



# The Belizean Garifuna Identity: Migratory and Transnational Space and its Effects on the Home Community



Amalia Louisa Rylander  
Thesis submitted for the Degree of  
Master of Philosophy in Indigenous Studies  
Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education  
University of Tromsø  
Norway  
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## ABSTRACT

From their very origins, the Afro-Indigenous people who dwell along the Caribbean coasts of northern Central America have been migrants. They have been so both on their own volition and through forced migrations. Having started out as Caribs from the South American Amazon Basin, having traversed the River courses up through the Orinoco Delta, and having crossed into the West Indian southern archipelago, they established themselves on the islands. There, they merged with the Arawak Taino peoples. It is believed that this migration was one of choice.

The African forefathers were survivors of shipwrecked European vessels. They were remnants of human cargoes bound for the New World's plantations as enslaved labor to the sugarcane industry. Providentially, these escapees were assisted by the hospitable Carib Arawak people with whom they intermingled, and multiplied in their new homeland on the Island of St. Vincent's. This was a forced migration from the African continent.

St. Vincent's did not long remain home, except as an ancestral habitat, because during the heyday of power struggles among European antagonists another forced migration lay on their history's horizon. It took the form of exile to the Bay Islands off the Honduran coast, after a prolonged and ill-fated bout of hostilities with the colonials. The Garífunas' subsequent journeys to the Isthmus were of their own preferences, once they had surmised that the land to which they had been banished was not to their liking.

Home then became the four nation-states of Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Belize where the core of the people still abide in the original towns, villages and hamlets. However, in response to the dictates of meaningful livelihoods, they pioneered the routes of migrant workers in neighboring lands as well as abroad. In the last two centuries, they've begun as temporary Central American and West Indian migrants to become permanent United States transmigrants and transnationals, two phenomena developed through global transformations.

In this Thesis, I endeavor to trace the migratory paths of the forebears of the Garífunas; explore their self-identification as Afro-Indigenous; study their culture of where "home" is at any given time; investigate their commonalities and fierce sense of nationhood even though their dwelling crosses four borders; and I examine their religious rites and rituals which connect them to the past and bind them together as a unified and stable people: the worship of the *Gubidas* through the call of the ancestors to the family *Düügü*.



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# 1. Introduction

On the Caribbean coast of northern Central America the indigenous people of color, the Garífunas of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua, have since the mid 19th century temporarily abandoned kith and kin to venture into the more affluent communities abroad, particularly to the USA and Canada. There they labor to garner incomes that could not only maintain, beyond subsistence, the families left behind but to query the possibilities and options not available in their native soil. Even when Garífunas become permanent residents or citizens of the countries to which they migrate, they continue to maintain their relatives who are unable or reluctant to relocate.

In the country of Belize, formerly British Honduras, the Garífunas and the other people of color, the Creoles, form the majority of émigrés who provide for families yet at home. In Dangriga, the center of the Stann Creek District and the principal Garífuna town in Belize, more than 60%<sup>1</sup> of the economy is in the form of monies from emigrants in the United States and Canada. Presently, money transfers from North America have swollen to such large proportions, that it is no longer a purely family or community matter. It has become a national issue as well. In recent years, it is reported that funds sent to Belize by its emigrated citizens far exceed Aid from the Western countries and Institutions.

## 1.1. Main Concepts and Research Questions

Since its independence from Britain the government of Belize has recognized, acknowledged and taken pride in the multicultural, multiethnic and multilingual composition of its population. During the time of British colonialism, the social hierarchy was strictly according to race and color, with the Caucasians (whether British or North American) as the ruling class; and the Mayas (Yucatecs, Ketchis and Mopan) and Black Caribs (the present Garífunas) as the disposed, marginalized and on the periphery of the social and political spectrum.

With independence, self-governance, and the redefinitions of peoples, the Garífunas and Mayas have become valued members of society, and now are the "indigenous populations" of the country. Both peoples, are part of the larger transnational Latin American inhabitants, occupying multiple countries. The Mayas can be found from Chiapas and the Quintana Roo, Yucatan of Mexico to the Nicaraguan Costa Rican border; and the Garífunas are firmly established in four countries on the isthmus. For this reason, among others, they

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<sup>1</sup> Fieldwork: Conversation with informant, High School classmate, Filipa Nuñez, Dangriga, Belize, July 17, 2009.

are now being touted as celebrated members of the Belizean society. The Garífuna of Dangriga is a small vestige of the exiled Caribs, the Afro-Amerindian people of St. Vincent Island, to the Island of Roatán on the Honduran coast. From there, they journeyed to southern Belize.

During my fieldwork in Belize and Honduras, I observed that the Garifunas and the Mayas differed in their survival strategies and economic pursuits. Among the alternative choices available, the Garifunas often chose emigration as a means of personal financial enhancement in addition to communal and cultural survival; while the Mayas remained in their villages and towns embracing their ancestral methods and agrarian system. This observation is one of the incentives and inspiration for my research. My purpose for this Thesis is to analyze the Garifuna's route of seeking occupation abroad, supporting their communities and residing long-term away while still calling Belize their home. In view of the fact that for more than two centuries, generations of British Honduran Caribs, now Belizean Garifunas, have chosen this path to financial sustenance and a continued existence as a nation, my research questions became:

1. How did the Garifunas become an indigenous people?
2. What are the forces which impel them to emigrate away from kin and kith?
3. To what extent do families and community demands influence migrants' actions?
4. What are the influences which compel transmigrants to return home?

## **1.2. Relevance and Objective**

Globalization is a phenomenon of the present age. The increased speed and affordability of travel, the proximity of people to one another by means of the rapid growth of information technology such as the internet and mobile telephones, and the immediate awareness of what's happening worldwide via the television media, have made migration from one region to another easier than ever before. It takes only three hours to travel from Belize City to Miami, Florida; and for people seeking the ". . . better things of life,"<sup>2</sup> when they know that those better things are readily accessible ". . . out there,"<sup>3</sup> it becomes a compelling impetus for migration.

Globalization and the current temporary migrations (Chaney 1979:209) therefore, are both germane to the subject of community survival by Belizean Garífunas. When asked

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<sup>2</sup> Fieldwork: Conversation with informant, Alba Castillo, Belize City, Belize June 8, 2009.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.



where home was for one of the College student informants, vacationing in Dangriga, he unhesitatingly replied, "Texas and Belize."<sup>4</sup> He reflected still others who stated that the foreign city where they resided and work, as well as Belize were where home is. Thus the transnational Garífuna family is becoming a persuasive influence in the Belizean social landscape.

My objectives here are to:

1. Determine the factors persuading Garífuna to migrate to other venues.
2. Describe the transformation from being migrants to becoming transmigrants.
3. Analyze the transnationality standing of the Belizean Garífuna family.

I believe that my research is significant and unique because although there are texts already written on these subjects, I have read none which deals specifically with why Garifunas routinely, consistently and on a long-term basis send those hard earned monies back to Dangriga.

### **1.3. Methodology**

The methodological norm on which this Thesis is constructed is the qualitative premise, whereby during the fieldwork small focus group discussions, individual interviews, informal and casual conversations, private (family) tours, and my own personal observations were implemented. Distinguished here, are the terms "interviews" and "conversations." Interviews consisted of formal prearranged meetings in which particular persons were consulted and questioned to elicit useful information and material. Casual conversations, many of which were fortuitously unintentional and unpremeditated occurrences, comprised of spontaneous informal exchanges of thoughts, opinions, and feelings. Whenever I found myself in someone's living-room or back yard, the reason for being in Belize usually came up, and the topic of support from abroad was inevitably discussed.

The respondents consisted of Garífunas who considered themselves as indigenous, besides those who considered themselves ethnic Creoles. The politics of "indigenoussness" and "ethnicity" in Belize and of "who is Garífuna," as well as the several reasons why people regard themselves as Garífunas or Creoles will be discussed throughout other chapters.

All participants were knowledgeable and readily conversant about migration, which was a hot political subject in Summer 2009. Some partakers had earlier been recipients of support from abroad, some were still currently being supported similarly provided for, others

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<sup>4</sup> Fieldwork: Interview with informant, Zoilo Zuniga, Dangriga, Belize, July 18, 2009.

were retirees and returnees, now enjoying the “good life” on pensions from a previous stint abroad, and the majority still had relations overseas. The respondents consisted of local government leaders, bank personnel, educators, members of community organizations and an NGO, social workers, a clergyman and a couple of university professors. My relatives were included, and so were certain of my former High School classmates, who had returned home years ago after completing their higher education abroad and are now running the country. Formal interviews were conducted in both Belize City and Dangriga, and the interviewees numbered nineteen souls.

### *1.3.1. Participant Observation*

Doing participant observation has many things in common with what everyone does in newly encountered social situations. At first, one may feel at a loss as to how to behave and conduct oneself. However, by familiarization, watching carefully what other people say and do, by taking cues from others, imitating their actions, by adapting to and learning the culture of the life around, the researcher begins to feel less like a stranger. This is the transformation from being a *participant observer* to becoming an *ordinary participant*, who eventually gives little thought to the social situations encountered (Spradley 1980: 53).

Such transformation was experienced, because although I arrived in Belize with many preconceived ideas, those notions were quickly abandoned when the realization dawned upon me that so much had changed since my departure. Adjustment to being a *participant observer* and gradually redeveloping into an *ordinary participant* occurred. The resulting difficulty was that by staying with relatives during my fieldwork, I was treated as an *insider* when I was actually feeling like an *outsider*. It was reassuring to know that "doing ethnographic fieldwork often involves alternating between the insider and outsider experiences, and sometimes having both simultaneously" (Spradley: 59). I was introduced, first as a member of the community, and then as a researcher. Incidentally, it was by using this method of *participant observation*, that I was able to switch my study from an inconvenient and flawed topic to this more relevant one.<sup>5</sup>

### *1.3.2. Workshops*

The unplanned participation in two workshops in Dangriga on the subject of the health risks of runaways and homeless children and teens, produced an unexpected goldmine of data. At

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<sup>5</sup> My original Thesis was on the absconding of Garífuna Communal Lands in Aguan, Honduras by the Honduran government, and its transfer to Mega-tourism international concerns. Not only was the topic uninterestingly a non- issue to the locals, neither was it relevant to the locality.

those events, questions pertinent to my research were fielded and the answers yielded valuable material regarding the care of the youth left in the guardianship of elderly relatives while the parents worked in a foreign country. The staff and employees of the district hospital, who were in attendance and who conducted the meetings included nurses, psychologists and other clinicians. These personnel then became enrolled as contributors in later interviews.

### *1.3.3. Focus Groups*

Two focus group discussions were organized by local contacts. One consisted of a meeting of four staff members and one volunteer of an NGO. The subject centered on the distribution of the 60% monies from "economic exiles" (Chaney); and of the remaining 40% derived from local agriculture and fishing, occupations in which both men minimally, and women principally, participated in.

The second group discussion included a neighborhood family club where the issue was on the advantages to both departing and sending parties. The former discourse was in Spanish in Honduras, where I first learned about the extent to which Garifunas depended on foreign funds; the latter was in English in Belize City, where its actuality was confirmed. It was then that the decision was finally made to delve into this topic for the Thesis.

### *1.3.4. Tour Observations*

The concept of the "grand tour" comes from the common experience of having someone show us around. However, this is a superficial identification of only the major features of a community, for like all grand tour observations, it provides merely the most general aspects of events or of the locale (Spradley: 78). Some participants took me to see their new SUVs (Sports Utility Vehicles), plots of ground, and boats or houses which had been constructed by money, "Fram di States."<sup>6</sup> Meandering through the showcased properties (both in Belize and Honduras), one could not miss the fact that the newer homes and buildings had noticeably American mid-western or ranch style attributes, complete with modern appliances and furniture; a distinct departure from the typical Garífuna cement, daub or wooden abode.

### *1.3.5. Interviews and Conversations*

The most meaningful interviews were the unplanned, informal and casual meetings. While in Honduras, the participants gave obviously canned, prepared responses to my questions. This was due to my having an American-Garifuna to contact them prior to my arrival. She had

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<sup>6</sup> This is an example of patois, commonly spoken among familiars throughout Belize.

arranged most of my meetings there, and the informants gave almost the same answers to the various inquiries.

In Belize, there were no such previous plans, so the spontaneity to the questions was straight from the heart. The danger here was that afterwards some people didn't want their impulsive responses to be taken into consideration. In those cases, they had to be convinced that their anonymity would be discretely honored.

### *1.3.6. Ethnographic Record Keeping*

An ethnographic record consists of field notes, tape recordings, pictures, artifacts, and anything else that documents the social situation under study. A description of a culture is produced from an *ethnographic record* of the events of a society within a given time, including the informants' responses to the ethnographer's queries and tests. Besides identifying the various language users in the field situation, the ethnographer must *make a verbatim record of what people say*, but this obvious principle of getting things down word-for-word is frequently violated. Whether recording things people say in natural contexts or in more formal ethnographic interviews, the investigator's tendency to translate continues to operate (Spradley: 67).

At every opportunity during my field study, whether during interviews, conversations, on family tours, or workshops, I would immediately scribble down almost everything said and impressions felt, remembering my advisor's parting words, "Write everything down the same day that they occur!" Later, the notes were transcribed in detail. In the beginning, it was easy to write using the verbatim principle because the informants spoke the standard English. But, as the work progressed and people became more familiar with me, they began to speak the patoi common in everyday use.

During those times and especially as focus group discussions or casual, even friendly and family conversations got heated up, translation on the spot of the ensuing dialogues was the most practical route to take. A tape recorder was not used, because of the precaution that people would not be natural knowing that their words were actually being logged; but they were glad, for the most part, to have their pictures taken. Once the camera was in view, many, especially the children and teens began to pose.

### *1.3.7. Challenges*

The first dilemma I faced as a researcher, who was in the beginning considered an insider, was that I did not speak Garífuna, the language. The townspeople's disappointment resulted in

the label "an Oreo Garífuna"<sup>7</sup> by a young adult; and an elder strictly charged me to learn the language as soon as possible. One of the anomalies of the language is that there are some subjects which only a woman can say or ask, and others that only the men can. The explanation is that when the African males intermarried with the Amerindian females on St. Vincent Island, the girl children spoke the language of the mothers, and boy children spoke that of the fathers. This idiosyncrasy is imbedded in the language today, so in instances where I was in unfamiliar places, one of my former classmates served as an interpreter for this very reason. Discretion was of utmost importance to her and to the members in the town. Few things could be worse than to show impertinence to an elder by asking what might be considered an indiscrete question.

Secondly, as a married woman travelling alone, I was initially looked upon with quick askance. The men initially hesitated to participate in the interviews until after they were persuaded that I was of so-and-so's family, and would not contravene the traditions. Moments like these were when I felt like an outsider, not fully understanding the cultural and linguistic rules. Married women also spoke differently from singles. "To escape such a reception, a person must be able to identify himself as a member of a familiar group through kinship ties, caste ties and/or community affiliation" (Berreman 2007: 138). I was grateful for the support I received from the women, who assisted by taking turns to accompany me to appointments and engagements, and who explained the differences of the language usages between the genders, marital status and age groups. They were particularly concerned about the possibility of my insulting someone or showing disrespect.

Thirdly, on the morning of my arrival in Belize, the populace had been awakened at 2:00am in the middle of the night to the devastating jolt of a massive earthquake, 7.1 on the Richter Scale. This prevented me from starting the interviews for almost a week and a half, for the people and government were focused on assessing the damages and future repairs of their residences and the country's infrastructure. The main difficulty was that roads connecting to the outlying districts, including to Dangriga, were closed for quite some time, causing a late start.

Fourthly, and perhaps most importantly, I had written my Project Description on Honduras, and had studied as thoroughly as possible the subject of Garifuna Community Land Grab by their governmental authorities, focusing on the dispatch of such lands to international

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<sup>7</sup> Oreo is a famous American cookie sandwich. It is made of two dark chocolate biscuits with white vanilla cream between them. The term indicates someone who is a person of color on the outside, but behaves like a westerner.

tourism investors and resort conglomerates. Although it was true for several parts of the country, nothing was further from the truth in the specific region I was investigating. Having decided to return to Belize from Honduras, I narrowly missed the coup-d'etat and overthrow of the then President of Honduras, on the very week-end. The turbulence which ensued the ousting of the now ex-President José Manuel Zelaya and the relocation of his family, included bloodshed in the streets of Tegucigalpa, the capital, and the lockdown of the major airports in the country. Still in his pajamas, he was deported to Costa Rica. That was the main talk in Belize on my return there. Still, another few days' delay!

The final predicament was that the fieldwork was conducted in the summer months, when most Belizeans were escaping the tropical heat and vacationing outside of the country. This was the time when potential migrants went North to probe their prospects of relocating there. It coincided with the holidays, when American-Garifuna youth and College students came to spend their holidays with relatives in Dangriga, to stay in touch with their culture, and to attend the annual language tutorials provided by the community. Providentially, it became a good time to interview several young adults and to get their impressions about being residents (and for some, citizens) of two countries.

#### *1.3.8. Ethical Considerations*

Although several of my informants, particularly the teenagers and budding adults, did not want anonymity regarding their responses I assured them all that none of their names would be used. In places where a direct quote from a verbatim statement would be admitted in the text, the use of a fictitious name would be employed.

#### *1.3.9. Case Studies*

There are three case studies of transnationals. All three live in the United States. The first two are both Belizeans and residents in Los Angeles, California. The third has homes in Belize City, Belize, La Ceiba, Honduras, and Boston, Massachusetts. These were my initial American contacts, who were eager to tell me of the saga of their migration from their country of origin to North America.

### **1.4. Thesis Outline**

This Thesis comprises of six chapters. This first chapter has introduced the background and main concepts of indigenusness, globalization, migration and community support by transnationals. The research questions have been delineated; the objectives, my motivations



and justifications for the study have been described; the methodology has been detailed; the various methods of data collection techniques have been depicted; and the incidental but relevant experiences and the challenges encountered have been disclosed.

Chapter Two delves into the theories, terminologies and definitions of ethnicity and indigeneity and their differentiations, with a hard look at ILO 169 and what Garífunas deem significant about their status as indigenous, despite ILO 169 definition's ambiguity. Because Belize is a multicultural, multilingual nation, with much ongoing debates concerning the subject, this chapter will discuss mainly the Garífuna as indigenous.

Chapter Three is entitled, *Belizean and Garífuna Historical Geography* and deals with the genesis of the Garífuna people in the West Indies and their forced migration therefrom; as well as the lessons learnt and how they have shaped the Garífuna himself, his society and his future. It will apply the constructivist perspective of the past history to identify aspects of the present Garífuna culture, with particular attention to their sense of nationhood and their shared commonalities though dwelling in four Central American countries and North America. Here, we view their mass exile by the British from their "native" St. Vincent Island and its lingering effects on future generations; as well as their proclivity to resistance, their common language, their customary religious rituals; and the frequent and periodic meteorological upheavals (annual hurricanes and occasional minor rumbling earthquakes) which have, to a great extent, shaped their migratory tendencies.

Chapter Four traces and describes the varying migration patterns which evolved in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries Garífuna communities, and we explore the concomitant development of the matrifocal household of that time.

Chapter Five glances at the transnational and transmigration phenomena, whereby Belizean (and other) Garífunas find themselves integrated into two or more national arenas, and considering them all home. We will see how the different American political administrations and their ensuing laws have helped or hindered this transmigration/transnational development.

Chapter Six looks into the important religious aspect of the people and their continued affiliation and faithful devotion to their ancestors. Here, we investigate how their rites and rituals practiced particularly in the *Dügü* keep them connected to their past, and help them to keep the culture of their ancestors robust, relevant and alive.

Chapter Two now turns its attention to the theories regarding the subject of Garífuna indigenosity and to the literature of others who have authored texts about them.



Over Dangriga

## **2. Indigenusness and Self-Identification**

During the past three decades, "indigenous peoples" have increasingly captured international interest, which began with the spotlight on the Americas where the condition and standing of the Native Americans were unquestionable. However, Western commentators, non-governmental organizations, and inter-governmental institutions have appropriated the terminology's use further than the Americas; this at the instigation of several nation-states which sought a definition that would determine that the populations they refer to as "tribal" or "minority nationalities" were not "indigenous peoples" (Sanders 1999: 4). The consequential debates have also engulfed other peoples who seem not to fit the pre-Columbian requirement of habitation before colonialism: among them the Garífunas.

The United Nations has unfailingly regarded indigenous people as a special case, separate from other cultural, ethnic or racial minorities and therefore possessing special rights. In the face of this treatment, some have argued that possibly tribals and minority nationalities should be seen as cultural minorities, not as indigenous peoples. This is the policy of the two North American governments of the United States and Canada, as well as Australia, and New Zealand. These proved to be the four countries which voted against the 2007 United Nations Declaration on The Rights of Indigenous Peoples; eleven other nations abstained, and thirty-four national representatives were absent, taking no part in the election that day.

Especially since the racial evidence may disprove the classical definition of the expression "indigenous" in relation to the Garífunas of Central America, the focus of this chapter is to discuss the notion of indigeneity; how these people view their own status; and why they label themselves as indigenous. On September 13, 2007, when the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted, the four Meso-American countries in which Garífunas call home: Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua were among the first to espouse it. These States did so because they had already recognized this particular populace within their four boundaries as belonging to the category of indigenous. It was through the endeavors and the doings of the Garífunas themselves which spurred this result, for they had always and everywhere proclaimed and maintained their unique way of life. Here, too, I will illustrate how the perception of their indigenusness has helped Garífunas to thrive as a migrant people, working abroad and supporting their Belizean families, preservating their communities, and conserving their culture.

## 2.1. The Issue of Self-Definition

Long before the word "indigenous" became a term of international endearment and respectability; long before it replaced the now discarded idioms of "savages," "primitives," "natives," "tribes," and "backward peoples;" and long before these nomenclatures became euphemized to suit modern political correctness, the Black Caribs<sup>8</sup> were a people stalwart in living their traditions and proud of what they considered their special culture. Even when they were grossly discriminated against, especially because of their stubborn inability to kowtow to British colonialism's dictates of capitalisms through slavery, they insisted in retaining their traditional, religious, communal, and societal practices.

So, when a Garífuna was recently asked about ILO 169 and how it related to their view of themselves as indigenous, her reply was, "We are aware of ILO 169, but we have not relied on that to consider ourselves indigenous."<sup>9</sup> When queried further, "If we are not relying on ILO 169 in considering ourselves indigenous, what are we basing it on?" Her unhesitating response was, "We determine our own self-identification. Our ancestors have handed down the knowledge of our exile from St. Vincent Island, and there are extensive studies written about that. Our Arawak ancestry makes us Indigenous, and our African ancestry makes us African (Ibid)." The Garífuna have a long memory, and most know the details of their fateful defeat and forced migration to the Central American coast at the behest of the British long before ethnographic research on them became popular.

## 2.2. ILO 169 and the Cobo Definition

The International Labor Organization began its endeavors on behalf of indigenous peoples in the 1950's, and early in that decade penned the text, *Indigenous Peoples: Living and Working Conditions of Aboriginal Populations in Independent Countries* (Geneva 1953), which commented on the definitional problems, and noting that it was "increasingly difficult to find a reliable and generally applicable test to distinguish between the aborigines and the rest of the population" (Sanders 1999: 12). The ensuing ILO Convention 107 of 1957 spoke of indigenous and tribal peoples and referred to them in Article 1 (b) as individuals who are:

regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country or geographic region to which the country belongs, at the time of conquest or colonization (Ibid.).

This was revised by ILO Convention 169 in 1989 with an amended definition that:

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<sup>8</sup> Black Caribs: derogatory term used by the British for the present day Garífunas during colonial times

<sup>9</sup> Informant and former High School classmate, Miranda Pascasio, Dangriga, Belize: March 17, 2010.

peoples in independent countries are regarded as indigenous on account of their descent from the populations which inhabited the country at the time of conquest or colonization or the establishment of present state boundaries and who, irrespective of their legal status, retain some or all of their own social, economic, cultural and political institutions (Ibid.).

The new designation was the result of the now acclaimed *Martinez Cobo Study*, composed by the UN Special Rapporteur, José R. Martínez Cobo, who in 1972 was authorized to develop a "working definition" for the category. A decade later, in 1983 he reported to the UN Sub-Commission on The Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities that:

Indigenous communities, peoples and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with pre-invasion and pre-colonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now prevailing in those territories, or parts of them. They form at present non-dominant sectors of society and are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories, their ethnic identity, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns and social institutions (Ibid.).

### **2.3. Garífuna Rejoinder**

Garífunas respond to all three classifications, mentioned above, admitting that they are indeed descended from Amerindian populations (Arawaks and Caribs) who inhabited the Antilles Islands at the time of conquest and colonization. Not only were their ancestors conquered and colonized by Europeans, they became amalgamated with surviving, shipwrecked Africans and later, courageous runaways who nature had blessed by rescuing them from the repulsive fate of slavery. Hence, through those ancestors they can trace their historical continuity from their pre-invasion and pre-colonial periods.

During that time also the former Africans, already once uprooted and forcibly transported across the Atlantic, were calling the new world in which they found themselves "home." One of their national myths is that they were hospitably received by the Amerindian Caribs and Arawaks. Even before their exodus from their St. Vincent homeland they considered themselves distinct from other sectors of the prevailing societies. It is reported that in order to make a distinction between their offspring and those of slave children, they bound the heads of their newborns so that they would have jutting foreheads, unlike those of the slave progeny. From the time of their banishment across the Caribbean Sea to the disputed Island of Roatán, they have formed (or were coerced to form) non-dominant and marginalized sectors of the societies; and they have proven that they are determined to preserve, develop and transmit to future generations their ethnic identity, their cultural patterns and social institutions.

## 2.4. The United Nations' Caveat and Exception

There is one major addendum that poses an exception to the definition of indigenous which is intriguing and relevant to the African equation of the Garífuna, and is noteworthy to mention here. At the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs: Division for Social Affairs of the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, a workshop on data collection and disaggregation for Indigenous peoples was held in New York City on January 19-21, 2004. The matter discussed was, *The Concept of Indigenous Peoples*. At that event a background paper was prepared by the Secretariat of the Permanent Forum (United Nations 2004: 4).

At the outset, in the very introduction, the Secretariat remarked that “considerable thinking and debate have been devoted to the question of definition of “indigenous peoples,” but that no such definition had ever been adopted” (Ibid.). Presently, there continues to be a lack of consensus of a definition, and some contend as to whether there is even a need for one (Sanders: 11). It was on this very point that on November 28, 2006 the process of adoption of the Declaration came to a halt when the African bloc of fifty-three countries decided to defer consideration pending further consultations (Wiessner 2008: 1159).

The African states' original criticism was that the term, “indigenous peoples” was not defined in the Declaration Draft. Scholars have justified the absence of delimitation with the need to avoid packaging the diversity of indigenous peoples into a straitjacket of objective criteria incongruent with the variety of peoples' traditions and aspirations in real life (Ibid.: 1163). Some commentators attempting to define nations and indigenous as well, agree that it is a subject on which it is extraordinarily hard to get a conceptual grip. Not that defining political phenomena is ever easy: any attempt to encapsulate a complex and variable political phenomenon in a definition invites counter-examples, while the form of words chosen often has controversial political overtones (Canovan 1996: 50).

However, the most critical and illuminating was the assertion, as far as Garífunas are concerned, was the Secretariat's telling statement that:

The terms “Indigenous peoples” and “tribal peoples” are used by the ILO because there are tribal people who are not “indigenous” in the literal sense in the countries in which they live, but who nevertheless live in a similar situation -- an example would be Afro-descended tribal people in Central America . . . who may not have lived in the region they inhabit longer than other population groups. Nevertheless, many of these peoples refer to themselves as “indigenous” in order to fall under discussions taking place at the United Nations. For practical purposes the terms “indigenous” and “tribal” are used as synonyms in the UN system when the peoples concerned identify themselves under the indigenous agenda (United Nations: 4).



This modifying explanation or caveat may be an admonition to be considered when evaluating or interpreting who is included in the discussions of the UN Declaration. It may also be a cautionary detail whereby misinterpretations can be prevented. Whatever the reason, because of such ambivalence and because the debate may continue everlastingly, most activist Garifunas depend upon their own individual self-identification as a means of relating to their status. As one informant often snidely remarked, "If we wait for the robins, Spring might have come and gone."<sup>10</sup> What she meant was that they couldn't (or wouldn't) wait for the International powers-that-be to decide on the terminologies while a living had to be made, families had to be housed and fed, and life had to be lived.

## **2.5. The Imagined Community: Belief Constitutes Nationhood**

Authors on nationalism agree that what makes a people a nation is their shared characteristics, whether they be political or cultural. Others propose that the crucial factor is consciousness. Some say that "a nation exists when a significant number of people in a community consider themselves a nation or when they behave as if they are one" (Seton-Watson 1977: 5). Benedict Anderson's account of nations as 'imagined communities' has been widely accepted because it captures much about the way nations exist. Being 'imagined', the nation exists in the mind of the participants, and the connection between the growth of national feeling and the development of printed literature enables strangers to share that consciousness with them (Canovan: 54).

There is no doubt that Garifunas perceive themselves as a unified community, a nation even, albeit located in four separate Central American countries and the two in North America. In the past, they had welcomed many Western students, academics and researchers who scrutinize them and documented much about them. As a teenager, my first encounter with such material was Douglas MacRae Taylor's *The Black Carib of British Honduras*. I recall being surprised by how accurate he was about the things I did know about my culture, and grateful for the information on matters I didn't yet understand. Summertime, during the decade of the 1960's, was when droves of pale young Hippies, with writing pads and pens in hand, tape recorders belted at their waists, and cameras slung around their necks, came from the North (some as Peace Corp missionaries) to study the Kerobees.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Informant and Community elder, Chica LeBlanc, Los Angeles, California: Case Study 1.

<sup>11</sup> Kerobees: Derogatory term used of Garifunas by Belizean Creoles before Independence, and before Garifuna became "indigenous" and thereby respectable. During fieldwork, I never heard the word used.

However, in recent decades, the Garífuna community has produced its own scholars who have generated much literature now housed in the major university libraries, especially in the discipline of Social Studies. Stories which were once told orally from generation to generation are now found commercially in children's books; recipes which were once the secret domain of the elderly matriarchs, are now published and marketed under 'exotic meals' in cookbooks; and Carib/Garífuna poetry, once ridiculed, is now being printed in the vernacular for all to enjoy. Twenty years ago, *The People's Garífuna-English Dictionary* was published in Belize, and even non-Garífuna speaking people made sure to get their personal copy. When it first came out, the prized gift to receive was one's own edition.<sup>12</sup> As Andersen envisaged, this flurry of print has captured the imagination of the people; it has galvanized them in a cohesion not hitherto experienced for quite some time; it has stimulated the artistic juices of both elders and youth to such an extent, that they have resurrected the old music, the traditional drummings, and the dances, of which the *punta* and its derivative the *punta rock* have had worldwide popularity.

Most importantly, the language is being revitalized from its endangered state as Garífuna after-school language classes are being sponsored both in Belize and abroad. These language centers are ministering to the second and third generations, not only to those in Los Angeles, New York City, Chicago and Houston, but in Dangriga and Belize City as well. All these factors have unwittingly engendered and revived a genuine sense of national allegiance and pride in Garífunas everywhere.

## **2.6. Garífuna Indigeneity**

In a variation of the same theme as Anderson's *Imagined Community*, David Miller in *On Nationality* asserts that the principle of nationality embraces the proposition that to have a national identity is to think of oneself as belonging to a community constituted by mutual belief, extended in history, active in character, connected to a particular territory, and marked off from others by its members' distinct traits. These identities may be partly mythical in nature, but they answer a pressing need of maintaining solidarity in modern society, and they comprise of five significant features. In answering the question, "What does it mean to think of oneself as belonging to a national community?" as Garífunas overtly consider themselves, I will expand on this attributes and see if and where they are applicable to this people.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., Chica LeBlanc.

## **2.7. Belief Creates The Nation**

The *first* point is that national communities are constituted by belief: a nationality exists when its members believe that it does. National identities are properly part of personal identities; and the people deem that their existence as a nation depends on their shared belief that its members belong together, and also that they have the shared wish to continue their life in common. In asserting national identity, they imagine that their credos and commitments are reflected by those who share that identity.

### *2.7.1. Historical Continuity and Obligations*

The *second* feature is that it is an identity that embodies historical continuity. Nations stretch backwards into the past, and often in most cases their origins are conveniently lost in the mist of time. In the course of this history various momentous events may have occurred, and progeny can identify with the actual people who played a role at those salient moments, appropriating their heroes' deeds as their own. Frequently, these events involve military victories and defeats; and if there are historical tragedies rather than glories, those tragedies impose duties and demands. The historical national community is one of obligation. Because the ancestors toiled and spilt their blood to build and defend the nation, the generations born into it inherit an obligation to continue their noble endeavors. The historical community therefore stretches back from the past and marches forward into the future across the generations.

### *2.7.2. Activism*

The *third* distinguishing aspect of national identity is that it is an active identity. Nations are communities that do things together, like teamwork, making decisions and achieving results. This active identity is a valuable or vulnerable facet of nationality, for the nation becomes what it is by the decisions that it makes through its proxies: statesmen, soldiers, or sports men. When these representatives make mistakes and cause failure, the whole nation is brought to shame.

### *2.7.3. Geography: The Homeland*

The *fourth* aspect of such identity is that it connects a group of people to a particular geographical place. Where there are sacred sites or places of origin it is not essential that the people permanently occupy that location. But a nation must have a homeland. It may be a source of difficulty, but one of the nation's initial actions must include controlling its own

piece of ground. This is important, if not critical, for a national community because it then can inspire and motivate the populace to aspire to become a political community.

#### *2.7.4. Shared Distinguishing Traits*

The *fifth* essential aspect of national identity is that the people who compose the nation are believed to share certain traits that mark them off from other peoples. Their common traits can be cultural, biological or linguistic in character; they can consist in shared values, or shared tastes. The people who compose a nation must believe that there is something distinctive about themselves that differentiates them from other nations, and that it serves to set them apart from outsiders. National identities can remain unarticulated, and yet still exercise a pervasive influence on people's self-awareness and behavior (Miller 1995: 22-25).

#### *2.7.5. One National Identity, Five Different Citizenships*

Garífunas view themselves as a national identity in all five of the above mentioned elements. Although they are separated across borders and possess two different second languages and sub-cultures, they yet epitomize the profoundly similar Garífuna attributes. Even though the Belizeans are English speaking and on occasion demonstrate British tendencies in their conduct, and while the others speak Spanish and sometimes display a reticent demeanor, they almost all consider Garífuna their first language whether they speak it fluently or not. They relish the same stewed fish or boiled blue crabs, fúfú (mashed plantains), and cassava bread drenched in spiced and seasoned coconut milk, whether they reside in Dangriga, Belize, or Aguán, Honduras, or Boston, Massachusetts. They all believe and retell the same story of their origins on St. Vincent's Island. And they argue the same sentiment that they "were never enslaved nor served as slaves." They see themselves as part of the great Garífuna Diaspora which will some day meet again in St. Vincent's.

Secondly, this people have a historical continuity. Every self-respecting adult Garífuna knows two specific years that relates to them as a people. The first is the year 1638 when a couple of Iberian brigs ran aground on the shores of the Island of St. Vincent and discharged its human cargo of Africans bound for the auction blocks in the Americas. The second year known, and some even know the actual date, is April 16, 1798. That was the year in which their unaccommodating ancestors were exiled to the furthest point away from their homeland, on the other end of the Caribbean Sea to the Island of Roatán. They may dwell in other pieces of earth's surface, but they know where they came from. St. Vincent is the cradle of their foundation as a people.

Thirdly, they have always been an actively dynamic entity. It was because they fiercely defended their persons and their fortunes against who they viewed as interlopers that they were eventually banished away from their motherland. And while they suffered for a season in Roatán, it wasn't long before they took the initiative to remove from there and to relocate on the Central American Atlantic rim. There they were able to thrive and govern themselves, and continue to do so. With their migration to North America they are afforded not only opportunities for economic betterment, but education enhancement as well.

Fourthly, as a previously defeated and dispossessed people bereft of their original homelands, first in Africa and then St. Vincent, they are content to make the best of it in their adopted countries. There is no urgency to become a political community per se, except as contributing and successful citizens within the confines of the respective country where they reside. In their migratory journeys to far flung places, they carry either their Belizean, Guatemalan, Honduran or Nicaraguan passports indicating where their citizenry is pledged. For them, citizenship and nationhood are two separate matters. Having been marginalized on the rugged edges of these countries, it is comforting to believe in and relive the myths of a romantic and grandiose past on their flourishing island home.

Fifthly, Garífunas have no doubt that the people of their nation encompass common traits which mark them off from other peoples. They are enthusiastic and proud of their history, their Afro-Amerindian language with its seeming peculiarities and anomalies, their special particular commemorative celebrations recognized by the non-Garífuna state, their captivating Afro-Caribbean cuisine, their singular brand of syncretic Catholicism, their ancestor religion with its accompanying songs, dance, masquerades and ceremonial rituals, their warm relations with one another, and their own special charm, wit, and humor. Until very recently, not only were they a society apart from Dangriga, Belize in the northern littoral of the Gulf of Honduras to the southern Black River of Nicaragua, their members did not intermarry or have any social dealings with other, non-Garífuna communities with which they may come in contact (Taylor 1951: 37).

## **2.8. Garífuna Identity Formation**

Global forces paved the way for the Garífunas in Central America to enter another phase of their history in which their identity formation took a new twist. It was a time in which they began to forge new transnational identities as members of the world indigenous community (Matthei and Smith 2008: 227). In a largely unheralded effort aimed at 'revitalizing a spirit of

indigenous rootedness' (Palacio 1993)<sup>13</sup> the Belizean intellectuals who fostered the Garífuna identity movement applied for and were granted membership in the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) through the Caribbean Organization of Indigenous Peoples (COIP). The Garífuna had been accepted as members among the millions of aboriginal peoples in the Americas. Their inclusion on the Council provided an important legitimization of their indigenous identity and signaled that other 'fourth world' peoples had accepted them as political allies in their common struggle. As a result, they have been emboldened to form a second organization whose membership consists of six organizations based in Honduras, Guatemala, Belize and the United States. Identifying itself as a Garifuna Diaspora Movement they have recently petitioned the British government for reparations for the 'massacre and expulsion' of Garífuna from St. Vincent (Ibid.).

The National Garifuna Council (NGC), an organization formed in Dangriga, Belize in 1981 began to become vocal in the resistance to the prejudice and discrimination the Garífuna experience in Belize and elsewhere. Impetus for open political opposition came as members of the Council succeeded in obtaining a 2001 UNESCO proclamation which recognized and cited the Garífuna language, dance and music among 19 'Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity'. The proclamation engendered hopes in Belize and the United States that this would bring wider attention to the Garífuna and their efforts to 'preserve' their culture and heritage (NGC Belize, 2004). Work on the UNESCO proclamation highlighted the need to save the endangered Garífuna language. In 1997, prior to the granting of the award, and a decade before the UN adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, the NGC produced a broadly worded political statement that not only emphasized the Council's concern about language loss but their rights as indigenous people:

As an indigenous people, the Garifuna Nation has basic rights to autonomy and self-determination, and the right to maintain and preserve Garifuna language and culture. Further, the Garifuna Nation recognized the right of the Garifuna communities and member organizations in each country to establish and implement local level language policies and development initiatives, and expects these rights to be guaranteed by local governments, as described by the United Nations Draft Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (NGC Belize, Dec., 1997).

The National Garífuna Council (NGC) also signed a 'Memorandum of Understanding' with the Government of Belize' (GOB) which formally recognizes the NGC as the official

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<sup>13</sup> This is a speech given by Dr. Joseph Palacio at the Symposium at the 2nd Gathering of Indigenous People of the Caribbean, August/September 2003.



representative of the Garífuna people in Belize. Important clauses in the document pledged that:

1. the Government of Belize (GOB) shall give due recognition to the social, cultural, religious and Spiritual values and practices of the Gariganu (plural for Garifuna) in Belize.
2. the GOB shall consult the NGC whenever consideration is being given to legislative or administrative measures which will directly and especially affect the Gariganu in Belize.
3. the GOB shall take measures, in cooperation with the NGC, to protect and preserve the land and sea environments of communities predominantly populated by the Gariganu of Belize.
4. the GOB shall do everything possible to prevent discrimination against Garifuna workers, whether with respect to employment, promotion, or other aspects.

By their own identity formation and reformations, as well as their present self-declaration as an 'indigenous people', Garifunas continue the process of shaking off the remnant shackles of colonial-bred racism which had attempted to impinged upon their humanity and their sense of dignity for three centuries. They had survived the ruthless genocide that was inflicted upon the aboriginal peoples of the New World and had escaped from the cruel slavery which other Amerindian and African kin were subjected to. They have done so by consciously and conscientiously living their culture (Palacio, 1993).

### **3. Belizean Garífuna Historical Geography**

The purpose of this chapter is to review the history of the Garífunas to see what lessons they may have taken from the important events of the past to form their collective identity; and also to shed light on how their history, as seen by them, is part of their present communal heritage. Pointedly, it is about how their bygone encounters and experiences have shaped their present customs and conduct, especially in the sphere of migration and relocation from home.

#### **3.1. The Genesis of the Garífunas**

Ask any Garífuna about his ancestry, and you will be told that they are the descendants of the Amazonian Caribs, who migrated to the Eastern Caribbean islands from South America through the Orinoco River Delta (Gullick 1985: 37; Young 1971 [1795]: 5). On their rout northward, up through the archipelago, they met the island Taino Arawak (Gullick: 35) Amerindians, with whose men they clashed and with whose women they interbred. Throughout their several pre-Columbian conflicts and conquests with and against each other, these two peoples merged to form a hybrid and bi-lingual populace, the "Red" and "Yellow" Caribs, with the women conversing in the Arawak tongue and the men speaking Carib.

Within a century of Christopher Columbus' traverses over the Atlantic Ocean and his "discovery" of the "New World," the European powers began to vie and jostle with one another to assume dominance over the newly revealed verdant and virginal hemisphere. The Spaniards, the British and the French committed mayhem with each other in this endeavor, but they all agreed that in expanding their foothold on the various pieces of territory which they had grasped for themselves, a massive workforce needed to be acquired.

Too delicate, too refined or too lazy to work the plantations to turn the enormous profits which they foresaw possible and for which they lusted, their recourse was to subjugate, enslave and oppress the unsuspecting natives they found there. When these indigenous inhabitants, accustomed to a languid life of leisure in the sultry tropics died like flies under the harsh and unfamiliar tasks, nor could they adapt to the intolerable and inhospitable treatment by the light-skinned and golden bearded foreigners, the Europeans lost no time in finding other means to achieve their common purpose. They simply pilfered Africa's sturdy and well-bodied people as the solution.

In the early 1600's, when the slave trade was becoming a booming, lucrative business and the plantation factories were humming with the production of sugar and rum, two Iberian

ships loaded with prime African flesh bound for the slave auction blocks in the North American regional markets floundered and ran aground off the shores of the Island of St. Vincent. The hardy souls which had survived both the Atlantic passage and the timely shipwreck were, according to the ancestral reports, fortunately rescued and hospitably welcomed by the Caribs. Having safely landed ashore and making the island their new home, these Africans intermarried (sometimes by sheer capture of the women or by the peaceful consent of the men) with the Carib/Arawakan citizens, thereby generating the present day Garífuna people.

Garífunas say that this fusion of New World Islanders and providentially never enslaved Africans having birthed them, endowed them with the African biological features of woolly kinky hair, dark mocha complexion, full lips and rounded hips; and the Amerindians bestowed upon them their unique language, local traditions and culture. Of course, the African forebears had also retained some of their customary ritual practices, most notably the music, dances and the drummings. Garífunas over the centuries have purposely and proudly preserved their ethnicity and language for over three hundred fifty years, for local history dates the arrival of derelict remnants of three Iberian ships to their isle in 1635 (Johnson 2007: 62). The British named them "Black Caribs" to distinguish them from the "Red" and "Yellow" Caribs of Dominica, St. Vincent, and other atolls in the Caribbean region.

### **3.2. Resistance and Wars**

Europeans continued to contend with one another over the possession of lands they fictitiously termed *terra nullius*, pretending that this part of the world, which existence they were previously woefully ignorant of, were uninhabited territories which they could squander indiscriminately among themselves. The local residents were of no consequence to them. Where the Island of St. Vincent was concerned, the Garífunas were constantly in the crossfire of the French and English rivals, who made and unmade treaties, not only between themselves but also with the indigenous people on the island.

Later in the then British Honduras of the 1950's and 60's, one of the favorite playful chidings among Garífuna youth came from the American Cowboy movies, "White man speak with fork-ed tongue." Whenever the youngsters felt that their comrades had cheated in a game or deceived them out of their meager allowances, this was their favorite slur. But they were merely reflecting the deep and long-held distrust that their elders had felt towards the colonizers. The Garífunas of St. Vincent, before their expulsion, never knew when they would be betrayed, renounced, ambush or robbed by either the French or English colonials.

### **3.3. Consequence of the Treaty Of Paris, 1763**

During the most turbulent period on the Island, between 1763 and the expulsion of the Garífunas to the farthest western reaches of the Caribbean, murders, massacre, mayhem and assassinations were so frequent that Carib men had on all occasions to carry a saber or cutlass and a loaded musket, ever on the cock, wherever they went (Gullick: 77). This episode of unrest began at the end of the French and Indian War (The Intercolonial War) in the Americas when the defeated France surrendered most of her New World possessions, among them St. Vincent, to Britain. This was accomplished by the Treaty of Paris, which was signed on Thursday, February 10, 1763.

The cessation of this particular island was in blatant violation of previous treaties between the French and British and also with the Caribs, guaranteeing that the island would be neutral ground, off limits to both the European parties, and to remain a refuge site for the Caribs (Wilson 1997: 202). This breach was a common and repeated complaint which the Caribs launched (Gullick: 81). Still, despite their outcry, the British occupied the homeland which the Caribs defended and for which they stood in a unified opposition.

After annexation and only nine months subsequent to the signing of the Treaty, it was declared "in a speech from the (British) throne," on Sunday, November 13, 1763 (Young: 18), that immediate colonization of the ceded island was in view, and that the lands were to be granted out on terms of sale, and the monies derived to be applied to national purposes (Ibid.: 19). Not understanding that the slash and burn, swidden agricultural techniques employed by the Caribs required the use of vast acreages, the British Commissioners in charge of apportioning properties considered that they held too much land for their numbers and that they seemed to have cultivated very little.

#### *3.3.1. Banishment: The Final Solution*

The commissioners were immediately appointed to carry the plan of settlement into effect; and their instructions were made out and signed on Thursday, December 6, 1764. The Caribs were then assured that each family would be granted, "such portions of ground as they had already cleared, or as might further be adjudged necessary for their comfort and subsistence." There were only two conditions: *first*, their acquiescence in the allotment and sale of lands within their district; the *second* is that they allowed roads of communication to be made through their country. If these conditions were accepted, all "Chairibs" were offered the full rights of British subjects (Ibid.: 23).

Understandably, the Garífunas refused to yield their domain under any circumstance, neither would they succumb to the British domination for they foresaw no honor in becoming British subjects. Instead, they persisted in standing their ground, and so the Carib Wars commenced. Under the leadership of their Chief, Joseph Chatoyer, they made vain attempts at preventing the Englishmen from absconding with their lands and their personages through sheer harassment, holding of hostages, raids upon the colonial settlements and military barracks, and through sporadic guerrilla warfare.

Ultimately, after thirty-one beleaguered years, they were defeated by the reinforced enemy numbers and by their modern military technology. The death of Chief Chatoyer so disheartened them, that they no longer had the spirit to match the British fortified armed forces. On Wednesday, June 15, 1796, the majority of them surrendered when their minor chiefs sued for peace. The British captured more than 5,000 men, women and children and imprisoned them on the nearby Baliceaux, an island of less than three quarters of a square mile consisting of cliffs, poor soil, and only one well. Many of the prisoners never lived to tell the tale.

In a letter written one year previously to Drewry Ottley, Esq, the agent for the British Crown for the Island of St. Vincent's, dated from Huntercombe, September 20, 1795, Sir William Young first suggested what the final solution should be. His dispatch was the instrument which advocated the final demise of the Caribs from their second motherland, their century-and-a-half native soil in the West Indies. In his late eighteenth century correspondence, Young wrote:

"Dear Sir,

Understanding that the commission with which you are entrusted from the colony of St. Vincent's relates more especially to the late insurrection of the Black Charaibs, and to the measures to be taken in consequence; I feel it a public duty, which I owe to the country at large, and to my brother planters of St. Vincent's in particular, to publish the result of an examination into original papers . . . .

By our British fellow-subjects in St. Vincent's, it is represented that the late attack upon them by the Charaibs was wholly unprovoked; and that in its operation cruelty and perfidy were so blended, that no future confidence can subsist; and that *the sole alternative remains of the Charaibs being removed from off the face of the island*" (Young 1971 [1795]: 1-2).

This is the missive which sealed the Caribs' fate on St. Vincent's Island. In less than two years from the writing of this document, the English government approved and executed the plan. The remaining routed, defeated, captured and imprisoned people were, on Saturday, February 25, 1797, escorted aboard the *HMS Experiment*, and two weeks later on March 11th, another Saturday, (Gullick: 85) they headed for the Bay of Honduras arriving by mid-April

1797 (Gonzalez 1988: 23, 39) to the farthest possible furlongs across the Caribbean Sea, the island of Roatán, just off the Honduran/Guatemalan seaboard. With scant provisions provided for them, it was the British plan that this would prove to be their final death knell (Forte 2006: 178).

Only half their original numbers, about 2,500 (Harvey, 2005: 45) saints, survived the second arduous marine crossing--the first of course, was the longer Atlantic forced migration from Africa. Perceiving that the rugged, barren soil in Roatán was unproductive and unsatisfactory for their personal and communal agricultural needs and that the ragged, jagged coastline was disappointingly inadequate for their fishing requirements, they petitioned the Spanish authorities to take residence in Honduras. The Spaniards, displeased and disquieted with the British designs and encroachments on the Southern Yucatan mahogany province of Belice, and having admired the Garífunas' bold (if not suicidal) military prowess, promptly granted the request and hired them into the Spanish army against the English.

### **3.4. Some Characteristics Developed After Exile**

The reported day of their arrival to Roatán, Wednesday, April 12, 1797, is celebrated all over the Atlantic Rim of Central America and in the Bronx, New York (probably in Los Angeles, Chicago and Boston) as well as other parts of the USA. On April 12, 2010, one of my informants sent this message via e-mail:

We are celebrating today 213 years since our arrival to the island of Roatán in Honduras, Central America. We are also celebrating our history as a people, as a culture and ethnic group, having our origins from the fusion of Africa and Siboneys who were the predecessors of Arawak (Taino). Garíganu arrived to Honduras, hailing from the St. Vincent Island exiled by the British.

When we were born in St. Vincent, we were free men and never slaves. Moreover, when we arrived to Roatán on April 12, 1797, we were free men and never slaves. The proof is that when we started negotiating our move to mainland Honduras, with the Spanish authorities stationed in Trujillo, they accepted us as free men, and on May 17, 1797, Garíganu arrived in Trujillo. Two Garífuna communities were founded there by our ancestors: Garíbalu "Caribal" to the East and "Cristalu" to the West.

Due to the fact that we had military experience, the Spanish incorporated our people immediately into their army in order to fight back against the English transgressions. Historical documents tell that the Spaniards allowed us to organize our own commandos to help combat the English attacks to mainland Honduras.

Our African heritage of the Honduran population in many communities is a testimonial to the undeniable acknowledgement of our presence in Honduras and ever since [1797] we have become an essential part of the national identity and of the fabric of this nation (Gonzalez 2010).

#### *3.4.1. Never Slaves*

That "we were never slaves" is the reverberating echo heard among Garífunas at times of joy and of grief; at times of pride and of disgrace; at times for admonition and for encouragement; at times with friends and with foes; at the dawn of day and at dusk. A child's earliest



encounters with her Garífuna maternal grandfather would be that she must always behave with dignity and obey her mother because, "We were never slaves." The word "dignity" may always be remembered because hearing it for the first time when a child, it would have a melodious, unfamiliar ring to the ear, and "never slaves" might be totally lost to her. In preparing for High School, it would be her uncle's responsibility to give her the family lecture on personal integrity and about her responsibility of becoming a well-educated citizen because "We were never slaves."

There were also tacit, wordless ways of making that statement: the furrowed brows of parents and relatives, the upturned eyes of the elders, the wry smiles of the neighbors, the scolding visage were all ways of indicating that the youngsters were conducting themselves as "you know what: shameless slaves!" That "we were never slaves" is a fact (or myth) that every self-respecting Garífuna family (whether practicing, observing, acculturated, assimilated or transnational) believes, is inspired and motivated by it, and teaches it to the next generation.

### **3.5. Lessons Learned**

The humiliating dismissal from St. Vincent's was a major watershed event in the Garífuna's communal memory bank, and out of it came some landmark attributes, four of which are offered.

#### *3.5.1. Freedom*

*First*, the Garífunas have developed a great respect for, and an unfailingly sense of freedom. The up-side to this is that they will not infringe on other people's freedoms, always stressing that one must make up one's own mind. In the counsel of many, one must make her/his own decisions. It is seldom heard, "You *must* do this," or "You *must* do that!" except between mother and children. After a warning or an offer, the parting words among men might be, "Yu choice, man."

The down-side is that most Garífunas don't like to be told what to do and especially not how to do it. It may be a universal "man thing," but it seems pronounced among the Garífunas. In earlier years they were considered lazy for not working for "the man" or seeking employment at "di company store." In reality, it had nothing to do with indolence, but having a boss to them was like having a power-wielding taskmaster over them. A Garífuna would rather be his own boss in his small enterprise, than be under the pressure of another's demands.

Only the dire need to care for himself and his family, or to show off his education or skills, or because of the prospects of a future of utter freedom (through the acquisition or accumulation of wealth, or retirement) would cause him to be employed by another. They had witnessed the pitiable submissions to slavery by their compatriots on St. Vincent Island, they had fought and suffered to prevent it in their community; and they would have none of it.

### 3.5.2. *Individualism*

*Second*, Garífunas have a fierce sense of individualism. They can be loyally faithful friends, and usually enjoy belonging to the crowd, and having lots of compadres (comrades); but if no one will join them in a desired project or a necessary or determined venture, bets are that they'll do it alone. One hardly ever finds a 'Lone Ranger' or "Maverick" Garífuna, but if the crowd chooses not to support him, he's not afraid to do whatever needs to be done by himself. A favorite saying one would often hear is, "I am sleeping with my own eyes!"

This example rendered here is not uncommon for Garífuna farmers and fishers in teaching their urbanized youth this principle of independence and self-reliance. One of the uncles, the favorite uncle, would on an unsuspecting and appointed day take three or four of his urban dwelling pre-teen nieces and nephews in their preferred dory for an ostensibly leisurely boat ride or fishing trip. When they had reached the middle of the river or out just beyond the shoals of the sea, and when they were obliviously enjoying themselves, the uncles would turn the dory over.

Panicked sounds will be heard for miles around while the youngsters scream, shriek, squeal and screech in fending for their lives. Supposedly, no one is watching, for the river banks or the seashore are unusually deserted then. However, a thousand eyes are plastered on the scene behind curtained windows, all ready to spring out to assist if there are difficulties. While the children are gulping water, splashing, flaying and dunking up and down, eyes as large as oversized, turkey eggs the uncle, alertly monitoring each child, turns the dory right side up. Most often, in one last gasp the children grasp the edge of the boat and pull themselves in. The rest are pulled out of the water by the uncle. It may seem a bit extreme to outsiders, but the point is made.

Most village or towns' children know how to swim from almost infancy, and an urbanized child has many opportunities to learn to do so during holidays when they visit the family compound. Pre-teens who can't yet swim by eleven or twelve learn by ordeal. Life's lessons on self-determination, preparedness, and individualism are taught in other ways as well, but this is the one seen, experienced, traumatized by and remembered. Another

important result is the phenomenal bonding which takes place between such children and their mentor uncles.

### *3.5.3. Skepticism Regarding Leaders and Leadership*

*Third*, Garífunas have a strong distrust of leaders, whether they be kings, politicians, military commanders, district chiefs, cleric or prophets. Although most Garífuna children grow up in intensely conservative Catholic homes, they will often hear irreverent statements like, "Don't pay any attention to what that priest says! He's only a man, just like your uncles and father." No sooner than he becomes grown a child quickly abandons the weekly Saturday confessionals. Or they might hear, "Even the Pope makes mistakes." This is said, even though children have learnt in catechism classes that the Pope is infallible. Or, "Sister so-and-so" (the nuns who educates them) "doesn't run *this* household." Although teachers and educators are held in highest esteem, this is not meant to demean. It's just that, "Nobody lords it around *here!*"

This attitude of distrusting leaders has been a detriment of the Garífuna community, for they have never had their own elected representatives in the national, district, or local government. Although they make up a large number of the educators of Belize, they are most non-savvy when it comes to politics. They are much more at ease with a council of their peers, or elders, to decide on the important issues of governance; they seem to be quite averse to the individual as leader. It is believed that because they had once put so much confidence on their leaders during the turbulent last years in St. Vincent's, especially on Chief Chatoyer who died through his own pride and folly, while others fought in the battles, that they ended up victims of the British design of expulsion and the loss of their beloved homeland. Another hard lesson learned is that a man is his only leader; he either succeeds or perishes by his own merits or errors.

### *3.5.4. Resistance*

*Fourth*, Garífunas (almost) always resist first before eventually complying with whatever proposal which seems to divert from the status quo. During my fieldwork in both Belize and Honduras, I noted that in assemblies and meetings the people would listen seemingly intently to the speakers, but afterwards they vociferously would give every reason why the recommended proposition would be totally unworkable for their specific need. Opposition was often loud, repeated, and anticipated.

I observed the same conduct in some of their Los Angeles Association meetings. At first, the majority present was vocal in negating the value or probable feasibility of a new idea. However, after prolonged debates and when everyone was satisfied that s/he had had their say, they would not only agree or vote positively, but they would become staunch supporters of the newly advanced measures. They may not all participate in the initiation of an undertaking, but once it is established everyone would show up to protest if it was threatened or replaced. Because they had to resist the British for so long in St. Vincent's, and because changes proved dangerous for them, some say that resistance to things novel had become a strong habit by the time they left Roatán for the Central American coasts.

### **3.6. Migration: The Isthmus of Central America**

Having assessed their situation and knowing that a livelihood could not be eked out of the infertile earth on the island of Roatán, and having received permission from the Spaniards to take up residence on the mainland, the banished exiles rowed ashore to the major coastal city of Trujillo. From there they branched off to the north and south, forming small family villages along the entire shoreline of the countries of Honduras, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. Once they had settled, had built a family craft for fishing and trade, and had prepared the land for the women to plant the necessary manioc and vegetables, they promptly joined the Spanish army to battle against the continuously impinging British. When such tenure was complete, they returned to their new homes, and to the matter of creating newer settlements and seeking work wherever it was available. The furthest north where they established themselves was in the colony called British Honduras, now Belize.

#### *3.6.1. Belize*

Although it is not quite certain when the Garífunas initially arrived in Belize, the first archival reference of them there is the debate at the Belize City Magistrate Meeting of Monday, August 9, 1802 (Palacio 2006 (b): 180) to prevent them from coming to the Settlement, in case they committed the same "atrocities" for which they were reputed in St. Vincent. By that time there were about 150 Garífuna settlers in the southern area (Belizenet.com). When they persisted in coming to Belize Town, again in 1811 they are mentioned, for the Magistrates further ordered that the Garífuna should not remain in the Settlement for more than 48 hours (Ibid.). To stay there longer, all "Caribs" arriving at the Fort (Belize Town) must get a permit or ticket from the Superintendent, or leave within 48 hours. These proscriptions and constraints applied to the men and women who came as traders to market their wares, fish and

foodstuffs, and not to those whom the English woodcutters had hired as laborers in their lumber camps along the several Belize navigable rivers.

Many Garífuna males had left their villages in Honduras and had come as migrant workers to participate in the lucrative mahogany industry in neighboring British Honduras. The backbreaking job of cutting timber and logging it through the dense virginal mahogany forests and then downstream, required much manpower. And although the British had their slaves, there was always work for strong, tough and willing hands. So the official curfews and prohibitions which were legislated in early Belize were directed to the independent and entrepreneur Garífuna, and not to the much needed temporary migrant lumberman (Izard 2006: 179).

In 1832, after many found themselves on the wrong side of one of Honduras' many unsettling Civil Wars, about 200 of them accompanying an enterprising adventurer, Alejo Beni, travelled by canoes and dories and arrived in southern Belize on Monday, November 19, 1832 (Cortés 2006: 65). At the location where they landed, they founded the Settlement of Stann Creek. Annually the entire nation of Belize celebrates with its Garífuna citizens the heroics of that day with marches, dances, drummings and reenactment of their entry to the city, now named Dangriga.

Garífunas of Belize have come a long way, from the days of blatant and unapologetic discrimination against them in all levels of society. One of the main factors favoring them has been their abiding self-sufficiency and the maintenance of their culture and communities through whatever circumstances. They have been able to do so, ever since they embarked upon the Central American beaches, by migrating throughout the region, working wherever possible, and knowing that in any Garífuna hamlet, village, town, or city they could find hospitable kin to assist them either on their way or in their stay.

### *3.6.2. Exile: A Blessing in Disguise*

Garífunas have benefitted tremendously from that defining moment of their exile in 1797. I believe that they gained more than they lost. Indeed, many still seem to smart at the memory of the indignity of the whole event, but fate dealt them a very lucky hand in terms of just the issue of space and territorial acquisition.

Although St. Vincent has become the mythical, idyllic Camelot for them, as fecund a people as they are, and at the rate at which they were multiplying and have continued to do so, the Island would have soon begin to cramp them within its tiny borders. They would have eventually had to seek more terrain for themselves and their growing families. One may even

go so far as to say that the British did them a great favor in financing the migration to Roatán. Look at what has happened since then.

### *3.6.3. A Nation across Borders: A Global People*

Garífunas have inhabited practically the entire northern coastline of Central America, and though some have had to struggle with their host countries about the preservation of their communal lands, there is enough elbow room for everyone. On my field work in Honduras and Belize, the homesteads in the hamlets and villages had ample space between them, and houses were quite a distance from the others.

They have also become a multi-citizen people with their children having the choice of which state they'd prefer to call their country. A Honduran Garífuna who marries a Belizean Garífuna will have descendants who possess that option; and many exercise that choice when it is necessary or beneficial to do so. This is true especially when they desire to migrate elsewhere. During the 1950s and 1960s many Belizean citizens who had Honduran or Guatemalan fathers utilized their Latin citizenship to acquire visas into the United States, and thus bypass the tedious and discriminatory British quota system. Ever since Roatán, they have continued their migratory excursions; and today this wanderlust has led many to become residents and citizens of several other countries abroad, notably the United States and Canada. Since a Belizean does not lose the Belize citizenship because they've been naturalized in another country, many Garífunas have multiple citizenship and carry two or three passports.

## **3.7. Commonalities**

Despite the fact that they are separated by the borders of the four countries of Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize, and regardless that some have been subjected to British and others to Spanish colonial policies, they see themselves bound together as one nation, with mutual features and commonalities which identifies them as Garífunas. Some are identified here.

### *3.7.1. The Shared History*

First is their *shared remembered history* of shipwreck, rescue by and amalgamation with the Island Caribs; their recurring cooperation to avoid slavery and colonization in their bygone homeland; their defeat and banishment from St. Vincent; and their relocation to Central America. When one listens to Garífunas discuss their pre-exile war history, one gets the eerie feeling that each one was actually there.

Once, at an Association Meeting in Los Angeles (of a mixed group of Central Americans living in California), there was a discussion about the creation of a dedication plaque in honor of Chief Joseph Chatoyer. The younger men saw him as an example and model for the youth. On the other hand, the older women loudly rebutted that the Chief as a lecherous leader, who had "no marals" (morals), was a terrible example for all men, and undeserving of any honor because he had openly had five wives. "Shameless lech . . .!" pouted the women. That afternoon, it was as if Chatoyer was actually in the room being judged by his descendants five or six generations removed. The question of the plaque became mute for several years. Recently however, the Garífunas of New York have petitioned the city to have one of its Avenues named after the fallen Chief. The older women are no longer, so the younger generation having waited their turn, have resurrected the question. It's no longer a plaque they request, but a whole New York Avenue!

### 3.7.2. *The Language*

Second, is their everyday usage of the *Garífuna language*. The vitality of the culture and the traditions are enhanced by the daily use of the language, and it has held them cohesively as a conscious ethnic entity. Being dispersed and separated from one another by state borders has not divorced them from the language and practices of the old customs. Most Garífunas are multi-lingual. They speak Garífuna, as well as the languages of the countries wherein they live.

In Belize, English (the official language) is Garífunas' second language, along with Spanish and the Creole. In Honduras and Guatemala, not only do they speak Spanish, but English and the Creole dialect. In the United States, all three languages and the dialect are interspersed throughout the day, depending on where one is. Whether in The Bronx, New York; in Dangriga, Belize; in Los Angeles, California; in Santa Rosa de Aguan, Honduras; in Chicago, Illinois; in Bluefields, Nicaragua, from Garífuna to Garífuna the days starts out with "Buíti binafi" (Good morning in Garífuna).

### 3.7.3. *The Religion*

Third is their *regularly practiced religion*. Garífunas' overwhelming faithfulness to the Roman Catholic Church allowed them to syncretize their Afro-Amerindian rites with Christian sacraments. In the past, it was the Church which advocated for education and other "civilizing" accommodations on their behalf. And while the church and state competed for hegemony over them, it was possible for them to escape notice by them both.

On St. Vincent's, the French monks had already evangelized the Carib Arawaks, and no sooner had the Africans disembarked that they too were Christianized. The religion which evolved was a syncretic (Harvey: 47), featuring a blend of the three components: Indigenous, African and Catholic, but conveniently clothed in the robe of Catholicism. Although exposed to the Protestant Anglicans and Methodists those were rejected as being too strict, dull, colorless, and without drama or pageantry.

The Catholic rituals with their statues of the Saints, parades and festivals, bazaars, sprinklings of Holy Water, numerous genuflections throughout the worship services were more in tune with Garífuna liking. The people are devout and faithful Catholics, and the religious observances are practiced both in private and public ceremonials. The Mass initiates almost all important Garífuna events, from Baptism at birth, to First Communion at the age of reason and the start of personal responsibility, to Confirmation at the entrance of adolescence, to the nuptials at adulthood, to Extreme Unction at death. The clerics are held in high regard, whether abroad or "in the old country." The most important religious rites in honor of the ancestors, *the Dugu*, will be dealt with in another chapter.

#### *3.7.4. Geographic Isolation*

Fourth is the former *geographic remoteness*. Garífunas usually lived in the remote hinterlands and shores of their adopted countries, in places that were of no value or interest to the authorities and their fellow citizens. Until modern tourists discovered and took an interest in their extensive, pristine beaches, two centuries of Central American governments had simply ignored the Garífuna communities.

This neglect afforded the people years to nestle, nurture, observe and practice their culture without interference. Enjoying their off-the-beaten-track, lowland seaboard habitat for so long, gave them a sense of communal freedom and autonomy. Especially in the Latin countries, they were simply ignored and left alone. During that time the language, culture and traditions flourished and thrived.

#### *3.7.5. Ad Hoc Leadership*

Fifth is their *aversion regarding political leadership*, a fear or apprehension engendered since their St. Vincent's downfall. Although this topic has been dealt with already, it is relevant here as well. Almost every Garífuna town or hamlet has a Town Council or Village Council consisting of reliable and trustworthy members of the community. Meetings are open to all,



and for the most part they are well attended, as people don't want to be left out when its discussion time.

Although not a people prone to anarchy, each considers himself a self-respecting, self-reliant member of first, his Garífuna family (his own personal family, and his mother's household), and second of the Garífuna nation. He's a man who "sleeps with his own eyes" because at the end of the day, he must depend on no one but himself; and he understands that politics is a matter of, "each man for himself, and God for us all."

These common attributes of, 1) a shared history, 2) the Garífuna language, 3) the religion, 4) the geographic isolation, and 5) the preference for Ad Hoc governance or a council of wise old folk have resulted as a consequence of their removal from St. Vincent and transport to the Central American isthmus. What some meant for evil, has turned out for the common good.

### 3.8. Distinction Between Deportation and Exile

It is here that I challenge the nomenclature used in many of the texts narrating the removal of the Garífuna ancestors from their homeland in St. Vincent to Roatán; and make a distinction between the terms, "deportation" and "exile." Repeatedly in the recent articles on their websites some indigenous commentators and activists employ the words "deport, deported, deportation" in their literature. Using the word "deportation" to describe the banishment of a people who were the rightful inhabitants before powerful trespassers invaded their lands and rapaciously confiscated it, is proof positive that History is written by and for the benefit of the victors. It is understandable when Europeans use the term "deportation" in their writings, but it displays a naïveté and immature self consciousness when (supposedly) enlightened indigenous activists do so.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith confirms that, "Imperialism frames the indigenous experience," (Smith 1999: 19) and she postulates that "Imperialism still hurts, still destroys . . . ." Somehow, throughout my research on the Garífunas when it came to this critical moment in their history, I found the word "deportation" quite disturbing, although grammatically and in the context used it seemed appropriate. In Garífuna history, the event of their removal is so significant, so vital, and so central that today almost all happenings are dated either pre- or post- the crossing. Smith adds:

". . . these words, from an indigenous perspective are problematic. They tend to provoke a whole array of feelings, attitudes and values. They are words of emotion which draw attention to the way in which the indigenous are ridiculed or condemned in academic and popular discourses." (Ibid.: 20).

#### 3.8.1. *Exile, Banishment, Dispossession vs. Deportation*

My understanding of deportation is that one is expelled from a country because he has taken up residency there illegally. It means, according to the dictionary:

- 1) the lawful expulsion of an undesired *alien* from a state
- 2) the removal from a country of an *alien* whose presence is illegal or detrimental to the public welfare

The operating word here in both definitions is "alien." To deport someone denotes the official act of expelling an alien. And one may inquire as to who were the illegal aliens in eighteenth century St. Vincent's? Was it not those who had come from afar to other people's lands with their many legal fictions and absurd doctrines and blind theories about discovering empty no-man's lands, the invisibility of those already there, the unfitness of the native

savages, the obligation of Christianizing them for their own good, and the fabrication of necessary and just wars of conquest? It was because of their superior technology of mass destruction that Europeans were able to dislodge the lawful occupants from their country.

Since deportation gives the impressions that the Caribs which the British found on the island were there illegally, "deported," when applied to the transfer of the Garífunas, should be amended to another more relevant word. Other apt and useful terms could be: expatriated, ousted, forced from, expelled, scattered, dispersed, dislodged, dispossessed . . . .

### *3.8.2. Exile*

The view that the Garífunas were "exiled" or "banished" is much preferable because these words connote that: they were expelled from their native land by the authoritative decree of the victors in their longstanding conflict with the French and British; or that they were persons banished from their native lands; or that they were separated, removed and transported from their home by the force of circumstances. "Exile" deals with the relationship between the victors and the vanquished, not between legal citizens and illegal aliens.

Tuhiwai Smith deals with the idea of indigenous people's seeing History through different lenses from others. This is true for Garífunas, but regrettably their literature uses the victor's derogatory vocabulary in describing themselves, thereby undermining their pivotal historical experience and unconsciously identifying themselves according to the others' perception of them. In this paper I have adjusted the term "deportation" to "exile," because although the ancestors fought a noble warfare and lost, they had done so defending the country to which they were legal citizens.

### *3.8.3. Development of the Migrant Wage Laborer*

One of the most essential outcome of their transport away from St. Vincent's was that accepting their two previous forced migrations, Garífunas turned it into a positive strength and a strategy for economic, social and cultural survival. As migrant workers, willing to leave home for employment elsewhere, in order to provide for themselves and their families, they became part of the pioneers in a different economic order and have evolved into a global people. The next chapter investigates this phenomenon of Garífuna as migrant wage laborer.

## 4. Nineteenth Century Garífuna Migration Patterns

Immediately upon being stranded on the unfamiliar and intolerable terrain of the Island of Roatán in mid-April 1797, the surviving and enterprising Garífuna began seeking more habitable environments, of their own choosing, so that they could embark upon a peaceful existence of reestablishing a home, making a living of fishing, farming and of plying the local waters to trade. After receiving permission from the local Spanish government to cross over to the mainland, many of these indomitable souls landed initially in Honduras and by 1802 some had come to the southern coast of the foundling British colony, British Honduras, to join the English lumberjacks in logging mahogany in the dense virgin forests.

Another mass migration occurred in 1932 and it was then that the settlement of Dangriga was created. Today this city, the capital of the Stann Creek District holds the largest Garífuna population in Belize. At the turn of the Twentieth Century when the market collapsed before WWII and the banana companies had shut down their operations, many Honduran and Belizean Garífunas were forced to look for alternative work, most of which was some distance away from their homes in the villages and towns. Some joined the U.S. and British merchant marines, which were looking for new recruits to replace those who had left for war. When their tenure of service was complete some of them settled in England and the United States, but most returned to their Central American communities.

Of the returnees, a considerable number of them were actively recruited in foreign-owned plantations, mines, factories and other enterprises which required and depended upon local native labor for their operations. These industries were usually some distance away from the home villages, but because of the allure of receiving cash, or because of some other pressures, many were led to seek out those wage-paying jobs. Occasionally, the work may be obtained fairly near or adjacent to the native settlements, but for the most part the men had to migrate some distance to reach the job. A rainbow of problems concerning family adjustments arose from the various situations which developed in connection with migrant wage earning. The primary modifications occurred in the relationship between husbands and wives, the role of the genders of the household as a result of the man's prolonged absences, and new patterns of behavior within the indigenous socio-cultural system (Gonzalez 1961:1264)

## 4.1. Male Migration Categories

In her study on the subject of itinerant workforces, Nancie S. Gonzalez makes an initial exploratory attempt to classify the various types of migrant wage labor and suggests some of the possible effects of each type on family organizations and alliances. The nature of the period of absenteeism from the workers' home villages or towns was used as the principle of classification, for this variable characteristic seemed most significant for the purpose. The types she discussed include the following (Gonzalez, 1265).

1. *Seasonal migration*
2. *Temporary, non-seasonal migration*
3. *Recurrent Migration*
4. *Continuous Migration*
5. *Permanent Removal*

### 4.1.1. Seasonal Migration

*Seasonal migrants* travel once a year, as a family or as a single adult individual, to areas in which great numbers of workers are needed temporarily and expressly for such occupations as harvesting or processing of raw food items. Garífunas may travel to the United States, within the bordering Central American countries of Honduras or Guatemala, or to a West Indies island.

In most instances the husband travels alone during the harvesting period, leaving his wife and the other members of his family to fend for themselves and to continue the tasks necessary for the upkeep of the family's property until his return. In the Caribbean, large numbers of workers have been for years constantly needed for the sugarcane industry, and for harvesting bananas, pineapples and other tropical crops. It appears that this model of *seasonal migration* has only a minimal determining effect on the family structure. Depending on his contract with the "bossman," a laborer's return home at a reasonably definite time is an almost guaranteed fact.

Researcher, Harald Eidheim, reports that for the ordinary person in a similar community he investigated, foreign money meant a great deal both in real and symbolic terms, whether the money was being used for support, amusement or for investing. When someone returns from a stint abroad, with some money jingling in his pockets, everybody in town talks about his success. And to show his achievements, the returned worker spends his funds on building a house, purchasing a truck or a piece of land, or investing in a small business (Eidheim, 1985: 36).

#### *4.1.2. Temporary, Non-seasonal Migration*

In the category of *temporary, non-seasonal migration*, the migrants rarely travel in family groups, and most often this model of migration consists of young unmarried adults, both females and males. The reasons given for migrating are that young people wish to see something of the world, to learn Western ways, to earn a certain amount of cash with which to purchase goods especially valued by their own culture, and to gain prestige among their fellows. This type of migration, however, cannot completely support the home society; therefore traditional economic pursuits essentially remain as before.

However, from the point of view of the home villagers, the labor migration serves to introduce added luxuries and new ideas. From the point of view of the migrant, his period away from home takes on the character of a personal adventure. He sees new peoples, places, and cultures and has new experiences, all of which he recounts to his eagerly engaged and curious friends and kinsmen back in town. Besides, he may acquire many novel and technological objects which impress his stay-at-home companions; he may use other unusual and interesting items as gifts for those still at home; he may spend his money on new clothing and other accoutrements such as watches, jewelry, or even get a gold tooth for his personal adornment; or he may apply his funds to secure a bride.

Earlier in the mid-1900's, it was the usual custom for young men, whether single or married, to make two or three such journeys to earn enough money to pay for cattle, building materials and furnishings for a new home, or to procure a boat or a plot of land. After these things are obtained, they typically return to settle permanently in their home territory (Gonzalez 1961: 1267).

The result is that first, an additional source of wealth is created. Second, new ideas and wants are brought back to the towns and villages. This tends to perpetuate the system, since money is needed constantly and in increasing amounts to satisfy the newly acquired desires; and many young people will follow in the footsteps of the former migrants. Third, the traditional means of gaining prestige are undermined. Young men returning home with cash gain status and prominence out of proportion to their age and experience. In many cases this fact interferes with the authority structure of the culture, which previously placed greatest responsibility and respect in the community elders. Fourth, the available supply of labor to carry on the necessary pursuits of the traditional way of life is greatly diminished. The prolonged absences of the younger able-bodied men place a heavier burden on the older men, the women, and in some cases the children. The responsibilities and work previously done by these young adults must be borne by those left behind. On their return, the young men's new

standing within the community precludes them from returning to such humble and demeaning occupations. And fifth, the removal of so many young men creates an imbalance in the gender ratio, which results in a delayed marriage age for both genders, with possible effects on the birth rate. Often, it creates a wider gap in the ages of husbands and wives with the returning men marrying young girls as much as a decade younger than themselves.

This type of migrant wage labor seems to cause limited disruption to the traditional social organization and the home situation; and where changes do occur they are generally of a gradual nature. The evidence is that the family organization is only somewhat affected by *temporary non-seasonal migration*.

#### 4.1.3. *Recurrent Migration*

*Recurrent migration* may be viewed as merely an extension or intensification of *temporary, non-seasonal migration*, and it does appear that in cases where acculturation has proceeded to the point where native peoples desire more of the goods of the Western world, *recurrent migration* has replaced the previous pattern of *temporary, non-seasonal migration*. In *recurrent migration* men make irregular excursions, of varying lengths of time, to procure wage labor throughout their productive years. The social effects of this type of migration are quite different from those noted in the previous sections, especially in regard to the fragility of the family household and organization.

Once again, in most of these cases the migrants have wives and families who are left behind in the villages and towns. The men may return at frequent intervals throughout the year, or they may be absent for several years without returning. The frequency of return hinges upon several factors, including the distance which must be traveled to obtain work, the amount of job security offered to the migrant, and the amount of economic return.

Interestingly, on my fieldwork both in Honduras and Belize, these considerations seem not to be of much concern for the women, for as soon as they become employed they begin to send money home immediately, often as much as 70% of their incomes, especially if they work as live-in maids and nannies. It doesn't matter to them initially that, "being a nanny is a job with negative stability" (Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2004: 36), or that the distances to the jobs are far away, or that there may be a lack of job security. The welfare of the children is of paramount and primary concern of their mothers, and if a woman promises to be home at a certain time or date, she'll make every effort to be there. When it comes to money and finances, she is not at all embarrassed to send even small amounts via Western Union

financial services, to make sure that her offspring are properly housed, fed, clad, educated, cared for, and get to celebrate their birthdays with many foreign gifts.

*Recurrent migrant* males may desire to return home as often as possible, and especially for the important ancestor rituals and ceremonies, or when family crises happen. In addition, many of the men may feel obligated to return to help with various economic and domestic activities such as clearing fields, harvesting, fishing, house-building, and slaughtering. But from the point of view of management, a worker who frequently leaves the job to return home on visits is a less desirable employee than one who works steadily for longer periods of time.

For this reason, the employing corporations often encourage their workers to travel farther away than the nearest labor centers or camps to obtain work. The migrants may be lured by the company's promise of higher wages, free one-way transportation, and other supposed benefits -- the farther away a man is from his home, the less often he will be able to or attempt to return there. Sometimes the employers deliberately flood a labor market area with the importation of large numbers of worker from a distance, so that local residents will be unable to secure any jobs near their homes, and then they too will be forced to travel to get work (Gonzalez, 1961: 1269).

*Recurrent migration* can support the home society if there are enough jobs available in comparison with number of men seeking work, and if the economic return is great enough. Depending upon the degree of acculturation to Western goods, and the amount of dependence of the group as a whole upon wage labor to secure the goods they consider necessary, there will be great variability in the distance a man will travel to obtain work and in the frequency with which he return to his home village.

Regardless of how long the *recurrent migrant* laborer is away from home, the outstanding fact about this category is that the men are absent not only during their youth but for periods of varying lengths after they have reached maturity. They remain linked to their home villages in various ways, but primarily by the fact that their wives and children continue to reside there. The most frequently mentioned effects which concern the families and household organizations are the changing relationships between husband and wife, as well with members of the contiguous generations. *Recurrent migrants* seldom took their wives and children with them to the labor centers, as the family was considered an economic liability, rather than being an asset as they would be in their village: It was believed that opportunities for women to become employed were limited.



When the women did take on employment which took them outside the home, provisions had to be made for the care of the children. This often caused problems, and the children were ultimately returned to the village to be attended to by grandparents and other relatives. When the wives and children of the migrant remained in the towns and villages, other sorts of problems arose. Some writers contend that especially in matrilineal groups there was no more divorce than formerly. However adultery became prevalent in many societies where men were absent from their wives over long periods of time. Although other variables might play a role in how spouses and family organizations maintain themselves, it seemed that prolonged separation of migrant husbands and their wives does lead to marital instability, infidelity, or often both.

There are cases where young men are no longer so dependent upon their fathers or uncles in getting a start in life, since an alternative way of earning a living is present in wage labor; and at the same time, these same young men have become increasingly reluctant to divide their cash wages among a large group of people according to traditional customs of distribution along kinship lines. Sometimes, the total amount of cash wages received by a worker is simply not enough to support himself in the city and a family in the town or village. Much less is there enough to disperse to relatives outside his own nuclear family. It can be noted here that it is often widespread knowledge among the locals that a man might have a woman and children in the location where he is employed besides the wife and children left in his family village. As a consequence, a woman whose husband has left her in the village generally must live with some other adults who form a cooperative group for carrying on domestic affairs.

In the long absence of her husband, or if he fails to return home at all, or if he neglects to send remittances fairly regularly, the a migrant worker's wife usually returns to the household of her parents, where the consanguineal household would provide greater security and less vulnerability for her and the children left behind. The consanguineal household variously called the matrifocal family, the matriarchal family, or the maternal family is not only the most effective but the most practiced household arrangement among the Garífunas. Here the children stay with their mother, and in the care and custody of their mother's blood related kin, which functions to maintain and socialize the children, in the continued absence of the father, and even when he returns. The woman too is incorporated into this cooperative group which is larger than merely the nuclear family. Another abandoned sister and her children may be part of the household as well. Invariably, this family arrangement is

dominated by a grandmother or aunt who is the principal breadwinner or organizer in the household.

This family group usually contains some adult males even though others ordinarily belonging to it may be also absent. These men occupy the positions of sons, brothers, or uncles, rather than husbands or fathers, with the sibling group as the solid, enduring unit. Whenever this domestic arrangement becomes established, it is difficult to disentangle, as it may even prevail long after an errant husband has returned, although he may be included when he comes back. "Once bitten, twice shy," is one of the old Garífuna sayings, which translate, in this instance into, "You have to prove yourself first, brother, before your family is released to you!"

The men in this family composition, whether they hold wage-paying jobs or not, are always expected to contribute to the expenses of not only the household in which they are living, but also of those in which they have children. If a man returns to his hometown penniless, having lost his job, or having lived a dissipated and riotous life, or having fallen into some misfortune, he is more readily accepted into the household of his mother and sisters than into that of his wife. If under those circumstances, he dares to be reunited with his wife in her family's household, although he would be taken back in, for the children's sake, he would be subjected to being snubbed and given the cold-shoulder. To avoid being ridiculed by her kinsfolk that he came back "Wid wan han to the front an' wan to the bak,"<sup>14</sup> he either stayed away altogether, forming new family alliances elsewhere, or returned to his own mother's household where the welcoming refrain would be, "Mí son, right or wrong, *mí* son."<sup>15</sup>

Eidheim confirms this in his examination of mother-son relationships in the Carib town of Grand Bay on the island of Dominica. He found that the strongest and most enduring of all familial bonding was that between a mother and her son. It seemed that a boy was socialized to carry out his mother's decisions and biddings, and when he reached adulthood his role became that of her provider and protector. In that local culture, he is willing to support and take her side in a controversy regardless of whether she is right or wrong. When he is abroad, his letters and sending of money indicates that a man and his mother have a

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<sup>14</sup> A term of shame, indicating one's failure was so appalling, he returned destitute and almost nude. His hands were used to cover his exposed body parts.

<sup>15</sup> This is a Garífuna mother's proud proclamation regarding her utter faith in her son. No matter what, 'He is my son, right or wrong, he is *my* son!'

lifelong loyalty to each other. Even when he has relationships with other women, his mother takes priority (Eidheim: 59-61).

#### *4.1.4. Permanent Removal*

*Permanent removal* includes all of the former migrant wage labor patterns in which workers move from their home areas to other specific locations which offer more opportunities for employment. They usually settle more or less permanently there. Most often such workers are accompanied by their wives and families; in other cases they go alone with the intention of having the family join them at a later date. This became the prevalent migration form from the beginning of the 1960's when because of household pressures and the prolonged periods of meager living and abstinence, women were forced to take a second look at their existence, reassess their choices and available options, and then decided to venture out into the migratory wage labor market themselves.

## **4.2. Garífuna Matrilocality and Consanguineal Households**

The term, "consanguineal", according to the dictionary means, having the same ancestry or descent. It describes households where the people are related by blood or are of the same origin. As already been mentioned, the wider consanguineal family has retained great significance among the Garífuna families. Partners may come and go, and the home be removed several times during the lifetime of a single generation, but a kinsman or kinswoman always can be sure of such welcome, help, and protection as his or her relatives can afford, especially when these are on the maternal side of the family.

So, though households are usually composed of the conjugal family group, it may at any time receive the addition of some aged, widowed, or distressed relative, or of one who, for some reason or another, desires a temporary or permanent change of domicile. Moreover, if the father of a family be away for an elongated period, the mother will shut up house, leave her children with her own mother or with a married sister, and go her way seeking means for her livelihood and that of her youngsters (Taylor: 74). Often young children are raised by great-grandmothers, grandmothers and aunts or some other close female relative, until their mothers return for them sometime during their school age years, or when some special occasion commands their return.

This may happen when there is death in the family. The belief in the power of the *gubida* (or family dead) is one of the strongest bonds holding the consanguineal kin together. Whenever a rite is held to do honor to one or more of the ancestral spirits, all the direct descendants of the dead concerned, as well as those of their siblings, are required to attend

and to contribute to the feasts and celebrations. The scattered family members of such lineage groups (regardless of where they may be) are expected to meet together on such solemn occasions. Another occurrence when all parents and grandparents, as well as god-parents and aunts and uncles are obliged to assemble is when a marriage is in the offing; all are called upon to give their judgment, advice and admonitions on the mating or matrimony of a young man and woman (Taylor: 75).

In describing the social organization of the Garífunas in Belize and Guatemala, Nancy Gonzalez finds that the most effective and enduring domestic relationships in contemporary Garífuna society tend to develop among consanguineal kin (Helms 1981: 79). However, strong emphasis is focused particularly on maternal relatives, producing a high degree of matrifocality with the household and family. The common dictionary definition of "matrifocal" is that it is a designation of family units or household structures which are headed by the mother and lacking a father permanently or for extended periods. Here the most lasting relationships are those between mother and child and between siblings. Although marriages officially accounted for close to 55 percent of Garífuna households in Gonzalez's study in nearby Livingston (Guatemala), affinal unions were frequently entered into lightly, with little or no ceremony, and are "brittle and unenduring" (Gonzalez 1969:68). When these marriages dissolve, the children invariably remain with their mother. Consequently, the fundamental and permanent core of the household group is composed of a woman and her children or several related women consisting of the woman's mother and her daughters or several sisters and their children (Helms: 79).

Sometimes the male economic and sexual partners of these women will be in temporary residence with them, but such men generally spend only a short time in the household. They then depart, perhaps to take a job in another town, perhaps to reside for a short while with another woman, or perhaps to return to their own home, usually meaning their mother's or sister's house. Given the frequency with which connubial liaisons dissolve, sons and brothers emerge as the most stable male members of many households. The individual residences of the consanguineal women (mothers and daughters or sisters) composing the household may be physically arranged, adjacent to a common yard as a compound composed of a separate but common kitchen and sleeping quarters of the various females units (Gonzalez 1969: 68-89)

Helms reports that during the nineteenth century, after becoming established in coastal Honduras, Carib men still favored fishing pursuits and still lived away from home for as long as five to eight months at a time, working as laborers in Central American lumber (mahogany)

camps. The Carib women continued to tend to the agriculture, although they also periodically sold or exchanged garden produce in the larger towns of Honduras and Belize. Quoting Thomas Young's observation from 1847, she adds that:

Polygamy is general amongst them; some having as many as three or four wives, but the husband is compelled to have a separate house and plantation for each, and if he gives a present to one he must give the others one of the same value; and he must also divide his time equally among them, a week with one, a week with another, and so on (Ibid.: 83).

Now, however a man seldom, if ever, keeps more than one wife in the same town or village. Nonetheless, as in former times, he continues to develop and retain very close ties with his mother and sisters, and even today, he is likely to regard his mother's household as his home, and to frequently return there as a place of refuge and relaxation (Ibid.: 84) from some of the commotion he may have engendered with his wife's or other women's relatives.

Living, as he has done for generations, with the sea at his front door and with a lagoon at back the Garífuna has established his reputation as an excellent seaman. All the coastwise vessels and many of the smaller banana boats which plied between Florida and Central America often carry largely Garífuna crews. But, for the average Garífuna sailor, such employment is intermittent and often serves rather as a stepping stone to reestablishing himself abroad, than as a permanent means of livelihood. In the meantime, like the worker from a factory or from a logging camp, he returns periodically to his native town loaded with cash and knick-knacks and bauble for his family and friends. Then he takes things easy--for as long as his earnings last--in the bosom of his family (Taylor: 55).

Some men may still work as fishermen and seek local seasonal wage labor jobs, while others have also become involved with diversified cash crop agriculture. The women still carry on the small farming for subsistence and periodic sale. Garífuna males have gained the notoriety of leaving most of the family's work to their womenfolk, for while they usually concentrate on transportation by sea, house and boat building and repair, clearing and burning of the land, basketry and woodwork, the women do the back-breaking planting, weeding, gathering and preparing food, collecting firewood, washing clothes, and all other household duties (Ibid.: 55). Many younger women have now left the villages and towns for months or years at a time to take up seasonal wage paying jobs in the fruit or fish canneries or to work as domestics in the larger and more affluent urban areas, either within their own country or abroad.

Given the uncertainty of men's labor opportunities and the scant cash contributions they provide, wives and children frequently find it preferable to remain with, or to return to,

the household and residential compound of the wife's mother or her married sisters. This residential pattern not only opens access to the financial contributions of brothers and sons but also frees the husbands and fathers associated with these women to fully exploit job opportunities wherever and whenever they may occur without threat to the household stability.

The consanguineal household or compound also facilitates cooperative agricultural activities, particularly in the case of the time-consuming production of manioc, from harvesting the tuber to rendering it into cassava bread, a traditional staple which women have always prepared with communal group labor (Helms: 84). The consanguineal household also encourages individual women's participation in the job market by providing a stable and secure home with an older sister or mother tending the children of a younger woman who may wish to leave the home to find work. The frequent occurrences of the consanguineal household arrangement, therefore, give evidence of the economic conditions of the Garífuna family (Helms, 84-84).

### **4.3. Case Study 1**

One of my case studies is about a Belizean Garífuna family which has experienced the two latter forms of the migratory wage labor model: the *recurrent migration* and the *continuous migration*. The LeBlanc lives' as members of a migrant family was set in motion when a dispute erupted between the husband and the wife's older brother, in whose lumber company the husband had been employed. Since the husband was offended by the "unfounded" accusation of being a worthless gambler and womanizer, and since the brother-in-law would not recant of his allegation, reconciliation was not forthcoming. Because he was fluent in Spanish, the husband decided to leave the town and work as a migrant wage laborer in Guatemala, as he had done as a young man. When the remittances stopped coming in the wife, broken-hearted and ill "from bearing so many children in such a short time" (according to her sister, the nurse) took their five children and moved to her family home in Belize City. In the Garífuna culture, even for a married woman living with her husband and children as a nuclear family, the home in which she grew up in with her parents, and her siblings is always deemed the "family home." So, there in Belize City they took up residence and were provided for by her mother, older brother and sisters.

After a couple of years into this arrangement, the husband resumed sending some quetzales (the monetary unit of Guatemala) which were immediately converted into the British Honduras dollars (this was before Belize's independence.) Periodically sending money to his wife entitled the husband to make occasional forays back home to visit his

family and to display his prosperity and general well being. At those times he would bring more of his wages, much to the delight of the wife; and toys and small trinkets for the children, much to their excitement; and other gifts for his now appeased, yet skeptical in-laws.

In the process of these stopovers, the wife became pregnant, much to the consternation and irritation of her older brother and sister. At the same time, the husband's visits ceased, and so did the flow of quetzales. Gradually, because she had become a non-contributing member of the household, tensions between the wife and her siblings occurred. Matters came to a head, when the brother, in a spate of exasperation (over what his sister considered a minor infraction by her eldest son) announced that since he was already "providing for another man's 'get'" he had now planned on marrying and having his own family to worry about. Although the relations were soon healed between the wife and her brother, there was always afterwards a certain amount of tension in the house when he was there.

When, one day the older sister intimated that she and her children were beggars, the wife made up her mind that, "come hell or high water," she was taking the insults no more. She wouldn't wait the long years before her sons could bail her out of her pitiable situation. So, she would "take the bull by the horns,"<sup>16</sup> and relocate herself to the anonymity of the United States, even if it meant going through the "back door,"<sup>17</sup> if necessary. When she revealed her plans to her family, shocked by her audacity and cheek, they debated but eventually wrote her a letter of support, an item required by the American consulate for a visitor's visa to the USA.

She then packed her pataki<sup>18</sup> and went to Guatemala in search of her errant husband who was fortuitously a Honduran citizen, and who needn't wait on the British quota system as Belizeans at the time had to do to acquire a visa. After arranging for the care of the six children and promising them that she'd soon return for them, she hiked with a friend (who bought old American cars from the Mexican/American border towns in California and Texas and sold them in Belize) and traveled to Los Angeles. There, an acquaintance helped her to find a job in one of Los Angeles' suburbs, where she worked as a Nanny to the two small children of a UCLA music professor and her insurance agent husband.

She was so devoted to the children and rendered such superior care to them, that when three months later the 1961 Hurricane Hattie devastated Belize City, and in a of panicked nervousness she told her employees that she had to return home to attend to her children's

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<sup>16</sup> Take a daring risk.

<sup>17</sup> This means going through Mexico and the California or Texas border, sometimes without proper documentations.

<sup>18</sup> Garífuna word for suitcase.

needs, they offered to sponsor her and her entire family if she would return to them as soon as possible. With the proper documents pocketed, she returned to Belize, packed the two oldest and two youngest children, and accompanied by her husband, returned to Los Angeles as the caretaker of her two young charges.

Soon, her oldest daughter was accepted into the local college, the oldest son was enlisted into the military, the two youngest children were registered into the neighborhood parochial Catholic elementary school, and the husband was employed as a janitor in one of the Beverly Hills synagogues. Six months later, when her sister in charge of the remaining two children in Belize began spending the money sent, at her own discretion and not according to instructions mandated via the mail, and when letters received informing of the delinquency and truancy of the two teenagers, the wife took the trans-Mexican express to Belize. There, she reprimanded the offending youngsters and made plans to assist her relatives in joining her in California.

Two weeks later, after finalizing her affairs in Belize, she boarded a north-bound Batty Bros. bus and arrived in Los Angeles within a harrowing week. The wife continued working with her former employees until their children became teenagers. The LeBlanc couple, now both retired, continues to reside in California, their children now grown and gone. They travel occasionally to Belize, especially for the funeral of the dear departed siblings and other contemporaries. Sometimes, they return just as tourists, although now with age, such holiday visits are becoming few and far between. However, they can be called upon when monies are needed for the several extended families still there.

The specificities may be different for other emigrating families and their households, but in general, due to the prolonged absences of their menfolk, beginning with the 1960's Garífuna women began to take the initiative in venturing from their Central American homelands to work in the large urban areas of the United States. The following chapter will explore the role of both genders in the global changes in migration, how the flood of recent remittances is changing the economic landscape the Garífuna communities at home, how the people are becoming transformed into a transnational people.





Young dancers

## **5. Transnationality: A Phenomenon Since the 1960s**

Two seemingly unrelated incidents occurred during the decade of 1959-1969, which suddenly and unexpectedly turned the tides of Belizean fortunes for the good, transformed the economic and migratory patterns of Garífuna males, and opened up a niche in the world of employment for Garífuna women. These events reversed the role of migrant workers from the men to the women, and have had lasting effects on the communities and the population which now unquestionably depend upon the regular remittances sent from abroad, for the care of the children and the elderly left behind.

### **5.1. The Cuban Revolution of 1959**

When Fidel and Raúl Castro, Ché Guevara and other rebels overthrew the Cuban government and ousted its President, Fulgenio Batista, while its citizenry celebrated New Year's Day on Thursday, January 1, 1959, no one dreamt of the revolutionary ramifications it would have on the little tropical country nestled along the Mexican District of Quintana Roo on the north, by the Guatemalan Province of Peten on the west, and bathed by the Caribbean Sea on the East. Unlike the other Central American states, Belize is the only country in Central American without a coastline on the North Pacific Ocean.

In 1958 it was a minute, insignificant, lowland British colony with the only English speaking population on the Isthmus, and, “A country as poor as a church mouse.”<sup>19</sup> The British baymen loggers had completely depleted the lush and luxuriant Logwood, Mahogany and Ziricote forests for which British Honduras was well reputed. Therefore, when Cuba’s cane production was shunned by its powerful northern neighbor, and when Belize was chosen among others to fill the gap, the government did not hesitate to grab the opportunity of turning the northern Belizean region into flourishing waves of grassy sugarcane sheaves, concluding that the country’s sagging economy could only improve from such a providential God send.

#### *5.1.1. United States Embargo Imposed on Cuba*

Fidel Castro’s Cuban revolution happened just in the nick of time! No sooner had Mr. Castro proclaimed that Cuba had become a communist, atheist country than the United States declared, in March 1959, an arms embargo against him. During the nineteen months which lapsed between then and October 1960 when the business, trade, and financial blockade was

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<sup>19</sup> Informant, Vicente Acosta, Los Angeles, May 4, 2009.

levied on Cuba, the buzz around Belize was that prayers were answered since the Americans were looking for additional cane growers among the West Indies and the Central American countries to replace the rumored, soon-to-be embargoed Cuban sugar. That was the event which shifted the Garífuna man's migratory wanderings from being abroad and away for long periods to becoming stay at home Dads. For a season, from the early 1960s through the 1980s sugar cane was king in Belize and men were usually home.

There was a young Garífuna entrepreneur, Jimmy Pasquale, who had profited previously in the Mahogany and Logwood timber industry, and foreseeing that it soon would be defunct, he had the foresight to change to sugarcane production only a couple of years before the fortuitous Cuban affair occurred. Together with other (Mayan) small farmers in the Northern District of Corozal, he was struggling with his fledgling cane plantation operations. Then the Belize government received a large quota allotment from the United States and started encouraging and subsidizing these small farmers to increase their sugarcane output.

This meant, among other things, that the old rickety building which once housed the old sugar factory had to be redesigned, remodeled and expanded; and now men who would have ordinarily traveled abroad for migratory work, could find employment near their homes. Corozal in the north was only a few hours away by truck, a mere 102 kilometers from Belize City and 158 kilometers from the Garífuna enclaves of Dangriga, Punta Gorda and Puerto Barrios, the towns farthest south in Belize.

The sugarcane camps could not be built quickly enough, as the men (and women keen of becoming kitchen hands or commissary clerks) thronged the roads as they headed towards the camps, to sign up for employment. Finally, the men could stay in the vicinity of their homes, tend to their families and be gainfully employed at the same time. Finally, there was money enough to go around, real American money no less, and wives and children had their men back in the family compound. However, as soon as households got back to normalcy, the doorway of opportunity were again flung wide open for the enterprising Garífuna women to enter through.

## **5.2. Feminism and Flower Power**

The second pivotal event was in the mid-1960s when the American "Baby Boomers" had begun to come of age, and they were in a protesting mood. Some of them believed that the racist, war-mongering, male dominating society had restricted and suppressed not only people of color but women as well; and that that society was still holding females back from expressing their God-given gifts and talents. Budding young females were not going to

emulate their mothers and be found "pregnant, barefoot, and in the kitchen."<sup>20</sup> As they entered the local colleges and universities, they got their protesting feet wet in the Civil Rights Movement under the tutelage of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Ralph Abernathy and other African-American clerics, businessmen (and women), and politicians.

Along with their young male counterparts: young men of military service age who burned their draft cards to protest the Vietnam War, brazen young women ripped off their bras and burned them openly in the public squares. Together they organized mass rallies, demonstrations, sit-ins, marches and other acts of non-violent, civil disobedience on campuses or in the cities' downtown and business centers to show their abhorrence of the oppressive policies they thought were directed towards their gender, as well as against the Vietnamese and other people of poorer nations overseas. Every governmental policy came under their critical scrutiny and disapproval.

These young women had studied about Gandhi, and had read Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 radical and ground-breaking text, *The Second Sex*; Franz Fanon's work on Black identity in *Black Skin, White Mask* and his anti-colonial prose, *The Wretched of the Earth*. They were greatly influenced by protest literature and activities, whether in the media or textbooks, and they dabbled in Marxist theories and communal lifestyles. These young feminists of the 1960s admired their grandmothers for striving and achieving their much sought for voting and property rights. It was now up to them to finish the task by accomplishing equality in the professions and the business workplace. They set the pace for the later determined generation of the 1980s and '90s to break the glass ceiling and burst onto the scene or the white male bastion, the Boardroom.

Besides the Feminists, there were other young women who were active partakers of the non-political Hippie Movement. These were more interested in their sexual freedoms and the right to return to Nature, and if they were going to San Francisco (where they congregated in the city's Haight/Ashbury district) they remembered to wear some flowers in their hair. Creating new music, participating in poetry readings, attending the various Renaissance Festivals, traveling long distances to the mass outdoors musical concerts in rain or shine, collecting petals of mountain flowers for the faddish, non-caffeine tea consumption, composing their underground newspapers, and experimenting with recreational drugs were their main concerns. Although their agenda was totally different from the Feminists, they

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<sup>20</sup> 1960s Feminist slogan.

helped to create the niche in which Garífuna women, as well as women from all over the world, were able to occupy.

I have added this piece of Feminist and Hippie history because I believe that these women have impacted tremendously the migratory development of Garífuna women to the United States and upon the recent evolution of the transnational Garífuna family.

### **5.3. Garífuna Women's Migration Northward**

When these radical young American Women Libbers of the 1960s threw their underwear into the streets of Los Angeles, New York City, Boston, Chicago and Podunk, USA; or simply burnt them in open fires on their college and university campuses, they were inadvertently opening the floodgates of immigration, and thereby liberating thousands of Third and Fourth World women and their children from grinding impoverishments and hardships. The Chica LeBlancs of the developing countries were poised at the portals with bated breaths to burst through. As Western women sought previously withheld professional careers and employment beyond the home, they had created the contemporary need for a host of care providers.

Because of globalization women are on the move as never before. Western female executives jet about the world, succeeding in the once all male careers, and turning over the care of their children, elderly parents, and homes to other women from the hamlets of Belize and from other far flung hamlets of poorer countries. These migrant workers now do the work that affluent women are no longer able or willing to do; work such as maids, nannies, domestics, and nurses' aides to senior citizens, residing in homes for the elderly, and as caregivers to the handicapped.

To accomplish this, Garífuna women, as well as others from all over the globe, leave their own children in the care of grandmothers, sister, and sisters-in-law. Seldom, but it does happen, the elder daughter is drawn out of school to care for her younger siblings. The American woman commutes to work an average of twenty-eight minutes a day (Ehrenreich 2002: 3), and sees her children in the morning and at night. The Garífuna woman had traveled many miles from her home, unsure as to when she'd see her family again. However, she had a sense of liberation at the chance of becoming an independent breadwinner and of enhancing her children's material and educational opportunities.

This pattern of female migration reflected a global gender revolution, for in both rich and poor countries, fewer and fewer families could rely solely on the male breadwinner. Everywhere, the earning power of most men has diminished since the 1970s and the women

had to go out to bridge the income gap. Most women, like their men, usually migrated from the south to the north, from poor countries to rich ones, and to the nearest comparatively rich country, preferably one whose language they spoke (Ibid.: 6).

This was true of the English speaking Belizean Garífuna women, who between the 1960s and '80s, entered the United States through the main Mexican/American border cities of Mexicali/Calexico and Tijuana/San Diego into California and on to north beyond Los Angeles; via the two Nogales Cities into Arizona and on to Phoenix; and Ciudad Acuña/Del Rio, Marmoros/Brownsville and Ciudad Juarez/El Paso into Texas and on to San Antonio, Corpus Christi, and to other places unknown.

This occasion, of crossing the Mexican Border into the United States cities, was one time which proved advantageous to be persons-of-color; because they were thought to be Afro-Americans, and not a threat of drug smuggling as their other Latin American neighbors were often suspected. In the late 1980s and the 1990s when more middle-class Garífunas began sacrificing and exchanging their high status professional employment for more lucrative pay (even as menial domestic labor), and when airfare became affordable, they took the three to four hour flights directly into Miami, Galveston, Houston, Dallas, Los Angeles, and then further north into San Francisco, Chicago, Atlanta, New York and Boston.

#### **5.4. Destination of Choice: The United States**

There were various reasons why Garífunas choose the United States. One of the motives was that it is there that some of the men originally went, as citrus fruit pickers in Florida, as seasoned seamen in the US merchant marines stopping at the Gulf of Mexico's, Pacific coast, and the Atlantic seaboard wharves, and as construction workers in the shipbuilding piers of the New England States. There, they could contact families, friends and acquaintances of their male predecessors and avoid landing in the country cold turkey and without support. When the men migrated, it usually took them about a week by sea to reach the United States. But by the time the women were journeying northwards, they could do so by air; and as previously discussed, they had already become acquainted with the trans-Mexican highways and road links.

Another rationale for heading towards the United States was because of the English language. English is the official language of Belize, and although different pockets of the population speak other tongues and/or dialects, the multi-lingual Belizean Garífunas were fluent in the Americans vernacular. Although Belize was a British colony during the '60s, American influences were being experienced, and British importance was on the wane. The

Belizean economy was becoming more dependent on U. S. commerce, rather than on Britain, and American companies had begun to be progressively more involved in Belizean businesses, especially in the production of sugarcane derivatives, and in the infant development of ecotourism.

Cultural barriers were being eradicated through the presence of Americans who introduced their varying lifestyles and institutions into the Belizean society. The first arrivals were the Mennonites, who during the 1950s and 1960s migrated to Belize from Mexico and Canada, and who proved to be a valuable economic addition to the country (Everitt, 1983: 82). In spite of the fact that they lived quite isolated from the wider Belizean society, building upon their Christian beliefs, agricultural skills, astute entrepreneurial activities, agricultural skills and strong working ethos, they established a reputable and stable economic position within Belize (Roessingh 2007:107).

These Mennonites had taken the worst, water-logged, swamplands and turned them into veritable gardens of Eden by producing an abundance of novel vegetables and ground foods which were introduced into the local diets. Their beef, hogs and chickens were the healthiest and they were most desirable in the district markets. Although when the Mennonites first appeared in Belize they were laughed at and ridiculed because of their foreign clothing and their bearded men, they soon became highly respected because of their excellence in productivity in both agriculture and animal husbandry. While their meats and vegetables were of the highest quality, their prices were compatible with the ordinary Belizean pocketbook.

Other United States interventions occurred when a rash of President Kennedy's idealistic Peace Corp teachers, nurses, doctors, agriculturalists, engineers, researchers, and others filled the landscape, being highly visible and of service wherever possible. Many overstaying their tenure, or after their stint returning to Belize to stay, they seemed to be everywhere involving themselves in the social and political happenings of the country. Upon their heels came the new Jesus groups, and others of the Pentecostal persuasion who relentlessly attempted to evangelize the staunch Catholic, Anglican and Methodist populace.

Then came the disgruntled Baby Boomers, exiting their Hippie phase, and establishing small enterprises such as miniature restaurants, the previously unheard of bed-and-breakfast businesses, specialty boutiques, and novelty and souvenir shops. All these militated to remove cultural barriers between Belizeans and the North Americans. American presence and efforts to accommodate themselves to Belizean ways helped to remove the "snooty gringos" stigma which was attached to earlier U. S. visitors. At the same time, the expansion of

information about America took place through the media in the form of television, radio, movies, music, magazines, and the dissemination of commercial products (Straughan: 3). Garífunas developed a familiarity about Americans from those who were in Belize, and believed that they would be hospitably treated by those unknowns they would find in the United States.

#### *5.4.1. Meteorological Upheavals*

Many believe that the sole reason that people migrate is because they are in search of a better life than what they think their country of origin could offer. But beneath the superficial reasoning of “searching for a better life,” are layers of causes and motives. I have already dealt with the challenges of the prolonged absences of the husbands and fathers of the Garífuna families, and its accompanying distresses to their households. It is noteworthy to mention here that another great impetus which hastened the women’s departure from home was the devastating Hurricane Hattie of October 1961. Hurricanes were no strangers of Belizeans who had weathered some with windspeeds of 120 km per hour or more. Meteorologists could predict that within any 100 year period as many as 33 tropical storms and hurricanes would hit Belize, with hurricanes once every 6 or 7 years. In the past century Belize was hit thrice in 1931, 1946 and 1961 (Weaver: 2) with devastating wreckage in their wake.

On Tuesday, October 31, 1961 Hurricane Hattie, considered “worst hurricane ever,” (Weaver: 5) swept in, so late in the season and with such ferocity at 250 km per hour, that there were 300+ fatalities; thousands of homeless survivors roamed the streets searching for food; and Belize City was so badly damaged that immediately thereafter the capital had to be relocated inland to Belmopan in the highlands. Many, fed up with the necessary and recurring renewals of their lives and livelihoods, simply abandoned kin and kith and headed for the sanctuary, stability and salaries of urban America. After Hattie’s ferocious post-hurricane tidal wave had inundated and swept away homes and properties of the communities, many destitute Garífunas simply pulled up their stakes and left.

Besides having to deal with cyclic meteorological hazards, Belize’s economic condition consisted of high unemployment, underemployment and low wages. If one’s ambition was to achieve upward mobility, earning additional incomes dictated that s/he had to emigrate to accomplish it. However, financial betterment was not always a primary motive for Garífunas’ moving abroad. Some moved, or they sent their post High School young



women and men to the United States to afford them the possibility of broadening their horizons, furthering their education, and either honing old skills or learning new ones.

Sometimes these young people were sent by their parents to the United States to better their lot, and so that eventually they may gain economic support from the child in its adulthood (Everitt, 1984:320). With the migration of women into the American labor market, and due to their economic independence, such reliance on their children had become a mute and irrelevant subject. The Garífuna children present in America have usually been sponsored by their parents already living in America, or they were born there, thereby creating a new classification, the Garífuna-American. In their Isthmian home along the Caribbean Sea, one never heard of a Belizean- or a Guatemalan- or a Honduran-Garífuna. But because of the American peculiarity of naming immigrants by the hyphenation of their original homeland, I have heard, both in Belize, in Los Angeles, New York and elsewhere the new term, “Garífuna-American” as it relates to people residing in or born in America. This is novel.

## **5.5. The Transnational Garífuna Family**

Beginning with the mid-1960s, Garífuna emigrants from Belize have had their feet resolutely planted equally in the *terra firma* of both the home and host countries, and astutely benefitted from the best of both worlds. They made no permanent rupture from their homes in Belize, they do not become permanently uprooted, they did not abandon their old patterns of living, nor did they suffer the painful experience of learning a new language and culture. Their networks and activities encompassed both societies, and their lives cut across national boundaries bringing the two societies into a single social field. To accommodate this different and contemporary consciousness and experience of similar new migrant populations, new concepts and new terminologies have developed.

### *5.5.1. Transnationalism and Transmigrants*

The term, “Transnationalism” is defined as the processes by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants who build such social environments by developing and maintaining multiple relations, whether familial, economic, social, organizational, religious or political that span borders are designated as “Transmigrants.” These transmigrants take action, make decisions, feel concerns and develop identities within social networks that connect them to two or more societies simultaneously. Within their complex web of social relations, transmigrants draw

upon and create fluid and multiple identities grounded both in their society of origin and in the host societies (Glick Schiller *et al.* 2006: 1).

Some scholars consider this, “. . . creation of a transnational community linking immigrant groups in the advanced countries with their respective sending nations and hometowns,” as a phenomenon, “that has only recently caught the eye of researchers in the field of immigration,” with its need to advance theoretical notions which facilitate its interpretation (Portes *et al.*, 1999: 217). The term transnational had already been utilized to describe informal import-export businesses and classes of bi-national professionals. Now the phenomenon of transnationalism is being used to describe the emergent labor immigration itself, and the growing number of persons who live dual lives: speaking two languages, having homes in two countries, and mainly living through continuous regular contact across national borders (Ibid.: 218).

## **5.6. Case Study 2**

A case in point would be the immigration narrative of Tía Olga who is in her late fifties and is living with her husband and their two grandchildren. She was sponsored by her older sister and husband who had preceded her in the 1970s, and whose children she had cared for when the sister first emigrated to the United States. Tía Olga had worked first as a nanny in Beverly Hills, but couldn't take the, “rudeness of the children,” so her sister and friends rallied to her support and helped her to find another job as a personal aid to an elderly couple. While thus employed she took a year's night course to become a nurse's aide, preparing herself for a more lucrative occupation, to which she switched promptly after graduating.

Tía Olga accomplished four things during her tenure as a nursing assistant at one of the neighborhood hospitals. First, she returned home to Belize to legally marry her long time common-law husband, and the father of all three of her children. Second, she sponsored him and the children to the U.S. Third, with the continued help of her older sister, she situated him into a stable, good-paying job. Fourth, together they bought a small two-bedroom beginner's home in a relatively decent part of the city. And fifth, she immediately got pregnant with her fourth child, “Mí American security, yu know.”<sup>21</sup> All this accomplished in a period of five or six years. It is quite common among Garifunas to not be slack about their goals of getting as comfortable as possible in their new transitory, yet permanent, home in America.

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<sup>21</sup> As with marrying an American citizen, it is believed that having a child on American soil guarantees parental immunization from deportation.

The 1965 Amendment changes in the U. S. immigration laws had much to do with the success of the Tía Olgas, and the throng of Garífunas who entered the United States in the era of the late 1960s and '70s – for it abolished the national origins quota system and changed the preference procedure to give priority to family reunification over occupational skills. This law has also often been singled out as the principle reason for the “new immigration” and the change in its composition. The laws most crucial consequence was the removal of barriers to immigrants whose countries were previously excluded because they were colonies of other quota countries. It was also important for it influenced migration decisions and constituted a key context of reception, shaping the destinies of newcomers, especially in their right to full membership and future applications for citizenship (Rubaut 1994: 588).

For Southern California Garífunas, as well as elsewhere, by one stroke of official pen, President Lyndon Bains Johnson revolutionized Garífuna “marals”<sup>22</sup> (morals), and restructured the family household. Since U. S. immigration law required that the reunification of spouses, meant “married” spouses, in the late 1960s through the '80s there was a rash of nuptials among the Tías and the Tíos.<sup>23</sup> Although there has always been tacit consent and knowledge that Garífuna men may have a “sweetheart” or two, that practice temporarily became drastically curtailed. If one wanted to be sponsored to America he had to choose the woman who could sponsor him. Once he came to America as a married man, he was usually corralled at home, a man with only one wife. For appearances sake, he had only one official address, and if he had a mistress elsewhere, it was usually in the old country, far away from his American family.

The second restructuring was in the composition of the family. Although Garífuna hospitality persists as in Belize, and the house may at any time contain visiting relatives, or temporary transients, the nuclear family has become the basis of the household, complete with mother, father, and children. The modern Garífuna household has become transformed from the matriarchal extended family domain to resemble the ordinary two parents and children American residence.

Chaney describes the job possibilities for such migrants as Tío as:

“The contemporary labor transmigration is a new, flexible international labor reserve which operates almost completely outside the normal regulations and protection afforded to workers in the sending or receiving society. Typically, the new immigrants take on the residue of low skilled, low salaried jobs which defy

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<sup>22</sup> Especially among Garífuna matrons, when dissatisfied with the conduct of others, the term, “loose marals” was employed instead of the word “Morals.”

<sup>23</sup> Tías and Tíos are aunts and uncles, whether real or fictive.

automation (or simply are not worth automating, because cheap laboring hands are available) such as restaurant workers, day laborers, construction workers, street cleaners, janitors and custodians, parking lot attendants, baggage handlers at the airports and hotels, truck and gypsy cab drivers and particularly the women as domestic servants” (Chaney 1979: 207).

Garífunas are not initially concerned about such matters as higher wages, Social Security and medical benefits, nor about the job’s status (or lack thereof) because they believe that once they get their feet into the door, they can improve their lot either by finding more advantageous employment in another place, or by moving upward and becoming indispensable just where they are. It is worth adding here that any right-minded Garífuna would not be found dead doing any of the above mentioned jobs if he were in Belize. But in America, away from street pals, and making four or five times the wages than if he were home, doing menial labor is considered “any port sufficing in a storm!” until he is able to get something better.

So Tía Olga’s husband began working three part time jobs until he finally got a full-time employment as a janitor, complete with all benefits, and at the same hospital where she worked. Together they sent their children to parochial Elementary and High Schools until they were ready for college and for branching out on their own. They purchased an old dilapidated duplex, spent many after-work-hours cleaning, repairing, painting, and making it spiffy; after which they rented it to reliable Mexican and Asian tenants. Soon, they gave their beginner’s home to the eldest married son, moved into a better part of the city, had a new brick house built in Belize for their retirement, purchased rental properties there and became landlords both in America and at home.

With the assistance of the many local Belizean and Garífuna Associations to which they have become eager dues paying members, Tía Olga and her husband have recreated their Belize city neighborhood right in the midst of Central Los Angeles. As many of their friends have done, either through Association subsidized excursions or individualized planned trips, they travel back to Belize at least once or twice each year visiting relatives, attending to their properties there, and participating in family and community enjoyments. When they arrive in Belize they have huge valises filled with clothing, electronics, linens, kitchenware and other gifts for relatives and friends and they return to the States with medicinal herbs and potions, frozen tamales, creole breads and buns, beans, goat cheese, cassava bread and other items which will sustain their culinary appetites until its time to return to Belize the following year (England, 2006: 2).

While there, Tía Olga may make cassava bread with her friends, or she might join a dance group rehearsing the steps she might have forgotten; or she might start singing in the old choir; or she may spend the days making coconut oil and preparing other foodstuffs which she may store in the new freezer. Tío may go fishing in one of his old mahogany dugout dories with some of his old ex-merchant marines retired pals. He may get a chance to attend a wake, appreciating the camaraderie, the rum-drinking, the vigorous drumming, and the hip jerking *punta* dancing. He may even consult a shaman about his recent nightmares or lingering sickness, or share some secret which he knows will be safe to the grave. On their return to Los Angeles, they are relieved to be back into the lap of the comforts they have become accustomed to, away from the biting flies and bugs, from the stifling humidity and scorching heat, and from the incessant sound of crickets through the night.

As they approach retirement age, Tía and Tío anticipate going to Belize for good to live in their new house, a house they could never have afforded to build without working abroad. They would collect their retirement pensions and Social Security checks and live like royalty back home. There are no regrets for them, for living in America with its own peculiar challenges of classism and racism was well worth the time and effort. To have escaped the poverty of Belize and have achieved the material success which they could never have attained there was worth the price they endured.

There seems to be some conflicts, however, as Tía has decided that she would rather remain in Los Angeles where her daughters and all her grandchildren live. The girls visit frequently and even send their children home for summers, but they have no plans on returning permanently themselves. Tío, however looks forward to returning where he will be surrounded by admiring friends and neighbors, and where his status would be elevated above that of a perpetual foreigner elsewhere.

Tía Olga and her family's narrative is typical of transmigration patterns of the recent decades. They are members of the current transnational communities in which social processes are embedded in and carried out in two national contexts simultaneously, in Belize and Los Angeles. They have successfully supported two families, in two different national venues. They have banked a substantial nest egg so that if they ever finally make the decision to return to Belize for good, the funds will be there for that eventuality.

Their return for good is very tenuous, because as these transmigrants work at and prosper on their jobs; as they form families and satisfyingly raise their children and get pleasure from the grandchildren; as they attend educational institutions and amass information and knowledge; as they develop work histories; as they build long lasting relationships; as

they become progressively more assimilated into the sunny California society; and as their affiliation into the United States becomes deep-rooted, they often do not make any more of a clean break with the American society than they did with families back home in Belize when they first left.

The end result is that individuals and families become as rooted socially and economically in Los Angeles as they did in Belize (England, 2006: 4). The ambivalence that Tía Olga and her husband are experiencing comes from their affiliation to the United States through economic and social ties, while their national allegiance and sense of cultural identity remains rooted in Belize. Until the decision is made as to where they will ultimately spend their latter days, they are both interested and active in Belizean politics. They subscribe to the Belizean newspapers and continue to participate in the hometown associations that support community development in Belize, and they foster their long distance nationalism by their persistent identification with Belize rather than with America.



*Dügü* drummers

## 6. Ancestor Worship: The Quintessence of Home

This chapter reveals the importance of the ancestral religion, describes its rituals incorporated in the *Dügü*, and how it is the one stronghold that can propel the transmigrant remnant community back to the land of their mothers and fathers; or help them to remain as transnationals in America.

Garífunas are an intensely spiritual people who from the womb to the grave are engrossed with the spiritual aspects of their existence. It is no wonder that they are quite devout in their choice of the European religion that they adhere to. Catholicism is their preference, for its beliefs, rituals, relics and statuary are pliable enough to include and accommodate their traditions, culture and spiritual idiosyncrasies. They have no quarrel with the Protestant sects, for although Protestants are most adamant in shunning the Garífunas spirituality, Garífunas admire their biblical clarity and strictness. The majority are practicing Roman Catholics with the minority participating in the old Methodist and Anglican traditions, and some of the modern Pentecostal and Baptist movements.

It is significant to note that whether Catholic, mainline Protestant, Charismatic or Pentecostal, a Garífuna is primarily an Ancestor worshipper. No matter how educated, sophisticated, or westernized s/he may be on a New York or Los Angeles Sunday morning, between Monday through Saturday, when prolonged misfortune lingers, when modern Western medicine brings no relief, and when the whispers of the “old ones” (the ancestors) can be detected, a Garífuna promptly reverts to becoming an ancestor devotee. We will here investigate the powerful pull this spirituality has on the Garífuna’s psyche and way of life, and how it serves as the crucible of his/her life and decisions.

The Garífuna extended family is the crux of the culture, and it includes both the living and the dead! In this culture, the elders are held in high esteem, whether they exist in this life or in the next. It is believed that when parents and grandparents have passed over in death from the physical to the spiritual realm, they possess more power in the afterlife than when they inhabited the earth.

These predecessors are deemed to be jealously watching over their descendants monitoring their behavior, rewarding the virtuous and punishing the vulgar. The Garífuna believes that the ancestors (*the Gubidas*) are close to them, always protecting them from evil and providing good luck (Palacio 2006: 113). They are said to give warnings and counsel to their loved ones, and make attempts to correct the misguided notions and actions of their heirs,

by coming to them in dreams, or by instructing the shaman to request what amounts to a “family reunion.” This family reunion is called the *Dügü*.

Since most Garífunas are convinced that their unhappy ancestral spirits can and may cause unsavory occurrences to happen to people, such as causing them to be inflicted by some seemingly incurable and severe sickness, or by experiencing the most unlikely accidents and calamities, or by encountering a prolonged series of ill fortune—all these, to get the family’s attention. Therefore, most will heed the call which usually comes in dreams or even in visions. Sometimes the call does go unheeded by the unbelieving, procrastinating, reluctant or outright disobedient individual who has been notified, until a near fatal mishap or disease occurs.

There are several reasons why one would disobey the appeal of the ancestors. One cause is that the recipient has become an assimilated or acculturated westerner, who no longer gives credence to the Garífuna spiritual tenets and considers them as mere myths. Young adults who have been educated in the University subjects of Western Philosophy, Psychology, History, Astronomy and Anthropology are the main culprits of such doubt and unbelief.



Preparation: *Dügü* dancers

Another rationale is that the person who has received the message may have membership in one of the more austere Christian religions which frowns upon any other belief in the world of the spirit except that founded upon the Judeo-Christian biblical scriptures.



There are examples, though, where the ancestors have specifically targeted Garifuna priests in the Catholic Church, or deacons and presbyters in a fundamentalist Protestant sect to relay the message that the “old ones” are calling them to a *Dügü* (Greene 1998: 172).

Some skeptics think that they have escaped the surveilling eyes of the ancestors because of their transmigration so far from the home community. There are those who have developed a comfortable reliance on the benefits of becoming Americans, and they have concluded that: with hard work, there will always be a flow of income; with medical insurance, sickness and disease will be overcome; with caution and following the law, there will always be protection; and with superior knowledge, all circumstances can be resolved and settled.

And others simply cannot be bothered with the vast expenditure of time, energy, finances and concentration necessary to sponsor such an event as a *Dügü* gathering. For many, it is up to the hard knocks of life to convince them that the ancestors’ invitation is made only once before a reply is expected to be forthcoming. The ceremony and festival cannot be prompted, initiated nor offered by the volition of the descendants, it must be sought for by the will of the departed, or it is advised by a shaman. According to Taylor, moreover, “if it were given unsought, such an offering would be considered as made to the devil (Taylor 1967: 113). Therefore, dreams should be paid attention to. If one of the forefathers appears, thereby indicating the desire to convene a family gathering, it may be best not to hesitate in complying.

When one form of devastation or another visits and revisits the erring individual or family, and when all else fails, the reluctant one may be persuaded to take a journey to the old country to consult a shaman and bring one’s woes to him or her. The shaman or priest-healer, called a *buyai* (Jenkins 1983: 432), *büiai* (Wells 1982: 44), and *buyei* (England 2006: 94), *buwiye* (Gonzalez: 85), in the Garifuna tongue, will then confer with the spirits to ascertain what should be done. If the forefathers request a ritual assembly and celebration, the *buyei* will notify the family of the type, and the decision will be made as to when such assemblage will be held. Much has to be considered and planned for. Typically the date is set for a year or more beyond the decision to conduct *Dügü* (Stone 2008: 224), *Dogó* (Taylor: 113) and *Dugu* (Holland 2008: 2) or one of the other ancestor rites.

There are three main ancestral rituals that may be petitioned: the *Amuyadahani*, the bathing of the spirits of the deceased; the *Chugú*, the feeding of the spirits, and the *Dügü*, the feasting of and with the ancestors. The least requested rite is the bathing of the spirit/s, and its participation is limited to the immediate family and very close relatives: offspring, siblings

and cousins who are able to attend. The whole affair lasts only a few hours, starting early in the morning. It is preceded by a Catholic mass followed by a simple breakfast of bread, coffee, and liquor.

A complete set of clean clothing (hung on a clothesline in the bedroom of the house), and water for the bath is offered to the honored ancestor spirit. The bath consists of pouring water into the floor of the kitchen, and as the water sinks into the ground, it indicates that the spirit is refreshed (Gonzalez: 84). When the family partakes of the breakfast (a place being set for the ancestor) their conversation is centered on their experiences with the person when s/he was still alive.

Sometimes the spirit may be keen on having foods it once relished, and the living kin are apprised (in a dream or by the *buyei*) that a *chugú* should be prepared. It is a one-night gala of singing, dancing, and feeding the spirits of the ancestors. Many more people who are descendants of the honored person or of their siblings come to celebrate this occasion. The *Dügü* is the most intense of the three main ancestral rites, lasting (nowadays) for two or three days and nights, usually a long week-end. Because this is the most frequently stipulated ritual, because it is the most significant for the community, because it is the most complex, and because it is the most popular among the families, the *Dügü*'s planning is quite thorough and is usually determined to be about a year or more into the future.

The reason for such a lengthy delay is because the *Dügü* rite, the most sacred, elaborate, and the root symbol of the Garífuna respect and communication with the *Gubida/s* (the spirit/s of the ancestor/s), requires much diligent preparation. This groundwork includes inviting as many relatives as can be remembered and located, as well as friends from Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, the United States and Canada. It is a time of acquiring food and drinks particularly those enumerated by the *Gubida*. The *buyei* will relay the date agreed upon to the other officiating performers which include: at least three drummers; the *gusewe*, those who will be wearing red body paints and the *galati* who will be wearing red dyed garments (Wells: 45); the four groups of *gayusa* singers; the appointed fishermen who will find and catch the fish and seafood; and another *buyei* if the invited family and anticipated guests are numerous.

This long preparation time is also necessary so that financial contributions from the far flung relatives beyond Belize (as distant as New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, San Francisco, Miami, New Orleans, Detroit, Boston (Jenkins: 431) and elsewhere can be collected; so that the sacrificial animals can be raised, comprising of pigs, hens and roosters, and the purchase of two or three cows; so that food supplies can be planted, grown and gathered, including the

favorite mainstay of cassava to make cassava bread (*ereba*), plantains, green bananas, rice and beans for the special ancestor meals.

During this year of preparation, relatives from all over have ample time to make their personal, familial, employment and travel arrangements (Greene: 170), for even the ancestors are traveling from as far as the old tribal homes in St. Vincent Island and Roatán. Besides, during the interim the *dabúyaba*, the cult house or ancestral temple in the village, either has to be built, renovated or repaired, depending on whether one is still standing, is in need of reparation, or whether its condition is such that it must be demolished and rebuilt. The lumber, bricks and daub must be supplied for it, and the carpenters must be procured and hired.

This is a time when one may receive multiple invitations because there is no greater insult than to be uninvited to the occasion of honoring one's ancestors; even if it is improbable that one would attend, s/he can send money or assist in some other tangible way to show that they understand the gravity of their obligation and to demonstrate their solidarity. Besides, all are diligent to assure that none is ignored for fear that they may fall into disfavor with the ancestors.

There are many reasons for sponsoring the *Dügü*, and the first, is to show the family's respect to the forefathers and to appease them for the misdeeds and neglect of family members (Holland: 2). Jenkins makes a salient point in proposing that in the local Belizean Garífuna communities where unemployment is widespread, poverty is prevalent, malnutrition is rampant among children and pregnant women, the ambitious and middle-class reside abroad, economic prospects are minimal and where other social stress prevail, the frequent *Dügüs* summoned through the *buyeis* is a fitting way of "sharing." She adds that:

It seems likely that the great sacrifice that characterizes *Dügü* results in material good. The flow of cash and food emanating and the manner in which these are obtained reaches a large number of Garifuna households. Even non-Garifuna shopkeepers benefit as several hundred migrants return each summer for these ceremonies, buying film, drinks, local crafts, and sundry items. A conservative estimate of BZE \$1,500.00 per rite, when multiplied by an average of eight rites per year in the Dangriga area, yields BZE \$12,000.00 brought into the area yearly, largely by U. S. migrants and their kin. The sum is equivalent to the annual spending power of 10 to 12 permanently employed wage earners (Jenkins: 439-440).

Observing the household dynamics, she reports that the most acrimonious disputes and tensions occur:

among kinswomen as they maneuver as individuals to secure the benefits of a single wage earner's generosity. The scarcity of jobs often leads to conflict between a man's

wife, his sisters, and his mother, or among half-siblings of the same father. Ancestral cult activities, by contrast involve families spanning the entire socioeconomic spectrum and associational memberships and thus work to dray conflict-ridden kindred into cohesive units (Ibid.: 432).

Because of the increasingly recurrent *Dügüis* the people in the central as well as in the neighboring and peripheral Garífuna villages and hamlets can be guaranteed periodic episodes of sufficient high-caloric, high-protein nutritious meals. During the *Dügü* it can be expected there will be family healings, reconciliations and reunifications, for it is believed that rupture and estrangements affect not just the immediate families but the general community on earth and:

Its effects can be felt even in “*Seir*,” which is the home of the dead and the seat of God. It is when the living cannot or will not find a solution to correct the bad situations that the dead ancestors come to intervene. . . . It is during the *Dügü* that relationships are revealed, and family members who have not spoken to each other for many years must now, “Bury the hatchet. These indigenous beliefs form the basis for *Dügü* , a ritual whose primary purpose is to heal family member of physical ailments and emotional strife while promoting solidarity (Greene: 169).

The cost of the *Dügü* service, ceremony, and festival can be vastly expensive, and with estimates ranging from several hundred dollars to thousands. In 1979 sponsors who were interviewed stated that their costs ranged between BZE \$ 700.00 and BZE \$1,000.00; in 1981 the reported figures rose to between BZE \$1,800.00 and BZE \$2,400.00. In addition, at one *Dügü* the airfares for those coming from New York City alone amounted to BZE \$12,000.00. One man reported that he had spent US \$6,000.00, although the affair had been substantially supported by his siblings as well (Jenkins: 437).

Some have decried that *Dügü* was now becoming “big business” and insinuating that the Belizean Garífuna had lost the essential holiness of the ritual in their efforts to compete and outdo one another in the amount of money spent. In some cases, there is even specialization of labor which entails the hiring of fishermen, cooks, musicians, drummers and caretakers, not to mention the cadre of women whose role it is to become possessed and relay messages from the spirits to the living (Gonzalez 1988: 92). Such a celebratory event can be scheduled at any time during the year except in the Lenten and Christmas seasons, since the *buyei*'s spirit helpers are busy elsewhere at those times. The summer months (April through September) are the most convenient times. It is also a popular time as it accommodates the summer vacations of the transmigrants in foreign lands (Ibid.: 435).

The celebrations begin when two or three canoes each with a captain, a sailor, and three women, are sent out to the off-shore cays to catch crabs, fish, and other seafood (Taylor:

116). They are expected in three days when all the *Gubidas*, the families and their guests are present. Long before the appointed hour of six in the morning, the beach is crowded with people on the lookout for the first appearance of the canoes bearing their catch; while in the ancestor temple the drummers (with their drums made from a single piece of mahogany) (Ibid.: 119), and singers rehearse their rhythms and prepare for the processional from the beach to the *dabuyaba*. There throughout the next three nights and two days there will be 60 to 72 hours of constant rounds of dancing, drumming, singing, eating, trances and possessions to occupy the entire community.

Once inside the *dabuyaba*, fishers place the crabs, fish, conches, lobsters, turtles and whatever else, are placed in an elongated pile down the center of the hall: and remain there during the opening songs, to be removed afterwards for cleaning and cooking. In the corners are the sacrificial cocks tied awaiting their slaughter. Several hours later, when the foods have been cooked, the main table will be set with a massive amount of delicacies. No one eats because during more incantations, drummings, and dancings and drinking it is the ancestors who will eat first. I will not delve into nor describe the *Dügü* ceremony here at length, because as Nancie Gonzalez mentioned in her text of 1988, others have:

. . . described such ceremonies in detail, and several other observers have provided refinements and alternative analyses (M. Cohen 1984, Foster 1981; Howland 1984; Jenkins 1983; Kerns 1983; McCauley 1981; Sellers 1969; Taylor 1951: 113-31; Wells 1982). One result of the newer ethnographic work has been to demonstrate the continuing strength and importance of these rituals, even in the face of massive acculturation and modernization (Gonzalez 1988: 84-85).

There is one segment of the *Dügü* festival that I would like to describe, and that is what is termed “the pillaging of the children.” It is noteworthy because children are strictly forbidden to attend any other part of the *Dügü* except during the period when there is no singing, drumming drinking, nor dancing and while the *Gubidas* are considered to be quietly eating their portions.

After a full day of cooking, the women bring out from the kitchen and display large pans and tubs filled with boiled, baked and broiled chicken, stewed and fried fish, boiled and sautéed conchs, stewed crabs, pounded plantains (*hudút*), sweet rice pudding, rice and beans, baked and simmered pork, and green bananas poached in coconut milk (Jenkins :436). On another day, together with the local provisions, the migrant purchased foods from the United States consisting of hams, chocolate cakes, liqueurs, salt cod, candies and Kool Aid will be included. And of course, with every meal the prized *ereba*, cassava bread, is abundantly provided.

During the phase while the *Gubidas* are enjoying their feast in peace, the “pillaging,” the only part of the ceremony especially for the children takes place. The related children and any child from the community may bring a bowl or calabash to be filled with generous portions of meats, vegetables and starches from the ancestors’ table and may eat to their hearts’ content. Nowadays, plastic cups and plates are used rather than the calabashes or tin bowls of the past.

The explanation for this segment in the ceremony is that it is intended for the *Gubidas* to become acquainted with the new generation, upon whom they will some day depend (for the continuing of the Garífuna traditions and chiefly the *Dügü*) and whom they must therefore protect. The eating is a time of nurture for the children, so that they may know that the ancestors are there to look after them; and as their introduction to the ancestors. However, there can be no prolonged contact between the youths and the spirits because the children could be endangered due to their tender ages, and because their spirits are too immature for such powerful contacts (Taylor: 1967).

After the *Gubidas* and the youngster have been satisfied and the children were safely off the premises, the remainder of the food is eaten by the rest of the participants, and the rest are delivered to the old, infirm and the needy who could not attend the ceremony and festivities. All foods and drinks must be distributed before the end of the feast. Another critically important aspect of the *Dügü* is the spirit-possession which occurs during a period of rum drinking and dancing. When one is possessed, s/he impersonates the deceased ancestor whose spirit has entered him/her, and through that person, the *Gubida* instructs the family. Often, the descendants are instructed to become reconciled and to patch up their differences; other times they are approved for things that they have done which are beneficial to the common good of all; to answer pressing questions or to solve an urgent affair.

This would have been an excellent time for Tía Olga and her husband to query about whether they should return to Belize or to make Los Angeles their current home. If the ancestors approve of Los Angeles, then the matter becomes settled, and America becomes their current home; although it is always understood that the permanent home is in the “old country.” If the *Gubidas* condemn the notion, then Tía must end her days in Belize, or instruct her heirs that there is where she intends to be buried, even if she remains in the United States. If they are silent on the question, giving no response, then the choice is up to the couple. The period of the possessions, accompanied by drinking, intense drumming, dancing, and singing is one of the longest portions of the ceremony, as several ancestors might have something to say at that time.

### 6.1. Case Study 3

On my field work, I attended a *Dügü* service. The 1998 Hurricane Mitch, with sustained winds of 285 km/h had churned rivers, reconfigured beaches, and buried underwater many of the ancestral homes. Some people were waiting for the governments to reimburse them for their losses, while others were too demoralized to do anything. But the *Gubidas* became restless and between 1999 and 2008 there ensued a rash of miscarriages, accidents, financial breakdowns, the economic crisis and other difficulties. The matter came to a head when Rosita, a healthy 34 year old descendant, out of the blue, had a massive stroke which left her partially paralyzed and with her speech impaired. It was a loud wake up call for the family. The ancestors had been calling for the building of the ancestor homes as their resting place. Now, everyone was listening.

All who were summoned to sponsor a *Dügü* and hadn't informed the family owned up, and recanted of their noncompliance; then the *buyei* was consulted, and the date was set for the week-end of June 12<sup>th</sup> through 14<sup>th</sup> of 2009. Fortuitously, I was in Central America at that time and because I was a family member I was invited to attend. I was told rather apologetically by my Pentecostal cousin (Rosita's mother) that sometimes, "We have to go beyond the church's teachings and respect our culture and our elders."<sup>24</sup> Her statement puzzled me until I was at the event and experienced the spiritual component and rituals.

When we got to the village where the rites were being performed, I missed the initial part because I became ill from the heat and humidity and was taken to the home of one of the other relatives to sleep. I heard the drumming and singing throughout the night and early in the morning, when I returned to the new home built for the event, everything was already in progress. In a separate room, plates of much food lay on a large round table. The foodstuff consisted of muffins, breads, tamales, fried fish heads in a coconut milk sauce, cassava bread, pork rind chicharrón, bowls of conch stew, potato salad, rice and beans, glasses of water, bottles of cokes and 7UP, flasks of beer, a host of familiar and unfamiliar fruit, many bottles of rum, whisky and vodka. This was all set aside for the *Gubidas*.

In another room, it was a woman's world. They were assembled together saying the Rosary to the Virgin Mother and singing Catholic songs. Men were outside on the porch, drinking and chatting (sometimes loudly). When one of the women came out to "shush" them, looks of disregard and disgusted disdain were shared by the men. One said something in Garifuna, and they all laughed. As more people arrived, they got up to set up a large white tent in the yard and to place chairs inside. After the women were through with the Rosary, the

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<sup>24</sup> Cousin Myra, resident of Boston, Massachusetts, on June 11, 2009

female *buyei* conducted the Mass. Afterwards, snacks and fingerfoods were dispensed among the guests.

Along with the snacks, rounds of glasses of liquor were being passed. The repetitive drumming singing, dancing made it seem as if time was flying by, for soon, in the main room abundant food was spread out. Gradually, children started coming through the gate. The music ceased and it was understood that the *Gubidas* were having their day's meal. Plastic plates filled with food and cups with soda were given to the children who ate their meal outside and left as quietly as they had come. As they left a busload of people turned up, and a fresh set of singing, dancing, drinking, drumming and eating commenced.

In the evening, a little after sunset, the music and dancing seemed more intense, and the dancing devolved into jitterings, twitchings and indescribable spastic movements. The older women, holding outstretched cloths, surrounded a younger woman who was twirling wildly in the middle of the room. Everyone moved away, except the older women who tried to protect her; when she finally fell, she did so in one of the older women's arms. She was jabbering something in the Garifuna language, while some of the people in the room nodded their heads and saying, "Hmm, hmm," in agreement. This was repeated by other dancers as the drumming became more rapid. My host explained that this was the possession of the spirits part of the *Dügü*

The next day, after Mass was celebrated there was a surreal calm. Workers distributed food to the people in the village, and cleaned the compound. The host family and I left that afternoon for the house in the city, where we slept many hours into the next day. From the reports from the *buyeis*, the ancestors were pleased with the reception they received in the village, and with the new house where they could visit and rest whenever they wished. The family received a call from Boston a few days later, that although Rosita was not completely recovered, she was mending rapidly. There was much gladness at the news, and Myra soon left for Boston.

## **6.2. Politicization of the *Dügü***

In November 1989, a month after Hurricane Mitch's assault on the northern Central American coast devastating several Garifuna villages, the Honduran government took advantage of the situation to do a land grab on the communal lands. Since most Garifunas held no individual land titles but held property in common as communities, with plots assigned according to the Garifuna Village Council, the government proposed a



Constitutional change, Reform 107. Article 107 of the Honduran Constitution, among other things protected the Garífuna homeland along the Caribbean coast. Reform 107 would remove that protection, and then the land could be transferred to tourist conglomerates for Honduran economic development.

The Garínua community had no time to protest through the legal system because the government was moving swiftly with its plans to disenfranchise the indigenous people. In their corresponding haste the only thing to do was to appeal to the ancestors. And having done so, they took their drummers, singers, *buyeis*, priests and prayers, as well as their neighbor Indigenous Honduran brothers, into the streets of the capital, Tegucigalpa. Their defense was two-pronged: one, was the action of the *Gubidas* via their public *Dügü* (perhaps the first time), and second, was their appeal to the International forum via the instrument of ILO 169.

The Central American Garífunas beat the familial drums, sang the canticles of the elders, prayed their ancient prayers on the steps of the Honduran Supreme Court, while their kin in New York went directly to the United Nations to present their case. Overnight, the Honduran President and his Congress repealed Reform 107 and restored the original Article to the Constitution. Thus the Garífuna people won the day. They had implemented the good graces of the ancestors; they had unashamedly displayed their indigenous integrity and cultural rites from beyond the hinterlands into the public arena; and they had accessed the modern facilities of International Law. If Honduras had succeeded, there would have been another mass migration, for without their present homelands, they would have to find another. Johnson recounts that:

In poor states like Honduras, compliance with international law, or the appearance of such, is a weighty matter in part because of the lack of powerful national mythologies.

In this game of appearances, Garífuna activists' gesture toward international law was sufficient to pressure the State into backpeddling from its initially aggressive posture.

The success was earned through bypassing state-based legal structure and marshalling transnational defences (ILO 169, and the threat of denunciation before the United Nation, a threat facilitated by the transnational nature of Garifuna society. They increased their legitimacy as national actors to be reckoned with precisely by virtue of the extra-national (local and transnational) quality of their identity Johnson (2005:92).

What Johnson failed to add was that by daring to access their *Gubidas* through the public performance of the *Dügü* ritual, the ancestors had no other choice but to assist the descendants in their political struggle. This is totally new for both the present activists and their ancestors, who always (in the past) had prided themselves in being wholly non-political.

That shows the ancestors approval and cooperation, as well as a new venture into the political world.



Fisherman and his catch

## CONCLUSION

“When push comes to shove,” as one of the Los Angeles residents laughingly related, “we Garífunas pick up and leave.” I found that my respondents seemed settled and comfortable wherever they resided. The generation which came of age during the 1960s seemed the most flexible, living in both world of Central America and North America. They have their feet grounded in two cultures, ready to take up permanent residence in either territory.

However the generation after them live in both worlds only vicariously through their parents and the stories they tell of home. Central America is where their roots are and where they go for vacations and every-so-often when the ancestors call. But their branches thrive in the atmosphere of the United States, the land of much opportunity, possibilities and growth. Together with their parents this is the generation which helps to finance the different Associations which keep the culture and traditions alive abroad, as well as agitate for recognition as a viable economic and social force in the American cities where they dwell.

The younger generation has only a superficial, mythical and romantic idea of being Garífuna. Although they participate in after-school classes of the language, the dances, the cuisine, I believe that the history of migration ends with them. The tales of St. Vincent’s, the courage of Chatoyer, the struggle for autonomy on the Island, their eventual dispossession and short existence on Roatán, their resurrection on the Central American coast are equivalent to the tales of George Washington, the Revolutionary War, the pioneers of the prairies, and the struggles of the Civil Rights era.

In the past, the old Garífunas bided their time and trusted their migratory travels to bring them to a satisfactory but temporary source of revenue and economic security. Their adherence to the Garífuna family and particularly to their mothers’ families, to their culture and language practiced in their little villages, to their respect for the departed ancestors and the strength of their religion kept them bound to a home which was far away and often a place only truly lived in at retirement. But at heart, home was found in villages like Aguán, Honduras or Dangriga, Belize or Blue Fields, Nicaragua, or Livingston, Guatemala. Now these pieces of Geography are where, “My grandparents come from!”

However, from my observation a new territory where Garífunas seem to be treading is the political scene. As beneficiaries of ILO 169 and the UN Declaration of Indigenous Rights they are flexing their migratory muscles in the arena of politics, and are taking the *Gubidas* with them.

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