



# Social extermination in the El Paraíso neighborhood. A structural constructivist analysis in the period 2010-2021

## Exterminio social en el barrio El Paraíso. Un análisis constructivista estructural en el periodo 2010-2021

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### ABSTRACT

The article explores the results of the project “Social Extermination in the El Paraíso neighborhood: 2010 - 2021”, carried out by the seedbed Esperanza en Marcha of the Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios - UNIMINUTO, Bogotá headquarters. The research focused on reflecting on the social representations of young people in the Paraíso neighborhood about the practices of social extermination that have occurred during the last ten years, based on the analysis of the categories, using the approaches of Pierre Bourdieu's structural constructivism and a qualitative methodology of narrative cut, where information gathering techniques related to semi-structured interviews, focus groups, and social cartographies were used. The research revealed the structural components of social extermination, recognizing that it originates from dominance over the youth of the neighborhood through the establishment of practices and thoughts that seek to annihilate what is different, what does not fit into the capitalist, patriarchal, and colonial system, Recognizing that this generates some affectations in the construction of identity of the young people due to the stigmatization of their place of residence and the violation of their human rights, the above is also reflected in the absence of governmental accompaniment, where finally it is the scenarios of youth resistance that make visible the situations and demand protection from community actions.

**Keywords:** collective human rights, peace, resistance to oppression, violation of human rights.

**JEL Classification:** L83, M54, Z00

**Received:** 15-03-2024

**Revised:** 01-06-2024

**Accepted:** 15-06-2024

**Published:** 01-07-2024

**Editor:** Carlos Alberto Gómez Cano 

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**Cite as:** Salas, I. y Álvarez, N. (2024). Exterminio social en el barrio El Paraíso. Un análisis constructivista estructural en el periodo 2010-2021. *Región Científica*, 5(2), 2024333. <https://doi.org/10.58763/rc2024333>

### RESUMEN

El artículo explora los resultados del proyecto “Exterminio Social en el barrio El Paraíso: 2010-2021”, realizado desde el semillero Esperanza en Marcha, de la Corporación Universitaria Minuto de Dios (UNIMINUTO), sede Bogotá. La investigación se centró en reflexionar sobre las representaciones sociales de los jóvenes del barrio El Paraíso, frente a las prácticas de exterminio social ocurridas durante los últimos 10 años; eso a partir del análisis de categorías, los planteamientos del constructivismo estructural y una metodología cualitativa de corte narrativo, en la que se utilizaron técnicas de recolección de información relacionadas con entrevistas semiestructuradas, grupos focales y cartografías sociales. La investigación reveló los componentes estructurales del exterminio social, al reconocer que se origina desde un dominio sobre las juventudes del barrio, a través del establecimiento de prácticas y pensamientos que buscan aniquilar lo diferente o no encaje en el sistema capitalista, patriarcal y colonial; cosa que genera unas afectaciones en la construcción de identidad de los jóvenes por la estigmatización de su lugar de residencia y la vulneración a sus derechos humanos. Lo anterior se refleja en la ausencia de acompañamiento gubernamental, y en que son los escenarios de resistencia juvenil los que visibilizan las situaciones y exigen protección desde acciones comunitarias.

**Palabras clave:** derechos humanos colectivos, paz, resistencia a la opresión, violación de los derechos humanos.

**Clasificación JEL:** L83, M54, Z00

## INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of “Social Cleansing,” as the communities know it, is a targeted social extermination that, according to the history of Ciudad Bolívar, is directly attributed to the paramilitary groups that inhabit the various neighborhoods.



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However, in recent years, it has been revealed that the residents of the area themselves actively participate in this process, organizing groups and carrying out the murders under the guise of improving security.

From this, questions arise surrounding the acts of social extermination in the El Paraíso neighborhood, which have an intimate character, as it is a social problem that is being investigated due to its proximity to the neighborhood, as it is located in the area where one of the researchers resides. The project is guided by a structural constructivist approach, allowing for the identification of the issues that originate and foster the development of the problem. It also explores the subjective elements condensed in the social representations of the neighborhood's youth. This fosters critical and proactive inquiry into the strategies of neighborhood foundations and leaders seeking to denounce and definitively eliminate the practice of Social Extermination in the area.

Therefore, it allows for constructing critical and reflective knowledge around the social reality addressed and its relationship with the constituent elements of violence, as the annihilation of differences. The research focuses specifically on the Human Rights subfield, which makes visible the events that occurred within the framework of the practices of social extermination in the El Paraíso neighborhood, as well as recognizing the processes of defense and resistance of some youth organizations in the area.

## METHODOLOGY

### Qualitative design

The research methodology used was qualitative, based on the narrative method. Considering that young people construct their practices through the meanings they give to social phenomena, the stories constructed with the participants demonstrate the relevance and impact on the daily life of Social Extermination events between 2010 and 2021. The narrative method allowed for the expression of detailed information in time, space, and impacts; it also showed that narrative can be a reliable and clear path to producing knowledge about the social world (María & Ortiz, 2021).

The research was based on Bourdieu's structuralist constructivist approach (Jacay, 2022; Hernández, 2022), as it addresses the central elements of "campus" and "habitus," contextualized within the territorial dynamics of the El Paraíso neighborhood. The central categories that guided the analysis were social representations, social extermination, and resistance, from the perspective of the authors Rojas (2022) and Cote and Vega (2022), among others.

### Context and sample

The level of study is descriptive in scope, describing situations or events occurring in the area and, to a certain extent, developing a social representation of the phenomenon of Social Extermination in the El Paraíso neighborhood. This is based on the exploration of the social representations of 12 young people belonging to grassroots social organizations who carry out resistance operations against acts of violence and defend human rights through collective actions. To collect this information, 12 structural interviews were conducted with youth leaders, a social mapping was conducted with a group of young people that included a tour of the neighborhood to encourage the exercise of remembrance and memory, and three focus groups were held to delve deeper into issues related to social representations regarding social extermination and resistance actions.

### Systematic review design

For the bibliographic review, the guidelines of Sánchez et al. (2023) were followed, which were adapted to this specific article. A search was carried out through the Scopus database, taking into account the thematic descriptors "social representations" AND "young". Initially, the search patterns established were original and review articles in English or Spanish published between 2021 and 2024. Likewise, 35 publications were identified in a total of 32 journals, as shown in table 1; of these, 30 belonged to quartile 1 and the rest (2) to quartile 2; 19 were from the United Kingdom, 8 from the Netherlands, 4 from the United States, and 1 from China. The areas of knowledge represented were Social Sciences (29), Earth Sciences (6), Medical Sciences (5), Computer Sciences (4), Business Sciences (3), and other sciences (3). Most journals were not limited to a specific area of knowledge but linked two or more. The frequency of publications by year was as follows: 2021 (4), 2022 (9), 2023 (15), and 2024 (7).

**Table 1.**  
*Analysis of the sources consulted in the Scopus database*

Title of the magazine	Country	Area of knowledge	H-index	Quartile
International Journal of Educational Research	United Kingdom	Social Sciences	15	Q1
International Journal of Geoheritage and Parks	China	Earth Sciences Social Sciences	19	Q1
Current Research in Ecological and Social Psychology	Netherlands	Social Sciences	9	Q2
Children and Youth Services Review	United Kingdom	Social Sciences	115	Q1
Journal of Environmental Management	United States	Environmental Sciences Medicine	243	Q1
International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction	United Kingdom	Earth Sciences Social Sciences	86	Q1
Health & Place	United Kingdom	Medicine Social Sciences	137	Q1
Advances in Life Course Research	Netherlands	Social Sciences	47	Q2
Current Research in Environmental Sustainability	Netherlands	Environmental Sciences	18	Q1
Social Science & Medicine	United Kingdom	Social Sciences Medicine	283	Q1
International Journal of Intercultural Relations	United Kingdom	Business Sciences Social Sciences	102	Q1
Appetite	United States	Nursing Social Sciences	178	Q1
Learning, Culture and Social Interaction	Netherlands	Social Sciences	35	Q1
Computers in Human Behavior Reports	United Kingdom	Computer Science Social Sciences	22	Q1
Tourism Management	United Kingdom	Business Sciences Social Sciences	255	Q1
International Journal of Drug Policy	Netherlands	Medicine	98	Q1
SSM - Mental Health	United Kingdom	Social Sciences	11	Q1
Energy Research & Social Science	United Kingdom	Energy Social Sciences	113	Q1
Journal of Experimental Social Psychology	United States	Social Sciences	171	Q1
Social Sciences & Humanities Open	United Kingdom	Social Sciences	25	Q1
Child Abuse & Neglect	United Kingdom	Medicine Social Sciences	174	Q1
Computers in Human Behavior	United Kingdom	Social Sciences Computer Science	251	Q1
Wellbeing, Space and Society	Netherlands	Social Sciences	9	Q1
Journal of Experimental Social Psychology	United States	Social Sciences	171	Q1
Journal of Rural Studies	United Kingdom	Biological Sciences Social Sciences	135	Q1
SSM - Qualitative Research in Health	United Kingdom	Social Sciences	9	Q1
Global Environmental Change	United Kingdom	Environmental Sciences Social Sciences	225	Q1
Women's Studies International Forum	United Kingdom	Social Sciences	71	Q1
International Journal of Information Management	United Kingdom	Business Sciences Computer Science Social Sciences	177	Q1
Computers in Human Behavior	Netherlands	Social Sciences Computer Science	251	Q1
Travel Behaviour and Society	Netherlands	Social Sciences	46	Q1
Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions	Netherlands	Environmental Sciences Social Sciences	79	Q1

**Source:** own elaboration, based on data extracted from <https://www.scimagojr.com/>

Among the sources consulted, the authors addressed social representations among young people from different perspectives. In all cases, factors were identified that influenced individuals or groups, causing marginalization, rejection, or violence, such as criticism, identity, type of employment, gender perspective, religion, health, habitat, Internet access, social practices, race, and religion, as shown in table 2.

**Table 2.**

*Distribution of authors according to the treatment they offer to social representations in young people*

Authors	Year	Treatment of social representations
Alkhateeb, H., Romanowski, M., Chaaban, Y., and Abu-Tineh, A.	2022	Gender approach
Blanco-Fuente, I., Ancín, R., Albertín-Carbó, P., and Pastor, Y.	2024	
Miele, C., Maquigneau, A., Joyal, C., Bertsch, I., Gangi, O., Gonthier, H., Rawlinson, C., Vigourt-Oudart, S., Symphorien, E., Heasman, A., Letourneau, E., Moncany, A.-H., and Lacambre, M.	2023	Profession, identity and employment
Salgado, F., and Magalhães, S. I.	2024	
Buchan, P., Evans, L. S., Barr, S., and Pieraccini, M.	2024	
Cvetković, V., Dragašević, A., Protić, D., Janković, B., Nikolić, N., and Milošević, P.	2022	
Lahlou, S., Heitmayer, M., Pea, R., Russell, M., Schimmelpfennig, R., Yamin, P., Dawes, A., Babcock, B., Kamiya, K., Krejci, K., Suzuki, T., and Yamada, R.	2022	
Rault-Chodankar, Y.-M.	2022	Psychology
Blanchard, C., and Paquet, M.	2023	
Holder, A., Ruhanen, L., Walters, G., and Mkono, M.	2023	
Holm, S., Petersen, M., Enghoff, O., and Hesse, M.	2023	
Hosny, N., Bovey, M., Dutray, F., and Heim, E.	2023	
Kazarovytska, F., and Imhoff, R.	2023	Artificial intelligence
Larrea, C., Muñoz, A., Echeverría, R., Larrea, O., and Gracia-Arnaiz, M.	2024	
Selzer, S., and Lanzendorf, M.	2022	
Julsrud, T., and Aasen, M.	2024	
Millet, K., Buehler, F., Du, G., and Kokkoris, M.	2023	
Savela, N., Oksanen, A., Pellert, M., and Garcia, D.	2021	Social and environmental context
Scales, D., Gorman, J., DiCaprio, P., Hurth, L., Radhakrishnan, M., Windham, S., Akunne, A., Florman, J., Leininger, L., and Starks, T.	2023	
Birman, D.	2024	
Gago, T., and Sá, I.	2021	
Rostan, J., Billing, S.-L., Doran, J., and Hughes, A.	2022	
Valor, C., Martino, J., and Ruiz, L.	2023	Health and gender
Fannin, M., Collard, S., and Davies, S.	2024	
Fuster, N., Palomares-Linares, I., and Susino, J.	2023	
Gaspar, M., Sato, P., and Scagliusi, F.	2022	
Gesthuizen, M., Savelkoul, M., y Scheepers, P.	2021	
Graça, J., Campos, L., Guedes, D., Roque, L., Brazão, V., Truninger, M., and Godinho, C.	2023	Nutrition
Grossen, M., Zittoun, T., and Baucal, A.	2022	Education
Harren, N., Walburg, V., and Chabrol, H.	2021	Addictions
Mbaye, A., Schmidt, J., and Cormier-Salem, M.	2023	Social practices
Moore, G., Fardghassemi, S., and Joffe, H.	2023	Loneliness and citizenship
Mosley, A., Biernat, M., and Adams, G.	2023	Racism
Phillips, M., Smith, D., Brooking, H., and Duer, M.	2022	Gentrification
Robert, S., Quercy, A., and Schleyer-Lindenmann, A.	2023	Territoriality

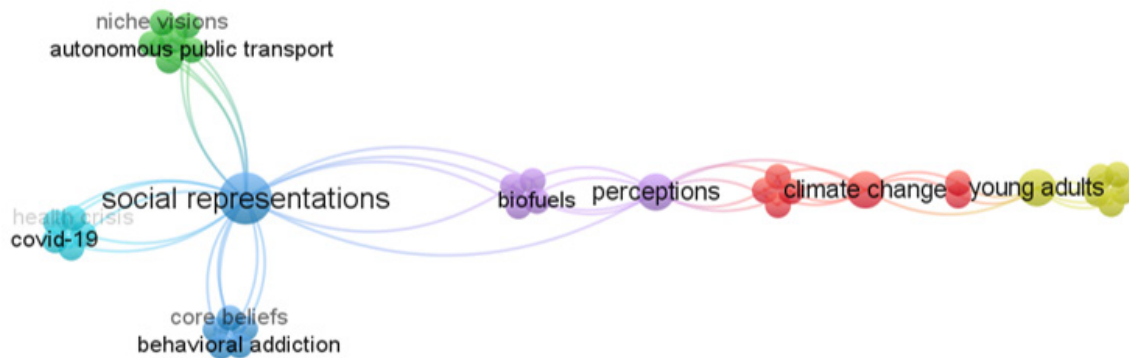
**Source:** own elaboration

Using Lens.org software, 98 additional sources extracted from the Scopus and Web of Science databases were processed. The subject descriptors used to identify the sources were: “social representations” AND “young”. The search was conducted based on the period (2021-2024) and document type (journal article or book chapter).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research results are presented in line with the objectives set forth in the study. At a general level, it can be stated that the social representations constructed by young people around the acts of social extermination in the El Paraíso neighborhood expressed their feelings about it, indicating that—from these acts onward—the struggle to survive in a society that violates, stigmatizes, and marginalizes them due to their social and geographical location constantly grows. Bourdieu refers to them as the environment where social actors are governed by their experiences, customs, and conceptions derived from social domination.

**Figure 1.**  
*Evidence of the keyword co-occurrence network*



**Source:** own elaboration based on VOSviewer software

Based on these data, the following table shows the analysis of research clusters associated with social representations in young people, based on the items.

**Table 3.**  
*Cluster analysis*

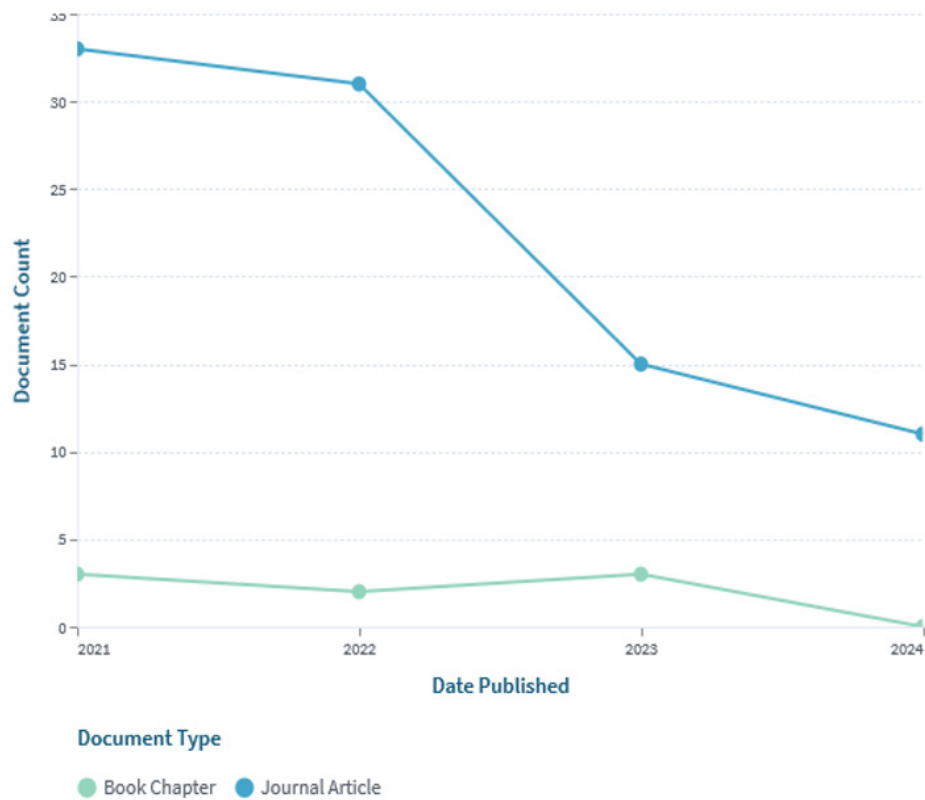
Cluster	Items	Color	Description
C1	7	Red	Focuses on environmental aspects
C2	6	Green	Focuses on social expectations and business opportunities
C3	6	Dark blue	Focuses on behaviors, addictions, and issues associated with internet use
C4	6	Mustard	Focuses on deprivation, loneliness, social connections, and neighborhood
C5	5	Purple	Focuses on productive aspects
C6	5	Light blue	Focuses on issues associated with COVID-19, such as isolation
Total	35		

**Source:** own elaboration based on data processed with the VOSviewer software

Analysis of the sources consulted through Lens.org allowed us to determine trends in academic work over time (2021-2024), areas of knowledge, main journals, and countries with the highest frequency of publications on social representations and youth.

This topic has been addressed from different areas of knowledge; figure 3 shows the variety of these. It is notable how general areas of knowledge are illustrated, but most are specific and diverse. This allows us to determine the variety and transversality of these categories (social representations and youth).

**Figure 2.**  
*Academic papers over time*



Source: own elaboration based on Lens.org software

**Figure 3.**  
*Main areas of knowledge*

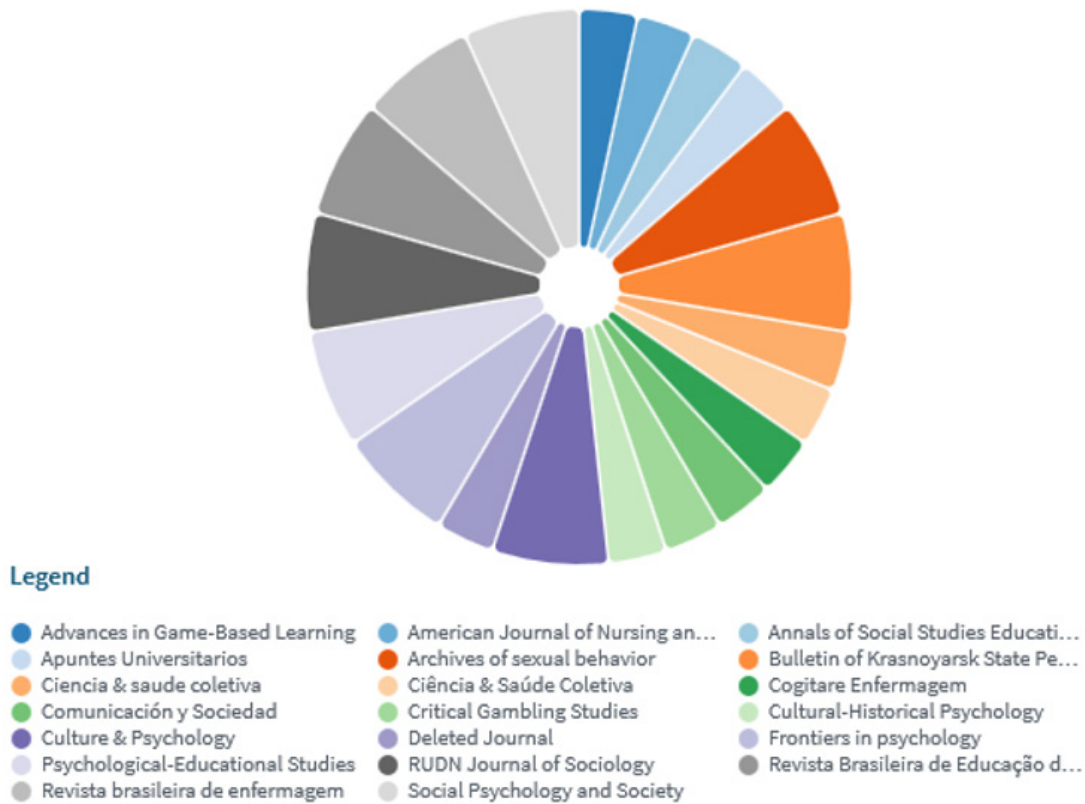
6	5	12	8	13
Aesthetics	Anger	Anthropology	Archaeology	Art
4	9	5	14	4
Artificial intelligence	Biology	Chemistry	Computer science	Content analysis
9	8	7	4	18
Context (archaeology)	Context (language use)	Coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19)	Demography	Developmental psychology
7	4	4	11	8
Disease	Diversity (politics)	Economics	Epistemology	Feeling
19	9	12	5	6
Gender studies	Geography	Humanities	Identity (music)	Infectious disease (medical specialty)
25	8	5	6	16
Law	Linguistics	Mathematics	Mathematics education	Medicine
10	9	6	9	9
Narrative	Neuroscience	Pathology	Pedagogy	Perception
5	23	35	18	5
Perspective (graphical)	Philosophy	Political science	Politics	Population
6	64	6	14	6
Psychiatry	Psychology	Public relations	Qualitative research	Representation (politics)
45	8	26	64	5
Social psychology	Social representation	Social science	Sociology	

Source: own elaboration based on Lens.org software



The trend in the number of articles per journal is between 1 and 3 per year and there is a great variety of these, as shown in figure 4.

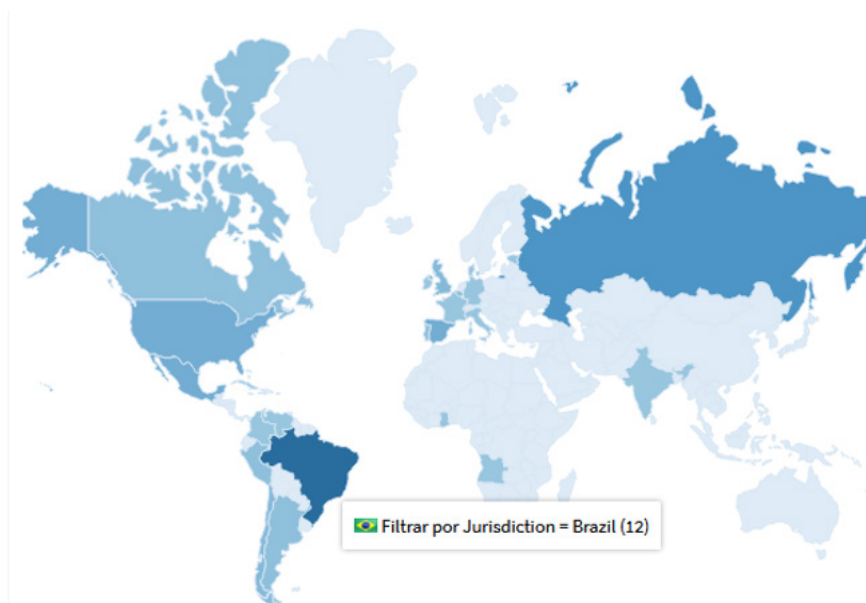
**Figure 4.**  
*Main journals*



Source: own elaboration based on Lens.org software

The country with the largest number of publications on the topic is Brazil, with 12 articles. With the exception of Russia, the region with the largest number of publications on the topic is the Americas, with a similarity across countries (figure 5).

**Figure 5.**  
*Most active countries*



Source: own elaboration based on Lens.org software

The literature review reveals that in Ciudad Bolívar, acts of social extermination date back to 1983 when it began to emerge as a peripheral locality of Bogotá (Caquimbo, 2023; Fajardo, 2024; Guaman, 2024; Orjuela & Urrego, 2024). Indeed, the locality continues to bear the consequences of the city's social inequality, becoming a contested territory where various armed groups maintain territorial control, violating the human rights of its inhabitants.

Based on the reconstruction of the acts of social extermination recognized by young people in the El Paraíso neighborhood over the past 10 years, a timeline was collaboratively developed, establishing that since 2010, several events have occurred that have impacted the neighborhood, such as the creation of micro-trafficking gangs and the arrival of BACRIM (Basque Drug Trafficking Units) between 2010 and 2011; The identification of "social cleansing" as a systematic practice of these groups, recalling anecdotes of the death and disappearance of several well-known young people in the neighborhood, with a peak between 2012 and 2015; the progressive appearance of pamphlets signed by the illegal organization "Águilas Negras" and an increase in extermination cases between 2015 and 2019, with an increase in murders of community leaders and human rights defenders in areas of the neighborhood between 2019 and 2022.

To this extent, it is identified that the practice of social extermination experienced in the El Paraíso neighborhood has influenced the lifestyles of young people in relation to the increase in stigma, inequality, and rejection of youth identity. This indicates an exercise in camouflaging these practices, based on discourses of citizen security, which entails the decision to "do justice" violently and by one's own hand, even if it is through illegal armed groups. Just as there are pressure groups on these young people, there are established social structures that can serve as a catalyst, such as the family, the school, the community, projects, foundations, and NGOs (Peñate & Jiménez, 2020; Aloulou, 2022).

The above, in the authors' opinion, prevents young people from developing freely, even causing them to fail to reach adulthood, leaving them without options. This violence has no repercussions for the perpetrators, as cases are recorded as homicides and do not lead to an effective resolution regarding the identification of the individual or group perpetrators involved. It causes emotional pain and frustration for family, friends, and community members.

It could be said that the violence experienced today negatively affects young people in aspects such as mental health, behavior, interaction, and personal, intrapersonal, and interpersonal relationships with others and their environment in the face of these changes. They are exposed to a difficult reality to face, which has given rise to discrimination, hatred, contempt, and resentment over the years. Social extermination is based on domination and death, causing the community to subject young people to rules established years ago, even though these rules may be repressive, coercive, and violent. These behaviors can be modeled in formal or informal educational contexts, according to Cristancho (2023), which include schools, neighborhood initiatives, creative workshops, social integration and addiction relief initiatives, health promotion, and social prevention, among others.

The social representations of social extermination that young people have constructed deprive people of their lives; this is part of symbolic violence when it is perpetrated out of ridicule, mockery, or to send a message to the other citizens of the victim. This has been on the rise, especially in Colombia, as a consequence of conflicts and social problems and dysfunctional individuals who practice social extermination, impacting young people increasingly.

Finally, the human rights advocacy processes being carried out in the El Paraíso neighborhood in response to territorial transformation are led by grassroots social organizations, including the Naguesi Foundation, the Youth Center, the "Night Has a Thousand Eyes, the Day Only One" initiative, and "Survamos," among others. It is a priority to reflect on and build new systems of "practices of self," as Foucault put it, according to Luzuriaga et al. (2022), or to modify conventional and culturally established practices in order to generate new practices and, therefore, new forms of subjectivation, which offer young people alternative futures so they are not forced into the violence experienced in the El Paraíso neighborhood. In line with Cardo et al. (2023), the community, rather than exerting pressure on young people to alienate them, is the ideal space to foster respect for cultural diversity, a sense of belonging, identity, and self-esteem.

The stigma of neighborhoods, society, and the disastrous dominant social order of paramilitary groups leads some young people to think about what social extermination represents, and this attitude is acquired as a framework for their lives. Therefore, community organizations and collective unity are essential in searching for processes that encourage and allow young people to participate in art, music, and sports settings to foster the neighborhood's territorial identity. An example of this is young people who express their struggle against environmental pollution and crime through murals, graffiti, and expressions that mark their territorial identity and feelings (Mora & Camacho, 2023; Cruz et al., 2024).



In this sense, public spaces constitute settings that, in addition to serving as leisure and enjoyment, foster social exchange and facilitate community dynamism. Young people frequently appropriate these spaces for recreational purposes but also for the formation of identities, exchange of ideas, and expressions. This demonstrates the existence of a geographic, spatial, and belonging identity (Cote & Vega, 2022). Therefore, there is a constant struggle for life, hope, and youth dignity; through this approach, leaders and foundations are joining forces to create alternatives that connect young people with recreational, artistic, or employment activities.

The Youth Center is one example of how young people are integrated through projects and engage in sports, recreational, and artistic activities, such as dance, theater, urban music, visual arts, writing, and photography. These types of activities foster entrepreneurship, creativity, social participation, and training. They give young people a real role to play, catering to their tastes and preferences (Almeida, 2021).

Youth movements emerge through the organizations structured in Ciudad Bolívar as sociocultural processes. They connect with educational and employment alternatives, where they are accepted as key players in political action, a fundamental part of the resistance movement due to the different conditions in which they find themselves. The social movement constitutes the fundamental axis of community work based on popular participation and motivates the mobilization of individuals and their organizations, which leads to the fight for rights, the increase of state presence, and the diversification of efforts to rebuild the social fabric in the locality (Rojas & Quintana, 2022), in order to promote the comprehensive development of individuals, with participatory and equitable democracy.

Given the current situation in the sector, it is pertinent to support and contribute to solutions focused on Human Rights, comprehensive government strategies, and participatory public policies that recognize the experiences of the youth population excluded and discriminated against by illegal groups. At the same time, it is necessary to raise awareness among society at large, including public servants, community leaders, and others, in the face of a phenomenon that does not completely change but rather mutates over the years. This is done in order to overcome the social paradigm, negative stereotypes, the fractured identity, and the false beliefs that justify violence and techniques of social extermination.

Society at large must commit to denaturalizing the acts of social extermination occurring throughout the country, and it is a priority to advance effective processes to defend life based on initiatives from the communities themselves. Based on their experience, they recognize those actions that can lead to strengthening bonds based on affection, empathy, and collective interests while also demanding institutional responses translated into public policies that prevent, mitigate, and put an end to these acts, using a cross-cutting approach. This is even more so when means of coexistence are required to maintain relationships among young people based on mutual recognition and building on differences.

It is important to highlight that Bourdieu's concepts of "campus" and "habitus" allow us to recognize the complexity of social extermination, based on social structures independent of consciousness and will, in which groups exercise dominance and power that guide the community, permeating its differences and similarities through capital. In short, young people are bound to this structure, as they cannot renounce life in society; the former conditions the individual's subjective constructions, limiting and directing them. Furthermore, this structure generates psychosocial effects on young people that force them to adopt patterns of action in the face of practices of social extermination, and social movements are effective in this regard. These do not necessarily have to provoke rebellion and opposition; they can also be led toward the search for educational, welfare, health, environmental, and economic improvements (Lučić et al., 2021).

For all these reasons, we must continue to address the structural notion of social extermination, which allows us to interpret the facts systematically rather than in isolation. It leads to the generation of situated knowledge that fosters the identification, formulation, and implementation of concrete actions to mitigate, counteract, and reject social extermination in the local community, not only through community demands but also through the defense of human rights at the local level.

## CONCLUSIONS

Social representations play a crucial role in young people's perceptions of their environment and their place in society. These can influence their attitudes toward human rights and social justice, as well as their place in their environment, community, or school and/or workplace. As agents of change, young people have the potential to challenge and transform these representations, especially in the context of practices of social extermination, which include systematic violence and the marginalization of certain groups, seriously violating human rights. Projects,

foundations, NGOs, and other organizations that work in an integrated manner to address social gaps, address the problems young people face, and seek greater integration into society are important in this regard. It is essential that they are informed and engaged, recognizing the practices of social extermination, their consequences and causes, and dismantling the structures that sustain them. By promoting and defending human rights, young people can foster a culture of respect and dignity, becoming active advocates and agents of change in their communities, thus contributing to building a more just and inclusive society.

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## FINANCING

The authors did not receive funding for the development of this research.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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