

**The Garinagu and Their Indigenous-Black Identity:
Improving Inter-ethnic Relations by Increasing Awareness
of the Complex Reality of Guatemala**

Introduction

This paper uses Critical Realism, a geographic theory that looks at how humans in a place can morally progress by increasing their awareness of reality and appreciation for diversity, to assess the moral progress of inter-ethnic relations in Guatemala regarding the Garinagu. In the case of the Garinagu in Guatemala, there is very low awareness of Garifuna¹ culture and minimal (if not fake) appreciation for the diversity they bring to the country. Their mixed indigenous and Afro-descended ethnic identity, as well as cultural differences from the rest of the population, brings variety and complexity to the citizenry of Guatemala. Instead of being accurately recognized as members of a nation that declares pluricultural values, the Garifuna community faces limited rhetorical inclusion in the national discourse and political exclusion in the laws. Overall, since the 1996 Peace Accords, moral progress toward pluriculturalism in the state has been slow.

I will begin with an introduction of Critical Realism as a geographic theory and use it to examine inter-ethnic relations in Guatemala. Then I will describe Garifuna cultural identity as accurately as I am able. Finally, I will analyze the way the Garinagu and their identity within Guatemala have been addressed in national politics and by the Catholic Church, two major realms where inter-ethnic relations occur, with respect to building a more democratic and pluricultural nation during the Peace Process. I borrow the term “Peace Process” from A. L. Anderson’s “Of One Accord,” as it refers to a series of national and international conversations and debates about building a stable and peaceful Guatemala post-civil war.

¹ “Garifuna” is an adjective referring to the people and their culture. The people themselves are referred to as “Garinagu.” Their name comes from Carib = garif, and “karaphuna,” the word in their language.

Critical Realism

This paper uses the framework of Critical Realism to analyze the amount of awareness of Garifuna cultural identity in the Peace Process. Critical Realism is a theory and social scientific method that commits human ability to reason by stepping outside our viewpoint (and back in, and back out) as a process of increasing our awareness of reality and using that awareness to morally progress². This means that there is a reality outside of our own perspective, and, as we gain more knowledge about this reality, we come closer to but never completely know the truth (which is not ultimately knowable because it is always changing) (Sack “Geographic Problematic”).

Critical Realism calls for a mindful interaction of thinkers because no relative opinion alone holds all the truth and multiple perspectives of reality are needed to make the best decisions for a community of people. Decisions are not always based on the most information available, and the lack of cultural understanding becomes an obstacle to intrinsic growth. A principal way that a group of people can better understand their own culture is by comparing it with the culture of others (Tuan, “View” 103). Then, with more information, awareness, and understanding, people can make moral progress, which can be defined as a directional growth toward inclusion, universal love, and what Yi-Fu Tuan describes as civility, food security, and valuing the arts over a “splendid material world” (Sack, “Progress” 81).

I argue that to make Guatemala a better place, or nation, those in charge of creating laws concerning citizens’ rights and those in charge of cultural education should value all the ethnic groups living in Guatemala and more accurately or carefully discuss their cultural attributes. Robert David Sack explains the two necessary conditions for moral progress. First, free and open access to information is necessary so reality can be

² It’s a philosophy that falls between empiricism/positivism and post-structuralism/relativism.

seen; and second, we need to value a more varied and complex reality instead of a simpler one (“Geographic Problematic” 122). To increase moral progress in Guatemala, we need more information about Guatemalan reality and become more aware of misconstrued reality.

The beginning of the Peace Process (1994-1996) officially ended the 36 year civil war in Guatemala and was a major step in building opportunities toward the moral progress of equality. Rachel Sieder, lecturer on Latin American Studies at the University of London, affirms that state government, and specifically its law-making processes, is a central realm for the unending formation of the nation of Guatemala:

During periods of political transition a range of actors, including domestic elites, international donors, and intergovernmental institutions, and political and social movements attempt to advance different and often competing visions of the state, governance, and citizenship. The state itself can usefully be analyzed as a series of institutions and sites where conflicts over power are constantly negotiated from above and below. One of the primary sites of engagement where such different imaginaries and political projects are contested from the top down and the bottom up is the law. This is because the law is central to claiming rights and enforcing obligations. (204)

To make Guatemala a truly democratic and pluricultural nation, which is cited again and again as a principle goal of the Peace Process, the Garinagu’s existence and rights to their cultural identity should be recognized, protected, and practiced under the law. Only through increasing awareness about the reality of ethnic groups in Guatemala can discourse become genuinely inclusive, create steps necessary to improve inter-ethnic relations, combat racism, and ultimately become truly pluricultural.

One major obstacle to valuing a varied and complex reality is dualistic thinking about ethnicity and class in Guatemala. The meaning that has been given to Guatemala’s ethnic history is centered on dualisms. Dualisms are the inaccurate structuring of thoughts into binary oppositions (Sayer, “Behind” 285). To make progress on moral

issues, we must overcome these dualisms and consider continuums, outlying factors, causes and effects, and the like of these dichotomies. In the case of Guatemala, we need to look outside of the Maya-Ladino ethnic and class debate and consider the relationship of the Garinagu in the Guatemalan state. Though a small percentage of the population (see table),³ the Garinagu are different from other indigenous groups and add diversity and complexity to Guatemala's reality. Linguistically the Garinagu are identified as a separate, localized population by the Guatemalan census. However, in the national political realm, their culture, though incredibly different, is often blended into one of the two dominant ethnicities in discourse on race and culture (Anderson 92).

Ethnicity	#	% of Total
Ladino	6,750,170	60.09
Maya	4,411,964	39.3
Xinka	16,214	0.001
Garinagu	5,040	0.0004
Other	53,808	0.005
TOTAL	11,237,196	100%

Population of Guatemala, 2002

The Garinagu on the Caribbean coast have often been absent from national discourse, partially due to geographical and cultural isolation from the indigenous Maya and Ladino (mestizo) populations concentrated in central and western highland Guatemala. The community of Livingston, which has the largest Guatemalan Garinagu population, exemplifies Garifuna life and culture. Incredibly isolated from Guatemala City, it is only reachable by boat from Puerto Barrios, where other Garinagu live. Located in the Department of Izabal, these two communities are situated on the 30 miles of Guatemalan coastline between Belize and Honduras, which on a perfect day without accidents, livestock, or weather delays, is a seven hour bus ride from the capital. Only

³ See Table of ethnic percent, taken from the national census of 2002 (Guatemala Instituto Nacional de Estadística, 31). Numbers probably vary from census figures, as accurate reporting is difficult, and most scholarship cites the Maya population to be around 60% and the Ladino population around 39%

recently have the indigenous Maya of Guatemala begun to argue for Garifuna indigenous rights to political and cultural participation in Guatemala. The Peace Accords of 1996 legally extended Maya cosmivision as a universal indigenous concept to include the Xinca and Garifuna people (Anderson 19).

The ethnic-class debate in Guatemala comes from a long history of oppression of the Maya by the Ladinos. Since the physical features of indigenous peoples and Ladinos are similar due to *mestizaje*,⁴ ethnicity is usually determined from cultural attributes (type of clothing and language spoken) and economic status. Some Guatemalans believe the socio-political struggle is about this difference in ethnicity, while others believe it's about class. It becomes an even stronger dichotomy when "poor" is almost always associated with indigenous and "wealthy" with Ladino. Though it should describe different cultural practices and dark skin color, "Garifuna" is often simplified or altered to fit into one of these two categories.

The 1988-1990 FLASCO conference proceedings in *Estado y Nación* show how the Garinagu were considered neither Maya nor Ladino before the Peace Process started. At the conference Victoriano Alvarez reported his view of the Maya-Ladino conflict by defining four groups in Guatemala in dualistic terms, which exclude the Garinagu:

What provokes conflict in Guatemala is not an ethnic kind of conflict, but rather cultural- between the cosmivision and the anthropocentrism that has divided the people of Guatemala into four factions: poor Ladinos and rich Ladinos; poor Indians and rich Indians, because among the indigenous peoples there's a capitalist bourgeois, who exploit more viciously than the actual Ladino and who exploits his brother of the same race. (Solares 76; my translation)

Editor Jorge Solares broke the Maya-Ladino dualism by including the Garifuna voice in the debate because "the Garifuna question sheds important light on how the Indigenous and Ladinos think" (22). Since the Peace Accords officially ended the civil war,

⁴ Mixing of races/ethnicities to produce mixed offspring.

discrimination and political power struggles have nonetheless continued (14), and in this tense dichotic dialogue, the reality of Guatemala's Garinagu population is often forgotten. Raymundo Caz Tzub, a Maya participant in the conference, argued that the Maya:poor::Ladino:wealthy dichotomy needed to be expanded, but didn't acknowledge the Afro-descended people living as citizens in Guatemala (92). The rights of the Maya have been severely violated by the state, and they need to be defended. At the same time, however, the focus on Maya culture has included a "...historical amnesia occluding Guatemala's participation in the slave trade..." (Anderson 11).

When the Garinagu are included, it's minimal and conditional upon their relationship with the dualistic Maya-Ladino concept of the Guatemalan state. A. L. Anderson's work "Of One Accord" explains that some people try to place the Garinagu in a middle-class category alongside Ladinos, but this ignores not only the discrimination suffered based on their dark skin color, but also that most Garinagu are lower-class with little opportunity to move up (79). Since indigenous people and Ladinos are distinguished by culture rather than race, they minimize the fact that race relations (especially in the case of the Garinagu) are incredibly tied into culture and class (97). Above all, Anderson argues that the Garifuna community is diverse and has diverse opinions in response to the recent changes within the country (51). There is also diversity of opinion in regards to their cultural identity.

Garifuna Cultural Identity

Garifuna individuals have different perceptions on what being "Garifuna" means. Most acknowledge that Garifuna cultural identity varies as it's described from person to person, and many recognize a Garifuna "sense of being" or right to self-declaration. When I asked about the Garinagu, many Maya and Ladinos said what they knew about

Garifuna people was that they were black, lived in Livingston, and danced *punta*. While mostly true, this description leaves out the complexity and diversity of Garifuna culture, and thus the complexity and diversity of Guatemalan cultures, as well as fails to acknowledge the changes that are taking place in Garifuna culture. Drawing on U.S. and Guatemalan literature, observation of and participation in Garifuna communities, and 60 ethnographic interviews conducted by the author from June to August 2007, this section allows the Garinagu to explain their complex identity, including their: transient history, language, food, music/dance, indigenous-blackness, and spirituality/religion.

Garifuna History

One of the most important components of Garifuna identity is knowing the complex Garifuna history and transnational migratory nature of their people. Oral tradition is valued in Garifuna culture, and when there are discrepancies in written versions of history recorded by academics, it is worthwhile to remember that Garifuna identity lies in its stories of liberation and preservation . Active participation in their destiny is representative of the Garifuna people, and no academic analysis should, or can, take it away. So I narrate a mixed version of the history of Garifuna roots.

Their lineage is intense and detailed in *The Rise and Fall of the Black Caribs (Garifuna)* by I. A. Earle Kirby and C. I. Martin (see Appendix 1 for map). The Garinagu are a mix of two groups of people: Amerindians and Africans. The Carib and Arawak indigenous peoples lived on an island in the Caribbean (now called St. Vincent) before the arrival of the Europeans and captive Africans. After the Africans escaped from neighboring islands, saved themselves from shipwrecks, and/or were captured by the indigenous people, they mixed with the indigenous people. A Black Carib community grew throughout the 1600s on the island they called Yurumein. The French and the Dutch

attacked Yurumein, and the English repetitively claimed it. Pablo Mejilla García, Garifuna story teller in Livingston, told me proudly how the Black Carib leader, Agosto Satuyé, tricked the English when they came to attack. In 1773 the Black Caribs and the English made a treaty, but peace was not kept (Kirby and Martin 35).

In 1796 the English sent the Black Caribs to the Island Balliceaux to be deported. Half died of an epidemic, so only 2,500 were sent to the Island of Roatán, off the coast of Honduras. Then on May 19, 1797, depending on what you read, either the Spanish rescued the Black Caribs from Roatán to use their labor to cultivate land on the mainland near Trujillo (Gonzalez 61), or “due to the lack of primary material for the construction of houses, the recently arrived Garifuna in Roatán *decided* to move themselves to firm land” (*Pueblos Étnicos de Honduras* 9; my emphasis). After moving to the mainland, the Garinagu migrated north to Belize and south into Nicaragua, settling on the future Guatemalan coast from 1802 to 1806.

Language

Native Garifuna language is a mix of Carib, Arawak, African languages, Spanish, French, and English. Many of my interviewees mentioned language as the most defining Garifuna cultural trait, and, if not the most important, second to knowing the historical roots. It is spoken by roughly 50% of the Garifuna population (“Primera Encuesta” 23), and fewer Garinagu speak Garifuna because few children receive bilingual education and Spanish dominates school, work, and sometimes home life. Language use and preservation is a contentious topic when cultural identity is at stake. There’s a play between three languages in Garifuna life. Their native language, Garifuna, started to acquire more Spanish loan words until the movement to “purify” it and preserve the culture. Other loan words that came from English, like “tankey” (“thank you”), were

replaced with new ones (“*seremein*,” Arrivillaga “Personal Interview”). English words are also mixed into their Spanish. I heard the words “fock” (*fuck*) and “come here” from adults 20-40 years old. This influence could be from English-speaking family members who live in Belize and frequently visit Livingston and/or from U.S. movies and TV shows. The movies I saw being watched and sold in Livingston featured actors of dark skin color who spoke Ebonics, and the youth emulated their speech. Nevertheless, I heard considerably fewer English words in their Spanish than I do in from other Guatemalan Spanish-speakers.

Food

Interviewees informed me that the production and consumption of specific foods are still an integral part of Garifuna cultural identity. Nancy Gonzalez’ works about the Garinagu are well known and provide insight into the historical significance of food in Garifuna culture. Gonzalez and other anthropologists note that plantains, yucca, ñames, mangos, avocados, rice and beans, and fish are typical Garifuna food. The Garinagu are known for their work in the food industry (Gonzalez 60). Her 1969 book was updated in 1997 with her book *La historia del pueblo garífuna* that describes economically forced changes, “in addition to the traditional occupations of farming, and fishing, some sell lottery tickets, cold drinks, fruit, make clothing for their neighbors, tend small stores, or make and sell bread. A very few still make traditional wood and basketry items” (Gonzalez 61). The Garifuna household economy functioned similarly in 2007, with women selling coconut bread, bags of juice, and lottery tickets, or braiding tourists’ hair for additional income while men looked for work in the more formal sector: on ships at port, as police, or as semi-formal tourist guides. According to Mariano, a middle-aged

Garifuna fisherman, since industrialized fishing (by Ladinos) cleared the sea of catch, fishing no longer provided a sustainable income or living.

They have not stopped eating fish or beans and rice, but they have added to their diet cheaper food (like chicken) and faster food such as Ramen noodles, Mac and Cheese, and pancakes. Packaged soup, yogurt, and chocolate Ovaltine were also consumed in 2007. Some children occasionally ate cereal in the morning, but bread and coffee (and sometimes eggs) were still the norm. One could buy domestically sold bananas, which are 4-6 inches long and dark yellow, or pay a little more for export-quality bananas, which are 6-8 inches long, green, and firmer. Fast food was available in Puerto Barrios at Pollo Campero (a national chain), but so were gingerbread cookies, a Garifuna dessert. Because of the geographic isolation, the port, free trade agreements, and abundant tourists, there was more diversity of food than in other rural areas of Guatemala, but most food was also twice as expensive, leading to economic and health struggles for many families.

Music and Dance

Garifuna music is unique to their culture. Sung in the Garifuna language, songs tell of their transnational voyages and present-day discrimination by others. Pumped out of houses and vehicles and bars, various styles of music can be heard in every inch of Garifuna neighborhoods. Common types of Garifuna songs include: yancunú, junguguju, chumba, sambay, and parranda (Arrivillaga, “La Musica” 256). The most recognized and prided style of song is the *punta*, with a specific drum pattern and hip shake. “Puntarock,” a combination of *punta* and modern rock, can be heard from clamorous house stereos and nightclubs and danced in both places. Music in English from the U.S., especially 80s

music, has been somewhat popular, but it is not as bejeweled as music by Takía and Paula Castillo, Garifuna women, that is bought, sold, and sung on the street.

In 2007 foreign tourists were paying for drumming lessons and buying replicas of the African-based instruments, or, if really enamored, they bought a real leather covered wood drum. Sometimes they learned or attempted to dance *punta*; sometimes they watched others from their seats at the bar while sipping mojitos and cuba libres, while Garinagu sipped on the local drink, güifiti. Tourists from other areas of Guatemala were more familiar with the *punta*, but knew little else about Garifuna music (or culture), such as the African origin of the marimba (“La Música” 251).

Indigenous-Blackness

Garinagu claim many of their cultural practices to be a mix of their indigenous and African mixed descent. When indigenous rights are addressed in national and international political documents, they describe and protect indigeneity in the context of very Mayan practices and exclude Afro-descended practices. The Garinagu are protected as indigenous people, but still suffer from racism as people of dark skin color that others read as “slave.” Garifuna Gregorio Sandoval explained that many “brown skinned” construction employers won’t hire a “black” Garifuna. In addition to their indigenous heritage, the Garinagu also recognize their African decent and dark skin color, and they feel the discriminating effects of the social construction of race. This is vividly expressed by Garifuna Mario Ellington’s statement, “We can never *ever* say that we are Ladinos because we are black,” (Solares 43)⁵. It used to be said that Garinagu wanted to be “read” as indigenous (Whitehead 223), but today they proudly claim African heritage, although in a specific way. When telling the story of their history, some Garifuna place emphasis on the fact that the Garifuna “were never enslaved.” For example, Enrique Álvarez said

⁵ “Jamás podemos decir que somos ladinos porque somos negros.”

that racism comes from parents who falsely teach their children that the blacks were slaves, and this believed racism leads to discriminatory actions like how Garinagu will get their bags checked before leaving a hotel room in the capital under the presumption that “black people steal.”

Adjective choice to refer to skin color also varies. Many Garifuna refer to themselves as “negro” or “negra” (black). The main organization in Livingston is the *Black* Guatemalans Organization. However, others reject the color black as appropriate adjective for skin tone and prefer “moreno” (dark-skinned). Most of the individuals I interviewed that preferred to be called “moreno” had been through workshops on racism and understood race to be a social construction. They admitted that even though they did not believe in race or blackness, they were treated as if these categories were real.

These categories, like the Maya-Ladino dichotomy, also become real when taught in school. One FLASCO conference interviewee, Garifuna Gerardo Mario Ellington, explained his belief that denial of Garifuna identity happens because of ladinization⁶:

A Garinagu might ask, “Why am I black?” or resent it, because in schools they learn about Tecún Umán [Mayan leader] and Christopher Columbus and not about their own leaders, like Marco Sánchez Díaz. (Solares 43)

Overall, most Garinagu in Livingston didn’t mention skin color as important in defining Garifuna cultural identity, while in Puerto Barrios, where fewer Garinagu speak the language, skin color was mentioned as a more important trait.

Spirituality and Religion

Spirituality and religion can be important for some Garifunas’ cultural identity. Many Garinagu practice their own religion and/or Catholicism (fewer practice Protestantism or Rastafarianism). The Garinagu have their own religion based on the belief that life is controlled by a superior God and the ancestors. An oral religion, it is not

⁶ The process of becoming a Ladino.

written but learned through participation as a child and young adult (Kerns 176). The main practice is the celebration of the *chugu*, which is the worship the ancestors (Arrivillaga, “Marcos” 59). Along with singing and dancing to drum beats, celebrations involve eating and drinking (especially rum). According to Virginia Kerns, the ancestral spirits require worship in return for blessings and valuable advice given in dreams. The ancestors depend on the living to take care of them, and if they do not receive offerings through a *chugu*, the living can be punished. On the other hand, if they receive a respectable celebration, the living can be assured of good health (177-179). Rituals that satisfy the ancestors ensure the protection of children as well. While either a man or a woman can be a *bíyei*, or spiritual guide (186), Kerns explains that most of the work done by women to preserve Garifuna culture (such as the female leadership of *chugu* organization) functions well because their society is matrifocal (190). While other anthropologists are also quick to note the matrifocal social organization of the Garinagu, no Garifuna interviewee referred to the importance of women as a characteristic of Garifuna religion or cultural identity.

Garifuna religion is a part of Garifuna cultural identity even as it changes due to globalization. Most of the Garinagu that practiced Garifuna religion whom I interviewed were from the upper class. This could be because they have time and money to devote to long and expensive processes of making a *chugu* while the poor are spending their time constantly looking for work. Those of the upper class tend to have relatives who live abroad and can financially support the celebrations. Emigration north and subsequent return has mixed U.S. culture into Garifuna language, food, music and dress, but remittances have helped maintain Garifuna religious practices. The buildings required to be erected just for *chugus* are expensive and support from abroad is welcomed. The more

rum a family can buy, the more people they can invite and the longer the celebration will last, which gains more respect among the community and more blessings from the ancestors. Gerardo Mario Ellington, the current Vice Minister of Culture and Sports in Guatemala, explained the significance of the Garifuna religion, “To be Garifuna, culture is important, but the practice of spirituality encompasses everything.” According to Ellington, Garifuna religion expresses the cosmovision of the Garifuna people apart from Catholicism. But he recognizes that coordination exists between Catholicism and Garifuna religion.

In the 1800s most Garinagu accepted Catholicism, understanding saints and angels to be like Garifuna spirits (Dow 115). Kerns confirms that in the 1990s the Garinagu were practicing both Catholicism and their ancestral religion, and using both western medicine and local medicinal practices (and blaming the ancestors when they got sick). I knew a few women in Livingston who participated in Catholic mass and in *novenarios* (ninth day celebrations for the recently deceased). It did not appear to be a problem for other people in either group.

In the Political Realm: Indigenous Matters

When the Garinagu are involved in the political realm, they are often placed in the indigenous category. Progress is made when the Maya-Ladino dichotomy is broken, because Garifuna cultural identity is more diverse than “indigenous,” but the geographical distance of the Garinagu from the hub of the political realm in the capital and the Western highlands makes revealing the truth (and the changing truth) about Garifuna cultural identity difficult. This in turn makes improving inter-ethnic relations challenging. A. L. Anderson describes Livingston’s distant geography from Guatemalan power and politics as an obstacle to Garifuna participation in national politics:

...struggles to address 'local' problems in terms of 'national' questions obscure a coterie of complex, overlapping relations of unequal access to the institutions and discourses of power that create cultural political and economic regions and inevitably marginalize the *pueblo* or town of Livingston. (141)

The proposed laws of the Peace Process 1994-1996 and the international support of the indigenous people acknowledged a more varied and complex reality of Guatemala by incorporating indigenous rights, but they left aside its full complexity by failing to address the Garifuna (and Xinka)⁷ culture. A step in the direction of progress, these laws could have gone further to raise awareness of the Guatemalan reality. I critique in order to raise awareness, in accord with what geographer Andrew Sayer believes regarding what theorists Habermas and Apel say, "[A]ll criticism presupposes the possibility of a better life" ("Method" 172).

This section will address two documents that were produced during the Peace Process, through which the national discourse was "lasting peace through pluricultural equality and democracy." Rachel Sieder ascribes much progress to this process:

The peace settlement also mapped out a radical agenda, which aimed to include Guatemala's 60 percent indigenous population, historically subject to discrimination, socioeconomic exploitation, and political marginalization, in a new nation-building project. In spite of a deep-rooted legacy of racism, by the late 1990s internationalized 'rights thinking' had become part of the dominant idiom of political reform in Guatemala. (205)

As Sieder discusses the democratic transition that took place from 1994 to 1996, she praises the recognition of "Mayan values" and cites the pan-Mayan movement as molding group to lead the state out of its exclusionary nature. She calls the proposed "customary law" giving legal rights to the indigenous through the peace agreements "radical" (211) and says the *Defensoría Maya* preferred to call it "Mayan law" (213).

⁷ This paper's focus is on the Garinagu, which leaves out the reality of the Xinka people and their cultural needs and misrepresentations. Another examination could be done (or may already be) on the value of raising awareness about the Xinka people in Guatemala.

What would be truly radical would be to address issues of racism and discrimination against the Garinagu through the law and to consider how applying “Mayan law” to indigenous communities uniformly excludes the African roots of the mixed culture of the Garinagu.

This semi-radical discourse fabricated a sense of Garinagu inclusion in national politics and rights under the category of “indigenous,” but under closer examination of written works, it becomes apparent that actual Garifuna culture and identity are not accurately recognized nor protected. As Gerardo Mario Ellington said, “It is also evident that the situation has gone to the extreme in separating the Garifunas from the national process, as if their abduction were, in addition to geographical, also existential” (Solares 40).

In *Guatemala, Memoria del Silencio*, the Report of the Commission for Historical Explanation gave conclusions and recommendations about the Guatemalan civil war in 1994, at the beginning of the Peace Process. The Garinagu’s suffering was not acknowledged in what is viewed nationally and internationally as a “Maya-Ladino” conflict. The prologue began with:

Guatemala is a country of contrasts and contradictions. Situated in the middle of the American continent, bathed by the waters of the Caribbean and the Pacific, its inhabitants live in a multiethnic, pluricultural and multilingual nation, in a state which emerged from the triumph of liberal forces in Central America. (Guatemala)

The authors listened to thousands of testimonies and read thousands of documents, yet nowhere in the document are the effects of the civil war on the non-Maya and non-Ladino community discussed. The civil war did cause economic and sociopolitical problems in Livingston (Anderson 26). Not once anywhere in the document does “Garifuna,” “Garinagu,” “Livingston,” or “Izabal” appear. Even in the section titled

“Recommendations” that includes the sub-sections V. “Measures to strengthen the democratic process” and VI. “Other recommendations to promote peace and national harmony,” the Garinagu and the progress of their communities on the eastern coast are ignored.

Shortly after the Report was released, another collective recommendation to improve the Guatemalan socio-political situation was produced. In *Ley De Los Pueblos Maya, Garifuna Y Xinka* (“Law of the Maya, Garifuna, and Xinka Peoples,” from here on referred to as “Ley”), 400 indigenous organizations worked together in regional meetings from 1993 to 1996 to propose 113 articles to become law. While the laws were a step at building indigenous solidarity and awareness of Garifuna culture, the articles protected considerably more Mayan cultural practices than Garifuna cultural practices. Alliances between the indigenous Maya and the Garinagu led to initial Garifuna participation in the Peace Process (Anderson 89). Because of Garifuna and Xinka participation in the Peace Process, some renamed the Pan-Mayan movement “pan-indigenous.”

Renaming movements, however, has not provided information about the true diversity of Guatemalan cultures. The proposed laws repetitively use the name, “...the Maya, Xinka, and Garifuna Peoples” (here on “the Peoples”). The phrasing sounds inclusive, but it becomes rhetoric when the laws only promote indigenous rights that are centered on Mayan culture. There are a plethora of articles that use just the word “Maya” in reference to a right specifically desired for the Maya. No articles focus specifically on Garifuna needs or rights.

In 1985 the Constitution, under Article 70, gave the indigenous people the right to make laws and guaranteed them four main areas of rights (Ley 13):

1. Protection for indigenous life: traditions, social organizations, dress for men and women, languages.

2. Protection of land, and cooperative agriculture.
3. Provide state land to indigenous communities for their own development.
4. Protection and legislation of safety, health, and just salaries.

The *Ley* adds that the Peoples have been marginalized by the law and their participation in governing the state has been minimized as a result of discrimination. Jesús “Chucho” Garcia and James Early reflect on the racism that is intertwined with discrimination against afro-descendants participating in political processes throughout Latin America:

Yet a gap in racial consciousness and political analysis, disturbingly displayed by many progressive activists and political parties in Venezuela and throughout Latin America, continues to highlight Indigenous communities and avoids addressing needs and aspirations of Afro-Descendant communities. (52)

Mayan culture is promoted in articles that address indigenous dress, respect for the elderly, and protection of agriculture. Garifuna culture could be promoted by articles that address the rights to international community, respect for women’s leadership roles, and the protection of fishing. Garifuna community organizers are primarily women, and their social networks were international in scope, because their blackness weaves a wider net of solidarity than their indigenous roots could within the national Guatemalan context (Anderson 35). To protect the rights to Garifuna identity and culture, there should be an article that protects transnational identities and alliances.

Chapter II in the *Ley* details the rights of the Peoples to participate in state institutions. Article 15 lists requisites for elected officials, and the second item is “of Maya, Garifuna, or Xinka decent.”⁸ The geographical distance from the Garifuna homeland to the capital and how the transportation of resources is desperately needed is not addressed. The national legal system is centralized (though efforts have been made to

⁸ In a Ladino-run state, this is a step toward progress. But does it discriminate against the other ethnicities living in Livingston, such as the Chinese and the Kuli? How might focusing on getting these dominated ethnic groups into power at the national level ignore other members of the community?

decentralize it), and this creates unequal access to state government (Sieder 211). Instead of spending two days traveling to Guatemala City and back, Garinagu decide that energy could be better spent in community meetings and on local projects. Under Article 41, “USE OF THE MAYAN LANGUAGES,” public service personnel are required to speak native languages (23). Why does this article say “Mayan languages” instead of the common “Maya, Xinka, and Garifuna” phrase? Article 49, “ACADEMY OF MAYAN LANGUAGES IN GUATEMALA,” calls for the organization of appropriate forms of the Peoples’ cultural education and promote the development of the Xinka and Garifuna Academies (25). Financial support for Garifuna culture, however, is lacking; Article 52 calls for 5% of the state’s general budget to go to the Mayan University to support Mayan culture, but no percent of the budget is demanded for Garifuna education to help preserve their language, an integral part of their cultural identity.

Chapter VIII, “Work,” includes articles that guarantee rights of the Peoples regarding working conditions and access to jobs. Article 67 cites two holy days for the Maya, which have to be paid holidays (28), but there is no article pertaining to the celebrations or holidays of the Garinagu⁹. The diversity of indigenous spirituality is not recognized. Articles 69 and 70 require safety measures for agricultural workers but not the right to fish or the protection of waters. Why is safety while fishing, an important part of cultural identity in the Garifuna community, not addressed? ONEGUA (Black Guatemalans Organization) believes that cultural survival is of utmost importance, and survival requires the right of Garinagu to work where and how they want, whether it seems traditional or modern (Solares 82).

Chapter X on the economy contains Article 86 that prohibits the exploitation of cultural symbols, dress, and sacred places. What about prohibition of exploitation of skin

⁹ These could include the John Canoe, November 28 Garifuna Settlement Day, and dügüs.

color? Since the Maya and Ladino populations share phenotypes, indigenous dress and other visible cultural markers are protected from misuse. But dark Garifuna skin color is used to attract tourists, and it's not protected. The 1980s and 90s saw a rise in the number of *capitaleños* (people from the capital) who traveled to Livingston as vacationers (Anderson 10). At the same time, international tourism was increasing. The *morenos* were sometimes assumed to be citizens of Belize (and many Guatemalans think that Livingston is in Belize) (Anderson 26). Article 87 did propose that the profits of tourism go back to the communities, and that the Peoples be allowed to participate in the Guatemalan Tourism Institute. Currently, however, the Caribbean coast is advertised on the Institute's website in ways that fail to reveal the complexity of Garifuna cultural identity (Instituto).

ONEGUA withdrew from the Joint Commissions of the Peace Process because people continued to say that the day had come for the Garinagu's voice and vision and identity to be made known to the rest of Guatemala, but after two years, their name continued to be used without sincere support in political documents (Anderson 28). The Garifuna people felt that the "chorus of Maya, Xinka, Garifuna" was in name only and didn't accurately represent their indigeneity (3). Anderson argues that this new and sudden use of their name as a part of the pluricultural state came about through the use of their blackness and indigenusness, but it failed to recognize the fact that they were both black and indigenous at the same time (4). Articles that support Garifuna political participation, language, lifestyle, and equality of skin color would make this document more pluricultural as it claims to be and break the dualist thinking.

In the Church: An Example of Growing Awareness

The Catholic Church is a realm within in the communities of Livingston and Puerto Barrios where different ethnicities engage in growing awareness about their cultures and improve inter-ethnic relations. Though it has not always supported Garifuna cultural identity, the Catholic Church has been helping people learn and improve relationships more than the Peace Accords do, according to Garifuna teacher Vilma. The Church, an entity that includes the people who form it, including the Garinagu, Ladinos, and Kekchí Maya, is an example of how learning about other cultures can improve inter-ethnic relations. Moral progress has been made through valuing native languages, native music, baptismal practices, and homilies.

According to the First Sociodemographic and Political Survey of the Garifuna Community in Guatemala in 2003, the majority of Garinagu in Livingston are Catholic (23). The Human Rights Office of the Archbishop of Guatemala published a book, *Formas Tradicionales De Resolver Conflictos Por La Población Garífuna, De Livingston, Izabal*, in which they declared the importance of Garifuna traditions and knowledge of these traditions by both adults and youth. They also believed in the promise of improving inter-ethnic relations by increasing awareness of cultural differences, “May the present study be a reference on the customs and traditions of the population so that it contributes to a better intercommunication with people not of this population” (38; my translation).

The Church supports variations of cultural identity by offering mass in various languages. Each Sunday individuals of several ethnicities attend Spanish mass. The last Sunday of each month mass is celebrated in Garifuna language, and the second Sunday it is celebrated in Kekchí. In the Parish Office, there are booklets with the order of the mass in both Garifuna and Kekchí. Although few can read their native language, the booklets

are available for those who would like to learn or follow along. Garifuna Enrique Alvarez said that less discrimination existed in Livingston because of these masses.

The Church also supports Garifuna cultural identity with Garifuna music. Kekchies and Ladinos read scripture and prayers while drums and Garifuna rhythms lead songs communally sung in Spanish. But it's not always segregated; a Garifuna singer invited three Ladinas to learn the songs and sing with the Garifuna choir during mass. When I spoke with the Ladinas, they were excited and nervous (because they didn't know if they could grasp the different rhythms). During the mass they smiled while they sang and appeared to have fun. The Ladinas and the Garifuna women formed a friendship afterward; they went to the beach together the following Saturday.

Baptismal practices are another way ethnic groups learn about each other and make progress with inter-ethnic relations. Within the Church, baptism is a sacrament that welcomes a child into the Christian faith with the pouring of water and the promise of parents and godparents to raise the child in the faith community. It's an important practice in Livingston because if the parents are absent in the future (possibly from emigration), the godparents would take care of the child (Méndez Nelson 126). Garifuna Mariano is the godfather of 12 Kekchí children and considers himself their spiritual father. They see each other two times a week if they live in the same community or two times a month if they live in a neighboring rural community.

The Church supported the Garifuna community in Puerto Barrios by building a new church in the Garifuna neighborhood and celebrating an inauguration mass June 30, 2007. Numerous Garifunas, quite a few Kekchies, two Spanish nuns and I attended the mass in which two priests spoke powerfully about Garifuna culture and inter-ethnic relations. Father Sam was Kekchí, and he preached that living their culture was loving

Jesus Christ. Bishop Gabriel told me after mass that he had come from Jutiapa two years prior and loved the Garifuna and Kekch'ies, which he had exemplified by speaking in Garifuna during his homily and by dancing while the Garifuna women sang in Garifuna and the men beat the drums. He preached, "We are all equal in the eyes of God," and "Say no to racism! Yes to equality! If we don't share with each other, we destroy ourselves. If we share, we enrich ourselves. Let's not destroy Garifuna culture. We celebrate it." And it was evident that the Garifuna felt their culture was accepted during the mass because two prayed openly in Garifuna. Individuals of different ethnic groups also joined together physically by holding hands to sing the "Our Father" together.

After the mass, the priests affirmed the Church's affection for culture and inter-ethnic relations by referring to the Latin American Bishops Conference in Medellín, 1968, where they recognized the "seed of God" in Indigenous and Africans in America before Christianity was spread. This is important for affirming the part of Garifuna cultural identity that values its transnational and indigenous-black history and afro-indigenous spirituality. Perhaps the Church has been successful in building inter-ethnic relations because it recognized that harmony and progress would come through inter-cultural awareness and understanding twenty years before the state did.

What Guatemalans Could Gain from Inter-ethnic Relations with Garinagu

More Guatemalans could learn comparatively about their own cultural identity if they were given the opportunity to learn about Garifuna cultural identity, and they could better understand their place within Guatemalan society as it changes with globalization by analyzing Garifuna responses. An elderly Garifuna man told me that others could learn from the peaceful way of Garifuna life. Mariano believed that besides knowing *punta*, other Guatemalans could learn to enjoy the Caribbean environment and Garifuna

food. Vilma believed that Garinagu could also learn positive values through inter-ethnic relations, such as learning to work hard for success in education like the Kekch'ies do.

The Garinagu know the struggles and benefits of inter-ethnic relations. From the beginning of the arrival of the Garinagu to Livingston (*La Buga* in Garifuna, the mouth of the coast) in 1806, they have been living in close relationships with other ethnic groups. Though Garifuna cultural practices have adapted, nothing has completely changed them, not even dominating U.S. culture that has intensely penetrated the coast through its capitalism, free trade commercialism, and materialism. Alfonso Arrivillaga Cortés, researcher at the Universidad de San Carlos, Guatemala, ascribes both positive and negative effects from material and ideological influences of U.S. culture ("Marcos" 53). When I interviewed the Vice Minister of Culture and Sports in 2007, Garifuna Gerardo Mario Ellington, he did not hesitate to say that while spirituality and language are the most important practices, what is more important is that the Garinagu form their future together, recognizing that identities are dynamic and change from globalization processes that makes it impossible to plan to maintain an identity the same.

As Garifuna cultural identity slowly changes, Guatemalans of all ethnic backgrounds should learn about Garifuna history, language, food, music, religion, and experiences of indigenous-blackness. The Garinagu's dark skin sets their physical characteristics apart and refocuses the question of Guatemalan racism in the ethnic-class debate. Understanding the reality of the complexity of Garifuna culture will help other Guatemalans stop discriminating against those of dark skin color and help them more accurately see Guatemala as a pluricultural state. When cross cultural understandings grow, multiple perspectives on state-wide issues can be shared. This could stimulate moral progress toward the Peace Process proclamations of democratization, equality, and

rights for all people. Libio M. Centino B., a Garifuna psychologist, believes progress could be made through increased access to information and understanding among ethnic groups. He explains that all cultures change, but that the neoliberal capitalist system kills cultures based on nature so that there's not mass development for everyone but rather just for the few high-up. Citing the 6-7 families that dominate the state, he says they are always under pressure from the U.S. His ideal would be for Guatemalans to realize they are all a part of the human race and defeat U.S. imperialism.

As various ethnic groups in Guatemala are under pressure from free trade agreements to homogenize production, lifestyle, and culture, they could learn from the Garifuna communities about the positive and negative effects of trade and globalization. As tourists look for places to splurge their wealth, many restaurant and hotel owners are embracing the opportunity to capitalize. Globalization has offered more than fast food and non-autonomous jobs for the Garinagu. In the stores on the *calle principal* (main street) of Livingston, there was much North American presence in t-shirts, plastic jewelry, and imported household products. In the houses of Garifuna who had traveled to the U.S., there were more decorations, more trinkets, and more electronics. In the house of a couple who had lived in the U.S. for decades, a freezer kept food available that the market ran out of, though buying fresh is the norm in Guatemala¹⁰.

Garifuna individuals and community also choose to actively conserve their culture in various ways. Besides passing down the story of their history and talking to their children in the Garifuna language, a dozen Garifuna teachers meet each Friday to improve their Garifuna orthography. They continue to braid their mostly black hair with

¹⁰ Some of these changes are clearly related to class. The upper class obviously has more means to consume U.S. culture, but the lower class also acquires U.S. culture via leftovers. Second-hand clothes are shipped in packs to Puerto Barrios and sold for cheap at local stores, and donated clothes are also available. I saw a distribution of clothes at the Catholic Church that included shirts, pants, and tennis shoes.

creativity and pride; I did not observe obsession with relaxers or efforts to “whiten” looks. Talk of building a community hair salon for the 47 professional braiders is another example of pride in their cultural identity. In community meetings there were also brainstorming about future uses of the Garifuna Cultural Institute for promoting Garifuna art, dance, food, and more.

Conclusion

The nation could learn from the Garinagu on the Caribbean coast as they live peacefully with the Kekchí, Ladino, and Hindu populations, and make moral progress through inter-ethnic relations. They could reframe what it means to be Guatemalan and deepen their own analysis of what it means to be Ladino or Maya in the context of a pluricultural Guatemala.

Post-conflict peace processes are long journeys, and in the last 15 years Guatemalans have pushed toward more awareness and a better reality. Throughout the 1990s Garifuna identity was used in political discourse in the name of pluriculturalism. President Arzú visited Livingston in November 1997 for National Garifuna Day and used terms like “pluricultural” in his speech (Anderson 29). Now, this continuing discourse could improve the democratization and building of a stable, unified (but diverse) nation if information was more accessible to accurately describe Garifuna cultural identity. The failed effort of the 1999 Referendum to put into practice the rights legislatively guaranteed to indigenous people showed the delay in moral progress; “[t]he rejection of the constitutional reform package in May 1999 demonstrated that the idea of a multicultural nation-state is not yet socially and culturally embedded in Guatemalan civil and political society” (Anderson 218). The idea of the multicultural nation-state failed because free and open access to information was lacking (about to which extent the rights

of indigenous people would be protected), as was an appreciation for varied and complex reality (the thought of indigenous people with power was threatening). In 2005 Mayan writer Dr. Waq' Q'anil (Demetrio Cojtí Cuxil) published a book, *The Difficult Transition to a Multinational State*¹¹, in which he addressed the situation of the Maya, Xinka, and Garinagu and the racism that still needs to be overcome. In 2007 Ladino President Oscar Berger attended the inauguration of the Garifuna Cultural Institute, but state funding will not go beyond the construction costs to help maintain it.

What Gerardo Mario Ellington stated in 1993 is still relevant today:

We have to end all this devaluing, or how will it be possible to talk about progress in Guatemala if we don't love our roots? We need to achieve Guatemalan education about ethnicities, so they know how to value it, so they know what their culture is. And the Ladinos, who are the real antagonizers, need to know that inside their veins runs indigenous blood and we can't talk about Guatemalan progress if we don't love our own roots that are indigenous. (Solares 46)

Ellington and other Garinagu have provided valuable information about their own culture and obstacles to peace in the nation-state, so why not solicit more perspectives from the Garinagu about making moral progress in Guatemala? Only when we become as aware as possible of the reality of a place and its meaning (Guatemala and its varied and complex indigenous identities) can we morally progress. What will lead to the most unveiling of truth in order that reality can be understood and then improved? I draw this question from Victoria Lawson and Lynn Staeheli's pronouncement:

Our task as critical social scientists is to uncover structures and processes operating on humans and to understand how individual agents are constrained and empowered... The implications of processes such as racism, sexism, and oppression, *compel* committed research. [...] We seek to reduce illusion and change people's perceptions of what is possible so that they may change their 'reality.' (233)

¹¹ Ri K'ak'a Saqamaq' Pa Iximulew : La Difícil Transición Al Estado Multinacional : El Caso Del Estado Monoétnico De Guatemala.

My task in this paper was to uncover the ways in which Garifuna identity has been only partly recognized, so that you and I can become more aware of the Guatemalan reality. Through the Peace Process, moral progress has been made, but the true variety and complexity of Guatemala is still buried in racism and dualist thinking. I believe that much more could be done today to increase awareness of the reality of Garinagu existence and cultural identity (such as including their history and culture in school text books, supporting their political participation by making travel to the capital affordable, etc.). Increasing awareness has the potential to combat racism against people of darker skin color, improve the laws to reflect declarations of state values of democratic equality, and improve inter-ethnic relations in Guatemala. Both international discourse and the proposed laws written by the indigenous peoples themselves have moved toward moral progress but lacked the variety and complexity of Guatemalan indigenous cultures. The Catholic Church is an example of progress within the Caribbean coast communities. Here I have exposed more of reality, but as Critical Realism proclaims, one perspective cannot shed all the light necessary to see and understand the truth. Thus I believe we all share the task of acquiring knowledge and sharing our perspectives, but I emphasize that with more respect and support from outsiders, the Garinagu and other Guatemalans are in the best positions to become more aware of and change their own reality.

Appendix 1 (Kirby and Martin 48).

48 Population size and the effects of European contact

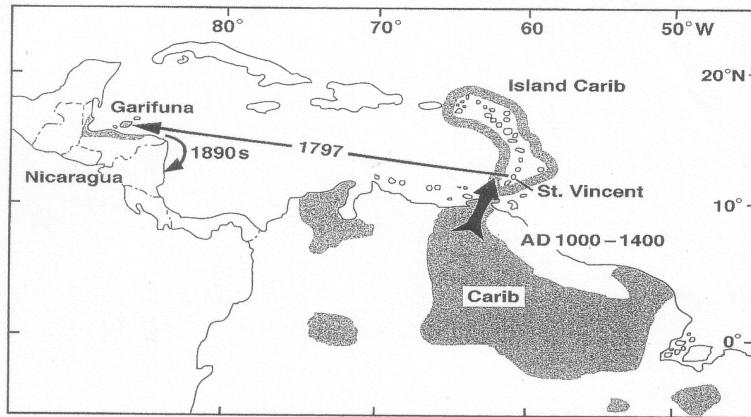


FIGURE 17 A visual reconstruction of the translocation of the Black Caribs from St. Vincent Island to the Bay Islands and finally to Honduras (Davidson, 1984).

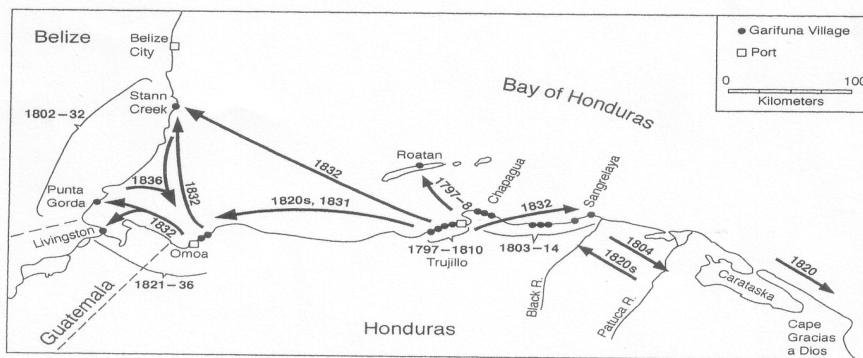


FIGURE 18 The pattern of the colonization of the coast of Central America followed by the Black Caribs (Garifuna) following their relocation in the Gulf of Trujillo in 1797 (Davidson, 1984).

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