taking the law into their own hands.

More recently, current President Luis Abinader continues to implement anti-immigrant policies and legal actions to remove Haitians from the country as announced in his 2024 plans to deport weekly 10,000 Haitian migrants who are fleeing gang violence and political instability in Haiti in addition to the 250,000 undocumented Haitians he expelled in 2023 (*Dominican Republic*, 2024). Those discriminatory migration policies echo the anti-Haitian ideology that Trujillo forged in the front line of his politics of governance and help us to better understand the structural violence that Haitians are facing in the Dominican Republic and the Dominican conception of nation-building.

DOMINICAN IDENTITY AND NATION-BUILDING

I argue that while identity and nationalism aim at creating a sense of nationhood and Dominicanness, they also produce racial violence that targets mainly Haitians seen as the “other” in the Dominican Republic. Racism against Haitians is disseminated through a dichotomy where on one side there are Dominicans viewed as the civilized, those of European descent and on the other side there are Haitians seen as the savages, those of African descent. Racial categorization has always been important in Dominican nation building, where race has been considered a social identity and legal status. For instance, Franco (1984) and Lizardo (1979) (cited by Wheeler, 2015) described ten racial categories that existed during the colonial period and that derived from the Spanish colonizers, Africans, and indigenous peoples. If this racial taxonomy aimed to categorize people, it also shows that miscegenation, intergradation, and migration make Dominican nationhood a complex process. However, with time, categories were buried, including blackness as few people self-identify as black as revealed in a federal census where — 82 percent— designate their race as “Indio,” while only 4.13 percent designate themselves as “black” (Gates, Jr., 2011., p. 120). Therefore, the Dominican Republic claims itself to be a country of Indian, Spanish, and European heritage while

Haiti is seen as a country of African ancestry, which many Dominicans reject. This dichotomy is reinforced by the differences in religious, cultural, and linguistic identities between the two countries.

These cultural and historical differences are fundamental to the construction of distinct and sometimes antagonistic racial ideologies and notions of national identity. Those facts contribute to forming an anti-Haitian sentiment in the Dominican Republic. Accordingly, for certain people of the nation, Dominican means not Haitian (Howard, 2001). As Martinez-Vergne (2005, p. 98) argues, anti-haitianism is the nectar that nourished and continues to nourish nationalism in the Dominican Republic. The exclusion of Haitianness in the building of the nation is the rejection of Africanness in favor of whiteness and Europeaness, which reproduces racist ideologies that condemned blackness in the nineteenth century (Muhammad, 2010) because blacks were considered a dangerous race with exceptional problems. Within this context, being black in the Dominican Republic is equivalent to being Haitian, a category that prevents social mobility through civic, political, and economic exclusion (Peña, 2016) and that disrupts the Latin, African, European, and Creole nationhood.

Dominican nationalism is defined and maintained by this set of ideologies that re-invent the nation regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail (Anderson, 1981). In the Dominican Republic, elites - in particular historians - contribute to this process of "national engineering" by legitimizing selective traditions and shaping national culture (Sagas, 2000, p. 5). Those facts that wrap up identity formation and nation-building run high in the process of exclusion in the country and the extension of violence against Haitians. Rafael Trujillo and his associates promote a *whitened*, Hispanicized image of Dominican identity that discounted and disparaged blackness and Haitianness (Wheeler, 2015, p. 120). For instance, the genocide of the Trujillo regime carried off not just Haitians but also Afro-Dominicans (Peña, 2016). The persistence of this association of darker skin with people of Haitian descent led the U.S. Embassy to issue a statement to warn "darker skinned U.S. citizens and U.S. citizens of African descent" against historical and contemporary discrimination patterns in the Dominican Republic in 2024 (Childers, 2023, p. 107). Therefore, the color line (Douglass, 1881), which evokes memories of colonialism, slavery, apartheid, and racial segregation, also plays an important role in the process of deportation of Haitians from the Dominican Republic as governmental authorities expelled even legal residents because they have Haitian- sounding names or "look like" Haitians (Matibag and Downing, 2011). The lynching of Tulile in 2015 was the latest of the development of racial violence in the country, a case that is apparently not being seriously investigated by Dominican police.

VIOLENCE, RACE, ANTI-HAITIANISMO , AND DANGEROUS NARRATIVES

While police reject the argument of racism and anti-Haitianism as the causes of the lynching of Tulile, Haitian immigrants, activists, and human rights organizations identify

Journal of African Community and Development, Volume 1, Issue 1, Spring 2025

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the motive of the crime as anti-Haitian sentiment. Even though lynching Haitians in the Dominican Republic may not be considered a routine (Perloff, 2000) as it was in the case of African Americans in the late 19th century, the lynching of Tulile was not the first in the Dominican Republic. Back, in 2009, a Haitian individual was lynched, a barbaric act that prompted more than 150 people to protest outside the Dominican Embassy (Hager, 2009). This incident led the Haitian government to recall its ambassador from the Dominican Republic. The lynchings of these Haitians present some similar features as the lynchings of African Americans in the United States. It is reported that the 2009 lynching was filmed by witnesses on their cell phones while, according to the Dominican press, a crowd applauded and laughed with no evidence of action taken by local authorities to stop the lynching (Hager 2009). The 2015 event occurred in a Dominican park, *Ercilia Pepin*, a public space, and involved several people according to Santiago police. Similarly, Hale (1999) defined spectacular lynching as a modern spectacle and an almost integral part of the national folk ways (204-205), and worked by ritualistically uniting white southerners, embodying the community in action (228). Considering that the lynching of Tulile happened after a group of Dominicans publicly burned a Haitian flag in Santiago (World War, 2015), the event not only symbolized a form of community action expressed in the form of a common racial identity based on the exclusion of Haitians but also was planned and coordinated, which reminds people of the lynching of Claude Neal in 1934 in Marianna, Florida where the "lynch party" was announced twelve hours in advance (Hale, 1999, p. 223). Those memories and their connection with the lynching of those Haitians were established by an attorney with the Robert F. Kennedy Center for Justice and Human Rights following the lynching of Tulile by declaring that: "frankly it is all too reminiscent of shameful denials of southern officials during the decades of terror lynchings perpetrated against African Americans here at home" (HuffPost Latino Voices, 2015).

The presence of Haitians in the Dominican Republic has always been controversial and has been referred to as what former Dominican president Mejia called a "peaceful invasion of Haitians" (Martin & Martin, 2006, p.165). People of Haitian origin have constantly been the victims of discriminatory policies that resulted in their deportation, statelessness, and violence from Dominican authorities. Police are often accused of abusing them. For example, in 1991, while conducting a round-up, Dominican police and soldiers forcibly entered Haitian migrants' dwellings and removed their merchandise and belongings (Camejo et al., 1992). The invasion of people's private space by Dominican soldiers in the interest of protecting other groups who are more valued and considered more entitled to the nation is a violation of their human rights and civil liberties. The *sentencia* that stripped thousands of Dominicans born of undocumented Haitian parents of their citizenship shows how those anti-Haitian practices have been institutionalized and supported by the law. The *sentencia* took away thousands of people of Haitian background the right to reside in the country, making their integration into Dominican society a legal impossibility. During summer of

2015, they were forced out and many became displaced in Haiti, a country that many had never seen before. As Matibag and Downing (2011) argue, such a law taken by a country that rejects its children attests that the Dominican government's policies put barriers to the well-being of individuals of Haitian descent. Violence against Haitian immigrants is also sustained by the circulation of narratives linked to the state-sponsored genocide of 1937. These narratives aim to recreate the terror that the Trujillio regime embodied and are held by anti-immigrant Dominican civilians, who use both verbal and non-verbal threats to attack Haitian immigrants. Many related stories were reported to me during my ethnographic fieldwork with the displaced people in Anse-à-Pitres. These stories describe how the complicity of Dominican nationalists and the state or the decision of civilians to act on behalf of the state can be dangerous. The danger of such a connection mirrors the 1994 Rwandan genocide in which the Hutu population was persuaded to kill neighbors, friends, family members and strangers (Hintjens, 2001).

Accordingly, many people of Haitian descent who were displaced in Anse-à-Pitres explained how they were threatened by Dominican soldiers as well as ordinary citizens who used narratives linked to the Trujillio trauma to frighten them and drive them to leave the country. While on the ground, I met a woman in her thirties whom I called Sabina.¹ She was one of the first displaced persons who arrived in Anse-à-Pitres in the summer of 2015. Sabina migrated to the Dominican Republic in 1998 while she was a young girl to escape critical poverty in Haiti and in search of a better life. While living in the Dominican Republic, she was a mobile merchant and ran a small business that consisted of walking on the street to sell toasted peanuts, peas, and cosmetic products such as fragrances, body lotions, deodorants, and blankets. She took those products from shops, sold them, and paid them back each fortnight. In return, she received a percentage of the money and was given some articles such as pots, dishes, chairs etc. This informal economic activity helped her survive in the country and take care of her children. However, in 2015, she was constrained to leave the country, leaving behind all her means of livelihoods. After meeting her in 2016, I gained a deeper understanding of her experiences. During our interview, I inquired about her reasons for leaving the Dominican Republic, to which Sabina replied:

I was living in Barahona, DR², in a small house that I rented. The house was burnt with all my belongings due to an electric shock. Thank God, the

¹ Names used in reference to research participants are false

² DR stands for Dominican Republic

children weren't burnt in the house. People said, if owners of the bateys³ didn't let us go, they would come and take us with knives and axes in the inability of the state to act. These Dominicans don't want to see Haitians *del diablo* (evils). Before they pushed me on a bus, I left, and I went to a brother of mine in Pedernales. When we (my children and I) got to Pedernales, I tried to see if I could find small jobs, but the situation has gotten worse [sic]. I went to the street and immigration agents took me and dropped me at the border.

Sabina continued to provide further insights into her deportation to Haiti by saying that: "For ages, people have been saying that there was a President in Saint Domingue (Dominican Republic) who used to apprehend Haitians and killed them. They sent children in the air and caught them with knives. The president was called Trujillo. Did you hear about this? I remember when they were telling these words in front of me."

As Sabina's statement attests, the violence against Haitians has taken many forms, from nonverbal to verbal, and has come from various sources. The state has used soldiers to remove Haitians arbitrarily. Those soldiers have committed many human rights violations. Sabina, whose children were born in the Dominican Republic, was not even spared from deportation, as they were with her when they were violently pushed on a bus and driven to the border. The second aspect of this violence is the involvement of ordinary citizens. As shown in Sabina's declaration, certain Dominican nationalists wanted to substitute themselves with the state and take actions, if necessary, against Haitians who would refuse to leave. This complicity between state and civilians is possible through the many stereotypes that have been developed to portray Haitians as *diablos* (evils), Black or African, which bears connotations of savagery with regards to the Afro-Haitian religion 'vodou' (Gates Jr., 2011, p. 156), but also by traumatizing Haitians with dangerous narratives such as this one told to Sabina that reminded her of the massacre ordered by Dominican President Trujillo. Those narratives have been passed down through generations and have caused fear in Haitians. Sabina, for example, remembered those stories and knew that they were serious and that they were forerunners of violence against Haitians. Similarly, Dominicans also used the same narratives to make Haitians feel the imminent danger like in this testimony by Zena who went to the Dominican Republic in 1986 with her mother when she was a child. She explained why she returned to Haiti:

³ Bateys are shantytown communities that have developed around sugar plantations, and they are known to have some of the worst living and working conditions in the country: no potable water, no electricity, no means of waste disposal, constant surveillance and policing by Dominican authorities, endemic diseases such as dengue, HIV/AIDS, Tuberculosis (TB), and malaria to name a few (Simmons, 2010, p. 11).

I returned to Haiti in 2015 because *Panyòl* (Dominicans) were threatening Haitians. They said if we didn't leave the land by June 15-20, 2017, they would break into our homes and apprehend [sic] us by any means necessary. The President is fussing over Haitians, but as civilians, they won't tolerate us. They will do to us the same Trujillo did to Haitians during his regime. That is why I picked up the children and left.

These words spread in Haitian communities, especially the bateys, where most Haitians worked. The verbal threats also included giving Haitians departure deadlines. As Zena said, many displaced people I met in Anse-à-Pitres talked about this deadline that was assigned to them to leave in the summer of 2015. By mentioning the name of Trujillo, these Dominicans made them aware of the consequences if they did not want to leave as expected. Some Dominican neighbors started to arm themselves as reported by Frinel who has spent his whole life in the Dominican Republic and who voluntarily left:

I left because they said they were expelling all Haitians. If Haitians didn't hurry to leave the way they wanted, they would force them to do so. The *Panyòl* (Dominicans) who lived next to us were buying machetes. They said they were going to attack us with machetes, and they were taking out their guns. They were putting a lot of pressure saying if people didn't want to go, they would kill them. All Haitians must go to their country.

With the retreat of the state from protecting people of Haitian background, the latter became easy victims for Dominican extremists who showed that they were well prepared to exercise any form of physical violence against Haitians. For instance, Mensou, a young boy of about twenty years old, was the victim of excessive violence used by Dominican civilians against him. He was born in Aguas Negras in the city of Pedernales in the Dominican Republic but was one of these Dominicans of Haitian descents whose birthright citizenship was revoked by the Dominican state. He lived as a foreigner in his own country. Since he heard those stories about expelling Haitians, he had been living with fear. He finally was expelled from the country and became displaced in Anse-à-Pitres. However, the lack of available job opportunities in the area forced him to return to the Dominican Republic to look for odd jobs by clandestinely crossing the border. While he went there one day, to his great surprise, he was attacked by a Dominican with a machete. He stated:

I arrived in La Colonia, DR. I went to work up there. You know it is not close to here (Anse-à-Pitres). When I arrived there around 5 p.m. I was passing by, a *Panyòl* called me, and said 'moreno, de dónde eres? (dark-skinned guy, Where are you from?' I said 'yo soy de Baja la Colonia (I am from Baja la Colonia).' He responded: de dónde eres,? de Hatí? (Where

are you from? From Haiti? I said: no sé mucho de Haití, pero vengo de Anse-à-Pitres (I don't know much about Haiti, but I come from Anse-à-Pitres.) He said: people from Anse-à-Pitres must not go up there because these people like to steal our stuff. I said: you can't tell me something like this. How many things have I already stolen for you? Someone else might have stolen your thing, but you don't have the right to tell me this. Immediately, he pulled out his machete and hit me. I was coming back from work and I also had a machete in my hand. He hit me with his machete, I spared the blow. He launched another one at me and I spared it again. Now, I threw myself onto him and I hit him with my machete too. When he realized that I could injure him, he left. He spent more than five or six days watching for me with a machete but thank God, he couldn't find me. Since then, they showed a bit of respect to me in the area. I came back to Haiti and didn't go back to the Dominican Republic anymore.

Although Mensou was born in the Dominican Republic and spent his entire life there, he could not get the Dominican *cédula*, the identification card that would entitle him to citizenship rights. The Dominican who attacked him asked him where he was from and if he was from Haiti. Clearly, the Dominican did not accept his response that he was from Baja la Colonia, Dominican Republic. While *la sentencia* had rendered Mensou unable to make claims to Dominican citizenship, it gave free rein to Dominican nationalists who wanted Haitians to be deported from the country. These violent narratives exposed here are known to both Haitians and Dominicans and are brought up to remind of the Trujillo's terror. If these narratives make Haitians aware of the danger they are exposed to by continuing to stay in the country, they serve as a tool for Dominican nationalists to join state authorities in their efforts to expel Haitians. The actions of civilians in the name of nationalism shows to what extent nationalism can give rise to mindless chauvinism and xenophobia and serve as the justification for organized violence (Chatterjee, 1993). These narratives used by ordinary Dominicans are also supplemented with political discourses that consist of making Haitians the scapegoats of social and economic problems in the Dominican Republic.

The anti-Haitian sentiment is largely informed by discourses and neoliberal policies and structural adjustment in the Dominican Republic. In the last two decades or so, the Dominican Republic has adopted a series of neoliberal economic policies by opening the country to foreign investors to ameliorate the effects of the declining sugar industry, promoting tourism, and increasing the development of factories (Gregory, 2014). While those measures have contributed to economic growth and an increase in foreign investment, they have also produced poverty, underemployment, and social and economic inequalities. Structural adjustment has left the Dominican Republic with important debts of almost US\$4 billion in the 1980s, forcing the government to devalue

the peso and raise the previously controlled prices of petrol and basic foods according to the IMF's advice, which has led to looting and rioting in Santo Domingo and other cities as poor people took to the streets in protest (Ferguson, 2008, p. 329). Liberato (2007) examined how investment in export-led industrialization created both opportunity and exploitation for women. While free trade zones increase women's access to market participation and economic independence, it produces negative effects on the health of female-headed households and exacerbates the double burden of wage and household work on women. As far as tourism development is concerned, cities are favored over others, which creates inequalities among Dominican citizens and the formation of differentiated citizenship based on marketable skills and participation (Ong, 2006). The retreat of the government from those cities simply encourages violence, corruption of the police, and murder (Brennan, 2004). Haitians who constitute most of the foreigners in this context started to be seen as a threat to the jobs of Dominican citizens. Since the country entered the neoliberal era, the Dominican state has increasingly adopted new migration policies to restrict Haitian migration and exclude Haitian-Dominicans from Dominican citizenry. Hostilities against Haitians work as both an accusation to make Haitians the scapegoats of Dominican society economically weakened, and a political strategy used by politicians to distract the people from other issues and rally the troops (Sagas, 2000).

CONCLUSION

This paper has examined how social and economic developments in the Dominican Republic, coupled with dangerous narratives, have contributed to marginalizing people of Haitian descent, and removing them from the country. To understand this issue, I have first looked at the historical relationship between the two countries and the colonial experiences of the two peoples. This history is often laden with tensions and political conflicts, which resulted in heavy consequences such as the genocide of thousands of Haitians in the Dominican Republic in 1937, constant violence, and exclusion. Second, the concepts of identity formation and nation-building play a significant role in creating a dichotomy "us" vs. "them" in the Dominican Republic. An essential tool to this process is the development of an anti-Haitian sentiment which consists of rallying Dominicans on one hand and excluding Haitians on the other hand by constituting them as the "other." Third, narratives associated with Trujillo who ordered the 1937 massacre in the forms of threat and violence continued to be relevant. For Haitians, they serve as prevention to avoid being the victims of violence and crime. As for Dominicans, they are used as a tool to spread fear among Haitians and to force them to leave. Dominicans' anti-Haitianism is, in part, a result of existing patterns of Western vilification of Haiti (Gates Jr., 201, p. 175).

Indeed, the rejection of Haitians has increasingly become global as evident in North America, the Caribbean, Latin America, and Europe. This has taken the form of both *de jure* and *de facto* discrimination from the report of baseless statements by

right-wing media about Haitians eating people's dogs in Springfield, Ohio in the United States (Dubuisson and Schuller, 2024) to anti-Haitian migration policies and laws. Already, in the 1970s, pressed by influential economic elites of South Florida, US authorities mobilized important resources to stop unwanted Haitian migration using drastic measures that included deporting massively Haitian migrants, incarcerating them, and employing coast guards to patrol Haitian coasts. When Haitians and human rights activists voiced concern against the brutality with which Haitians were treated, US authorities maintained that "the US government had administrative, legal, technical, and political means to prevent Haitians entering the territory" (Mitchell, 1994, p. 71). This unwanted Haitian migration also exists in Latin America. For instance, in Chile, where tens of thousands of Haitians emigrated in the wake of the 2010 earthquake that killed around 230, 000 people, the topic of immigration has been intensively debated as anti-immigrant discourses and rallies from right-wing political leaders multiply to blame immigrants for some of the country's crime problems (Witte-Lebhar, 2011). In 2018, an estimated 1,087 Haitian migrants signed up for humanitarian flights to return to Haiti, what some consider being forced deportation (Laing and Miranda, 2018). The same scenario repeated in 2024, when hundreds of Haitian nationals who were disappointed in their search for life improvement in Türkiye were forced to return to Haiti citing unemployment, malnutrition, and racism among the factors that caused them to leave (Le Nouvelliste, 2024; Haiti Libre, 2023). This increasing fear of Haitian migration is reminiscent of the era of great migration when African Americans fleeing the south were exceptionally seen as dangerous newcomers (Muhammad, 2010) and shows the extent to which Haitians' bare lives are expendable and unworthy of justice (Louis, Jr., 2024).

Finally, understanding the continuous violence and threat against Haitians in the Dominican Republic amounts to looking at the fraught history of interconnection between the two countries, the process of nation-building rooted in a conflation of racial and national identity supported by anti-Haitian narratives, and the multiplication of a series of discriminatory laws and policies that aim at excluding undocumented Haitian migrants from the nation. The hemispheric or global rejection of Haitians also has its roots in the way Haitians had violently disrupted the history of the world by shaking the foundations of racial discrimination, realizing the first abolition of slavery in a major slave society, and creating Latin America's first independent state (Geggus, 2010), a prowess for which Haitians have never been forgiven (Dubuisson & Schuller, 2024; Mystal, 2024).

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTOR

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Journal of African Community and Development, Volume 1, Issue 1, Spring 2025

<https://pacaf.org/jacad/>

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