Decolonizing Images and Representations about Africa and Its Descendants – The Case of Central America and Costa Rica

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Introduction

In this essay, we briefly discuss some of the dominant paradigms in the field of African Studies, as well as some of the challenges facing the field in the current situation in Central America in general and in Costa Rica in particular. Academic representations and perceptions about Africa and their descendants have been guided by ideological frameworks and the specific political agendas of the time and place in which they occurred as well as the forces of power that must be considered to overcome the colonized perceptions that still prevail today.

The Space and Its People

Central America is a region formed by seven countries: Guatemala, Belize, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama, which have different histories in their formation as independent states. From the mid-16th century until 1821, most of the territory was under the control of Spain, divided into three different colonial political spaces: Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica were provinces of the Kingdom of Guatemala that was attached to the Viceroyalty of New Spain, today Mexico. Panama was part of what is today Colombia. Belize and the Caribbean coast of Nicaragua were under British hegemony, which ended in 1981 and 1894 respectively.

Legally, the Spanish colonial state divided society in two social groups, the Indigenous and the Spanish Republics, which were separated from each other by specific laws for each, and by labor regulations and taxes.

The colonial state was a corporate system that assigned certain geographical spaces to Indigenous and Spanish people, organized urban life in guilds, and created a series of mechanisms so that the highest positions of the religious and administrative hierarchy could be accessed only by Spaniards born in Spain and the Creoles (descendants of Spaniards born in America).

In the mid-16th century, the Kingdom of Castile, Spain, occupied the territory of dozens of Indigenous states with varying degrees of pre-existing scientific and economic progress. After a few years of occupation, changes in production patterns and the impact of diseases and wars led to a demographic catastrophe that affected the region unevenly: some regions had losses of more than 90 % of the population. Those states that had greater negotiating capacity, such as Quiches and Cakchiquel, were able to manage the output of labor demanded by the new authorities for mining and agriculture, but those whose military force was significantly inferior to the Spanish experienced a more serious depopulation, as can be seen in Figure 1.

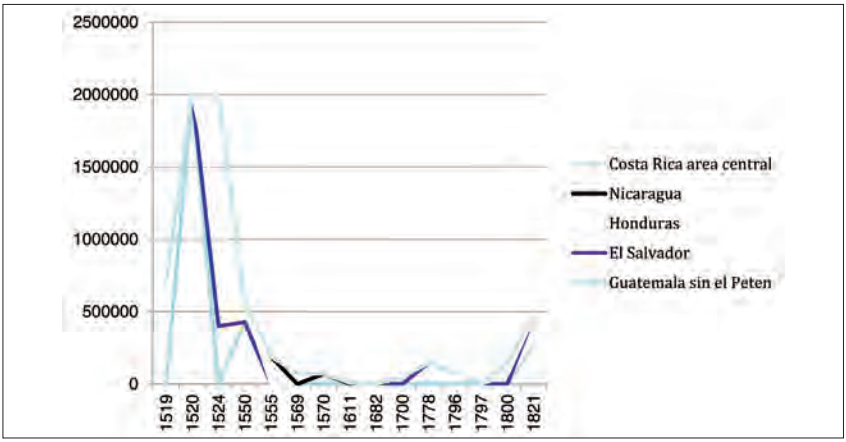

Figure 1: Demographic decline of the Indigenous population (Kramer et al. 1993: 80-81)

From this dramatic episode arose arguments about the *heroicity* of the past Indigenous populations and the strength of the Spanish cultural heritage in the present contemporary identity.

However, it was in this context of a dwindling labor force that the economic potential of the region was seen. Honduras, Nicaragua, and Pana-

ma began to recruit enslaved workers from Africa for mining through an international network which Patrick Manning has called a global system of labor (Manning 1996). Plantations for sugar in Guatemala, indigo in El Salvador, and cocoa in Costa Rica, as well as the construction of military forts in the region also demanded involuntary workers.[1] The areas of origin of these African workers were the Wolof and Mandinka, in West Africa, as well as the Akan, Igbo, and Ibibio, although the majority came from the Kongo and Angola regions. They also arrived from the south of Spain, which had been connected to North Africa for centuries.

Strong legislation regulated all social and personal relationships. Extreme physical and emotional violence, such as the norms derived from the *Partus sequitur ventrem* law, which stated that the condition of slavery was inherited from mothers to children, had dramatic consequences in the evolution of the experience of Africans and their descendants in Hispanic America.[2]

Already in the 17th century, we find in Central America, as in many places in Hispanic America, a large number of free descendants of Africans. The Spanish Empire did not have full control of all of its territories, nor of all the social spaces. There were mechanisms to avoid enslavement: individual flight, collective insurrections, and the purchase of freedom.

By the middle of the 17th century, we find important communities of black and mixed free populations in the whole region, integrated in brotherhoods, militias, as colonists, merchants, producers, tailors, blacksmiths, carpenters, weavers, shoemakers, service employees, etc., the majority of them not going through the experience of enslavement. Examples of those towns are San Felipe de Austria in León and San Andrés in Villa del Realejo, both in Nicaragua, and Nuestra Señora de los Angeles in Costa Rica, to name just a few.[3]

The concentration of the population of African origin influenced the payment of taxes. Authorities had ordered in 1574 that the descendants of free Africans who had land and wealth should pay taxes because *it was*

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[1] For the experience of slavery in the region, see McLeod 1973; Gudmundson 1978; Lutz 1982; Leiva 1982; Cáceres Gómez 2000; Velásquez 2001; Gudmundson/Wolfe 2010; Lokken 2013; Lohse 2014.

[2] These laws were derived from Alfonso X Partidas by Alfonso X, King of Castile in the 13th century. See Cabrera Lobo 1993 and de la Fuente 2010.

[3] Archivo General de Indias, Guatemala 43. N49. See also Molina Arguello 1962.

customary in their land, referring to Africa.[4] From there, a series of laws specified the assignment of the population of African origin to the Spanish Republic and not to the Indigenous ones, which continued throughout the whole colonial period in the Spanish colonial corpus.

In the next century, the militia was a space of social mobility in Central America, as in the rest of Latin America. The descendants of the first Africans were incorporated into militias and specific units were created in Guatemala, Nicaragua, Costa Rica and Panama, and some of their members even occupied authority positions. The lack of men of Spanish origin for militia service was a bargaining chip used by Afro-descendants to negotiate exemptions from tax payments while they were in service. During the 18th century, the descendants of these Africans spoke Spanish, were Catholics, and paid taxes.

The importance of Africans in the demographic recovery of the region can be seen through examples from Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama throughout the colonial period, as shown in Figures 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7.

It is possible to verify that in the middle of the Indigenous demographic decline the demographic group that had the largest growth was that of the African's descendants.

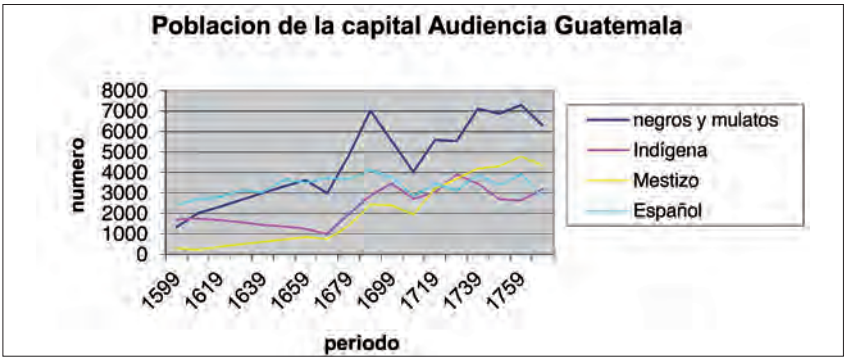

Figure 2: Population of the capital of the Kingdom of Guatemala (now Antigua Guatemala) (based on the data of Lutz 1982)

[4] The text says "por vivir en nuestras tierras y ser mantenidos en ellas en paz y justicia […] y porque así mismo en sus naturalezas tenían costumbre de pagar a sus reyes y señores tributos y en mucha cantidad, con justo y derecho título se les puede pedir que nos le paguen y que éste (tributo) fuese de un marco de plata en cada un año." (Konetzke 1958: 482).

Meanwhile, as Rubio Sánchez points out, in the port of El Realejo on the Pacific of Nicaragua, the most important in the province, 80 % of the population were Afro-descendants in the mid-18th century, while 60 % of the population was in Rivas, the main area of cocoa production, as we see in Figure 3.

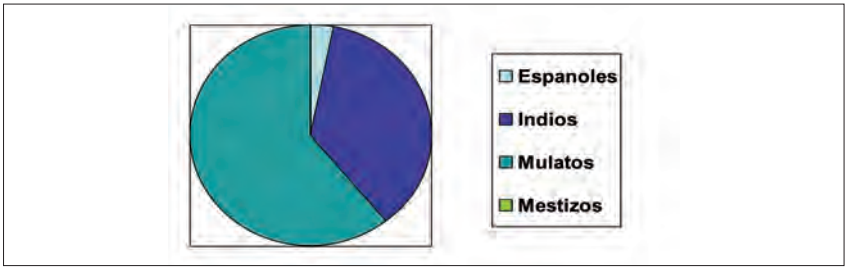

Figure 3: Baptisms in Rivas, Nicaragua, 1811-1821
(Rubio Sánchez 1975, Anexo demográfico)

In El Salvador the situation was not very different; Indigenous people composed only 43 % of the population, which is evidence of the importance of African contributions in the demographic recovery of the region, as shown in Figure 4.

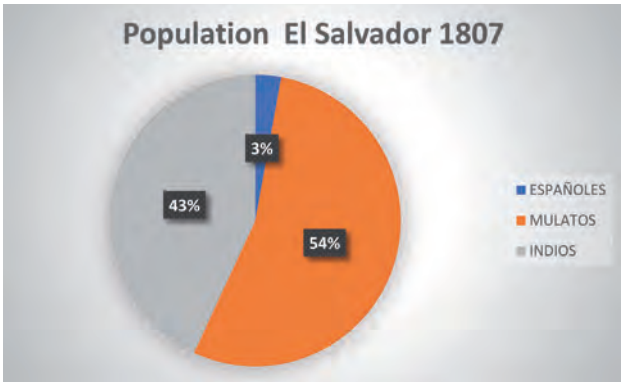

Figure 4 (based on the data of Heriberto Erquicia and Herrera 2017)

In Costa Rica, although the distribution of the population was clearly differentiated by region, 26 % of the population of the capital at Cartago was descended from Africans, while in the Pacific economic area, Esparza, they constituted 82 % of the population, as Figures 5 and 6 show.

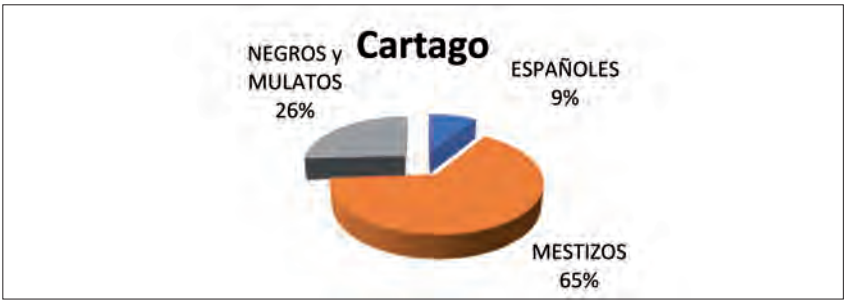

Figure 5 (based on the data of Pérez Brignoli 1988: 8)

Figure 6 (based on the data of Pérez Brignoli 1988: 8)

In Panama, the bridge that united the Atlantic with the Pacific, the importance of the population of African origin was even greater; 77 % of the total recorded in 1610 were African descendants, as can be seen in Figure 7.

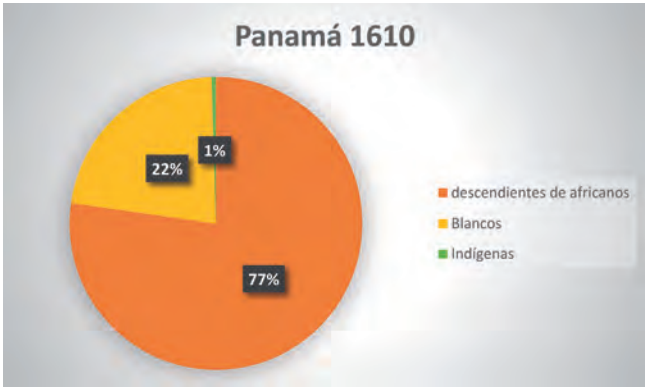

Figure 7 (based on the data of Castillero Calvo 1969)

These examples show that the demographic recovery of the Central American region during the Spanish colonial period was, in large part, due to the African contribution. Most of those towns were located in the Pacific area where the main Hispanic colonial cities were located, and not on the Caribbean as is usually believed.

The New States and New Ideologies about Africa and Africans at the End of the 19th Century

By 1821, after having achieved independence from Spain, new states were articulated and went through a series of political rearrangements until the second half of the 19th century, when each one more or less achieved the form it has today. Before the end of the first half of the 19th century, slavery was abolished in the region. At the end of the century, these states began defining the limits of the nation: territory, population, language, and religion. And the dominant narratives defined their societies in the singular, as white and/or *mestizo*(understood as the mixture of Spanish and Indian) societies, with a single language, some with a glorious Indigenous past, but all with a single historical experience inspired by the Spanish epic. They removed the Indigenous republics from political power and erased the Afro-descendants' legal recognition, delegitimating both from the new social order.

New laws and strategies were developed to promote the economic development of the region and place the different economies in the international economy guided by the ideals of progress and modernity. At the end of the 19th century, the New States turned to England, France, and Germany for capital and technology.

The construction of railways, the Panama Canal, and banana production were the points of investment with international capital. Alongside these investments, local and regional economies grew around abaca, fisheries, and cocoa. These trends resulted in one of the largest migrations in the region between 1870 and 1913, this time by African descendants from the Caribbean islands to the continental Caribbean of Central America, as shown in Figure 8.

In the first decades of the 20th century, more than 200,000 people came to Central America in the framework of these large-scale investments that placed the region at the centre of the new capitalist node, stimulating the construction of urban infrastructure: streets, aqueducts, sewers, lighting, theaters, offices, etc.

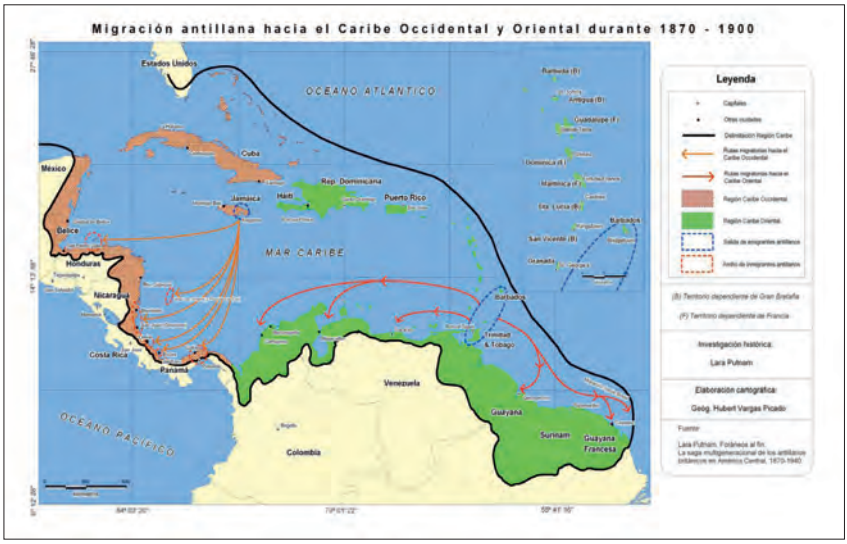

Figure 8 (Putnam 2011: 24)

Opportunities for the West Indian migrant workers improved with the transformation of the transport system. As Pérez and Hall have indicated, in the mid-19th century, the introduction of the steamboat changed spatial relationships dramatically: distances and prices shrank. That would explain, for example, the intense maritime movement of the United Fruit Company and the Royal Netherland West India Mail Steamship (Hall / Pérez Brignoli 2003: 201-202).

Large-scale banana production established the region as one of the largest producers in the world. In addition, writers, nurses, teachers, religious clerics, railway operators, telegraph operators, and accountants arrived in the region who enriched the professional world of the countries.

A network was created that linked the Caribbean region to New Orleans and New York; this network included Jamaica, Barbados, Cuba, Trinidad, Tobago, and Haiti, and on the Caribbean mainland, the ports of Colón and Bocas del Toro in Panama, Limon in Costa Rica, Bluefields and San Juan del Norte in Nicaragua, Puerto Cortes and La Ceiba in Honduras, and Puerto Barrios in Guatemala. To this mosaic of English-speaking, Protestant influence must be added the strong African Akan tradition that survives in the continuation of the tales of Anansi. Later on, these tales were supplemented by tales from workers immigrating from India and China.

By the late 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, Jamaica was the focal point for the region's inhabitants, whether they were from an African, European, or mixed cultural tradition. Kingston had been influential since the 18th century as the spearhead of the British presence in the region and the base of operations of international capital with financial and labor networks through which investments and labor arrived on the basis of the long experience and communication of 200 years of British occupation in the Caribbean Sea.

Anti-black legislation

Soon, however, the stimulus to this migration would see its limits. As we have said, at the end of the 19th century, and coinciding with European expansion in Africa and Asia, the national states of Latin America had begun to redefine the terms of their identities. The image that the European travelers transmitted spoke of mixed-blood Central American elites, children of Indians, Europeans, and Africans. The reengineering of the memory of the region's past would have disastrous consequences later on.

Since the 19th century, the official historiographical narrative had begun to define societies as 'white' or as 'mestizo' – extolling the Spanish contribution, minimizing the Indigenous component, and denying any African contribution. And as in other parts of the world, the 'whiter,' the closer to the European ideal, the more 'civilized.' So, when it came to visualizing and reconstructing the past, many of the details outlined in the first part of this article were actively made to disappear.

The 19th century liberal ideologies had opted to establish whiteness of the population as a whole, undermining the demands of different cultural groups. Different social groups assumed slogans of order and progress. The liberal discourse held that both the elites and the popular classes belonged to a single family that was white, European, civilized, and hence 'better.' The 'others' were qualified as 'uncivilized', 'conflictive', and 'uneducated.' To the ideology of order, progress, homeland, and identity would be added a racial ideology, of 'whitening,' which nullified the origins of different groups, their achievements, and social mobility, as Darío Euraque, Diana Senior and Ronald Soto have shown (cf. Putnam 2010; Euraque 1996; Euraque 2004; Quirós 2008; Senior 2011).

What happened in Central America can be seen in the detailed study of Lara Putnam. At the end of the 1920s, the governments of the Central

American region declared black immigration illegal on the explicit basis of race. And they put in place legal sanctions to limit the Afro-Caribbean entry and even expelled some of the second- or third-generation residents (Putnam 2011: 29-30; cf. also Euraque 2011: 58, 67).

In Guatemala and Nicaragua, the immigration of "black race" was illegal unless a special entry fee was paid. A few years later, Chinese, Arabs, Syrians, Armenians, Gypsies, and Indian 'coolies' were added to this regulation. El Salvador would do its counterpart in the same decade (Putnam 2010: 289).

In Honduras, new laws restricted the employment of black immigrants, and two years later they were added to the list of "restricted races" and forced to offer a deposit of $2,500 to enter the country, which was maintained until a few decades ago. In Panama, a mostly Afro-descendant country, a restrictive law was issued in 1926 to "blacks whose native language is not Spanish" and a list of "undesirable" races was also included. In 1941, a new constitution stripped the children of Afro-Caribbean immigrants born after 1928 of their Panamanian nationality (Putnam 2010: 290).

According to Putnam, one of the ideological bases of this legislation was instituted in 1927 in the first Pan American Conference on Eugenics and Homiculture, held in Havana and convened by the Cuban eugenic doctor, Domingo Ramos, and by Charles Davenport, head of the Eugenics Record Office of the Carnegie Institute (Putnam 2010: 292).

In the 1930s, deputies in Costa Rica limited Afro-Caribbean immigration, using the criterion that a possible "mixture" of races would be a threat to public health. This debate reached the media where it was argued that the national space should be protected by closing the borders and proposing a geographic segregation of the Caribbean people already settled in Costa Rica. Thus, the press and the popular voice identified a Zurquí tunnel and the city of Turrialba as references of that division, imaginary borders which can be found even today in popular thought. Turrialba popularly has been seen as the limit between the "black lowlands" and the "white highlands." Informal violence, concludes Putnam, followed the alleged spatial segregation within the Costa Rican territory and has left permanent scars in the collective memory of the region (Putnam 2010: 299). In 1942, "the black race" was included in the list of "undesirable races," with the "Chinese, Arabs, Turks, Syrians, Gypsies, and coolies," which had been banned already for a long time (Putnam 2010: 289-290).

This legislation, in contrast to what happened during the colonial period, excluded the descendants of Africans from the national ethos, leaving them on the "margins" of the definition of its territorial and symbolic social geography.

It is for those decades that the figure of Marcus Garvey – a black nationalist and Pan-Africanist will occupy a special place in the social movement of African origin in Panama, Costa Rica, and Belize.

Meanwhile, the First World War and the Depression of the 1930s left the North American economy in crisis, causing secondary crises in the economies of the region, particularly felt in the Caribbean Central America, as a result of the heavy dependence on banana exports by the national economy, up to 50 % in some countries (Putnam 2010: 291-296).

Images and Representations in Textbooks

In a review of the textbooks used in the region in the last two decades, we observe that there is a transversal axis in all of America on which the image of Africa circulates. In most of those narratives that have been used in a traditional historiographical perspective, the organization of the colonial Spanish period was explained through a so-called "social pyramid." In it, the Peninsular people occupied the upper stratum and the "blacks" the lowest one, and in the middle, it is argued, were the mestizos and below them the Indians. This social pyramid erases the term Africa or descendants of Africans, and replaces the identifications with the word blacks, or slaves, as synonyms in most cases. It shows a static image of colonial society and the ideological fiction that there were no poor Spanish peasants, nor social mobility among the descendants of Africans.

Figure 9, presented below, is often used as a basis of analysis of the social complexity present during the 300 years of colonial rule and, in the absence of more information about what happened, it is often used to explain the present.

These representations place the situation of people of African descent in the lowest echelon of society, as victims, without the possibility of agency or socio-economic and political mobility. This image completely ignores people who fought for freedom and were liberated from slavery during that same period, and that there were communities of Afro-descendants who ventured into business, cocoa farming, livestock production, and services, without ever being in slavery. Some of them achieved a

social position and acquired capital in the colonial period which allowed them to build hospitals and churches, while others owned haciendas and land, had captain and lieutenant titles, and had the right to carry arms despite the prohibitions, as we said earlier (Cáceres Gómez 2000: 90).

Figure 9: Quiros, A. (2010) *Fichas de Estudios Sociales para Secundaria 3er ciclo, 8vo año*. - Primera edición - San José, Costa Rica.: Litografía e Imprenta LIL. p. 118 und grafico poblacion

Africans and their descendants are presented as subdued and degraded, unable to articulate strategies of resistance or mobility. That fallacy about identities continues to be repeated and studied as a truth in most of the American continent. This has been created by the fiction that the phenotype is an economic and cultural marker associated with categories of subordination.

Therefore, the answers given to a question made to random groups of teachers in Central America in the framework of the *Del Olvido a la Memoria* project – which will be discussed later – is consistent with that narrative and should not be surprising.

The question, part of a broader questionnaire of ten items, was intended to assess the knowledge that teachers and their immediate social environment had about the history of the descendants of Africans.[5] The survey respondents consisted of a random sample of 30 primary and secondary teachers in each Central American country excluding Belize (see Table 1 below).

Table 1

Question:
What is the image of Africa that you believe people have in their minds?

Answers:
- Negative
- Only blacks.
- The place where the *punta* originated (dance)
- A country full of poverty, famine and lack of development possibilities, full of conflicts
- Only blacks and animals
- Only black people poorly fed or mentally disabled people
- Where poverty reigns
- Horror, malnutrition, discrimination
- Poverty, sadness, ignorance
- Backward country
- The continent of creation but also is presented as the poorest continent
- First civilization
- The worst because they only show us the negative side
- They are slave people still
- The cradle of all human beings
- Continent with diversity of flora and fauna.

[5] The surveys were held in each workshop that was made prior to the delivery and explanation of the contents of the collection of the fascicles *Del Olvido to the Memory* between 2010 and 2014. We created it as an instrument to visualize weaknesses and strengths of the teachers prior to the holding of every workshop.

- Multicultural.
- Environmental problems
- A poor nation with little racial education
- Poverty, malnutrition or famine, underdevelopment
- Where nobody is overcome because they do not believe in God
- Is the country where slaves came from or emerged

Images and Representations of Africa at the Popular Level

These images do not differ from other images transmitted in television programs and children's stories with familiar parallelisms between the African descendant and the animals and the jungle. Examples are the images of "Looney Tunes" and "Merri Melodies" which were originally transmitted on television and widespread during the second half of the 20th century, marking the lives of generations of children and young people, now adults. At least eleven of those cartoons were censored in the mid-1960s, but in many countries some of them with similar images are still being transmitted and reproduced.

The *Africa Squeaks* series, for example, in which the African continent is presented as backward and as an object of ridicule, presents the main character with animal and 'tribal' features. This 'fictionalized' image of African descendants fed on the ideas left by the Blackface in the American continent and the human zoos in the European case, all of them in the times of the colonial occupation of Africa.

Some of these images were recreated in children's literature, as in the Cocorí short story written by Joaquín Gutiérrez Mangel, the children's best-selling book from Central America and originally published in Chile in 1947. Its content has inspired artists in various countries, where it has been released to present an image on its cover and in the text their own interpretation of the story, such as the one shown below, in Figure 10, of the 1985 edition in Bulgaria. This image of the Cocorí character recalls Inki, the African child of the television fables who appears dressed in a loincloth, bracelets, earrings, and a bone in his head.

The contents of the story, the analysis of which is outside the scope of this paper, was legally confronted in the Court of Justice through an appeal for protection by two African descendant children who argued that

after reading the story in class they had begun to be subjected to teasing from their classmates.[6]

The ruling issued by the Constitutional Chamber in 1996, which is still enforced today, reflects the vision about the descendants of Africans prevalent in the decade of the 1990s. Some paragraphs provide an example:

Figure 10 (Gutiérrez 1985: 11)

> [N]owadays, if a person of white race travels to some place in Africa, where there are only tribes that have no contact with the outside world, the members of those tribes are usually surprised, and quite possibly even get scared if they see a blue-eyed blond arriving by any means of transport […] This Chamber does not consider that there is any discriminatory element in the book "Cocorí". Moreover, it is a book that – within the historical context […] – tries to highlight the virtues of a race that at that time was still condemned by the remnants of slavery, a time full of cruelties and that produced many sufferings and vexations not only to the black race, but also to the indigenous and mestizo race, among others. The character of Cocorí does

[6] The appeal provoked a heated debate in 1996, 2003, and 2015 about whether it should be compulsory reading in the country's schools. These debates stimulated the production of academic and journalistic articles which have explored possible meanings from a literary perspective. For examples of this, see K'añina 2004 and Duncan 2017. On the other hand, the debates also provoked waves of racist rhetoric in the media.

> not have a single negative quality: he is a generous, awake, brave boy, who spends a series of adventures moved by a romantic engine.
>
> (Powell and Campbell v. Ministry of Education 1996; our emphasis).

All this speaks of the relevance of decolonizing the image of Africa in the contemporary identity paradigms of Latin America.

The Importance of African Studies in the Region

The Center for Studies of Asia and Africa of El Colegio de México was for many years the training centre for Africanist researchers in Latin America. It was created in 1964 as a centre for Asian Studies with the support of UNESCO, and in 1982 the Sub-Saharan Africa area was opened. For example, students from Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Mexico have done their Master and PhD degrees there.

Meanwhile in Central America, as a result of political and economic instability, the military coups and armed conflicts experienced in Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, and Nicaragua, and the serious social and economical deterioration of the 1970s and 1980s, the issues of gender, history, and archeology were postponed. Two generations of students and researchers were lost, and the growth of libraries stopped. The signing of the peace agreements in the early 1990s slowly began a reversal of these trends.

In the field of news media, the interest in Africa was small and generally covered the classic thematic spectrum: food problems and military conflicts, until the FIFA World Cup was held in South Africa in 2010. The change came through the cable television that made information available to the public about the continent that cannot be found in the local media. As a result, today, the younger generation has more information and more data about the African continent, although this has not meant an immediate transformation of their conceptual paradigms.

A dynamic factor has been that African descendant groups in civil society have fostered the knowledge of their cultural roots and have achieved greater participation at a political and symbolic level with celebrations of Black Day, or the month of culture, or black ethnicity for several decades. In Panama, Costa Rica, El Salvador, and the Caribbean coast of the region, important poles of debate have emerged at the academic level and even in several municipalities (2016-2018), such as Co-

lon, Panama City, and Zacatecoluca. Several museums have also opened spaces for the exploration of the history and recognition of rights.

United Nations agencies have played a central role in pressing for compliance with their resolution of the decade 2015-2024 as the International Decade for People of African Descent, with the slogan Recognition, Justice, and Development (UN resolution 68/237).

The Teaching of the History of Africa in Costa Rica

In the case of Costa Rica, the interest in Asia and Africa began at the end of the seventies in the Universidad de Costa Rica as a result of the debate over the meaning of civilization and history and the Eurocentric perspectives that dominated those times (cf. E. Araya I. 1993; Agudelo 2017).

Africa as a topic of teaching in Humanities began with the pioneering work of the writer Eulalia Bernard and her emblematic course on Afro-Caribbean Culture. In the eighties, the political science department incorporated it in those cases in which it was relevant to explain certain political conjunctures. In the nineties, the fields of communication as well as the arts assigned spaces to the study of African particularities. But perhaps it was anthropology that incorporated African themes earlier, by the theories and debates around kinship and the concepts of tribe and ethnicity. In linguistic studies, Swahili is still one of the obligatory examples in the revision of the universal linguistic panorama.

However, many of these changes were isolated and did not respond to a coordinated strategy or to a transformation of curricular content, much less to a transformation of collective thinking that broke with the image, concepts, and ideas built about Africa, and overcame the Eurocentric criteria that dominated and still dominate in thought.

In the middle of the eighties, the first course on History of Africa was opened and since then it has been taught at the History Department of the Universidad de Costa Rica, being the only course on African history taught in Central America on a regular basis. At the beginning of the 2000s and as a result of the students' request, the traffic of enslaved people across the Atlantic and its consequences in Africa and America was introduced as a unit which fostered the interest to know and to connect the history of our Central American societies with African history.

In the same decade, intermittent programs were created in the Diplomatic Institute attached to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, at the Uni-

versity for Peace, attached to the United Nations, and at the National University, called the African Studies Program, which became a space for meeting, conversation, and discussion of African issues.

The Program of African Diaspora Studies, within the Center for Central American Historical Studies, was created in the University of Costa Rica (2000-2004). It was one of the four 'laboratories' where the students of master's and doctorate history programs debated their research subjects. The Chair in Africa and Caribbean Studies was created (2014-2018) under the Rector's office. Today, African history at the Universidad de Costa Rica is part of the program of world history courses (ancient, modern, medieval, and contemporary).

A series of international conferences have been hosted, the first being held in 1999 on the topic of "The Routes of Slavery in Africa and Latin America", in celebration of the 175th anniversary of the abolition of slavery in Central America, which brought together Africanists and Latin Americanist researchers. Of particular importance was the participation of three different universities: African Studies Program from El Colegio de Mexico; African History of York University, Toronto, and Central American History Program, Costa Rica.

Other conferences continued in that line in partnership with the Tubman Institute, from York University. In 2004, the conference "Haiti: Revolution, Independence and Emancipation," on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of Haiti's independence, was held at the University of Costa Rica's headquarters on the Caribbean coast. In 2006, the symposium on "Slavery, Culture, and Religion," was held in Cahuita, Limón, Costa Rica. In 2008, the international symposium "Slavery, Citizenship, and Memory. Minor Ports in the Caribbean and the Atlantic" took place in Omoa, Honduras, co-organized with Darío A. Euraque, who was at that time Director of the Honduran Institute of Anthropology and History.

In 2014, the symposium "The Meaning of Blackness I" was attended by more than 50 researchers from different countries in Latin America, North America, Europe, and Africa, and two years later, "The Meaning of Blackness II / The Meaning of Negritude II" took place. A workshop in 2017, "Press and Slavery XIX century," followed up, as well as two international academic forums held in the community of Cahuita in the Costa Rican Caribbean, "Calipso, Anancy, and Other Stories" and "Knowing Our History" in 2017 and 2018 respectively, also in partnership with York University, Canada.

Conclusion

As we have said, at the level of civil society, and as a result of the first World Conference against Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance (WCAR) carried out in Durban, South Africa in 2001, as well as the preparatory conference of the Americas carried out in Santiago de Chile in the previous year of 2000, and the intense work of the organizations grouped around the Central American Black Organization (ONECA), interest in knowing the African roots of our societies has increased.

As a result, two projects were launched: A special module about history in the "Educational Campaign on Human Rights and Ethnic Rights of Afro-descendant Populations" undertaken by the Inter-American Institute of Human Rights (2006-2007), and the educational project *Del Olvido a la Memoria* (2006) was training teachers in the study of the history of Africa and people of African descent in Central America supported by the project "The Slave Route: Resistance, Freedom, and Heritage," of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The aim of this project is to help transform the Central American vision of the history of the region through an education campaign that seeks to historicize the African presence, from its experience in Africa until its development in America.

Moreover, in 2017 in Panama, a resolution was approved that will change the trends in education. The resolution recommended promoting the inclusion in the educational curricula of the topics related to the history of Africa, slavery, and the teaching of the legacy of the populations of African descent through the Ministries of Education of the region at primary and secondary schools. The study of the African reality has a promising future (Agreement No. 5 of the 38th Ordinary Meeting of the Council of Ministers of Education and of the Council of Ministers and Directors of Culture of the CECC / SICA 2017).

A new reading of the demographic and cultural contribution of African societies in the demographic recovery of the Central American region must be set. Recognizing that the region experienced one of the most extreme cases of ethnocide as a result of the military conquest by Castile will show the role played by Africa in the configuration of the modern western Atlantic world. This recognition would make possible the building of a historical image of Africa that surpasses the image constructed in the interpretation of the Latin American colonial period,

made at the 19th and the beginning of the 20th centuries and displace the discussion on discrimination from the moral sphere and focus on the historical-social sphere.

Africa and Latin America have researchers of high academic quality that, in a South-South perspective, must be made more visible. They require the recognition of each other and their strengths which unfortunately does not happen enough. To name just a few of the topics: electoral processes, migration and immigration, traditions, Indigenous rights and political representation, the legacy of the colonialism in the curriculum, external debt, technology, agriculture, transitions from military governments and dictatorships to civil governments, and globalization. These topics have enormous potential.

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