



PROJECT MUSE®

Black Caribs / Garifuna: Maroon Geographies of Indigenous
Blackness

Paul Joseph López Oro

Small Axe, Volume 25, Number 3, November 2021, pp. 134-146 (Article)



Published by Duke University Press

➔ For additional information about this article

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/863466>

Black Caribs / Garifuna: Maroon Geographies of Indigenous Blackness

Paul Joseph López Oro

Edward Kamau Brathwaite, in the closing of his 1975 essay “Caribbean Man in Space and Time,” invites us to turn our attention inward, to the interiority of Caribbean life and culture. “My own inclination,” he notes, “is to establish a base in the inner plantation and proceed outwards: connection with the inner metropole, with the ancestors, with the outer plantation, and with the neglected maroons.”¹ It is here in the interiority of ancestry and marronage that Brathwaite ignites us to reimagine a terrain of Caribbeanness that transcends colonial knowledge production bounded by outer plantation speculations and instead envisions an inner plantation where ancestry and neglected Maroons are not simply footnotes but in the body of the text. Miriam Miranda, one of the best-known Garifuna Honduran activists and a lead organizer of one of the oldest Black Central American political organizations—the Organización Fraternal Negra de Honduras (Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras), founded in 1962—conjures Brathwaite’s closing remarks when she asserts, “Nosotros somos un pueblo de mar y de tierra. Somos negras indígenas nacidos en una pequeña isla en el Caribe llamado San Vicente. Nuestras ancestras lucharon contra la esclavitud y resisterion el colonialismo en cada respirar. Somos un pueblo que honramos nuestras ancestras no solo con palabras,

1 Edward Kamau Brathwaite, “Caribbean Man in Space and Time,” in “Caribbean Studies,” special issue, *Savacou*, nos. 11–12 (September 1975): 11; reprinted in this issue of *Small Axe*, 100.

pero también en acciones. Nuestras ancestras caminan con nosotros y siguen luchando con nosotras contra el racismo y colonialismo.”² Brathwaite and Miranda both center the political and intellectual labor of ancestry and Maroon geographies as acts of Black interiority and fugitivity in ways that disrupt colonial forms of knowledge production on the Caribbean and its diasporas.



Figure 1. Garifuna ancestral ritual gathering in Orchard Beach, the Bronx, in June 2018.
Photograph courtesy of the author

St. Vincent, the Central American Caribbean coast, and US major port cities such as New Orleans, Houston, New York City, and San Francisco are some of the multiple spaces that come “into play” with one another (to borrow from Richard Iton) as diasporic geographies of Garifuna marronage.³ Garinagu (Black Caribs), or Garifuna, as they are more widely known, are Black Indigenous peoples whose ethnogenesis lies in the Lesser Antillean island of St. Vincent as a site of ancestral homeland born of shipwrecked enslaved West Africans and Carib Arawak

² “We are a people of land and sea. We are Indigenous Blacks born on a small Caribbean island named St. Vincent. Our ancestors struggled against slavery and colonialism in every breath. We are a people who honor our ancestors not only in words but also in actions. Our ancestors walk with us and continue to struggle with us against racism and colonialism”; Miriam Miranda, oral history interview by the author, Honduras, August 2018 (translation mine).

³ See Richard Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics and Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 200.

Indians and whose marronage and resistance to European colonialism and enslavement led to their exile by British colonial powers in 1797 to the Bay Islands of Honduras. The Garifuna made subsequent migrations to Caribbean coastal regions of mainland Central America—to Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua—with continued dispossession in the face of anti-Black racism and mestizo nationalism. As US imperialism made its presence known in the region vis-à-vis banana plantations of the United Fruit Company, Garifuna and other Black Central Americans began in the 1950s to engage in transnational migrations to the United States, marking a historical conjuncture of Garifuna imperial subjects relocating to the Banana Republic capitals of New Orleans and New York City. I open this reflection on Brathwaite’s field-making essay “Caribbean Man in Space and Time” with an image of transgenerational Garifuna New Yorkers in an annual summer ritual gathering to honor and pay homage to ancestors and their ancestral memory (see fig. 1). In a public space far removed from St. Vincent (read, ancestral homeland) and Central America’s Caribbean coast (read, home home), the rituals are performed mostly by Garifuna New Yorkers; born and raised in the United States, with very little travel to the Caribbean coast of Central America, they embody a knowledge of ancestral memory and political imaginaries of Garifunanness that creates a space of possibilities to hold ancestry and multiple geographies in one place. Brathwaite’s notions of inner plantation and neglected Maroons invite us to look inward/outward to the fragmentations, imaginaries, and multiplicities not simply as instabilities but as new terrains of knowledge production in and outside the Caribbean. For this essay, I will pay close attention to Brathwaite’s call to further deepen our understanding of cultural life and expression of the Caribbean’s inner plantation, which points us to intellectual and political significance of embodied archives vis-à-vis spirituality, ancestry, and marronage. In “Caribbean Man” Brathwaite notes, “As a *central concern*, we can state that there has really been no systematic study of Caribbean culture and cultural expression, outside the period of slavery, and certainly no history of it in terms of ‘plantation’ or . . . multiform creolization. . . . This is because our culture history (essentially of the inner plantation) has had no ‘archive’ to work from. The archive of course is there, all around us: in the speech and actions of us.”⁴ It is right here, in this gem, that Brathwaite ruptures a space to move beyond the colonial archive of documentation and look inward to embodied archives of knowledge production such as ancestral memory and marronage to unearth histories that transcend time, space, and borders. Before turning to a close reading of Brathwaite’s notions of inner plantation and neglected Maroons, it is important to situate Garinagu’s articulations of Indigenous Blackness as a hemispheric project of Caribbeanness and Central Americanness throughout the Americas.

4 Brathwaite, “Caribbean Man,” *Savacou*, 9; this issue of *Small Axe*, 98 (italics in original).

A Note on Garifuna Indigenous Blackness

Blackness and Indigeneity remain codified and ascribed as mutually exclusive racial categories and identities in the Americas. Garifuna are persistently constructed as an anthropological puzzle because their contradictory and choreographed negotiations as simultaneously Black Indigenous peoples present a richly compelling conundrum.⁵ However, as we deepen our historical and contemporary understandings of Black and Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas, we can begin to dismember the colonial logics of racial compartmentalization and excavate multiple Black Indigenous histories, cultures, and politics. Garinagu articulations and self-makings of Black Indigeneity are not unique to Garifuna, since there are several communities of peoples of African descent throughout the Americas whose Indigenous ancestry and lineage shape their political consciousness as Black Indigenous, such as Gullah Geechee and Seminoles in the United States, *quilombos* in Brazil, Jamaican Maroons, and *palenques* in Colombia, among others. Furthermore, it is important to note that my interlocutors—who mostly find themselves living or having lived in New York City—understand their Garinagu Black Indigeneity as one rooted in the Caribbean, Central America, and the United States. The terms used by my interlocutors are multiple and include *negro indígena*, *afroindígena*, Black Indigenous / Afro-Indigenous, and Black Carib. These variations point to the multiplicity of geographies, spaces/places, and racial identity formations that Garinagu engage. In the context of Honduras and the rest of Caribbean coastal Central America, for example, Garinagu articulations and self-makings of Black Indigeneity are performed, negotiated, and lived in ways distinct from those of US-based Garifuna folks. In Central America, Garinagu notions of (Black) Indigeneity are bound to land and cultural traditions: claiming Indigeneity is a political move to secure land rights, tenure, and titles. In the United States, and more specifically in New York City, Garifuna use Indigeneity (read, Carib Arawak lineage) as a marker of cultural alterity within Blackness. Claiming Indigeneity is thus performing different work in these different spaces. Garinagu Indigenous Blackness hemispheric negotiations illuminate for us the nuances, complexities, contradictions, and continued overlapping dispossessions that Black and Indigenous communities face every day. Furthermore, what is compelling in the context of Garinagu folks here in the United States and on/in Central America's Caribbean coasts is how ancestral memory and Maroon geographies in both spaces mobilize political imaginaries of Garifunanness that transcend neatly constructed fixed compartmentalizations of Blackness, Indigeneity, land claims/tenure, and mestizo nationalism. In other words, how do Garifuna New Yorkers perform their marronage and ancestry in multiple geographies that hinge on their dispossession, folkloricization, and alienation from projects on mestizo/Latinx nationalism? I

5 See Mark Anderson, "When Afro Becomes (like) Indigenous: Garifuna and Afro-Indigenous Politics in Honduras," *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 12, no. 2 (2007): 384–413.

turn to the public performances of Garifunanness vis-à-vis Garifuna Settlement Day to unearth embodied histories of marronage and ancestral memory as an inscription onto the flesh.⁶

My framing of *Indigenous Blackness* thus comes directly from my interlocutors. In the context of Caribbean coastal Central America, Garinagu communities articulate their Caribbean Indigeneity as one bounded to land rights; this is why Garifuna Settlement Day originated on the Atlantic coast of Central America (in Belize, to be precise) as an Indigenous expression of land tenure and rights. Garifuna Indigeneity in Central America, presented as an ancestral heritage and a contemporary identity, is used to gain discursive, ontological, and material land/territory. Yet while ancestral land/territory is the epicenter of how Garifuna Indigeneity is materially articulated in Central America, in the United States there is a shift in how Garinagu invoke their Indigeneity that is rooted in St. Vincent—in the United States, Garifuna Indigeneity is expressed and performed as an othered formation of Blackness. Garifuna Indigeneity in the United States is constructed and performed as a signifier of Caribbeanness, of exceptional marronage, and locates a Caribbean geographical site of Garifuna ethnogenesis: St. Vincent. Therefore, in the United States Garifuna Indigeneity finds an imaginary homeland in St. Vincent not solely as a site of ethnogenesis but also as a nostalgia for marronage and Black Indigeneity. Yet even here, Garinagu articulations and performances of Black Indigeneity are not universal; they are distinct based on the specific geographies in which Garinagu folks find themselves. While retaining commonalities, Garifuna communities in Los Angeles, Houston, Chicago, and New York City have different expressions of and relationships to their Indigeneity based on the racialized geographies of those spaces. In the preface to her *Black Shoals*, Tiffany Lethabo King notes,

Genocide and slavery do not have an edge. While the force of their haunt has distinct feelings at the stress points and instantiations of Black fungibility and Native genocide, the violence moves as one. To perceive this distinct yet edgeless violence and its haunting requires a way of sensing that allows moving in and out of blurred and sharpened vision, acute and dulled senses of smell. It requires the taste buds at the back of the throat and the pinch of the acidic in the nerves of the jawline. Edgeless distinction is a haptic moment, shared, and a ceremonial Black and Indigenous ritual.⁷

King's provocation to pay attention to the edgeless colonial hauntings of Blackness and Indigeneity is generative as we think about the ways Garifuna folks negotiate and contradict their articulations and self-makings of Black Indigeneity.

⁶ My turn to embodied histories of ancestral memory builds on the grounding work of M. Jacqui Alexander's concepts of "markings on the flesh" as inscriptions of processes, ceremonial rituals in which the body "becomes a site of memory, not a commodity for sale." As Alexander notes, "Body and memory are lived in the same body, if you will, and this mutual living, this entanglement, enables us to think and feel these inscriptions as process, a process of embodiment." M. Jacqui Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing: Meditations on Feminism, Sexual Politics, Memory, and the Sacred* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005), 297, 297, 297–98.

⁷ Tiffany Lethabo King, preface to *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2019), x–xi.

The Black Indigeneity of Garifuna is a significant marker of distinction on Central America's Caribbean coast (and in the United States). In the context of Honduras, Garifuna have politically mobilized with the nation-state to gain constitutional rights to ancestral lands and inclusion in the polity through a politics of Afro-Indigeneity, pointing to a political subjectivity of Black Indigeneity tied to land rights and cultural heritage. Christopher Loperena critiques Honduran multiculturalism for commodifying Garifuna culture and bodies into folkloric objects for national consumption:

Garifuna has become synonymous with the multicultural nation, symbol and representative of the Honduran Caribbean, and the face of the Honduran Institute of Tourism. Afro-Indigenous culture is the foundation upon which tourism campaigns are built and promoted, and this embrace of Garifuna difference is a signifier of the modern liberal nation. This is most clearly illustrated by the images of Garifuna drummers and dancers abundantly displayed on the glossy pages of tourism brochures, websites, and magazines, such as *Honduras Tips*.⁸

Loperena's piercing critique of Honduran multiculturalism's folkloricization of Garifunanness builds on a historical understanding of anti-Black racism and violence in the region. Therefore, for Garifunanness to be consumed by the mestizo nation-state it must remain as folklore, as a past that is neither present nor brought into the future. Garifuna culture is marketed as folkloric for tourist attractions, while being stamped by the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization in 2001 as a "Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Heritage of Humanity."⁹ Loperena's critique can certainly travel to the Garifuna diaspora of New York City as well, where Garifuna New Yorkers mobilize to have their culture, language, and food recognized by the city through gatherings such as Garifuna Settlement Day and recognitions such as Garifuna American Heritage Month.

Ancestral Memory as Garifuna Interiority: The Politics of Self-Making Garifuna Political Imaginaries

Memories are embedded in our flesh. Memories are conjured in our everyday lives through words, sounds, fragrances, prayers, dreams, sights, and so much more. Memories are fragments of our pasts making a new home in the present. Throughout the African diaspora, memories and the act of remembering are political, ancestral, cultural, communal, and spiritual practices of surviving, preserving, and producing histories. Historically and presently, Garifuna are part of three distinct diasporas:¹⁰ the African diaspora (enslaved in the Middle Passage and marooned in the Americas), the Caribbean diaspora (St. Vincent is collectively

8 Christopher Loperena, "Radicalize Multiculturalism? Garifuna Activism and the Double-Bind of Participation in Postcoup Honduras," *Journal of Latin American and Caribbean Anthropology* 21, no. 3 (2016): 525.

9 See "Language, Dance, and Music of the Garifuna: Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua," at ich.unesco.org/en/RL/language-dance-and-music-of-the-garifuna-00001.

10 See Sarah England, *Afro-Central Americans in New York City: Garifuna Tales of Transnational Movements in Racialized Space* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 187.

articulated as homeland), and the Central American diaspora (the waves of migrations from south of the US border dating back from the 1880s to the present, despite the erasure of Black peoples in those histories of Latin American transmigrations). These multiple spaces, borders, languages, racial identities, and ethnicities shape how Garifuna negotiate, articulate, and perform their Black Indigeneity throughout the Americas. Garifuna ancestral memory as an embodied archive is the locus through which Garifuna folks in Caribbean coastal Central America and New York City negotiate, articulate, and perform their Black Indigeneity within multiple nation-state borders and racial formations.

Garifuna invocations and performances of ancestral memory mobilize a specific political project that aims to institutionalize Garifuna heritage, history, and language throughout the Americas, specifically Central America's Caribbean coast and the United States (New York City, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Houston, Chicago, New Orleans, Miami, and San Francisco). The act of remembering the ancestors is simultaneously a project of marronage (in conversation with multiple nation-states) and diasporic self-making for spaces of visibility, ontological belonging, and survival in the face of social death. My conceptualization of Garifuna ancestral memory builds on Zora Neale Hurston's reimagining of memories: "Like the dead-seeming cold rocks, I have memories within that came out of the material that went to make me. Time and place have had their say."¹¹ Garifuna ancestral memory is performed and articulated and shows that it serves as an embodied archive of Garifuna epistemologies. Garifuna ancestral memory calls on movement as an act of conjuring ancestral presence through dancing and drumming. By putting Hurston and Toni Morrison into conversation, I turn my attention to what Brathwaite gestures to as the inner plantation: the interiority of Caribbean cultural expression. Morrison poignantly reminds us, "Memories and recollections won't give me total access to the unwritten interior life of these people. Only the act of the imagination can help me."¹² Garifuna ancestral memory ruptures fixed discursive and ethnographic tropes of Garifuna exceptionalism as a Black and Indigenous conundrum to reimagine the materiality of Brathwaite's inner plantation and neglected Maroons, a call for nuanced attention to Caribbean cultural expressions and politics beyond the dominance of colonial knowledge production. By turning inward, we witness the intimacies of Garifuna ancestrality resistance and survival vis-à-vis public performances of Garifuna Settlement Day.

Geography and space inform the ways Garifuna ancestral memory is performed and reenacted. For example, Garifuna Settlement Day looks and feels vastly different in Brooklyn or the Bronx and on the Caribbean coast of Central America. Therefore, we need to conceive of Garifuna ancestral memory as always-already diasporic in its conjuring, reenactments, and articulations. *Diaspora* is more than a description of a historical phenomenon; it functions in more complicated ways than simply as a noun. In addition to describing the dispersal of

11 Zora Neale Hurston, *Dust Tracks on a Road* (New York: Harper Perennial Modern Classics, 2006), 1.

12 Toni Morrison, "The Site of Memory," in William Zinsser, ed., *Inventing the Truth: The Art and Craft of Memoir* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 92.

Black peoples across the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian Oceans, and the residual communities that movement engendered, diaspora is also performed, played with, appropriated.¹³ Saidiya Hartman presents a compelling definition of diaspora as “both an existent territory with objective coordinates and the figurative realm of an imagined past.”¹⁴ Hartman’s definition is useful insofar as it signals both the material and the ideological work that constitutes diasporicness and holds in one palm the structural and affective dimensions of the concept. Movement is, undoubtedly, a central trope in all theorizations of diaspora. *Routes, roots, exile, migrations, displacement, homecoming*—these are terms frequently invoked in the pantheon descriptions of diaspora, all in some capacity indicating bodies or ideas in motion. For instance, Honduras has the largest Garifuna community on the Caribbean coast of Central America, yet Dangriga, Belize, was the first place in the Americas to hold Garifuna Settlement Day, perhaps because of the political struggles Garifuna and creole peoples were engaged in there. Furthermore, New York City has the largest Garifuna communities outside Central America, a result of the long history of US imperialism on Central America’s Caribbean coast; the United Fruit Company headquarters were in Manhattan, and it was the company’s economic collapse that ignited the second wave of Garifuna migrations of the early 1960s. I thus conceive of diaspora as an anaformative impulse, drawing on Iton’s call to be suspicious of homeland narratives and any authenticating geographies that demand fixity, hierarchy, and hegemony. Iton’s conceptualization of diaspora “as anaform,” by which “we are encouraged, then, to put (all) space into play,” serves as fertile ground to excavate a reconfiguration and rearticulation of Garifuna political imaginaries.¹⁵

“The ancestors are always present,” explains Honduran-born, Bronx-based Garifuna *bueyi* (spiritual elder) Tola Guerrero. “They guide us. They walk with us. They remind us how to be Garifuna. But how? We have our own food, our own language, our own traditions. The ancestors are our memory. They give us our memory.”¹⁶ Guerrero’s words have haunted me ever since 1 September 2015, the day we made our way on the L train to the Eastern Brooklyn neighborhood of Canarsie for a *patronato* gathering of transmigrant residents of El Triunfo de la Cruz. It was a critical moment in my journey; I was piecing together what would evolve into my dissertation on Garifuna New Yorkers.¹⁷ My initial inquiry as I drafted my prospectus was, What does it mean to be Garifuna in New York City? I never could have imagined that this question would lead me to ancestral memory, to the queerness of being Garifuna, and to the diasporic performativity of Garifunanness. I am a third-generation Brooklynite of Garifuna Honduran descent, raised in a Pentecostal Christian household. My parents and siblings maintained some Garifuna spiritual traditions, so I grew up with a strong sense of religious

13 See Jasmine E. Johnson, “Dancing Africa, Making Diaspora” (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 2012), 3–5.

14 Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), 9.

15 Iton, *In Search of the Black Fantastic*, 200.

16 Tola Guerrero, interview by the author, New York City, 1 September 2015.

17 Paul Joseph López Oro, “Hemispheric Black Indigeneity: The Queer Politics of Self-Making Garifuna New York” (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2020).

syncretism and a solid consciousness of the workings of the Spirit.¹⁸ I witnessed weekly occurrences of catching the Holy Ghost, dancing in the Spirit, and speaking in tongues in and out of church. Still, it was not until I went into the “field” in Eastern Brooklyn, the South Bronx, and Upper Manhattan (Harlem/Hamilton Heights) that the ancestors kept coming up and I began to witness an urgent need for a closer examination of the political and discursive labor of the ancestors in the self-making processes of Garifuna New Yorkers, especially when in interview after interview multiple transgenerational voices were invoking the ancestors.

M. Jacqui Alexander’s conceptualization of “markings on the flesh” situates the Garifuna body as a site of memory. “These inscriptions . . . are processes,” Alexander explains, “ceremonial rituals through which practitioners become habituated to the spiritual, and this habituation implies that requirements are transposed onto the body.” Within a Garifuna worldview of ancestrality, markings and ritual preparations symbolize the nuances required for reenactments of ancestral arrival: bodily possession as a transfusion of communal knowledge, *baños* as an act of cleansing and healing the body in preparation for ancestral possession, and the ritualization of everyday practices of ancestral veneration. The body is “a site of memory, not a commodity for sale” or folkloricization.¹⁹ This is a growing concern of mine as I think through how Garifunanness is consumed, capitalized, and exported throughout the diaspora. Alexander’s work is critical here in thinking about how Garifuna bodies and memories are lived in the same moment, simultaneously inscribing themselves on and in the living, an act of “entanglement,” as Alexander argues, that “enables us to think and feel these inscriptions as process, a process of embodiment.”²⁰

Brathwaite’s inclination to establish a base in the inner plantation lays a foundational blueprint to conceptualize Garifuna ancestral memory here as one of marronage and ancestrality: a turn to the interior life of Garifuna cultural identity formation. Garifuna *ancestral memory* emerges from ethnographic data collected in the field, as well as from the anthropological scholarship on collective or social memory. This scholarship, however, does not fully consider the political and sacred labor of the ancestors as shapers and producers of histories. In the canonical ethnographic study *Disparate Diasporas: Identity and Politics in an African Nicaraguan Community*, Edmund T. Gordon places archival creole history and social memory in conversation with one another as an ethnographic practice of unearthing critical tools: “History as social memory . . . provides a reservoir of key symbols utilized in the everyday processes of mutual construction and maintenance of identity boundaries. . . . For Atlantic Coast people in general and Creoles in particular, history is a crucial terrain for thought and political practice.”²¹

18 An important distinction to note here is that although Catholicism remains the dominant religion practiced among Garifuna folks, the evangelical movements of the 1990s in Central America mark a particular shift in spiritual/religious discourses about which Garifuna traditions should be maintained.

19 Alexander, *Pedagogies of Crossing*, 297.

20 *Ibid.*, 298.

21 Edmund T. Gordon, *Disparate Diasporas: Identity and Politics in an African Nicaraguan Community* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1998), 93. In chapter 4, “Creole History and Social Memory,” Gordon makes a necessary intervention into the ambiguous relationship creoles on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua have with their history, which highlights the anti-Black

Remembering is a critical way of teaching and preserving traditions, and recalling the people (elders) who created customs is one way of keeping them alive. Memory, synonymous with remembering, represents how knowledge is transmitted, confirms how rituals are shared, and demonstrates how narratives are transmitted through a community's experiences regardless of geographical specificity. While they may be written, these narratives are also discursive. Memory thus refers to what has been written *and* to what has been passed on through rituals, practices, symbols, and other unwritten aspects of Garifuna culture and oral traditions. As LeRhonda Manigault-Bryant suggests regarding ancestral memory among Gullah/Geechee communities, "[Memory] encompasses the features of the past that are very much a part of the present. Understanding the aspects of memory as they are ritualized, (re)appropriated, and performed is significant because it provides a means of understanding the social, cultural, and religious perspectives of a given community."²²

Garifuna Settlement Day is fertile ground for thinking about how Garifuna politically mobilize via performances of arrival, exile, and territory through an embodied archive of ancestral memory. Garifuna Settlement Day is a public act of remembering and reenactment, a performative space to embody ancestral memory (see fig. 2). In the present day, Garifuna Settlement Day is commemorated throughout the Americas, specifically within Garifuna diasporas in the United States and along Central America's Caribbean coast. The origins of the reenactment of Garifuna Settlement Day are distinctively Central American and Caribbean. It was started in Dangriga, Belize, as an already-present communal practice of remembering the ancestors on the day of arrival to Central America from St. Vincent, an ethnogenesis that is burned into the Garifuna political imagination as one of resistance to enslavement and European colonialism. St. Vincent is a place of nostalgia as a site of ancestral memory and the birthplace of Garifunanness. In Belize, 19 November 1823 is recognized as the date of arrival of the Garinagu to Dangriga, the location of the largest Garifuna community in the country.²³ The first Garifuna Settlement Day celebration in the Americas took place on 19 November 1941 in Dangriga (Belize, at that time, was British Honduras) as a political mobilization of remembrance and ethnoracial recognition in the face of land encroachment and anti-Black racism. This political project of Garifuna cultural preservation emerged at a significant historical juncture, with the continuous migrations of Black and Indigenous communities to the Belizean, Guatemalan, and Honduran Caribbean coasts, and the political struggles for independence in the last British colony in Central America (Belize would gain its independence forty years later, on 21 September 1981).

nature of the archive on Nicaragua's Atlantic coast. As he notes, both written and oral creole historical narratives have tended to be embedded within general accounts of Atlantic coast history rather than being accounts specifically focused on creole histories. His turn to social memory of creole history from creole folks is generative in articulating creole social memory as a key component of their collective political imaginary.

22 LeRhonda S. Manigault-Bryant, *Talking to the Dead: Religion, Music, and Lived Memory among Gullah/Geechee Women* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 173.

23 See Oliver N. Greene Jr., "Celebrating Garifuna Settlement Day in Belize," in Timothy Rommen and Daniel T. Neely, eds., *Sun, Sea, and Sound: Music and Tourism in the Circum-Caribbean* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 173.



Figure 2. Members of the Joseph Chatoyer Dance Company participate in Garifuna Settlement Day at Brooklyn Borough Hall, 2014. Photograph courtesy of the author

Garifuna Settlement Day was the result of the activism of Honduran-born, Belize-raised Garifuna civil rights activist Thomas Vincent Ramos, who led a national campaign to pressure the Belizean nation-state to recognize 19 November as a national holiday.²⁴ Ramos is a particularly compelling political figure in Garifuna history, and his multiple ties to Honduras and Belize illustrate the fluidity of nation-state borders on the Caribbean coast of Central America for Garifuna, creole, and Indigenous communities whose racialization as Black ascribe them as alien to the mestizo national imaginary.²⁵ While the historical origins of Garifuna Settlement Day merit much more in-depth attention, especially because it also informs a larger contemporary Garifuna political imaginary, my inquiry here lies with the political and discursive labor of performing Garifunanness together with embodied ancestral memory in the public space of Garifuna Settlement Day throughout the diaspora, specifically in Central America and New York City.

24 See Paul Joseph López Oro, "Ramos, Tomas Vicente," in Franklin W. Knight and Henry Louis Gates Jr., eds., *Dictionary of Caribbean and Afro-Latin American Biography* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 251–53.

25 Blackness is a direct threat to the project of whitening in the mestizo nation-state and needs to be imagined as outside it, as the perpetual alien, for the myth of *mestizaje* to function. The alienness that is demarcated onto Blackness by the mestizo imaginary highlights the histories of exile and displacement of Garinagu because of their foreign, outsider roots in St. Vincent, placing them in a perpetual state of alienness. The "threat" of Blackness propels the nation-state to create juridical language to establish its imagined *mestizaje*. Race and national ideologies in the Americas are thus inextricable. For further in-depth scholarship on race in Latin America, see Juliet Hooker, "Indigenous Inclusion / Black Exclusion: Race, Ethnicity, and Multicultural Citizenship in Latin America," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 37, no. 2 (2005): 285–310; Courtney Desiree Morris, "To Defend This Sunrise: Race, Place, and Creole Women's Political Subjectivity on the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua" (PhD diss., University of Texas at Austin, 2012); Kia Lilly Caldwell, *Negras in Brazil: Re-envisioning Black Women, Citizenship, and the Politics of Identity* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Tianna S. Paschel, *Becoming Black Political Subjects: Movements and Ethno-racial Rights in Colombia and Brazil* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2016); Christen A. Smith, *Afro-Paradise: Blackness, Violence, and Performance in Brazil* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2016); Jennifer Goett, *Black Autonomy: Race, Gender, and Afro-Nicaraguan Activism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2016); George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Keisha-Khan Y. Perry, *Black Women against the Land Grab: The Fight for Racial Justice in Brazil* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013); Sherwin K. Bryant, Rachel Sarah O'Toole, and Ben Vinson, *Africans to Spanish America: Expanding the Diaspora* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2014); Herman L. Bennett, *Colonial Blackness: A History of Afro-Mexico* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010); and Lowell Gudmundson and Justin Wolfe, *Blacks and Blackness in Central America: Between Race and Place* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

The notion of arrival is foundational to how Garifuna imagine their marronage in and exile from St. Vincent. Settlement and arrival are hallmark ideas in Garifuna political imagination that can potentially serve to disrupt fixed narratives of Black Atlantic epistemologies for a people born out of hybridity and shipwrecks. Garifuna Settlement Day is thus a site of performative rupture in the Americas. The reenactment of ancestral arrival from St. Vincent to Central America also illustrates the complexities of the racialized geographies of Central America's Caribbean coast.²⁶ In the Central American imaginary, Blackness is ascribed to and conceptualized as always-already being present only on the Caribbean coast of Central American nation-states, removed from the interior of mestizo governance. Both images taken in Dangriga highlight the act of arrival/arriving as a central theme in the performance of Garifuna Settlement Day. Arrival and exile are key political tropes enacted by Garifuna folks as they carefully choreograph their negotiations of Blackness (read, Middle Passage), Indigeneity (read, First Peoples of the Americas), and *mestizaje* (read, their census categorization as Hispanic/Latino in the Central American nation-states they reside in and in the United States).

Performance transmits memories, makes political claims, and manifests a group's sense of identity and belonging.²⁷ I read Garifuna Settlement Day alongside Brathwaite's concepts of the inner plantation and neglected Maroons to argue that Garifuna diaspora is practiced and performed contemporarily and that everyday Garifuna folks utilize ancestral memory to make sense of their own individual selves and to ground their collective identities. Ancestral memory is a multisited embodied archive of dreams, songs, spirit possession, oral traditions, performances, rituals, art, film, drumming, memories, oral histories, and so much more. While there is certainly significant work on ancestry and spirits in the field of Black Atlantic religions, my interest in multiple manifestations of Garifuna ancestry is centered on how these spiritual and cultural expressions inform the politics of self-making, of forging political identities. In other words, while I see scholarly importance in analyzing Garifuna spirituality/religiosity and its relationship to the broader conceptualization of the African diaspora, that is not my main concern here.²⁸ Instead, I focus on how the performances of ancestral memory mobilize multiple forms of Garifuna political imaginaries throughout their diasporas. Garifuna

26 Paul Joseph López Oro, "Digitizing Ancestral Memory: Garifuna Settlement Day in the Americas and in Cyberspace," in Jennifer Gómez Menjívar and Gloria Elizabeth Chacón, eds., *Indigenous Interfaces: Spaces, Technology, and Social Networks in Mexico and Central America* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2019), 79.

27 See Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003). Taylor defines *repertoire* as "enact[ed] embodied memory: performances, gestures, orality, movement, dance, singing[,] . . . those acts usually thought of as ephemeral, nonreproducible knowledge. . . . The repertoire requires presence: people participate in the production and reproduction of knowledge by 'being there'" (20).

28 See Paul Christopher Johnson, *Diaspora Conversions: Black Carib Religion and the Recovery of Africa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007). After conducting seven years of multisite fieldwork in Garifuna communities on the Caribbean coast of Honduras and in New York City, Johnson's ethnography shows how Garifuna diasporas make Garifuna religious practices. Borrowing from Thomas Tweed, Johnson lays out a theory of "diasporic religion[s]" whose members view themselves against new historical and territorial horizons that change the meaning and configuration of religious, ethnic, and racial identifications (2). He argues that Garifuna Honduran homeland rituals turn toward St. Vincent, while migration to New York City has led to what he terms "diasporic horizons," with New York Garifuna rituals turning toward Honduras and the African continent (7–8). As a result, Garifuna Indigeneity is foreclosed, in his account. Garifuna self-articulations as Maroon in the Americas via Arawak Caribness fall out of Johnson's analysis. See also Thomas A. Tweed, *Our Lady of the Exile: Diasporic Religion at a Cuban Catholic Shrine in Miami* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

invocations and performances of ancestral memory mobilize a specific political project that aims to institutionalize Garifuna heritage, history, and language throughout the Americas, specifically the Caribbean coast of Central America and the United States (New York City, Los Angeles, Atlanta, Houston, Chicago, New Orleans, Miami, and San Francisco). The act of remembering the ancestors is simultaneously a project of marronage (in conversation with multiple nation-states) and diasporic self-making for spaces of visibility, ontological belonging, and survival in the face of social death. Brathwaite's neglected Maroons bring us into a generative space of how Black geographies and fugitivity have always-already been Indigenous to/in the Americas. They reimagine for us how Garifuna political imaginaries of arrival, exile, settlement, and ongoing dispossession transcend time and space. *Neglected* is striking here as a formulation that thinks of the unseen/forgotten but simultaneously re-membered.

"Our research will have to equip us," Brathwaite writes, "to more precisely observe, account for, and assess *agents of change*: the changes (material, spiritual, electronic) in the inner and outer metropolises; and the processes of change within and between the inner and outer plantation."²⁹ In "Caribbean Man" he lays the grounding for my work and the futurity of Garifuna folks to think through the multiplicities of Caribbeanness hemispherically such that its fragmentations can be seen as generative spaces of conjuring ancestral memory.

29 Brathwaite, "Caribbean Man," *Savacou*, 11; this issue of *Small Axe*, 100 (italics in original).