



Endangered Lyrics in Endangered Languages: Documenting the Arumahani songs of the Garifuna in Belize and New York City

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Queens College & Endangered Language Alliance

September 25, 2015

Garifuna and its linguistic environs

- Garifuna is the Arawakan language with the second largest number of speakers.

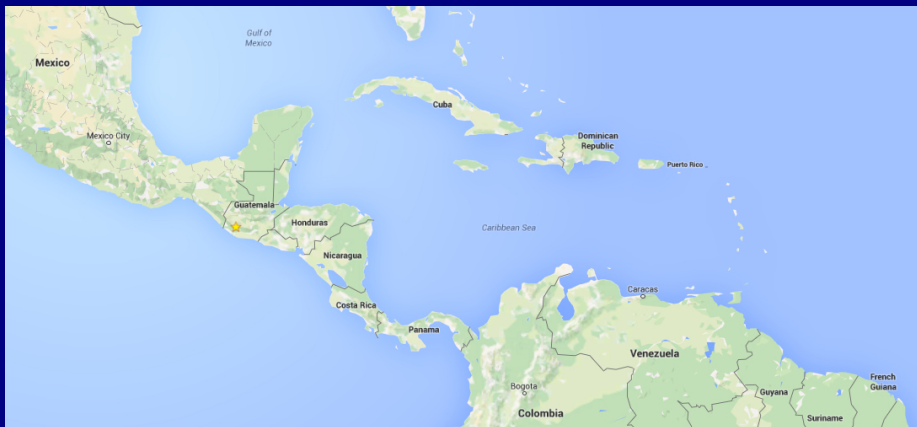
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- But most Arawakan languages have very small speaker populations and are highly endangered.
- The Garifuna are not a typical indigenous people of the Americas. They have a mixed ancestry and do not differ phenotypically from other Afro-Caribbean populations.

- The Central American region



• The Antilles



Garifuna history

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- The Garifuna sided with the French against the British and suffered severely when the British took control of the island.
- In 1795, the British exiled the Garifuna to the small island of Balliceaux where roughly 2,500 people, half the population, died.

Balliceaux today

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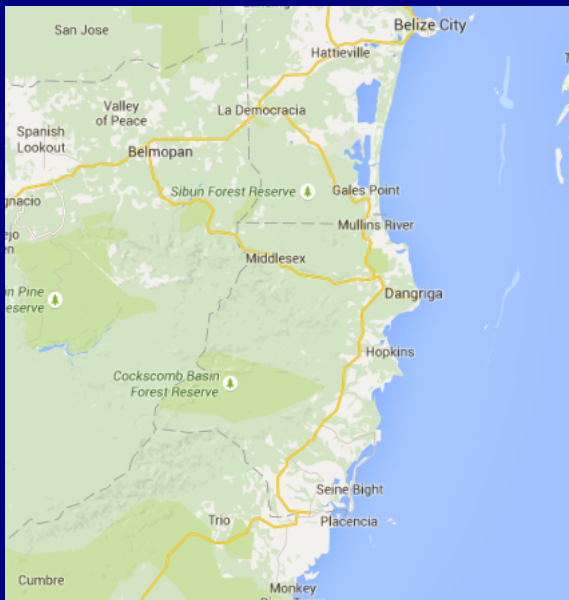
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Garifuna history

- From Balliceaux the population was removed to Roatan off the coast of Honduras. From Roatan they occupied the Caribbean coast from Nicaragua to Belize.

• The Garifuna villages of Belize



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- Garifuna also shows no signs whatsoever of creolization although there is a lot of basic vocabulary from Carib and a large number of assimilated loans from French.
- Garifuna is in fact one of the most morphologically complex Arawakan languages documented.

l-a-gumu-cha-gua-güdü-ni-wa fariengu-oü
 3SM.GEN-VRB-end-ASP-REFL-CAUS-NMLZ-PASS distance-NMLZ
 ‘to eliminate distancing’ (Cayetano1 19:10)

Phylogenetic affiliation

- Garifuna is thought to be most closely related to Taino (the indigenous language of Puerto Rico which was decimated by the Spanish) and Lokono (Suriname).

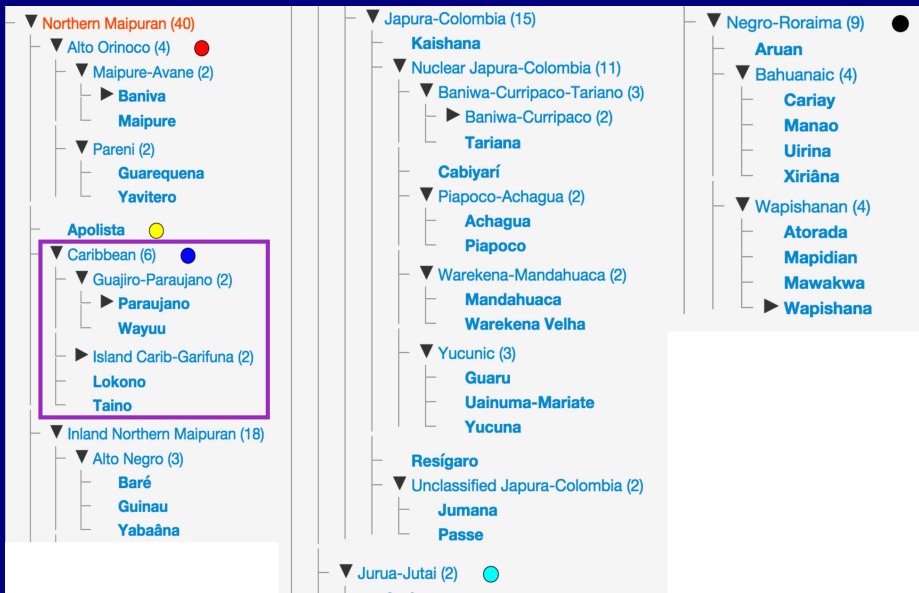
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- It must be noted though that the proposed classifications are not based on the comparative method but rather surface similarity.
- The study of Arawakan historical linguistics is still in its infancy but many of the relevant languages are critically endangered.

Phylogenetic affiliation



Endangerment

- Today the population of Garifuna speakers is estimated by Grinevald (2007:69,71) to be 22,000 for Honduras and 12,000 for Belize. The Ethnologue reports the far higher total of 195,800 for all countries with 98,000 for Honduras, 16,100 for Belize and 16,700 for Guatemala. There are no remaining speakers in Nicaragua.

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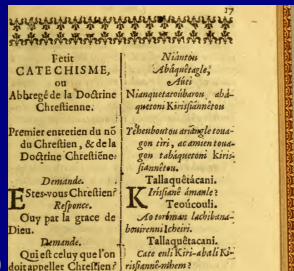
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- Honduras has become a stronghold for the language but Spanish is also encroaching quickly there.
- A decades old pattern of immigration to the United States has had wide ranging effects on Garifuna society (Gonzalez, 1979; Kerns, 1983).

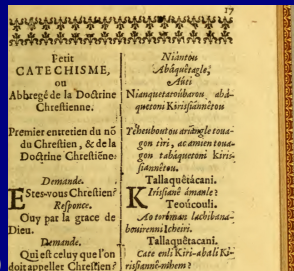
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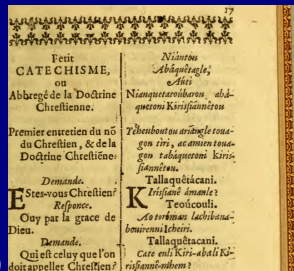
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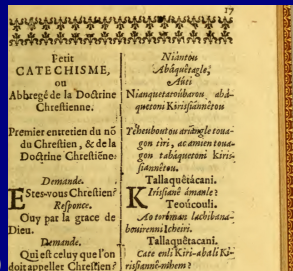
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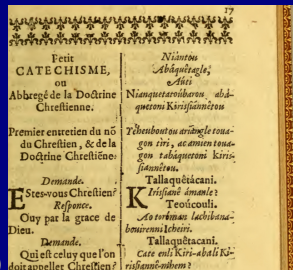
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- Work on Garifuna music: Hadel (1972, 1974); Jenkins and Jenkins (1982b, 1984); Whipple (1971)



Previous recordings

Recorded and Produced by CDFL and TRIO 274638

ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 402 STEREO

**DABUYABARUGU:
INSIDE THE TEMPLE**
Sacred Music of the
Garifuna of Belize



The Black Caribs of Honduras
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**Honduras
MUSIQUE GARIFUNA**
La tradition des Caribs noirs



**Honduras
GARIFUNA MUSIC**
The tradition of the black Caribs

Recorded and Produced by CDFL and TRIO 274638

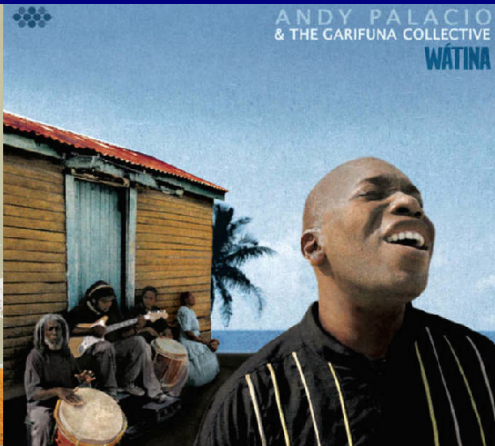
ETHNIC FOLKWAYS RECORDS FE 402 STEREO

**Traditional Music of
THE GARIFUNA
(Black Carib)
OF BELIZE**



Modern music

Andy Palacio & Aurelio Martinez



The *uyanu* genres (Jenkins and Jenkins, 1982a)

“Songs are performed in even-numbered sets, never less than 4 at a time, and, as singers move directly from one melody to the next, the dancers reverse their direction as they move in a circle in one part of the temple. Song sets usually last 20 to 30 minutes. For 4 or 5 nights, including 3 or 4 full days as well, participants dance and sing almost continually. At midnight, the drums cease for a while and a genre of song known as uyanu is performed. These are semi-sacred gestured songs, differentiated into male and female sub-types. They are sung a cappella in irregular meter by women standing in lines and linked by their little fingers. The female version, abaimahani, is far more commonly heard today than is the male version, arumahani. The Garifuna refer to uyanu as their “soul music”, since these songs are generally mournful and serious. Although arumahani appears to be dying out, the abaimahani is very much alive with new ones created yearly. The dugu itself is gaining in popularity in Belize. Every summer, between 6 and 12 of these ceremonies are held, drawing participants from as away as Honduras and Canada.”

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- They are referred to as “semi-sacred” songs, a term which seems to have been first used by Carol and Travis Jenkins in their writings.
- But what does it mean to be “semi-sacred”?

“Semi-sacred” music

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- Sacred songs also seem to be a set repertoire while the “semi-sacred” *arumahani* and *abaimahani* were continually being composed.
- Both genres are sung by a row of singers standing with one foot forward and their pinkies linked. Similar (but distinct) movements are used in the two genres.

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- The *abaimahani* is the women's genre and the lyrics recount various misfortunes from a woman's perspective.
- The lyrics are loosely structured and typically enigmatic. They refer to real events that were experienced by the composers but often unknown to current singers.

New interest in endangered music

music endangerment

HOW LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE CAN HELP



Catherine Grant



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HILL**

The Oxford Handbook of **MUSIC REVIVAL**

Endangered musics and endangered language

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- In the case of Garifuna, it is very clearly shift rather than an overall reduction in musical activity.
- The genres that have encroached on *uyanú* are many: punta, punta rock, rap, reggae. Garifuna musicians perform many of these genres in Garifuna.

Assessing Factor 1 for non-emergent music genres (Grant, 2014, p.112)

Degree of endangerment	Grade	Intergenerational transmission
<i>safe</i>	5	Genre is performed by all appropriate ages and is transmitted intergenerationally
<i>unsafe</i>	4	Genre is performed by all appropriate ages, but transmission to the youngest appropriate generation is weakening.
<i>definitively endangered</i>	3	Genre is performed mostly by the middle generations and up.
<i>severely endangered</i>	2	Genre is performed mostly by the older generations.
<i>critically endangered</i>	1	Genre is performed only by the very elderly, and then only partially and infrequently.
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- Traditional contexts were increasing as the fluent L1 speakers were decreasing.
- One of the explicit aims of preserving the songs is so that the younger generation can participate more fully in ceremonial life.

The ELDP funded project

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- We videotaped our participants being interviewed by James as well as performing the songs.

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- The negative side is that the singers are the best ones to interpret the lyrics.

Participants



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The field context

- The work would not at all have been possible without James Lovell, who had a direct (often familial) link to all the singers.



The field context

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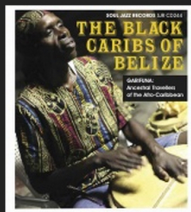
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- Very recently, a British record label recorded traditional music in Dangriga and also appeared to have reneged on some of their promises.
- We won trust by compensating all the singers immediately and sending the entire set of recordings back to key participants. (We are now sending all the performers their performances as well.)

The field context



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GARIFUNA: ANCESTRAL TRAVELLERS OF THE CARIBBEAN

Soul Jazz Records

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2. Bato Drum Group — Daraboun Me Yamadi (Combination) [PLAY](#)
3. Dugu Ensemble — E-E Au Gayu (Dugu) [PLAY](#)
4. Gilla And The Wageira Le Drummers — Dam Me Tiabin (Charikanari) [PLAY](#)
5. Bato Drum Group — Instrumental (Gunjel) [PLAY](#)
6. Uwarani — Lemesi Le Bichugubei [PLAY](#)
7. Bato Drum Group — Instrumental (Chumba) [PLAY](#)
8. Dugu Ensemble — Chiba La Barana Wabugurate (Dugu) [PLAY](#)
9. Gilla And The Wageira Le Drummers — Guribiyua (Paranda) [PLAY](#)
10. Bato Drum Group — Instrumental (Combination) [PLAY](#)
11. Uwarani — Liboria Laure (Gunjel) [PLAY](#)
12. Gilla And The Wageira Le Drummers — Play Jankunu Play (Jankunu / Wanaragua) [PLAY](#)
13. Bato Drum Group — Charikanari Habinahan Dangrigana (Charikanari) [PLAY](#)
14. Gilla And The Wageira Le Drummers — Fiura (Paranda) [PLAY](#)

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- It was helpful that we were also interested in recording the stories and opinions about the music rather than simply removing the songs from their contexts as previous researchers had done.
- Topics included the transmission of songs, treatment of singers, ownership of songs, proper and improper contexts for traditional songs and the stories behind the songs themselves.

Transmission

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- In New York, younger male singers from Honduras perform *arumahani* in a form that is no longer found in Belize.

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- But there is no concerted effort to transmit songs in the diaspora. These kinds of efforts are only now taking off in Belize.

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- Transmission paradox: the singers are in New York but the contexts for transmission (the *dabyuaba*) are in the Garifuna territories.
- Displaced musical traditions have also been reported for 17th century French songs which survive in Quebec and Louisiana but not in France and seasonal agricultural songs which survive among the Indian community in Trinidad but not in India (Grant, 2014, p.56).
- But there is no concerted effort to transmit songs in the diaspora. These kinds of efforts are only now taking off in Belize.
- Unlike in the French and Indian cases, intergenerational language transmission is not really taking place in the diaspora.

Lyrics (Vincensini & Romay 2001, p.22-23)

“The words traditionally speak of the epic history of the ancestors, sometimes very ancient episodes which seem to be impossible to identify or interpret. This latter point characterises all song lyrics, even the most recent ones. For the uninitiated, their cryptic nature frequently suggests a mixture of random fragments strangely separated from their context, like excerpts drawn at random from various books on a bookshelf. When the singer explains them however, we see that they contain many meaningful moral or philosophical ideas which are hidden by the simple words used and the complete or considerable lack of context.”

Arumahani (Vincensini & Romay 2001, p.25)

Yunis, come see me, come see me, nephew, my brother's son.
We are in midsummer, the sun beats down on me.
I come into the hot sun, with my knapsack.
The orders which my uncle gives, I knew they would be disastrous.

Arumahani (Vincensini & Romay 2001, p.25)

What will I tell them. (repeat)
The masters of the world, or my equal?
I keep quiet, because I am so poor.
I have no way to make money.
When the people who make money talk, when the rich talk, I feel ashamed,
Oh! Sibila! Oh

Arumahani (Vincensini & Romay 2001, p.25)

No sooner have I gotten up, it hurts.
I, my son, I already have it (an illness).
It leaves me, it comes back.
My time is up, brother-in-law!
I have lived through so many things!
And it starts to hurt again.
My tears flow, from the beach to my home.
I can't go on the water.
What I have immediately stops me.
It leaves me, it comes back.

Abimahani (Vincensini & Romay 2001, p.25)

What sad news we hear, that Rigo is dead.

Where is the mother? (repeated)

When Enriqueta arrived (repeated)

She said to him 'I don't see you any more', and she fainted.

The concept of *iáwaü*

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- Cayetano (1993) defines: **iáwaü** (noun, feminine) picture; photo; shadow; image
- The concept of *iáwaü* turns out to be crucial to understanding the function of songs and who Garifuna music, especially the *uyanú* genres are composed.

*ligiati nafayerua bei luagu naremuha ladüga aba giara la
nawaragu dale narihi susereti ubou. **nayawadali** ahen
mayawaduna, memeragubadina*

‘that’s how I’m paid for my singing because I can be relieved
when I see the bad things in the world. **I’ll make an image of it,**
if I don’t, I won’t rest peacefully.’

Some short and long term goals

- All the annotations will be put into a searchable database online together with the audio and some video (based on an underlying FLEx database)

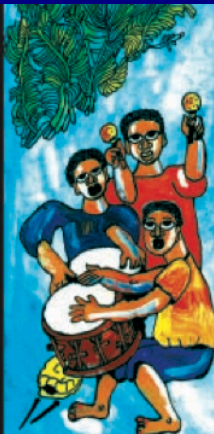
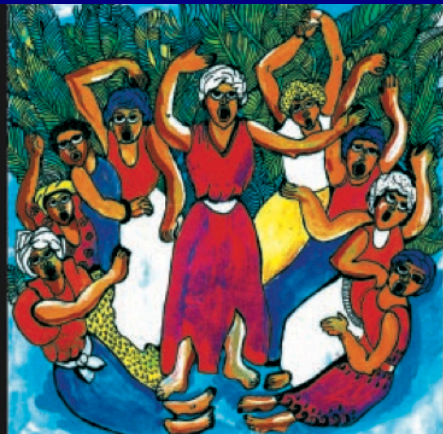
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- We are exploring the possibility of similar song workshops with Garifuna-American youth in New York using these materials.

Thanks for listening!



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