Wanaragua. The *Garífuna* Rhythmic Key as the Epicenter of Afro-American Mestizaje

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Synthesis

This paper proposes a study of the concept of the Afro-American rhythmic key or timeline through a case study: the Wanaragua rhythm from the *Garífuna* community of Livingston, Guatemala. The aim is to understand the rhythmic perspectives it presents and its foundational relationship with many Afro-American rhythms, within an analytical framework that considers the complexity and dynamics of this social group in terms of its history of slavery, miscegenation, war, and marginalization. To achieve this, it proposes the existence of a "*Garífuna* Key" as a contribution to the study of emerging Afro-American music from a mestizo thought perspective.

Introduction

In April 2008, I had the opportunity to conduct fieldwork with the *Garífuna* community of Livingston, Guatemala, which later led to the publication of an e-book in which I worked primarily on the didactic transposition of the music from this community to classrooms anywhere in the world, where these rhythms can be played using tables and chairs (Perez Guarnieri: 2009). As a percussionist, I not only recorded various audiovisual materials regarding this phenomenon but also had the chance to actively participate, experience, and learn rhythms, songs, and dances.

The Garífuna music is truly captivating from any perspective, as it not only highlights the interrelationship between the drumbeats, turtle shells, and sisiras; the energetic, unpredictable, and original chants that accompany it, and the dances that emerge in this part of the world, but it is also admirable for the ancestry evident in each of these performances, which express stories of resistance, resilience, marginalization, and identity that span across all of the Americas.

Based on the material worked on and considering the proven educational and musical potential in the didactic transposition of this music, I made a second trip during the months of January and February 2010, when I had the opportunity to live even more closely with the community and learn many aspects of their culture, leading me to consider

Garífuna music as a foundational epicenter for understanding Afro-American music.

In this article, I will take the Wanaragua rhythm as a case study to analyze the hybridization present in the Garífuna rhythmic key or timeline and its relation to the mestizo characteristic of this social group, proposing this approach for future studies of emerging Afro-American music.

2. Context
Afro-America

The forced arrival of enslaved men, women, and children during the colonization of the Americas is still not fully acknowledged in its entirety.

The presence of Afro-American cultural identity has historically been suppressed, rendered invisible, and diluted in favor of shaping American nations toward the end of the 19th century under European ideals of a white and "civilized" society, in which Black and Indigenous elements were perceived as a clear hindrance to progress. Even after slavery was abolished on our continent—a process that began in the early 19th century and culminated with Brazil in 1888—racist ideas were far from disappearing. On the contrary, the concepts of "race" and "color"[1] were established as a means to assert the hegemony of the ruling classes, this time with "scientific" arguments that purportedly demonstrated the innate inferiority of Black, Indigenous, mixed-race, and mulatto populations.

Scientific racism was quickly adopted by the elites of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, immersed in addressing the challenge of how to transform their 'backward' and underdeveloped nations into modern and 'civilized' republics. This transformation, they concluded, had to go beyond being merely political or economic; it also had to be racial. To be civilized, Latin America had to become white." (Reid Andrews: 2007, p. 197).

Since then, under the guise of the shared ideals of that era, the authorities of various American states implemented actions to suppress and annihilate cultural expressions of African, mestizo, Indigenous, or, more broadly, non-European origin. These actions, far from being halted with the abolition of slavery, became even more pronounced, now under the redemptive pretext of the ideas of civilization and progress.

Within this context, the formation of Afro-American identity groups and the persistence of their cultural expressions becomes even more valuable, as those national ideals and principles have generated prejudices and determinations that persist today, relegating these groups to marginalization and structural poverty.

Throughout this work, I will attempt to describe some general characteristics of

[1] "[...] The 'coloniality of power' created 'race' and created 'color' [...] these classificatory categories, far from being based on the description of objective biological or cultural data, were historical inventions functional to the conditions of coloniality and the post-colonial situation." (Segato: 2007, p. 100).

Garífuna music, highlighting its African component and its mestizo origin, establishing a direct relationship with the concept of mestizaje in the Americas. This will, in turn, allow for a reconsideration of the analysis and systematization of the music of Afro-American cultures in general, based on the recognition of the Garífuna key or timeline.

The presence of African identity in the Garífuna community is evident not only in its music and dance but also in many other aspects that I will attempt to analyze. However, the goal of this work is not solely to identify and describe musical elements that may express this Africanness, but to orient the analysis towards understanding the musician within their current social context. To this end, performative arts will be considered in the search to comprehend, interpret, and express the troubling situation of Afro-descendants in Latin America (Mukuna: 1999), considering that Africanness is the identity these social groups "have shaped to resist enslavement" (Arocha, cited by Ferreira: 2008, p. 237), through processes of transculturation, resilience, extension, and creation of these musical forms and diverse expressions. Because even as sociopolitical discourses evolve to mask this situation, marginalization, disregard, and devaluation remain a colonial legacy that continues to persist in relation to these communities.

I believe it is crucial to emphasize the importance of deepening these studies and understanding that *"When one hears a drum, they are not merely listening to a percussive sound but perceiving the vibration of a culture through time, embodied in the simple act of playing, of executing certain rhythms" (Perez Guarnieri, 2009)*. The study and analysis of Afro-American music will undoubtedly generate knowledge about human relationships, especially in times when flags of cultural diversity and social action are easily raised while entire families succumb to the lack of opportunities available to them.

The Garifuna People - A Story of Mestizaje

In 1635, a ship carrying enslaved people from Central Africa (modern-day Senegal and Gambia) sailed toward the Antilles, much like countless other vessels that fueled the deplorable trade in human lives. At the time, the Americas offered colonial powers lucrative opportunities requiring enslaved labor.

There are conflicting accounts about whether the shipwreck was accidental or the result of a rebellion aboard the slaver. Oral tradition leans toward the latter. What is certain is that these Africans arrived free on the shores of the island of Saint Vincent, where they were welcomed by the indigenous Arawak people.

In Yorumein, the indigenous name for the island, these Africans began to coexist with others from various shipwrecks, escaped slaves, Caribs, and the Arawaks themselves. Despite their differences, they intermingled, and the Garifuna ethnicity emerged. This group, in some ways,

formed an alliance against the colonial European settlers.

The Garifunas began to represent a significant force of rebellion in the Antilles, earning *"a reputation for belligerence that heightened the imaginaries about the Caribs"* (Arrivillaga, 2009, p. 24). They led an important insurrection movement that ended in 1797 when they were defeated by the British, who decided to deport the 2,080 survivors to Roatán Island in Honduras, in what is considered *"the saddest day in Garifuna history."* From that point on, a series of migratory movements, both forced and voluntary, diversified the group into various settlements around the Gulf of Honduras, including Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua[2].

It is very difficult to understand and systematize the cultural manifestations of this group through a Eurocentric lens because, as we have briefly described, the history of the Garifuna is one of enslavement, mestizaje, wars, and forced migrations. The impact of this historical trajectory on community identity is profound. At the same time, the African and Arawak components that gave rise to the Garifuna not only point to the concept of mestizaje but also to a process of cultural complementarity. This process can explain this encounter, as well as many others across our continent. Ibarra (2007) applies this concept to his studies on the Zambo groups of Mosquitia:

"It is not about acculturation or transculturation; rather, it should be understood as the coupling of similar cultural traits and practices inherent to the sociocultural backgrounds of each of the cultures that meet, which are the product of their history and their life in society. [...] What seems to be observed is that, in the emergence of the Zambo groups, no cultural elements were introduced or transmitted that could be deemed entirely 'new'; instead, the similarities of these practices functioned as points of contact that were found and complemented each other. Sociocultural similarities would contribute to fostering more positive and less conflictive relationships between the Indigenous people and the Africans, helping them to face new lives in less challenging ways." (Ibarra, 2007, p. 108)

This cultural complementarity within the context of Garifuna history allows us to understand the circumstances of the African/Arawak encounter through the similarity of certain cultural, agricultural,

[2] This event represents, for the African diaspora, a second deportation. Outraged, enslaved, mistreated, Africans arrived in Central America, where, after years of integration and fusion with the Arawaks, they managed to build a community. Once again, they endured destruction and deportation, with most survivors being young people who later had to collaborate with colonial forces. Amid all this upheaval, the Garifuna settled mainly in Belize and Guatemala, managing to preserve their extraordinary culture. Therefore, when we hear the Garaon playing a *parranda*, we are perceiving much more than just that rhythm; we are hearing an entire people maintaining their identity through the resounding beat of that drum.

and funerary practices, among others. However, it is essential to note that this encounter took place in a context of hostility and ongoing warfare, where Africans and Arawaks shared a common enemy: the white man. The Garifuna, as an already established mixed-race group, faced this environment with exemplary resilience and resistance, earning recognition in the region as a warrior and steadfast people.

To understand their expressions, it is necessary to consider the dynamic nature of mestizo thinking and, above all, the rupture that mestizaje represents in the linear conception of time typically employed in our analyses. Socially, they are communities in constant movement, historically forced to survive under adverse conditions. Culturally, their expressions, as will be explored in this study, challenge Western notions of temporality through the fusion of highly diverse and complex elements—often simplified and undervalued by Eurocentric perspectives.

The Garifuna people express a transnational, mestizo cultural identity encompassing settlements throughout the Gulf of Honduras and extending to the United States, home to the largest Garifuna community[3]. This group shares common historical experiences, a collective ancestry, and a shared culture (Hall, 1999), which grants them a sense of unity. However, their culture also continues to develop unique characteristics based on their geographical and historical contexts. They build their future within a social framework that connects them through their past and, despite differences, unmistakably positions them as "others"—a placement shaped by the colonial experience and reinforced by the nations they inhabit, which continue to marginalize them.

The Garifuna Community of Livingston

Livingston is a small town on the Caribbean coast of Guatemala, located where the Río Dulce meets the sea. Accessible only by boat—either by traveling up the Río Dulce or along the Caribbean coast from Puerto Barrios—the journey along the river, although longer, offers an unforgettable experience through vast mangrove forests, vibrant birdlife, volcanoes, and an explosion of lush green vegetation.

The town is small, and while the Garifuna make up just under half of the population, their language is heard everywhere—a

[3] Regarding this, Arrivillaga Cortes, in "La población Garífuna Migrante" (2009), highlights the mobility of this community as a distinctive trait. He also explains the settlement in the United States as the pursuit of the "American dream," framing it as the only viable escape from the current social marginalization of the Garifuna. The author references the following demographic figures to illustrate their population distribution: 98,000 inhabitants in Honduras, 14,061 in Belize, 45,000 in Guatemala, 500 in Nicaragua, and 120,000 in the United States. Based on these figures and their geographical dispersion, the author conceptualizes Garifuna citizenship as transnational.

highly expressive tongue with tones deeply connected to African languages. Walking through the streets of Livingston, one feels as though everything is music.

Current migratory movements have led many families to depend economically on a member residing in the United States, home to the largest Garifuna community today. The livelihood of the inhabitants of Livingston is tied to activities such as fishing, manual labor, and tourism. Many musicians residing there "begs" from tourists, forming occasional groups that spontaneously roam bars seeking those who might take an interest in their music. After performing for a few minutes, they "pass the hat" to collect some coins.

In terms of education, Garifuna language content has recently been introduced into district schools. However, its implementation remains challenging due to the lack of specific teacher training in this area. Beyond the historical perspective mentioned earlier, I find it essential to express the commitment I have made to the Garifuna community in general and the Livingston community in particular, emphasizing the pressing needs in all areas of life within this town. Garifuna music does more than express ancestry, sacredness, and Afro-American cultural heritage—it also reflects the marginalization to which they have historically been, and continue to be, subjected.

Within Guatemala itself, little is known about Garifuna history. Clichés or stereotypes about Afro-American black culture often dominate perceptions, portraying it as picturesque, Caribbean, or somewhat exotic, which fosters foreignness and invisibility. The Garifuna are often referred to as "the blacks from the coast," with limited acknowledgment of their Guatemalan nationality, and their language remains widely unrecognized.

The marginalization I refer to is evident in the lack of attention from governmental bodies to basic needs, such as healthcare, infrastructure, and education, denying equal opportunities to this community.

Nevertheless, the historical resilience of this social group allows them to maintain a strong collective commitment to transmitting and preserving their cultural identity despite adversity.

Garifuna identity representations, such as the music described and analyzed in this work, not only embody the collective and individual acts of resistance that enabled them to escape the fatal fate imposed by colonization and the slave trade but also highlight the group's remarkable ability to reorganize, rebuild communities, and redefine their sense of identity within this context. This process demonstrates that they are not merely survivors

of a diluted African past but represent the transfer and integration of African culture into the Americas (Lovejoy: 2007).

3. General Characteristics of Garífuna Music

The music of the Garífuna people from Livingston, Guatemala, represents much more than an organization of sounds with specific characteristics that we might attempt to transcribe and perform. It reflects the impact that the colonization process had on the formation of this social group at social, economic, cultural, and historical levels.

The Garífuna drum tells a story that speaks of both war and peace, slavery and freedom, seas and rivers, death and life, center and periphery, conquered and conquerors, victors and defeated, marginalization and hope, Africa and America.

"In appearance, silenced beyond memory by the power of the experience of slavery, Africa was, in fact, present everywhere: in the daily life and customs of the slave barracks; in the languages and patois of the plantations; in names and words, sometimes disconnected from their taxonomies; in the secret syntactic structures through which other languages were produced; in the stories and tales told to children; in the religious practices and spiritual beliefs; in the arts, crafts, music, and rhythms of society during slavery and after emancipation. Africa, the signifier that could not be directly represented in slavery, remained, and still remains, as the ineffable and unexpressed 'presence' in Caribbean culture. It is 'hidden' behind every verbal inflection, every narrative twist of Caribbean cultural life. This is the secret code with which every Western text was 're-read.' It is the deep bass of all rhythms and bodily movements. This was, and is, the 'Africa' that is 'alive and kicking in the diaspora'" (Hall, 1999, 139).

The continuity of certain African customs in America, such as sociality and the cooperative spirit that unites all members of the Garífuna community, can be observed in music which, like African music, has the following characteristics:

Functionality: Music is an integral part of life itself, accompanying the community's work and social events. For this reason, performances generally include rhythms, songs, dances, clothing, colors, flavors, aromas, and foods that vary according to social and religious contexts.

Sociality: Life is essentially social. Relationships with others and with nature are prioritized. All members of the community participate in musical events in some way: playing instruments, singing, dancing, cooking, or preparing clothing. Instruments are accessible to everyone; it is common to see children practicing on paint

or milk cans. Smaller drums are also made to be sold to tourists, and children often use them. Music reflects this sociality through the combination of rhythmic functions in the percussion ensemble, antiphonal singing, and dance.

Religiosity: The rhythms and chants of the Garífuna are rooted in and directly connected to the worship of ancestors and various deities, which, according to their beliefs, are revered. Syncretic rituals such as the Chugu and the Dugu are observed. It is also common to hear Garífuna chants accompanied by drums during Catholic Mass.

Orality: This music is transmitted orally from generation to generation and was not designed to be written down. The teaching of chants and rhythms is done exclusively through oral transmission and imitation. I have observed a very logical and interesting sequence in rhythm learning, which is built progressively, starting with basic fingerings that gradually become more complex until reaching the execution of traditional rhythms.

Naturalness: The relationship between the Garífuna people and nature is historical and constant, from everyday activities such as fishing, agriculture, and gastronomy. This connection is also reflected in music, which flows continuously, with rhythms expressing nature not only through the use of animal hides, turtle shells, and conch shells used as trumpets and rattles, but also through the perception of rhythmic fluidity.

The Instruments

This article focuses on drum beats and chants, *Sisiras,* and turtle shells, though it should be noted that there is an entire repertoire of music created with guitar, singing, and percussion that is also extremely interesting[4].

These beats are performed with a percussion ensemble that adheres to the logic of African and Afro-American ensembles, in the sense of clearly establishing the functions of lead, base, and improvisation.

The instruments used are:

Garaón Primera: A membranophone instrument constructed from a single hollowed-out log (Mahogany, San Juan, or Palm). It features a deer hide drumhead with wire snares, a wooden hoop, and a tensioning system made of ropes and wooden pegs tightened using a tourniquet system. (See photo.) Function: Improvisation.

Garaón Segunda: Same characteristics as described for the Garaón Primera but with larger dimensions, rope snares, and thus a much deeper sound. Function: Lead and Base.

Sisiras or Maracas: Large maracas made from gourds filled with seeds and small stones, paired and connected by a thread. Function: Lead and Base.

Illacu[5]*:* Rattles made of marine conch shells sewn onto fabric, worn by dancers

around their calves. (Used in the Waranagua.)

4. Drum Beats and the Key

The traditional drum beats I have learned and recorded are: *Hüngühüngü, Parranda, Chumba, Punta,* and *Waranagua.* Each of these has its own particularities, its dance, and its functionality.

As mentioned earlier, it is noteworthy to observe in these beats the African rhythmic organization, not only in terms of the distribution of roles and functions within the percussion ensemble (Perez Guarnieri: 2007) but also in the resulting rhythms, organized in linear and multilinear forms structured around the use of a Key or Timeline (Nketia: 1974, pp. 125-128).

In this regard, it is also important to mention the rhythmic structure concerning a pulse, an organic element around which the music is organized, whose presence, whether material or implicit, is unchanging (Vallejo: 2005): *"This music is organized concerning a time measurement pattern, a true common denominator for all the musicians, which can be made audible or remain implicit"* (Arom, Simha, regarding Central African music, cited by Vallejo op. cit).

In this sense, the pattern, which in a binary subdivision we would call "3:3:2," is observed as the structural basis of the rhythms discussed. It is a key often externalized through idiophones such as the *Sisiras* and turtle shells, although it can also be recognized in the mechanics and movements of the drummers and in the dance steps.

3:3:2 Key

91.1 9...1.

The key is present at all times; it flows through feet and hands, is expressed in dance, is heard in the instruments, but above all, it is felt and perceived.

The *Garaón Segunda* (the deepest drum) embodies the base function and also highlights this key. Not only does it structure and "contain" the entire beat, but it is also generally the drum that starts the rhythm, signals, and anticipates the beat that will be played and the tempo at which it will be executed. The importance of the base drum is significant, and the musician in charge must excel in power and precision. This is because the ensembles do not involve multiple percussion instruments with drum duplication; rather, they typically feature one of each instrument in a trio-quartet format (*Garaón Primera, Garaón Segunda, Sisiras,* and turtle shell).

[4] There are "Parranda" songs performed with guitar, voice, and percussion. In this regard, I must mention Juan Carlos Sanches, a wonderful exponent of the genre.

[5] Used only in the Waranagua rhythm. In the documented examples of this rhythm, when it is performed outside its usual context without the participation of dancers, the *Sisiras* are used instead.

The *Garaón Primera,* smaller and with higher tension tuning compared to the *Garaón Segunda,* improvises.

This timeline or "3:3:2" key, as mentioned earlier, structures the rhythmic patterns observed. For a deeper understanding of the analysis, it is noteworthy to highlight what I consider transcendent and captivating in the study of this music: the constant hybridization between what, in our Western metric systematic approach, we would categorize as binary or ternary subdivisions.

I use the term *transcendent* because I observe in these drum rhythms a characteristic common to all Afro-American music, which I have long referred to as the "Rhythmic Mountain Range of America":

Binary Key (3:3:2)

91..19..1.

Ternary Key (3 against 2)

91.. 9.1

The three components of this timeline can flow in such a way as to create a constant interaction between binary and ternary patterns. This can occur through juxtaposition—where one key clearly marks a binary pattern while a drum overlays with ternary rhythms, or vice versa—resulting in hybridization that often complicates analysis for Westernized or metrized ears. Alternatively, it can occur through *Natural Conversion*, where the interchange between rhythmic modalities happens seamlessly, without guidelines or announcements, yet maintaining consistency in subdivision. These variations occur according to context, energy, speed, volume, and the interaction with dancers, among other factors.

Fernando Ortiz, in his work *"La africanía de la música folklórica cubana"* (Ortiz, 1954, p. 238), describes a series of "Generative Rhythmic Cells." Referring to this pattern, he details it as "The so-called Tresillo," highlighting the Western tendency to metrically confine rhythm, leading to the perception of the tresillo as an "irregular" value unable to coexist with binary rhythmic cells. Ortiz explicitly notes that the written formula of "quarter note triplet" is improper in this context.

However, based on my direct experience with these rhythms, what I observe aligns with the earlier point: the three sounds of the mentioned key constantly fluctuate between ternary and binary subdivisions without needing explicit guidelines, announcements, or coordination. This is neither a ternary key (commonly labeled as "Tresillo" or "3 against 2") nor a binary key (3:3:2). Often, it is not even consistently evident at an auditory level; it arises from gestures and continuous movement[6].

5. Wanaragua

The *Wanaragua* (or *Yancunú*) [7] is a rhythm with origins tracing back to the island of St. Vincent—the ancestral homeland of the Garífuna people. According to popular

knowledge, Garífuna men, disturbed by the constant harassment and threats from white men towards their women, created this dance. They disguised themselves as women, donning dresses, masks, and wigs to deceive English soldiers, who were caught off guard and subdued by the Garífuna. The dance showcases movements of great skill and agility, revolving around a principal step.
The main step of the dance consists of a permanent binary balance between the heel and the tip of the foot as the main step, from which the dancer then enters and exits according to their skill and ability. It is audibly externalized through the *"Illacu."*

The dancer's feet move symmetrically, balancing between the tip and the heel in a binary movement over the ternary base sustained by the *Garaón Segunda.* The dancer begins to perform various movements that dictate what the drummer should play, creating a dialogue in which the drum must follow the dancer's steps.

The structuring timeline of Garífuna music is present in a hybrid and constant manner.

Throughout the performance, variations between binary and ternary subdivisions, which are not prearranged, can be appreciated. These variations respond to contextual situations, especially in relation to the dance, which directs the improvisational function of the *Garaón Primera* and directly determines the interrelationships established between rhythmic functions.

Moreover, I believe that the sound produced by the dance steps tends to binarize the ensemble, as this main step generates figures of quarter and eighth notes in conventional notation in the maracas.

This randomness evidenced/expressed in the *Wanaragua* and in Garífuna rhythms in general can refer us to the concept of unpredictability and the ever-changing dynamics of mestizaje. Considering the emerging complexity of the brutal encounter between Africans, Americans, and Europeans in the Americas, we find in these rhythms that chaotic dimension inherent to blends and mestizajes.

The interpretative approach, the mechanics, and the movements of musicians and dancers generate a complex musical universe that can only be understood from the mestizo logic. To this end, it is interesting to cite Gruzinski's metaphor of the cloud:

"But what predominates in nature and in our environment is the cloud, a form that is desperately complex, vague, changing, fluctuating, and always in motion.

[6] In fact, the presence of the key could be referred to as beats that are felt but not heard. Perhaps this line of research could be further explored in relation to the mechanics and movements, concepts that attempt to describe rhythmic interpretation based on the movement musicians make to play rather than on the acoustic phenomenon itself.

[7] Wanaragua is the Garífuna name, and the term "Yuncunú" would be, according to oral sources, the "Spanish" name. In fact, the latter is the name by which the rhythm under study is popularly known, although I will refer to it in this work by its original name.

Mestizajes belong to this order of reality. [...] The model of the cloud assumes that all reality entails, on the one hand, an unrecognizable part and, on the other, a dose of uncertainty and randomness." (Gruzinski, 2007, p. 70)

These are musically rhythmic forms that are open, flexible, and dynamic, with pre-established guidelines and parameters in relation to fundamental functions structured around a timeline, constantly flowing between the rhythmic dimensions that, from our Western perspective, we call binary and ternary.

Perhaps one of the main challenges in systematizing these rhythms is precisely that randomness in division, that lack of definition in the boundaries between the binary and ternary, which does not fit into metric structures that contrast with the constant dynamism of mestizaje.

It may be that the metric categorization *"binary-ternary"* corresponds to the logic of establishing *"castes"* and denying the diversity of mestizaje. It is difficult to comprehend how such a clearly defined yet arbitrary boundary can be established without considering the possibility of a dynamic logic of indivisibility points within it.

6. The Garífuna Key: Expression of Mestizaje

During the analysis of this issue, I have found rhythmic dimensions in the *Waranagua* rhythm that lead me to assert that experiencing it allows for an understanding of those dimensions present in all Afro-American rhythms across the continent. The Western notations through which we usually learn to play an instrument, compose, create, listen, analyze, and conceptualize music do not allow us to understand and value the immense richness present in these musical forms that naturally emerge from a complex process of slavery, wars, forced migrations, and ongoing marginalization.

It is not possible to apply an analytical framework tied to metric structures perfectly divisible into multiples of two or three figures because, while these divisions do occur, they do not remain invariant during the performance process. As in the fundamental principles of African music and as a clear example of its presence in the Americas, Garífuna rhythmic structures possess an internal

[8] It would have been very interesting to access audio recordings of this rhythm from its origins since we cannot ignore that the population's access to mass media also determines its "metrization." Likewise, given the bleak socioeconomic outlook, the idealization of North American culture, and the close possibility of migrating north in pursuit of that "American dream," the penetration of massive urban radio music is constant, and its influence is undeniable. Many musicians, in their pursuit of that dream, embark on musical explorations involving different commercial genres with modern instruments (electronic drums, synthesizers, bass, and electric guitar) and create a very interesting fusion. In these pursuits, the rhythms undergo quantization and permanent innovation, especially in the performances of younger musicians who are more influenced by media-driven music. With this in mind, it is common to confuse this rhythm with another currently in fashion: reggaetón, which has a clearly binary metrization.

organization that corresponds to linear and multilinear forms interrelated through a *Key* or timeline, functioning as a constant reference for everything that is played, danced, and sung. (Nketia: 1974, op. cit.).

This key may or may not be externalized by some idiophone instrument—typically, in Garífuna music, maracas or turtle shells depending on the rhythm or context—but it underlies, structures, and organizes the entire performance.

For this analysis, I will use Ferreira's concept of *"Structural Core,"* which he employs to describe various Afro-American percussion ensembles of the *"Black Atlantic,"* referring to *"the smallest systematic unit formed by two lines of time in opposition, where the result is a greater complexity than its component parts. [...] the structural core is a minimal abstract model of the framework of interpretation and action in which actors produce and define these systems. (Ferreira: 2007, 8)."*

In this case, the structural core of the Wanaragua could be defined by the Garaón 2° and the Sisiras. It is important to clarify that, according to oral sources, this rhythm was originally played only with drums, and as we have seen, the Sisiras are replaced by *"Illacus,"* another type of maraca that dancers place around their calves. In the examples collected, it was often observed that when this rhythm is performed outside its ritual context, Sisiras are usually added.

Musical expressions vary within the same rhythm depending on the context and instrumentation of each performance, so the results presented here aim to be as didactic a description as possible of the rhythm in question. The advantage of this publication is that the reader will at least be able to listen to some of the transcribed examples.

The following structural core corresponds to the rhythm's development, announced by the rhythm detailed as *"Garaón 2° - beginning"* (Audio 2).

Garaón 2° -Beginning

9..1 9.1. 90.1 9.1.

Garaón 2° -Development

90.1 901. 90.1 901.

Sisiras

1.1 ... 1.1 ...

Garífuna Key[9]

1.1 .1. 1.1 .1.

In Audio File 1, we can hear the complete ensemble without vocals and something that happens consistently in the recorded examples: the shifting of the starting point

[9] As mentioned, the clave structures the functions but is not always externalized. In the Waranagua, no instrument sustains it exactly as transcribed, but its perception is evident when observing the function of the Sisiras and the sharp beat of the Garaón 2°.

in execution. Or rather, the absence of the concept of metricity, which leads musicians to interpret rhythmic unity in different ways. In the mentioned example, the Sisiras are performed as follows:

Garaón 2° (audio 2)

90.1 901. 90.1 901.

Sisiras (audio 3)

..1 1.1 ..1 .1.

In the same file, we can hear the improvisation of the Garaón 1°, which has been transcribed descriptively in Figure 1.

The analysis framework presented here is intended as the beginning of systematic work on the other rhythms recorded, which, due to space limitations, have not been included in this document.

Transcription

I highlight the descriptive intent of the transcriptions made, as an approximation of the musical event experienced and recorded. As I continue working on the material, I encounter more and new challenges, as no matter how hard we try, we tend to approximate what we hear with the structures we are familiar with, which often ends up prescribing and predetermining subsequent listening[10].

Musical expressions vary within the same rhythm depending on the context, so the results presented here aim to be as didactic as possible in describing the rhythm in question. With the advantage that in this publication, the reader will at least be able to hear some of the transcribed examples.

The examples are presented in a notation system used for the didactic transcription of rhythms in the "Africa en el Aula" project (Perez Guarnieri: 2007). This system proposes the arrangement of drum strokes in sub-grouped boxes, which basically contain the following symbols and correspondences:

0 = Low stroke in the center of the drum

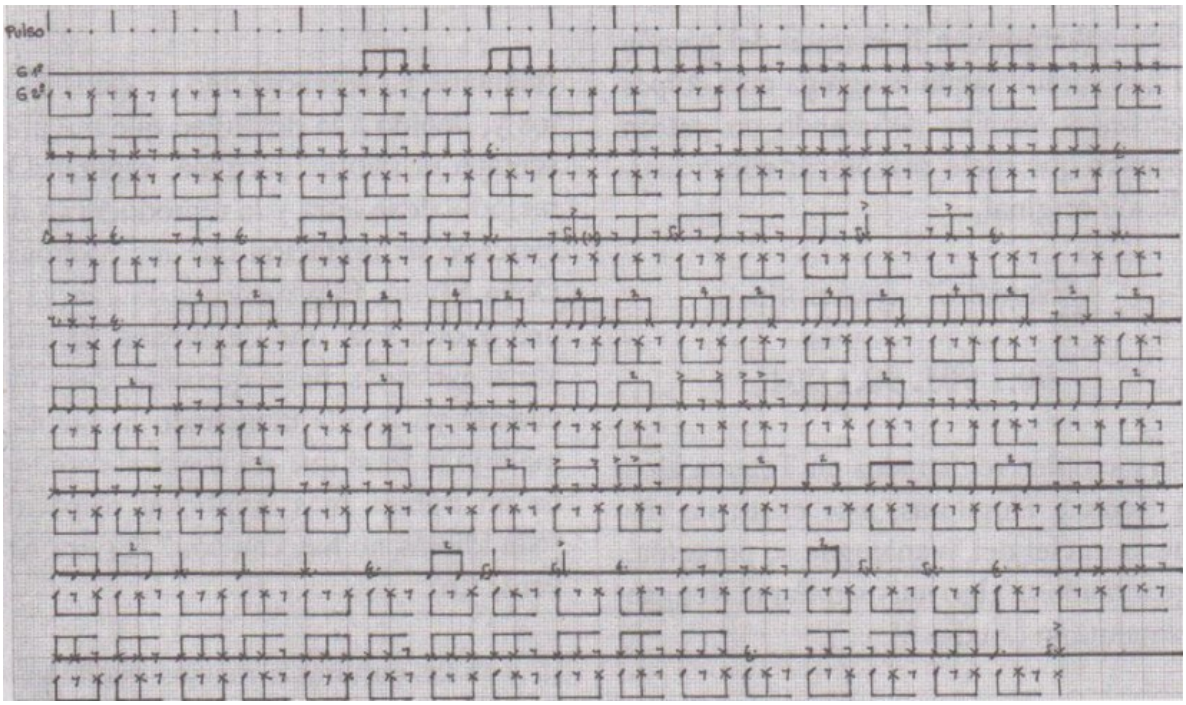
1 = High stroke or "galleta" at the edge of the drum

. = Silence

9 = Perception of regular pulsation – main step of the dance

[10] Regarding the concept of prescriptive writing, I quote Charles Seeger: "[...] By using this mostly prescriptive notation as a descriptive writing system for the sound of any music other than Western, we do two things; both clearly 'non-scientific'. First, we distinguish what appears to us as structures in the other music that refer to structures familiar to Western art and what we write, ignoring everything else; that is, everything for which we do not have symbols. Second, we expect the resulting notation to be read by people who do not possess the tradition of that other music. The result can only be a conglomerate of structures, part European, part non-European, connected by a movement that is one hundred percent European. To ascribe such a manifestation of subjectivity as 'scientific' would be presumptuous [...]" (Seeger: 1977, p. 170, my translation).

The transcription of the Garaón 1° solo (audio file 1) was done on graph paper using conventional figures, with the goal of addressing some of the challenges posed by the execution (Figure 1).



The Trap of the West

In the same way that I refer to this flexibility in subdivision, I would like to highlight the constant confusion one can fall into regarding starting points. This eternal search for systematization forces us to listen in a regulated manner where we seek the beginning and the end of a rhythm phrase, of a moment. This relates to a concept of time that is measured, counted, and linear, and when applied to the systematization of music, results in a metric listening approach where we try to identify regular pulses and find the initial one:
The "one," the "earth."

On the other hand, we observe in Garífuna culture a circular concept of time with clear African reminiscences, where time is the lived experience, the flow, and in music, this conception generates a comprehensive view of rhythm that we can find in all aspects of life. Therefore, there is also a dynamic interpretation in which what we consider "starting points," "meter," or "basic pulse" constantly changes.

With a demonstration of simple mastery, the Wanaragua invites us to reconsider all the concepts and misunderstandings we specialists have regarding rhythm.

As we can see in transcription 1, corresponding to audio example 1, at the beginning of the rhythm, the Garaón 2° clearly marks three beats: one low and two high, which predisposes us to listen metrically to an accentuation towards the first of the two high notes.

Garaón 2° - Initial Perception

91.1 .0. 91.1 ...

However, with the entrance of Garaón 1°, Garaón 2° adds more low beats and ends up defining a rhythmic pattern that often unsettles our original perception.

Garaón 2° - Development

90.1 901. 90.1 901.

In examples recorded in Tegucigalpa and Roatán, Honduras, this initial rhythmic scheme of Wanaragua persists, creating something very similar to Jamaican reggae (*audio 6*).

Garaón 2° - Beginning

9..1 9.1. 90.1 9.1.

7. Songs

The antiphonal singing, so characteristic of African music, is also present among the Garífuna. There is a constant emphasis on *idiomatic expressiveness*, which is prioritized over tuning or intonation. This does not mean there is no tuning; rather, corrections and adjustments are directly tied to the language, to "*being understood*."

During fieldwork, I dedicated a significant amount of time investigating the teaching methodology for instruments and songs. Regarding the latter, in interviews with "gayusa" women from the Garífuna House of Culture, Doña Elvira Álvarez gave me a marvelous lesson.

While I attempted to learn one of these songs and struggled with the Garífuna language, I separated the melody from the lyrics and reproduced it in an imitation exercise that Doña Elvira suggested. She shook her head repeatedly, spelled out the Garífuna words for me, and emphatically, when I kept humming the song, she told me the phrase that headlines a broader chapter on this subject: "*Without language, there is no song*" (*Elvira Álvarez, personal communication*).

"[...] In traditional African cultures, the theory implicit in practice is rarely explained. Errors are pointed out and corrected by playing or singing the correct way so that the person who made the mistake adjusts in the same way that grammatical and other language errors are corrected without resorting to theoretical explanations. Musicians determine whether their tuning is correct by playing entire phrases and pieces as tests [...]" (Nketia, 1997, p. 23).

Songs, some used in ceremonies and others in various social contexts, feature a soloist voice and a chorus that continuously responds through phrases of varied durations and articulations. It is striking to observe the dynamics in which these performances take place, where singers stand in a row or semicircle without even looking at each other. There are no visible signals or gestures to the outside. The coordination of entrances and

exits is inherently tied to ancestral learning and the rhythm of the drums.

While rehearsing some songs without drums, standing in a semicircle and gazing at the horizon, I couldn't resist asking how they managed to coordinate, given that not only were they not looking at each other, but at that moment, there were no percussion instruments accompanying them either. "*Ah! It's because we all imagine that the drums are playing*" (*Cosme Noralez, personal communication*).

Lyrics and Stories

The songs I accessed from the community possess lyrics that reflect an important and compelling social sensitivity. One is never the same after hearing one of these songs. To conclude this work and as a preview, I cite below one of the songs that accompany the process of transcription and analysis (*Audio 7 Solo Voice - Audios 4 and 5 with drums*):

Niha gudemen nuaguya munada
(There is poverty here in my house) [11]

Soloist: Niha gudemen nuaguya munada
Nille saminon nuaguya wabie

Chorus: Sarabanu eee wawa
Sarabanu ninamuleñe
Sarabanu saxaba wawa
Maguiradina

[11] This song has been recorded in both Wanaragua and Chumba rhythms. The transcription and translation are by Mrs. Blanca Franzuá.

Translation:

There is much poverty in my house, and much to think about as well...

Rise up for me, my brother, rise up for me, oh my dear brother...

Rise up for me because I have no tears left...

8. Conclusions

The history of the Garífuna people takes us back to an Afro-American mestizaje (mixed heritage) that exemplarily expresses resistance, resilience, and cultural re-creation manifested in their traditions, music, and dances. In approaching the study of their music, using the Wanaragua rhythm as a case study, we have attempted to dimension and position it within a mestizo logic of thought as an analytical tool. From this perspective, the inclusion of the concept of "*Garífuna clave*" is proposed to describe that timeline as a reference for Afro-American rhythmic structuring in general, consisting of three sounds that interrelate from a non-metric rhythmic perspective.

After listening to and experiencing Garífuna rhythms, transcription becomes a challenge that encourages the idea that understanding Wanaragua implicitly involves knowledge of the American rhythmic cordillera and consideration of the "*Garífuna clave*" as a paradigmatic

expression of mestizaje. The resistance of this clave to conventional transcription and analysis compels us to consider its true mestizo dimension.

Afro-American musical expressions have been directly proportional to the number of enslaved human beings brought in during colonization. Within them, not only do particularities and a marvelous diversity become evident, but common elements also stand out, related to the African diaspora and its recreation in the Americas, in a complex, dynamic, and continuous process.

The Garifuna people, like all Afro-descendant social groups in the Americas, have demonstrated a capacity for continuity, innovation, and transformation of their traditions as an alternative to dominant thinking. Their social organization, the persistence of their worship practices, and the reaffirmation of their identity related to a shared past are expressed in their performative arts. These serve as concrete actions for constructing a sense of belonging and a community ethos that conveys both past and current resistance and resilience. The Garifuna drums are an emblem of communication, ancestry, and sociality, resisting from the margins against the advances of a society that prioritizes connectivity, consumption, and individualism. Perhaps this is precisely why the study and appreciation of these cultures have not yet gained the recognition they deserve. Perhaps there is not yet a true intention to build knowledge from alternative perspectives, no matter how much authorities, educators, and scholars loudly proclaim freedoms and equalities. Perhaps this is why we should listen to how the Garaón continues to resonate from Livingston to the entire world.

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