

AFRO-HISPANICS AND SELF-IDENTITY: THE GODS TO THE RESCUE?

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Abstract

Identity is one of the social constructs that gives a sense of belonging to an individual or a group. While establishing one's identity does not necessarily pose a challenge in one's own country of origin because of certain degrees of homogeneity in language, culture, skin colour, etc., it could be otherwise, when as a descendant of another race a group is the target of a dominant culture. This paper adopts Link & Phelan's (2001) conceptualization of stigmatization to examine whether the return to African traditional religious practices by some Afro-descendants is the ideal coping strategy against the discrimination and identity threat they are subject to.

1. Introduction

African, European and Amerindian elements were the three main components in the shaping of the multi-ethnic culture of Latin America with the African leaving indelible marks in virtually all aspects of Latin American life: its history, its people, its music, its religion, its literature, its language, and even its behavioral patterns (Villegas Rogers 2006: 562). In spite of these positive contributions, Afro-descendants face multi-secular discrimination and invisibility (Lipski 2008: 5). This paper focuses mainly on those Afro-descendants whose ancestry is linked to those African victims of the transatlantic slave trade in Spanish-speaking America (the terms Afro-Hispanics, Afro-Latino, or blacks will be used alternatively). The paper adopts the concept of stigma according to Link and Phelan (2001) in an attempt to examine the continuous practice of African traditional religions by this group in the face of discrimination and marginalization. The paper is arranged as follows. Section 2 gives a brief overview of the concept of stigma according to Link & Phelan (2001). In section 3, the status of Afro-Latinos in Hispanic society is highlighted alongside the effects of stigma-induced threat on identity. Section 4 presents an outline of some African religious ceremonies and the relevance as voluntary or coping strategy in

identity threatening situations. The fifth section forms the summary and conclusion.

1. Stigma

The literature on stigma reveals the concept as subject to different interpretations. Goffmann (1963: 3) defines stigma as an attribute that extensively discredits an individual, reducing him or her from a whole and usual person to a tainted and discounted one. This definition has been criticized for “including several somewhat different, albeit very instructively; there has been confusion as to what the term means” (Link and Phelan 2013: 529).

A look at the term as it obtains in Crocker et al. (1998:505), Link and Phelan (2001: 367), and Jones et al. (1984) and it becomes clear that the authors do not define the concept, but rather, give descriptions of the process, the prevalent conditions that favour stigma, the context in which stigma thrives as well as the common factor across cultures in which attributes are stigmatized.

Crandall and Eshleman (2003) focus on the outward manifestations of a stigmatized group or individual as well as the visible or invisible forms of stigmatization marks, whether they are controllable or uncontrollable, or linked to appearance such as group membership.

More research explains the effects of stigma on the psychological wellbeing of the labeled group and its effects on self-esteem (Crocker & Mayor 1989), academic performance (Steele 1992; Steele & Aronson 1995), amongst a host of others.

Link & Phelan (2001) list four interrelated factors or components; the convergence of which results in stigma. In the first instance, people distinguish and label differences. Secondly, widespread cultural beliefs then form the basis for linking labeled persons to negative stereotypes. In the third component, the labeled one or persons are categorized in a bid to separate “them” from “others”. The fourth stage illustrates how labeled persons experience status loss and discrimination. The combination of all four elements of labeling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination co-occur in a power situation that is conducive for stigma. Consequently, Stigmatization is entirely contingent on access to social, economic, and political power that allows the identification of

differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled persons into distinct categories, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, and discrimination(2013: 529).

This section has dwelt on the different views on stigma and how the concept has further evolved since Goffman's seminal work of 1963. It also highlights the perspective of Link and Phelan (2001) being adopted for this paper. The next section takes up the status of blacks in Hispanic society hand in hand with the question of whether Afro-Latinos are a stigmatized group in the Spanish speaking world.

2. Afro-descendants in Hispanic Society

The U.N. Economic Council for Latin America (ECLA) reports that Afro-descendants have little or no job security, are mostly denied access to the labour market, and their skin colour also denies them the right to quality education.

Davis (2006) on the report on *the State of the World's Minorities*(2006) cites the situation of Afro-descendants as poor in areas of employment, health and education when compared with their white and *mestizo* counterparts in Hispanic America. In addition, their historical contributions and actual presence continues to be ridiculed, downplayed or even ignored. In the face of this, they also face strong pressures to assimilate (2006: 71).

Antón et. al (2009: 7) on the situation of Afro-descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean confirm the group as disadvantaged when compared with others in the regions. The authors also add that the exclusion they experience and poverty situation in which they find themselves are reflections of the racial discrimination they experience on a daily basis.

More recently, the report by the UN International Decade for People of African Descent (2015-2024) confirms the low representation of Afro-descendants in all societal structures in Spanish-speaking America.

Ironically, discrimination and most especially, racism are highly disputed in the Americas. Investigations by Wade (1997:51–57), Dulitzky (2001) and Preston (2012) show that the governments of the regions have a history of denying that race-based discrimination exists in their regions primarily because segregation laws which outrightly discriminated against blacks in the United

States and South Africa (Jim Crow and apartheid laws respectively) were never enacted in their regions. They therefore, claim to be examples of “racial democracies”, “racial melting pots”, “racial harmony” or a complete *mestizaje* or mixing of races. These denials however, do not alter the fact that Afro-descendants are the most low-visibility victims of racial discrimination in Latin American society (Dulitzky 2001: 4; Hooker 2005; Davis 2006: 72; Lipski 2008: 5).

Even in Cuba, with its politics of socialism that favours the lower class, there are documented incidents of racism and discrimination against Afro-Cubans (Davis 2006: 75; Castellanos Llanos 2008: 172). Reports from Honduras (Anderson 2002) as well as from Venezuela (Wright 1990; Herrera Salas 2005) present the same racial profiling of black Hispanics and their low status in the society. From Peru and Central America, Wade (2008: 108) reports that racial discrimination is unsystematic, individualistic, silent and masked. On the question of collective rights within the regions, Vasquez (2013) reveals that “while several countries now recognize indigenous people’s rights within their constitutions, recognition of Afro-descendant communities is not as common”. Colombia is exceptional in being the only region where all indigenous peoples’ laws and regulations apply also to Afro-descendants.

Historically, the reason for the low visibility of the Afro-Latino in the society has its roots in the European ideology of race (Wade 2008: 1; Stolcke 1995) coupled with the Spanish Empire’s own ideology of cleanliness of blood or *limpieza de sangre*. This ideology justified the enslavement of Africans through a combination of theological myth about the origin of Africans and a complex argument combining “physical explanations” with “moral explanations” (Herrera Salas 2005: 74).

In all, documented report evidence that the low visibility of Afro-descendants in Hispanic society is due to labelling and discrimination. Compounding their predicament and marginalization is also the attitude of denial on the part of the governments towards racism and discrimination. In the next section, some experiences in some Latin American countries demonstrate the convergence of the four interrelated components of stigma and how they pose a threat to Afro-Hispanic identity.

2.1 Afro-descendants and Stigma-induced Identity threat

Major & O'Brien (2005: 394-420) explain that contemporary perspectives on stigma lay emphasis on finding out the extent to which the effects of the phenomenon are demonstrated by analysing the labelled person or group's understanding of how they are viewed, how they interpret social contexts as well as their motives and goals. These observations can be carried out in two reverse ways: "top down" or "bottom up". While the former focuses on how people's perception of their environment and self-relevant motives shape their emotions and other cognitive aspects, the latter lays emphasis on how people's assumptions result from experiences with being targets of negative stereotypes and discrimination.

Wade (2006:107) briefly recalls how in his essays of the 1980s, he used the Spanish word, *negro* or 'black' to refer to black people. Unknown to him, in the Spanish speaking world, there is a labelling of differences based on equating skin colour with personal attributes. He was advised to use the term preferably as an adjective rather than as a noun because to refer to someone as *negro* or 'black' implies that blackness was the main or even sole important attribute of that person. The experiences of both Haitians (who are predominantly dark-skinned) and dark-skinned Dominicans for example, show that both are confronted with racism on a daily basis in the form of racial slurs and extreme violence. Ironically, the Dominican Republic has a population with 90% black ancestry (Miller 2014) is "the cradle of blackness in the Americas". Thus, the widespread tendency to "whiten oneself" (Torres-Saillant 1998: 1) is a form of self-denial and a response to the societal or dominant group's prejudice against 'dark-skin'.

Still on physical appearance, Miller, an African American professor narrates how her experience in the Dominican Republic made her realise that "straightened hair is a social currency" with billboards depicting curly-haired women carrying the headline "Your hair deserves better". The colloquial expression, *pelomaloor* "bad hair" (see Bintrim 2015) is used specifically to describe the natural or curly African hair which is spurned. Miller (2014) narrates her ordeal thus:

[...] there was a point when the jeers from the streets, shouts of “*Arréglateesepelo!*” (Fix that hair!) and mocking gestures about my prominent *pajón* (afro) became too much to deal with

[...]. After continuously feeling like a walking target with my sizable *pajón*, I decided to carry hair ties for the days that the taunts became unbearable.

Another aspect is cultural and literary stereotyping. Literary stereotyping of Africans is a bias whose origin dates back to the Spanish literary works of *siglo de oro*. In these works of Lope de la Vega, the African was the *bufon*, who could not speak correct Spanish; an assumption which gave rise to the pejorative term, *habla del negro* ‘black speech’. This expression, with emphasis on phonetic and pronunciation is still in use today, in the 21st century to describe the Spanish spoken by Afro-descendants as grotesque and corrupted (Lipski, 2005; 2008). Consequently, this bias forms part of the greatest obstacle to the research on early Afro-Hispanic language because the distortions in the documentations on African speech are based on racial prejudice, exaggeration and stereotyping of this group (Lipski 1993).

In the black populated regions of Camba Cua and Kamba Kokue in Paraguay for example, the latter group does not identify any link between language and their self-identity for the simple reason that Paraguay has never been included in the search for remnants of Afro-Hispanic language; and with no single document to give testimony of Africans’ approximations to Spanish during earlier times (Lipski 2008: 14; 30): a significant loss of self-pride and identity if language is twin-skin to identity (see Anzaldúa as cited in Gibson 2004).

In the Dominican Republic, the non-recognition of the contributions of blacks to the cultural identity of the country goes so far, that Preston (2012) reports that school curricula no longer have the country’s African history. A clear feature of self-denial because elements of African cultural survival appear even in Dominican speech as ethnolinguistic modalities that characterise the people’s handling of Spanish with peculiarities in lexical structure, phonetics, morphosyntax and intonation that suggest retentions from the languages of African slaves in colonial times (Torres-Saillant 1998: 3; Lipski 1994: 13). And even Dominican cuisine “take the form of

both cultural transmissions from Africa and creole innovations traceable to the plantation regime” (Deive 1990: 133-135). In the same vein, Mercado lamented in the 70s about such self-denial of the Afro-Puerto Rican:

In language, crafts, music, religion, entertainment, superstitions, cooking, in the arts of herbs and healing in short in all the thousand and one things which constitute the cultural web of a people, the influence of the Negroes is present. It is a shame, as we have said before, that due to the prejudice of the Whites, the constant rejections in small things (the smaller they are, the more painful) the Puerto Rican Negro consciously or unconsciously wishes to erase or disguise his unique traits in order to appear culturally White (1972: 260).

Compaset. al (1999) assert that reactions to negative labeling, stereotyping and discrimination give rise to voluntary responses or coping; which in turn can be seen as conscious, volitional efforts to regulate emotion, cognition, behavior, physiology, and the environment in response to stressful events or circumstances.

Furthermore, the tendency to gradually develop understandings for the dominant group’s view (Crocker 1999; Crocker et al. 1998; Steele 1997) of a group or person’s stigmatized status in society, their devaluation, knowledge of the dominant cultural stereotypes of their stigmatized identity, and recognition that they could be victims of discrimination (Crocker et al. 1998) is evident in the voluntary responses from the blacks to stigma-induced identity threat in the experiences cited: denying any link between language and identity to avoid being victims of negative stereotypes, attempts to “whiten” the skin, as well as the efforts to be seen as “culturally white”. Predominant is skin colour, regarded in the society as an “attribute” or a “mark” that resides in the person i.e., as something the person possesses (Link and Phelan, 2013: 529). This condition is in line with the assumption that physical appearance is a visible, stigmatizing mark that makes a person to be devalued in society (Major & O’Brien 2005: 395).

Adjustments to the dominant group's cultural views and opinions are nevertheless, a potential danger for a labeled group. The eventuality of identity loss becomes most probable as members of a stigmatized group begin to share the dominant's opinion of their societal status because of exposure to the dominant group's culture. The attitude of denial on the part of the governments of the regions also creates the fertile ground that sustains the marginalization of the Afro-Latino.

Unlike some Africans in Diaspora, who voluntarily left (and still) leave the African continent for the Americas, familiar and cultural ties including language, maintain and strengthen the link with the home country to which they may return whenever the urge to do so arises. The Afro-Hispanic, however, whose ancestors were forcefully taken away from different African countries of origin, can only call Spanish speaking America home, and Spanish, their mother tongue even though they are labelled, marginalized, and socially fare poorly in comparison with other minorities. Hence, and just like in former times when "the African *bozales* clung to their beliefs so as not to relinquish a very important aspect of their very personality" (Meggeney 2000: 1), many Afro-descendants are returning to African religious practices to preserve their self-identity. These practices are looked at as coping strategies in the next section.

3. The gods to the Rescue?

The appearance of the *negrosbozales* (as the newly arrived Africans sold as slaves were called) marked the onset of African religious practices in the Hispanic world. Their arrival reinvigorated African culture and tradition not only in the colonies, but also into the black and mulatto populations. Reinvigorated because, an unavoidable assimilation of the slave and mulatto populations into the mainstream dominant white culture would have been the consequence with the eventual loss of African customs and beliefs.

Meggeney (200: 4) adds that the conservation of the chants, stories, legends and the perseverance of the spirits within the religious traditions, all together, contributed to the survival of the identity and unique personality of the black slaves. Through the inability of the slave owners to stop such practices, the slaves were able to withstand and counteract many of the hardships experienced

during this period and most important of all, retain a very important aspect of their personality.

And while one encounters forms of syncretism or a juxtaposition in some religious practices such as the *María Lionza* or *el espiritismo marialioncero* (Paullier 2011), other aspects of African religious practices such as the belief in the role and power of ancestors, the system of multiple souls, the presence of spirits in inanimate objects (Meggeney 2000:19) etc., have remained unaltered in the beliefs of the Catholic Afro-Latino.

Paullier (2011) reports from Venezuela that in a country where nine out of ten persons claim to be Catholic, the practices of *santería* and *spiritism* are gaining more adherents. Other estimations put the figure at 30% in a population of about 28 million, while the anthropologist, Ronny Velásquez estimates that half of the Venezuelan population practice spiritism or *santería* in one form or other.

In no other realm are African cultural forms more evident in spiritual expressions than in Dominican life says Torres-Saillant (1998:3). The evidence of Dominican voodoo has been investigated by Deive (1992). Confirmed also is that in Dominican society people of various backgrounds have recourse to folk religion though the majority of Dominican voodoo practitioners just like in other parts of Spanish speaking America, are officially Catholics. Of significant interest is Davis's (1987: 194-195) observation that "strong African influences" provide aid to the Dominican people in many of the social functions of their daily lives. And as a key to understanding the psychology of the Dominican, the importance of voodoo and other spiritual manifestations has been advocated by Tejeda, Sanchez and Mella (1993: 54).

Undoubtedly the principal religious form in Hispanic America comes from Sub-Saharan Africa based on the Yoruba religious system: *santería* or *la Regla de Ocha* or the *Orishas* as they are called in Cuba, or *Candomblé* and *Batukein* in Uruguay and Argentina respectively. Describing the Cuban *santería*, Cabrera says:

la santería cubana [...] proviene de lo que es hoy el sur-occidente de Nigeria, traída por esclavos y

esclavas a lo largo de los siglos de la colonización española de la isla, ni solamente porque en sus ritos se habla Yoruba, sino también porque sus dioses mismos, los orichas, son negros(1996: 8)

The Cuban santería [...] is originally from what is today the South-west of Nigeria, brought over by slaves in the course of centuries of Spanish colonization of the island not solely because Yoruba is spoken during the rites, but also because the gods, the Orishas, are black. (My translation)

Castellanos Llanos claims that La Regla de Ocha or Santería is undeniably one of the strongest influences in Cuban culture, and one of the three most important religions, (the others being the Palo Monte and Abacua) of Cubans of both sexes in exile. She also claims that it is a fact that the practice of santería has spread in the United States with the arrival of Cuban immigrants. While Clark (2005) confirms that there are more followers of the santería religious practices in the United States than in Cuba or Africa. Practitioners of these ceremonies speak of spirits and deities; even though the primordial names of most were forgotten or have undergone transformations through syncretism or juxtaposition.

In the typical Cuban syncretism of santería, all the Orishas have a corresponding Christian saint. To the name of the Yoruba deity is added a corresponding name of a catholic saint. For example, Shango is Saint Barbara (Santa Barbara), the Yoruba god, Obatala is the Virgen of Mercedes, etc. The gender of the Orishas do not necessarily correspond with that of the saint (male/female) with whom the deity is identified. Cuban santería is described as a product of Cuban culture constructed in the course of a prolonged process of acculturation of religions brought into Cuba by African slaves and the Catholicism of their masters (Castellanos Llanos 2008: 167). The impact of this religious practice is such that “muchos cubanos de Cuba y del exilio han sido colonizados por la cultura afrocubana que quizá muchos de sus antepasados combatieron”. In other words, many Cubans in Cuba and in exile have become colonized by Afro-Cuban culture that many of their

ancestors most probably fought against. In the midst of multi-secular social invisibility (Lipski 2008: 2), returning to African traditional religious practices can also be viewed from the perspective expressed by Castellanos Llanos (2008) as:

la pobreza, la falta de poder de cualquier grupo humano se convierten fácilmente en acechos y amenazas, y que la posibilidad de apelar a recursos religiosos o mágicos les sirve tan bien a los santeros [...] para exorcizar su sentimiento de impotencia ante las adversidades (2008: 173)

In other words, every human group would turn to religion or some other forms of worship when poverty, a feeling of powerlessness and helplessness stares in the face of adversity. Castellanos Llanos (2008: 173) declares that this should not be seen as a condescending attitude towards religious practices which should get the proper respect they deserve regardless of the forms they take.

As a coping strategy however, this is positive as it avoids violence and more so, does not provoke inhuman measures in the 21st century. But is this strategy all it takes to retain one's identity in the face of stigmatization and marginalization or are Afro-descendants in different regions in Spanish speaking America employing other means and identifying more with their group to maintain self-pride?

Examined from the point of other coping strategies, Miller (2004) and Miller & Kaiser (2001) mention engagement and disengagement as features of coping. In the former, the method of reaction could take the form of approach or fight motivation, while the latter could take the form of reflecting to avoid or outright flight. The recurring revolts of the black slaves against their masters in the Spanish colonies can be appraised under the coping strategy of fight motivation because of no alternative to the *Weltanschauung* with regard to the African in those times.

Major & O'Brien (2005: 404) also highlight three coping strategies to identity threatening situations (a) attributing negative events to discrimination, (b) disengaging self-esteem and effort from identity-threatening domains (versus engaging and striving in these

domains), and (c) increasing identification with one's stigmatized group (versus distancing oneself from the group). The recourse to their African roots of which African traditional beliefs plays a significant role can be seen as a combination of coping strategies (a) and (c).

Most experiences of Afro-descendants in Hispanic America are discriminatory in nature. In recognition of this state of affairs, activities have been put into motion through increasing self-consciousness in several Latin American countries to stem this trend.

In addition, the Afro-Hispanic identifies with its kind all over the Spanish speaking world. Thus, the efforts are now geared towards more proactive awareness of their situation and contributions in the Hispanic world. Highlights of increasing global as well as regional awareness of the situation of Afro-Latinos in the Hispanic world are examined below.

3.1 Developments—Global and Regional

In more recent times, developments in the Hispanic world suggest recognition of the presence and true predicament of the Afro-descendant. These developments are looked at from Davis' (2006) report on *the State of the World Minorities* with focus on the report on Afro-descendants. This is drawn from the global recognition of Afro-descendants and the reactions of the regional governments to this trend.

Globally, the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban gave impetus to Afro-Latinos to present their views on their status in society. The positive outcome of this summit was the signing of the resolution by about 20 Latin American governments to the idea that people of African descent:

Should be treated with fairness and respect for their dignity and should not suffer discrimination of any kind based on origin, culture, skin colour or social condition (Davis 2006: 72).

Regional conferences, publications of policy papers, and several workshops between 2003 and 2005 all aimed at the promotion of

Afro-Latino issues formed the basis for collaborations between Latin American NGOs and International Institutions like the World Bank, Inter-American Development Bank, the Organization of American states, amongst others.

UNESCO in its 32nd General Conference held in 2003 officially recognized the Garifuna language and culture and the rites of the Congo Kings in the Dominican Republic as world heritage cultures.

In 2005 UNESCO's support of the Afro-Latinos in Ecuador led to the Esmeraldas International Centre for Indo-American Cultural Diversity and Human Development project.

At the regional levels, some governments of the regions have, since the Durban conference either instituted policies, or ratified earlier treaties in their respective provinces in recognition of Afro-descendants' rights. This has been strengthened by the Congresses of Legislators of African Descent (2003, 2004 and 2005) and the signing of the Bogota Declaration.

Afro-Colombians gathered for the first International Seminar on "Truth, Justice and Reparation for Afro-Colombian People for the Crimes of Slavery and Contemporary Violence" in 2005. Colombian law acknowledges collective land rights for Afro-Colombian communities and mandates that Afro-Colombian history be included in the secondary school curriculum. The situation of Afro-Colombians has also caught the attention of world bodies and international agencies.

Both global and regional efforts show a growing awareness of the Afro-Latino as a member of a marginalized group with blacks themselves identifying with their group. The question is, have the signed treaties, ratified laws and declarations really impacted positively on the life of the average Afro-Hispanic?

The Peruvian government's established National Commission for Andean Amazonic and Afro-Peruvian Peoples (CONAPA) has few resources with no legal backing to deal with violations and complaints. And the anti-discriminatory law in Ecuador is simply a paper document in the true sense of the word.

Being mostly symbolic, lacking funds, and with no legal backing, most of the laws, treaties and resolutions to protect and support the Afro-descendant are not implemented.

Consequently, human rights violations are frequent, but also dependent on the countries and the size of the black population. For example, in countries with large populations of African descent, abuses range from disappearances, extra-judicial executions, torture and unequal treatment in the economic, social and political spheres. In others, such as Argentina, Mexico, Paraguay and Uruguay, where Afro-descendants constitute small minorities, marginalization, prejudice and invisibility still plague hundreds of law-abiding citizens because of the colour of their skin (Davis 2006: 72).

This section has given some insight into how through group membership identification Afro-descendants have been able to create global awareness of their presence in Spanish speaking America. Simultaneously, the regional governments have acknowledged their presence and to varying degrees, implemented or revived existing laws against discrimination. But the multi-secular invisibility of the Afro-Latino is far from over as the tendency for them to be excluded or accepted depends on their population in a region.

4. Conclusion

In conclusion, the president of the organization, *Afrohispanos* Ponce Morales made the statement “Ya estamos integrados, ahora necesitamos que se nos incorpore” (Caballero 2015) - in other words, “we are already integrated, we now need to be incorporated” when he referred to the situation of Afro-descendants in Spain. These words are just as appropriate and transferable to Afro-Latinos in the Hispanic world because Afro-descendants in Spanish speaking America are not yet incorporated into the system that is actually theirs. They are incorporated when they become accepted as an insoluble part of the society that is prejudiced against them.

The involvement and cooperation of International Agencies with Afro-Hispanic NGOs and the declaration of 2015-2024 as the International Decade for People of African Descent by the UN is already creating awareness of the presence of blacks in the Spanish speaking world. To this end, the demands made by Ponce Morales for (1) The creation of a Fund for the development of Peoples of African descent similar to the Fund for Indigenous Peoples created over 30 years ago, and (2) A permanent Forum for Peoples of African descent at the headquarters of the UN in New York similar

to the Forum for Indigenous Peoples created 25 years ago would finally give the international recognition and presence needed for the low visibility status of the Afro-Latino to come to a permanent end.

The presence of the Afro-Hispanic in the UN would create opportunities for dialogue and interactions with the rest of the world; in this manner, support for the rights to basic social amenities such as education, health services, labour, etc., can be garnered towards the societal development of people of African descent in Spanish speaking America.

The recourse of Afro-descendants to African traditional forms of worship has a psychological effect of a non-violent response to injustice; it is a balm for the souls, a manner of coping with stigmatization and racial profiling. The traditional customs also give a sense of pride and fulfillment in identifying with one's own group. The complex of self-denial, 'skin whitening' and wanting to be 'culturally white' cannot arise in these customs and in this condition of self fulfilment. This recourse is also the reason why more and more Afro-Latinos are enquiring about their African ancestors, African traditions and customs; creating a wave of re-Africanization and pride in being African. The Osun Oshogbo Festival in Nigeria has become an attraction for many Cubans who, practicing the Santería religion whether in its syncretized form or otherwise, now have the opportunity to also learn the language of their African ancestors. However, the governments of the Spanish speaking regions have to address the matter of the Afro-descendant as issues of national interest just as Ponce Morales rightly says:

[...] nos tienen que considerar como parte indisoluble de esta sociedad porque un país que pretende crecer y avanzar no puede dejar atrás a millones de personas [...] (2015)

[...] we have to consider (them) as an indissoluble part of this society because a country that tries to grow and advance cannot leave millions of people behind...

While the President of *Afrohispanoshad* Spain as its focus in the above statement, the focus, which is leaving a particular people behind is relevant to all societies and naturally to the attitude of most governments in the Hispanic world. They have to also consider 'the Afro-descendant' as an indissoluble part of Latin American/Hispanic society, who make up millions of persons that cannot be left behind if the Hispanic word intends to because grow and advance.

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