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The Popular Tradition

Garínagu: From the Maroon Revolt to the Garífuna Nation Garífuna Ethnogenesis: A Maroon History

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Unlike the brutal extermination carried out by the conquerors in the Greater Antilles and other parts of the continent, the natives of the Lesser Antilles were combative and fought fiercely for their freedom. During the 16th century, the Caribs, besides waging battles, captured some Africans during their incursions as captives[1]. The Island Caribs, as the inhabitants of these islands are identified, were not a homogeneous group but rather the result of the encounter between the Igneri, Arawaks who arrived from the continent at the beginning of the Christian era, and two or three centuries later, the *Kalinas*, (Caribs).

Constantly disputing control of the territory, the Caribs subdued the Igneri population, taking their women as captive-wives, leading to a unique mestizaje where women continued reproducing their Arawak culture and men the Carib culture. Based on two entries in Raymond Breton's Carib-French dictionary, the mestizaje can be inferred. Callinago refers to the language spoken by men, calliponam to the speech of women[2].

In the 17th century, after the Spanish Crown abandoned its ambitions, the English and French renewed their interest in the islands and began pressuring the inhabitants. Between 1623 and 1625, they exterminated all the Caribs of St. Kitts, and in 1650, this time only the French, did the same in Martinique and Guadeloupe, leaving only Dominica and Saint Vincent as strongholds of the island population. Nevertheless, they continued resisting the Europeans and often sabotaged the consolidation of their settlements. The damage must have been significant, as in 1660, the French signed a treaty in Guadeloupe, recognizing Dominica and Saint Vincent as islands under their domain in exchange for ceasing attacks on the colonies and refraining from taking African slaves as prisoners.

The agreements lasted little, as the English continued attacking the islanders, who kept fighting back. By then, the Africans had left their condition as captives, and their numbers grew since 1635, when a group of shipwreck survivors sought refuge in Saint Vincent and escaped slavery. This event, the continuous escapes from plantations, some from neighboring islands, and yet another arrival of shipwreck survivors in 1675, contributed to the growth of the African population, who were mostly from West Africa, particularly Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Congo, and Dahomey.[3]

The unification of the Caribs with the Africans, against a common enemy, renewed their capacity for resistance, which extended throughout the XVII century and into the XVIII century. By then, they were known as cannibals, a corruption of

1 Ruy Coelho. *Los Caribes Negros de Honduras.*. Tegucigalpa, Guaymuras, 1995, pp. 32, 36. Douglas Taylor, *The Black Caribs of British Honduras,* New York, Viking Fund Publications in Anthropology No. 17, 1951, p. 18).

2 Distinguishes another group in question, the Galibi from the continental land, effectively related to those mentioned, Pére Raymond Breton, *Dictionnaire Caraibe- Frangois,* 1665. G. Bouquet, Auxerre, France.

3 Coelho, op. cit. p.36.

The term Carib led to accusations of anthropophagy, used to justify a cruel assault on their hegemony. Far from being considered the "noble savage" that Rousseau would propose years later, inspired by Agostino Brunias' portrayal of a Carib couple from the Lesser Antilles.[4]

In 1725, a relative peace was achieved after repelling the English when they attempted to seize Saint Vincent, bringing a period of prosperity for the islanders. Though reduced to those two islands, they engaged in trade, fishing, and maintained their own sugar plantations, many of which were worked by their own war captives. Meanwhile, the Europeans also carried out their own power struggles, which concluded in 1763 with the signing of the Treaty of Paris, transferring Dominica and Saint Vincent into English hands, reigniting hostilities. The results were not what the English expected, so in 1773, they signed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship, this time with the Black Charaibes (Black Caribs), as they were called for the first time.[5]

William Young, governor of the island of Saint Vincent, expressed his astonishment at the luxury with which Black Carib women dressed, the abundance of their harvests, and the wealth they displayed. Young pointed to several of their leaders, among them Chatoyer (Satuye), Du Valle (Duvale), Sambula, and Jean Baptiste, making demands in their favor and monitoring compliance with the Treaty.[6] Another factor strengthened the Caribs' claims—the echo of French republican ideas, which resonated among the inhabitants of Saint Vincent, many of whom were French speakers.

Although they received offers of support from the French to wage war against the English, it was their own decisions that ultimately led them to declare war in March 1795.[7]

The battles lasted less than a year. With Satuye dead early in the conflict, morale weakened, and the English, reinforced with troops and weapons, defeated them in June 1796. Confined in Balliceaux under extreme conditions for over six months, 50% of the 4,195 detained Black Caribs died. Eventually, they were sent to Isla de la Bahía (Honduras).

The journey was as difficult as those last six months, and deaths continued aboard. In the worst conditions, those "indomitable Caribs" departed into uncertainty, carrying in their memories those glorious times, the longing for Saint Vincent, which they considered their homeland, and the mark of the latest events they had lived.

These events will resurface as anchors in the formation of their nation after two hundred years of life in Central America.

Their dispersion across the Gulf of Honduras

On April 12, 1797, the English left their "cargo" in Port Royal, a site that regularly remained an English possession in Roatán. Although with the Caribs[9] had weapons,

4 Brunias was a sort of official painter for the English governor William Young after the Treaty of Paris in Saint Vincent. Unlike other painters, his gaze focused on native populations and their daily lives, leaving among his records on the Caribs a portrait of Satuye himself and his seven wives. Lennox Honychurch, Chatoyer's Artist: Agostino Brunias and the Depiction of St. Vincent, 2010.

5 Coelho, op. cit. p. 41.

6 William Young. *An Account of the Black Charaibs in the Island of St. Vincent*. Frank Cass, London, 1971 (first publication in 1795) p.96.

7 Nancie González, "Nuevas evidencias sobre el origen de los caribes- negros, con consideraciones sobre el significado de tradición", en Mesoamérica, 7 (12), 1986, p. 334.

8 Ídem, pp. 335-336.

9 The term Carib continued to be applied upon their arrival, alongside the term morenos. The word Carib was already used on the continent to designate unsubdued and non-converted groups, such as the Jicaques and Lacandones.

tools, seeds, and provisions, their conditions made it nearly impossible for them to be ready for agricultural work in less than a month. The factors leading to their transfer to the mainland remain unknown, but by October, their presence on the outskirts of Trujillo was a reality, with only a small group remaining in Roatán. The Caribs must have been eager to glimpse a future amid such uncertainty, making their alliance with the Crown decisive and their actions a determining factor.

The coastal population was reduced to those guarding the fortresses of San Felipe, Omoa, and Trujillo, led by a handful of Spaniards overseeing customs and military posts. Supporting this effort were battalions of morenos, made up of freed Blacks and French Blacks, a contingent that arrived a year before the Black Caribs.[10] Africans continued to be brought as slaves for the construction of Fort Omoa, as well as those trafficked by the English for their plantations on the Río Tinto (Black River), east of Trujillo. In smaller numbers, Antilleans (free colored) from Barbados and St. Kitts were also present.

Upon the Caribs' arrival, the coastal population faced many limitations, the most pressing being food shortages, as supplies had previously been brought from Cuba. This marked the Caribs' first role as farmers, before earning the trust to hold military positions, with cassava production yielding excellent results. In the militias, they also proved highly effective as

as demonstrated in 1799, when they defended Trujillo from an English attack or were called upon for the Motagua battery that same year. By 1802, they were already making headlines along the Gulf route and in logging camps, particularly in a settlement known as Carib-Town.[11]

Various groups, possibly rooted in old clan structures from their Vincentian life, and a highly militarized social system, enabled the Caribs to respond as a wartime contingent. According to oral tradition, the first dispersals from Trujillo led toward Mosquitia, the Upper Coast, and Omoa, the Lower Coast. Years later, more distant advances reached Amatique Bay and Belize. These events were led by Satuye's lieutenants, as preserved in memory, who, alongside their families, friends, and allies, established various coastal settlements. Names such as Sana and Bregal on the Honduran coast, Gulisi[12], Satuye's daughter in Belize, and Marcos Sánchez Díaz[13], remain historical protagonists and indisputable national heroes. According to the 1821 registry in Trujillo, Carib settlements included Grande de Guadalupe, Cristales, Carmen, San Juan, San Pedro, San Antonio, and Limonal.[14]

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10 The French Blacks or Republicans were a group of combatants allied with the Spanish in the fights against the French on the island of Saint-Domingue. After the Treaty of Paris, these fighters and their families arrived in Havana as Auxiliary Troops of Philip IV and were subsequently sent to Cádiz, Florida, Porto Belo, Yucatán, and Trujillo. See Jorge Victoria, *Las Tropas Auxiliares del rey en Centroamérica. Historia de los negros súbitos de la Monarquía española,* San José, Costa Rica, Editorial Universitaria, 2009.

11 Nancie González, Sojourners of the caribbean. Ethnogenesis and Ethnohistory of the Garifuna, University of Illinois Press, Urbana and Chicago, 1988, p. 58.

12 The journey led by Gulisi, Satuye's daughter, protected by her father's lieutenants and accompanied by her family to Belizean lands, is another key reference in oral tradition. Joseph O. Palacios, "Reconstructing Garifuna Oral History—Techniques and Methods in the History of a Caribbean People," in *The Garifuna: A Nation Across Borders. Essays in Social Anthropology*. Cubola, Belize, 2005, pp. 43-63.

13 Some versions attribute Haitian nationality to Marcos Sánchez Díaz, a detail that introduces

14 Elizet Payne Iglesias, El puerto de Truxillo. Un viaje a su melancólico abandono, Tegucigalpa, Editorial Guaymuras, 2007, pp. 191-193.

Making up 64% of the total population, they formed a considerable majority. That census year, with Spain's independence, the coast entered a period of decline, marked by constant uprisings that took a toll on the Caribs due to their political affiliations, whether voluntary or forced, leading many to flee to the Belizean coast in search of refuge.[15] The most memorable of these movements was led by Alejo Beni, who, accompanied by several people, arrived on November 19, 1832, in Stann Creek (formerly Carib-Town), the northernmost settlement, while to the east, their presence extended to Plaplaya, near the Mosquitia border.

B*uilding Garífuna Territoriality*

Entering the 19th century, after the post-independence revolts, new opportunities emerged, and the Caribs once again demonstrated their adaptability. Whether in turtle hunting, unloading and transporting goods, smuggling, logging camps, or even for the planned interoceanic canal in Nicaragua[16], they engaged in these activities driven by the need for subsistence, above all, ensuring the continuation of their autonomy

Although these movements were temporary, one became permanent—the occupation of Laguna de Perlas in Nicaragua, led by Joseph Sambola, who, alongside others, founded the community of San Vicente in the late 1880s, from this settlement, Santa Fe (founded in 1896) and Orinoco (in 1912)[17] emerged, lasting to this day.

In the late 19th century, a crop emerged that would transform the coming century, bananas. Initially cultivated by small-scale farmers known as "*poquiteros*," the industry was later taken over by foreign-owned banana companies. The arrival of large plantations brought workers from Jamaica, Barbados, and the southern United States, whose customs and ideas influenced coastal communities. This development also saw the improvement of old facilities, the opening of new ports, the clearing of paths, the expansion of roads, and the construction of railways, all of which became key activities.

With the fruit companies, unions and guild organizations emerged, providing motivation as they aligned with the mutual aid principles highly valued by the Caribs. In parallel, they developed their own movement, addressing their group interests rather than labor-related concerns. Leading this effort was Tomás Vicente Ramos, who founded the *Carib Development and Sick Aid Society* (C.D.S.) in Stann Creek in 1924. Shortly after, he established the *Carib International Society* (C.I.S.), expanding to Guatemala and Honduras, driving an unprecedented movement, particularly in health and medical services.

In 1937, a tragic event once again led to the forced displacement of a Carib group from the Honduran coast. During the dictatorship of Tiburcio Carias Andino (1932-1945), the San Juan community (near Tela) faced military repression, accused of sedition. The survivors, mostly women and children, fled to Belize, joining the Hopkins community. News of this injustice spread across the coast, quickly prompting banana plantation workers to go on strike, as the situation had clearly been fueled by corporate interests.

15 Dario Euraque notes that in 1831, many Caribs had to flee to Belize following the attacks led by General Franco...La Diáspora Africana en Honduras: entre la esclavitud colonial y la modernidad del protagonismo Garífuna, in Del Olvido a la Memoria, 1, Africanos y afromestizos en la historia colonial de Centroamérica, UNESCO, 2008, p. 52.

16 Some travelers reported their presence in Greytown by 1860, as noted by Kirchhoff in 1868, cited by William Y. Davidson in "The Garifuna of Pearl Lagoon: Ethnohistory of an Afro-American Enclave in Nicaragua," in Ethnohistory, Vol. 27, No. 1, 1980, pp. 31-47 (p. 34).

17 Along the coast, only two toponyms of Arawak origin have been identified: Orinoco and La Guaira, in Amatique Bay.

During the 20th century, mobility along the coast expanded, both in scope and reach. Suddenly, many Caribs began working in merchant shipping, while others settled in various metropolitan areas. Like other Caribbean populations, the primary destination of this migration was New York City, where by the late 1940s, they had not only settled but also organized.

Shortly after the second half of the 20th century, this migration came to be regarded by scholars as recurrent, with some even predicting cultural assimilation. Reality, however, proved otherwise. Embedded in what Morh defines as a circulatory dynamic, constantly reinforcing itself between here and there, they continue to practice their language, prepare their traditional foods, interpret their music and dances, and establish their own organizations, just as those settled in Central America have done. The latter, in turn, maintain their focus on a possible migration, and while this unfolds, they serve as custodians of the migrants' heritage.

The relatives who remain take charge of the land, manage remittances for construction improvements, provide domestic support, and, most importantly, assist adult women responsible for children and other dependents. Between these groups, a circulatory dynamic emerges, forming a mutual relationship with local communities. Even those born abroad continue their Garífuna affiliation, maintaining their cultural identity.

The Garínagu Facing the XXI Century

Throughout their life in Central America, beyond the consolidation of their own settlements, which still preserve what can be described as traditional cultural landscapes, the Garínagu inhabit various port neighborhoods in Belize, Puerto Barrios, Cortés, and La Ceiba, as well as in major cities across Central America and abroad.

Various factors influenced the selection of the sites they now occupy. Some settled along coastal edges for better visibility, others at crossroads that facilitated trade, access to settlements, and job opportunities. Alternatively, some chose riverbanks, creeks, inlets, or locations near reefs rich in marine resources. On the beaches, coconut trees provided a natural shield for fragile dwellings, built with compacted earth floors, mud and grass walls, or wooden slats extracted from palm trunks, which were also used for roofing.

These ranchos remain the most common form of housing to this day, spread across the lands of various family units. Alongside them, there are also modern homes with sophisticated designs, built using concrete and ceramic flooring, financed by remittances sent by migrant relatives.

Since the Vincentian period, women have played a central role in society, once even determining kinship along the maternal line. This historical prominence, though modified, remains today, with women—particularly adults—serving as caretakers, responsible for education and child-rearing, and often financial support. They also hold active economic roles and act as organizers of ancestral rites, among other responsibilities. Brotherhoods serve as important spaces for organization, fostering reciprocal cooperation, a value highly cherished by the Garífuna. Alongside their religious function, they promote a syncretism that brings drums, songs, and dances alongside saint processions, prayers, and masses, forming a ceremonial-festive cycle of great significance to each community.

The circular conception of time, where life is a transition through multiple identities, shapes the Garífuna worldview. Once a person passes away, their soul begins its journey to Seiri, the Garífuna pantheon. To ensure this passage, a series of ceremonies.

That begin nine days after death, The Belurian marking the transition of the soul. During this time, Uraga storytellers, accompanied by songs, recount the adventures of Anansi, much like the ancient African griots. Drums beat to the rhythm of Punta, while dance, characterized by strong hip movements, blends with food and drink, bidding farewell to the departed soul.

A few years after passing, when the ancestor can manifest, a Chugú or Dügü[18] is performed. These invocation ceremonies take place in the *Dabuyaba* (temples), led by a Buyei and a group of singers known as Gayusas, who dance to the rhythm of *Hunguhuledi*, carried by the drummers. The performance of these rituals becomes a significant family gathering, attended by both locals and expatriates, as the *Áhari* are unyielding toward those who fail to attend the rituals and favor those who do. This is another space where migrants often exert influence through their economic contributions.

The Garínagu have a strong preference for their own traditional foods. Some staples include Rice and Beans (coconut rice with beans), Tapou (stew made with coconut milk), and plantains in various ripeness levels and preparations: Judutu (fried plantains) and Daraza (plantain purée). Their beverages include Hibiscus tea, Zacaru (lemon tea), and Pulali (coconut atol). Among desserts, Bimecacule (sweet rice pudding) and fruit pastries hold important cultural significance. Many women prepare snacks and coconut bread at home, sold by their children or dependents on the streets. Others prepare both traditional and non-traditional meals for street vending, which serves as an important source of income.

At night gatherings, such as wakes, ginger tea is common, though some prefer Gifity, a blend of rum or aguardiente infused with roots, stems, and spices.

A distinct place is held by Casabe (Ereba), the Amerindian cassava biscuit, cherished both as food and symbolic reference. Raymond Breton associated the Calinago as "the men of cassava," aligning with their belief of being formed from this tuber's starch. However, both its cultivation and production are declining, with consumption now reliant on market acquisition from wholesale producers. This shift has led to the disuse of traditional tools, including Egui (grater), Ruguma (squeezer), Jibise (sifter), and Budare (cooking griddle), once essential in Caribbean tradition. Similarly, woven fiber-made items, such as Yamadi (waterproof bags for sea travel), mountain travel backpacks, hats, and domestic utensils like furniture, are increasingly scarce, unlike the more frequent presence of Western-style appliances and furnishings.

Their proximity to the sea has sustained their Vincentian navigation tradition, crucial for trade, fishing, and community ties. Today, artisanal fishers using traps, nets, gillnets, harpoons, and hooks face challenges from steam fleets employing trawling nets, which damage Garínagu fishing gear. This, along with recreational navigation, has led to the decline of the practice.

Land tenure is also under threat. Rooted in customary possession, many family and communal lands have been plundered by external groups seeking to promote tourism, where coastal inhabitants are treated as mere decorative elements, receiving no real benefits. The drug trade further exposes vulnerabilities, gradually eroding traditional power structures.

18 When the ceremony lasts no more than one day, it is called *Chugú*, while *Dügü* can extend up to three days.

Garínagu Wagia: The Garífuna Nation

With nearly fifty communities spread across four countries along the coast, the Garínagu remain a minority compared to other identities. In Honduras, they number 108,144 people (9% of the total population)[19] across thirty-six communities. In Belize, they account for 14,061 [20] (7%), residing in five communities. Guatemala has 3,702 (0.01%), and Nicaragua, 500, both with two settlements each. The largest concentration of Garífuna is found in migrant communities in cities like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, and New Orleans, with some estimates exceeding 100,000 people.[21]

They are Central America's most visible African identity, despite their small demographic presence and relatively recent history. They achieved this first through the assertion of their territoriality, then by influencing the nation-states they inhabit, and later by capturing global attention. Their music, dance, and oral traditions were recognized by UNESCO as Masterpieces of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity in 2004, and musician Andy Palacio was named a UNESCO Peace Ambassador.

According to Hobsbawm, the concept of invented traditions, whether created, constructed, or formally instituted, aims to instill values and behavioral norms, reinforcing continuity with the past[22]. From this perspective, *Yurumein* should be considered a tradition established in Central America[23] to legitimize its settlement, a central event in the consolidation of territoriality. Like ancestral rites, it serves as a way to bring the past into the present and ensure continuity into the future.

Benedict Anderson identifies three institutions through which the state conceptualizes territory, population, and national history: the census, the map, and the museum.[24] In their own way, the Garínagu have developed similar structures, expressing census concerns through their own estimates, consistently valuing their unified territorial identity tied to a common homeland: Saint Vincent, and establishing various cultural and educational centers, including their own museums.

Just like other identities in 17th- and 19th-century Europe, the Garínagu have shaped their own history, marked by great feats, heroes, memorable events, and celebrations. They proudly raise a flag, bear a coat of arms, and sing a national anthem, presenting themselves through their music, dances, clothing, spirituality, and language.

Bugawaguwadiwa Yuruemin giñe, so begins the first line of the song *Yurumein*, considered their anthem. "*Hemos sido expulsados de San Vicente,*" recalling how they moved from coast to coast in search of their brothers, *waluwahwinañanu garínagu waladei.* Examples like these, found in songs, stories passed down by elders, and ritual representations of Yurumein, help preserve collective memory, ensuring that generation after generation remembers the moment the English expelled them from San Vicente, their mythic homeland, their longed-for nation, where they attain a unique splendor.

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19 Cited in Hermann Gebauer, Honduras. *Nota técnica sobre los pueblos indígenas y afro descendientes.* Febrero, 2008. p.7 .

20 Joseph 0. Palacio, *The multifaceted Garifuna: juggling cultural spaces in the 21st century.* The Garífuna a Nation across borders. Essays in Social Anthropology. Joseph Palacios Editor. Cubula. Belize. 2005, p. 113.

21 According to Eric Cantor, estimates range between 100,000 and 500,000 residents abroad. See: http://www.migración-remesas.hn/document/remesa_lecciones.pdf.

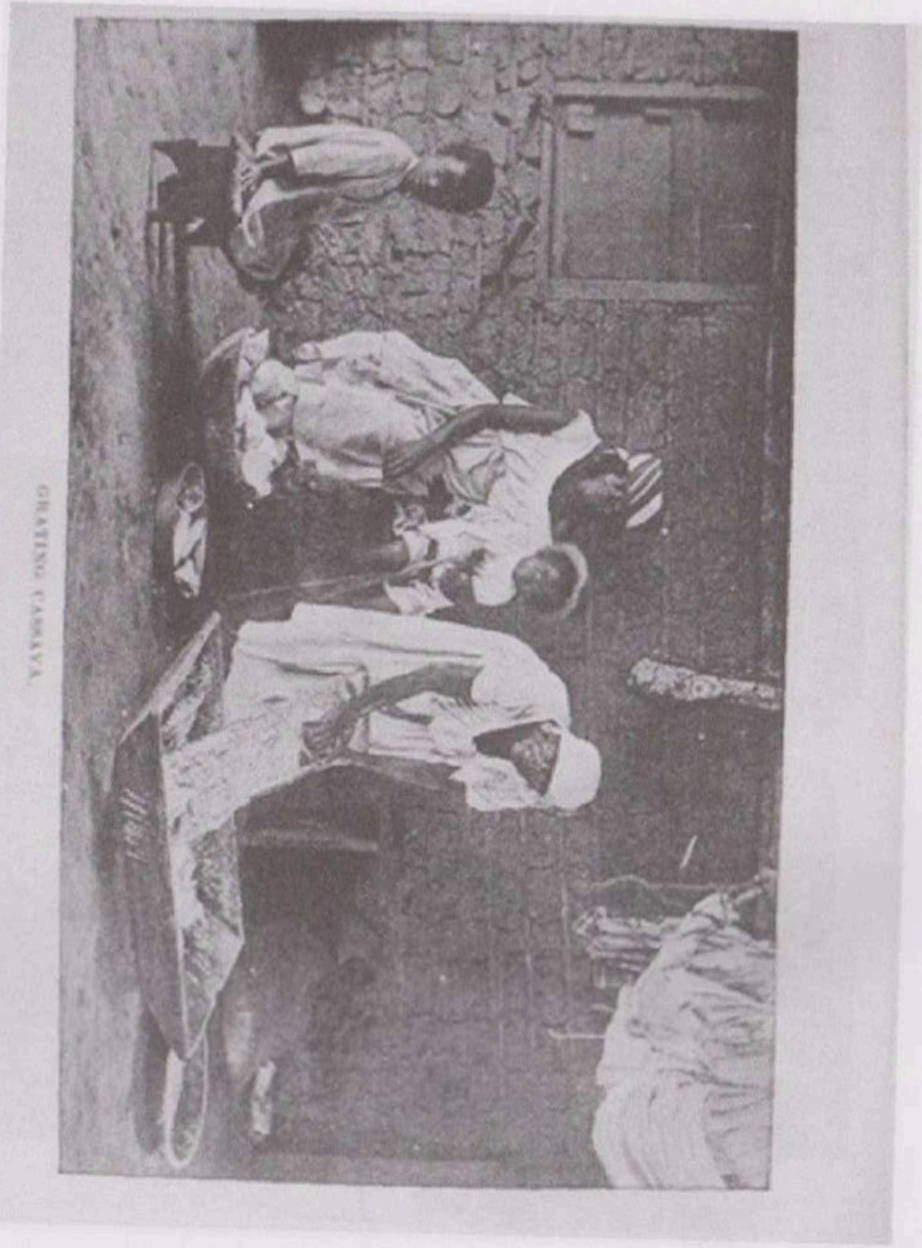
22 Eric Hobsbawm y Terence Ranger (eds), *La Invención de la Tradición*, Barcelona, Crítica, Grijalbo Mondadori, 2000, p. 4.

23 *Yurumein* is the ritual (scenic) representation of the arrival of the first settlers from San Vicente.

24 Benedict Anderson, *Comunidades Imaginadas. Reflexiones sobre el origen y la difusión del nacionalismo,* Mexico, Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2007.

It is clear that collective memory, in its various manifestations, plays a liberating role, allowing the construction of their own identity in relation to others. Despite being a minority in Central America and their dispersal beyond national borders, they assert a common sense of citizenship, reinforcing their self-invention as a nation.

A GROUP OF CARIB CHILDREN.


GRATING CASSAVA

Duna Urinagu
(Orinoco River, Orinoco Waters)

Uremu le wawaque lubei sua garínagu
This song is about all of us, the Garínagu

ayuragua lun le duna le urinagu
Farewell to the waters of Orinoco

bubaruun weye, guarawamei T. Duna le tubabuei
waquna wafandira waba

Toward the sun, let's take the water before our
boat, our flag ahead

garínagu fegela waqu (wayu) le anichegue
Garínagu, let's open our minds to wisdom

meredera wama aqumohouni ya ubouogle
Let's not fall behind in this world

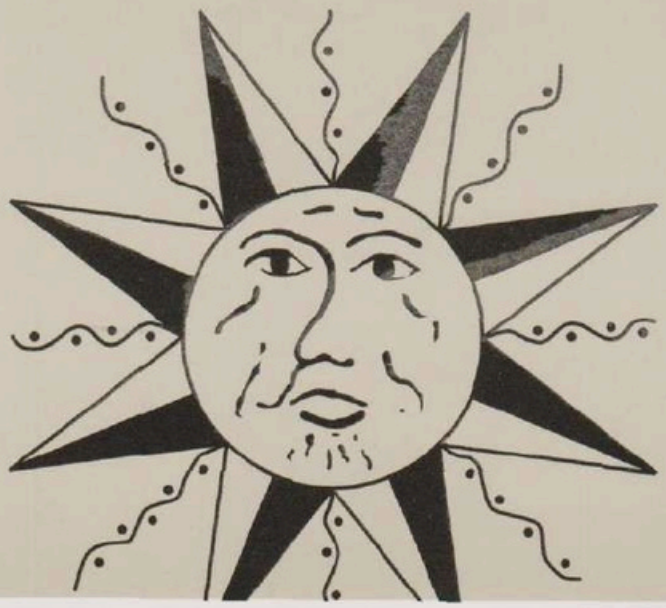
larasfaneri er lebener frendei haba wasanique
lun lawanseru, rasa garifuna
Let's open the doors of schools for our children,
for the development of the Garífuna people

hurawamei wafandira lun logirie wama
garínagu sungulei wavara no...
Garínagu, we are all one, let's not be ashamed

hudugua wama lui wafandira Arrodillémonos
Let's kneel before our flag, honor it!

ayo, ayo, ayo, duna urinagu
Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye, Orinoco Waters,
Orinoco River…

ladora, María Elena de Baltazar.



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