On Leaving and Joining Africanness Through Religion: The ‘Black Caribs’ Across Multiple Diasporic Horizons

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Abstract
Garifuna religion is derived from a confluence of Amerindian, African and European antecedents. For the Garifuna in Central America, the spatial focus of authentic religious practice has for over two centuries been that of their former homeland and site of ethnogenesis, the island of St Vincent. It is from St Vincent that the ancestors return, through spirit possession, to join with their living descendants in ritual events. During the last generation, about a third of the population migrated to the US, especially to New York City. This departure created a new diasporic horizon, as the Central American villages left behind now acquired their own aura of ancestral fidelity and religious power. Yet New-York-based Garifuna are now giving attention to the African components of their story of origin, to a degree that has not occurred in homeland villages of Honduras. This essay considers the notion of ‘leaving’ and ‘joining’ the African diaspora by examining religious components of Garifuna social formation on St Vincent, the deportation to Central America, and contemporary processes of Africanization being initiated in New York.

Keywords
Garifuna, Black Carib, religion, diaspora, migration

Introduction
Not all religions, or families of religions, are of the diasporic kind. Diasporic religions are comprised of practitioners who share references to sacralized spatial horizons, against which the group projects its ritual acts to evaluate their ‘fit’. Diasporic horizon is an apt phrase here because it connotes both a spatial edge of longing or nostalgia and a temporal edge of futurity and desire (Axel 2004: 27, 40). In the first sense of a spatial edge, a diasporic horizon is the ideal model that guides diasporic religious actors in their efforts to derive...
ritual efficacy from spatial authenticity. Certain remembered places are treated as sacred in the sense of being the source of deep and abiding identity, and religious power is acquired through the perceived fidelity of actions done here to the ones done there; there in the direction endowed with ‘mythical feeling value’ (Cassirer 1955: 85). The second edge, the temporal one of futurity and desire, suggests how diasporic affiliations map the authentic past always and inevitably in relation to a present situation. This is not necessarily in the narrowly instrumental sense of the ‘past as used for present purposes’, Halbwachs’s notion usefully critiqued by Rosalind Shaw (2002: 12); but, more modestly, how the memories of a distant site take shape in a material context that exerts ‘retroactive force’ on the past, and in a context of specific ideas of future redemption (Benjamin 1968: 254-255; Lefebvre 1991: 65).

And yet this opening gambit for some limited conceptual clarity is inadequate to describe flesh-and-blood people, who in everyday practice often conduct themselves in relation to multiple such horizons. Take the example of the Garifuna, formerly known by Europeans as the ‘Black Caribs’, to whose religious practices this essay devotes attention. Garifuna society derived from mixed Amerindian, African and European antecedents, and is now mainly located in some sixty villages along the Caribbean coast of Central America, the majority of which lie in Honduras. For the Garifuna in Central America, the spatial axis of authentic religious practice has for over two centuries been that of their former homeland and place of ethnogenesis, the small island of St Vincent. It is from St Vincent that the ancestors return, through spirit possession, to join with their living descendants in ritual events whose ‘spirit geography’ (Shaw 2002: 46-69) portrays the memory of origins on that island. During the last generation, however, with the local decline of available fruit-industry employment, about a third of the population (100,000 out of 300,000) has migrated abroad, especially to New York City.1 This leave-taking created a new diasporic horizon, as the Central American villages left behind now acquired the glow of ancestral fidelity and religious power. Yet the New-York-based Garifuna are also becoming increasingly attentive to the African components of their story of origin, to a degree that has not occurred in homeland villages of Honduras. Through the process of migration from Honduras to New York, and of reframing ritual events within the physical environment and the social networks of the city, the Garifuna are joining the religious African diaspora, as they re-read their ritual events in relation to the practices of neighboring Santeros, Vodunsi, Spiritists and assorted devotees of the Yoruba orishas encountered in the Bronx.

This cultural transformation entails both agency and its constraint. For, alongside the voluntary ethnogenetic and religious move of joining the African
diaspora, lies the involuntary conversion of becoming racially ‘black’, in part by being read into that category in the USA. The two conversions—of joining the African diaspora and becoming black—are indices of intertwined new subjectivities and subjectifications (Ong 1999: 18), new opportunities for social affiliation and novel sources of oppression that limit social mobility. Those subjectivities and subjectifications collude, however, in raising African historical horizons to prominence since African diasporic and black identifications, though by no means isomorphic, overlap with and often reinforce one another. Migration’s subordinations are not only losses, then; they are injustices that are also the conditions of new self-knowledge (Butler 1997: 2, 14-17). Just so, emigrants’ religious practice is not merely stunted by virtue of being dislocated from its indigenous sites of performance, but also transformed and invigorated. Emigrants critically reevaluate, and revalue, the question of authentic origins. By selectively remembering the past and the left-behind territory as an ideological problem, new opportunities for social and political alliances, as well as cultural defense, are opened. Those new religious identifications and affiliations fashioned by those Garifuna New Yorkers ‘in diaspora’, moreover, give rise to further productive tensions when they are remitted to the homeland and juxtaposed with local practices, resulting in distinct homeland versus diasporic redactions of ‘the tradition’.

The Garifunas’ multiple diasporic horizons serve different roles and to some degree are in tension with one another as anchors of varying identifications, creating dynamism that precludes stagnation or closure. The Central American diasporic horizon links them with Honduran Amerindians on specific occasions and for certain purposes, especially around issues of contested land rights (England 1999, 2006). And the St Vincent horizon aids the Garifuna in prosecuting and processing their historical relation and resistance to British colonialism, as well as current restitution claims against Great Britain for their forced deportation from St Vincent in 1797. The African diaspora opens new opportunities for historical reflection and political affiliation both in the USA and globally. The Garifuna show how a single group can simultaneously view itself against multiple diasporic horizons; or, put differently, strategically shift between discourses of diasporism and indigenism (Matory 2005: 109).

‘Diasporas’, the Garifuna case suggests, are not naturally or otherwise pre-existing social forms that conserve religious traditions in new spaces, or even transform traditions in the process of their recreation. They are cultural configurations that actual social actors and historical groups move in and out of, activating them to varying degrees. By joining a diaspora and becoming diasporic, a given religious group expresses the rising value and meaning of a possible memory-set and identity-formation. But joining a diaspora is a con-
structive and not merely expressive act. As a group begins to view itself against
new historical and territorial horizons, new religious, ethnic and even racial
identifications are disclosed from the past, transforming the meanings of the
present (e.g., Benjamin 1968; Gadamer 1975; Lefebvre 1991; Ricoeur 2004).
This broad trajectory describes a book-length argument on the Garifuna of
which this essay is but a part. In this section, my goal is more focused. It is to
try to sharpen the now dulled analytical point of calling something ‘diasporic’
by asking when a group is not, or ceases to be, ‘in diaspora’. If I am to argue
that the Garifuna are presently joining the African diaspora through religion,
why were they not ‘in it’ before; or, how and when did they ‘leave it’? To begin
to consider the question, we will first need to restore some analytical bite to
the key term, diaspora.

Diasproliferation: Who isn’t in diaspora?
The notion of diaspora has been progressively widened over the last century to
include not only Jewish, Greek and Armenian cases, but also diasporas as dis-
parate as those of the Portuguese (Klimt and Lubkemann 2002), the Morm-
ons (Smith and White 2004) and the New Orleans victims of Hurricane
Katrina in 2005 (Gross 2005); or even the dispersion of parts of the self from
a position of social valuation to one where little is accorded them, as in ‘the
sexual diaspora of older women’ (Merkin 2006: 18).2 It suddenly appears,
in other words, that everyone is in diaspora. Why not? We all came from
somewhere else, and are at least dimly enough aware of it to be able to call up
sentiments about the fact. Ethnic revivals are, moreover, a prudent reactive
move, a standard means of vying for a fair share of the socio-economic pie
(Barth 1969; Comaroff and Comaroff 1992; Rumbaut and Portes 2001: 5;
Baumann 2000; Berking 2003), and ‘diaspora’ has become their reliable vehi-
cle. Its practical, colloquial uses suggest affiliations given by virtue of biologi-
cal descent, which allegedly transmit ‘blood’ continuity across space.

This inspires groups and galvanizes political mobilizations, but for analyti-
cal and comparative purposes it falls short on at least two counts. First, in this
view there exist natural groupings of humans who, under conditions of emi-
migration, inevitably become diasporas. The problem with this is that there are
no such ‘natural groups’ and, it follows, no natural diasporas either. The sec-
ond obvious problem with everyday uses of ‘diaspora’ is that the category is
overly broad. It is not helpful to say that we are all members of diasporas,
though it is true that, if we expand the temporal horizon widely enough, all
human beings are descendants of East Africa (Palmer 1998).3 The reason most
of us are not East African diasporans, though we all have ancestors from there, is because that memory is not part of our conscious experience; nor is it constitutive, so far as we know, of our bodily habitus; nor are all of us read by others as members of that category. Folk invocations of diaspora fail to specify the cultural particularity of diasporans, the fact that it depends not merely on having a family tree with branches in another place, but that the double-consciousness in relation to place is central, even actively conjured in their lived experiences. Diasporans feel a gap between here and there, where they are really from. They may even value that gap, seeing it not as a deficiency but as a resource or mark of distinction, and effortfully cultivate a sense of it (Malkki 1997: 62).

If colloquial uses of ‘diaspora’ are confusing, there are conflicting analytical meanings conflated under the term as well—as social form, as type of consciousness, as mode of cultural production (Vertovec 2000: 142)—and at least three techniques of definition exercised in social scientific literature: that of etymology, that of typology and that of relation. The first of these is the route of roots, the tracing of its etymology as a way to delimit the term’s semantic range (e.g., Cohen 1997; Baumann 2000; Sheffer 2003). Diaspora: from the Greek verb, speirein (to sow, or scatter, as in seed); and the preposition dia (over); thus, ‘to scatter over’. The same Indo-European root, sp-, appears in words like ‘spore’, ‘spread’ and ‘sperm’. Diaspora was first used by Greeks to describe the colonization of Asia Minor and the Mediterranean world, and it probably connoted a sacrificial loss of the homeland for the cause of Greek expansion; hence irretrievable separation though not necessarily forced migration or enslavement. The word took on a different valence as applied to the Jewish experience, as a translation of the Hebrew term galut in the Greek version of Hebrew scripture, the Septuagint, connoting severance, exile (Deuteronomy 28: 25, 58-68) and the Jewish dispersions (732 BCE, conquest by Assyria; 586 BCE, conquest by Babylonia; 70 CE, conquest by Rome). Yet at least in the later context of rabbinic teaching it also carried the promise of ultimate return (Cohen 1997).

A second technique of definition has been the attempt to specify the empirical contents of a diaspora, so as to enable us to differentiate ‘diaspora societies’ from other societies (Safran 1991; Tölöyan 1996; Van Hear 1998; Baumann 2000; K. Butler 2001). Most obvious in these typological lists is the dispersion of a present group or of past ancestors from an original center to two or more new sites. Next is some retained collective memory about the homeland. A further criterion is the maintenance of relations with the departed homeland, at least as an imagined community, which defines in significant ways the contemporary experience of the hostland. The best of these list-based definitions
then call attention to the need for institutional infrastructures that make and sustain diasporic sentiments. A fifth common feature invoked is that a diaspora group remains at least partly separate, distinct or alienated from the mainstream society within the host country. A sixth typical characteristic offered is the nostalgic idealization of the ancestral homeland and ancestral time, which may or may not be linked with the valuation of actual permanent return (Appadurai 1996: 37-38; Tweed 1997: 94; Baumann 2000: 327).

The list-making technique has been helpful in generating a rough consensus. Still, perhaps the most fruitful approach for restoring some theoretical usefulness to diaspora and diasporic religion is that of defining the term by relation; by considering the question of what diasporas are not, and when one is not in one. To put this differently, if groups undergo ‘de-diasporization’ (Van Hear 1998: 48), what exactly does this entail? One of Nicholas Van Hear’s examples seems clear enough: people can go back to wherever they consider home; when they do so on a permanent basis, they cease to be in diaspora. Recent examples include ethnic Germans and Greeks returning to homelands from the former USSR after 1989; another example is Palestinians returned to the West Bank from Kuwait from 1990-1992 (Van Hear 1998: 6, 48, 195, 200). Another way a group can be non-diasporic is by remaining always in transit, for example as nomads, such that the lack of any established homeland location precludes any sense of territorial dislocation (Cohen 1997). The Bedouins and the Romani provide possible examples. Yet another non-diasporic style is the community that is entirely uprooted to a new homeland, and is therefore not dispersed; it remains intact, merely in a new place, and the key spatial feature of diaspora, the engagement of hostland and homeland communities across a gap, is forfeit. Finally, at least as a logical possibility we can imagine a group that remains dislocated from a homeland community, but which so fully assimilates in the hostland that it is no longer cognizant of the homeland, and abandons the sort of co-responsibility that is constitutive of active diasporas (Saint Blancat in Baumann 2000; Werbner 2000: 17). Diasporic affiliations and representations come into being under certain historical conditions and may be transformed or disappear under others (Clifford 1994: 315).

Closer to this journal’s concerns, Eugene Genovese long ago suggested that the brutality of slavery prevented Africans from remembering and practicing their religions intact. He viewed African American Christianity as a blend of African, European, Mediterranean Christian and Amerindian cultures (Genovese 1972: 209-12). Yet for Genovese, as for Herskovits (1958), this did not mean leaving the African diaspora, as it did, for example, in E. Franklin Frazier’s (1974) evaluations of African American religion. Even
slaves, in Genovese’s perspective, maintained an African worldview, as demonstrated, for example, by the import of concepts of the ancestors, just as Shaw’s (2002) vivid descriptions of spirit geographies in Sierra Leone suggest the maintenance of a form of practical, implicit and embodied rather than discursive memory. Something like this perspective, the claim of a latent or embodied African diasporic tie despite the absence of a conscious spatial horizon in memory, or outright expressions of Africanness in discourse, has remained prominent in various guises, most notoriously in Paul Gilroy’s ‘changing same’—a kind of continuity based, so far as I understand him, in a shared stratum of performative musicality (1993: 101). I shall return to this issue in the Conclusion. For now, however, I suggest that in so far as Garifuna ancestors who return to be feted by the living in Honduran Garifuna ritual performances are dressed, presented and greeted as Island Carib Indians from St Vincent, and in so far as Africa is nowhere to be found in songs describing the ancestors’ origins or sojourns, then such ritual events are not usefully interpreted as parts of an African diaspora.

The Garifuna case suggests yet another way of leaving, or of not being ‘in the African diaspora’, and that is when a plurality of African homeland sites are congealed through ethnogenetic processes into a different territorial/temporal horizon of authentic origins and aspirations. This is what appears to have occurred on St Vincent. ‘Africa’ as a whole had not yet in the late seventeenth century emerged as a source of diasporic consciousness—and would not for two centuries to follow—and the Afro-Indians who came to be called the Black Caribs adopted St Vincent as their home, their place of origins and, eventually, after their deportation to the Central American coast in 1797, their reference point or even a sacred source of ancestral spirits. This is no retrograde assertion liable to the Herskovits critique against those who say that, ‘the Negro is thus a man without a past’ (1958: 2). On the contrary: it is to say that Africans have pasts that are not eternally determined by a continent of origin. It is to fully enough restore ‘the past’ to Africans that they may even, on occasion, leave Africanness behind, and then adopt it again. This is easy to assert, however, and much more difficult to demonstrate historically. In the next sections, I try to flesh out the process of the replacement of African homelands with the emergent diasporic horizon of St Vincent. The descriptions of the process of religious reformation are by necessity bound up with details of the ethnogenetic process in general.
Ethnogenesis of an Afro-Euro-Amerindian ‘colonial tribe’

Garifuna religion provides a stunning example of the religious exchanges and encounters that occurred throughout the Caribbean Basin during the centuries after Columbus’s landing. In comparison with the violence with which Europeans devoured Hispaniola, Puerto Rico, Cuba and Jamaica, including the violence of religious conversion, many of the small, ‘lesser’ Antilles in the southeast corner of the Caribbean archipelago remained relatively ignored until well into the eighteenth century.

Enslaved Africans destined for Caribbean labor were abruptly thrown onto the shores and mercy of the Island Caribs of St Vincent, on an island named but ignored by the Spanish. Out of this sudden co-presence, an encounter not chosen by either group, a new synthetic ethnicity and religion—what Mary Helms (1969) called a ‘colonial tribe’—was born. The specific rapprochement by which the Africans survived and, together with the Indians, founded the new ethnicity and religious culture of the ‘Black Caribs’ remains something of a mystery, despite the fact that the presence of a large number of ‘negroes’ seen on St Vincent elicited no shortage of explanations from various European observers. The British Major John Scott ascribed two Spanish slavers intended for Barbados shipwrecked in 1635 off the coast of St Vincent as the source of Africans, an event recapitulated by later authors often enough to become the standard account of the origins of the Black Caribs (Sieur de la Borde 1992 [1674]: 150; Young 1764: 7; Davidson 1787: 7; Morris 1787; Edwards 1799: 104; Leblond 2000 [1813]: 108; Great Britain Calendar of State Papers 1880: 534, in Kerns 1997: 38; Gonzalez 1988: 26; Hulme and Whitehead 1992: 171; Coelho 1995: 36). Sir William Young, Britain’s future Governor of Dominica, referred in 1764 and more specifically, in papers posthumously published by his son in 1795, to a similar shipwreck event that befell a Portuguese vessel in 1675 (Young 1764; 1971 [1795]: 6).

In the paradigmatic shipwreck narrative, surviving Africans were tolerated and assimilated by the Island Caribs for reasons that remain opaque. To be sure, the Africans augmented Carib military forces that were facing expanding European encroachments. Island Caribs had already been displaced from many neighboring islands, and St Vincent, along with St Lucia and Dominica, remained relatively autonomous only as a result of a 1660 concord among European powers to allow it to remain a sort of early ‘Indian reserve’, a compact renewed in the 1748 Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle (W. Young 1971 [1795]: 3-5; Conzemius 1928: 187; Gonzalez 1988: 15-6). The small island reserves were regarded as inauspicious for profitable agricultural development because of their rugged, mountainous landscapes and rocky shores, by contrast with their neighbor, ‘smooth polished Barbados’ (Young 1764: 26). As a key British
slave entrepôt from 1627 until the cessation of British slave-trading in 1808, Barbados enjoyed no such calm.

Though the Island Caribs sometimes acquired large numbers of Africans in one fell swoop—such as the five hundred they captured from a shipwreck near Grenada (Vásquez de Espinosa in Thornton 1998: 284)—the shipwreck narrative of origins is not sufficient to account for the rapid growth of the Black Carib population on St Vincent, and there must have been additional influxes. One likely cause is that there occurred much earlier interethnic alliances between Africans and Indians. The historian John Thornton (1998: 272-303) collected descriptions of many Caribbean interactions between Africans and Amerindians. As early as 1546, for example, a letter from the governor of Margarita to the city council of San Juan, Puerto Rico, advised the council to look out for Carib Indians and ‘blacks who go with them’. Another report from Dominica, as early as 1574, noted the Island Caribs acquiring and integrating into their society both Spanish and African captives acquired in periodic raiding expeditions (cf. Gonzalez 1988:26). An Afro-Puerto Rican named Luiza de Navarette was returned to her home isle in 1576 after four years of life as a slave to the Caribs, and reported the widespread distribution of Africans in Carib villages (in Hulme and Whitehead 1992: 40). The Island Carib pattern of raiding European colonies and capturing African slaves was common, and was regarded as a serious problem by European powers. So much so, notes Thornton (1998: 290), that one Spanish official, Sancho de Alquizla ‘estimated in 1612 that as many as two thousand African slaves were in captivity in the Carib islands’. In 1658, the Caribs on the island of Grenada accused the French of stealing their African slaves, even as Jean-Baptiste du Tertre in the 1660s reported precisely the inverse complaint being levied by the French on Martinique against the Caribs (in Gonzalez 1988: 26). In 1674, de la Borde described the situation on St Vincent in the following terms:

‘There are a great number of negroes who live with them, particularly on St Vincent where their stronghold is. They have so multiplied that at present they are as powerful as them [the Caraïbes]. Some of them are fugitive maroons who were taken in war; these are slaves of the Caraïbes, whom they call Tamons; but the greater part came from some Flemish or Spanish ship which was wrecked close to their islands (1704: 574; English translation Hulme and Whitehead 1992: 150).’

As de la Borde made clear, the Island Caribs did not always or inevitably treat Africans as slaves, but rather only those taken captive in military operations. Depending on the specific local political dynamics, Africans were at times enlisted as military allies, especially since, as Thornton proposed (1998: 293), many African slaves who found themselves in Carib hands either by ship-
wreck, capture or marronage, had already been seasoned by extensive military experience in Africa. Africans from the Gold Coast were likely to have been excellent builders of large canoes, moreover, and useful in the fashioning and manning of Island Carib canoes reported to carry fifty persons or more (de la Borde 1704: 571; Davidson 1787: 18). There were surely amorous and reproductive exchanges too. Father Raymond Breton reported from his sojourn on Dominica in the mid-seventeenth century the special terms applied to ‘les enfants engendrez des Sauvages & des Negresses’ (Breton 1968 [1665]: 26; Leblond 2000 [1813]: 109).

The 1635 date should therefore not be taken as a fixed moment of Africans’ arrival, but rather as one of a series of syncretic events by which Africans came to St Vincent. The ethnic group that by the second half of the 1700s came to be called the ‘Black Caribs’ emerged processually between 1600 and 1796, not only from the notorious shipwrecks, but also from Island Carib raids, from maroons fleeing the rising plantation economy on neighboring islands, and by intermarriage with Island Caribs on St Vincent.6

Manifold sources of African arrivals suggest that no single ethnic group can be regarded as the African progenitor of the Black Caribs. Sir William Young reported the Africans shipwrecked in 1675 as being of ‘Moco’ ethnicity, deported from the Bight of Benin in what is today Nigeria (W. Young 1971 [1795]: 6). This society is often identified with the ethnic group Efik, of the Cross River delta and the slaving port of Old Calabar (in the Bight of Biafra, not the Bight of Benin, as Young had it). Yet Young’s report provides at best a small piece of the puzzle. Terms like Karabali, Efik, Igbo and Moko often served as terminal-point ethnonyms for any number of interior groups joined under a single name at a port of embarkation (Kolapo 2004). Given the general demographic trends of the slave trade, the Spanish ships earlier lost in 1635 would have been likely to have carried West Central African cargo from Angola (Curtin 1969; Lovejoy 1983; Klein 1999). And these groups were augmented by Africans of other ethnic groups and languages arriving from nearby islands, especially Barbados, named as the primary source by the Dominican missionary Jean Baptiste Labat, who lived on Dominica at the close of the seventeenth century:

Besides the savages, this island is also inhabited by a very great number of fugitive negroes, for the most part from Barbados, which, being to windward of Saint Vincent, gives the runaways every possible facility for escaping from their masters’ plantations in boats or on piperis or rafts, and taking refuge among the savages. The Caribs formerly brought them back to their masters, when they were at peace with them, or took and sold them to the French or to the Spaniards. I don’t know for what reason they have changed their method, nor what has induced them to receive these negroes
amongst themselves and to regard them as belonging to one and the same nation. They regret it now very much and very unwaveringly, for the number of negroes has increased to such an extent, either by those born in the country or by those come from Barbados to join them, that it much surpasses that of the Caribs, so that the negroes have forced them to share the island and to relinquish the windward side to them. But it is not even that which mortifies the savages most, but the frequent kidnapping of their wives and daughters, whom the negroes seize whenever they want… (Labat in Taylor 1951: 22; cf. Edwards 1799: 104).

Labat’s specific citation of Barbados as the main source of maroon additions to the Black Caribs increases the chances that many Africans from the Gold Coast (Asante, Ewe, Fon, Fante), the center of the eighteenth-century British slave trade to Barbados, would also have been part of the emerging ethnic group. But the label ‘Moco’ suggests that the Bight of Biafra also provided slaves for Barbados. In that region, slaves were captured from among the Yoruba, Efik, Igbo and Ibibio peoples. Between 1627 and 1807, four hundred thousand Africans were deported to Barbados, more than to any other destination in the English Caribbean, and Barbados was an early tinderbox of rebellion and desertion (Craton 1986; Bianchi 1988: 93).

The reputation of St Vincent as a ‘free island’ and destination for maroons circulated and grew in the 1700s, attracting new arrivals. As it did, the specific African territories that might have served as an anchor of ethnic identity were complicated by a radical pluralism of cultures. The Africans adopted, and were adopted by, the Island Carib tongue and religion as a common lingua and religio franca.

What unfolded was an ethnogenesis forged in a relatively short cycle of a shared resistance to slavery. For though never laboring as slaves, the Black Caribs lived under the continual threat of enslavement, and very much within the expanding sugar plantation system. There were, therefore, strong incentives attached to ‘becoming Carib’ for the Africans. It offered a shared religious grammar for disparate African ethnicities, but also the hope of a buffer against enslavement. Later in the eighteenth century the British colonist George Davidson observed, after living near the Black Caribs for two years, that they continued the Island Carib practice of flattening their infants’ foreheads because they ‘perceived the necessity of a discrimination founded on more obvious marks than that of complexion’ (1787: 10; W. Young 1971 [1795]: 8; cf. du Tertre 1992: 129). The young French doctor, Jean-Baptiste Leblond, observed the same around 1767 (2000 [1813]: 80, 110, 136). In Davidson’s view, Black Caribs appeared dangerously similar to enslaved Africans, and sought to mark their distinctiveness through bodily modifications. But if this was so, the reason for needing such distinction was the risk of being confused
with the runaway slaves whom they often aided through encouragement and with arms (Morris 1787). The new ethnic group was a ‘colonial tribe’, then, not only because it emerged in the 1600s Caribbean contact zone, but also because it was born of the resistance to European colonization.

Though Labat had described the Caribs treating the ‘negroes’ as members of ‘one and the same nation’, his vision of their inter-group transculturation as a generally harmonious one seems exaggerated. Initially the Africans were captives and servants of the Island Caribs. Armand de la Paix’s Relation from 1646 reported that, ‘Some Negroes of St Vincent of the isles, being in Saint Lucia, massacred some French people from Martinique by the order of their Carib master’ (in Taylor 1949: 382), implying that the Africans were at least initially perceived to be ruled by Island Caribs. Yet de la Borde observed in 1674 that the Black Caribs were already as powerful as the Island Caribs (1704: 574). In 1700 the governor of Martinique, who then held jurisdiction over St Vincent, divided the island between the western ‘Red Carib’ zone and the eastern ‘Black Carib’ domain. Shortly thereafter, by the 1720s, they were reported to be masters of the island. The British Captain Braithwaite described being met by five hundred Black Caribs as he put ashore on St Vincent, all of them armed and organized with martial discipline. After entertaining some of them on board his ship, he dignified them with the standard honorary cannon discharge, ‘and received, in return, as regular volleys of small shot as I ever heard’ (Uring 1726: 109). By the early eighteenth century the Black Caribs were already a semi-autonomous, well-formed social and military organization, galvanized in and by the cauldron of the slave system that surrounded them.

A detailed letter dated September 3, 1705, written by Monsieur de Beaumont, a companion to the Dominican missionary Raymond Breton, suggests the spatial separation and the tensions that had already divided the Island Caribs from the Black Caribs. Beaumont interviewed a group of Carib Indians who passed his ship in pirogues, en route to the windward (eastern) Black Carib side of the island to exact a revenge killing. The Indians indicated their openness to European military aid against the Black Caribs, a prospect that left Beaumont salivating in his report: ‘That would be a good catch. It is claimed that there are about 3,000 negroes, all strong, fit to send to the Spanish mines. There is a war between them which can only be ended by a specific campaign, since it is based on the fact that these negroes kidnap the women of the savages, who are very jealous and never forgive’ (M. de Beaumont 1992 [1705]: 176). The spatial separation and rivalry between the two communities was confirmed in Braithwaite’s report a few decades later, of parleys with an ‘Indian Chief’ and a distinct ‘Chief of the Negroes’ (Uring 1726: 108-10). As depicted in British narratives, the Island Caribs were soon overshadowed and
even eclipsed by the Black Caribs. In the official correspondence of Valentine Morris, the British Governor-in-Chief of St Vincent in the late 1770s, for example, the ‘Charibs’ he referred to were solely the Black Caribs who caused him much trouble, dressing in ‘French colours’ and inciting runaway NEGROES to quit their masters (Morris 1787: 12, 16, 123, 126). The shifting nomenclature, wherein ‘Carib’ was often now applied to those of African descent, reflects the fact that the Island Caribs were by this point severely diminished as a group of political consequence in British eyes. Many of the ‘Yellow Caribs’ had fled to the islands of Tobago and Trinidad, and those remaining had been driven to the leeward (west) side of the island (Davidson 1787: 8; Leblond 2000 [1813]: 110). Many succumbed to the smallpox borne by Europeans to the islands, to which they had little immunity or resistance, a process that was already well under way by the mid-1600s (Breton 1992: 110).

We must exercise caution here, however. As Peter Hulme (2000: section II) proposes, the master narrative depicting St Vincent as being wholly under the control of the troublesome Black Caribs, a distinctly African rather than Amerindian group, served Great Britain’s colonial interests:

‘This Africanisation [of the Black Caribs] had a number of advantages for the planters. It emphasised the Black Carib role as usurpers. It helped avoid a repetition of the groundswell of British liberal opinion in defence of the indigenous Caribs during the war of the 1770s—which had forced the British to sue for peace. And it drew upon the traditional association of blackness with savagery and evil, exacerbated by the success of slave revolts in the Caribbean and, of course, especially in St Domingue after 1791.

Further evidence for this allegation can be found in the report of Jean-Baptiste Leblond, writing during the period of the first military clashes between Great Britain and the Black Caribs, from 1772 to 1773. He overheard colonists declaring that negotiating with the Caribs (instead of taking the land by force) was unjust, ‘because the Black Caribs, far from being the indigenes of the land, were originally from Africa’ (2000 [1813]: 153, translation mine). Africanizing the Black Caribs by stressing their utter separation from the ‘Yellow’ or ‘Red Caribs’ had strategic value for British colonists; it rendered their own land-appropriations equal in legal and ethical status to the Black Caribs’ previous settling of St Vincent. The point is that ‘Black’ was as much a political classifier of groups especially resistant to colonial settlement on St Vincent as it was a description of Black Caribs’ actual skin color, which probably varied widely among members of the nation.

In 1763 St Vincent was officially returned to British colonial jurisdiction under the Treaty of Paris, which ended the Seven Years’ War between Great
Britain and France. Nancie Gonzales nominated this as the temporal point in which the Black Caribs were properly born as a distinct, unique society (1988: 32). War and trade with Europeans dominated their livelihood in place of the former Island Carib raiding and trading networks with other Caribs; a money economy had begun to take shape as Black Caribs transported sugar to English ships anchored off St Vincent’s rocky coast; and incipient chiefdoms were formed around stable communities reliant on the domestication of fowl, pigs, cattle, as well as newly diversified crops like tobacco. The director of St Vincent’s botanical gardens, Alexander Anderson, writing in the late 1790s, recounted that the Black Caribs at this time traded widely, transporting goods from Martinique to Trinidad in their great canoes. They had even become players in the global market, as Black Carib tobacco harvests were regularly transported to Martinique to be refined into the ‘well-known Macuba snuff’, for European consumers (Anderson 1992: 217; Davidson 1787: 18). Meanwhile, the Black Carib named Du Vallée, like his brother the notorious chief Chatoyer, oversaw a small cotton plantation purchased with loans from ‘English gentlemen’ on which he directed the labor of nine slaves (Young 1992: 203, 212).

The economically astute Black Caribs remained vehemently anti-colonial, but pragmatically so, and differentiated between the European powers. French settlers, showing themselves relatively amenable to Black Carib territorial claims, were more tolerated than British ones. Enough French settlers arrived on St Vincent that France militarily occupied the island from 1778-1783, with the aid of the Black Caribs, while Great Britain was engaged in the United States’ War of Independence. Thereafter, when the island was restored to British control after 1783, this time for good, the Black Caribs never shook the reputation as being thoroughly ‘French’. After all, their names were mostly French, they all spoke French along with Carib, preferred red wine to rum, and were unmoved by the charms of the English Protestant missionaries. The British authorities had feared as much; their treaty with the Caribs from 1773 had stressed, in Article VII, ‘No undue intercourse with the French islands to be allowed’ (Young 1971 [1795]: 92).

**Black Carib religion on St Vincent**

We know little about what the Black Caribs’ emergence as a distinct ethnic group meant for the practice of religion until well into the nineteenth century, following their deportation to, and settlement of, the Central American coast. We must, therefore, triangulate between seventeenth-century descriptions and
nineteenth- and twentieth-century assessments to try to reconstruct a profile of early Black Carib religion. Still, it is clear that there were at least three obvious tributaries feeding the new group’s religious practices.

Let us begin with the Amerindian tributary. We know something of the religious practices from the Lesser Antilles based on seventeenth-century French accounts—from the Dominicans Jean Baptiste du Tertre, Jean Baptiste Labat, Raymond Breton, the Protestant Charles de Rochefort and the Jesuit affiliate Sieur de la Borde, who described Island Carib rites and beliefs on Dominica, Guadeloupe and St Vincent. Often the early reports described the Caribs as having no religion whatsoever (e.g., Breton 1992: 110; Davidson 1787: 6), and presented the practices in terms of their own pejorative polemics. De la Borde, to wit, accused them of being ‘not unlike the Calvinists’ for want of priests, altars or sacrifices, (1704: 523; 1992: 140), while British colonists in the eighteenth century found their Catholicism, along with other ‘French’ tastes, abhorrent. Carib religion, in other words, was consistently read in relation to the polemical contests that divided Europe, rendering its interpretation a thorny task.

St Vincent held its own spirit-geography for the Black Caribs: the Black Forest at the foot of the volcano was occupied by the presence of a spirit, as was the Lake and the ‘Cavern of Death’ (de Jonnès 1920 [1858]: 121). If these indigenous powers remained on the island when the Black Caribs were deported, they carried other aspects of their religious practice with them. Divination of illness and ceremonies of food offerings to spirits were led by religious leaders known by the Carib as piaye or boye; Raymond Breton called these priest/doctors boiyako (1992: 113). These officials, now called buyeis, were shamans in the classic sense of that term (e.g., Eliade 1964). Undergoing an initiation through a long period of seclusion, they learned to use tobacco and gourd rattles in the achievement of trances, they traveled ‘on high’ with the aid of their tutelary spirits to seek out and control malignant or neglected spirits who had caused the illness; they mediated the spirits with their voices for the patient and other audience members, ‘sucked’ the illness from the afflicted body in the form of a small bone or piece of wood, and appeased malignant spirits with food offerings (de la Borde 1704: 539-44). Also like today’s buyeis, they performed divination, and filled low tables (matoutou) with favored foods like cassava bread to feed malign spirits (mapoia). The Black Caribs adopted this religious office and techniques from their St Vincent hosts, the Island Caribs. De la Borde offered the best description of ritual practices on St Vincent, and is especially notable because of his simultaneous observation of the presence there of ‘a large number of Negroes’ living like the Island Caribs (1704: 574), offering a temporal reference point, the last quarter
of the seventeenth century, for locating when the transculturation of Island Carib and African into Black Carib religion may have begun. De la Borde described how ‘They sometimes put the hair or bones of their dead relatives in a calabash … and say that the spirit of the dead speaks within it, warning them of the plans of their enemies’ (546, translation mine). This ritual practice suggests either the possible borrowing of West African religious practices, such that the exchange was a two-way street, or at the very least an Island Carib ritual grammar that would have been strikingly familiar in structure to many Africans.

Garifuna religion continues to rely upon the leadership of such shamans. They orchestrate and direct sophisticated ritual performances that satisfy hungry ancestral spirits (gubida) with the influence of the helping spirits (hiyu-ruba). Contemporary buyeis use tobacco in trance and prepare tables generously laden with cassava bread and cassava beer to feed the spirits as their Carib progenitors did. Moreover, the red dye manufactured from annatto seeds (roucoun) used to paint the skin, ubiquitous in the daily routine of the Island Caribs, remains crucial in the Garifuna dügü ritual. These bear witness to the legacy of Island Carib practices in Black Carib religion.

The African religious tributary must have been important as well. In the most elaborate ritual performances of contemporary homeland Garifuna religion, for example, called dügü, three drums are used to guide dances that culminate in spirit possession by returning ancestors. Upon possessing the bodies of their living descendants, the ancestors dance, consort and consult with the living. Nowhere are such collective possession dances mentioned in descriptions of Island Carib religion (Gonzalez 1988: 29). The patterns do, however, recall the West and West Central African ritual uses of music and dance from the period. Consider, for example, the report of Captain Nathaniel Uring from his 1701 visit to the port of Loango, Angola, prior to sailing to St Vincent. While in Loango, Uring by chance heard drums and, curiosity quickened, sought their source. He found the drums in use in what he took to be a healing ritual. A sick woman lay on the ground surrounded by six to eight women singing to the rhythm of rattles they held in their hands, and the drumming of a man on a hollow tree trunk covered with skin (1726: 43). Uring, like many before and after him, discerned no religion among them, since their efforts appeared to be directed to the spirits of ancestors:

I could not perceive that they had any Religion among them: They have no Temples or Houses of Worship; nor did they pay Adoration to Any Thing that I could learn, tho’ they built Hutts over the Graves of some particular Persons of Distinction among ’em; and in those Hutts I saw several Utensils, such as they make use of in Eating and
Drinking. . . I was informed that it was customary for the Relations of the Dead to carry victuals, and leave it in those Hutts in the Night in order to entertain their deceased Friends. . . (46).

What is evident is that parts of ritual performed in Angola at roughly the time of Africans’ arrival on St Vincent presented performative similarities to de la Borde’s description of Island Carib practices a quarter-century prior, notably the preparation of foods left for the ancestral spirits. The caveat is that Uring’s report specifies more clearly that it is ancestors, ‘the Relations of the Dead’, who are being fed, whereas de la Borde’s surveillance separated his note on calabashes containing hair or bones of the dead from the more thoroughly described treatment of the zemeen and mapoia spirits.

Contemporary Garifuna rituals, like those of the Island Carib shamans, engage helping spirits to combat afflicting spirits, yet all of these spirits are also ancestors. It is tempting, if perhaps too convenient, to imagine today’s rites as a neat confluence of African and Island Carib streams, joined in the late seventeenth century. Yet this must remain a mere hypothesis in the face of the yawning absence of data on Black Carib religion in the eighteenth century. For example, the colonist George Davidson reported that the Black Caribs, ‘...have some faint ideas of a Supreme Cause which created all things, but they conceive that God commits the government of the world to subordinate Spirits. They make use of several incantations against Evil Spirits, to prevent their malignant influence’ (Davidson 1787: 9-10). Yet the precise nature of the subordinate spirits can be only guessed at, based on the triangulation with earlier views like de la Borde’s and later notes from Central America, to which we turn momentarily.

Catholicism also played a key role in the formative stages of Garifuna religion. Today, all traditional Garifuna religious actors consider themselves to be Catholic, and Catholicism provides the overall mythic structure within which the ancestor religion is maintained. Malignant (mafia) spirits, for example, typically spatially associated with ‘the bush’ (el monte), are considered manifestations of ‘the devil’, while positive spirits are regarded as agents of ‘God’ (Bungiu). Postmortem rites begin with ‘masses’ (lemesi) adapted from official Roman Catholic liturgy and continue with novenas (ninth-night masses) and anniversary masses performed to remember and appease the dead. Catholic saints are prominent on Garifuna altars, and specific saints like Esquipula and San António are called upon as miraculous sources of assistance.10 This is certainly partly because of the visits of French missionaries. But it is also possible that some of the Africans who settled on St Vincent were from the Kongo kingdom that had converted in the fifteenth century, and that they therefore...
arrived on St Vincent as African Christians already (Bianchi 1988: 98; Thornton 1998).

Catholicism in Black Carib religion on St Vincent probably consisted of selected elements that were elevated and given value while other aspects were easily left aside or forgotten. As we will see in the next section on the Black Caribs in Central America, for example, baptism was very popular during the nineteenth century while marriage was practically ignored, suggestive of the critical practice involved in whatever ‘syncretizing’ may have occurred. Such selective appropriations motivated the British colonist George Davidson to complain about the lack of concern on the part of French Catholic priests with any thorough religious instruction (1787: 9), leaving the Black Caribs, in his view, as yet in need of such religion as could make them ‘human beings’ at all (6, 20). The British effort was a more activist one, and a Methodist mission was under way even as Davidson wrote that would grant them not only true (Protestant) religion but also the ‘blessings’ of a British government (6-7). Yet the British Protestants made no headway, not least because the Black Caribs’ allegiances already lay firmly with French republicans and French Catholics. The Methodist missionary to the ‘Black Caribb Division’, Mr. Baxter, registered his frustration on February 25, 1790: ‘The Black Caribbs still remain civil and kind, but will hear nothing of religion’ (Coke 1790: 13).

In view of the Black Caribs’ formation as a ‘colonial tribe’, the fact of the resistance to Protestants, and of Catholicism’s influence, does not surprise. Catholic priests were key players in the process of Black Carib ethnogenesis. In 1763, when the British took control of St Vincent from France under the Treaty of Paris, the Black Caribs appointed as their political emissary the French priest they trusted more than any other European, Abbé Valladares (Young 1992 [1795]: 193; Kerns 1997: 31). And when Black Caribs allied themselves with France against Great Britain during the same period, their relationship with French priests helped to build that sense of affinity. British colonial officials like William Young viewed that relationship in cynical terms, as French political strategy ‘under covert of religion’, and ‘vamped up’ as spiritual consanguinity made through the institution of godparenthood (1971 [1795]: 17-19). But the Black Caribs seem not to have perceived the French priests’ efforts as merely instrumental. By the end of the eighteenth century, Black Caribs greeted Europeans with, ‘Quelles nouvelles de la France? Quelles nouvelles de l’Angleterre?’, as Young was asked on Christmas Day, 1791 (Young 1992 [1791]: 211). Though by the time of their deportation in 1797, only about ten percent of the Black Carib were baptized (Gonzalez 1988: 82, 96), in their nineteenth-century Central American homeland, virtually all would become at least nominally Catholic.
The Garifuna in Central America

The Black Caribs were closely bound to eastern Caribbean francophone networks throughout the eighteenth century. Beginning after 1763, they frequently landed arms in St Vincent after canoe journeys to Martinique, and at least one of their leaders called himself ‘Monsieur le Général’ (Morris 1787: 20; Leblond 2000 [1813]: 111). But these bonds grew tighter as republican proclamations of ‘Liberté, égalité, fraternité’ seemed to felicitously unite the Black Caribs’ own desires for autonomy with those of French ‘democratical whites’ (Edwards 1819: 3) desire to be rid of the British threat on St Vincent. For that threat was all too present. Plans for the removal of the Black Caribs from St Vincent were drawn up by the British as early as 1765; they arose again when France declared war against Great Britain in 1793. In 1795 the Black Caribs, together with French settlers, erupted in insurrection against the British. By 26 October 1796, 5,080 Black Carib captives had surrendered to the British, and most (4,195) transported to the tiny nearby island of Baliceaux (Gonzalez 1988: 35). There approximately half met their demise through disease and the lack of shelter. The remainder, reduced to fewer than two thousand, were again herded into the holds of a British convoy chaperoned by the warship the HMS Experiment. After a short journey that included brief stops at Bequia, Grenada and Jamaica, on 11 April 1797 they were deposited on Roatan, just off the coast of Spanish Honduras and the city of Trujillo.

Despite this abrupt and violent severing of the Black Caribs from their homeland of St Vincent, the last decades of the eighteenth century are recalled in contemporary oral histories as a golden age, a paradise lost (Coelho 1995: 42). They were prosperous, autonomous, proud and beginning to face the global Caribbean economy on their own terms. Chatoyer, their leader killed in the first days of the war, is recalled today as the greatest Black Carib hero, and in a sense the progenitor of all contemporary Garifuna. With his demise and the society’s collective deportation, they were exiled from their homeland and forced to indigenize a new terrain. Yet the transition was not wholly a loss. In the move to Central America, St Vincent (Garifuna: Yurumein) was reborn in memory, now as a sacred place and diasporic horizon. Moreover, with the transfer to a new territory, the ethnogenetic process was completed. To mark this juncture in the narrative, here I will switch to the contemporary ethnonym, Garifuna, when not directly quoting other sources.

Within a few months of their landing at Roatan, a single day’s sail from the mainland city of Trujillo, Honduras, the Garifuna were visited by Spanish officials. That the Spanish were satisfied by their sufficiently anti-British animosity was fortunate. Having arrived in March 1797, by May their existence
was already precarious, despite Bryan Edwards’s glib report to English readers that the Garifuna had been left in ‘a situation remarkably healthy, with excellent water and a fertile soil’ (1819: 74). The British had indeed left provisions, but many of these foodstuffs proved spoiled and unusable. One report suggested that the ship containing their resources was even allowed to sink at anchor, since the Garifuna were so utterly ‘grieved at their banishment’ from St Vincent (Roberts 1827: 273). The situation was dire, and the Garifuna were saved by being transported off the island by the Spanish, and were for the first time landed on American soil, in the port of Trujillo.

The Garifuna arrived into a mainland context of multiple African-descended, Amerindian and mixed ethnic groups. As they were French speakers, their reception at Trujillo was facilitated by the presence of two to three hundred French-speaking exiles from Haiti and Guadaloupe (Young 1847: 140; Crawford 1984:3; Davidson 1984: 16; Gonzalez 1984: 53, 1988: 53), possibly including the Haitian revolutionary military leaders Jean-François and Bias-sou (Bianchi 1988: 104). There was also a black community of Kongolesse origin in the vicinity of Trujillo as early as 1774, ‘Mondongo Negros’ fled from the Honduran interior, where slaves were used in gold and silver mines (Cavero in Bianchi 1988: 106). To the east of Trujillo were the Miskito Indians and the Afro-Indian ‘Sambos’ (Miskito-Africans) whose story of origin—of African survivors of wrecked slave ships being received and incorporated by Amerindians—echoed the Garifuna’s story on St Vincent. To the northwest, in and around the city of Belize in British Honduras, meanwhile, were Africans from Jamaica and other islands of the Anglo colonial world. And there was also a quarter in Belize called ‘Eboe-town’, named for the West African Igbo speakers who lived there (Gibbs 1883: 79). The presence of these communities points to a possible further process of transculturation for the Garifuna on the Central American mainland.

In part as a result of the pressure for land created by the sudden influx into Trujillo, many Garifunas pressed on to found other villages, especially in Mos-quitia to the east, where further inter-ethnic liaisons occurred with the Miskito (Young 1847: 130; Crawford 1984). Though the Garifuna were considered to be rigorously endogamous in their reproductive patterns, including in their own ideal self-representations (Roberts 1827: 274; Froebel 1859: 184; San-born 1886; Conzemius 1928: 183; Solien Gonzalez 1969: 27; Kerns 1984: 112), it seems likely that interethnic matches occurred, especially since men were typically away from their home villages much of the time, employed as soldiers or on woodcutting crews. Garifunas soon lived in near proximity and exchange with the Miskitos; perhaps too near for the Miskitos’ taste on some occasions, as the latter were displaced to settlements further east (Bard 1965
[1855]: 316). Nevertheless, during the traveler Orlando Roberts's visit to the Miskito king in the 1820s, two 'Kharibee' also arrived to pay the king a visit, and Roberts observed that these Garifuna men were 'great favorites' of the Miskito leader (1827: 159-60).16 This account is consistent with the record left by Thomas Young—a representative of the British Central American Land Company—attesting to Garifunas, Miskitos and Creoles all being present at evening entertainments of drumming and dancing (1847: 32). Oral histories of 1960s Garifunas, meanwhile, report earlier generations having intermarried in significant numbers with non-Garifuna blacks (Gonzalez 1969: 26).

**Garifuna religion in Central America**

What was the shape of nineteenth-century Garifuna religion within this new transnational network of Central American villages? Again the sources are few and far between. The Garifunas arrived at Trujillo as nominal Catholics, the recipients of French missionary efforts during the colonial period on St Vincent. The North American traveler and diplomat John Lloyd Stephens reported in 1841 that every Garifuna home in Belize included figures of the Virgin or other saints, and that he himself was in demand to act as a godparent for children newly baptized as Catholics (Stephens 1949: 20). Still, if his account shows that the Garifunas were Catholic at least in name, it also indicates that this was a selectively adopted version performed largely without priests, a matter noted not only by Stephens but also by the first US consul in Honduras, E.G. Squier, in 1855 (Bard 1965 [1855]: 317). When a rare priest arrived in the village, noted Squier, women lined up en masse to have their children baptized. Thomas Young (1847: 128) described Garifuna villagers sending their children into the town of Trujillo for baptism, presumably because priests rarely, if ever, circulated through the remote Garifuna outposts. Yet if the Garifunas revered the ritual of baptism, formal marriage was generally ignored (a pattern continuing to the present), as men were frequently at work away from the village. Moreover, the special efforts of the Church at specific sites and times, such as that noted above in Trujillo beginning in 1813, or by the missionary Padre Manuel de Jesús Subirana (‘Apóstol de los Caribes’)17 in the second half of the century (Davidson 1984b; Coelho 1995: 47), are noteworthy precisely because they cast into relief the absence of priests in most times and most places. Of this apparently unorthodox form of Catholicism one observer suggested of the Garifunas in Belize, 'He is a Christian where the Red Carib was an idolator, but he is, as his congener was, polygamous, superstitious, and migratory' (Gibbs 1883: 166).
To be sure, most travelers were ill-equipped to recognize, much less understand, Garifuna religious culture beyond its familiar Catholic features. For example, the early twentieth-century North American adventurer Peter Keenagh echoed the eighteenth-century missionaries by finding ‘no religion’ in Mosquitia at all, but rather only ‘a wild mixed ideology including Black Magic, Voodoo and all the extravagances of primitive superstition’ (1938: 123; cf. Bard 1965 [1855]: 245). Keenagh cast in particularly pejorative terms a religious mélange perceived by foreign witnesses as unsettling, but his caricature was not by any means atypical. The religious acts reported included ones about former slaves in Belize who ‘followed the African rites they had brought with them . . . keeping it up day and night’, especially in the weeks around Christmas, which fell between mahogany-cutting sessions (Gibbs 1883: 76), as well as ‘duppy’ belief, Obeah and ‘soukeah’ men among the so-called Sambos (Roberts 1827: 267; Gibbs 1883: 173; Conzemius 1928: 201; Keenagh 1938: 164-70). Even these caricatures are useful, however. For example, rituals against evil spirits called mafia were noted among the Paya Indians, as well as among the ‘Sambos’ in Keenagh’s report (1938: 141-2, 164), even though mafia was initially a Carib category of malicious spirits invoked on St Vincent since at least the 1600s. That the same terms for spirits were in use among different ethnic groups hints at a religious métissage that was continually under way.

That Garifuna religion of the nineteenth century was neither Catholic nor African nor Amerindian in any simple sense is best revealed in Thomas Young’s travelogue. Young described two main occasions for large ritual feasts in the villages, one at Christmastime, the other during so-called ‘Devil feasts’ (1847: 131). The description of the ‘Devil feast’ is unmistakably the first detailed written account of what is today called the dügü, a massive ritual event that recalls, reveres, placates and consults with beneficent ancestral spirits (gubida), and combats the feared mafia spirits. As described by Young, the feast lasted from three to seven days and entailed the arrival of numerous friends and relatives notified long in advance, who came to Mosquitia from as far away as Stann Creek in British Honduras. All the guests brought contributions of liquor and foods, and the plates of prepared edibles were presented on tables decorated with ‘fancy tablecloths’ and glass decanters. Foods that evoked memories of St Vincent customs, like cassava bread, were held in special esteem. Large quantities of liquor in the form of aguardiente were consumed, and women danced in a simple ‘to and fro’ movement of the hands and feet, while singing in a ‘peculiar intonation of voice’ (133). Young described the event in terms that are condescending and biased by his own Victorian Christianity, but which nonetheless are easily recognizable as roughly equivalent to today’s dügü. That these were uniquely Garifuna ritual events, rather than ...
merely borrowings from the Miskito or other nearby ethnic groups, was observed by Young as well; he declared that Miskito (including ‘Sambos’) rarely danced at all, though Miskito onlookers watched the spectacle of Garifuna drumming and dancing with quiet curiosity (135).

While Young’s account is far from comprehensive, we can infer fuller details of the ritual feasts in Eduard Conzemius’s (1928) ethnography of a dügü observed in 1920. Conzemius wrote that the feast was referred to by Ladinos as a baile mafya (mafya dance). Conzemius described the buyé, or shaman, the specialist who led the event and manifested spirits of the ancestors (gubida) on behalf of an ill patient afflicted by a malevolent spirit (mafya), and the use of red annatto dye on the faces of participants. This is at least a roughly similar ritual structure described for the Island Carib on St Vincent. Though specific reports of nineteenth-century Garifuna religion are scarce, cursory and biased by colonial and missionary objectives, by comparing Thomas Young’s account with earlier ones from St Vincent, and forward in time against the ritual witnessed by Conzemius, we can trace at least the outlines of continuities in ritual practice. Conzemius observed the preparation of food offerings for beneficial gubida spirits who then expel sickness-inducing ‘mafya’ spirits by the third day of the dügü ritual, in a pattern that at least in its basic structure continues today, and appears to show continuity with seventeenth-century reports of the low matoutou tables filled with food offerings for the spirits, as alluded to above.

Were the Catholic baptisms and saints in Garifuna homes a mere outward cover for the ‘authentic’ practices that remained secret? Conzemius thought so (1928: 200). But in view of the longer itinerary of Garifuna religion, there is no compelling need to ascribe authenticity to the dügü rites and the gubida ancestor spirits, and chicanery to Catholic ones. The reverence for the saints and rituals like baptism were obviously valued by the Garifuna, and selectively used on St Vincent even when their position required no such posturing. Some features of Catholic practice may even have been brought to St Vincent by African Catholics themselves.

Meanwhile, as on St Vincent, Protestant missionaries also worked near and among the Garifuna in the nineteenth century, especially in British territory but enjoyed little success (Kerns 1997: 34). Still, the Mississippian exile of the US Civil War, Charles Swett, attended evening service at a Methodist church in the city of Belize in 1868, and there encountered 200 ‘colored’ persons, some of whom may have been Garifuna, compared with a scant three whites (Swett 1868: 79), and Conzemius noted many Protestant conversions of Garifunas in British Honduras by the 1920s (1928: 200). It is possible that the presence of many black Protestants in the British territory swayed Garifuna settlers there whom the English missionaries could not. If so, this
slight shift foreshadowed the last decades of the twentieth century, when fast-growing Protestant evangélico movements became a key presence in nearly all Garifuna villages.

In sum, we can characterize nineteenth-century Garifuna religion as composed of elements of folk Catholicism—the appeal to diverse saints in the form of miniature icons and the attention to godparenthood and baptism, but rarely to rituals of marriage or the Eucharist—embedded within and intertwined with indigenous practices focused on singing, dancing and feasting with ancestors who proffered powers of protection, cure, success and fecundity. To these were assimilated possible new influences from the Haitians in Trujillo (Conzemius 1928: 192; Bianchi 1988: 114), and from Anglophone blacks of the British Caribbean, like the practice of Obeah.19 Garifuna religious culture was a transculturation not only of Island Carib, African and French Catholic practices carried from St Vincent, but an ongoing process of their implementation in new spaces. Yet within this creative adaptive process there also emerged a distant territorial anchor for Garifuna religious culture. St Vincent acquired the prestige of origins, and was transformed from a lived to an imagined place, a diasporic horizon against which the religious identity performed on the Central American coast was gauged. St Vincent became the sacred place of authentic origins, the place from which the ancestral spirits return, and the place of a remembered golden age of majestic self-rule and autonomy. It was there, the Garifuna say, that they had been most truly a nation defined in their own terms.

Religion and becoming black in the United States

While the second diaspora of the Garifuna is not the focus of this essay, a few comments are in order to at least gesture toward the notion of ‘joining the African diaspora’ (see Johnson 2007, for a full elaboration). The migration to the United States began in incipient form as a consequence of the transnational fruit industry between the Central American coast and cities like New Orleans. It gained force as Garifuna sailors occupied merchant marine posts left vacant during World War II, and then settled permanently on US soil. And it peaked during the last generation after the 1965 reform of US immigration law, which allowed familial migration paths by then already in place to be traversed with progressively greater frequency. Among the many surprises Garifuna migrants of the last generation report is the exposure to new racial codes.

Homeland Garifuna do not have a rigid racialist view of themselves or other groups. This may be in part because of their history of miscegenation both on St Vincent and after arrival in Honduras. Thomas Young, in 1842, described
'some being coal black, others again nearly as yellow as saffron' (in Gonzalez 1969: 25). Nancie Gonzalez’s fieldwork from the 1950s recorded Garifuna oral traditions of having become darker in color through intermarriage with other Caribbean blacks since arriving on the Central American coast in 1797, especially with those from Santo Domingo (1969: 26). Douglas Taylor (1951), among the first modern ethnographers of the Garifuna, stressed their Amerindian cultural features, and Gonzalez, the foremost contemporary ethnographer of the Garifuna, argued that they downplayed references to their Africanness through the 1950s, only publicly adopting this identification as Africanness became tolerated, and even fashionably ‘modern’ in certain venues (Gonzalez 1988: 5). Virginia Kerns’s fieldwork from the 1970s documents that Garifuna of Belize referred to themselves as ‘Carib’ as often as ‘Garifuna’, depending on with whom they were speaking (1997: 12).

There are reasons for the variability of Garifuna racial identifications. Perhaps the foremost Honduran Garifuna activist from 1970 until the present, Crisanto Meléndez, reports that, through his Honduran education in the 1950s and 1960s, Africa was never mentioned, and that he came to this knowledge late in life, through attendance at international conferences (1997, 2002). In my own fieldwork, Garifuna over forty years of age report much the same (cf. England 1999; Gordon and Anderson 1999). To cite merely one example of a story that has by now become familiar, the shaman and political leader Felix Miranda recounted his ‘conversion’ after emigrating to New York,

> Coming here has really opened my eyes, a million-fold. Particularly about who we really are. Because I had to find out who I was. One of the things I dreaded was, what if somebody asks me who I am, I would say I am a Garifuna, and they went, ‘What is that?’ Today I don't have to panic, because I know our African roots. But growing up in school, I thought this whole thing was Indian!

Still, Honduran Garifuna were and are aware of being darker in color than Honduran mestizos. In ritual performance this appears in the special attention devoted to, for example, St Esquipula, ‘Cristo Negro’. Moreover, some have cast their institutional lot with the category ‘negro’, founding organizations like La Organización Fraternal Negro Hondureño (OFRANEH) in the 1970s. But as Sarah England (1999) incisively analyzed, black identity in the homeland is balanced against other identifications called upon depending on the political context. An indigenous Amerindian identification was used, for example, in the 1992 protests against the quincentenary of Columbus’s arrival in the Americas, and the attempts thereafter to pressure the Honduran state into signing the International Labor Organization Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries #169 (1996) (Eng-
land 1999: 18-20). That identification has become even more important in the battle over the proposed reform of Constitutional Article 107, which would open Honduran beaches to foreign developers and potentially displace Garifuna communities that have been on those sites for, in some cases, over two hundred years.

In the move to the US, the pattern of a general fluidity of race identifications punctuated by specific definitions for occasions of specific political interventions is changed. It is both constrained and magnified. It is constrained as the Garifuna are read into racial categories already bounded by their proximal hosts—the large groups they are perceived as being similar to: blacks (a racial attribution), Hispanics (a linguistic or ethnic attribution), or Afro-Hispanics (a hybrid estimation). And it is magnified through the process of 'definitional duress' (Tweed 1997: 95). For example, Maria Elena, a middle-aged Garifuna woman in New York, reported first learning about the inflexibility of US race categories when she was 12:

You know how I learned about race in this country? I used to sit in the cafeteria with other foreigners who spoke Spanish or Portuguese. One day, all of a sudden, our table started getting hit with milk cartons! The American black kids were throwing food at us, thinking we weren’t speaking English just to distance ourselves from being black.

The school had to have an intervention to talk about it.


Privately, New York Garifuna universally express tensions they perceive with black Americans. The co-founder of Jamalali Uagucha, Inc., a community development project run from a storefront office, expressed it thus: ‘They want to run the whole show! They want to pull our census numbers into their category, to get their stuff! But we’re not just black, we’re Garifuna.’ Yet in public speeches, the same group proudly proclaims their 3,000 years of history from Yoruba and Ashanti ancestry, and the ‘negro fact’ of Garifuna ethnicity. In the US context, authentic roots are most often publicly presented not via the indigenous identification, nor through Hispanic or Latino connections, but rather by a strong discourse of African origins. This is also the affinity most expressed by New York buyeis, both in practice and in their own autobiographies.

The American metalanguage of race refracts Garifuna identity in a new way. Among Garifuna immigrants interviewed by England, forty-one percent report marking ‘Afro-American/Black’ on official census forms, thirty-eight percent report marking themselves as ‘Hispanic’, sixteen percent report marking ‘Other’ and writing in ‘Garifuna’, and five percent report marking ‘Other:
Afro-Hispanic’ (England 1999: 26). The three identifications present a racial mapping of the three diasporic horizons described earlier, in Africa, St Vincent and Honduras. The language of location on the African diasporic horizon is related to ‘black’ identifications; affiliation with the St Vincent diasporic horizon is related to specifically ‘Garifuna’ identifications; and loyalties toward Honduras or Central America is related to ‘Hispanic’ identifications.

Though for Garifuna in the US the repertoire of available identifications is constrained by US racial codes, there nevertheless remain multiple possible affiliations. These are selected depending on context, and indicate a process of code-switching. Just as Garifuna use religious code-switching, from ‘Catholic’ to ‘traditionalist [and Catholic]’ to ‘Cristiano’ [evangelical Protestant] (McAlister 1998: 138; Johnson 2007), they employ similar techniques with regard to ethnicity. For certain issues like land claims in Honduras brought to venues like the UN, or the attempt to claim reparations from Great Britain for the 1797 forced removal from St Vincent, indigenous identity is expedient. During the New York mayoral elections of 2001 and 2005, networking on behalf of Bronx borough president Fernando Ferrer brought the Garifuna into public action, and here their ‘Hispanic’ or ‘Afro-Hispanic’ identifications came to the fore. In the quest to locate venues, alliances and support for religious and other cultural events in the city, African diasporic identity takes front and center.

What is unique in the Garifuna case is that the ethnic reaction to being classified as ‘black’, at least in terms of religion, asserts ‘the tradition’ through analogues with Afro-Cuban and Puerto Rican Santería, Palo Monte, Santerismo and the Yoruba pantheon. In other words, the religious reaction to the racial reduction is an African diasporic one as much as a specifically Garifuna one. This leads to a partial fusion between black and African diasporic identifications. While Sarah England’s survey revealed a split in Garifuna census identifications between ‘Black’, ‘Hispanic’ and ‘Other’ denominations, all of the buyeis I interviewed expressed strong sentiments of identifying as black and Garifuna, rather than, say Hispanic-Garifuna or Honduran-Garifuna. This suggests that, unlike the pattern of the exaggeration of ethnic markers used as resistance to racialization in the US (like being francophone Catholics rather than merely ‘black’, for Haitian émigrés), Garifuna religious culture in the US leads to stronger racial identifications. This occurs because Africanness and blackness are fused in religious performances that link Garifuna tradition to the prestige and power of West African origins, and because participating in activities perceived as African culture in the racialist chiaroscuro of US color-codes reinforces ‘black’ self-classifications (cf. Telles 2004).

Many US-based and international Garifuna leaders see this renaissance as a recovery of Africanness, one that needs to be transmitted and solidified in homeland villages, and they approach the desired conversion to Africa-
centrism with missionary zeal. In October 2004, for example, an important Garifuna leader was returning from an international conference in Senegal to his home in Belize, and stopped to meet with several New York shamans for a strategy session, at which I was present. The two expressed objectives of the organization are to act as a conduit for Black Studies in Central America, and to seek reparations from Great Britain related to the 1797 deportation. The strategies under discussion were directed toward how to best re-Africanize the Central American communities by constructing new symbols that would lead homeland Garifuna into the pan-African network. The Belizean leader described progress on his plans for the construction of a ‘Garifuna culture park’ in his home country that would include not only a museum, study center and offices, but also a series of monuments—beginning with a forty-foot tall statue of the African continent, with the engraved caption, ‘We are African’—to help implement the new pedagogy. Schoolchildren from Garifuna territory throughout Central America would be bussed in to tour the monuments with trained guides, to transmit to the children an entirely new history. The purposes of the new Africa-centric teaching were described as ‘the analysis of blackness and what it is’, and to push toward a black curriculum in Garifuna education. As he reported, there is substantial resistance from the homeland villages. In one example he cited, a villager asked straight out, ‘What right do you have to try to change our memory from Carib to African?’

Despite such resistance, the group was agreed that the re-education—the re-positioning of their traditional religion within the African diaspora—was crucial to developing a greater internal pride and consciousness, and to securing prestige and benefits as an authentic and traditional culture in the international political scene. The appeal to territorial Africanness through its monumental force over the Belizean landscape here appeared as an entryway to the discussion of the condition of blackness. This offers the prospect of a counterpoint to a Central America that is hegemonically mestizo in national mythologies, in which blackness disappears, along with the Garifuna.

Whether one finds this missionary zeal to reform homeland Garifuna self-perceptions as African and black an important recovery of origins, or a pernicious globalization of US racial definitions, what is key to note is that the recovery of the repressed, the return of Africa, does not happen of its own accord. If this expansive African diasporan culture is ‘in the air’, it is also a strategic intervention orchestrated by key leaders, by which African diaspora culture serves as a platform for the discussion of blackness, and race constructions more generally.

The return of Garifuna black cosmopolitans from New York to Honduras, Belize and Guatemala carrying back a new racialized self-consciousness is consistent with comparative evidence of other Caribbeans’ emigrations to the US.
Racializations are internalized and then remitted to the Caribbean homeland. They are remitted by being carried by return migrants, as well as via global media of film and television that are overwhelmingly skewed to US-based representations of racial types and tensions. The Garifuna, like other Caribbean groups, are becoming not only a translocal society moving between Central America and US cities, but also a globalized society deluged in signs under which Africanness and blackness are merged. This globalizing racializing process appears to be narrowing the discrepancy between homeland and hostland articulations of race (McAlister 1998: 135; Waters 1999: 88; Levitt 2001: 60). But what is different about the case of Garifuna ancestor religion is that whereas religion or other forms of culture are typically a means of ethnic resistance to racialization, a means of fortifying sentiments of Haitianess, Cubanness, Puerto-Ricaness, etc., in the face of the juggernaut of the US racial reduction, here religion serves as at once a source of specific ethnic pride and as a gateway to a global black identity. As we saw, some leaders then even construct strategies for converting homeland communities to black consciousness.

**Conclusion**

In the foregoing, I have explored the notion that the Garifuna ‘left’ the African diaspora in the course of the ethnogenetic process that unfolded on St Vincent and then on the Honduran coast. What does that mean? African horizons receded in conscious memory, even as a reference point in ritual performance. This progressed in roughly two steps: first by becoming Caribs, albeit always marked by the color code of ‘black’, and then by becoming properly Garifuna, a unique Afro-Euro-Indian fusion whose sacred horizon was the shore of St Vincent. It was, and still is among Central American Garifuna, from that homeland that ancestral spirits return to aid and afflict the living.

Today, through the migrations to US cities and the return of those migrants to Central American home villages, many Garifuna are again joining the African diaspora. New memories, new diasporic horizons, have been disclosed and made thinkable for the Garifuna in the space of New York. The nature and style of this reclaimed Africanness is strongly shaped by the Yoruba-centric tendencies of African diasporic religious networks in the city, pushing the ‘recovery of the repressed’ toward specific niches. But that is a different chapter of a larger and still-unfolding story.

To conclude I would like to briefly revisit the analytical issues raised by the category of ‘African diaspora religions’. Earlier I referred to the notion of
‘latent’ Africanness hinted at in the work of Genovese, Gilroy and others. I then proposed, and attempted to give historical justification for, an allegedly clearer analytical model, namely that of ‘leaving and joining’ diasporic positions. The hope was that this might offer traction for answering the call for the production of not merely theories, but ethnographies and histories of diasporization (Gordon and Anderson 1999). In reconsidering this proposal in light of the historical trajectory presented, however, the two models hardly seem mutually exclusive. How might we retain the thrust of arguments like Genovese’s while at the same time attempting to give the notion of diaspora the more precise parameters it direly needs? Perhaps in this way. We can break the umbrella rubric of ‘diaspora’ into the study of at least three (and probably more) different social phenomena gathered under its shelter: 1) Diaspora in the form of relatively shared cultural dispositions across multiple sites, to the eye of an outside observer, but which may or may not exist as an internalized consciousness by religious actors. 2) Diaspora as an internalized conversion of consciousness, the subjective self-understanding as being of a diaspora, whether or not a multi-sited cultural resemblance empirically exists. 3) Diaspora as ‘diaspora’ and hence ideology, a discursive artifact articulated in speech and in the public sphere in order to achieve desired effects (Johnson 2007).

We might then begin to examine how the three forms are variously intercalibrated with each other. In thinking of the present case, for example, the Garifuna may always have remained ‘in’ the African diaspora in sense one, even as, in sense two, they ‘left’ the African diaspora. And the third sense is only now being engaged, beginning in the 1960s. The model is more complicated than it appears because, as New York Garifuna presently join the diaspora in the second and third senses, the first sense is shifted—the underlying set of relatively shared cultural dispositions performed in ritual begins to be tilted and reified in a particular version of it, the Yoruba-centric model. Entering or leaving diasporic ways of seeing in one sense, then, is always contingent on configuration of the other two. Of course, the actual work of interpretation becomes far more complex with the consideration of the multiple diasporic horizons in the historical repertoire of groups like the Garifuna. Yet this admittedly schematic model might help us at least begin to think comparatively about how diasporic horizons on the one hand enclose and delimit the range of religious practice, and on the other open out toward previously unimagined alliances and futures.
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Notes

1. All references to contemporary Garifuna religious practices, when not otherwise cited, are based on my own fieldwork. Fieldwork was conducted in multiple Garifuna villages of Honduras, most intensively in Corozal and in San Juan, as well as in the Bronx, New York. At Honduran sites, research was carried out in stints of from two to five months per year from 1997 to 2001. Research in the Bronx was carried in annual month-long visits between 1998 and 2004.

I take these rough figures from the recent publication of Sarah England (2006: 13), who derives the figures from Summer Institute of Linguistics estimates of Garifuna-speakers in various locales, newspaper reports in the US and her own calculations of fertility rates since the data was recorded. Honduras has an estimated 100,000 Garifuna in forty-three villages and cities; Belize, 12,000-20,000 in six villages plus Belize City; Guatemala, 16,700 Garifuna in Livingston and Puerto Barrios; and Nicaragua, 1,500 in three villages. But given that many of these figures are a decade old, and in view of high fertility rates, England estimates the total Central American population at around 200,000. Major US centers of Garifuna residence include New York, Los Angeles and New Orleans. Census numbers in the US are impossible to calculate since Immigration and Naturalization Service figures are tabulated by country of origin. England estimates the US population at 100,000-200,000; I lean toward the more conservative end of that estimate here.

2. The pattern begins with Zionist references at the end of the nineteenth century; its application to the African diaspora was initiated under that nomenclature around mid-twentieth century. The Armenian and Greek cases also predate the application to the African one, but were not as frequently invoked or discursively dominant (Gilroy 1993: 23, 205-208; Cohen 1997).

3. On this score of temporal frame, Palmer (1998) notes that the common use of ‘African diaspora’ today is actually only one in a much longer set of ‘streams’ of African diasporas, the first beginning 100,000 years ago. He places the second stream around 3000 BCE, with the mass movement of the Bantu-speaking peoples within the African continent and to the Indian Ocean. The third major stream was a trading diaspora initiated around the fifth century BCE, as traders, merchants, slaves and soldiers emigrated to Europe, the Middle East and Asia. The fourth major African diasporic stream is the one commonly meant by the phrase today, caused by the Atlantic trade in African slaves. The fifth stream began during the nineteenth century with the end of slavery and continues to the present. Palmer notes that the key issues of racial oppression and resistance to it as the salient features are characteristic only of the last two streams, together comprising the ‘modern’ African diaspora.

4. The question is whether the application of arguments about embodied memories are helpful in discussing diasporic identifications, or whether the latter are more usefully restricted to consciously held subject-positions, since someone—either a social actor or her
interpreter—must consciously match those bodily practices to spatial coordinates in order for them to be considered ‘diasporic’—referring to a distant territorial horizon—in any meaningful sense of the term.

5. There is a small but important discrepancy between the original French (at least as I have encountered it in Hennepin’s 1704 version), and the English translation provided by Hulme and Whitehead. Where Hulme and Whitehead’s version shows, ‘There are a great number of negroes who live with them . . .’ (italics mine), the French version in Hennepin reads, ‘Il y a quantité de Negres qui vivent comme eux . . .’ (italics mine).

6. By 1764, Sir William Young, Britain’s future Governor of Dominica and a landholder on St Vincent, found the Island Caribs completely dominated, ‘gradually extirpated or reduced to their obedience’ (1764: 8), and uses the phrase ‘Black Caribs’ in writing by, at the latest, 1773, when Great Britain was ceded St Vincent by France, until 1776, St Vincent was administratively subject to the Governor of Grenada. Beginning in 1776 it gained its own Governor, namely Valentine Morris. It again fell to the French (and Black Caribs) in 1777 before reverting to British dominion in 1783.

7. A small Island Carib enclave, established as a reserve in 1903, exists on the island of Dominica; a small number of Island Carib Amerindians also remain on St Vincent, though many were killed in the volcanic eruption of Mt Soufrière in 1902.

8. Davidson wrote that the Black Caribs sold their tobacco principally in Martinique, where it was made into Macouba, named after a district in Martinique where they formerly raised the best tobacco in the West Indies (1787: 18).

9. The prevalence of saints in homes was noted especially by John Lloyd Stephens, Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan, vol. 1 (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1841), in Kerns 1997: 34. Gonzalez (1988: 97) notes that ninety percent of Garifuna consider themselves ‘Catholic’ in the contemporary moment, and that this is not in any way regarded as contradictory with ancestor rituals. This has been my observation in the communities where I have worked in Honduras as well, with the key proviso that the number of evangélicos is higher today than 13 years ago, and that these evangélicos aggressively resist and denounce the ancestor practices.

10. Mondonga is a contemporary region in the interior of the Democratic Republic of Congo, but during the slave trade and thereafter in Central and South America, ‘Mondongo’ referred in general terms to the fact that ‘the man in question came from the interior, roughly to the north and east of the Congo (river) mouth . . .’ (Curtin 1969: 188).

11. Hodgson 1757 reports this event, as appears in Bard (1965 [1855]: 338, 357; cf. Thornton 1998: 284). The slaverships in this case were Dutch.


14. Subirana was born in Spain in 1807, and came to Cuba in 1850 and then to the Republic of Honduras in 1856. His work among the Garifunas on the north coast took place from 1858-1862 (Davidson 1984b: 449-451).
18. Swett reported finding six churches in the town of Belize, including two Episcopa-
lian, one Methodist, one Baptist, one Presbyterian and one Catholic (1968: 78). Addition-
ally, Gibbs (1883: 151) noted that a Wesleyan community of North Americans was settled
just a mile north of the Black Carib village at Punta Gorda.

19. Many Jamaicans arrived in Belizean, Guatemalan and Honduran port towns like La
Ceiba to work for the banana companies, beginning in the late 1800s, occupying the so-
called Barrio Inglés in that town (Solien Gonzalez 1969: 34; Posas 1993: 16). Similar
migration occurred in other Honduran port towns like Tela, Puerto Cortés, La Lima and
Puerto Castillo.

20. Most specifically, the phrase ‘African diaspora’ itself was first employed by George
Shepperson in a paper presented at the International Congress of African History held
at the University of Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, in 1965. To cite Edward Alpers (2001: 4):
Indeed, when George Shepperson first joined ‘African’ to ‘diaspora’ in 1965, he explicitly
did so because of the close parallels he saw between the Jewish diaspora and the dispersal of
Africans as a consequence of the slave trade. Shepperson argued that African American and
Caribbean intellectuals themselves had for a long time recognized and articulated connec-
tions between their own people in exile and that of the Jews. By his application of ‘diaspora’
to the experience of ‘The African Abroad’, as the session at which he presented his paper
was entitled and his paper makes plain, he declared as an historian and an outsider that he,
too, saw such parallels. Shepperson’s achievement here was to recognize the great similari-
ties in the comparative histories of these two great dispersions, especially the role of ‘slavery
and imperialism’ in the forced migration of both Jews and Africans, and to name the one
by the term used for the other.
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