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## ***“Ni de aquí, ni de allá”*: Garífuna Subjectivities and the Politics of Diasporic Belonging**

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## “*Ni de aquí, ni de allá*”: Garífuna Subjectivities and the Politics of Diasporic Belonging

*Paul Joseph López Oro*

On January 13, 2012, *The New York Times* published a multimedia series on “Being Garífuna,” arguing that “when it comes to being counted in the census, the Garínagu, who are part African, part indigenous, and part Central American, say they don’t fit into any box.” One of the featured interviewees in the multimedia series was Dilma Suazo, a second-generation Garífuna Honduran from East New York, Brooklyn who noted that, “people think that I’m automatically black, I mean they say it, oh ‘but you look black’ I tell them yeah okay but there’s more to it, more to who I am. If you want to go color-wise sure I can say I’m Black, if we go language wise sure I can say I’m Hispanic...And now you’re here and we gotta check all this stuff, so you know what, we called it and we gonna go to Other and just put Garífuna.”<sup>1</sup> Dilma’s articulation on the liminality of her racial and ethnic subjectivities is an important assertion. This article

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*In loving memory of Professor Juan Flores whose friendship and mentorship have been immeasurably valuable to me. I’m grateful to the generous and critical feedback from Alexander G. Weheliye, Nitasha Tamar Sharma, Juliet Hooker, Jasmine E. Johnson, Tianna S. Paschel, Miriam Jimenez Roman, Petra Rivera-Rideau, Jennifer Jones, and Monica Alexandra Jimenez.*

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along with the same-day publication of a *Race Mixed* series titled “For Many Latinos, Racial Identity is more Culture than Color,” focused on the complexities of ethnicity by highlighting the challenges that Latinos face when ascribing to US racial categories. This persistent narrative of Latinos centering their ethnic diversity rather than racial identity maintains the fallacy that Latinos are magically so racially mixed that they transcend racial discourse and the US black and white binary. Fetishizing US Latinos as a multiracial and multicultural subject not only reinscribes Latin American *mestizaje* in the United States, a delusional myth that racial mixture creates racial sameness and racial democracy but also dismisses centuries of black and indigenous political mobilization against racial injustices and inequalities in Latin America and the Caribbean. Arlene Dávila urges us to turn the map of Latin America upside down to discover a top-down racial hierarchy of *Latinidad*, a racial hierarchy that Latinos of African descent continue to live and survive at the bottom of. She notes that “we can no longer take simple refuge in appeals to a common *Latinidad*; concepts of ‘*mestizaje*’ or transnational *Latinidad* are not inherently inclusive. Black and indigenous Latinos are not exempted from racial discrimination by well-meaning appeals to *mestizaje*.”<sup>2</sup>

The *Garínagu*<sup>3</sup> or *Garífuna*, as they are popularly known, are black indigenous people born out of the mixture of shipwrecked West African slaves and Carib Arawak indigenous people on the island of St. Vincent in 1635. The account of *Garífuna* as descendants of shipwrecked slaves is widely accepted in the collective memory among *Garínagu* as an experience rooted in *marronage* and resistance to enslavement. This ethnogenesis account divorces them from the transatlantic slave trade and plantation life in the Americas, as well as shapes and influences their relationships with African-Americans. This *marronage* occurred in the midst of wars of colonial domination between the Spanish, the British, and the French. *Garífuna* were exiled from St. Vincent to the Caribbean coast of Central America in 1797 by British colonial rule.<sup>4</sup> Since the 1920s, this community has been a vital part of the labor force in dock work, merchant fleets, and other maritime services in Central America and the US. The largest wave of *Garífuna* migration to the US began in the 1940s with the collapse of the United Fruit Company banana plantations in Honduras, propelling the rapid establishment of *Garífuna* communities in US port cities such as New Orleans, San Francisco, and New York. From the early 1990s to the present, land displacement, corrupt government, and gang violence in Central America

have created the conditions for another major wave of Garífuna migration to urban spaces in the US South, such as Houston and Atlanta.

New York City is home to the largest Garífuna communities outside of Central America with an estimated 290,000 living in all five boroughs, specifically in the working-class, immigrant neighborhoods of Eastern Brooklyn and the South Bronx. In 2010, Garífuna community-based organizations in partnership with the US Census Bureau encouraged Garífuna households to check off the category of “Other” and write in Garífuna to ensure an accurate count, political representation, and the potential for Garífuna to be its own box in 2020. Three years later in Honduras, the newly formed Secretariat of Indigenous and Afro-Honduran Peoples (SEDINAFROH) organized a census campaign “Yo Tengo Identidad y Confío en el Censo” mobilizing Garífuna and other black Honduran communities to check off *Afrohondureño*. This new census term makes a historic intervention in the monolithic mestizo imaginary of Honduras in that it officially recognizes peoples of African descent. However, Garífuna communities sued the Honduran government for imposing a category that violently erases their black indigenous history, culture, language, and identity.

Building upon Richard Iton’s theorization of diaspora “to put (all) space into play,”<sup>5</sup> this paper is rooted in the transnational spaces of the South Bronx, East Brooklyn, and the Northern Caribbean coast of Honduras, analyzing the ways in which Garífuna Hondurans negotiate their diasporic belonging beyond the nation-states they are bounded by the racial categories of the Census that they do not easily fit into. I examine how Garífuna engage multiple conceptions of diaspora to create in the formation of new expressions of Garífuna subjectivity, and how US ascriptions of blackness inform these processes of negotiating in the in-between of blackness, indigeneity, and Latinidad. Garínagu people are members of three diasporas: the African diaspora, the Garífuna diaspora, and the Central American diaspora. They are simultaneously black, indigenous, and Latino; they can be Honduran, Belizean, Guatemalan, Nicaraguan, and American; they are part of Central America and part of the Caribbean.<sup>6</sup> As an ethnic group they share a common language and culture, as well as histories of colonialism, displacement, and transnational migration that unite them across nation-state borders. Garífuna subjectivity is rooted in dispossession and resistance to colonialism and nation-states. As such, Garífuna communities are fundamentally transnational with multiple homes of dislocation. By examining two census campaigns, one in New York City and one in Honduras occurring in 2010 and 2013, respectively, I intend to open a

dialogue in multiple spaces on how Garífuneness is being categorized on state-sanctioned documents like the Census. Census projects are intended for the democratic State to collect data on the demographics of their populations in order to distribute financial resources across communities. Furthermore, census collection processes have historically undercounted and misrepresented black communities throughout the Americas. In the case of Latin America, it is difficult to compile definitive statistics on the size of black communities since, as Juliet Hooker notes, “many countries in the region still do not include questions about race and ethnicity in their national censuses.”<sup>7</sup> Centrally, I ask: what is at stake in the assertion of Garífuna specificity on both the US and the Honduran census forms? What is Garífuneness contesting in these census projects: US blackness? indigeneity? Latinidad? What does Dilma Suazo’s reaction to her interpellation as black “yeah but there’s more to it, more to who I am” do discursively, on and off the census form?

In this interdisciplinary study I analyze historical archives, ethnographic data, and use theories of racial formation to illustrate the multiples ways in which Garínagu politically engage in their everyday lives within their multiple subjectivities. I begin with a textual analysis of discourses of mestizaje in nineteenth-century Honduran historiography to frame how and why Garífuna and other black Hondurans remain outside of the mestizo nation-state, an alienation that extends into the construct of Latinidad in the United States. My role as community organizer in the 2010 US Census “Garífunas Stand Up and Be Counted” campaign in New York City and participant-observation researcher of the “*Yo Tengo Identidad y Confío en el Censo*” 2013 Honduran census campaign informs my analysis of transnational disconnections and connections. Last, I engage with the visual archive constructed by the State to illustrate how Honduras as a neoliberal multicultural nation-state needs to situate Garífuna communities fixed in a specific geography and political isolation in order to ensure their alienation and political disenfranchisement. More importantly, this visual archive is used by Garífuna communities to speak back to the erroneous categorization by the State onto their identities and communities. I place these multiple, intersecting archives and methods in conversation from the margins to unearth an interstitial space that Garínagu occupy. Prior to analyzing these two census projects, it is necessary to situate Garífuna within theories of mestizaje and the African diaspora, a theorization that places Garínagu always already as a transnational peoples with multiple dislocations of home: *ni de aquí, ni de allá*.

GARIFUNIZANDO THEORIES OF MESTIZAJE  
AND THE BLACK DIASPORA IN CENTRAL AMERICA

Political theorist Juliet Hooker offers us a powerful analysis on the ambiguity of blacks and blackness in Latin American mestizo nationhood. She notes that “indigenous people occupy a certain place in the national symbolic universe as ancestral contributors to the new, hybrid *mestizo* nation and culture, even if they are seen as marginal and traditional in the present... People of African descent, by contrast have been rendered invisible in many Latin American narratives of *mestizaje*, and their place in the national political community is therefore more ambiguous.”<sup>8</sup> It is this space of ambiguity that I find to be critical to my analysis of *Blackness as alien* to mestizaje and Latinidad. The black subject is a direct threat to the project of whitening in the mestizo nation-state and needs to be imagined as outside of it, the perpetual alien in order for the myth of mestizaje to function as truth.<sup>9</sup> The Honduran Caribbean coast is also imagined to exist on the margins of the mestizo nation-state as a site of spatial and racial difference, reinforcing Garinagu and other black Honduran communities as outside of the national project. My observations are built upon the contributions of Courtney Morris whose scholarship is situated on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, a similar region to that of the Caribbean Coast of Honduras. Morris observes:

The Coast continues to be read as Black because the Mestizo nation needs to imagine it as the only site of Blackness in order to maintain the myth of the Mestizo (read = non Black) nation...the Atlantic Coast as a Black space continues to be (re)invented in ways that reflect historical patterns of exclusion and emergent forms of spatial control and management that marginalize Black and Indigenous communities in the region while reproducing the myth of Nicaraguan mestizaje.<sup>10</sup>

This alienation of blackness in mestizo Central American nation-states is where I find a space for theorizing the African diaspora to articulate how practices of black resistance and black political mobilization are transnational and resist the nation-state.

In situating the historical narrative of peoples of African descent in Honduras, it is important to briefly outline the larger discourses of *mestizaje* that I am directly in conversation with. Tanya Golash-Boza and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argue that race and national ideologies in the Americas are inextricable and the ideas and practices of race were essential

to the conquest and colonization of the Americas.<sup>11</sup> Race<sup>12</sup> is central to Latin American nationalism. It contends that the nation is a homogenous melting pot and connotes a dual process of cultural hybridity through biological race mixture. Latin American forms of nationalism have been predicated on the notion that mestizaje has eliminated racial hierarchy and fostered an inclusive sense of nationhood. Mestizaje is central to the “racial democracy thesis,”<sup>13</sup> which asserts that ethnoracial categories do not exist in Latin American countries. Latin Americanists have typically highlighted both homogenous national identity and the absence of Jim Crow-like laws in Latin American countries as testaments to their harmonious race relations in comparison to the United States. There are different variants of discourses around mestizaje; the notion of mestizaje is inherently and explicitly about whitening through race mixture.

Mestizaje is not universal in Latin America; it functions differently in every nation-state and its construction emerges at distinct moments of nation-state formation. Honduras has a distinct historical juncture with the emergence of mestizaje as an official political rhetoric at the end of the nineteenth century. It was a moment of great instability with the economic and political prominence of the United Fruit Company, the rapid migration of thousands of West Indian laborers, and the high rates of employment of Garifuna laborers on banana plantations.<sup>14</sup> These histories of Latin American mestizaje lay the groundwork for understanding past and contemporary anti-black racism in Honduras and how Latinidad as a US formation of mestizaje is constructed on the same pillars of antiblackness. Jafari S. Allen argues that “the celebration of mestizaje is a celebration of black holocaust,”<sup>15</sup> an important provocation as mestizaje masks antiblack racism in the same celebration of racial mixture. I engage with the complexities of mestizaje and the African diaspora in Latin America as a blueprint for examining the entanglements of race and ethnicity that second- and third-generation Garifuna Hondurans negotiate in New York City. Antiblack racism and discourses of mestizaje that construct blackness outside of the nation-state continue to shape the ways in which Garifuna youth and previous generations have mobilized politically and socially both transnationally and locally. Building on the works of Edmund T. Gordon and Mark Anderson, I also conceptualize diaspora as a political and theoretical project that resists the boundedness of the nation-state. Garifuna’s afroindigeneity unsettles the geographical fixity of US blackness, as well as complicates our understandings of histories of black and indigenous communities in

the Americas. Garínagu live within multiple diasporas, living in various Central American nation-states as well as the United States whose afroindigeneity mobilizes transformative modes of subaltern politics.<sup>16</sup>

These two census projects serve as objects of analysis that mediate various spaces of diasporic belonging, exclusion/inclusion, and blackness/Indigenous/Latinidad. My understandings and usage of diaspora as a condition of subjectivity, marked by the contingencies of long histories of displacements and genealogies of dispossession, entangled by racialized histories of colonialism, imperialism, and modernity, has been shaped by the work of the late Richard Iton. Iton approached diaspora as a deconstruction of colonial sites and narratives particularly as a delinking geography and power. He notes that “conceiving of diaspora as anaform, we are encouraged, then, to put (all) space into play,”<sup>17</sup> an anaformative impulse that will ultimately resist homeland narrative and authenticating geographies that demand fixity, hegemony, and hierarchy. Richard Iton’s notion of diaspora as an anaformative impulse provides a useful lens for understanding how Garífuna subjectivities are engaging multiple spaces of black indigeneity beyond the boundedness of imperial geographies. Diaspora is a site of dislocation where multiple and dissident maps and geographies of blackness are living and working across, within, and against, nation-states.<sup>18</sup> I place the concepts of diaspora, mestizaje, and *ni de aquí, ni de allá* in conversation with each other to unearth the liminal spaces where the multiplicity of Garífuna subjectivities live/survive. To borrow from Deborah Paredez, I’m invested in a “space of belonging and difference. A place of not-yet-here-ness that evokes longing and possibility. A place of be-longing. *Ni de aquí, ni de allá*. A (no) place for us.”<sup>19</sup>

“YEAH I’M BLACK, BUT THERE’S MORE TO IT, MORE  
TO WHO I AM”: CONTESTING US BLACKNESS, INDIGENEITY,  
AND LATINIDAD IN NEW YORK CITY

In *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*, an autobiographical essay, “We Are Black Too: Experiences of a Honduran Garífuna,” illustrates the complexities of Aida Lambert’s mixed experiences among US blacks and Spanish-speaking immigrants. Her feeling of rejection by black Americans and acceptance by Puerto Ricans is a significant act of remembrance. This is not a universal narrative by Spanish-speaking black immigrants who continued to experience anti-black racism from their



own country mates in the United States. The most-well-known example is Arturo Alfonso Schomburg, a black Puerto Rican who migrated to Harlem in 1891, but, in contrast to Aida, felt rejected by other Spanish-speaking immigrants and embraced by African-Americans and other black Caribbeans. Aida's generation resisted US labeling as African-American and maintained a household mantra of "*somos negros pero no como aquellos*" [we are black but not like them], the "them" being African-Americans. This narrative does not remain true for second- and, especially, third-generation Garínagu as their interpellation as black Americans creates interstitial spaces between their blackness, Garifuneness, and Latinidad, never fully belonging into any of these categories because of the United States being a dislocation of birthplace, citizenship, and fragmented home. Aida Lambert, a Garífuna Honduran woman from Sambo Creek who migrated to East Harlem in 1968 was a founding committee member of *Desfile de la Hispanidad* [Hispanic Parade]. The Annual Hispanic Parade in October emerges mid-1980s when Nuyoricans and recent migrants from the island wanted to exhibit their culture, work ethic, and racial differences from their African-American neighbors. Aida's involvement developed out of her language barriers with other English-speaking black and her cultural and linguistic bond with Puerto Ricans and Dominicans. Lambert notes: "I have found that even though you are Black, the fact that you are Latina means to them [African-Americans] that you are of another race...even at home in Honduras, our Garífuna culture and our language, is losing ground and becoming less and less familiar. And here it is even more so. My own children, as much as I try to keep the culture alive, they have their own lives and often forget whatever they learn. Not to mention my grandchildren, who were born here. I warn them about my experiences with African-Americans, but they play with them, are influenced by them, and join them. They make friends with them, they identify with them, in the way they dress, and talk, and the music they listen to. And what can I do, I have to let them choose their own culture preferences."<sup>20</sup> I begin with Aida Lambert's *testimonio* because it explicitly articulates the thinking and experiences lived by the first generation of Garífuna who migrated in the late 1960s, a generation whose leadership continues to shape how second- and third-generation Garífuna New Yorkers negotiate their subjectivities. Aida's generation cemented the rhetoric of *Proud To Be Garífuna* among the youth and it directly influences the 2010 US Census "Garífunas Stand Up and Be Counted."

Brooklyn and the South Bronx are special and unique spaces in the African Diaspora particularly for black immigrants from Hispanophone

Latin America. The South Bronx was the first geography both my parents encountered when migrating from Honduras’ Northern Caribbean Coast in the early 1980s, though the entirety of my life has been in Brooklyn. Garífuna migration patterns to the US vary from generation to generation. Garífuna labor migration has been occurring since the 1920s to major US port cities such as New Orleans and New York, due to expertise in maritime services and economic ties of the United Fruit Company. After the collapse of the United Fruit Company in 1954, scholars have noted a mass exodus of Garínagu to the US. They migrated along with Jamaicans, Haitians, Guyanese, Dominicans, Puerto Ricans, Trinidadians, mostly black Caribbeans and South Americans to work in the industrial economy of New York City. Sarah England notes that “early transmigrants preferred Harlem, where they could find inexpensive ‘kitchens’ (one-room apartments) and were able to camouflage themselves to avoid the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS). But many also liked the Hispanic flavor of the Bronx and the larger apartments made cheaper by the real estate devaluation white flight caused, the deindustrialization of the Bronx manufacturing sector, and the growing number of public housing projects that were being constituted there.”<sup>21</sup> England’s observation points us to an important space that Garínagu have historically lived in but remains grossly understudied and underhistoricized. Harlem is a central point of migration for Garínagu in the 1940s due to their activism in the United Negro Improvement Association and identification with Garveyism in Honduras and throughout the rest of Caribbean Central America. Also, the term “camouflage” makes an interesting presence here in a discussion about the INS, suggesting that because Garífuna bodies are read as black, they can physically camouflage into African-Americanness. This assertion reinscribes the notion that in the United States the immigrant body is a non-black body; rather, the US immigrant body is one ascribed to Asians/Mexicans (a certain kind of brownness that is non-African descendant). Moreover, the narrative of Garínagu liking the “Hispanic flavor of the Bronx” is indeed problematic and glosses over histories of mestizo assimilation Garínagu have had to endure both in Central America and within other Hispanic New York City communities. While resisting internal mestizo colonialism in Honduras and the generic categorization of Hispanic in the US, Garínagu Hondurans have had to historically assimilate into Spanish-speaking mestizo culture. Mapping out where Garífuna live in New York City is critical to highlighting the community organizing practices that influenced how volunteers collected

data for the US Census bureau. Garífuna organizations targeted Upper Manhattan, Brooklyn, and the Bronx as focal points to conduct household surveys and census form filling-out sessions. Geography places a vital role in how census forms impact the federal and state resources available in those regions and it illustrates the residential patterns of Garífuna communities who predominantly reside in tenement buildings, housing projects, and working-class black Caribbean immigrant and US black neighborhoods of Brooklyn and the Bronx.<sup>22</sup>

“*GARÍFUNAS STAND UP AND BE COUNTED! ¡GARÍFUNAS  
HAGÁMONOS CONTAR! GARÍNAGU, ABAHÜDÜWA WAMÁ*”:  
2010 US CENSUS IN NEW YORK CITY

Aida’s attention to the loss of culture is a reoccurring concern by first-generation Garífuna immigrants, both in Honduras and in the United States. This concern ignites collective organizing through cultural centers in both New York City and Central America to restore and preserve Garífuna language, culture, dance, and cuisine vis-à-vis Garínagu youth. Since the concern for losing Garífuna culture emerges out of a first-generation, elder framework, second-generation and third-generation Garífuna youth are central to these cultural movements of preservation and revitalization. From the early 1990s to the present, Garínagu New Yorkers have organized to establish several community-based organizations to conserve Garífuna culture and language among the present and future generations of Garífuna New Yorkers. Garífuna Coalition United States, Inc., is the largest community-based, nonprofit organization in the heart of the South Bronx, organized by and for Garífuna communities. It provides social and economic justice resources and led the 2010 Census campaign of “Garífunas Stand Up and Be Counted.” This census campaign is the first organized effort to accurately account for how many Garínagu live in the five boroughs in order to facilitate federal/state recognition of Garífuna identity as well as to contest limiting and narrow US Census categorization. The magnitude of this project garnered attention from the Mayor’s Office to *The New York Times*, which published a multimedia series titled “Being Garífuna.”

By checking off “Other” and writing in Garífuna there is a disruption on the census form, a space being altered, ruptured; a silence is being broken from the margins. I think it is easy to claim that the Garífuna seek to transcend US blackness particularly in the moments such as when Dilma Suazo states “Yeah, I’m Black, but there is to more to it. More to who

I am,” or when interim executive director of Garífuna Coalition United States, Sulma Arzu-Brown states “it’s time for me to explain who I am to you, rather than you thinking you can identify me.”<sup>23</sup> These are the moments I find to be critically valuable as both Dilma and Sulma who participated in the 2010 US Census campaign with Garífuna Coalition United States articulate why they think it is important to assert their own identity and not that of their peers and the State. This is particularly true for Garínagu youth, the generation whose imaginary of Central America exist only through the stories passed on by their great-grandparents, grandparents, and parents. In the US, Garínagu Hondurans encounter a white/black binary that despite their racial blackness, places them outside of this binary because of their Latinidad. Blacks of Hispanophone Latin American and Caribbean descent, born and raised in the US, have in the past three decades collectively organized around the term “Afro-Latin@.” Miriam Jiménez-Román and Juan Flores in their pioneering text *The Afro-Latin@ Reader* define Afro-Latin@s to be “people of African descent in Mexico, Central and South America, and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean, and by extension those of African descent in the United States whose origins are in Latin America and the Caribbean.”<sup>24</sup> This definition of Afro-Latinidad is both pathbreaking and exclusionary, as a term speaking back to the exclusion of blacks and blackness within US Latinidad. As it is defined, it is limited to Spanish-speaking black communities. This particular discursive move negates the entangled histories of English- and French-speaking black communities in Spanish-speaking nation-states. I am referring specifically to Haitians, Panamanians/Costa Ricans of West Indian descent, Creole in Nicaragua and Belize, and other several examples. More importantly, the usefulness of Afro-Latin@ lies in its potential to unsettle the mutually exclusive nature of blackness and Latinidad; one can be black Latin@ without negating either subjectivity.<sup>25</sup> Garínagu have engaged with Afro-Latin@ identity noting its limitations on incorporating their afroindigenous culture within the larger Afro-Latin@ movement. Afro-Latin@ and Afro-Honduran are conceptually functioning in similar ways by seeking political inclusion and visibility into the very apparatus that has created the invisibility of blacks and blackness. Moreover, Garífuna push back on both terms demonstrates a resistance to compartmentalizing their blackness into an all-inclusive term and here we see a reiteration of the concern on the loss of Garífuna culture. Arturo Arias contends that Central Americans are often not visible within dominant constructions of Latinidad, in part due to their unique histories of migration to the United States and their interpellation as Mexican.<sup>26</sup> However, his analysis ignores

black Central Americans by assuming that all Central American “brownness” blends into a Mexican-centered Latinidad in the United States. In this context, the diverse identities of black Central Americans become eclipsed by assumptions that they do not exist within normative boundaries of Central American or US Latino identities.

John D. Márquez asserts that the “racialization of Mexicans as a natural threat to nation building during the mid-nineteenth century is important for thinking about the racialization of Latinidad at large because of the symbolic significance of the border demarcating Latin America from the United States.”<sup>27</sup> Márquez’s attention to the centrality of the imperial construct of the US–Mexico border as a symbolic demarcation as a racialized geography is a significant opening to discuss the corporeality of brownness in Latinidad. This construct has a significant impact in the current news coverage on what President Obama has called “urgent humanitarian situation” in reference to the surge of unaccompanied and undocumented minors from Central America.<sup>28</sup> There has been an unprecedented migration of nearly 63,000 Central American children from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, a migration phenomenon that has visually represented mestizo bodies and stories. Both US and Latin American news coverage on this mass exodus has been centered on mestizo children, although the majority of unaccompanied and undocumented Honduran minors are Garífuna.<sup>29</sup> Since this migration of undocumented and unaccompanied minors is not a new phenomenon, the US 2010 Census serves as an important documentation of the growing numbers of Garífuna youth who continue to migrate to the US. One of the objectives of the census campaign was also to pay close attention to these numbers as Central American demographics shift in the US. Among Garífuna census volunteers, a major concern was that Garífuna numbers would easily get lost if individuals only checked off or wrote in their Central American origins; hence, checking off “Other” and writing in Garífuna was a necessary move to ensure an assumed accurate count.

CATEGORIZING BLACK INDIGENEITY ON THE HONDURAN  
CENSUS: CAMPAÑA DE AUTOIDENTIFICACIÓN “YO TENGO  
IDENTIDAD Y CONFIO EN EL CENSO 2013”

In the beginning of 2013, the streets, supermarkets, homes, clinics, schools, and municipal buildings on the Northern Caribbean coast were bombarded with posters urging Garífuna to participate in the census

(Fig. 3.1). Even a short radio/television advertisement both in Spanish and Garífuna was routinely played depicting rural spaces, specifically near the beach, dancing punta, and playing drums: images that highlight Garínagu cultural and linguistic practices. “*Yo soy Garífuna. Por eso vivo mis tradiciones. Tengo amor por mi territorio. Vivo orgullosa de mis raíces. Por eso yo soy orgullosamente Garífuna. Tu cuentas. Por tus derechos y beneficios confía en el censo y participa. Tu cuentas*” [I am Garífuna. That is why I live my traditions. I have love for my territory. I live proud of my roots. That is why I’m proudly Garífuna. You count. For your rights and benefits trust in the census and participate. You count].<sup>30</sup>

The census campaign raised many questions: if the only racial category available on the 2013 Honduran census is “Afrohondureña/o” as a state-sanctioned term, then why is marketing solely targeting Garífuna communities? What is being foreclosed by the demarcation of “Afrohondureña/o” as the term to be used, collected, and disseminated by the state? Last, in order for Garínagu to be included in this census project, what violent erasures are endured by evoking “Afrohondureña/o” as an all-encompassing hyphenated blackness? In other words, what is the price of inclusion, recognition, and multicultural citizenship? Garífuna activists and political leaders filed a lawsuit on September 6, 2013 against the Honduran government in rejection of the government’s usage of the term “Afro-Honduran” and “Afro-descendant” in the 2013 census campaign.

They noted that these terms are “*un despojo de la identidad del pueblo garífuna de Honduras*”<sup>31</sup> [a dispossession to the identity of the Garífuna people of Honduras]. Critiquing the Honduran census project as a continuation of a government that maintains “*política de segregación racial, exclusión, y genocidio de nuestro pueblo garífuna*” [a policy of racial segregation, exclusion, and genocide of our Garífuna people]. This census as a recognition of multiculturalism disguises the reality that neoliberalism is a form of racial capitalism.

On November 12, 2010, the Honduran congress declared itself to be: “*un estado multiétnico y pluricultural en el que cohabitan nueve pueblos indígenas y Afro hondureños que son: Lenca, Misquitos, Tolupanes, Pech, Maya-Chorti, Tabwaka, Nahoas, Garífunas, y Afro descendientes Isleños de habla inglesa*”<sup>32</sup> [a multiethnic and multicultural state in which nine indigenous and Afro-Honduran communities cohabit]. Simultaneously, this congressional state recognition of multiculturalism also formed a government agency, *Secretaría de Estado en los Despachos de Pueblos Indígenas y Afrohondureños* (SEDINAFROH) [Secretary of State Ministry of indig-



**Fig. 3.1** “Tengo Identidad y Confío en el Censo” flyer from Honduras (2013 Tengo Identidad census flyer, Courtesy of SEDINAFROH, accessed on March 10, 2014 <http://www.sedinafroh.gob.hn/index.php/de-interes/eventos/mes-de-la-herencia-africana-2013>)



enous and Afro-Honduran Peoples]. This initiative was established in the throes of an ongoing resistance movement precipitated by the coup d'état of June 28, 2009, which was based on a political dispute over plans to rewrite the Constitution of Honduras to allow for presidential reelection, similar to Venezuela's Hugo Chavez's constitutional referendum. This political dispute led to the Honduran military forcibly removing President Manuel Zelaya at gunpoint from his residence and exiling him to Costa Rica. Mark Anderson has recently written about how political transformations in Honduras have affected state politics and policies on race, ethnicity, and multiculturalism. Honduras does not have a constitutional reform or comprehensive law concerning ethnic rights, which is augmented by political polarization, and the current military state regime has established an unstable political dialogue between the state and black/indigenous communities. Mark Anderson contends that “the Honduran state is attempting to incorporate a discourse of antiracism in the same manner that it has, in the past twenty years, incorporated a limited recognition of cultural rights, while maintaining neoliberal policies that deepen structural inequalities. State multicultural politics can strive to accommodate both antiracism and cultural rights into racial governance and the management of ethnic politics...Garífuna activism articulated in a language of collective cultural rights in conflict with elite visions of political economy represents the most confrontational, controversial, and challenging politics of ethnoracial justice and liberation.”<sup>33</sup> The Honduran 2013 census project “*Yo Tengo Identidad y Confío en el Censo*” [I have identity and I trust in the Census] has failed Garífuna communities because the mestizo nation-state constructs “*Afrohondureño*” as an all-encompassing term for all blacks in Honduras. This term narrates a violent erasure and negation of the distinct conjunctures of the African diaspora in Honduras, thus perpetuating omissions of the distinct cultures, contributions, and histories of enslaved and free Africans and their descendants, Garífuna, black West Indians, Jamaicans, Creole, and two centuries of British colonial rule on the Caribbean coast of Honduras. Projects of inclusion, recognition, and institutionalization of blacks and blackness into the mestizo nation-state are fundamentally limited and restrictive by the very apparatus that alienates them.

In the 1980s and 1990s, many Latin American nation-states implemented multicultural citizenship reforms that established certain collective rights for indigenous communities, with explicit limitations and exclusions to black communities. Juliet Hooker observes how discourses



of multicultural citizenship divide and compartmentalize the different kinds of political subjects indigenous and African-descent peoples are maintaining a racial hierarchy of indigenous inclusion and black exclusion in relationship to the imagined “true nationals.” She notes that “Afro-descendants have been positioned as “racial” subjects without an ethnic identity distinct from the larger *mestizo* culture, while indigenous people have been seen as “ethnic groups” with separate cultures and ways of life.”<sup>34</sup> The shift from *mestizaje* to multiculturalism remains rooted in anti-blackness, particularly since these multicultural citizenship reforms privilege certain kinds of subjects and modes of collective rights, alienating black communities as non-indigenous to the land. In most Latin American countries, peoples of African descent are not included as a census category, rendering them largely invisible and alienated from the polity.<sup>35</sup> The emergence of an official discourse of multicultural citizenship and inclusion has done little to transform hegemonic representations of Garínagu as nonnationals who exist outside of and alien to the *mestizo* nation-state. Charles Hale’s observes that neoliberal multiculturalism in Guatemala as a regime of governance from *mestizo* elites discourages the assertion of racial subjectivities that threaten or destabilize the very foundation of *mestizo* nationalism.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, black and indigenous communities are able to participate in neoliberal multiculturalism provided they frame their demands for national belonging using the terms of this discourse, for example, using the term “Afrohondureña/o” is an absorption into the project, rather than demanding a deconstruction of *mestizo* identity politics. Multiculturalism creates difficult choices for black and indigenous communities to participate in state projects at the risk of compromising demands, and critiquing state initiatives at the risk of marginalization and loss of political influence and recognition.

The emergence of Afro-Honduran as a racial category on the 2013 Honduran census is certainly a historical moment by a monolithic *mestizo* nation-state recognizing its African-descendant communities. Latin America has made the census a key site of struggle for access to resources and recognition, as also the United States. Implementing multicultural policies has required Latin American states to clearly define ethnoracial categories and collect data on their sizes and characteristics in unprecedented ways, which is perceived to be a historic moment of democratic liberal progression.<sup>37</sup> Latin American states have rarely institutionalized racial categories, noted as in opposition to the rigid racial categories of the United States. These census projects organized by black and indigenous

communities intend to unsettle these mestizo narratives and as well as place pressure on nation-states for recognition and inclusion.

In Honduras, making a stake in Garífuna categorization on the census is a stake to inserting ancestral land rights. On the other hand, claims to land rights are complicated in New York City, for there is no land for Garínagu to claim. However, similar to the ways that pushing for recognition of Garífuna in Honduras troubles the dominant image of a mestizo country, advocating for Garífuna categorization on the US Census unsettles hegemonic distinctions between blackness, indigeneity, and *Latinidad*. Cultural anthropologist Ana Aparicio’s ethnographic study of second-generation Dominicans in Washington Heights notes that “scholars writing about transnationalism argue that contemporary immigrants are identifying and positioning themselves between ‘home’ and ‘host’ countries; that is, although their daily existence occurs in their ‘host’ country, their social, political, and economic existence continues to be in their ‘home’ country.”<sup>38</sup> Transnational Garífuna migration to borrow from Iton places multiple spaces into play with each other, in ways that appear to transcend the nation-state, but contradictorily reinscribes and invokes the nation-state to reimagine new lives and subjectivities in the United States.

### ALWAYS ALREADY IN MOVEMENT: GARÍFUNA SUBJECTIVITIES

Garífuna subjectivity is rooted in dispossession and resistance to colonialism and nation-states. Garífuna communities are always already in movement with multiple homes of dislocation, similarly to other blacks in the Americas. Throughout this paper, I have threaded a narrative of dislocations and the political and cultural struggles for Garífuna to carve out spaces of belonging. Diaspora as an analytical concept has been useful in mapping out entangled histories of blacks and blackness in Honduras and New York City, but I am conscious of its limitations and reinscription into the nation-state, as a locus of power and definition. I find blackness to be a much more compelling and useful tool in excavating histories and knowledges of US born Garífuna youth, as they live, define, and perform their blackness/indigeneity/*Latinidad* in multiple and entangled ways. Blackness transcends colonial and imperial boundaries ascribed and codified to our taxonomies. Blackness unites our distinct diasporas but it does not do so with the assumption that the communities are at all the

same. Rather, it does so with the understanding that blackness is a political category that positions African-descended peoples in the Americas, in Europe, and Asia as the ultimate Other to white humanity.

## NOTES

1. Matthew Orr and Vijai Singh, "Being Garífuna," *The New York Times* (January 13, 2012) accessed March 10, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/video/us/100000001285066/being-Garífuna.html>
2. Arlene Dávila, *Latino Spin: Public Image and the Whitewashing of Race* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 9.
3. Garífuna refers to the language as well as to an individual. It could also be used as an adjective as in "Garífuna people." Garínagu is the plural form of Garífuna.
4. Nancie L. Gonzalez, *Sojourners of the Caribbean: Ethnogenesis and Ethnohistory of the Garífuna* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 39.
5. Richard Iton. *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics & Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 200.
6. Sarah England, *Afro-Central Americans in New York City: Garífuna Tales of Transnational Movements through Racialized Space* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 8.
7. Juliet Hooker, "Afro-descendant Struggles for Collective Rights in Latin America: Between Race and Culture," *SOULS: A Critical Journal of Black Politics, Culture, and Society*, vol. 10, no. 2 (2008), 281. Today, reinserting questions about race and ethnicity in Latin American national censuses, many of which were removed in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries, is in fact a major demand by Black and Indigenous communities.
8. Juliet Hooker, "Indigenous Inclusion/Black Exclusion: Race, Ethnicity, and Multicultural Citizenship in Latin America," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, vol. 37 (May 2005), 301.
9. Within Central American mestizaje, a common trope ascribed to Blackness is foreignness, such as in the case of the Garínagu who speak a non-Hispanophone language and whose homeland is always invoked to be St. Vincent despite over 200 years of living in Central America, marking them as alien. As also Black communities colonized by the British and West Indian diasporic migrations due to their cultural and linguistic difference to the mestizo nation-states they reside in (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, and Panama) are marked as alien to Central America's mestizaje.

10. Courtney Desiree Morris, “To Defend This Sunrise: Race, Place, and Creole Women’s Political Subjectivity on the Caribbean Coast of Nicaragua,” PhD dissertation, The University of Texas at Austin (August 2012), 57.
11. Tanya Golash-Boza and Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, “Introduction: Rethinking race, racism, identity and ideology in Latin America,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 10 (October 2013), 1485.
12. The definition of race that I use in this paper borrows from the work of Barnor Hesse who argues that race is irreducible to the body, and that it is merely one among several taxonomies such as language, culture, religion, geography, and climate, which came together in the colonial creations “Europeanness” and “non-Europeanness.” Hesse notes how “race,” even in late-nineteenth-century distinctions was deployed in excess of the corporeal, having multiple references of association (e.g. territory, climate, history, culture, religion), suggesting that the body was less the ubiquitous metaphor of “race than its privileged metonym.” Barnor Hesse, “Racialized modernity: An analytics of white mythologies,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 30, no. 4 (June 2007), 653.
13. Tianna Paschel, “The Right to Difference: Explaining Colombia’s Shift from Color Blindness to the Law of Black Communities,” *The American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 116, no. 3 (November 2010), 732.
14. Darío A. Euraque, “The Threat of Blackness to the Mestizo Nation: Race and Ethnicity in the Honduran Banana Economy, 1920s and 1930s,” in Steve Striffler and Mark Moberg’s, eds. *Banana Wars: Power, Production, and History in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), 243.
15. Jafari S. Allen, *¡Venceremos? The Erotics of Black Self-Making in Cuba* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 48.
16. Marc Perry, “Garífuna Youth in New York City: Race, Ethnicity, and the Performance of Diasporic Identities.” Master’s Thesis (University of Texas at Austin, 1999), 15.
17. Richard Iton. *In Search of the Black Fantastic: Politics & Popular Culture in the Post-Civil Rights Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 200.
18. Ibid., p. 201.
19. Deborah Paredez. ““Queer for Uncle Sam”: Anita’s Latina diva citizenship in *West Side Story*” *Latino Studies*, vol. 12, no. 3 (2014), 349.
20. Aida Lambert, “We Are Black Too: Experiences of a Honduras Garífuna,” in Miriam Jimenez-Román and Juan Flores, eds. *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 433.
21. Sarah England, *Afro Central Americans in New York City: Garífuna Tales of Transnational Movements in Racialized Space* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 51.

22. Sarah England, *Afro-Central Americans in New York City: Garífuna Tales of Transnational Movements through Racialized Space* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 188.
23. Roxanne L. Scott, "Just Don't Call Them Afro-Latino," *Voices of NY* (June 26, 2014). Accessed on December 15, 2014 <http://www.voicesofny.org/2014/06/just-dont-call-them-afro-latino/>
24. Miriam Jiménez-Román and Juan Flores, editors, *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), p. 1.
25. Vielka Cecilia Hoy, "Negotiating among Invisibilities: Tales of Afro-Latinidades in the United States," in *The Afro-Latin@ Reader: History and Culture in the United States*, Miriam Jiménez Roman and Juan Flores, eds. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 430.
26. Arturo Arias, "Central American-Americans: Invisibility, Power, and Representation in the US Latino World," *Latino Studies*, vol. 1, no. 1 (2003), 171.
27. John D. Márquez, *Black-Brown Solidarity: Racial Politics in the New Gulf South* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2013), 59.
28. Haeyoun Park, "Children at the Border," *The New York Times*, August 7, 2014. Accessed on August 15, 2014, <http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/07/15/us/questions-about-the-border-kids.html?module=Search&mbReward=relbias%3Ar%2C%7B%22%22%3A%22R%3A14%22%7D>.
29. Jasmine Garsd, "Garífuna: The Young Black Latino Exodus You've Never heard About," *Fusion*, June 5, 2014. Accessed on August 15, 2014. <http://fusion.net/justice/story/garifuna-young-black-latino-exodus-youve-heard-743461>.
30. SEDINAFROH. "Yo soy Garífuna," Advertisement clip for the National Honduran Census 2013 campaign for Self-Identification. Posted on (August 19, 2013) accessed on April 15, 2014 <http://youtu.be/Nsd-OVfGxBs>.
31. Santos Israel Centeno. "Garífunas rechazan el término 'afro,'" *La Prensa* (September 16, 2013) accessed on March 10, 2014 <http://www.laprensa.hn/edicionimpresa/384341-96/gar%C3%ADfunas-rechazan-el-t%C3%A9rmino-afro>.
32. Rigoberto Chang Castillo. "Decreto Creacion SEDINAFROH," in *La Gaceta: Diario Oficial de la Republica de Honduras*, no. 32, 364 (November 12, 2010), 1.
33. Mark Anderson, "Garífuna Activism and the Corporatist Honduran State since the 2009 Coup," in Jean Muteba Rahier's, ed., *Black Social Movements in Latin America: From Monocultural Mestizaje to Multiculturalism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillian, 2012), 55.
34. Juliet Hooker, *Race and the Politics of Solidarity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 81.

35. Helen I. Safa, “Challenging Mestizaje: A Gender Perspective on Indigenous and Afrodescendant Movements in Latin America,” *Critique of Anthropology*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2005), 312.
36. Charles Hale. “Neoliberal Multiculturalism: The Remaking of Cultural Rights and Racial Dominance in Central America,” *Political and Legal Anthropology Review*, vol. 28, no. 1 (2005), 18.
37. Tianna Paschel, “The Beautiful Faces of my Black People: Race, Ethnicity, and the Politics of Colombia’s 2005 Census,” *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 36, no. 10, Special Issue: Rethinking Race, Racism, Identity, and Ideology in Latin America (May 2013), 1544.
38. Ana Aparicio, *Dominican-Americans and the Politics of Empowerment* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 7.

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