

NARRATION, NAVIGATION & NEGOTIATION

An ethnographic account of Garifuna identifications and representations in Dangriga, Belize

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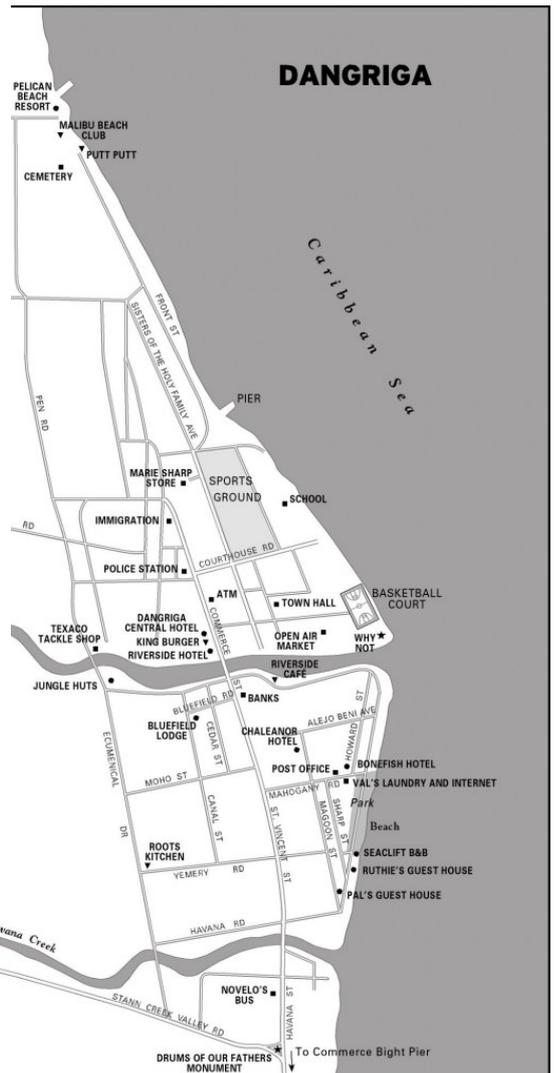
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Abstract



The Belizean Garinagu are an ethnic group developed out of a rich cultural matrix merging African, European and Amerindian influences. Contemporary pressures of globalisation combined with historical structures of subjugation now create an environment many Garinagu believe to be detrimental to the continuation of their culture. This thesis is concerned with the way in which members of the Garifuna community in Dangriga narrate, navigate and negotiate their ethnic identity within the context of globalisation. By balancing identification and representation between Amerindian and African 'roots', the Garinagu are creatively (re)constructing history and heritage as they negotiate a place for themselves within the Belizean multi-ethnic society. The experiences of the Garifuna community in Belize emphasize the multiplicity and relationality of ethnic identification, and reveal the importance of place and geography as the Garinagu are navigating through Dangriga's fragmented landscape.



Map I (top) Location Belize in Central America.

Map II (centre-left) Location Dangriga in Belize.

Map III (centre-right) Dangriga.

Maps adapted from Belize Travel Guide moon.com.

Table of contents

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	4
ABSTRACT	5
THE REGRETTABLE PLIGHT OF GARIFUNA	8
INTRODUCTION	9
THE SETTING	10
METHODS OF RESEARCH	10
THESIS OUTLINE	13
CHAPTER 1 QUESTIONS OF THEORY	14
1.1. REFLECTIONS ON ETHNICITY AND AFRO-INDIGENEITY	14
1.2. GLOBALISATION AND THE SPATIALITY OF IDENTITY	16
1.3. REPRESENTING IDENTITY	18
IN CONCLUSION	20
CHAPTER 2 ETHNOGENESIS AND ETHNICITY	21
2.1. NAVIGATING HISTORY AND STRUCTURES OF SUBJUGATION	21
2.2. BORDERING US FROM THEM: GARIFUNA AND CREOLE IDENTITIES	23
2.3. THE STUFF WITHIN: LANGUAGE, MUSIC, FOOD AND SPIRITUALITY	25
2.4. GARIFUNADUÁÜ	28
IN CONCLUSION	30
CHAPTER 3 DANGRIGA: NARRATING GLOBALISATION	31
3.1. LOSING LANGUAGE	31
3.2. THE CULTURE IN AGRICULTURE	34
3.3. MIGRATORY FLOWS	35
IN CONCLUSION	37
CHAPTER 4 NEGOTIATING AUTHENTICITY	38
4.1. THE CHÜLÜHADIWA GARIFUNA MONUMENT PARK	40
4.2. GARIFUNA SETTLEMENT DAY	41
4.3. MASTERPIECE OF THE ORAL AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE OF HUMANITY	43
IN CONCLUSION	44
CHAPTER 5 THE GEOGRAPHY OF IDENTITY	45
5.1. PLACING GARIFUNADUÁÜ	45
5.2. THE ROLE OF TOURISM	47
5.3. SPIRITUALITY	49
IN CONCLUSION	51
CONCLUSION	52
BIBLIOGRAPHY	54
APPENDIX I REFLECTIONS ON FIELDWORK IN BELIZE	64

THE REGRETTABLE PLIGHT OF GARIFUNA

(We'll Remedy It) - By Fabian Cayetano

Oh Garifuna,
Ever since Yurumein
Our forebearers have struggled to maintain you.
Foolish and lacking consideration,
The English arrived, and the French arrived,
Ready for war.
Because your stubborn manliness
You stood bow and arrow, manfully.
The English, the French, were not men enough to
To defeat you; to the point that it became
necessary
That the Englishman caused you to board his vessel
So he could leave you on the shores of Roatan
On the twenty fifth of the second month,
In the year, now long gone,
One thousand seven hundred Four score and
seventeen.

Our cultural roots and our language
Once held dear by
Chatoyer and our ancestors,
We're now ashamed of.
A rich heritage,
A heritage, highly praised by many
Different foreign peoples,
That is what we abandon to ape the
ways of others
My kinsfolk.
You know, we are abandoning Garifuna.
Now, at a time when the price of
ereba is up and
The demand for it is high.
That's when ereba bakers are
vanishing.
We've turned away from dumari and
ginutti,
Food that gave
Sturdiness and health to the Garifuna
man.
It is the American ways that we now
imitate in our dress.

Disappearing are gunjei,
Wanaragua, tire,
Abeimahani, arumahani and
hungu-hungu;
Many of our kin have become ashamed
To speak Garifuna;
Now speak a Garifuna that lacks
fluency
Being abandoned too are chugu, dugu
and amundahani
Where are the buyeis?
Where are the medicine men?

Where are the men endowed with
mystical power?
Oh Garifuna,
Are we abandoning you completely?
That you should leave us

Oh Garifuna,
Is it here on the shores of Belize that
You will be defeated?
Is it here that we will cause you to vanish
From ourselves?
When then will the answer of our grandchildren
And our more distant descendants be when
they're asked,
'What is your race?'
They will then not be able to pass as European.
They will then not be able to pass as Mulatto.
They will then not be able to pass as Amerindian.
How regrettable is your plight!

Let us arise, Garifuna kinsmen,
Arise, men of wisdom;
Arise, men of culture;
Arise, men of learning;
Support Garifuna in its
Struggle forward
Towards progress.
Let Garifuna be spoken
Let Garifuna be written in books
Let us teach Garifuna in our schools
In Barranco, Punta Gorda, Seine bight,
Georgetown, Hopkins and Dangriga.
Let our heritage and
our language be dear to us,
And let us strive to have
Garifuna spoken on Radio Belize;
And our descendants can say
one day,
'Here is our culture, our
Heritage, our language,
our legacy delivered to us
From our grandfathers
And our ancestors.'

Introduction



Every face tells a different story. Every mind takes its own course. But together, our narratives and roads collide and coalesce to become interwoven into the fabric of collectivity. The poem recited above, written by Garifuna Fabian Cayetano, illustrates some important threads in the collective fabric of the Afro-Amerindian Garinagu² in Belize. Their story is one of hardship, pride, and now also fear. Born out of the brutal collision of people brought about by colonialism, the Garinagu developed a rich cultural matrix which merges African, European and Amerindian influences (Gonzales 1988). *The regrettable plight of Garifuna* suggests identification with Garifuna, through language, food, dance and spirituality, is waning because of the tendency to ‘ape the ways of others’ and to identify with ‘American ways’. Contemporary pressures of globalisation combined with historical structures of subjugation now create an environment many Garinagu believe to be detrimental to the continuation of their culture.

This thesis is concerned with how members of the Garifuna community in the Belizean town Dangriga narrate, navigate and negotiate their ethnic identity within the context of globalisation. Responding to the global processes they perceive as threatening, the Garinagu are creatively (re)constructing history and heritage while continuously negotiating which narratives are incorporated into the collective fabric of Garifuna-ness. Through delineating the way in which Garinagu deal with ethnicity, I aim to emphasize the constructed nature of ethnic identity and how it is always characterized by multiplicity and relationality (Barth 1969; Baumann 1999; Cohen 2000; Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Nagel 1994; Roosens 1989). Moreover, their experiences contribute to this debate by claiming geography as another crucial element of ethnic identification. The Garinagu have long been of interests to a range of scholars (Cayetano 2005; Ellis 2010; Gonzales 1988; Gullick 1985; Kerns 1989; M. Palacio 1995; J. Palacio 2005; Roessingh 2004; Taylor 1951). These scholars, some of them ethnographers, have mainly emphasized rural communities in their analyses. In this thesis, I focus on how the Garifuna community reacts to the challenges posed by global processes in the urban environment of Dangriga.

The current phase of globalisation remains the context in which our lives are framed (Appadurai 1996; Bauman 1998; Friedman 1994; Gilroy 1993; Hannerz 1992; Kearney 1995), and this study illustrates that globalisation and hybridity are not new phenomena to the Caribbean region. The Garinagu, as “the quintessential Caribbean people” (J. Palacio 2005:11), are from their genesis to contemporary strategies of cultural continuation, inextricably bound to global flows. The dynamic socio-spatial effects brought about by globalisation, together with the manner in which Garifuna

² Singular or referring to culture, identity or language: Garifuna.

identity and its representations balance between Amerindian and African 'roots', the complexities in relating themselves to other groups in Belize, and the narration of history to fit contemporary needs, combine to create a sense of what 'being Garifuna' in contemporary Belize entails.

The remainder of this introduction is dedicated to the setting of my fieldwork, methods of research and the outline of this thesis.

The Setting

The fragrant scent of fresh citrus fruits signals our proximity to Dangriga. It is the second time I reach the quiet seaside town by bus, and by now I know its outskirts are surrounded with rows of citrus trees, mostly belonging to the large Pomona factory. While passing the Chülühadiwa Garifuna Monument Park, I squint my eyes against the sun to see if the pupils from the Gulisi Primary School are already off for today. But we pass in full speed, now almost a mile from the bus station the driver probably cannot wait to stretch his legs after the one and a half hour drive from the Belizean capital Belmopan. Nonetheless, it was a relatively quick and smooth ride: one of Dangriga's best features is its favourable location in the Stann Creek District, halfway on the Belizean coastline. It is as easy to access the town from land as it is from the sea. Connected to the major highways and boat routes, Dangriga is an important node in the national and international network of people and goods.

This centrality is not immediately apparent when arriving in this laid-back town. Wide dusty roads – surrounded by colourful, elevated, wooden and concrete houses– cross Dangriga from north to south and east to west. Running east, they become increasingly more sandy and eventually bend ninety degrees to run parallel to the bright blue Caribbean sea. It takes barely thirty minutes to cycle from the most southern to the most northern point. A journey wherein you will encounter a friendly mosaic of faces: of the 9.096 residents, the Garifuna community makes up about 60%, the remaining 40% is made up of Creoles, Mestizos, East Indians and Chinese residents (SIB 2010). Settled in 1802 by Garinagu, Dangriga is today considered the Garifuna cultural capital of Belize.

Amidst rustling palm trees and coconut vendors, for a moment you feel like you are on a Caribbean island. This Dangrigan vibe is one to be found all over Belize, which exhibits a special duality in location and heritage. The small country –280km long and 109km wide– is located on the Central American mainland and neighbours the large Spanish speaking countries of Guatemala and Mexico. Besides some respite from the scorching sun, the brisk prevailing breeze of the Caribbean sea has, long ago, brought the ships of British conquerors. Due to this history of more than a century of British rule, Belize developed close cultural ties with the Caribbean islands (Wilk 1994), resulting in a distinct 'Caribbean feel' to this Central American country. As is characteristic for the Caribbean, Belize is home to a multi-ethnic population. With approximately 291.800 inhabitants, it is the most sparsely populated country of Central America and resembles more of a mosaic than a melting pot, as the array of ethnic groups are geographically located (Roessingh 2004).

As a country with one foot in Central America and the other in the Caribbean, Belize stands on 'shifting transnational terrain' where foreign influences are intrinsically connected to the increasing importance of local culture (Wilk 1999:245). Because its population is gradually cosmopolitanizing with a large number of Belizeans travelling; living abroad; watching American or Mexican television shows; and consuming imported goods, the production of ethnic culture seems to be more distinct and flourishing than ever (Wilk 1999:245; Sutherland 1998:70). As a well-connected town, Dangriga is fully enmeshed in these processes of globalisation. Faced with these rapidly changing circumstances, the local Garifuna community is (re)creating ways of defining themselves and relating to others.

Methods of research

I have spent two –short but intensive– months of fieldwork in March and April 2011. I did not originally set out to study strategies in the preservation of a supposedly disappearing culture, but was plunged into the topic. Armed with my research proposal, I intended to explore representations of ethnic identity vis-à-vis the tourism industry. The very afternoon of my arrival in Dangriga, however, revealed how irrelevant those few tourists in Dangriga are for the Garifuna community. Cautiously explaining my research plan to people, they first made it obvious that tourism for them was of no importance yet, because tourists are hardly present in this town. 'Dangriga is just a pass-through point', I was casually but resolutely told. My questions thus did not make any sense to my interlocutors. Second, I was promptly told something very intriguing: Garifuna culture is no longer around in Dangriga. Once again experiencing that reality is ever more interesting and complex than one can anticipate on, I decided to pursue the processes behind this statement. This eventually led me to broaden the context of ethnic identification as Garifuna from flows of tourists to flows of people, ideas, technologies, finance and media –or globalisation (cf. Appadurai 1996). This wider scope allowed me to incorporate much more of the complexities and concerns people deal with in defining who they are.

The people that feature in this text are not just, to borrow a phrase from Rebhun (1999:9), variables in a theoretical postulate. I did not meet any typical Garifuna in Dangriga. Rather, I met individuals. It was not hard to find people in Dangriga willing to partake in my research. I found that a general concern over the continuity of Garifuna culture was present in such a way, that people felt any aid in its documentation and 'preservation' was welcome. I was seen as one of those 'foreign people' mentioned in the poem by Fabian Cayetano, coming to praise Garifuna heritage. On my first evening I met Shannon Lorenzo, who was able to immediately sum up the important places I should go and who I should definitely meet. My first interview took place on the second day in the field with Alice Nigels, with whom in the weeks to follow I developed, what I would call, a friendship. She

guided me not only through the landscape of being Garifuna, but also through the streets of Dangriga in search of a bike, a home, or some good rice and beans.

I found a range of interlocutors by asking the people I interviewed if they had friends or relatives who were willing to see me –the snowball method. This worked well for me. Through Alice, for example, I met Dora, who had the time and ability to discuss her engaging life story with me. The choice for conducting a series of life history interviews with Dora sprung from two sources. First, the approach of compassionate empathy, which I describe below, emphasizes the need for a focus on people and their stories. I want to convey the lived experience of being Garifuna, and what better way to do this than through the method of life history? The second reason has to do with the Garifuna tradition of transmitting stories orally (cf. J. Palacio 2005). It thus felt appropriate that in delineating the experience of being Garifuna, I would include fragments of an orally narrated history.

In addition to the individuals mentioned above, I encountered interlocutors by keeping an open mind and chatting with whomever I came across. To capture as much as possible the multiplicity of individuals in the Garifuna community, I kept an eye for people of different backgrounds and with diverse viewpoints. Finally, I deliberately selected people for interviews who were closely connected to the National Garifuna Council (NGC). In-depth interviews with popular intellectuals³, such as Roy Cayetano, provided me not only with insight into the workings of the NGC, but also with another perspective on my data. I have tried to balance the protection of privacy of these people with accuracy by giving each individual a pseudonym⁴, but refraining from conflating stories or characters.

Participant observation remained the context wherein I employed a range of other methods and techniques (cf. DeWalt & DeWalt 2002). I participated in daily life by shopping, cooking and eating together with my interlocutors. I ran errands, listened to the radio, watched television, organized birthday parties and worked in the garden. Through ‘hanging out’ I established rapport, observed situations, and learned which questions are relevant to ask. In addition, I used both informal conversations and formal interviews. These interviews range from half an hour to three hours in length, with an average of one hour. Most interviews were unstructured or semi-structured. I felt these types gave most room to whichever issue was significant for the interviewee, and the more informal nature encouraged people to answer and act more naturally. My questions were therefore open-ended and left room for a flow of interaction directed by my interlocutors.

Most of the time, I learned more from informal interactions than from formal ones. I used the informal arena to ‘contextualize’ the information I received from interviews: I observed situations and asked other about what I had heard. This served two purposes. First, contextualizing

³ For a discussion on popular intellectuals as builders of social cohesion and activists see Baud and Rutten (2004).

⁴ Except for Roy Cayetano, Anthony Sabal and Theodore Aranda.

allowed me to test my interpretations as it provided me with a continuous member check, and second, I discovered this was a good technique to elicit more opinions on the same topic and start discussions on themes relevant to my research. I have attempted to stay as faithful as possible to the stories as told by my interlocutors. However, in the process of transcription from the spoken to the written word, I inevitably lost words or interpretations. Through this continuous member-check I hope to have minimized the ever-present danger of misinterpretation. Also, I am aware my presence had an impact on 'the field'. On some cases in this text, I left my own voice in. These were moments when people answered directly to one of my questions or engaged in explicitly explaining something I, as outsider, would not automatically understand.

Furthermore, I profoundly realized that, as a white-skinned privileged European, travelling to formerly British Honduras to study and document an indigenous black community believed to be on the fringe of extinction, without careful consideration I would be conducting fieldwork reminiscent to that of 'salvage anthropologists' of the early twentieth century. This position made me feel most uncomfortable. Therefore, before I entered the field, I reflected on these issues and contemplated how to avoid becoming, in Keesings' (2006) words, a "dealer in exotica". I would like to share some of these reflections here in order to situate my position in relation to the data I collected.

Recently, an approach to ethnography has been developed which I took as a framework for my research: the compassionate turn (cf. Sluka & Robben 2007). Scheper-Hughes (2006) presents one of the most moving cases for this turn: when we recognize the imperfection of anthropology while doing our absolute best at listening and observing with empathy and compassion, anthropology can be an act of solidarity, a work of recognition and an opportunity for self-expression. Compassionate empathy, in this way, is an epistemological approach (Sluka & Robben 2007:24). Throughout my fieldwork, I have committed myself to individuals and the narratives they tell on the local level, while also framing their stories into the historical, economic and political processes which shape our experiences. For indeed, I am myself part of the global processes operating in Dangriga. Abu-Lughod (2006) and Gupta and Ferguson (2006) both argue for a consideration of historical and global interconnections: anthropologists should engage in questions of difference through connection. We are all subject to the same historical processes simultaneously connecting and differentiating (Gupta & Ferguson 2006:615).

Finally, while focussing on processes of globalisation, a word of caution is appropriate. The current image of a world in flux due to transnational flows and scapes creates an image of borderless anthropology (Gupta & Ferguson 2006). This imagery implies a detachment of engagement, commitment and accountability to the local level. However, when looking past these metaphors, it becomes apparent how unequal and, in effect, local these processes are. Borders are still a very real phenomenon (Scheper-Hughes 2006:508). Hence, Scheper-Hughes (2006) contents anthropologists

need to describe the specificity of lives and provide deeply textured, fine-tuned narratives. For the effects of larger processes are articulated only on the local level (Abu-Lughod 2006:474).

Ethnography, as the practice and product of anthropologists, is concerned with asking and answering the question “what does it mean to be human?” (Gay y Blasco & Wardle 2006:1). Because of ethnography’s intimate dealings with the experiences of human beings, anthropology can contribute to an understanding of humanity by emphasizing the multiplicity of truths and interpretations in making sense of the world. For what is true for anthropology is “based on the changing nature of others’ imaginations, on the way they see the world, their culture, their response to globalisation, unequal power relations, and inequalities (...)” (Moore & Sanders 2006:19). What follows is a contextualized account of the way Garifuna in Dangriga imagine themselves in formulating a response to globalisation.

Thesis outline

The thesis is divided into five chapters. The opening chapter discusses anthropological theories on ethnic identification, representations thereof and considers the phenomenon of globalisation. I propose three elements of ethnic identification which are crucial to my research: multiplicity, relationality and geography. This is followed by a chapter on the historical maps through which Garinagu navigate today in order to make sense of their ethnicity and position in contemporary Belize, and a discussion on the shape and content of being Garifuna as defined by my interlocutors. Chapter three deals with experiences of globalisation, with particular attention to the loss of language, changing livelihoods and the impact of migratory flows. In chapter four I examine strategies of cultural preservation pursued by the National Garifuna Council. Chapter five considers the connection between identity and geography, and community strategies in dealing with the perceived loss of culture. In the final section I present my conclusions. Appendix I contains some reflections on fieldwork in Belize.

As these chapters will show, the Garinagu I encountered are master-storytellers and continuously negotiate with each other how their stories become interwoven into the meta-narrative of what being Garifuna in Dangriga entails –which in turn will leave enough room for both collective and individual routings through an increasingly fragmented landscape. My title, *Narration, Navigation & Negotiation*, is meant to convey the large amount of agency Garinagu exercise in constructing, claiming, telling, contesting and mapping their ethnic identifications in a context they perceive as hostile to their culture.

Chapter 1



Questions of theory

At the core of this exercise lie issues of ethnic identification in a continuously changing world. It is therefore appropriate to reflect here on some questions of theory regarding ethnic identity and globalisation. Both topics cover vast and complex social fields and are characterized by theoretical disagreements among researchers. For my purposes here, I will examine three aspects of ethnic identity which are of importance to my research: multiplicity, relationality, and geography. There are multiple ways to interpret and represent being Garifuna; ethnic identity always comprises relating oneself to others; and appropriation of place plays a central role in representing and asserting identity. In this chapter I will first situate my position in the debates on ethnicity. Section two deals with the relation between identity and geography through a discussion on globalisation, where I propose spatiality as another dimension of ethnic identity. In section three I conclude with the consideration that representations are always accompanied by relations of power and notions of authenticity.

1.1. Reflections on ethnicity and Afro-Indigeneity

Ethnicity⁵ and identity are inextricably connected to each other. As Eriksen (2010:17) notes: ethnicity is in fact a social identity based on contrasting oneself and the group to others and their groups. My approach to ethnicity is that of social constructionism, focussing on how ethnic boundaries and identities are continuously negotiated, revised and revitalized through the social interaction that takes place within the ethnic group and between ethnic communities or other groups (Nagel 1994:152). Instead of a primordial vision of ethnicity as a biological, static, isolated entity wherein fundamental cultural values are shared (Barth 1969:10-11), social constructionism problematizes rather than assumes ethnic identity by regarding it as relational (Yashar 1998:29). Most notable of the critics to primordialism is Fredrik Barth (1969), who emphasizes ethnicity and (ethnic) identity to be situational, changeable and the result of a dialectical labelling process between oneself and others. Barth (1969:14) proposed a structural analysis of ethnicity: the social boundaries of ethnicity mattered, not the cultural content –or ‘stuff’ in his words. Groups present different identities at

⁵ Ethnic refers to a group-level phenomena, whereas ethnic identity is the ethnic group membership of an individual, ethnic identification refers to the process of identifying oneself or the other with an ethnic group (Emberling 1997:302) and ethnicity is the product of actions undertaken by ethnic groups as they shape and reshape their self-definition and culture (Nagel 1994:152).

different times to different audiences in a chameleon-like manner as the content of ethnicity changes according to the nature of the boundary (Cohen 2000:3).

Concurring with instrumentalism, I believe ethnicity is contextual. This situational negotiation results in a layering of ethnic identities: depending on the choices available, an individual can choose which aspect of his or her ethnic identity to emphasize depending on 'where and with whom the interaction occurs' (Nagel 1994:155). This illustrates the multiplicity of ethnic identities, the ethnic 'repertoire' or 'shopping chart' (cf. Koonings & Silva 1999; Nagel 1994). Afro-Indigeneity is a certain type of ethnic identity, linking blackness to indigeneity. The Garinagu, as an Afro-Indigenous group in Belize, can emphasize either part of their identity. They can be defined in opposition to non-indigenous Creoles, but also be differentiated from the Mayas who are believed to be 'more indigenous' (Roessingh 2004). In chapter four I focus on the efforts of a Garifuna social movement that strategically emphasizes the indigenous identity of Garinagu. Indeed, claims to indigeneity reflect political, economic and material goals of collective benefits that come with recognition –this is also referred to as strategic essentialism (Yashar 1998).

However, contrary to many instrumentalists who solely emphasize the *strategic* element within ethnic identification (see Baud *et al.* 1994), social constructionism recognizes ethnic identity to be constructed and maintained through meaning provided by religion, language, culture and –real or assumed– ancestry. Many (ethnic) groups still refer to culture as the 'glue' which holds them together. Nevertheless, I see Garifuna culture not as a static, timeless, discrete and homogeneous entity: culture is a concept which entails multiple ideological and physical spaces, strategies, interests, improvisations and discursive formations which produce numerous negotiable subjective experiences constituted in relation to different audiences (Abu-Lughod 2006:472; Kirstsoglou & Theodossopoulos 2004:138). It is in this sense that culture will be used throughout this thesis.

Although the term 'race' and primordialist notions of identity and ethnicity have been erased from the anthropological lexicon and discarded as analytical tools, reality as presented by scientists is not necessarily the personal reality people experience in daily life. When people refer to their ethnic identity, they usually draw from three spheres of influence which are assumed to be causally related to each other: biological factors; cultural traits; and spiritual forces (Baronov & Yelvington 2009:252-3). This is most articulated in multi-ethnic societies, such as Belize. As Oostindie (1997:288) writes: "thinking in these [essentialist] terms is still characteristic for Caribbean reality". For indeed, claims to indigeneity are only salient in the language of essentialism. Therefore, while situating my position within the social constructionist vision of negotiation and layering as central to ethnicity, I will include several crucial elements – referring to biological, cultural and spiritual factors– which are stressed by members of ethnic groups who creatively use agency while constructing their identity.

First of all, ethnic identity is relational. Members of an ethnic group “consider themselves as essentially distinctive from members of other groups of whom they are aware and with whom they enter into relationships” (Eriksen 2010:17). Second, ethnic groups often share a real or assumed common ancestry through a biological connection. Ethnicity is closely related to (metaphoric) kinship (Emberling 1997:302; Yelvington 2001) and entails therefore groups larger than an extended family or lineage. Related is how this common ancestry provides a source for collective memory which has a unifying function through ethnogenesis (Roosens 1989) and the invention of tradition (Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983). Third, specific phenotypic characteristics remain crucial in the classification of oneself and others. In Belize, as in many other parts of the world, people draw on biological factors when classifying groups by their phenotype. Fourth, people who ethnically identify themselves with a group often feel connected through a set of shared attitudes and behaviours combined with common symbolisms and meanings, or ‘culture’. The two spheres of spiritual forces and cultural traits are crucial in the construction of a distinct indigenous identity as they unite the group and are recognized by allocators of indigenous rights. Fifth, no group that wishes to culturally distinguish itself is a homogenous entity. Members engage themselves in a continuous negotiation of what constitutes their ethnic identity and how this should be represented. Identities, including ethnic identity, are characterized by multiplicity.

Summarizing the above, this analysis of ethnic identification includes notions of differentiation from others, multiple interpretations in the negotiation of history and cultural content, perceptions of phenotypic characteristics and shared attitudes and behaviours. All identities are ‘routed’, whereby collectives and individuals navigate the maps made available to them and occasionally draw up a new one. The Garinagu, who already at their genesis were a diaspora community born out of the Black Atlantic, cannot be said to have ‘roots’ (cf. Gilroy 1993). But rather, they are ‘routed’ in a wider collision of cultures and histories encompassing the Caribbean, Africa, Europe, Central America and North America. As there are global routes, there are also national and local ones, unavoidably connected to processes of globalisation and its spatial implications. The following section discusses this phenomenon of globalisation and geography as a fundamental feature of ethnic identity.

1.2. Globalisation and the spatiality of identity

Globalisation is such a phenomenon prone to many abstractions and metaphors. There are scapes, flows, zones, compressions and expansions (cf. Appadurai 1996; Clifford 1988; Friedman 1994; Hannerz 1987,1992; Robertson 1992). Bauman (1998:60) for example refers to globalisation as an anonymous force, “operating the vast –foggy and slushy, impassable and untameable– no man’s land (...)”, and Geschiere and Meyer (1998:601) concur it is “beset with vagueness and inconsistencies”.

Although globalisation in these views might be a sensitizing notion rather than an analytical concept, it remains of crucial importance to investigate its processes and effects in order to understand the experience of identity.

It has become a truism in anthropology that our worlds are characterized by a continuous flux of ideas, ideologies, people, goods, images, messages and technologies (Lash & Urry 1994). This, Appadurai (1996) notes, is a world of flows. Globalisation in Appadurai's (1996) view is thus another term for a world of disjunctive flows, colliding and causing friction in different localities. Hannerz (1992:221) termed this global interconnectedness an imagined "global cultural flow chart", pointing to the spatial dimension of these flows. Nonetheless, globalisation, Hannerz (1997) warns elsewhere, is not just about continuities and flows, it is also about boundaries. Or rather about frontiers and borderlands: zones characterized by blurring and ambiguity (Hannerz 1997:9). There is thus a balance between flows and closure, Geschiere and Meyer (1998:602) state, pointing to the empirical evidence that people's awareness of being in a global system triggers a search for orientation points and the construction of boundaries –or frontiers in Hannerz' words. This duality is also referred to in the globalisation discourse as deterritorialization and reterritorialization⁶ (Inda & Rosaldo 2008).

Discussions and debates on globalisation contribute to deconstructing the belief that locality is something given and have broadened the scope of research to transnational movements, diasporas and creole cultures (Geschiere & Meyer 1998; Kearney 1995). Furthermore, understanding how locality is being produced in a global context is essential for a comprehension of the way identities are being formed and transformed in the continuous dialectic with global processes (Appadurai 1996:178).

The combination of globalisation and identity is according to Geschiere and Meyer (2002) an explosive one. Identity, they argue, refers to peoples attempts to reify flows and mark boundaries in the dynamic environment of global processes. Places and place-making become important tools in this reification process. As Martin (1997, in Osborne 2001:3) argues:

Identity is formed and continually reinforced via individual practice within culturally defined spaces (...)
Sense of place, as a component of identity and psychic interiority, is a lived embodied felt quality of place that informs practice and is productive of particular expressions of place.

Appadurai (1996) notes that in the social sciences, much traditional thinking about localities has been driven by ideas of geographical and cultural coherence. With the spatiality of identity I do not wish to imply that culture is essentially connected to place, but rather that people ascribe meaning to space

⁶ The former refers to a detachment of culture and place as objects, ideas and people are picked up in the flow and dropped somewhere else, thereby becoming 'disconnected from fixed locations in space and time'(Inda & Rosaldo 2008:14). The latter then grounds cultural objects and subjects again into specific localities.

and thereby produce places which function as a stage where ethnic identity is acted out within the group itself, with other groups and with the government (Osborne 2001:5).

Space and the creation of place in managing representations of ethnic identity are of central importance to the Garifuna community in Dangriga. Sack (1997) notes that when narratives within an ethnic group emphasize a strong connection to the land, such as the case with the Garinagu, there is often a tendency to “(...) blur distinctions between the natural and the cultural, and the living and the dead. Place is often inhabited by the spirits of the ancestors (...)” (Sack 1997:136), which in turn gives more salience to particular places. I discuss the spiritual aspect of the spatiality of identity in more detail in chapter six. At this point it is important to note that Dangriga is perceived as the ‘cultural capital’ of the Garinagu, infusing the town with a sense of ‘Garifuna-ness’. But in this globalized world of flows, one groups’ conception of place is not necessarily shared by other groups living in the same location. Places then, Sack (1997:138) argues, “become thinned out and merge with space.” And because feelings of cultural continuity are connected to place, its appropriation and construction becomes “a central component of many peoples’ strategies of survival” (Osborne 2001:6). This points to a temporal connection to place. Since group identities extend back into the past and forward into the future, ethnic groups can frame identities in a discourse of authenticity, supporting their claim for preservation and distinctiveness in an increasingly globalized place (Orlove 2004). The discourse of representation and authenticity is the focus of the next section.

1.3. Representing identity

The tension between the global and the local is ever present and most tangibly felt by those who seek to brand and promote their otherness: this needs to be done in universally recognizable terms “in which difference is represented, merchandised, rendered negotiable (...)” (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009:24). Whereas anthropologists identified the need to ‘liquidate culture’ (Fabian 1991) through recognizing fluidity and dynamism instead of seeing culture as a fixed and static concept, people feel the need to bound culture to a certain essence and locality. In the representation of difference two important issues arise: who has the authority and legitimacy to represent culture and what counts as ‘authentic’ in these representations? I turn to these issues below.

The culture-concept and its place within anthropology have been subject of debate since the birth of the discipline. Following Weber, Geertz (2006:236) believed culture to be symbolic, a public and collective text to be read which consists of ‘webs of significance’ created by the same people caught in them. Hence, analyzing culture is analyzing meaning. In investigating these ‘webs’, their meaning and their relation to globalisation I also believe with Keesing (2006) –who formulated a critique on Geertz– that an analysis of the distribution of power and knowledge is essential. Keesing (2006) argues how different people write and read the ‘cultural text’ differently, resulting in a certain

distribution of knowledge and power. Related is his second comment that 'cultures are webs of mystification as well as signification'(Keesing 2006:258). Political and economic interests are often moulded onto particular interpretations and representations of cultural identity, hiding certain ideologies. The context in which we place cultures must thus not only be historical, but also economic and political (Keesing 2006:258).

Public representations of culture always carry issues of cultural ownership. Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos (2004:135) argue how a statement of collective identity is made every time a cultural performance is shown. But who has the legitimacy to decide the content of this identity? During the course of my fieldwork I noticed how the construction and representation of Garifuna identity is mostly in the hands of a small elite. This 'cultural elite' consists of the more affluent and educated members of the Garifuna community in Belize such as teachers, linguists, anthropologists and government officials. Organized through and around an NGO, they take on the task of promoting a certain narrative of Garifuna-ness through, for example, a museum. As Tice (Kirtsoglou & Theodossopoulos 2004:151) writes: "commercialisation of native people's arts' can be a site where ethnicity is manipulated." This manipulation of ethnicity, as a social creation, occurs within the interplay of the interests of those in power and local agency of community members. "Culture", Nagel (1994:162) writes, "provides the content and meaning of ethnicity". By reinventing the past through the construction of authenticity, the present is invented and strategic goals can be fulfilled. Powerful subgroups thus have the legitimacy to define what counts as authentic culture, thereby reinventing the past in the service of present strategic and political agendas.

When ethnic identity is authenticated, it is often the 'showcase elements' which are being emphasized and commoditized (Roessing & Bras 2005:31). 'Culture' gets a more narrow connotation as those aspects important for attracting tourists –such as rituals, music, art and dance– become homogenized, seen as timeless and emphasized as authentic. This is often perceived as an opportunity for maintaining cultural continuity whilst gaining high economic returns.

As is the case with several of the concepts described above, authenticity has a long theoretical history characterized by several different approaches such as postmodernism and constructivism. For the sake of brevity and clarity, this section focuses purely on the much more recent connection between authenticity and ethnic identification while taking a constructivist approach. Pantser (2005:72) notes how authenticity is regarded as the 'proper' identity of an individual or group and provides an eloquent description of authenticity as "the outcome of particular historical circumstances, institutional arrangements, power relations, and discursive contexts". Therefore, it would be more accurate to speak of authentication instead of authenticity as it refers to a continuous creative process.

Nevertheless, 'authentic' in people's lived experience remains a quality that objects or performances have or have not. It refers to those ethnic features or objects that are 'traditional' and 'pure'. Symbols, myths, artefacts, monuments and performances are the stuff of history, tradition, and heritage which represent an authentic identity (Osborne 2001:3). Authenticity is thus subject to the same dichotomous thinking as ethnic identity when it is believed to imply homogeneity, unity, uniformity, and purity instead of heterogeneity, fragmentation, pluralism, and hybridization (Pantsers 2005:72). The constructionist perspective allows here for an analysis of the agency exercised by the actors involved. What counts as authentic is continuously reinterpreted and renovated. As Nagengast and Kearney (1990:72) note in their discussion on Mixtec ethnicity, indigenous survival strategies are constantly transforming in reaction to changing political, social and economic conditions. Thus although authenticity is experienced as such, it does not reside in the essence of things. It is actively constructed, reinvented, strategically decided upon, and negotiated by numerous actors who relate to the same phenomena (Pantsers 2005).

In conclusion

In this chapter I have delineated several concepts and issues which can be used as a framework for understanding identification as Garifuna and representations thereof. As I will demonstrate in the following chapters, ethnic identity is characterized by multiplicity, relationality and geography. Chapter two deals extensively with the first two elements, where after the duality of globalisation becomes evident in chapter three as processes of flux and fix in Dangriga crystallize into the relocation from a focus on agriculture to one on wage labour, the loss of language and migratory flows. How power and authentic representations of culture are connected is the focus of chapter four. The final chapter concerns itself with the relation between ethnic identity and place, showing how geography forms an essential component of experiences of ethnicity in Dangriga.

Chapter 2



Ethnogenesis and ethnicity

Life is comprised of journeys. Not only physical journeys, also mental ones. We journey through the past and the present. We have journeyed for the sake and survival of our boys and girls. And we are journeying towards our aspirations.⁷

This quote by Mary Lopez⁸ illustrates how the nomadic history of the Garinagu is deeply entwined with their present day ethnic identification. To understand contemporary issues and theoretical debates concerning Garifuna ethnic identity, an understanding of their genesis and development as a people is essential. This chapter first explores the ethnogenesis (Roosens 1989) of the Garinagu, focussing on events and structures still reverberating through contemporary Belize. The history presented here should not be read as a narrative of factual Garifuna ‘roots’ or traces of a ‘bloodline’, but rather as the way in which the majority of contemporary Garinagu socially imagine and negotiate their common history (cf. Hobsbawn and Ranger 1983). I then examine Garifuna ethnicity by describing their present-day position within Belizean society and their ambiguous relation to the dominant ethnic group of Creoles where after I focus on what my interlocutors in Dangriga see as the ‘substance’ colouring their identity. This brings me to a concept Garinagu consider to be of fundamental importance: *Garifunaduúü*⁹, signifying unity, togetherness and metaphoric kinship (cf. Emberling 1997; Yelvington 2001). As we will see, all elements of being a Garifuna crystallize into this sense of reciprocity.

2.1. Navigating history and structures of subjugation

Most history, Wright (1992, in Osborne 2001:10) notes, becomes a myth “by which cultures navigate through time”. The historical route of the Garifuna starts with the migration of Amazonian Caribs¹⁰ through the Orinoco River Delta before 2000 B.C (J. Palacio 2008:14) and, following the arrival of Columbus in 1492, the forced migration of Africans to Latin America and the Caribbean in what is also called the Black Atlantic (cf. Gilroy 1993). Consistent with literature on this incident (Gonzalez

⁷ Mary Lopez. Presentation convention National Garifuna Council. 05-03-2011.

⁸ All persons quoted throughout this thesis, unless stated otherwise, consider themselves Garifuna.

⁹ Garifunaduúü is spelled differently by different individuals. Here, I adhere to the spelling as proposed by Ellis (2010).

¹⁰ The term ‘Carib’ was ascribed to this group by European discoverers, who also made the geographical distinction between Island Caribs and Mainland Caribs. However, this particular group called themselves Kari’na-speakers (Roessingh 2004:57).

1989; Kerns 1989; Gullick 1985; Hulme & Whitehead 1992; Taylor 1951) several Garifuna told me how two Spanish slave ships went down into the depths of the Caribbean sea just off the coast of the island of St. Vincent in 1635. Those who survived the shipwreck, a majority of would-be slaves, reached land and were hospitably received by the island residents. Soon the Africans and Island Caribs intermingled, giving rise to a new group of people known as the Black Caribs (Gonzalez 1989). This story is referred to as the principal cause of the presence of Africans on the island. And, not unimportant for present-day Garinagu, because of this timely shipwreck it is asserted their ancestors were never slaves. The vague historical data on such a fascinating event as a shipwreck provided room for Garinagu to actively interpret and imagine the story of their genesis. Eventually, a strong foundational myth was created by giving detail, colour and *schwung* to otherwise imprecise and contradictory scientific literature.¹¹

The Garinagu thus are one of the components of diasporic Britain: “the Afro-Caribbean/British/American Black Atlantic” (Ferguson 1994:135). While this group physically resemble their African ancestors, featuring a dark complexion and kinky hair, they largely copied the cultural characteristics as well as the religious and cosmic system of the Island Caribs –though incorporating certain African practices regarding music, dancing and drumming (Roessingh 2004:65). The Amerindian elements of Garifuna culture are important in contemporary claims to indigeneity.

Resistance and war on St. Vincent eventually led the deportation of Garinagu to the island of Roatan (J. Palacio 2008). Hereafter, a small group of Garinagu¹² migrated to the mainland of Honduras from where they spread to present-day Nicaragua, Guatemala and Belize. In 1832, many Garinagu arrived in what would become British Honduras in 1862. Informed by years of myth-making, the British conceived of the Black Caribs as the savage, cannibalistic, inherently rebellious and thus unreliable Other, providing fertile breeding ground for some ineradicable prejudices and stereotypes (Roessingh 2004; Sutherland 1998; Moberg 2005; J. Palacio 2005). Being outnumbered and fearing a ‘black insurrection’ by both Creoles and Garinagu, the British made use of what my interlocutors in Dangriga call a divide-and-rule strategy by institutionalizing political, social and economic exclusion of the Garinagu. The Creole-Garifuna hierarchical relation is still reflected in contemporary Belizean demographic, political, social and economic issues (Wilcox 2006:20).

The Creoles originated as a distinct ethnic group in the late 18th century as a mix of African slaves and the British colonists. Myrtle Palacio (1995:77) notes that within the hierarchical colonial

¹¹ See Roessingh (2004) for a detailed review of the literature and controversies on this subject.

¹² Roessingh (2004:73) takes this point in history to use the name Garinagu instead of Black Caribs. Upon arrival in Central America the Black Caribs engaged in a dialectal self-identification which inspired them to refer to themselves as Garinagu (Roessingh 2004: 74; see also Eriksen 2003; Barth 1969). In 1975 the term ‘Garifuna’ was officially recognized (Wilcox 2006). In a similar fashion the name of Stann Creek settlement was changed into Dangriga, a Garifuna word for ‘sweet waters’ (Roessingh 2004; Wilcox 2006).

system where Europeans had the highest social status, in contrast to the ‘stubborn’ Garifuna, Creoles readily adopted the language, lifestyle and values of the settlers. The British granted them positions as civil servants which gave Creoles a considerable degree of political and economic power. The relatively good social position of the Creole is for example reflected in the fact that Creole language became the lingua franca of Belize. Official ethnic categories thus strengthened ethnic boundaries within Belize by serving as a basis for discriminatory practices.

In the early twentieth century, members of the Garifuna community rose to defy the inaccurate narratives of their heritage and intended to reclaim ownership of representations of their identity. An early example of the rise of ethnic consciousness is Thomas Vincent Ramos (1887-1955), a civil rights activist remembered for his unrelenting effort to establish a public and bank holiday on November 19, celebrating the Garifuna arrival to Belize. The independence from Great Britain, on September 21 1981, subsequently created the conditions wherein Garinagu could organize. The official vision of the Belizean nation is multi-ethnic, which means that besides the national identity, other identities compatible with different ethnic groups are recognized (Medina 1997). However, Belize has a political model of plurality rule wherein only two political parties compete: the United Democratic Party (UDP), which is Creole dominated, and the Peoples United Party (PUP), which is Mestizo dominated. An important consequence is that creating small ethnic political parties is strategically useless, thus political preferences cross ethnic boundaries. Related is the compensating effort by ethnic minorities of organizing into social movements in order to achieve their goals (Gutierrez Rojas 2007). The National Garifuna Council, established in 1981, presents such a social movement.

This NGO initially flowed out of the Garifuna Settlement Day celebration commissions in the different communities because, as founding member Roy Cayetano¹³ recalls, “We recognized there were broader issues to deal with”. Based in Dangriga, the NGC now has branches in all Garifuna communities and has members throughout Belize. Ambitiously they assemble with the main objectives of preserving Garifuna culture and promoting economic development of the Garifuna (Izgard 2005:182; cf. NGC 2011). These objectives crystallize into a range of activities which are the subject of chapter four.

2.2. Bordering us from them: Garifuna and Creole identities

Walking alongside the Caribbean sea on Dangriga’s finest beach, just in front of Pelican Beach Resort, twenty-year-old Mali points to a group of children running and jumping off the pier. “Which of them is Creole?”, she asks me, “And which is Garifuna?”. Squinting my eyes against the bright morning sun, I confess I cannot tell the difference. With both having the striking African features of a deep dark skin

¹³ Roy Cayetano. Interview. 07-04-2011.

and curly black hair, physical appearance alone has not been useful in selecting my informants. "Exactly!" Mali exclaims, "This is why Garifuna has advantage. She can go about and be Garifuna in the house and streets in Dangriga. But in Belize City she can be a Creole. Because the difference is hard to tell you know? Only the culture will tell but the culture is not always there."¹⁴

This excerpt from my personal journal reveals several interesting elements on the relation between Garinagu and Creoles within Belize. First, Mali sees an advantage in the fact that Garinagu can situationally choose if they want to underline their Garifuna heritage or merge into the larger Afro-Belizean group as Creole, implying also Creoles do not have either the option or the desire to be identified as Garifuna. Secondly, it can supposedly be beneficial to downplay Garifuna identity in Belize City whereas identifying as Garifuna in Dangriga or at home is preferable. Thirdly, Mali sees the difference between Garifuna and Creole largely as a matter of culture. And finally, culture is something which can be present or absent. In this paragraph I aim to show which social dynamics go behind Mali's comments: why would Garinagu downplay their ethnic identity in certain contexts and how do they at other times distinguish themselves from Creoles?¹⁵

Several Garinagu told me they themselves could not tell the difference between a Creole and a Garifuna just by looking¹⁶, so that they had to rely on other markers of identity. Most notable of these other markers is language.¹⁷ Indeed, the strongest claim for distinctiveness comes from differences in language and culture. For in the process of assimilation to the British, Creoles lost most of their African cultural practices and heritage (M. Palacio 1995:27), enticing Garifuna to 'accuse' Creoles for not having their 'own' culture or language. While sitting on her porch overlooking a broad backstreet in Dangriga, Keisha –a thirteen-year-old Garifuna– told me one morning: "Those Creole don't have no language or religion like us. Them just copycats. Thinkin' them better with clothes and things but in the end there is nothing there."¹⁸ Remarks like these are not uncommon among Garinagu. Physically similar to the Creoles the Garinagu thus assert differentiation on the basis of their unique heritage and culture.

Garifuna heritage resulting in a distinct culture is thus crucial in bordering 'us' and 'them'. Although the hierarchical relation between Creoles and Garinagu, combined with the Garifuna emphasis on descent, makes it highly unlikely a Creole will identify as Garifuna, the border is more fluid the other way around; as Mali signalled at the start of this paragraph, culture can be 'hidden'. Garinagu sometimes opt for downplaying their heritage in contexts where being Garifuna can be

¹⁴ Mali. Conversation. 10-03-2011.

¹⁵ Of all ethnicities within Belize, I solely focus on Creoles here because, due to their common African heritage and physical similarities, I found this group to be most present in the Garifuna boundary construction and Garifuna imaginations of themselves.

¹⁶ See M. Palacio (1995) for a study on stereotypes pertaining to physical appearance of Garifuna and Creole.

¹⁷ Roy Cayetano. Conversation. 05-03-2011.

¹⁸ Keisha Flores. Conversation. 08-04-2011.

disadvantageous. This can be for example when discrimination is likely or anticipated. Marge Frederick – a twenty-three year old woman balancing housewife duties and high school– voices this as follows, “When I’m in Belize City, I do not say I’m Garifuna. If I was to go to school there, nobody would sit next to me ‘cause they would be afraid.”¹⁹

Garinagu are thus highly aware of the labels attached to them by others in Belizean society; this gives them the opportunity to exert agency and act according to the circumstances. Another example is the active use of these prejudices to one’s advantage. The Southern town of Punta Gorda, as one Garifuna man told me, has always been seen as the hearth of Garifuna spirituality. If a Garifuna from PG feels wronged by someone, a simple reference to his birthplace (indicating some proficiency in spiritism or voodoo) supposedly suffices to scare off the wrongdoer. These examples show how the negotiated and problematic nature of ethnicity becomes apparent within the dynamics of agency, ethnic layering and ascription.

Due to physical similarities, the negative epithet sometimes associated with being Garifuna in Belizean society can be easily avoided by identifying as Creole or merging into the larger group of Afro-Belizeans –illustrating the multiplicity of identities. Identification as Afro-Belizean is also invoked in opposition to the ‘Spanish’ (migrants from Spanish speaking countries), who are sometimes not perceived as true Belizeans (Medina 1997). Nonetheless, the Garinagu in Dangriga I spoke to take enormous pride in the richness of ‘their culture’. To my question on what differentiates Garifuna from Creole, the first answer I almost invariably received was “We have our own history, our own food, our own language, our own music, our own dances and our own religion”. Culture both legitimizes and animates ethnic identification as Garifuna. It is to the elements of this rich culture to which I now turn.

2.3. The stuff within: language, music, food and spirituality

Although ethnicity should certainly not be regarded as a historical legacy of migration or conquest (Nagel 1994), Garifuna perceive their culture to be rooted in their turbulent past for it is the historical amalgam of Carib, African and African-American influences that, combined with other influences, has evolved into a distinct language, belief system, cuisine, music and dance. These elements are, unsurprisingly, intrinsically connected to each other. In this paragraph I will delineate some important characteristics of what Garinagu themselves designate as ‘their culture’ and simultaneously show their interwoven-ness.

An important pillar on which Garinagu base their sense of ethnic identity is the Garifuna distinctive language. As a mix of Arawak, French, Bantu, Yoruba and Swahili (Gonzales 1988) this language reflects the hybrid origins of its people and is perceived as a characteristic element of being

¹⁹ Marge Frederick. Interview. 15-03-2011.

Garifuna. In alignment with the preceding paragraph, the value of language lies within its symbolic representation of ethnic identity and is central to processes of inclusion and exclusion between Garinagu and other ethnic groups in Belize. Linguist Roy Cayetano –a balanced, patient, but always busy man– was the first to explain the importance of this to me:

It distinguishes us from the other cultures living in Belize. Physically, there are almost no differences between a Creole and a Garifuna. However, through speech this boundary is immediately recognizable.²⁰

My interlocutors in Dangriga often refer to Garifuna as a ‘shush-language’ which can be used to gossip about others who are present but are not able to understand it. Language presents such a strong component of ethnic identification that in Dangriga the erosion of Garifuna as the principal vernacular of Garinagu is perceived as a threat to the continuity of Garifuna culture as a whole. As Taylor (1977:xv) writes:

Language, as the primary means of perpetuating culture, profoundly reflects and informs the culture itself. Its presence is a living representation of the way of life of a people; its disappearance or destruction usually signals the replacement of one cultural system by another.

26 I examine the dynamics behind the perception that language is disappearing in chapter three; for now it suffices to stress the pivotal force Garifuna exerts on other pillars of ethnic identity.

Most naturally, language is closely connected to the songs, the music and consequently the dances that are part of Garifuna culture. Garifuna music merges West African with Amerindian rhythms and revolves mainly around the beating of the drums (Izgard 2005:181). One particular subgenre of Garifuna music, the punta, is considered to be iconic of Garifuna identity throughout Belize (Greene 2002). Practically all my interlocutors in Dangriga listen to Garifuna music on the radio or own c.d.’s by famous artists, such as Andy Palacio, Pen Cayetano or Junior Aranda. Also, at religious and social events drummers, singers and dancers take central stage. Through their music the Garinagu are able to refer to past events, articulate social values, morality, and express spirituality; it thus presents both a public and private form of cultural expression.

The inspiration for Garifuna songs and music is in turn said to come naturally as part of the traditional agriculture and fishing practices; when working in close proximity to the ancestors. Roy Cayetano culturally translated this notion by comparing musical inspiration from the ancestors to “what you would call a muse”²¹. In accordance with Gonzalez (1989) prominent musician and painter Pen Cayetano claims that the fabric of Garifuna culture revolves around these traditional communal

²⁰ Roy Cayetano. Conversation. 05-03-2011.

²¹ Roy Cayetano. Interview. 07-04-2011

practices of fishing and farming.²² The 'ideal' Garifuna diet contains crops such as plantain, cassava, coconut and fish, from which, for example, *hudut* (ground plantain with coconut milk and fish) is prepared. Especially the labour-intensive planting and baking of cassava is in Pen's opinion central to maintaining a distinct identity. Passionately gesturing with his paint brush he fiercely states that, "To bake a cassava is the centre of Garifuna culture, our art and music 's all inspired by planting and baking cassava!"²³ The communal farming and baking of cassava thus gave birth to a certain music style and lyrics. Besides this music, traditional Garifuna crops continue to be markers of ethnic identity. Dora –a feisty, humorous and stubborn 76 year-old local of Dangriga– for example shook her head when she saw me eating rice for lunch. She commented, "We don't eat rice, our people. We don't know about rice so much. We eat from the farm, cassava bread and plantain. Like me, I am a cassava girl."²⁴

Whereas Garifuna music and food are appreciated throughout Belize, their spirituality remains largely behind closed doors as it is frowned upon by other Belizeans. Marge, a young Garifuna woman, lamented that "Because of these spirits [ancestors] they say the Garinagu are an evil people."²⁵ Ancestor worship is the main component of Garifuna spirituality (Roessingh 2004). As I have argued, the past is extremely important to Garinagu and as the ancestors connect the present to the past, or 'the roots', the reverence of one's ancestors is a task to be taken very seriously. One of the most significant religious events is the feasting of the dead: the *dügü* ritual. This ritual, led by a religious specialist (the *buyai*), is initiated when an ancestor is dissatisfied. It is a very costly affair as the entire family, including the migrated members, need to be present for the two week during ritual. During these weeks there will be traditional drumming, meals prepared from cassava, plantain, coconut and fish will be served and songs in the language of the ancestors, Garifuna, play a central role. The preparation of such an event can take over a year.

Unfortunately no *dügü* service was held during my research because, as someone pointed out, the ancestors mainly request *dügü's* during the summer holidays so everyone can be present – illustrating the constructions and negotiations within this ritual. Many Garinagu I talked to emphasize the unifying character of the *dügü*, as it brings all family members together: the *dügü* thus carries an important function as social glue, one of the main reasons Roessingh (2004) argues it is the centre of Garifuna culture. This religion of the ancestors is combined with Christianity, mostly Catholicism (Izgard 2005). The close connection between the two belief systems is exemplified by Dora, who attends church masses every Sunday, often refers to God or Jesus in daily conversations but

²² Pen Cayetano. Interview. 31-03-2011.

²³ Pen Cayetano. Interview. 31-03-2011

²⁴ Dora. Conversation. 12-03-2011.

²⁵ Marge Frederick. Interview. 15-03-2011.

simultaneously performs rituals for the ancestors and hangs garlic above the front door to fend off spirits. Her practices reflect the syncretism of Garifuna religiosity.

In examining and outlining what constitutes as ‘Garifuna culture’ there is always the risk of reifying something which in reality is changeable and dynamic (cf. Baumann 1999). What needs to be stressed is that the Garifuna I spoke to themselves consider these elements of culture as crucial markers of their ethnic identity, either present or absent in daily practices and in whichever shape they come; these are the elements present *within each* Garifuna. Language, music, food and spirituality are conflated with people and territory: they become embodied through practicing and performing them.²⁶ Furthermore, practising these elements exerts a unifying effect on the community. This idea of a unifying essence is reflected in the concept of *Garifunaduáü*, signifying reciprocity and togetherness, which my interlocutors in Dangriga consider to be of fundamental importance to their ethnic identification as Garifuna. The next paragraph looks at this concept in more detail.

2.4. Garifunaduáü

Within all elements mentioned in the preceding paragraph, the values of communality and reciprocity, a sense of unity and mutual dependency, appear to be central to what Dangrigan Garifuna consider ‘the essence’ of Garifuna culture. This sense of belonging to an ethnic community with a shared history and culture is what my interlocutors call *Garifunaduáü*, a concept in Garifuna which can be roughly translated as Garifuna-ness. When uttering this word many people make an ‘inclusionary movement’ with their arms and hands, as if trying to embrace someone. Answering my question on what I needed to know to understand Garifuna culture, Roy Cayetano said,

I believe the essence of Garifuna culture is mutual reciprocity, *Garifunaduáü* is an ideal. I for you and you for me, it is reflected in everyday life. It is about sharing, about love. This is at the heart of everything. A traditional Garifuna society is based on collective responsibility. As individual Garifuna we are weak, but together we are strong.²⁷

Hence *Garifunaduáü* presents a feeling of being one people moving through the tides of time. By calling *Garifunaduáü* an ideal, Roy also pulls our attention towards its intangible nature: it is the imagination of what being perfectly and wholly Garifuna constitutes. Comparing reactions from different members of the community, I found an interesting duality of continuity and temporality within *Garifunaduáü*. Shannon Lorenzo –a hardworking, business-minded mother of two– for example explains that:

²⁶ See Wade’s (2005) discussion on the embodiment of mestizaje in Colombia.

²⁷ Roy Cayetano. Interview. 07-04-2011

Garifunaduáü for me means all of us sitting together at church on the nineteenth [of November]. There's this feeling of unity among us. We're connected, we are Garifuna. It is about following your culture.²⁸

During one of my first conversation with Alice Nigels –a fiercely independent, strong opinioned, world-wise woman who is always in the mood for some ginger wine– she concurred with connection and unity as a defining feature of Garifunaduáü, but added:

Garifunaduáü is about if you have Garifuna in you, it is in your blood. If you have a grandfather or grandmother who is Garifuna people say Garifunaduáü, like you have Garifuna in you. Being Garifuna is in your blood.²⁹

In a sense, Garifunaduáü thus represents continuity as some form of metaphoric kinship (Emberling 1997:302; Yelvington 2001), referring to a biological blood connection which unifies a group of people. But simultaneously –much in the same way Mali at the beginning of this chapter felt culture is something that can be present or absent– Shannon describes it as a feeling that can be conjured up at certain times and places and can be stronger or weaker depending on the extent to which someone 'follows their culture'. When I asked Alice about this temporality, she remarked that "It is always there. But children these days do not act on their Garifunaduáü, they are not using it"³⁰.

Combined with Roy's perspective, Garifunaduáü can almost be seen as a Platonic idea or perception through which all members of the community are connected as everyone carries a reflection of this 'essence'. On a more concrete level, Garifunaduáü can roughly be defined as both heritage and the execution of this heritage through mutual reciprocity. Marge brings it to an even more concrete level when she says:

In language we are one; cassava we make all of us; the songs and dances we, all of us, make on the farm; and then we perform them at the *dügü* where we can also laugh, cry and feast with our ancestors. This is Garifunaduáü, this is what we do³¹.

My interlocutors nostalgically remember the time when Garifunaduáü was overtly present in Dangriga. Now, they say, it is evaporating in Dangriga's urban, globalized, landscape.

²⁸ Shannon Laurenzo. Interview. 30-03-2011.

²⁹ Alice Nigels. Interview. 30-03-2011.

³⁰ Alice Nigels. Interview. 30-03-2011.

³¹ Marge Frederick. Interview. 15-03-2011.

In conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined the story of Garifuna unique nomadic heritage and the harsh structures in which they found themselves after they settled along the Belizean shores. As narrated by the NGC, this account presents a strategic recollection of history adapted to present needs. The indigeneity of Garifuna ancestors combined with the assertion that they were never slaves are actively emphasized elements. I have subsequently argued how institutionalized isolation and official ethnic categories strengthened ethnic boundaries within Belize by serving as a basis for discriminatory practices. Prejudices on Garifuna spirituality and perceived backwardness sometimes lead Garinagu to downplay their ethnicity in multi-ethnic settings, while at other times differentiation from Creoles is asserted on the basis of Garifuna unique heritage and culture. This culture both legitimizes and animates ethnic identification as Garifuna, whereby there is a special role for language as an ethnic marker connected to music, food and spirituality. Finally I argued how 'being Garifuna' crystallizes into Garifunaduáü, a complex notion of reciprocity, unity and embodiment.

In chapter three I explain why Garifuna culture is perceived as disappearing due to global processes swaying through Dangriga. Remembered as once permeating every inch of Dangriga's social, cultural and physical space, Garifunaduáü has become fragmented in time and space which causes my interlocutors to experience a loss of culture.

Chapter 3



Dangriga: narrating globalisation

On a particularly hot afternoon, a month since my arrival in Dangriga, I asked Dora whether she would tell me about the history of her life. Sitting in her favourite chair on the veranda, she was cleaning some fish her neighbours had caught in Stann Creek earlier this day. Looking up at me over her glasses, she smiled and said, “My life is a long one you know. It is not going to fit in your book.”³² Having witnessed and lived through colonization and decolonization, hurricanes and droughts, happiness and sadness during her seventy-six years of residence on Dangriga’s soil, I knew she was right. The ‘book’, as she persisted to call the thesis that would flow out of my research, would by no means be able to account for the richness of her life. As an alternative, I have chosen to narrate her story here in a series of fragments, explaining, reflecting or illuminating the ways in which Dora and the community residing in her home town peddled through the waves of change hitting Dangriga’s shore.

In this chapter I argue that Garifuna culture is perceived to be disappearing because the unity and structures of reciprocity that are believed to be at its core –Garifunaduáü– are being undermined by processes of globalisation. The upsurge of Dangriga in the global wage economy heightened perceptions of the detrimental impact of globalisation through two migratory flows, the loss of language and the changing livelihood of Garifuna in Dangriga. I hope Dora’s narrative will force us to reach beyond the impersonal and structural character in which globalisation is often described and focus our attention on the complexities of human life.

3.1. Losing language

*Buiti binafi, ida biangi? Magadietina, seremein.*³³ Surprised looks from passersby were thrown our way as I exchanged a morning greeting in Garifuna with Dora, who just returned from an early trip to the central market. She walks slowly, the arthritis is bothering her today. “You learn you learn”, Dora happily mumbles as we once again make ourselves comfortable on the porch in front of her colourful wooden house. Then she continues,

³² Dora. Conversation. 05-04-2011.

³³ Good morning, how are you? I am fine, thank you.

“Those children don’t bother themselves to speak Garifuna these days. It is a shame, that it is. You come to study us, no? Go see to Hopkins, the culture there is stronger than in Dangriga. You know in Hopkins everybody speaks Garifuna. Even the little kids go and speak it on the streets.”³⁴

In chapter two I briefly touched upon language as an important instrument in the construction of boundaries. I also mentioned the superior economic and political position of the Creole in Belizean society and how Creole English is now the lingua franca of the country. In this paragraph I show how the social dynamics of Belizean society and processes of globalisation are connected to the demise of Garifuna language and its unifying force. I asked Dora to explain why her language is no longer spoken in Dangriga:

So much questions. We begin from my beginning. The year of 1934 was when I was born. On the 29th of September right here. My sister was born in Honduras. But I am born right in this yard. That is why I belong to Dangriga. I born here I grow here. This place is for them, for my mother and my grandmother. All of them spoke Garifuna to us. Especially my grandfather. He would speak nothing else, only Garifuna! This is where I learned to speak our language. Dangriga in those days was small. Small like Hopkins. My grandfather had a shop below our house where he would sell whatever you need. Not those nonsense them sell today. If you need a bucket then you go to the store and ask for *búngidu* and they give you a bucket. Now them shopkeepers do not know what it is you want with *búngidu*. You don’t use Garifuna anymore in the shops you understand?³⁵

32

There are a few reasons behind the degeneration of Garifuna language In Dangriga, with this story Dora touches upon several important ones. First, Garifuna is no longer the language of Dangriga’s economic and political life. As the town continues to expand –it is the commercial and business center of Stann Creek district– while providing a home to an increasing group of Latin and Creole residents, Creole becomes increasingly more dominant as a mutually intelligible language. The shopkeepers Dora mentions are no longer Garifuna, but Chinese, Spanish or Creole. Garifuna has thus lost its function in public life.

Second, Dora learned to speak Garifuna at home from her parents and grandparents. It was not, and still is not, taught in an institutionalized manner. The Belizean public education system bears the legacy of colonial times as it is designed in such a way that Garifuna is not taught to children at school and Garifuna culture is briefly touched upon as part of Belizean history, but not as an contemporary part of the social, political, cultural and economic landscape of Belize. Roy Cayetano beliefs the educational system was designed for children from colonizers, who were supposed to return to England one day.³⁶ The contemporary school system reflects this focus on people and

³⁴ Dora. Conversation. 16-04-2011.

³⁵ Dora. Interview. 11-04-2011.

³⁶ Roy Cayetano. Interview. 07-04-2011.

events outside of Belize. Knowledge of linguistic and cultural heritage should therefore come from the parents, but as paragraph 3.3. will show they are not always around to impart this cultural capital.

Third, in a relatively short period of time, globalisation brought an influx of western products, people and technology to Belize referred to by Dora as 'nonsense'. Every day, at around seven o'clock, Dora switches on her tiny television set. She watches *Lingo* or *Deal or no Deal* until she gets so sleepy her eyes close themselves automatically. "I like watching the TV., he is my company at night"³⁷, she said to me one day. Dora is not the only one who likes to watch television. Belize owns fifteen television stations that take a direct feed from satellites and in Dangriga almost everyone has access to cable networks broadcasting the full range of American stations. Richard Wilk, who has done extensive ethnographic research in Belize notes, "American television programming has become a central fact of Belizean daily life" (1994:95).

In products and people, Belize is strongly connected to the United States. All my interlocutors have family members living in the United States and/or frequently visits the States themselves. The younger generation Belizeans are strongly influenced by this 'westernization'. To blend in, young Garinagu rather speak English (Creole) than Garifuna. Youths feel talking Garifuna distances them from the aspired western culture and makes them vulnerable to discrimination –as explained above, negative stereotypes about Garinagu are widespread throughout Belize. Bonner (2001) refers to the refusal of Garifuna youth to speak Garifuna as 'language shame'. The National Garifuna Council (NGC 2011) recognizes this effect when they note that:

(...) there is currently an identity crisis among the young Garifuna people most of whom cannot speak, let alone read and write, their own language, and do not know where they came from or who they are. They, therefore, become vulnerable to the lure of the North and the subtle messages they see on the television screens featuring persons who look like them and, in their misguided minds, must somehow be them.

This, according to the NGC, is the result of the language, history and culture not being properly taught in schools and at home. During my fieldwork I noticed that the Garinagu who did not speak Garifuna were indeed young people with family overseas. A comment I heard often was "I understand it, but I cannot speak it". Dora does not believe you can understand a language but not speak it: "Them excuses. It is a racial business, between Creole and Garifuna. They pretend in Belize we live as one happy family of ethnic groups, but this is not true."³⁸ Old stereotypes and new influences thus result in the language not being passed on to next generations. Many young parents now do not know how to speak Garifuna, making the streets of Dangriga void of its rhythmic sounds.

³⁷ Dora. Conversation. 16-04-2011.

³⁸ Dora. Conversation. 11-03-2011.

3.2. The culture in agriculture

“If you want to know me you need to know I am a farm lady”, Dora told me at five a.m. in the morning while she was ferociously getting rid of stubborn grass growing in her sandy garden. Wiping some sweat of her forehead, she continued:

My grandfather owned two farms. We would go there every morning before school starts. It is three miles away, so they carried us, me and my cousin David. We pick it up and then go and sell. We have to work, you don't go: no food! No breakfast if you don't work. I was around seventeen years old at this time, because I already had a boyfriend. There was coconut, plantain, yam and cane at the farm. I am a farm lady. My mother taught me to get up early and go to work. This is why I get up early still today, it is from my mom who taught me. In those days, everybody had a farm. Nearly all of the people. These children now don't care about farms. But I like it, I like work. I had my place at the farm, with coco and plantain and cassava. We had cassava, this big! We grate it and strain it. We make starch out of it and go and sell it at Belize City. I'm not like those children at that time. They cares about money alone. Me not. The money I make I give to my mother. Anything I need she buys and I have to wear it. It wasn't all with this money and clothing, not with our people. Those children are terrible.³⁹

In contemporary urbanized Dangriga, subsistence farming is no longer enough to sustain one's family and the majority of Garinagu are now employed as wage workers. Exercising reciprocity as part of Garifunaduáü becomes more difficult in this setting. As Roy Cayetano explained to me on the veranda of his colourful house in Dangriga:

Our spirituality and way of life are better to maintain in an agrarian society. Cassava symbolizes this unity and reciprocity. When you can provide yourself and your family and friends with the basic necessities without relying on the outside reciprocity is more easy.⁴⁰

However, today the conditions for farm work discourage greater interest in agriculture. Not only has working the land become more difficult due to poor, acidic soils, Dangriga's integration into the capitalist world economy results in the growing importance of money and wage dependency. In Roy's words “We are now carried in the wave of globalisation.”⁴¹ In addition, the Belizean economy is one with high unemployment and low wages. When working on the family farm became untenable, Dora started to work at citrus factory Pomona:

There were a lot of people working in Pomona, you had the day shift and the night shift. We shop there and we sleep there. A lot of Garinagu: I met my husband there. Not like these days. Those young ones

³⁹ Dora. Interview. 09-04-2011.

⁴⁰ Roy Cayetano. Interview. 07-04-2011.

⁴¹ Roy Cayetano. Interview. 07-04-2011.

don't want to work on the farms so they go. Like my sister went to the States in 2000. Then who works the roots? Not Garinagu I tell you.⁴²

Traditionally, Garinagu worked in the fishing industry and small-scale agriculture. As the citrus, banana and shrimp-farming industries (two of the so-called Belizean 'big three', the third one being sugar) rose in Dangriga, many Garifuna such as Dora started to work for companies like Pomona –a big citrus producer a few miles inland of Dangriga's coast. However, as a result of the influx of Spanish speaking immigrants from neighbouring countries Guatemala and Honduras combined with the exodus of Garifuna to the United States, the agrarian workforce is now largely made up of immigrants. The labour workforce in the citrus, banana and shrimp-farming industries is for 93% imported from Central America (SIB 2000). Taking a walk through downtown Dangriga, it became evident to me this process has not been limited to the farms: although Garinagu are the numerical majority, all of the roughly thirty-five supermarkets and convenience stores located in town are owned by Chinese businessmen. As the next paragraph will show, many Garinagu needed to migrate in search of a good livelihood.

3.3. Migratory flows

35

It was 1961. We were all sleeping in this house. Me, my mother and my two boys. One was four months old, the other one was one year. We didn't know, they didn't announce it. Then my grandfather in law came and knocked on the door, he knocked loud! 'What is wrong with you?!', he yelled, 'It's coming and it's coming with water!'⁴³

With a mixture of excitement and fear still glistening in her eyes, Dora starts to tell me about the event that will leave Dangriga with a permanent scar and spur the migration of hundreds to the United States: the arrival of hurricane Hattie on Halloween in 1961. Luckily, everyone in her family survived this force of nature. Pointing to a nearby house she continues: "We took shelter in that concrete one over there. From there we saw our house rocking like a hammock. And then the roof, it drops down and winds throw it off, the top of the house was clean gone."⁴⁴

This was the fate of many houses in Dangriga. When the survivors returned to the piles of wood that used to be their homes and the muddy mess that was once a fertile farmland, many lifted their heels and headed to the urban areas of the United States. Now, Dora has many family members living in 'the States', among them her sister. Six years ago, she went to visit for half a year:

⁴² Dora. Interview. 09-04-2011.

⁴³ Dora. Interview. 01-04-2011.

⁴⁴ Dora. Interview. 01-04-2011.

It was a vacation, [my son] fix up the paper for me. I gone to California, to see my sister in law. And I love it there! People are really nice you know, a lot of people are there like you. And they treat me good. (...) We visited all relatives in the States. I didn't want to come home! If I would have the money, I will go again.⁴⁵

Recent years witnessed a dramatic change in demographic compilation of Dangriga. The main drive behind this change are two migratory flows in different directions: an influx of immigrants and an exodus of Garinagu. Whereas the Afro-Belizeans used to be a majority in Belize when Dora was a teenager in the late forties, the percentage of Garinagu and Creole in Stann Creek District has radically dropped to a mere 31% of the population (SIB 2000). While the number of immigrants, mostly from Central American countries and China, increased to 14.8% of the Belizean population (SIB 2000), O'Conner (1998) estimates that 50% of the Garifuna population has migrated to the United States in search for economic and educational opportunities. Shop owner Dean has travelled to the United States several times, his stays ranging from a few years to one week. He explains why Garinagu now move away from Dangriga:

The reason why people move now is all about the money. Everything you make when you live there gets doubled, right? If I was to make a 100 U.S., it would be 200 Belize here. So that is what you think of when you go. A lot of people take jobs they wouldn't take here, because the pay is better. Such as housekeeping. I have relatives living in every state, I can't even count them if you ask me. They are all from Dangriga. Many are now in the army, the navy, the marines or the air force. Many cousins are there now.⁴⁶

Most migrants are between the ages of twenty and thirty-four (SIB 2000). This trend is deeply felt in Dangriga: my interlocutors believe the exodus has left an inedible impact on Garifuna culture in their town. Glenn Moralez –an intelligent and witty owner of an art gallery– expresses that “It is like the HIV/AIDS disease in Africa, it takes away the young strong working people with the knowledge and brains. This destroys the fabric of a culture (...).”⁴⁷

Dangriga thus suffers from a brain drain, whereby not only economic capital is drizzling away, but also social and cultural capital as family structures are drastically altered causing cultural knowledge not to be passed on to future generations. The fact that many young adults and children do not speak Garifuna is also connected to the continuing exodus of Garinagu to the United States: as parents moved, they left their children without passing on cultural heritage or instilling a sense of ethnic identity.

⁴⁵ Dora. Interview. 01-04-2011.

⁴⁶ Dean. Interview. 31-03-2011.

⁴⁷ Glenn Moralez. Interview. 08-03-2011.

It appears this cultural void is being filled with something else: every month a large delivery truck makes its rounds through Dangriga. Wherever he pulls over, people receive clothing, shoes, and electronics from their relatives abroad. Dean explains the excitement he felt when receiving items from America: “We got all kinds of new stuff, for school and your footwear. You wanted the American look.”⁴⁸ The ones who stay in Dangriga receive remittances from their generous relatives sending the ‘American look’. The flows of migrants thus also sparked flows of money and objects. This ‘Americanizing’ is perceived as ‘Creolizing’, for the Creoles are believed to be closer to western culture. Garinagu are, according to Marge, “Becoming more like Creole and losing their culture”.⁴⁹

In conclusion

The loss of unity, the breaking up of Garifunaduáü, is the main factor my interlocutors in Dangriga identify as detrimental to the continuation of Garifuna ethnic identity. This unity is being challenged by the sweeping force of globalisation. This materializes into migratory flows, the loss of traditional structures of communal work, and the decreasing use of Garifuna language as the community is being sucked into a capitalist cash economy where there is not much cash to be made. Besides economic remittances, the direct connection to the U.S. brings about cultural remittances such as ideas through television, radio, movies and material goods send home contributing to the perceived ‘westernization’ of the Garifuna community. Although migration was no new phenomenon to the Garinagu, hurricane Hattie sparked such a large outflow it has created a vicious cycle which effects still reverberate through Dangriga. Globalisation has furthermore decreased the time lag that once existed between Belize and the United States. Flows of people, objects and ideas challenge pre-existing structures of life in Dangriga, altering the way people relate to themselves and to others.

However, not everyone believes Garifuna culture to be extinguished or ‘unsalvageable’. I found that both publicly and privately, elements of Garifuna ethnic identity remain entrenched in the discourse and practice of the Garinagu community in Dangriga. In chapter four and five I will elaborate on these discourses and practices.

⁴⁸ Dean. Interview. 31-03-2011.

⁴⁹ Marge Frederick. Conversation. 15-03-2011.

Chapter 4



Negotiating authenticity

Concluding a weekday in early March 2011, the sun has begun its descent into the western mountains of Belize, colouring the air with soft amber tones. The pointy, tall Chülühadiwa Garinagu Monument – symbolizing and celebrating the arrival, survival and prosperity of the Belizean Garinagu– casts a small strip of shadow over the fourteen acres of land it shares with the Gulsili primary school and the Gulsili Garifuna Museum. The sound of a whistle pierces the air, signalling the end of another school day for the approximately hundred children attending the only school in Dangriga where Garifuna is part of the curriculum. As a humid breeze carries the salty scent of the Caribbean sea, a dust devil picks up some swaying plastic bags and a ripped piece of paper, scaring off a dog. This causes hilarity among the handful of schoolchildren who are hurdled together on the shadowy steps at the foot of the monument. Dressed in uniforms resembling a traditional Garifuna outfit in the colours of the Garifuna flag –yellow, white and black– I can imagine they need some shelter from the still scorching sun. While Alice and I lean against the thick concrete entrance gate to the museum and watch the activities unfold, I muse how different this spot in Dangriga must have looked, was it not for the efforts of the National Garifuna Council.

38

Indeed, the National Garifuna Council (NGC) plays a pivotal role in the “continuing and preserving of Garifuna culture”⁵⁰, as Alice calls it, thereby counteracting the perceived detrimental impact of globalisation. In this chapter, I examine the strategies used by the NGC to claim a certain version of being-Garifuna through the construction and commercialisation of Garifuna identity by means of a museum, a school, the celebration of Garifuna Settlement Day and UNESCO candidacy. I show how the perceived disappearance of culture in Dangriga is locally being contested by appropriating certain places within the town as distinctively Garifuna. These claims on place and time serve to assign historical importance to the Garifuna as a distinct ethnic group and the celebration of Garifuna Settlement Day stresses how the continuity of this culture is a responsibility of all Belizeans, not only of Garifuna. The UNESCO proclamation of Garifuna culture as Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity then locates the Garifuna on the global stage as it stretches the responsibility of preservation to all humanity. Within all levels, negotiations are taking place in the construction of Garifuna identity.

⁵⁰ Alice Nigels. Conversation. 10-04-2011

4.1. The Chülühadiwa Garifuna Monument Park

Nearly all activities revolving around Garifuna culture in Belize are initiated by the NGC. For, as Shannon says, “The NGC controls what is happening in the area of cultural activities, people are not taking their own initiatives”.⁵¹ The members of the NGC are therefore seen as cultural revivalists and leaders of the Belizean Garifuna community. The current president of the NGC, Ernest Castro, states that the purpose of the NGC is “to promote Garifuna culture. Its retrieval, development and prolongation.”⁵² At the local level, this purpose mainly crystallizes into the Chülühadiwa Garifuna Monument Park on the outskirts of Dangriga, where the Gulisi Primary School, the Gulisi Garifuna Museum and the Chülühadiwa monument are located. For my purposes here I will first discuss the museum as an effort to transmit Garifuna history and second the school within the context of revitalizing language.

When I came across board member Roy Cayetano at the monument grounds one day, I asked him about the purpose of the museum and for whom it was intended. He answered by recounting the narrative of Gulisi, daughter of the legendary chief Joseph Chatoyer –who is, as described in chapter two, remembered for his courage in resisting the British forces on St. Vincent. As the story goes, Gulisi was only thirteen years old when her father died. She nevertheless survived the brutal conditions of the Garifuna exile to Roatan and eventually migrated to Belize. Here, she settled with her husband and thirteen sons. She was so proud of her ancestry, that she was determined to transmit her history and culture to her children. To this end, she told the story of Garifuna hardship, arrival and survival over and over again. In Roy’s words:

She would wake up all her children to tell the story and her children would tell it to their children and so on and on. Gulisi transmitted information, she shared the Garifuna story with other people. This is what we want with the museum, transmit and share. Both for tourists and Garinagu.⁵³

Thus in a way, with the museum the NGC tries to fill the ‘cultural void’ young Garinagu migrants left when they headed for the United States without first educating their children about Garifuna history and culture. The Gulisi Garifuna museum opened for public on November 18, 2004 and presents an account of Garifuna history and culture through several exhibits dedicated to music, spirituality, clothing, community, livelihoods, T.V. Ramos, Gulisi, cooking and artefacts, migrations, and a historical time line. The version of Garifuna history and culture as interpreted by the NGC is portrayed as a factual account through the official status associated with museums, thereby veiling its constructed authenticity. In this sense, museums function as “theatres of memory” (Till 2001, in

⁵¹ Dana Joseph. Interview. 30-03-2011

⁵² Ernest Castro. Conversation 05-03-2011.

⁵³ Roy Cayetano. Conversation. 30-03-2011.

Wilcox 2006:122). Displayed in a museum, an interpretation of artefacts and narratives gains a certain authority over other versions, thereby shaping the social memory of Garinagu in Belize and presenting a unified image of Garifuna culture to others. For example, the NGC's focus on the Amerindian (and thus indigenous) element of Garifuna identity becomes articulated in the selection of artefacts and stories featured in the Gulisi museum: the migrations section, for example, focuses more on Amerindian journeys than the African one. The performance, retrieval and display of culture are indeed central to issues of indigenous identity and recognition.

However, almost none of the Dangrigan Garifuna I spoke to had personally visited the museum. During my two months of 'hanging out exercises' I witnessed few occasions on which Garinagu visited the museum. A memorable one was when a construction worker, who was building the second part of the Gulisi Primary School, wandered over during his break. This seventeen-year-old from the nearby village of Hopkins was not at all pleased with the content of the museum. "All this you see is not from around here", he confided to me, "not Dangriga or Hopkins. It's not what is real."⁵⁴ In response to my surprised look, he explained that he felt that what was displayed at the museum did not correspond to the stories he heard growing up, reflecting the existence of different interpretations of Garifuna history in the community. Schisms in interpretations even led to the development of other organizations representing Garinagu. One of them is the World Garifuna Organization (WGO), founded in 2000 by Theodore Aranda, which stresses that the underdevelopment and poverty facing Garinagu are similar to conditions in other black societies; Garinagu should therefore align themselves with other blacks (Izgard 2005:190). In contrast to the NGC, the WGO discourse thus focuses on being black and belonging to the African diaspora (Aranda 2011).

Undeniably, managing the representation of Garifuna identity comes down to who controls the access to the resources of the commoditization of Garifuna identity and who has the right, or legitimacy, to define what can be seen as authentic. Although people do not always agree with the version presented by the NGC, they do stress their status as 'leaders of Garifuna'. This, unlike the WGO⁵⁵, provides the NGC with enough legitimacy to claim they represent Garinagu throughout Belize. This is why I mainly focused on the NGC in the course of my research.

Another important strategy employed by the NGC is their effort to revitalize Garifuna language through institutionalized means, such as schooling because "the language is the primary vehicle for the transmission of the culture" (NGC 2011). According to several Garinagu I spoke to, the perceived loss of their linguistic capital needs to be revived through of upbringing and education. In their

⁵⁴ Conversation at museum grounds. 08-04-2011.

⁵⁵ The leader of the WGO, Theodore Aranda, is not a popular figure among the Garinagu of Dangriga due to schandals and lack of community support during his creation of the Chülühadiwa monument, which he founded in his own honour.

justification for candidature for an UNESCO proclamation, to which I return below, the NGC (2011) writes:

Story telling is an art that unfortunately is not taught and is not being learnt by younger folk who are becoming less and less competent in the language (...) In this climate, it is imperative that the National Garifuna Council takes the lead in working out interventions aimed at arresting the loss of the language and other elements of the culture.

The NGC has taken up the struggle for the recognition of Garifuna history and the promotion of Garifuna language through bilingual education. The Gulisi Primary school, established on September 11 2007, illustrates these efforts of ensuring the continuity of language and history as distinct markers of cultural identity. The curriculum of Garifuna history, songs and dances, together with the colourful school outfits described earlier, furthermore present strong symbols of the 'Garifuna nation' (Anderson 1983).

Moreover, there have been several projects on high schools where students could learn Garifuna, but these projects were soon terminated due to a lack of interest.⁵⁶ This reveals that not everyone in the community is enthusiastic about the efforts of the NGC on the area of language. Glenn for example states that:

The NGC is making efforts to teach Garifuna to the kids at school. But this is merely the theoretics of culture. The food is still not being planted, and the fish is not being caught. The children who do learn Garifuna are thus not well rounded, they only get the language but no other aspects.⁵⁷

His view reflects an emphasis on other elements of Garifuna culture, what he would probably call the practical elements such as agriculture (recount the importance of cassava) and fishing. However, as evident from the section on language in chapter three, most people I spoke to *do* underscore the importance of language to Garifunaduáü and support efforts to revitalize this language.

4.2. Garifuna Settlement Day

"The culture is not here in Dangriga every day. Our leaders [the NGC] concentrate mainly on one day, on the nineteenth of November. Then everyone is into the culture,"⁵⁸ Shannon replied to my observation that everyone seemed to connect Garifuna culture to a certain time, namely Garifuna Settlement Day. One of the primary tasks of the NGC is the organization of Garifuna Settlement Day. Founded by T.V. Ramos, this day is of great significance to my interlocutors, many of whom confided that "on the nineteenth, the culture is *really* on". Thousands of Garinagu from Belize, Honduras,

⁵⁶ Anthony Sabal. Conversation. 30-03-2011.

⁵⁷ Glenn Morales. Conversation. 30-03-2011.

⁵⁸ Shannon Laurenzo. Conversation. 30-03-2011.

Guatemala and the United States travel to Dangriga to take part in this grand celebration of the arrival of Garinagu in Dangriga and stress their ethnic identity through the explicit performance of culture. During this day, I was told several times, a parade of boats –adorned with Garifuna flags and filled with drummers playing punta and people carrying traditional artefacts such as fishing nets or utensils for the preparation of cassava– arrives on Dangriga’s shore. A procession then leads to the Catholic Church where a mass is held in Garifuna. The official part of the day comprises of ‘Garifuna cultural revivalists’ speaking on the importance of maintaining Garifuna culture (Roessingh 2004:151). And finally, and for many people most importantly, the party continues throughout the night.

Izgard (2005:185) describes ‘the nineteenth’, as locals call it, as an identity ritual which emphasizes once again how long the Garinagu have been in Belize and simultaneously legitimizes ethnic identity. The importance of this day should in his view be linked to the diasporic history and resulting place-making of the Garinagu:

The establishment in what today is their territory constitutes a transcendental episode and a reference point around which revolves the affirmation of a feeling of belonging to the community (Izgard 2005:186).

42 Celebrating Garifuna Settlement Day thus provides the community with a sense of rootedness in a certain place, which enhances their feeling of unity. Roessingh (2004:151-152) makes a similar point, referring to the celebration as “a collective means of expression of identity”.

That I was researching Garifuna identity, but not attending Settlement Day, struck my interlocutors as extremely odd and they pitied me for not being able to attend the celebration before writing my ‘book’. Where Izgard (2005) and Roessingh (2004) refer to feelings of belonging and collectivity, my interlocutors mention that Garifunaduáü is strongest on this day. Marge told me that, “We wear our dresses and dance punta, eat the hudut and talk Garifuna all day. We’re one together then and all peoples in Belize sees all our culture.”⁵⁹ This remark illustrates first what constitutes strong Garifunaduáü and second how Garifuna Settlement Day serves to establish a place for Garinagu on the national stage. Through this day, Garinagu assert an identity within the national framework of the Belizean society and display what differentiates them from other Belizeans, most notably the Creole population. Yet this differentiation at the national level happens within NGC rhetoric of cultural survival, pride and indigeneity. In this sense Garifuna Settlement Day represents, to speak with Izgard (2005:188) again, the political activation of the components of Garifuna heritage intended to assert uniqueness as an indigenous population within Belize.

⁵⁹ Marge Frederick. Conversation. 09-03-2011.

4.3. Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity

In May 2001 Garifuna language, dance and music were awarded the distinction of Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity, issued by the United Nations Organization for Education, Science and Culture (UNESCO). Izgard (2005:187) notes that the UNESCO candidacy shows a reawakening in the consciousness of the NGC of the “necessity in a globalized world (...) to use the necessary channels for the survival of Garifuna uniqueness.” Again, this uniqueness is voiced through the emphasis on the Amerindian elements of Garifuna culture. In the justification for candidature, the NGC (2011) writes:

Because it was on the West Indian island of St. Vincent that the Garifuna came into existence as an identifiable group, the Garifuna people of Belize consider themselves, and are generally acknowledged, indigenous to the Circum-Caribbean region. In addition, this group of people have traditionally identified more with their Amerindian ancestry than with their African origins (...).

Comaroff and Comaroff (2009:30) can provide an explanation as to why indigeneity is important in this context. They describe how the legitimacy of ‘external custodians of culture’, in this case the Western colonizers, came into question during decolonization. This gained more momentum with the emergence of global nongovernmental organizations carrying ideologies of human rights and intellectual property (Comaroff & Comaroff 2009:30). Marks of difference, they argue, became valuable with the rise of increasingly heterogeneous nation-states and the upsurge of a global politics of identity. Hence an interest ensued for indigeneity, intellectual property law and intangible cultural heritage as proposed by UNESCO. With the transition of the world to a more global place, politics of identity increased in significance and ‘indigenous identity’ was transported into the legal domain. Joseph Palacio (2005:119) notes that “it was indigeneity and its almost unconscious preservation that made the Garifuna win the Proclamation.”

The UNESCO distinction articulates the concern for promoting and preserving Garifuna culture on a global level and calls for international solidarity in guarding cultural diversity. However, this is hardly felt at the local level. When I asked Mali what she thought of this distinction, she threw me a quizzical look and answered with “What are you talkin’ about girl? The what of which humanity?”. After providing some context for my question, Mali said she vaguely remembered something. “But”, she added, “this is some list with the Taj Mahal also on it, right? What use is a list to us, I ask. Nothing if you ask me.”⁶⁰ The proclamation has indeed not led to any benefits in the form of financing or fundraising (Cayetano & Cayetano 2005:249) and has even led some locals to comment that:

⁶⁰ Mali. Conversation. 12-04-2011.

What they do at the NGC is mostly self-gain and nepotism. They are living of the indigenous race. Because this is what happens within indigenous organizations, they apply and get monies and grants. But what do you see in the community? Nothing. I do not see any results, there are no benefits.⁶¹

Nevertheless, there is a sense of pride in that the world heritage list converts local cultural elements into a global responsibility, the heritage of humanity. The candidacy and eventual proclamation thus represent an important symbolic action from the NGC in their quest for safeguarding Garifuna culture. As Roy Cayetano mentioned during an interview, “now it is not only our job to preserve Garifuna culture. It is the job of all humanity.”⁶²

In conclusion

Museums, school curricula and public performances Garifuna history do not preserve a fixed history, but engage in social constructions in the context of the present, and always in close association with those in power (Osborne 2001). The images and narratives of what constitutes Garifunaduú as presented by the NGC draw members of the community together through the discourse of identity, but are simultaneously contested and negotiated among the Garinagu as not everyone accepts these representations. By drawing on certain ‘authentic’ Garifuna practices, foods, music, language and religion, these elements of identity are reified and transformed into principal components of a (re)constructed heritage which is politically charged. The discourse and practices the NGC employs in counteracting the disappearance of culture strongly focuses on the Carib and Amerindian origins of the Garifuna in order to give more salience to the claim to indigenous peoplehood. Their strategies can be meaningfully divided into the local, national and global level wherein a consistent version of Garifuna identity is represented. But identities are always subject to inherent conflict, being continuously (re)constructed and (re)defined.

The next chapter examines the increased fragmented experience and manifestation of Garifuna identity more closely and shows in which way locals continue to express their ethnic identity and ascribe meaning to their globalized urban environment as Garinagu spirituality inscribes Dangriga’s landscape with Garifunaduú.

⁶¹ Glenn Morales. Interview. 13-03-2011.

⁶² Roy Cayetano. Interview. 07-04-2011.

Chapter 5



The geography of identity

Culture is now confined to certain given areas and certain given times. The values of the Garinagu are no longer present in Dangriga. By values I mean the food, the language etcetera. Like the entire culture is no longer there.⁶³

Brandon –a bright-eyed teacher at Dangriga’s high school and local historian of Hopkins village– answered to my question whether he thought Garifuna culture is disappearing. His reaction reflects how the perception of many Garinagu in Dangriga with regard to the presence of Garifuna culture is changing. Whereas they feel it was once a coherent whole, it is now becoming increasingly fragmented.

This chapter explains first how stressing certain ethnic elements in certain places and on certain times as described in chapter four makes identification as Garifuna more situational. I show how the commercialized aspects of Garifuna identity have contributed to a more fragmented experience and expression of Garifunaduáü. Garifuna ethnic identification becomes disjointed in time and place as it is stressed only in defined places within Belize, within Dangriga itself and on defined times. In the face of globalisation, Garifunaduáü does not disappear but becomes something which can be capitalized in efforts to turn Dangriga into a place of tourism. Nevertheless, whether the public places in Dangriga will eventually become charged with touristic versions of Garifuna identity or not, I contend the symbolic landscape of Dangriga is already replete with Garifunaduáü through practices and beliefs of spirituality.

5.1. Placing Garifunaduáü

During the first few days of my stay, people relentlessly maintained that Garifuna culture was not something that was present in Dangriga. If I wanted to study Garifuna culture, they said, I should pack my bags and go to the small village Hopkins. Within their statements, there was an implicit notion of hierarchy in the strength of Garifunaduáü related to place. This is also observed by Roessingh (2004) who points to an inter-village rivalry between Hopkins, Seine Bight and Dangriga. If this is the case, Garinagu in Dangriga have long accepted they are losing the race. The reasons for the perception of cultural loss are outlined in chapter three: processes of globalisation are most often felt to be the culprit. J. Palacio (2005:105) offers an interesting contribution by arguing that “the

⁶³ Brandon. Conversation. 16-04-2011.

Garifuna struggle for cultural survival takes place within different cultural spaces and often simultaneously". He identifies three cultural spaces: Garifuna home villages, urban areas and the global sphere. This is comparable to the distinction made in chapter five on the strategies of the NGC and the different levels in which they are employed.

Important first is the transition from 'traditional village life' as Garinagu perceive it to 'modern city life'. J. Palacio (2005:120) argues that cultural dynamism in urban Garifuna communities, such as Dangriga, decreases as the "incubator of indigenous Garifuna culture" is the village. He thus links survival of Garifuna culture directly to survival of the spatial dynamics of the village. Confronting my interlocutors with this statement, they fully agreed. A young man from Dangriga explained to me that:

There is a difference between a town and a village, you understand? In a town, like Dangriga, we is living the fast life. A lot of things are happening, keeping the kids busy. But down in Hopkins life is still slow.⁶⁴

Being from Hopkins thus makes one more Garifuna than being from Dangriga, even when in both cases the parents are Garifuna themselves.

In a paper on Canadian nationalism, Osborne (2001) examines the geography of identity. I propose that his approach is applicable to the ethnic identification of the Garinagu community in Dangriga. He argues that people's identification with a place is essential for their awareness of identity, or an "a-where-ness" (Osborne 2001:3). J. Palacio (2005) agrees when noting that physical space in the form of geography can be helpful in assessing how people assign cultural value to certain localities in order to (re)claim identity. Geography here is not merely an empty container, it is essential in strategies of cultural survival (Osborne 2001).

The processes of globalisation contribute to the experience of a new geography of ethnic identification. This shifting geography happens between Dangriga and other places, and between places within the town itself. Places within Dangriga are also being defined as explicitly Garifuna or non-Garifuna. In reaction to his vision that Garifuna culture is not around in Dangriga, I asked hotel owner Charlie where he sends his guests when they ask about the Garifuna. After all, the Lonely Planet advertises the town as the 'cultural capital' of the Garifuna. His answer is exemplary for the perception of many Garinagu:

When people ask me about Garifuna culture, I send them to two main spots. First the museum, and second Pen Cayetano's art gallery. Sometimes I send them to people who know a lot about the culture,

⁶⁴ Conversation. 08-03-2011.

such as Phyllis Cayetano or Gwen Nunez. But those are the main things, the museum and Pen. Most of the time people come here for culture, but there is no culture in Dangriga.⁶⁵

Charlie identifies certain places in Dangriga as specifically related to Garifuna culture, such as the museum and the art gallery owned by Pen Cayetano but simultaneously contends there is no culture in Dangriga. He feels that Garifuna culture is a localized, isolated phenomenon inscribed only in few parts of the town's topography. As Harvey (1990) writes, the assignment of places within a city indicates hierarchies, appropriate activities and reflects representations of identity. Geographers call a culturally loaded geography a landscape (Osborne 2001). These landscapes are inscribed with both the dominant ethnicity as well as a multiplicity of other ethnicities and identities. In Dangriga, where Garinagu are in majority, the landscape is only partially filled with explicit representations of Garifuna identity whereas the language and practices of Creoles and 'Spanish' dominate the economic and political daily life in the town. "You see, Garifuna is not on the streets", Alice told me during a stroll down Dangriga's main road, "If I speak Garifuna in the supermarket they would not understand. Look this burrito shack. If I want hüdüt, where can I get this?"⁶⁶ Garifunaduáü is still present she feels, but some elements of Garifuna identity are no longer entwined within Dangriga's landscape.

The strategies of the NGC involve the appropriation of pieces of land with monument sites and a museum which construct and (re)negotiate Garifuna identity and inscribe this identity on specific places. Wilcox (2006:92) notes that it is through this appropriation of space (and through Garifuna Settlement Day also time) within the backdrop of globalisation that the Garinagu try to gain agency in marking particular locations as distinctly Garifuna. This leads Alicia, and many others with her, to refer to places in Dangriga where and when 'culture is on' and where and when 'culture is off'. The community is not pleased with this situational presence of Garifuna culture: I noticed a strong urge among people to charge the landscape (again) with a more integrated representation of their identity. This urge is most clearly expressed in the discourse of tourism to which I turn below.

5.2. The role of tourism

In the context of tourism in Dangriga, the three social fields as described by J. Palacio (2005) merge together as village ideals –being Garifuna– meet global flows –tourists– at Dangriga's urban centre. Both locals and the NGC feel transforming Dangriga into a place of tourism will be beneficial for preserving Garifuna culture. The tourist industry in Dangriga is still fairly underdeveloped, as the town mostly functions as a hop-off point to the cayes or the inlands. Few tourists consider Dangriga a destination and travel with the purpose to experience Garifuna culture. So Dangriga is not a main tourist destination, but many locals believe it could be. Several hotel owners expressed their

⁶⁵ Charlie. Interview. 09-03-2011.

⁶⁶ Alice Nigels. Conversation. 03-03-2011.

intention of developing a 'cultural place' on the roof of their establishment because they felt that there is nothing happening throughout the year.⁶⁷ Or as Shannon puts it: "It is a pity we don't capitalize on it. Culture is a natural resource, it can generate income."⁶⁸ Garifuna culture is thus seen in some way as having the potential to spur economic development by being a quality, a resource, people 'have'.

By essentializing Garifuna culture to a resource it becomes a strategic tool which can be used to obtain other goals, such as economic prosperity. Tourism will, according to many of my interlocutors, inspire the Garinagu of Dangriga to act upon their Garifunaduáü which will eventually result in "(...) the street trembling with the sound of our drums, the air filled with smells from our food and the sea full of tourists enjoying the culture of Dangriga"⁶⁹ as Mali so eloquently put it. The flow of tourists would furthermore contribute to the continuity of Garifuna culture as it would be something measurably valuable: my interlocutors feel that pride would be instilled again into the youths when they would notice how their culture is worth visiting. A steady tourist interest would additionally attract government funding. These funds can be used for Garifuna heritage and economic aid. Thus Garifunaduáü is directly connected to the economic revenues from tourism. In effect, the 'traditional, community-based, reciprocal Garifunaduáü' becomes revitalized in cadence with global, capitalist, flows of people and money. The same forces which locals perceive as detrimental to the continuation of Garifuna culture can simultaneously, when they become locally controlled, 'save' it by re-introducing elements of Garifuna culture into Dangriga's landscape.

Nevertheless, tourism development is also believed to be a perilous enterprise as it entails the danger of exploitation. Shannon explains:

Placencia [southern tourist town] is sold, owned by outsiders. They have more money (...) they [in Placencia] are economically Garifuna. It is a source of income for them. By exploitation I mean people coming in and taking culture, they take it somewhere else and make movies and change culture.⁷⁰

Tourism can thus also be a dangerous strategy with the possibility of culture being 'taken' to another place. A place where it according to Shannon does not belong, as it becomes changed there. My interlocutors thus feel that Dangriga is in need of more overt expressions of Garifuna identity, as to attract tourists and save the culture. But this development should be locally controlled to avoid becoming 'economically Garifuna'. However, as is evident from the words of Shannon and Charlie, most people in Dangriga today do *not* capitalize on their ethnic identity and tourism is no big business in the small seaside town. The major exception is Garifuna Settlement Day, when the

⁶⁷ Charlie. Interview. 09-03-2011.

⁶⁸ Shannon Laurenzo. Interview. 02-03-2011.

⁶⁹ Mali. Conversation. Conversation. 06-03-2011.

⁷⁰ Shannon Laurenzo. Interview. 02-03-2011.

streets of Dangriga are replete with the 'showcase elements' of Garifuna identity (Roessingh & Bras 2003).

But there is one element which does not feature in the discourse of cultural loss as something in need of saving through showcasing: spirituality. During my fieldwork I observed spirituality to be a remaining connecting feature of Garifuna identity, contributing strongly to feelings of Garifunaduáü. In the next section, I show how the 'cultural voids' caused by globalisation in Dangriga's landscape are today being filled through practices and beliefs of spirituality.

5.3. Spirituality

At the end of March 2011, incidences of burglary in Dangriga rose significantly. For instance, one of the wealthy members of the community was robbed while she was sleeping in her house. This and other incidences were the talk of the town; people were scared and felt unsafe. In these conversations, one element kept recurring: the fact that the thieves were able to clean out the house with the owner vast asleep. This was only possible, according to my interlocutors, due to a special spray the thieves carried. This spray was *obeah*, magical, and made you sleep so deep you could not hear a thing. Asking Dora about this, she confided her house was safe. She had taken precautions to make sure the spray did not work in her house. In response to my puzzled look, she commenced to point out herbs in her yard of which the combination had protective power. I soon discovered that people protect themselves not only from humans, but also from spirits. Some people always wear their t-shirts inside out; when they come home around twelve o'clock they walk in backwards; and gloves of garlic hang above the front door or a thin line of salt adorns the windows. I was told these measures were taken to make sure that the thousands of spirits roaming Dangriga's streets will not enter the house. One evening, Marge's voice dropped to a whisper when she told me:

Out there, there are many many spirits together with our ancestors. They are on the streets. None of the spirits are good. You can wear a bodyguard as protection under your clothes, or a silver ring with herbs inside or a cross from Jesus. This protects you from all kinds of spirits. The ancestors are different, they protect you and warn you from evil. When it is bad we go to the *buyai* [spiritual leader]. Everyone does.⁷¹

These daily dealings with spirituality and the mystic framework in which mundane, scary or unexplainable events are placed show how spirituality as an element of Garifunaduáü continuously permeates the symbolic landscape of Dangriga. The strategies of cultural survival proposed by the NGC are necessarily public and do not need to be supported by all Garinagu, but these individual expressions of identity can show individual variation while merging into the grand scheme of

⁷¹ Marge Frederick. Conversation. 10-03-2011.

Garifuna spirituality, contributing to the continuation of Garifunaduáü. Roessingh (2004:203) notes that "(...) one of the most fundamental characteristics is a group's own traditional religious system. After all, this domain remains under the control of the ethnic group itself". By charging Dangriga's streets with the presence of spirits and the ghost of their ancestors, Garinagu reclaim this place as their own. The material world becomes imbued with symbolically-loaded sites and events which establish and maintain the connection between past, present and future, thereby providing cultural continuity.

The younger generation is however more reluctant to engage in Garifuna spiritism. Prejudice against Garinagu is often based on what others, both nervously and mockingly, call 'their voodoo'. As famous as Garifuna dance and music is in Belize, as notorious is their spirituality. Nonetheless, most people maintained it is an important part of being Garifuna. "The spirits", Alice once said to me, "are what belongs to my culture. I don't care what they say. This is who we are".⁷² Alice, and many others with her, thus continues to feel that spirituality is an important element of her identification as Garifuna.

Moreover, the most important ritual within Garifuna spirituality, the dügü, functions as a 'social glue' connecting family members with each other and with members of other families. As I explained in chapter three, during the dügü all members of the family must be present, even those who migrated to the United States. Because if not, according to Marge, "the spirit will find you no matter where you are and whip you"⁷³. Ms. Hale –an employee of Dangriga's town hall– voices the role of the dügü as follows:

Through the ancestors, unity takes place. The rituals binds us as a people. For example all family members must be present at the dügü. We eat together, we sing together, we pray together, we dance together and we laugh together. This is what binds us. The ancestors guide and protect us.⁷⁴

The ancestors are seen as a connection between the past, present and future, as a way to forge bonds between communities and maintain harmonious relationships among family members. Roessingh (2004:108) agrees when he writes that the value of the dügü is its commonality and as an expression of "collective identity of the ethnic group". During the principal ritual of the dügü, the Mali hymn, the unity of the Garinagu families becomes embodied in a sacred dance honoring the ancestors. Two interlocutors who expressed their reservations about spiritism both 'confessed' they attended dügüs if they were held within their families because of both "better be sure than sorry"⁷⁵ and the element of a reunion. Additionally, during dügü ceremonies the right to land is expressed

⁷² Alice Nigels. Conversation. 10-04-2011.

⁷³ Marge Frederick. Interview. 15-03-2011.

⁷⁴ Ms. Hale. Interview. 15-03-2011.

⁷⁵ Glenn Moralez. Conversation. 15-03-2011.

symbolically (Foster 1987, in Roessingh 2004:203), connecting spirituality to physical places. The *dügü* is thus the quintessential manifestation of Garifunaduáü and simultaneously expresses a claim to define a place as distinctly Garifuna.

In conclusion

Ethnic identification as Garifuna is formed and represented through public and private practices within a culturally defined space, or landscape. Some aspects of Garifuna culture which are prone to discrimination, such as spirituality, are downplayed in the public arena but continue to thrive privately. And qualities Garifuna are renowned for, such as their turbulent history and talent for drum making and music are emphasized in the ideas my interlocutors voice to actively present these to tourists. Thereby making tourism as part of globalisation processes, albeit not overtly present in Dangriga, an active force in the construction and negotiation of Garifuna ethnic identity in Belize. Today, the Garifuna community in Dangriga feels that in public expressions of identity being Garifuna is fragmented. The drumming, language, clothing and food associated with their culture and identity are not explicitly present in Dangriga. Only on certain places, such as the museum and the monument grounds, or certain times, such as Garifuna Settlement Day are these elements imprinted into Dangriga's landscape. However, spirituality presents an important ground on which Garifunaduáü is asserted and symbolic and physical space is appropriated as Garifuna. Through these practices and beliefs of spirituality, Garinagu reconnect with each other and perform their ethnic identity while constructing and consecrating a symbolic topography by manning Dangriga's dusty roads with the spirit of their ancestors.

Conclusion



Deeply marked by a history characterized by colonialism, war and exile, the Garinagu take enormous pride in, but simultaneously fear for, their cultural resilience. In *The regrettable plight of Garifuna*, Fabian Cayetano emphasized the strength his ancestors displayed on St. Vincent while fighting the colonial powers and the hardship they had to endure after they were deported. This survival ‘myth’ (cf. Osborne 2001) provides a map for my interlocutors by which they navigate through the past and the present. Politically grounded, the map envisioned today is an attempt to achieve certain ethnic goals in the Belizean multi-ethnic society. As I have argued, Garifuna ethnicity in Belize is negotiated within the dynamics of boundary-creation and struggles over resources. Garinagu assert differentiation from Creoles on the basis of their unique heritage and culture, and ‘being Garifuna’ crystallizes into Garifunaduáü, a complex notion of reciprocity, unity and embodiment.

Dangriga, the cultural capital of the Garinagu, is fully enmeshed in the waves of globalisation. Migratory flows, the loss of traditional structures of communal work, and the decreasing use of Garifuna language all contribute to the feeling that Garifunaduáü is becoming increasingly fragmented –hence causing a blurring of boundaries. Reciprocal structures are shattered and feelings of communality decrease as families emigrate and money replaces trade in goods. The dislocation from place, argues Osborne (2001:6), erodes the spiritual and material connections between people. This perceived cultural loss needs to be battled because it touches upon fundamental issues of identity within the context of a multi-ethnic society. As Fabian rhymes, they will not be able to pass as European, Mulatto or Amerindian. If you are not Garifuna, then who are you?

The NGC publicly contests the disappearance of culture by promoting their Amerindian version of Garifuna identity on the local, national and global level. More or less successful, these strategies reify elements of ethnicity into principal components of a (re)constructed heritage which is politically charged. The community members in Dangriga are, however, not passively listening to the story as told by the NGC. My interlocutors navigate through the culturally defined landscape of Garifunaduáü as presented by the NGC, and simultaneously –through tourism and spirituality– narrate their own version of identity within a fragmented symbolic place.

The development of tourism now presents an important future strategy for community organizations and community members alike. For in an age of planetary consumerism, what better way of preserving culture is there than making it a popular commodity? The strategic benefits are evident: by managing tourist potential, political presence, autonomy and material circumstances can be enhanced (Chambers 2000, in Comaroff & Comaroff 2009:24). Furthermore through tourism, Garifuna culture might be felt as more firmly entrenched in Dangriga’s landscape. The same global

flows of people and money perceived by my interlocutors as detrimental to the continuation of Garifuna culture can simultaneously, when they become locally controlled, 'save' it.

Left out of my analysis is a closer, or 'thick' (cf. Geertz 2006) consideration of the role of Garifuna spirituality and its practices in daily life. To research something so profound and intimate such as dealings with passed loved ones and – often times secretive– protections against spiritual forces, requires a far greater depth of fieldwork over a more extended period of time. Whereas I could become a comfortable presence in daily life, a deeper level of trust takes time to establish. The role of Belizean nation-building and nationalism in relation to identification as Garifuna presents another interesting field of research on which I touch briefly, but did not research extensively. These larger issues present another important context in which the construction and negotiation of ethnicity takes place and could provide valuable insights into the relation between different types of identities in Belize. The study of migratory patterns in Belize and abroad through multi-sited ethnography (cf. Hannerz 2007) could finally contribute to a broader conceptualization of the geography of identity.

The chapters above have revealed how Garinagu in Dangriga narrate, navigate and negotiate their ethnic identity within the backdrop of globalisation processes. Responding to the impact of migratory flows, the loss of language and changing livelihoods, my interlocutors are negotiating a place for themselves within the Belizean multi-ethnic society by creatively (re)constructing history and heritage through the discourse of indigeneity, while simultaneously navigating and reclaiming Dangriga's streets by imbuing them with Garifuna spirituality. The way in which Garinagu handle ethnicity emphasizes how ethnic identity is always characterized by a multiplicity of identifications, exists only in relation to others, and continues to be entwined in meaning and salience to place. It has also become evident that history, as a narrative which can be told in many different versions, is actively refashioned, navigated and manipulated to address current social, political and economic needs in a dialectic of contest and consensus. Identity, as Orlove (2004:1) writes, extends back into the past and forward into the future. Through representations of cultural heritage, such as a museum or public holiday, powerful groups like the NGC authenticate and present their narrative of the contours and content of ethnicity as accurate truths –which in turn are endlessly being negotiated.

Ultimately, this ethnographic account of a Garifuna community in Dangriga has shown that only through motion can meanings become durable: to ensure the continuation of Garifuna culture, people, as agents, must necessarily remember and invent culture, reflect upon it and experiment with it, and pass these (re)creations on through conversations and debates (Hannerz 1997:5). The stories of ethnicity my interlocutors enact reveal their creativity, resourcefulness and resilience and profoundly accentuate the processual nature of culture.

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Appendix I



Reflections on fieldwork in Belize

When I chose the path of cultural anthropology three years ago, I could not imagine myself conducting fieldwork comparable to those established anthropologists whose ethnographies we analysed. It seemed an insurmountable task at the time, but also an extremely important one. For Geertz (2006) voices what I have often heard during lectures at Utrecht University: to understand anthropology, you need to understand what anthropologists do. And what anthropologists do, is ethnography. Now, I can say I have done ethnography. Do I understand anthropology? I would not be so bold as to state I completely know a discipline which continuously faces the problem of defining itself (cf. Moore and Sanders 2006). But by doing fieldwork, certain things become tangible were they were first intangible. Below, I briefly consider my fieldwork experience in Belize.

Ethnography, as I already stated in my introduction, profoundly touches upon the question “What does it mean to be human?”. I did not understand the full meaning behind this question until my experiences as a fieldworker. No longer sentences in a book, the anthropological discourse on culture, ethnicity, identity and globalisation became alive and embodied by the people around me who I was supposed to study. Inside university walls we theorize about all these ‘concepts’ and ‘constructs’, but in Belize I was surrounded by individuals living their own lives. In fact, my interlocutors were not only teaching me about what it means to be human in Dangriga, but also what it means to be human for me. Doing fieldwork is a rollercoaster of emotions: insecurity, frustration, happiness, desolation and delight all presented themselves to me.

I felt insecure at times when I doubted the legitimacy of my own presence in the field and what authority I had in interpreting these wonderful stories and ‘using’ them for my thesis. Was I trained enough to do this? Can anyone ever be trained enough to do this? I was developing my thesis out of this interaction, but what is in it for them? Furthermore, one of the questions that runs through this thesis, on the authority of representations, was also an issue also running through my fieldwork. Let me furnish an example of this insecurity and frustration. Renting one of the rooms in the house of one of my interlocutors, we cooked, chatted and watched television together. Until one day she stole something from my room. Aside from the interesting opportunity this event provided to visit a Garifuna religious specialist, it made me realise how Other I in fact was for her: a supposedly rich student from Europe. And basically, that this dichotomy was always present during my fieldwork: *I* would never be one of *them*. Realizing this made me feel lonely and I wondered if it was even possible to rightfully give an account of their lives. This could have led me into perpetual postmodern

considerations on authority, knowledge and the Other, but I was in the field so I needed a practical answer to these doubts.

What Sluka and Robben (2007) and Scheper-Hughes (2006) write about compassionate empathy as an approach turned out to be extremely useful in this context. What I most concretely felt during my research is that, as an anthropologist, you can really be either your own tool or your own obstacle: whenever I felt insecure or frustrated, I was able to pick myself up again by remembering I should just go outside and *listen*. Just by *being there*, walking, feeling, smelling and observing, I always ended up meeting new people or seeing one of my interlocutors. I might not have done everything perfect, but I did it to the best of my abilities. Rabinows' *Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco* (2007) explores the nature of fieldwork as an ethical experience and a quest, and I indeed experienced it as such.

As I started to fit more and more into the rhythm of Dangriga and the lives of its residents, increasingly felt 'at home' in my role as researcher. To the right, you see a picture of me in Garifuna outfit at the annual convention of the NGC. Although I looked rather colourful for my taste, I was happy one of my friends lend me an outfit as she insisted I needed to wear one in order to 'fit in'. Making notes in my traditional dress as the only non-Garifuna at the convention, I felt extremely anthropologically sound.



Figure 1 - Convention National Garifuna Council

Furthermore, I was genuinely happy when I was interviewing someone, or when I was engaged in conversations with Dora, Alice, Shannon, Glenn, Marge or anyone else in Dangriga willing to devote some of their time to me. I loved hearing people tell stories and I got the impression they loved telling them. Profiling myself as a student of Garifuna culture interested in their experiences and opinions, which I in effect was, opened many doors and, importantly, mouths. Some people perceived my listening ear and scribbling pen as a work of recognition, an outsider interested in what they had to say about themselves and the wider dynamics of their culture. While we were simultaneously delineating and experiencing how to be local in Dangriga, both me and my interlocutors had a good time.

