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Black Liberation and Indigenous Sovereignty in Latin America

A review of *Africanidades Latinoamericanas y Caribeñas: Legados Culturales y Horizontes de Derechos*.

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In July 2024 I visited a Bribri Indigenous community in Salitre, Costa Rica. In a conversation with Michael Morales, a Bribri teacher and Indigenous leader mentioned that his people constitute just 1% of Costa Rica's population, making it challenging to achieve legislative recognition and Indigenous autonomy. Morales discussed the impacts of both international and national legislation on Bribri rights, including the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention 169 by the International Labour Organization (approved in 1989) and Costa Rica's educational reforms aimed at supporting Indigenous languages and cultures.

Indigenous Law No. 6172 of 1977 (IWGIA, 2023), acknowledges 24 Indigenous territories, yet there continues to be ongoing efforts to reclaim land and gain complete sovereignty. Morales stated that there is a difference between law and practice. As such, the Bribri often have to assert agency over their rights irrespective of current laws in Costa Rica. Morales highlighted the murder of Sergio Rojas in 2019, a Bribri Indigenous land defender in Costa Rica, amid his efforts to reclaim Indigenous territories (Ortiz, 2024). Despite the gravity of the case, the Costa Rican judicial system did not prosecute the suspects due to inadequate evidence. Despite Costa Rica's endorsement of international agreements such as the 2007 UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the ILO 169 Convention, the UN has reminded the state of its obligations under these treaties to «protect the special rights of Indigenous Peoples and

their advocates» (United Nations as cited in Ortiz, 2024). This incident calls attention to the continuous challenges and dangers faced by Indigenous leaders in Costa Rica and the systemic shortcomings in upholding their rights, despite the presence of international and national protective laws (Ortiz, 2024). My conversation with Bribri Leader Michael Morales highlights the interconnected struggles of Black liberation and Indigenous sovereignty—a theme that resonates deeply across in the special issue of *Africanidades Latinoamericanas y Caribeñas: Legados Culturales y Horizontes de Derechos*. In Miguel González's interview of Yolanda Camacho - an Afro-Mexican female leader of Oaxaca and entitled «Nuestra lucha cuestiona la estigmatización de los negros» (2023), she highlights the joint efforts of Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities - particularly women - in confronting discrimination and advocating for rights through collaborative initiatives and cultural empowerment through workshops and advocacy. This article emphasizes the collaboration between Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities in pushing for legislative reforms and defending their rights, focusing on shared struggles and unity to foster cultural and territorial recognition. These collaborative efforts include education, cultural events, and legal advocacy, aiming to influence policy and ensure representation in legislative changes (González, 2023). In her interview with González (2023), Camacho states «In 2015, the first Meeting of Women

of Central America and the Caribbean was held in the capital of Nicaragua. At that meeting, the organizing comrades told us that it was the first time that black women from Mexico attended. We realized that all the countries had similar agendas and were going for the same thing: recognition of human rights, land and territory, health and public policies». Similarly, the article «Afro-Colombians and Interculturality in the Pacific Region» by Velasco, Castrillón, Tobón (2023) included in the IGWIA edited collection *Africanidades Latinoamericanas y Caribeñas: Legados Culturales y Horizontes de Derechos* discusses how Afro-Colombians continue to face significant challenges despite the protections afforded by Colombia's Law 70 of 1993, which acknowledges the collective land rights of Black campesinos. This legislation, a crucial part of the 1991 Constitution's multicultural reforms, is intended to support Afro-Colombian communities along riverbanks in the Pacific region. However, a notable «implementation gap» persists, with the state's failure to enforce these rights leaving the community exposed to exploitation and violence (Velasco, Castrillón, and Tobón, 2023).

Indeed, Afro-Descendant people from Caribbean countries do have similar agendas. When we see the impact of Caribbean migration to Latin America, particularly Jamaican migration to Costa Rica - Marcus Garvey's Pan-African and Black nationalist ideologies further enriches this discourse. It reveals how Black pride, culture, and economic independence have shaped Afro-descendant and Indigenous solidarity and resistance across Latin America. Garvey's influence resonates in the collective memory and ongoing campaigns for self-determination and cultural recognition, as seen in the legislative reforms discussed in this special issue - such as the constitutional recognition of Afro-descendant people in Mexico under Article Two, Section C (González, 2023).

The special edited collection *Africanidades Latinoamericanas y Caribeñas: Legados Culturales y Horizontes de Derechos* features interviews and articles by Afro-descendant leaders from Bolivia, Mexico, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Colombia, and Brazil. Hearing directly from leaders in these countries provide unique insights into the specific challenges and achievements in their respective countries. The digital copy of the collection is available in Spanish, while English versions can be accessed via Debates Indigenas (<https://debatesindigenas.org>).

The special edited collection not only documents complex histories but also serves as a catalyst for current and future advocacy, emphasizing the need for solidarity

between Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities in pursuing shared goals of liberation and justice. The recognition of these intertwined struggles is vital for dismantling the ongoing legacies of colonialism in Latin America and supporting movements that advocate for both Black liberation and Indigenous sovereignty.

Africanidades Latinoamericanas y Caribeñas: Legados Culturales y Horizontes de Derechos articulates the interconnected struggles of Black and Indigenous communities against white supremacy and settler colonialism and the broader historical and contemporary impact on Afro-descendant leaders in their communities. This special collection highlights the critical need for collaboration and mutual support to navigate the complex social, economic, and political challenges faced by Afro-descendant and Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas. Camacho says «Coexistence is good» (2023). Indeed, true liberation - sovereignty of all people and reclamation of Indigenous land - cannot happen in silo. We must coexist and collaborate to drive progress forward.

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