
Afro-Descendants in Chile: From Disappearance to Reappearance

Ibrahim Tuo

Department of Iberian and Latin American Studies, Félix Houphouët-Boigny University, Abidjan, Ivory Coast

Email address:

ibrahim_tuo86@yahoo.com

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Abstract: Studies related to slavery but also to the contribution of Africans to American culture and population, for more than two decades, have allowed progress in the knowledge of these issues that, far from being secondary and anecdotal, point to a better knowledge of the social conditions that, in the Americas, they allowed the accumulation of capital. Despite the brutality of the slave system, the works have shown many aspects of the African community in America, precisely in Chile. In the case of this country, they received during the colonial era a large contingent of slaves from Argentina, Peru, etc ... this people was liberated and became a metis of the servile yoke in order to be visible. Then, after a long time they will be forced to hide you so as not to be punished. This is how they moved away from public spaces and big cities to become invisible. Today, they have struggled with many aspects of culture such as groupings, music produced by people deprived of liberty or subaltern, rhythms, songs and dances. These are elements that allowed the invisibility of the black population in Chile. So, in this article, the purpose is to know and analyze the process of disappearance and reappearance of Afro-descendants in Chile. The objective is to show how the process of disappearance and reappearance of the Afro-descendant population in Chile has been.

Keywords: Afro-Descendant, Chile, Disappearance, Reappearance

1. Introduction

The phenomenon that this research seeks to understand is the process of disappearance, self-recognition and identity reconstruction that the African people have been confronted with since their arrival in Chile. The word Afro-descendant is related to the presence of African descendants in America. This has arisen since the arrival of slaves on the American continent. After their distribution in the country, they have been confronted with the dilemma of forced disappearance so that Chile becomes a country without blacks. It is necessary to understand the historical conditions that have shaped the scenario. Therefore, the current study seeks to contextualise as a first question the period of Chileanisation, which represents the primordial moment in which the invisibilisation and denial of blacks is manifested, forming a very strong process of cultural and phenotypical loss.

On the other hand, despite its denial, one of the purposes of this study is to understand and make known the different ways in which the Afro-descendant identity is represented,

the various elements that compose it. Then, it will show how this identity has been configured and updated over time according to the different contexts and their transformations. It will also refer to the composition of the movement through the formation of its movements, divisions and alliances, as well as its struggles for identity visibilisation through its demands and discourses.

According to María Paz Espinosa Peña [8], the period of Chileanisation occurred between 1911 and 1929. Following her, she states that, during the last four years of this period, there have been strong consequences on the Afro-descendant population in the regions of Arica and the Azapa Valley because they have been forcibly exiled, mistreated, persecuted, raided, not to mention those murdered by civil society groups and the Chilean state. This phenomenon has led to the disappearance, camouflage and invisibility of the African presence. At the same time, this has provoked a strong process of whitening of the Chilean population and for

the African descendants to suffer the discrimination and repression of which they have been victims. The problem of denial of black identity has continued until a new march of self-recognition is slowly beginning to emerge. This step has been achieved through a new generation made up of the grandchildren and children of those who lived through that period, who have now reconstructed themselves as Afro-Chileans.

From all this, this question arises: How has the process of disappearance and isolation of Afro-Chileans been shaped? What has been the method used to achieve their goal of visibility in the country?

The aim of this research is to analyse the discourses of Chileanisation and concealment of blacks. Then, to describe the experiences and motivations of this population to self-recognise themselves as Afro-descendants and finally to account for the process of self-recognition.

This problem is going to be answered in our research work by describing the method to be followed.

2. Methodology

The methodology requires a documentary and descriptive research of the situation of the afrodescendant population in the regions of the Azapa and Azapa valleys because they were the regions where these people lived. To begin with, compiled bibliographic material was compiled on this subject in terms of denial, exclusion and identity reconstruction, the use of political strategies, the Afro-descendant realities and processes in Chile.

Then, different written documents and publications in the domain of the disappearance and reappearance of Afro-descendants were considered to reach the objective of the work since in countries like Spain where it is easy to find many books to research. Ultimately, in order to analyse the documents and qualify them, the analytical method served as a guidance. This is a scientific method that allows us to observe and collect data. The wide diversity of the authors was mainly considered in order to achieve a study that includes the presence, disappearance and reappearance of the African population in Chile. The authors who have dealt with this subject are mentioned below. The authors analysed include: María Paz Espinosa Peña [8].

3. Development

3.1. *The Black Presence in the Chilean Republic*

✎ This part of the development, will contextualise the presence of blacks in Chile, from their arrival in the colonial period to recent centuries. In order to understand this data on the presence of Blacks, history will play a paramount role. The presence of blacks in Chile dates back to the 16th century. In this period, Arica and its surroundings belonged to Peruvian territory. According to Wormald Cruz, this is where there was a large black population, and at that time there were already 1,200 blacks in Peru who were distributed

in many places along the coast, Arica was also included in this place. The author adds that, in addition to the internment into the country of 500 free "ebony pieces" in compensation for services rendered to the Crown. This situation was increasing by the 17th century. It was estimated that there were about a thousand black slaves and a hundred free blacks [18]. Rolando Mellafe adds that by the 16th century there were 7,000 blacks, mulattos and zambos, out of a total population of 17,600 inhabitants in Chilean territory. And the population of blacks and mestizos of colour increased markedly to 22,000 in the seventeenth century [12].

Valentín Briones, for his part, thinks that in the corregimiento¹ of Arica, the largest assembly of slaves was in the cities, except for the valleys in the south of Peru, where there was also a large black presence, the geographical framework being Lluta, Sama, Locumba, Tacna and the Azapa valley in the north and then in the south, places like Matilla, San Lorenzo de Tarapacá, Pica, among others [3]. To enrich this point of view, Wormald gave us a percentage of the black presence saying that during the year 1871 blacks and mestizos of blacks constituted 58% of the population of the territory, being 1,602 in the city of Arica out of a total of 2,768 inhabitants. In Azapa, the percentage was even higher, 455 out of a total of 590 inhabitants, while whites represented only 23.9% [18].

When the blacks arrived, they settled in different parts of Chile. They stayed in the Azapa Valley at the beginning of the 20th century. In this period, many Afro-Chilean families in this period had inheritances that they had bought as free blacks or by bequest from their chiefs. To illustrate this thesis, the testimony of Arturo Carrasco was quoted by María Paz Espinosa Peña when he said: There was a hacienda called the Albarracín hacienda, where all the blacks used to gather to have parties, to dance, to recreate themselves, where carnivals were held, everything... the Corvacho family owned a lot of land [8].

Later, the blacks settled in La Chimba, which is located on the coast of Arica, and the limits of this place are not totally defined, but they are very close. Blacks and whites lived in this part of the country, but the blacks were much more numerous than the whites. Espinosa Peña said: "They were mixed, but there were more blacks than whites, blondes, there was everything, there were Bolivians, Peruvians" [8].

In the end, Arica is a city where there were also many blacks, precisely in the Lubanga neighbourhood at the beginning of the 20th century. This place was a meeting point for black people to express themselves and live together. That is why Briones wrote:

"fue un enclave urbano de pequeños comerciantes negros. Barrio también donde pudieron desarrollar ciertos oficios tales como lavandería y labores de costura, además de la presencia de cantinas" [4].

Moreover, in this sector, women dominated in domestic

¹ The term *corregimiento* is used for territorial demarcations for administrative purposes.

service while men owned small businesses, as Wormald Cruz [18] has noted.

3.2. *The Denial of Africans*

To find out more about the denial of blacks in Chile, let us underscore that this country itself has turned its back on this indisputable history. However, there are those who have wondered about it, even though they have turned their backs on it. To further the current deepen research, a particular attention is paid to the classics of Chilean history such as Diego Barros Arana or Benjamín Vicuña Mackenna among others in the 19th century. Further, Nicolás Palacios who, not being a historian, has experienced the racial conformation of Chileans since the beginning of the 20th century. All of them, although they have mentioned "black" Africans as an element present in colonial Chile, have categorically denied their existence in Chile at the turn of the 19th to the 20th century as a mixed, extinguished, bleached race, or blood diluted by that of the European mixed to a large or small degree with the indigenous. According to them, favourably diluted, knowing that Chile did not bear, apparently, the offence of that outlawed race, patent in other latitudes. To justify this idea, Nicolas Palacios wrote this text at the beginning of the 20th century:

Debo también recordar que nunca hubo en Chile esclavos negros empleados en las faenas agrícolas o mineras. Los escasos africanos que fueron traídos al país quedaron en las ciudades, de caleseros o domésticos en las casas ricas. Sólo los jesuitas, poco antes de su expulsión, habían empezado a traer negros para ocuparlos en el campo. Cuando se decretó su salida del país, se encontraron en sus numerosas haciendas algunas centenas de esclavos de esa raza, los que fueron vendidos en el extranjero por cuenta del real tesoro. (...) Es por lo que las poquísimas familias chilenas en que aún es dable notar indicios de sangre africana pertenecen a las ciudades, los campos están en absoluto indemnes de ella. [14].

For Rolando Mellafe, after Chile's independence and, subsequently, in the process of creating a nation, it was necessary to re-construct a Europeanising and white memory that would require the idealised present. There have been some who have been interested in referring to the colonial history of the slave trade despite the denial of intermarriage with Africans. They have done so as an episode in Chile's formative past. The continuity of African cultural traits or the mixture was often denied, but they have forgotten to deny slavery as an establishment that had penetrated all the American colonies [11].

Afro-descendants in Arica have appeared in the local press mainly to demand to be recognised as a people in the 2012 Census. However, the response was disapproved because it responded to a flawed circle. According to the country's authorities, there is no concrete data on the considerable number of black people in the country. And one can never speak of ethnicity when referring to Afro-descendants, since they do not have a recognisable and stable territory or their

own language in Chile. For the authorities, the Afro-descendants were Peruvians, but not Chileans.

In February 2015, Afro-descendant organisations presented their demands to the executive branch of government, which was incisive in its response. The response received to the demands of this population informed that it is not true that their demands would be understood in the context of a migrant policy because the government was working on this. The following is what the note pointed out:

Que, primeramente, como Gobierno agradecemos el envío de vuestra carta, en este sentido, queremos señalar que con fecha 26 de enero de 2015, se constituyó el Consejo Técnico de Política Migratoria (CTPM), instancia que asesorará el cumplimiento de la Política Nacional Migratoria y los acuerdos del Consejo de Política Migratoria, el cual fue creado por S. E. Presidenta de la República, Sra. Michelle Bachelet con fecha 11 de junio del año 2014, mediante Decreto N. 1393... Que, conforme a lo anterior esperamos que el Consejo Asesor Técnico de Política Migratoria avance a paso firme respecto de un correcto análisis en relación a la población afrodescendiente que habita actualmente en nuestro país, así como también, de la proposición de modificaciones a la normativa vigente que considere la actual realidad social y económica de Chile, en un contexto de globalización, pluriculturalidad, participación ciudadana y respeto irrestricto a los derechos humanos y las distintas convenciones sobre materias migrantes que ha suscrito el país [13].

Knowing that the letter sent by the black groups visibly raised the historical and territorial request of the mass of Arica and Azapa, the response of the authorities contained the Afro demand in the condition of migrants, mentioning that they have been living in the region for more than 400 years. What is strange?

Then, in order to be recognised, the Afro-descendants had a hearing with Mrs. Ximena Clark, national director of INE, Cristián Báez, representative of the Afro-descendant organisations; Fabiana del Popolo, for CELADE (Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre), Population Division; Nancy Yáñez, lawyer of the Observatorio Ciudadano and expert in indigenous law; and finally, Luis Campos, Anthropologist, advisor to the organisations. This meeting raised again the request for inclusion and the response has not changed. For the authorities there was no time for a new question knowing that there was little time left for the Abbreviated Census 2017. From this moment on, the black population has found itself.

3.3. *The Period of Chilenisation and Invisibilisation*

Chilenisation is the designation used to distinguish a process of transculturation or acculturation of the areas administered and incorporated by Chile after the War of the Pacific (1879-1883), with the aim of transposing the cultural traditions of Chile to replace those sown in Peru and the values of the black communities in the area of Chile where

this African population was located.

According to Luis Campos and María Espinoza, blacks have been settled in large numbers in neighbouring valleys such as Arica and also in the city of Azapa. These cities have been throughout Chile's history mostly Afro-descendant [5]. But, following Alberto Díaz Araya, Luis Galdames Rosas and Rodrigo Ruz Zagal, in the mid-nineteenth century after the extension of saltpetre exploitation, new population contingents will begin to arrive, especially European migrants, knowing that the city continued to be inhabited mostly by Afros. When the region was still under Peruvian sovereignty is something that has become evident with the censuses that have been carried out [7]. Sergio González Miranda goes on to say that after the War of the Pacific and the Chileanisation campaigns, Africans represented the Peruvianness that they wanted to annihilate from the region, which led to the persecution, exile and discrimination that led to the idea that blacks were not Chilean [9]. Most of the Afro families had to go into exile because their houses were marked with crosses. Most of them lost their land and property, which some still claim today, and only a few managed to return.

For Javiere Alarcón, Isabel Araya and Nicole Chávez, the divided families were forced to find progenies of today's Afro-Chileans in Peruvian localities and other more distant ones such as Arequipa and Lima and others nearby such as Tacna and Sama [1]. Luis Campos and María Espinoza said that it was from this moment onwards that the disappearance of the blacks began, who assumed a series of skills that allowed them to continue to remain in the territory. Among so many practices, one could find the intentional marriage with people of non-African descent, the processes of whitening of this population that included the loss of family and ritual ties and above all the abandonment of rural conditions [5]. Since the beginning of the 20th century, the region has been influenced by former saltpetre workers. As a result of the end of this extractive activity, they have come to live in the city. According to Ruz, Galdames and Díaz, in 1950, the Chilean state took on the national development of the northern border with greater force, creating the Junta de Adelanto and the arrival of new Chileans from the south.

Many of them, who were professionals, have shaped the region until recently [15]. The Afro-descendant presence was invisibilised from that time onwards and immobilised the regime of a melting pot of races and miscegenation. This avoided appearing racist from the discourse of the separation of differences and the creation of a new subject. Now, the mestizo of Arica will remain the heir of various cultural traditions. These include indigenous, Afro-descendant and Spanish culture.

According to Valentín Briones, this situation of invisibilisation of the black population will continue during the second half of the 20th century. This will necessarily mean that the black presence will have been totally dissolved. There was not a decade in more than 400 years of colonial and republican history in which no vestige of the blacks of Arica appeared, as the data of his research shows [4].

Wormald Cruz gives us an example of what Briones says when he says: blacks and mulattos appear defending the port of Arica from pirate attacks in 1681 [18].

The Chileanisation of the region began through the sayings of González between 1881 and 1929, that is, after the War of the Pacific. This involved a targeted persecution of blacks who were recognised as an example of Peruvianness [9]. Posters multiplied in nationalist propaganda in which the Peruvian shown as a "traitor" was represented by an Afro-descendant [7].

3.4. The Process of Black Recognition

Despite denial and invisibility, blacks have embarked on a new path to recognition in the territory. The first proposal for the affirmation of Afro-Colombians in Chile really began in 2008. In that year, in parallel with the National Institute of Statistics (INE), the appropriate dialogues were held so that Afro-descendants could be included in the 2012 Census. According to Marta Salgado [16], the Afro leader at the time, Afro-descendants were concerned about being counted in the 2002 Census. According to ECLAC, one of the few countries in Latin America that did not have a differentiating question at that time were Chile and the Dominican Republic. They were the only two countries that did not associate this type of query in the Register [6].

Blacks did not count in Chile because there were cultural obstacles for this population to be considered. Therefore, in 2008, in this context, talks began with doubts about the counterpart. Thus, Salgado said that, after many agreements and the conclusive refusal to move forward on the issue, the African associations came together to lobby in a different way [16]. As they had started the pressure, they had become visible in the city of Arica and every 6 January their drums sounded as an emblem of identity when they undertook to celebrate the Pascua de Negros (Black Easter). This had never been used in such a direct way to protest in society. In front of the headquarters of the public services of the Arica region, the batucadas were repeated incessantly throughout 2009 and eventually the city authorities were sensitised. While the question of the existence of the blacks had been put to rest, the non-existent blacks were already in the city celebrating with their tumbes, carnivals, etc... They also left no one alone and hindered the work of the public services. The existence of blacks could not really be denied as they were demanding to be recognised, counted in the census and incorporated into the national population of Chile [8].

The conversations that started from that moment onwards began with the following statements: black people are in Arica, they exist, there is no experience to develop the question, there is no time in the 2012 census to incorporate them. INE, the Regional Government and the Municipality of Arica, taking on board these findings, addressed the demands of Afro-descendant groups and began a specific study in the Region of Arica and Parinacota to help create the experience before counting Afro-descendants or to have an approximation to the socio-cultural particularities of this population. Thus, according to the INE from 2011 to 2014,

the Afro-descendant Characterization Survey (ENCAFRO) began its work and delivered the following results: Afro-descendants represented 4.7% of the region, i.e. a total of 8,415 people [10]. This number could change when the advancement of the process of self-recognition and through the increase of migratory processes is taken into account.

3.5. Cultural Practices

In this part, it is necessary to describe or explain the various symbolic points and practices of the black population in Chile. According to Sánchez [17], Afro-descendant identities are configured through a mixture of new and habitual elements that involve an invariable assimilation, adaptation, recreation and transformation of many cultural elements. They put it in these words: "they include original local productions. These are hybrid and intercultural ethnic identities, constructed in both local and transnational contexts [17].

The process of self-recognition of the culture of this black people, from this perspective, has emerged in Chile from a process of awareness.

Based on the above, let us say that, despite having been made invisible, the black population continued to live and strengthen their culture. Put differently, the traditional practices linked from history to a black identity remained in an exclusive space, but included a slave past without full acceptance or knowledge.

The Afro-descendant population, through awareness-raising, is beginning to re-emerge, entering the public domain through a fusion of different traditional elements that were hidden in the private sphere. In these reinventions, it is important to note the memory of the ancients, which is the basis for adapting, reinterpreting and ultimately resignifying the present culture and identity, which is defined on the basis of a common past, that of being descendants of African slaves. This is what unites them as a community.

One of the cultural practices is language and its valuation. This is a primordial component of ethnic identities because of its relationship with the native language. African language is considered as an inheritance left by the ancestors and is also deeply related to tradition. African dialects or languages are a product of the repression and uprootedness implied by servitude, the Blacks aspired to in their quest for identity strengthening. Groups were formed in order to remain strong. These Afro-descendant associations have investigated certain terminologies and words used by the population which, as Baéz said, have African roots:

"bemba, tumba, comba, macumba y Lumbanga, que según estos términos con las consonantes "mb", en su mayoría son palabras del idioma Limbundu o a veces nombrado kimbundu, provenientes de la región de Angóla, el Congo y Mozambique, que fueron parte de la civilización Bantú" [2].

Knowing that they are not necessarily certain about African culture, they make an effort to find certain similarities with these words. It can be said from this

perspective that Afro-descendants have constructed certain local words with which they represent themselves.

As far as religion is concerned, let us say that it is a fundamental element today in the construction of Afro-descendant identity, because religious festivities are deeply rooted in Chile. They are purely slave and black manifestations of a region. In this context, there is an agenda of religious festivals and carnivals, celebrated by the Afro-descendant population of the Azapa Valley. The main Black celebrations in Chile are, among others, the massive pilgrimage to the Virgen de las Peñas in October, the celebration of the May crosses and the Feast of San Miguel de Azapa in September.

The grandparents, on the other hand, are practitioners of the "Señor de Locumba", a festival that takes place in February in the Sama² Valley. There are many other Afro-descendant beliefs such as those referring to "witchcraft" and a Yoruba³ cultural heritage.

4. Conclusion

We conclude by saying that in Chile, there was a large Afro-descendant population that was eventually expelled with greater force. But, in certain places, many Blacks managed to remain. Staying in these places represented a real space of resistance in which Afro-descendants were able to preserve and recover their identity. To reconstruct an identity, Afro-descendants had to take into account many things such as historical events and contexts. These are elements that symbolised the loss of their culture and the denial of their own existence. At the moment when an Afro-descendant identity began to be reconstructed on the basis of the vindication and visibility of a black past, this denial of black identity continued until many years before. Since then, the inclusion of the Afro-descendant variable has been included in the national census. This is how people of African descent have reappeared in Chile.

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² It is a city located around Tacna, also a town in Peru.

³ The Yoruba are an ethno-linguistic group from West Africa and Nigeria.

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