

The Evolution of the

Afrocolombian Social Movement*

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Abstract

This paper** traces the evolution of the Afro-Colombian Social Movement from colonial times, starting with a historical background of the early black resistance against slavery: how the first runaway captives formed new societies or communities called *palenques*. Additionally, this article highlights the importance of the black-indigenous association in defending land and fighting against marginalization, and the role of women in the same context. The Afro-Colombian Social Movement grew out of the oppression and

Resumen

Este artículo propone una reseña histórica del Movimiento Social Afro-Colombiano desde la Colonia hasta hoy, partiendo de las resistencias de los esclavizados y pasando por los *palenques* y la importancia de la asociación negro-indígena en su lucha por la defensa de territorios y en contra de la marginalización; en este recorrido se exalta el papel de la mujer. El texto también explora cómo la *etnoeducación* surge como respuesta a la opresión, el silenciamiento cultural y a la desigualdad en que viven las comunidades negras en Colom-

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inequality that black communities faced. In the struggle for equal rights, *etnoeducación*, a new teaching and learning process, was approved by law in the early nineties and is crucial to the evolution of the Afro-Colombian Social Movement.

Key words: captive, Palenque, maroons, etnoeducación (ethnic education), feminist movement, multiculturalism, etnodesarrollo (ethnic development), cross cultural relations, identity, Afro-Colombian studies.

bia y su importancia en la evolución del Movimiento Social Afro-colombiano.

Palabras clave: cautivo, Palenque, cimarrones, resistencia, etnoeducación, movimiento feminista, multiculturalismo, etnodesarrollo, relaciones interculturales, identidad, Cátedra de Estudios Afro-Colombianos.

Early Resistance

The organized resistance of African people in Colombia began in the sixteenth century when the enslaved started to revolt and to organize into palenques (palisades) to resist slavery. "In 1603 Gerónimo de Suazo, Governor of Cartagena, facing an imminent attack by the Palenque of La Matuna led by Benkos Bioho, signed a peace agreement in what he called the 'War of the Runaway Slaves'" (Friedemann, 1993: 91). New captives from Africa often escaped as soon as they touched Colombian soil; they were called *zapacos* or black *zapacos*. "The word *zapaco* derives from *zapar* which means to mine, a common occupation among African slaves" (Friedeman, 91). Tensions between runaway blacks and the government gradually increased. On August 23rd, 1691 the King of Spain cancelled an early decree that "ordered the conquest of the palenques of Montes de Maria where people had taken up arms" (Friedemann, 91). Free blacks struggled for many years trying to help others gain freedom.

The formation of palenques started as early as the year 1525 with the *palenque* called Tofeme nearby Cartagena. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries here were around twenty palenques in Colombia, the majority of them located on the Caribbean Coast. New palenques were formed in the eighteenth century with the relocation of some slaves to the Pacific Coast for mining and agriculture.

The people living in these new communities or palenques were called *cimarrones*. According to the Movimiento Nacional Cimarron or National Cimarron Movement: “Cimarrones were African slaves who ran away to the forest to gain their freedom and to form a new society free from slavery in their new settlements called Palenques, which were the nests of freedom and independence in the American continent” (Movimiento Nacional Cimarrón, n.d.).

The *cimarrones* were early resistance fighters, who defended their women and children in order to maintain their history, culture, and mainly their freedom. Today, the word *cimarrón* is still in use as a symbol of resistance. One of the oldest and most successful organizations in the fight for equality in Colombia is named in honor of the early Africans who resisted to enslavement: “Movimiento Cimarrón de Colombia.”

The struggle for freedom continued for centuries. It was not only until 1851 that the abolition took place. But in the period leading up to abolition there were signs that Colombian laws were changing in favor of slaves. After independence, in 1821, Gran Colombia, as it was called at that time, passed the so called law of the “free womb” on July 21st, 1821. “This law banned the importation of new slaves into the country and directed that henceforth all children born of slave mothers would be free but would have to work for the mother’s masters without paying until age eighteen— theoretically as compensation for their upbringing” (Helg, 2004: 163).

Slavery was abolished in 1851, but unfortunately, the newly freed men were not able to find jobs or to get any support from the Colombian government to establish a new life style. With these limitations they did not have any alternative but to work for the same people who enslaved them before. So their free time and payment was very limited, and the working conditions were as bad as before. According to Juan de Dios Mosquera (2007), abolition did not benefit black people: “The afro community passed from the Spanish colony to the Creole Spanish republic as slaves, and from 1851 with the abolition, they passed from the slave way of living to being a crop worker, or a simple employee who has to do the most difficult low jobs, or as poor peasants and a second class citizens” (66).

Many former captives rebelled and refused to work for white men. Blacks were literally free only on paper, but the truth was that slavery of a sort secretly continued.

The struggle for equal rights continues. Black communities are known for defending their territories from early times. Many of the issues that black communities are facing are the same as the ones that indigenous people face. The association between blacks and indigenous people plays an important role in the history of the evolution of the social movements in Colombia.

From Black Social Movement to an Afrocolombian Social Movement

The Afrocolombian Social Movement began in the 1970s. The early Afro American movement in the United States headed by Martin Luther King set an example for many other black communities around the world including black Colombians. Indigenous people were also an inspiration and a model for the early Colombian black movement. Indigenous people “organized around land under the Agrarian Reform Law 135 of 1961, which recognized the rights of indigenous people over the land they had traditionally occupied” (Ng’Weno, 2007: 423). This recognition inspired the Afrocolombian peasants to mobilize in the 1970s to fight for their lands. But unlike indigenous people, blacks never had any representation or recognition of land management. Disparities in the way of life between black communities and the rest of the Colombian population mobilized blacks to organize. The black movement began in the 1970s. The first official meeting of the Black Movement was the “Congress on the Black Culture of the Americas” in 1977, on the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the discovery of America. The congress was held in Cali, Colombia, in order to promote reflection about and interest in the history and the current situation of Afro-Americans on that decade. (The expression Afro-Americans here includes blacks from North and South America.) The congress was also a call to join efforts in the fight against the remaining traces of slavery, to ensure rights for black people and their descendents. (Tamayo, 1995) To continue with this work, there were two more meetings: one in Panama in 1980, called “The Cultural Identity of Blacks in the Americas” and a third in Brazil in 1982: “African Diaspora: Political and Cultural African Consciousness.” The fact that the first event was held in Colombia was assign of the strength of the Black Movement there in the late 70s.

The 1970s were followed by many gatherings and the formation of new pro-black rights movements in Colombia. The 1980s were important in organizing and collecting ideas and facts that would eventually help in getting recognition for the Afrocolombians as a distinct ethnic group with a distinctive way of living and culture. After many years of work, the Afrocolombian movement gained a big victory when in 1991, the constitutional reform declared Colombia a multicultural and a diverse country. Black resistance is going for more than five centuries. Juan de Dios Mosquera called the fight to preserve black culture as the struggle against ethnocide. He states: “The ethnocide going on for more than five centuries did not destroy the resistance of the African and indigenous culture. But, the ecocide, the mining companies, loggers, fishing industry and coca plantations, will destroy the natural resources of the [Pacific coast] region” (Mosquera, 2007: 60).

Interviewed during the celebration of Afrocolombian week in May 2008, professors Rubén Hernández and Francisco Adelmo Asprilla, concluded that the 1990s was the most important decade for the Afrocolombian Social Movement. Scholars strongly believe that the social movement made possible the approval of Law 70, created to promote equality among the different ethnic groups in the country. Law 70 defines Afrocolombians as: “The group of families of Afro-Colombian descent that possesses its own culture; shares a common history and has its own traditions and customs with a rural-urban setting, reveals, and preserves a consciousness of identity that distinguishes it from other ethnic groups” (Law 70, 1993). The recognition of Afrocolombians as a distinct culture was meant to create more opportunities for them in Colombian society. But the movement is suffering division because of the unequal distribution of resources, and the official recognition of Afrocolombians is inconsistent across the country. People who really need help and opportunities are not favored by these new laws. Many Afrocolombians are committed to helping the collective, but many others are working for their personal benefit.

The Afrocolombian Social Movement Today

The Afrocolombian Social Movement is facing many difficulties. The fact that Afrocolombians gained recognition by law is not enough to guarantee representation in the political and economic arena. Professor Hernández mentioned in his speech on ethno-education that black communities have

been losing empowerment, and there is a need to recover the impulse that brought Afrocolombians together in earlier times.

Historically, the Afrocolombian movement has two tendencies described by Professor Hernández: 1) Individualism, which has been controlled by the traditional parties that have the power to run the nation, and 2) A communal movement which is concerned with the communities' benefit and social wellness. The tendency after the constitutional reform of 1991 is for communal wellness, but unfortunately according to him: "There is a biased tendency that prays to god and eats at the same time with the devil." Even though the communal goal empowered the movement to succeed with the approval of Law 70, with time this collectivity has been less influential. In order to be more effective, the Afrocolombian social movement has to work on sharing authority and recovering the sense of communality. Additionally it will be important to involve people with different backgrounds to express the plurality and multi-ethnic diversity which is one of the main characteristics of the social fabric of the nation.

Finally, a democracy clearly requires a multicultural approach. Multiculturalism is an important concept in the current era of globalization. The social movement has a responsibility to facilitate the process of *etnoeducación* to help consolidate the Afrocolombians as an ethnic group and to teach the nation to see Afrocolombians as part of a diverse and plural country. The social movement and the process of *etnoeducación* must jointly speak dialogue with the whole community.

There are many challenges for the *etnoeducación* process. Even though the process was mandated by the modification to the Constitution in 1991, it has so far not been implemented in schools around the country. *Etnoeducadores* and the social movement continue to struggle. It is also important to differentiate between *etnoeducación* and the Afrocolombian studies program. The *etnoeducación*, according to Juan Mosquera (2007), needs to be understood as: "An investigative, learning and socialization process that has to be taught to all Colombians, about Afrocolombianidad. Afrocolombianidad is a patrimony that belongs to all Colombian people regardless of race or culture" (128). The *etnoeducación* process strives to improve Colombian's way of living; through the learning process which would allow people to understand and respect one another in a reduction of violence affecting the country, but mainly the black communities. "The main

purpose of the *etnoeducación* is to facilitate inter-cultural and inter-racial relations among the different ethnic groups” (Mosquera, 2007: 129).

The Afrocolombian movement is experiencing a time of transition. There has been much discussion of the pros and cons of the movement itself and a division among its members. In his lecture about the challenges that the movement is facing, Emigdio Cuesta Pino, President of the “*Consultiva Nacional de Organizaciones Afrocolombianas*” (CNOA) stated that “There are too many organizations, within the group, and it is necessary to converge to make them more credible in front of the state” (personal communication, May 23rd, 2008). This problem derives from the Constitutional Reform of 1991, during which the government demanded to set up organizations in order to address any claims. Consequently, people from neighborhoods, activists, students, scholars and anyone looking to be heard, configured into small groups, generating more than three thousand Afrocolombian organizations today. This gave the government a perfect excuse to decline negotiation arguing that it is impossible to manage such a diversity of groups.

The high number of individual organizations actually weakened the movement as a whole because Afrocolombians have not been able to converge to claim their rights. One of the main challenges for Afrocolombians is to cut the number of organizations and to unify into a smaller group representing collective ideas. A second challenge, according to Emigdio Cuestas Pino, is to watch the public policies to ensure and safeguard the rights of Afrocolombians.

It is time for Afrocolombians to be recognized with pride. The fact that people deny their identity as Afrocolombians is reflected on the last census of 2005 which counted only 10.5% Afrocolombians, but it is recognized by scholars as Ng’Weno (2007) that more than twenty per cent of the population is of Afro descent. People need to put the fear and embarrassment behind them. Blacks need to be proud of their African roots in order to represent themselves with dignity. The identity issue can be conquered by teaching African history and traditions. Unfortunately in Colombia people are rarely taught about Africa.

Cuestas Pino believes that Africa must be a referent on the Afrocolombian struggle for recognitions. He affirmed that: “Many of the wars in Africa

happened because of people's resistance to a change in their way of life and Western economic impositions... African thought should be an inspiration for us" (Personal communication, May 23rd, 2008).

The issues faced by the Afrocolombian Social Movement are linked with the identity crisis in Colombia. Reaffirming African identity and looking for positive referents can help Afrocolombians to recover their dignity. Collective participation in the Afrocolombian Social Movement is needed in order to claim the equal social status that the movement lacks up today. Fighting for a multicultural country must be the flag of the Afrocolombian Social Movement in order to be recognized as a distinct ethnic group that shares the same territory with others, but deserves respect and acknowledgment of their own culture. The issues faced by the Afrocolombian Social Movement are linked with the identity crisis in Colombia. Reaffirming African identity and looking for positive referents can help Afrocolombians to recover their dignity. Collective participation in the Afrocolombian Social Movement is needed in order to claim the equal social status that the movement lacks up today. Fighting for a multicultural country is the mission of the Afrocolombian Social Movement in order to be recognized as a distinct ethnic group that deserves respect and acknowledgment of their own culture that shares the same territory with others.

There are multiple factors that need to be considered within the Afrocolombian Social Movement, and one of them is the role of the Afrocolombian women and their contribution to the movement and their role as tradition keepers.

The Role of Afrocolombian Women and the Feminist Movement

Being black and female is especially difficult in Colombia. In colonial times women were house laborers. Black women played an important role in maintaining family traditions generation by generation. Today their role as keepers of tradition has not been recognized. But women always played important roles, not only in the family and at the community level, but also within the Afrocolombian Social Movement. In her essay "People, Place and Plant in the Pacific Coast of Colombia," Camacho expressed:

In Colombia black women's work has been central to place making, to the reconstruction of the social and cultural fabric, and to

the transmission of ancestral knowledge [...] Black women have also played an active role in supporting their families, and have contributed to community mobilization and ethnic organization for the defense of place and culture. (n.d.).

Quietly, black women maintained family unity, but historically they were physically and sexually abused by their masters. Also, black women were seen as reproductive bodies for increasing slaves' number without additional investment. The constant abuse for hundreds of years, placed black women in a disadvantageous position, reason why the definition of black women needs to be readdressed towards a more positive image. The discourse on social imaginaries has to be transformed in order to change the terminology that defines black women's bodies. Black women are stereotyped as good lovers, excellent cooks, and hard working mothers. Camacho reported that the stereotype of Colombian black women is linked with their history:

In Colombia, black women's history is inscribed in a context of patriarchal power, colonial domination, violence, and cultural and spatial fragmentation and marginalization. Since their inception as slaves valued for the productive function of their bodies and the reproduction of free labor for slave owners, black women have been central to the reconstitution of the black family and kinship networks, the recreation of the spiritual and cultural world, and in remembering the social fabric through home place-making (8).

However the perpetuation of the irrelevance of black women in society also occurs within black culture. The gender based division of labor since colonial times has contributed to sexism today. According to Lozano and Peñaranda: "The division of labor by gender subjugates black women into two or three working shifts... It is also lamentable that black men treat their women violently and aggressively. Physical and psychological abuses are common just because 'she is my woman'" (2007: 721). In other words, women become an object.

Also Afrocolombian women writers and artists are not recognized. Afrocolombian poets, María Teresa Ramírez, Edelma Zapata Pérez, and Mary Grueso Romero (Krakusin, 2007), have an extensive trajectory in Colombian poetry. Their work reflexes the double marginalization –sexism and racism– that Afrocolombian women suffer in daily life. Poetry becomes a

tool against subordination. These writers are the voice of many black women who feel oppressed, but their work is unknown by Colombian citizens.

One of the main tasks of Afrocolombian women is to join in a communal project demanding equal treatment and respect. Also the discussion about racism and sexism needs to include both men and women.

The women's struggle is supported by the feminist movement. However, when Afrocolombian women look for support within the feminist movement "The feminist movement has trouble in recognizing the diversity of women and does not propose racism as an issue in its arguments" (Lozano and Peñaranda, 2007: 719). The most affected women in the disparities in Colombian society are blacks, and indigenous. Racism and sexism impact the global economy because the most important decisions concerning economics and politics are usually made by white males. "The gender and ethnic inequality of economic globalization looks at black and indigenous communities as the ones that possess cultural and natural resources that can be taken for the benefit of the global economy" (Lozano and Peñaranda, 2007: 721). It is not a coincidence that the richest areas in natural resources in the world have the poorest usually black and indigenous communities.

The struggle against sexism is seen as a threat by the Afrocolombian Social Movement. Afrocolombian males see the feminist movement as a distraction for succeeding as a whole group in the fight for equal rights, and cultural identity (Asher, 2007). With the approval of Law 70 in 1993, Afrocolombian women on the Pacific coast became more engaged and active in their organization as part of an economic force supporting Afrocolombian families. This engagement was reflected in various cooperatives such as "Coop Mujeres" –Women's Cooperative– and "Fedemujer" (Women's federation). According to Asher (2007), these women who brought more income to their homes, felt more respected from their husbands or partners (22). In the search for respect and identity, Afrocolombian women also became a key piece in organizing and administering meetings, budget and solving last minute issues, but their "behind the scene" work is not valued by Afrocolombian males.

In conclusion, black women in Colombia need to reinforce their organizations and to mobilize in order to become more visible and effective in the process of resistance. By confronting racism and sexism through dis-

cussion within the Afrocolombian Social Movement, black women would become more visible and would achieve equality in the political arena.

Finding ways to a better means of living requires hard work and political negotiation to have legal representation. The results of the hard work were reflected in the Constitutional Reform in 1991.

The Policies of Multiculturalism: The Constitutional Reform of 1991

After many years of work, the Afrocolombians finally were recognized by the Colombian government as a unique ethnic group in a multicultural country. The Constitutional reform was a success for Afrocolombians. The first achievement was the creation of transitory article 55, to protect the lands of blacks and indigenous peoples on the Pacific Coast. This law was provisional, but two years later the government made it official with the creation of Law 70 in 1993. This achievement was the result of the hard work for many years of the “Comisión Especial de Comunidades Negras” (Special Commission of Black Communities) (see Arocha).

Law 70 was created to promote equality among the different ethnic groups in Colombia and to recognize the uniqueness of some cultures such as the Afrocolombians. The law is composed of eight chapters and sixty five articles. Law 70 defines black communities as: “The group of families of Afrocolombian descent that possesses its own culture; shares a common history and has its own traditions and customs with a rural-urban setting, and that reveals and preserves a consciousness of identity that distinguishes it from other ethnic groups” (Law 70, 1993).

Law 70 promises equal opportunities for Afrocolombians in various areas. For example, in chapter II, article 3 of the present law is based on the following principles:

- Recognition and protection of ethnic and cultural diversity, and equal rights for all cultures that compose the Colombian nationality.
- Respect for the integrity and dignity of the Black Communities’ cultural life.

- Participation of the Black Communities and their organizations, without detriment to their autonomy, in decisions that affect them and in those that affect the entire nation in conformity with the law.
- The protection of the environment, emphasizing the relationships established by the Black Communities and nature.

Chapter V, article 32 states that:

The Colombian State recognizes and guarantees the Black Communities the right to an education in accordance with their needs and their ethnic and cultural aspirations.

It is also important to note that this Law is oriented to protect cultural values and traditions. In order for them to remain competitive, it is imperative to provide black communities with the same standards of education as all other ethnic groups. Article 36 states:

Education for black communities must develop general knowledge and skills that will assist them in participating fully and equally in the activities of their local and national communities.

Article 38 states:

The members of the Black Communities must have access to means of technical, technological, and professional training that will place them on equal footing with other citizens [...]

The Afrocolombians are protected and guaranteed by law access to the same standard of living as other Colombians, but there is a division among people from African descent who do not identify themselves as Afrocolombians. This identity crisis is due to the lack of information about Africa and its influence in Colombian culture. Westernized educational methods deny the importance and the influence that the African diaspora brought to the Americas. For this reason the Afrocolombian Social Movement was fighting to have a different teaching-learning method according to the reality that Afrocolombians were living. In its efforts to promote a different kind of education, some laws were approved and *etnoeducación* became the ideal form for teaching Colombians the diversity that the country possesses.

Etnoeducación: A Tool Against Marginalization and Afrocolombian Self Identification

Etnoeducación has an excellent potential for transforming perceptions of identity. *Etnoeducación* opposes traditional ways of teaching history, and breaks a legacy of abandonment by the government. *Etnoeducación* has been used by the Afrocolombian Social Movement to correct and improve the overall perception of the black community. This way of teaching is performed by *etnoeducadores*.

The term *etnoeducadores* will be used here when referring to people who act as tutors or teachers promoting multiculturalism and diversity in Colombia. *Etnoeducación* is considered as the methodology for these teachings. According to the Colombian Department of Education *etnoeducación* is a policy to promote diversity:

The objective of this policy is to establish intercultural education in all public and private schools in order that children and families understand that the Afrocolombian, indigenous, and gypsy cultures are part of our national roots... At the same time, this policy looks for the development of an education that responds to the needs and expectations of the different ethnic groups, developing cultural identity, intercultural relations, and multilingualism.

The concept of *etnoeducación* was first used in the 1980s when the Black Social Movement did an analysis of education in Colombia. They determined that it was necessary to develop a different kind of education: an education for identity and an education that generated a sense of belonging. This was the departure point for *etnoeducación* facilitated by the deep crisis that Colombia was experiencing around the 1980s. In Hernández' words:

In the 1980s, the country was having a crisis of legitimacy of the Nation, a crisis of the political parties, and a general social crisis; this crisis was the result, among many others, of the violence that was affecting Colombia at that time. (Personal communication May 21st, 2008).

The crisis created the opportunity for social movements to join efforts and to participate in a new process striving for democracy. Another important element in the origins of *etnoeducación* was a micro crisis affecting the cultural history of the black population in Colombia.

According to the Afrocolombian Social Movement, in the 1980's education was far away from the reality that the country and black communities were living; it was very distant from the traditional African roots. Education was one that made blacks feel ashamed of their language, traditions, and culture. The education did not have room for pluralism. According to Hernández, the narrow way of education generated uprooting, identity loss, and cultural alienation. From this analysis, the social movements started to develop a plan for a new kind of education that would allow people to go back to their roots, to be proud of their ethnicity and to recuperate their identity. Some specific work was done through art, and many ethnic groups such as "Ataoles" and "Casimbas Negras" utilized artistic expression as a way to recover the sense of belonging. Of note was the educational project developed in Palenque de San Basilio. The plan took advantage of some new projects within the Ministry of Education to promote native language and traditions. It is important to highlight that Palenque de San Basilio is one of the few places in Colombia that preserves its African roots. They speak their own language called Palenquero, which derives from African languages.

The 1980s were important in creating awareness and it was the starting point in gaining official recognition for all the work that was done by the Black social movement for more than ten years, but the 1990s are recognized as the golden decade for Afrocolombians.

The 1990s were more successful. It was in 1991 that social movements not just on the Pacific or Caribbean coasts, but at the national level became participants on the Constitutional reform. It was in that year that transitory article 55 was approved and then Law 70 was passed two years later in 1993 making *etnoeducación* mandatory in all schools in Colombia, public and private. Hernández pointed out that:

With the Law 70 a new dynamic begins for *etnoeducación*, which was institutionalized and it was crystallized when an invitation was opened for people who wanted to join the process as *etnoeducadores* (Personal communication, May 21st, 2008).

The learning process continues. Hernández stresses the importance of developing an ethnic-education process based on historical and cultural background. He expressed: "Etnoeducación must acknowledge the roots of

African culture. The term Afrocolombian is our identifier as descendents of African culture which nurtures from the most ancient communities that succeeded on their world view of freedom. We have to learn about the cultures of the African continent.” Hernández talked about the importance of the different components of the African culture including spiritual, material, and institutional facets, and the need to clarify that black culture is more than dance and music, and it contains stronger elements:

We vindicate our music, our religiosity, our mythology, and we vindicate our worldwide view, but our ancient culture has important material components such as technical production including the different agricultural practices, handicrafts, etc... and those practices have a physical and a geographical space where we live in and a natural habitat where we practice our culture. (Personal communication, May 21st, 008).

The lack of knowledge about the African continent is mentioned by Friedemann (1993), who stated that the omission of Africa in educational programs in Colombia, denied to our society a real knowledge about Africa and its peoples. She also mentioned the disadvantage that South America had in front of other parts of the world, because scholarly documents were usually released in languages different than Spanish. This knowledge is more available now, and *etnoeducación* was created with the objective of promulgating this history.

In 1994, Law 115 was passed making *etnoeducación* officially integrated into the educational system. One of the most important achievements was the creation of the “Afrocolombian studies class” which is mandatory in elementary and secondary school.” (Mosquera, 2007, p. 128) The implementation of this class has been slow and haphazard. The Afrocolombian studies were created in order to increase tolerance and understanding among the various ethnic groups. But people misunderstand that this is only for black communities. Arocha (2004) clearly explains:

The purpose of this class, implies a complete restructure of the educational system, because is not a class for only black people. It is an instrument for auto-representation aiming to increase ethnic tolerance and inclusion. (169).

People devoted to promote the Afrocolombian studies are called *etnoeducadores*. According to the law new job opportunities must be created for *etnoeducadores*, but these are often underfunded and the reality is that many teachers work voluntarily without payment. The school system is not supporting the implementation of ethnic studies, and the government is neglecting the distribution of materials for *etnoeducación*. During the celebration of Afrocolombian week in May 2008 in Cartagena, there was a rally in support of *etnoeducadores* and the necessity of hiring them officially by the school system.

In communities where *etnoeducadores* are not available, their role is played by a community leader. Passing traditions and teaching through oral tradition is important to *etnoeducación*. Oral tradition plays a significant role in Afrocolombian culture. It is through oral tradition and oral history that Afrocolombian culture maintains continuity generation through generation. It is through dialogue that Afrocolombians solve their conflicts and internal affairs. For all these reasons, Afrocolombians need to recover and reaffirm their cultural background in order to elevate themselves. The linking of *Etnoeducación* and the development of black communities is called *etnodesarrollo* (ethnic-development). This way of development or *Etnodesarrollo* must agree with the local and cultural identity. The Afrocolombian Social Movement opposes to the westernization imposed to Colombians by the globalization process.

In the process of education it is important to remember that Colombia is a multicultural country. Another element derives from the relationship between *etnoeducación* and the dialogue with other racial groups: intercultural relations. According to Hernández:

Etnoeducación allows us to be more tolerant with other ethnic groups, additionally, through *etnoeducación* and intercultural relations the process of democracy is easier. Cross-cultural relations can be the main tool for a real democracy. (Personal communication, May 21st, 2008).

Here Hernández points to democracy as the path to equal treatment and participation for Afrocolombians.

Etnoeducación is a pedagogic method understood as the relation between the teaching-learning practice used by the African ancestors. *Etnoeducación* supports the concept of *justicia ancestral* (“justice of the ancestors”), and the importance of the community. As an example of the teaching-learning method, Hernández pointed out the case of Palenque de San Basilio where Batata, a local leader, taught farmers, women, and children how to live in a community through a socialization process. This way Afrocolombians recover their culture: through oral history, meeting with the elders, and listening to story tellers. According to Hernández:

Pedagogy has to be linked to the territory, we cannot teach just for teaching, we have to value and love our territory, and from that love and appreciation of our land, we are going to defend it. (Personal communication).

He also mentioned that Afrocolombians cannot be easily persuaded to sell their land for crumbs to those who try to sell them a capitalistic concept of development in order to exploit their natural resources.

Unfortunately some people are forced to sell their lands in order to survive. Learning about the importance of the relationship between territory and culture is crucial for Afrocolombians. It is for this reason that *etnoeducación* plays an essential role beyond the classroom; it has to go beyond the school and the university, into the communities. All the concepts learned in the classroom must transfer to the community. The responsibilities of *etnoeducadores* include research and a total involvement with the people. Community involvement is crucial in this process, as the learning of traditions and history will encourage people to protect and value the land they live in.

Learning about their own culture is very important, but Afrocolombians also need to be aware of the diversity that Colombia encompasses. In order to facilitate *etnoeducación*, two questions need to be answered: 1. Who are the Afrocolombians? 2. What do Afrocolombians have in common with other ethnic groups?

Afrocolombians need to discover who they are and to recognize their African heritage. After a profound understanding of their own identity they will be able to acknowledge similarities with other ethnic groups

developing the concept of cross-cultural relations. The most important point initially is to acknowledge, appreciate, and value their-own cultural heritage. This will instill pride and the self confidence to work on intercultural relations.

Etnoeducación has to highlight that Afro-Colombian heritage goes beyond music and dance; it has to acknowledge the contributions of the Africans to the world. Among these contributions, Hernández mentioned the mathematics and engineering of the Egyptians.

We contributed also to science and that has to be taught. We need to learn African history, in that way, we are going to understand better who the Egyptians were. With a world-view, and understanding of the Chinese history and Asian history, etc, it is proven that this kind of pedagogic global view helps us to understand better our local knowledge (Hernandez' lecture, May 21st, 2008).

A global point of view will allow *etnoeducadores* to help Afrocolombians to clarify their role in the world. In order to transmit that knowledge there must be a curriculum that matches the broad expectations of *etnoeducación*. The ethno-curriculum needs to be developed according to the local territory. The process should also be dynamic because Afrocolombian culture has changed throughout history. The curriculum needs to be updated according to the present times. It is here where collective memory plays a critical role on keeping this knowledge updated. The collective memory is recreated by locals who through story-telling and communal activities pass traditional customs generation by generation. The learning project has to be done collectively. Ultimately, Afrocolombians will be able to find what they have, what they lost, and what they can recover. Collective memory technique allows *etnoeducadores* to be interactive with the people.

History books cannot provide the dynamic interactive approach that is needed. Hernández added:

The collective memory method understands that the community is the object of the research, it is the research's source, and it is the subject of the research.

And he explains that it is the object because the community does a self analysis, it is the source because the community possesses the knowledge and transfers that knowledge, and it is the subject because the knowledge of that research must return to the community in its own benefit. This knowledge must return to the community and be part of their global project of life. The implementation of *etnoeducación* must be one of the main goals for the Afrocolombian Social Movement in order to gain more recognition.

Conclusions

The Afrocolombian Social Movement has great potential to create equal participation in socio-politics. The enthusiasm that characterized the social movement in the 1990s needs to be recovered. Working on the concepts of multiculturalism and diversity has to be a priority. *Etnoeducación* is a vital approach for teaching diversity and propagating the information required to advance the Afrocolombian Movement. Working on the implementation of the “Cátedra de Estudios Afrocolombianos” (Afrocolombian Studies) is vital for the learning process.

Another issue that needs to be addressed is the myriad organizations involved in the fight for equal rights for Afrocolombians. It is necessary to unite these organizations in order to become stronger. By uniting, the social movement will regain the power that was diluted due to the complex problems that black communities have faced. Collectivism will lead to success.

Collectivism means including Afrocolombian women within the social movement. Women have to become more visible in their process of resistance. They need to be stronger in the fight against racism and sexism. These topics need to be addressed through discussion. Afrocolombian women must claim equal participation in the political arena where the most important decisions are made. It is important to remember that alliances among women regardless of their ethnic background would be helpful in this struggle. Women need to organize, because all of them are under-represented in politics, education, and economics. Additionally, Afrocolombian women need to continue working closely with their children in order to maintain cultural traditions.

Another important goal for the Afrocolombian Social Movement is to work with universities and educational institutions on the diversity issue. Because economic resources are scarce, it would be ideal to organize informal groups with faculty members and students in order to open up discussion on racism, discrimination, sexism, and multiculturalism. Implementing the policies on *etnoeducación* will help in confronting these issues.

Finally, the Afrocolombian Social Movement needs to work closely with the mass media, newspapers, magazines, and television to promote events that support multiculturalism, and to become more visible. Mass media portrays Colombians in an Europeanized way, but the struggle continues. Changing the way that Afrocolombians are portrayed is urgent.

The Afrocolombian Social Movement needs to keep on working against marginalization, poverty, and fighting for equal socio-politic opportunities.

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