



APPROACH TO THE ETHNOEDUCATION AND THE RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE OF YOUNG COLOMBIAN AFRO-DESCENDANTS

Tracking of sociodemographic variables and analysis of religious and educational categories.

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ABSTRACT

Religion is a complex human phenomenon that can be analyzed from different epistemological and anthropological perspectives, from which religious experiences are reconstructed as part of the active relationship between personal consciousness and the disruptive presence of a transcendent "other". In Colombia, there is a significant population of young Afro-descendants who have a series of religious and cultural beliefs rooted in their origins and traditions. Under this consideration, in this research, case of study, it is analyzed how ethno-education, as a public policy in Colombia, allows the development of the religious experience of young Afro-descendants.

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1. Introduction

The political Constitution of Colombia of 1991 recognized the country's ethnic and cultural diversity as the nation's heritage, which allows different peoples to have an autonomy that enables them to propose education models consistent with their way of life. As part of this recognition, the concept of ethno-education arises, which according to article 55 of Law 115 of 1994, relates to education for ethnic groups which is offered to communities that comprises the nationality and possess a culture, a language, traditions, and laws of its own (Congress of Colombia, 1994). Under this premise, education must be associated with the environment, the productive process, the social and cultural process, in which their beliefs and traditions are respected (Ministry of Education, 2007).

According to what was stated by Arbelaez and Velez (2008), the word ethno-education arises from the words ethnicity and education, the first being associated with people or race and denoting a human community with racial, linguistic, or cultural similarities. Thus, ethno-education is used to denote pedagogy for these human communities.

Moreover, within Convention 169 of the International Labor Organization on indigenous and tribal peoples, which is ratified in Colombia through Law 21 of 1991, education for ethnic groups is addressed as a series of public educational policies that are consistent with the definition of the multicultural and multiethnic State. Complementing these positions, Romero (2008) emphasizes that ethno-education is a process through which the members of a people build knowledge and values, develop skills and abilities according to their needs, aspirations, and interests.

One of the key elements of this research is the religious experience, which according to Corpas (2010) corresponds to "the experiences of men who discover the divine in their own existence as an incursion of transcendence in the human sphere" (p. 65). Said experiences assume different forms according to the scenarios and specific circumstances that each person experiences (García, 2009).

Based on these elements, Corpas establishes that the religious experience needs a process of mediation, interpretation, and community expression, from which meaning is associated. Thus, according to Corpas (2010) religions can be considered as an experience mechanism, as they are seen as socially established mediations to be lived, mediated, interpreted, and expressed.

Perhaps one of the contributions to remark is related to the fact that the religious experience having a historical component and elements such as the cultural circumstances in which it is lived, marks the type of experience, its interpretation, and the way of expressing it (Martelo, 2015). Therefore, religions are manifestations of a religious experience that correspond to specific historical circumstances (Corpas, 2010).

Another concept regarding the religious experience is the one described by Nicuesa (2015), who relates it as a deep and complex experience in the intimate experience of God. It is about the approach to the divine essence that is constituted as a turning point in personal life. Likewise, Nicuesa defines that the religious experience requires an extraordinary event, it is the result of faith in God, of recognizing the presence of God in life (Nicuesa, 2015).

From this perspective, this research analyzes the way in which ethno-education under the guidelines of public policies promotes the development of the religious experience in young Afro-descendant people from the town of Usme in the city of Bogota, Colombia. This type of exploration seeks to recognize religious experiences as part of the essential experiences of people, and how they are configured as one of the ways in which human beings can express their desire for personal transcendence and the construction of community identity in their relationships with a deity.

To achieve this objective, the starting point is describing the methods and techniques implemented throughout the development of the research; Subsequently, the results obtained as part of the research process are described, which focuses on three main axes: the description of the sociodemographic variables that recognize the presence of Afro-descendant communities in Bogotá; the recognition of the impact of Colombian ethno-educational policies in the

development of the new urban configurations of young Afro-descendant people and finally, the investigation of the perceptions of the religious experience of young people of African descent through the account that they will tell.

Accordingly, an investigation of a qualitative nature with a hermeneutical-interpretive paradigm and with a descriptive level is implemented, through which would be analyzed the relationships between the foundations of the public ethno-education policy and their relationship with the development of religious experiences of some students from the town of Usme in Bogotá, Colombia, making use of case study tools.

2. Materials and methods

Addressing research approaches in the field of human sciences or any other field refers to looking at both reality itself and the way of intentionally and methodically producing knowledge about it. Epistemologically, qualitative research aims to an effort to understand social reality as the result of a historical process of construction, seen from the logic and feelings of its protagonists, and therefore, from their particular aspects and with an internal perspective (Sandoval, 1996).

In this research paradigm, knowledge is a shared creation based on the interaction between the researcher and the researched, in which values mediate or influence the generation of knowledge – which makes it necessary to “get into reality”, the object of analysis, in order to understand it both in its internal logic and in its specificity (Sandoval, 1996). The type of research to be carried out in this work is qualitative, which provides a methodology focused on the complex understanding of the world, based on the analysis of experiences and from the perspective of the people who live it (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984). According to Sampieri (2008), qualitative research is characterized by studies focused on subjects, who adopt the perspective from the phenomenon to be studied.

As for the research paradigm, this corresponds to the hermeneutic-interpretive. From the position of hermeneutics, it is aimed to understand the texts from the intentional and contextual interpretive exercise. Therefore, it

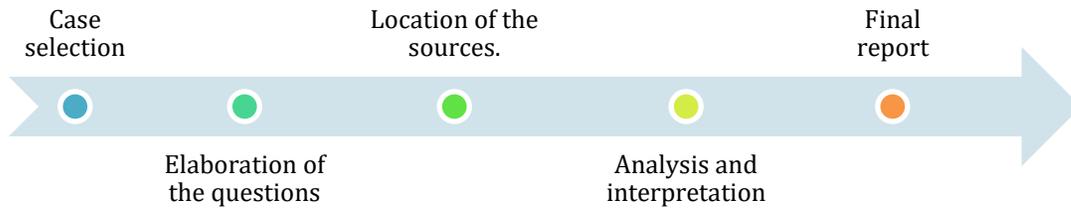
requires the development of the intelligibility of the discourse contained in the texts to achieve the capture of the meaning embodied in them (Martyniuk, 1994). From the interpretive research, the theoretical bases are consolidated as the guideline from which practice is conducted, i.e. the subjective meanings of the social actors and their actions are made explicit as a set of social rules (Carr and Kemmis, 1988).

Regarding the level of research, the study is classified as descriptive, a scientific method that observes and defines the subject's behavior without influencing him in any manner. In the specific case, it seeks to describe the way in which the public policy of ethno-education promotes the consolidation of religious experiences in the town of Usme in the city of Bogotá, Colombia.

On the other hand, the research method corresponds to a case study, a technique commonly used in the social sciences, which is based on search and inquiry. In this way, case studies are carried out in order to establish a series of hypotheses that are resolved from the analysis of the elements observed in the evaluated sample. Regarding the main objectives associated with the case study, these are related to the elaboration of hypotheses or theories through the study of reality, the description and recording of facts or circumstances, and the verification of phenomena.

The phases of implementation of a case study are described in Figure 1. The selection of the case defines what you want to study, the scope of it, and the people who turn out to be interesting in it. The elaboration of the questions determines what you want to find out and the degree of deepening about the phenomenon. The third phase corresponds to the location of the sources and data collection by observation techniques and interviews, from which the analysis and interpretation of the information are carried out, being a fundamental part of this the contrast of the hypotheses are for concluding. Finally, the preparation of the report corresponds to the action of recording each of the details of the study.

Figure 1. The sequence of implementation of a case study



Source: Author, 2020

The population under study corresponds to the inhabitants of the town of Usme who are located to the southeast of the city of Bogota. As it is complex to address such a large population, it was decided to take a sample corresponding to young afro-descendant people who live in that town, at neighborhoods called Chapinerito, Chico Sur, La Reforma and El Progreso, and who were willing to participate in the research.

Regarding characteristics of the participants, their ages ranged from 10 to 17 years, being between fifth to eleventh grades at the school. As they were minors, both the participants and their tutors were informed of the scope and characteristics of the research, giving their informed consent.

This study is carried out inductively. In the first place, an immersion is made in the town of Usme (Barrios La Reforma, El Progreso, Chapinerito and Chico sur). For this case, a tour

of the streets will be made in order to identify the places where the Afro community is concentrated, and thus recognize their behavior, social and cultural expressions. Subsequently, the focus group, art workshop, and biographical account will be carried out.

After the recognition and immersion in the context, each of the participants answered a questionnaire, designed as a structured interview, and they took part in the painting workshop and biographical account as seen in Figure 2. The information collected was triangulated into two large categories: ethno-education and religious experience. In turn, a set of subcategories emerges from the foregoing: education, culture, ethno-education, Afro-Colombian, Afro-descendant. From the religious experience category, the subcategories obtained were Religion, Yemayá, God, and Culture.

Figure 2. Art Workshop Development



Source: Author, 2020

3. Results.

3.1 Sociodemographic characteristics of the Afro-descendant community in Bogotá.

The Afro-descendant population in Colombia according to the 2005 Census was 96,523 people, of which 49.9% corresponded to men (48,219) and the remaining 50.1% to women (48,304) (Ministry of Culture, 2010). On the other hand, the main place of origin of Afro-Colombians who live in Bogotá come from Choco with 17.5%. The main reasons for this displacement is the search for a better quality of life and job opportunities, education, civil war, forced displacement and health (District Planning Secretary, 2014).

Regarding the location of Afro-Colombians, they are mainly concentrated in the towns of Engativa, Suba, Kennedy, San Cristóbal and Bosa. Regarding the range of age of the Afro-Colombian population, it is between the ages of 20 and 50.

Likewise, the educational level of Afro-Colombians residing in Bogotá indicates that illiteracy levels are lower compared to Cartagena, Quibdo, and the national average. Thus, the average of these populations that know how to read and write in Bogotá is 93.37%; two percentage points above Cali (District Planning Secretariat, 2014)

In Bogotá, although access to the educational system is favorable, attendance at an educational institution for Afro-Colombians between the ages of 12 and 18 is low. According to the provisions of the Mayor's Office, 29% of the people in this age range attend an educational establishment, a lower percentage compared to the non-ethnic population, which is 33%. This dynamic is associated with the fact that 55.6% of the Afro-Colombian population quit studying because they need to work and 59.6% do not have the resources to pay for their studies.

Finally, regarding the population with some type of disability, in Bogotá, the Afro-Colombian community with this condition is slightly higher in the male than in the female population (4.9% compared to 4.5%). Likewise, and according to the SIPOD report in 2010, in Bogotá there were 30,141 people from ethnic groups in a situation of displacement, of which 5,167 corresponded to

Afro-Colombian people (District Planning Secretariat, 2014).

3.2 Characteristics of the Afro community where the case study was developed

The Afro-descendant community that contributes to the development of this research is located in the fifth area of Usme, UPZ Alfonso Lopez, Sector La Reforma, to the southeast of the city of Bogotá, in the urban area. The inhabited territory that has residents of socioeconomic strata 1, 2, and 3 has access to urban and inter-municipal transport, access roads and public services. There are also spaces to develop cultural, recreational, and sports activities, health care, surveillance and education centers, worship centers, control, and security bodies, as well as entities for the development of administrative and legal processes.

It is worth highlighting that some of the aforementioned territories are due to impoverished, violent realities and lack of opportunities, which is why a large part of the Afro-descendant community has moved to different national places, including the capital city, Bogotá. The causes of migration of the Afro-descendant population are diverse: opportunities for study, professionals who wish to work at higher levels, economic reasons and consequences of the armed conflict, among others

For this particular case, with the child and adolescent community with whom the research activities were developed, it can be seen for the most that they are Afro-descendants born in Bogotá and their families have been away from their homeland for some time – the possibility of knowing places, customs, and ancestral family have been few if not null. In the same way, it is evident that in their educational institutions there are few tools and spaces that are offered to them for the knowledge of their ethnicity. Sometimes they receive support in another way, either in foundations or schools led by the same Afro-Colombian community or the support from interns who are worried about the loss of identity and also concerned by the transmission of knowledge.

The living conditions in the capital are alarming since some of them live in invasion

areas or do not have favorable conditions that allow them to have an optimal quality of life. Nevertheless, they are happy children, willing to serve and very close to each other, have the right to education in schools in the same area, live with their families, but they do not always respond to the type of nuclear family – either because some of them are not in Bogota, because of coexistence-type separations or because of the death of some of the members of the family.

As mentioned throughout this paper, this research addressed and analyzed the perception of young people of African descent regarding the conception of ethno-education and its influence on the development of religious experiences. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews and biographical analysis were implemented through painting workshops, interviews, and content stories.

In the first approach that young people make when inquiring about education, it can be seen that they associate it with the life project in which scenarios such as school, home, and cultural elements of their ethnic group are contemplated; other young people associate it with respect. Another common position regarding the concept of education lies in the fact that young people relate it to as a right and also by sharing a series of knowledge regarding a specific topic or a new topic. Participants see education from a comprehensive concept, which occurs in different environments, inclusive participation valuing knowledge from experience. They consider education as an action that will allow them to develop elements used throughout their lives. National policies states education as a comprehensive personal and community process that each person also carries out permanently in defense of self-recognition. One of the interesting concepts raised by one of the young people is related to the fact that education has a bidirectional sense, that is, it is related to learning or teaching. It is recognized that it is a participatory action where the one who teaches is perceived, there is an appropriation of knowledge and then exercise it in their own functions or repeat the process of transmission of their customs and traditions within their own Afro-descendant communities

as well as those who wish to be illustrated by them.

When consulting young people about the importance of education, they said that it is fundamental in their development, since it directs them in the formation of values such as respect, recognition of culture, and consolidates them as forgers of possibilities. In the same way, it helps them to keep away from common problems in society such as falling into drug addiction, gangs, among others. In this order, one of the elements arranged by a participant is associated with the fact that the importance of education should not only focus on institutional issues, education also is given at home, which on many occasions is what configures the behavioral elements and social skills.

Another participant assured that through education the development of logical capacities and planning for the future are fostered. In addition, it allows young people to learn values that are essential on a daily basis.

One of the facts highlighted by the participants is associated with the education and formation of the Afro-Colombian culture. According to them, these issues are not addressed within educational institutions, and this is seen in the behavior of some peers, who demonstrate racist behaviors or in concrete actions that show the lack of self-recognition by some young Afro-descendants.

When consulting the participants of this research about the concept of ethno-education, it is evident that some children and adolescents cannot associate this word with any central idea, but rather in a general way, although some of the participants can give an account of its relationship with what they identify and characterizes their Afro-descendant community and as the knowledge that comes from ancestral time and that has come to them by another of their peers who speak to them about their ethnicity or race, and ancestry transmitted with strong roots, in the same way they speak about the development history of enslavement, its great struggles, and achievements obtained in privileged scenarios.

When consulting young people about the way in which the institution integrates the concept of ethno-education in its educational proposals,

they related that during the development of certain public celebrations in their schools, they participate with some samples of their culture. However, they state that there is not a clear implementation of an Afro-descendant education project through which they support the formation of different elements of culture or promote being Afro-Colombian. Perhaps one of the shortcomings described by one of the participants is associated with the fact that educational institutions do not address elements of culture in-depth, only issues such as slavery and the origin of the black race are addressed.

One of the important aspects highlighted by young people is the association of ethno-education with the knowledge of their roots, their culture, their artistic expression, their ancestors, and their gods. As part of this, they include making known and teaching about their roots, ethnicities, beliefs, and customs, through a bilateral learning-teaching process among peers. As part of this process, one of the young people remarks on the importance of understanding that ethno-education teaches us something fundamental, as there are no differences between races.

When consulting young people about the public policy of ethno-education, the participants were emphatic in stating that they did not know it. Neither the school constitutes a mean nor

formulates strategies to develop it. One of the facts that draws attention is that there are certain elements in the school's coexistence handbook that prohibits them from adapting their culture to student life – as an example, they highlight the restriction of the use of colored turbans and other accessories that are important in their culture.

In the second moment of the investigation in which they are asked to represent their religious experience on a canvas and then make an account of it, different types of drawings were found, as it is evidenced by figure 4 and narrations. Within these stories, one of the participants relates his religious experience to the Bible and supports his choice stating that the story of God and what is coming is written there. Likewise, he remarks on the fact that the Yemayá School, a cultural educative initiative led by some women leaders from this Afro community, fosters a closer relationship with God through music and ancestral knowledge.

One of the participants decided to draw on her canvas an image in which elements of the Afro culture with which she feels identified converge. Another interesting fact is defined by a young woman who decided to draw an Afro woman with a traditional costume, and whom was defined as the Virgin Mary.

Figure 4. Paintings made by the participants



Source: Author, 2020

Similarly, there were young people who made drawings related to their ancestry, such as a woman from Africa, but under the concept of slavery, a known truth and with which they identify with. Others decided to capture the

image of mother Yemayá and the mystical use of colors, which for one of the young people represents Orisha.

When asking young people if the educational institution in which they study has allowed them

to explore the religious sphere in their lives, they corroborate that they do, but that these processes focus on teaching about explicit topics rather than promoting the formation of spaces for the consolidation of religious experiences based on their beliefs and culture.

Contrary to this position, there are students who consider that this has not been possible. The bases of the teachings have focused on describing religions such as Catholic and Evangelical, and educational institutions do not address issues of spirituality and consolidation of experiences under the recognition of cultural diversity.

4. Discussion

From the development and the results given by the research, it was possible to establish that some children and adolescents are unable to relate the concept of ethno-education with any central idea, even when other participants were able to establish a relationship between it and the Afro-descendant community that identifies them and associating it in turn with the set of knowledge that comes from the ancestors and that is transmitted verbally by their families. This type of concept is similar to the position established by Castillo (2016), for whom ethno-education corresponds to the set of community processes that strengthen the dynamics of an ethnic group, in which fundamental elements such as cultural values allow ancestral people to persist in time.

From this perspective and as a consensus between the theoretical and investigative elements, it is established that ethno-education is directly related to the practices of a community that are directed to the rescue and continuity of the culture. In the explicit case of this research, it was found that educational institutions are not fully promoting spaces and tools for the transmission of such knowledge.

With regard to education, the concept that young people have about it refers to an integral idea approached under different environments, such as home and school, which leads to inclusive participation and the evaluation of knowledge. This position is consistent with the provisions of the Ministry of Education, which describes it as a process of permanent, personal,

cultural, and social training based on the human person, dignity, rights, and duties.

The theoretical review carried out and the results of the field-work allow us to understand ethno-education as a social and cultural movement, whose objective has been to make visible the community dynamics against racism and the marginalization of black, indigenous, Palenquero and Raizal populations. This movement was generated at the end of the 20th century, initially among black communities from the north of Cauca, Tumaco, Guapi, and Choco; the palanqueros of San Basilio in Bolívar, and the bilingual raizales of San Andrés and Providencia; gaining strength in large cities, such as Cali and Bogotá. In the educational field, it results from a displacement and appropriation of the concept of ethno-development proposed by Bonfil in 1982 (Castillo 2016).

García Rincon (2014) has used the concept of "home inside" to account for the dynamics of education that take place within black communities and in their collective territories, and it implies three central elements: self-determination, community participation, and dialogue of knowledge. As a result, it has been the promulgation of the Chair of Afro-Colombian Studies, which with Decree 1122 of 1998 was established as a more intercultural perspective (Castillo 2016).

However, there is a founding element of ethno-education and it is the commitment to develop relationships based on recognition and respect for the other, especially for their particularity, their history, and their future (Bodnar, 2009).

Now, as part of the concept of culture, Afro-Colombianity arises and relates to the set of cultural, collective, material, spiritual and political values that are given by African and Afro-Colombian ancestors. From the position of the research, it was possible to recognize Afro-Colombianity as the set of cultural diversity that is given by the union of peoples that at some point in history experienced a series of events that are sometimes framed in discrimination.

Despite this, there is still so much to do for educational policy to be accepted in all educational fields. In order for ethno-education to reach all levels, the main challenge is not

limited to stress the struggles of the peoples, it must also make socialization of all the contributions at the scientific, social, artistic, cultural, and legislative level of the indigenous peoples, Afro-Colombians and Romany communities in the present. In such a way that, "in addition to helping to strengthen the processes of the ethnic and cultural identities of the various Colombian groups, they should go further and direct themselves towards inclusion and social justice, having as one of its main foundations the conception of a real democracy and without inequalities and bet on developing citizen capacities that respond to the social, economic and political problems of Colombia, in order to work for a more just, peaceful and democratic society" (Ruiz and Medina, 2014).

Colombia recognizes religious freedom and defines itself as a non-denominational nation in articles 13, 19, and 68 of the Political Constitution of 1991. It makes explicit the free choice of religious education for adults, young people, and children; and, consequently, the obligation of the State to foster and favor respect for the options taken in this regard by parents for their children, and not to promote or favor adherence to a specific religious creed, or sponsor the forms of religious indifference or atheism" (Echeverri, 2012).

Figure 5. Afro Mass



Source: Author, 2016

In this order, the promotion of religious experiences becomes a methodology that provides light to reality, new possibilities are configured to understand and act on it. It is precisely for these reasons that Duch (1979)

affirms that religious experiences allow people to penetrate essential aspects that are sometimes considered closed and unrecognizable. These types of positions are supported by Meza (2009), who establishes that the religious experience is, in its essence, ineffable, inexpressible, only communicable through ordinary language in its most superficial aspects without being able to penetrate its essence. Language is not only an insufficient, deficient instrument but also a deforming instrument of the genuine and extraordinary religious experience.

From the lived experience and consequent to what was proposed by García (2009), the consolidation of the religious experience was evidenced under a character of intimacy, of strictly personal appeal, of presence and effectiveness, from which a deep experience of total unification of the person and absolute integration. In this way, the religious experience provides the person with a feeling of unity and totality, but also of "being" with completeness and fulfillment.

In the case of the Afro-Colombian people, the consolidation of a different form of religious experience has been evidenced, the approach with God is represented in their joy and pain, the image of God as the light and companion on the path through history - that presence that understands in silence, understands its pain as a people despised, enslaved, mistreated and forgotten.

From the perspective of public policy and consistent with the results obtained, it is evident that, although the Colombian State has adopted legislative and administrative measures to implement the ethno-education policy, to guarantee the right to cultural diversity in education, no institutional measures have been adopted that allow a true implementation of the ethno-educational philosophy (Rodríguez et al., 2008).

5. Conclusions

Based on the analyzes made in this research, education is considered by young people as an aspect linked to social transformation that can generate novelties and expectations in people's lives and in the process of shaping their future. Through this, education is consolidated as a

learning transmission and generation process that defines the way in which each person relates to society.

From the public policy stance, important advances have been made in ethno-education and its materialization in classrooms. Thus, organizational strengthening has been promoted with ethnic authorities and the promotion of the right to decent and quality education, generating transfer and sustainability capacities through the different education secretariats.

Another axis has sought to strengthen the cultural and educational skills of children and young people through pedagogical projects that take place in different educational institutions, in which scenarios are created to promote cultural resignification practices, active participation, and

the consolidation of the sense of ancestral belonging.

Under the guidelines of public policy, one of the points that needs reinforcement is the construction of teaching skills for the redefinition of the educational model, through which comprehensive curricula are created, including research techniques and pedagogical material, consistent with each of the contexts and allowing to overcome the barriers between national educational systems and the requirements of each of the cultures. These types of needs were detected during the research process, according to the observations made by the young people, who alluded to the approach to ethnic issues based solely on historical facts such as slavery, but not on Afro-Colombian cultural reconstruction and recognition.

Figure 6. Children of the Afro community of Usme



Source: Organization CISPAC, 2020

As well, it was evidenced that ethno-education in terms of the topic is unknown and is associated in some way with the roots, which is learned as part of the culture, of the customs of the communities according to their ancestry, influenced even in the processes of consolidation of the religious experience, especially from the influence of the ancestors.

As part of the research, it was established that young people argue that religious experience is strongly linked to the figure of women, seen as the figure who teaches, transmits, makes history. Also, it was determined that the religious experience can be learned through cultural expressions such as dance, songs, oral tradition, and rites. This type of characteristics associates the religious experience as a learning process,

which leads the person to rediscover themselves within a community, each one being the one who gives it the meaning and importance it requires, within Afro-Colombian spirituality. It is interesting the perception of each deity and its manifestations with the lifestyle of each Afro-Colombian – each God implies concrete actions that motivate their daily lives and involve lifestyles, which, due to the lack of implementation of ethno-educational policies, can be misunderstood and forgotten.

Regarding the ethno-educational theme, this is seen in the schools as elements of history that tend to be repeated, explicitly on slavery topics. History of the race is approached as part of the problem of slavery, but not about their history understood from the customs, oral tradition,

cultural richness, and their reconstruction in the religious experience. It can be deemed that there is no real recognition of their role in society, they live a history that does not transform, by contrast, it is inherited and weighs.

Finally, within public policies in institutions such as schools, there is an urgent need to allow the use of elements part of the own Afro-Colombian culture to be both a means of rescuing the culture itself and as a didactic and pedagogical tool within ethno-education, considering that each of them is loaded with a

significant symbolism of recognition. Also, ethno-education and religious experience cannot be relegated exclusively to peer foundations or oral transmission – more scenarios must be strengthened by public policies that allow an integral development of the Afro-Colombian within multicultural environments, as a tool for an exodus to situations of racism, since these are often due to the lack of knowledge and acknowledge within society.

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