RECONSTRUCTING GARIFUNA ORAL HISTORY – TECHNIQUES AND METHODS IN THE STORY OF A CARIBBEAN PEOPLE

Introduction[1]

In the Caribbean[2] reconstructing history has been dominated by historians and anthropologists, many of whom have been associated with the University of the West Indies. Barry Higman, himself one of the more prolific historians in the region, has done a critical overview of the study of history within the Caribbean (1985: 1-29) indicating its strong points and areas that need much attention. Carnegie (1992: 5-26) has done a similar review of anthropology. To complement his study I highlight the contributions of Sidney Mintz (1960), Richard Price (1983), and Neil Whitehead (1997) who have done significant historical ethnographic work in the region and have become world renown in the field.

While both disciplines have overlapped on specific issues, there has been little focus on the distinct techniques and methods of history and anthropology and how to combine them to enrich the end product – the story of the informants themselves. One way to demonstrate this is to refer to oral history. Its potential to yield much information from a people's perspective is still in its infancy within the region. Yet within the larger field of social history it has a strong track record in other areas, notably Africa (Erim and Uya 1985 and Vansina 1985). It is the function of the student of history, therefore, to bring the fruit of work done in other areas and promote the prescriptive tool of oral history for more application in the region. This is one of the aims of this paper.

Similarly, orality as a subject matter of its own, has received considerable attention from anthropology. In this study we see how oral history could benefit from the scrutiny of sociolinguistic analysis.

By including the Garifuna as the informants in this study I am focusing on a people who have been studied considerably by historians and anthropologists alike. Craton (1982), Hulme and Whitehead (1992), and Franklyn (1992) have been among several historians. But the primary viewpoint has been the traumatic efforts of the Caribs[3] and subsequently the Garifuna at survival against excessive European imposition in the Eastern Caribbean. With respect to anthropolgists, the principal student of language history and sociolinguistics in the region, Douglas Taylor, gave most of his years to the study of the Caribs in Dominica. Gullick (1985) has also used linguistics to arrive at the study of myths among Caribs in St. Vincent. Nancie Gonzalez, on the other hand, has given her ample and keen attention to the Garifuna of Central America.

With all of this scholarly attention within both disciplines on the Garifuna why is there need for another study? The answer is that there has been no effort to use oral history to understand social and cultural linkages that the Garifuna transferred from St. Vincent to Honduras, and brought further north to the southern coast of Belize. Gonzalez made little use of oral traditions, which she considered unreliable (1988: 42, 73). Furthermore in her extensive field visits throughout Central America she did not meet anybody whose memory included persons born in St. Vincent and having done the crossing (1988: 61). Finally, the extensive oral history work that Gullick did was among the Caribs and African-descent persons in St. Vincent.

In this paper the populist and democratic nature of oral history transcends the confines of scholarly interest. I am sharing with readers a story that had remained within a family for more than two hundred years and which I was privileged to hear. Besides, I am doing so in the mode of a didactic case study, especially helpful to the beginner to see and appreciate the challenges of engaging in oral history research.

The Garifuna as Caribbean People

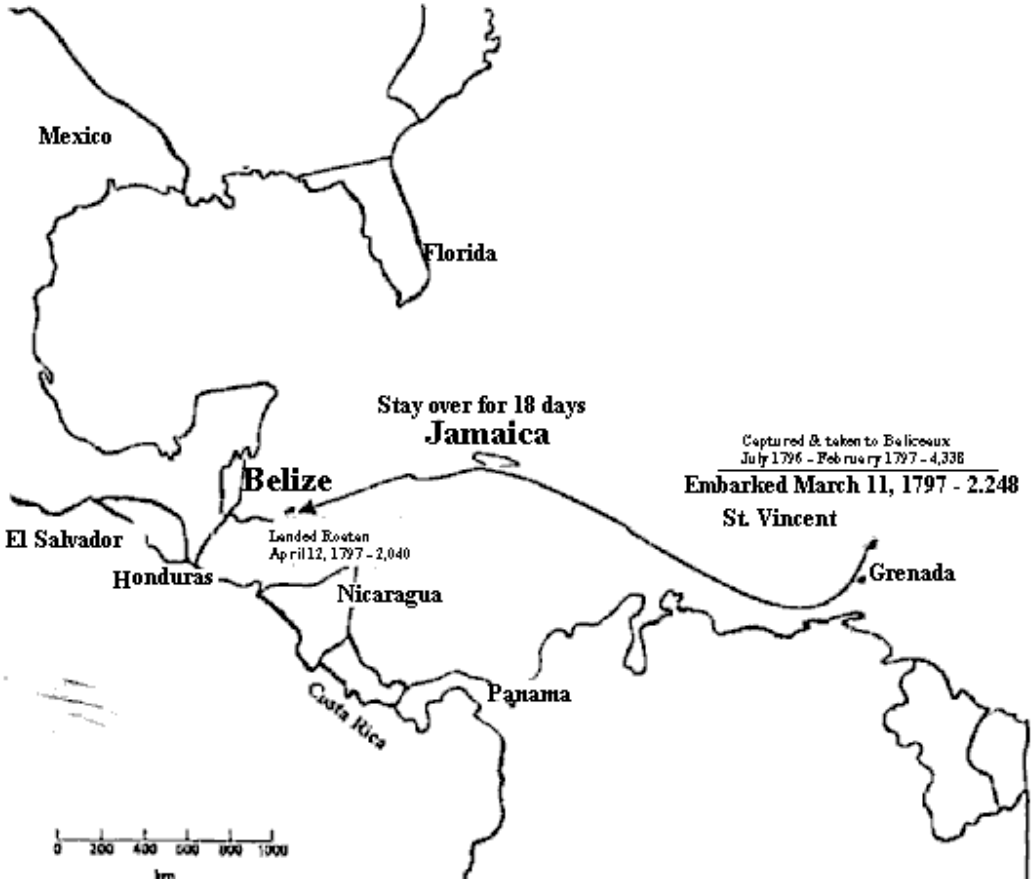
Notwithstanding the volumes of material that have derived about the Caribs and later the Garifuna, the image that persists among laypersons throughout the Caribbean is that of the fierce, warlike tribe that fought European expansion into the Lesser Antilles, starting in St. Kitts in 1622 and ending in St. Vincent in 1796, a period lasting more than 350 years (Ashdown 1972:72). Resistance exerted a tremendous toll and nowhere was this as painful as toward the bitter end. It is generally not realized that the events leading to the last Carib Wars, the final routing of the fighting men; the burning of homes, gardens, and boats; the forced march of men, women, and children to points of departure in St. Vincent, and the eventual transportation to an unknown destination where their future was at best uncertain and at worst in risky peril – all of these were British efforts at systematic genocide so they could take possession of Carib lands. As sequel the few remaining in St. Vincent were banned from engaging in any political activity.

After the wars the vengeance of the British persisted in St. Vincent. Gonzalez writes, “Thus, when they (i.e. Caribs) refused to surrender, they were hunted down without mercy. Over 1000 of their houses and 200 of their canoes were burned, their

crops destroyed, and their stores of food were confiscated." (1988:21). The extent of the loss of life, limb, and property will never be known but it remains deeply scarred in the collective memory of their descendants, as we shall see in the extract from oral history further below. The figures that I quote may not be accurate; however, they include what Gonzalez has been able to research so far. By October 26, 1796 5080 Caribs had surrendered according to Shepherd (Gonzalez 1988:35). Between July 1796 and February, 1797 4, 338 were captured and taken to Baliceaux, a holding station prior to the departure. On March 17, 1797 2,248 embarked and on April 12, 1797 2026 arrived in Roatan. The numbers of those finally making landfall represented about 25% of the original population in the home island of St. Vincent (Gonzalez 1988: 34). Figure 1 shows the route of exile from St. Vincent to Roatan via Grenada and Jamaica.

Figure 1

Map Showing Garifuna Deportation from St. Vincent to Roatan



No doubt the British did not foresee the bedraggled and demoralized arrivals weakly struggling to clamber out of the ships at the final destination of Roatan near the

coast of Honduras being able to survive for any length of time (Gonzalez 1988: 49). Indeed, their hopes were that the men would continue their warlike spirit and take up arms in defense of Roatan against the Spaniards and, of course, face their final ignominious defeat and extinction. Instead the Garifuna crossed over in large numbers to the Honduras mainland and from there started a dispersal that eventually resulted in establishing over seventy communities along the coast from Nicaragua to Honduras, Guatemala, and Belize (Davidson 1984:13-36). Simultaneously they gradually increased in numbers totaling by the late 1990's more than 200,000. Their successful mark in self-restitution is today seen in maintaining large aspects of their culture which no longer exists in St. Vincent.

The annihilation of the Caribs is analogous to what happened to several other aboriginal peoples in the path of European expansion in the Caribbean and the adjacent mainland (Palacio 1995: 25-40). The main difference is that the procedure for them has been documented, a privilege unavailable for other peoples and an unusual windfall for historians. There is another similarity that the Garifuna share with peoples within the region. Bioculturally their formation resulted from the intermixture of distinct sources – some indigenous to the region while others came from Europe, Asia, and Africa. The blending consolidated within the umbrage of slave plantations and the violent resistance to European domination.

The unique dimension to Caribbean creolization that the Garifuna embody is the preponderance of Amerindian cultural traits in a region where the myth of aboriginal extinction still persists; and the admixture with African within the same region where in

some parts, such as Jamaica, there is denial of such mixture (see Campbell 1988: 9). Furthermore, what is most difficult especially for the apologists of the new indigenous peoples movement in the Eastern Caribbean is the existence of a black group who speak a language of Amerindians and maintain their other traits. For some apologists there is the firm belief that the descendants of Amerindians should have their olive brown skin colour. Furthermore, there is the extirpation from the Eastern to the Western Caribbean, where they mixed extensively with the Miskito Indians, among other inhabitants of the coast of Central America. In short, Garifuna configuration can contribute much to our understanding of creolization in a region where it remains a primary concept of social structure and organization (Nettleford 1978).

To a large extent limitations in the content and methods of historical research have caused the limitations in the understanding of the Garifuna, among other peoples within the region. It leads to another similarity that they share with other Caribbean peoples. It is the extreme reverence given to the written word as the source of their history. It comes from historians who get their information from the large volume of archives available mainly in capitals of the metropole. It also comes from ethnographers who get their material verbally from informants but whose loyalty is not to enhancing the self-education of informants, much less reinforce their orality. To reverse the trend toward the fixation on written sources, Higman advocated in his 1985 article a great need to direct attention to oral historiography in the region. But we are still at the tip of the proverbial iceberg. We have not given it its due appreciation with its distinctive techniques and methods. Rather we want to justify why it should be done (Brodber 1983: 2-11). In this regard regional scholars need to learn much from the effort of their

colleagues in other post-colonial societies in Africa (Erim and Uya 1988) and Mexico (Leon-Paddilla 1992), who have long felt comfortable with oral historiography.

At this point it is necessary to divert slightly to give a brief overview of the current state of oral history study in the English speaking Caribbean. It is instructive that collecting folktales to strengthen African survivals was one of the first primary attractions of the region to anthropologists, see Bascom (1992), Beckwith (1929), Herskovitz (1973), and Hurston (1990). Early West Indian anthropologists, including Edith Clarke and M.G. Smith, gave folklore much attention. Armed with their newly learned gospel of cultural relativity, they were anxious to project the culture of the folk. But they met stiff resistance from the ethnocentric rearguard in the society who saw such efforts as reviving paganism and the evils of a past that should be forgotten. For a lively debate on this see M.G. Smith (1971:128-138).

Since the 1960's there have been efforts to present oral information as the centrepiece of its own investigation within the combined fields of linguistics and history. As a pioneer Kamau Brathwaite (1971 and 1978: 44-63) has used primary and secondary sources that weave together studies touching on spirituality, music, self-esteem, linguistics, poetry, and identifying specific root cultures in Africa. Concurrent inspiration came from a healthy and productive reciprocity among creative writers and others who were also searching for their own validation as a blend of various cultures. Examples include literary scholars George Lamming (1980) and Derek Walcott (1965); historian Walter Rodney (1972); social scientists Chevannes (1995), Carnegie (1987: 83-99), and

Besson (1987: 100-132); and humanists Nettleford (1978) and Warner-Lewis (1991). Libraries of the spoken word were also started in Trinidad and Tobago and Jamaica.

As cathartic as this explosion of interest has been, it is regrettable that it has harked back primarily to the Old World, and especially to Africa. There is an urgent need to focus on sources that are not only from the Old World but which grew from the blending taking place within the Caribbean. In other words, there is now a need to venerate not only our translatlantic pedigree but also the unique endogenous biocultural process that has evolved after more than 500 years of tense dialectical relations among the groups of arrivants and their aboriginal hosts. Richard Price (1983), who includes both African and Amerindian sources of Surinamese Maroons, has pointed towards this direction.

It is a direction that, probably more than other Caribbean peoples, the Garifuna have internalized within their own story. An abiding consciousness of being the results of the fusion of Amerindian and African has been integral to Garifuna self-worldview. Over time it has taken various contortions. There are indications that the escaped maroons willingly adopted as survival strategy Amerindian traits through their Carib spouses and offsprings to separate themselves from the slave population at St. Vincent (Gonzalez 1988: 149). Simultaneously there was great tension emanating from surviving Amerindians as the incomers were overtaking their women and land. Over time this tension has played itself into various myths at distinct times in the history of the island (Gullick 1985). On arrival at Central America the surviving Garifuna extended the scope of their already prodigious intermixture with other groups, including the Miskito,

Creoles, and Maya. Gradually the fact of being mixed within an ever increasing framework has remained integral to the group consciousness. The previous tension of Amerindian-black identity, which was tension ridden in St. Vincent is by itself a non-issue to the current population.

A Glimpse of Garifuna Oral History

Folktales are an important part of the link between grandparents and grandchildren. It was especially so in Garifuna communities before the arrival of electricity and the accompanying accessories of the radio and television. I remember the older folk in my household telling stories of events in faraway Guatemala and Honduras. The following story was told me by Mrs. Felicita Francisco in Dangriga, Belize in the early part of 1997. She had heard it from her grandmother, who had heard it from her own grandmother some 150 years ago. The first story teller was Gulisi, who claimed to have been born in St. Vincent to Chief Joseph Chatoyer and came to Honduras as one of the exiles. I will recount excerpts of the story in the first person as if Gulisi herself is speaking. To do this I have taken some editorial liberties but remain faithful to the gist of the original narrative.

"The first place in this country where we arrived was a short distance away on the bay north of Dangriga, which is now called Scotchman. Having been on the rough seas for some days crossing from Puerto Cortez, Honduras in our small sailing dory, my twelve sons and I were very tired. All we wanted was some food and shelter. However, on arriving at the beach we witnessed a frightening incident. Some pirates were burying their loot and in the ensuing scuffle they killed one of their own men and buried him

beside the loot. I got very scared and prayed that they would not do anything to us. I immediately ordered the boys to set sail and proceed further south. One stopped a short distance by the river Dangriga, that gave potable water, but the rest of us continued along the coast until we reached Commerce Bight.

"I decided that we should settle permanently at Commerce Bight. After some years the boys separated, some going further south where they settled communities at Riversdale, San Vicente (called after our former home island in the Caribbean), Punta Negra, Punta Icacos, and others. Together with a few of the boys, who subsequently got married and started their families, I remained at Commerce Bight taking care of my grandchildren and great grandchildren.

"One of these grandchildren was Amahuni. She was a rather unfortunate child and I became very much attached to her. Her mother, my daughter-in-law from my son Marugufino, had died when she was a baby and I became the only mother she knew. However, there was a white man, named Galin Guzman, the owner of all the land around Commerce Bight, who took a liking to little Amahuni. He offered to adopt her. At first I agreed but afterwards regretted my decision. I cried living tears and remained by his gate for days demanding that he gave her back to me until he relented. Working with Galin were black Creole people, who were not like us with our own language and culture but were similar to the black slaves that I had known in St. Vincent.

"I used to tell Amahuni and all the grandchildren stories about our life in St. Vincent and how we arrived in Central America. Having experienced the massacre of our people in St. Vincent and the miraculous way how we survived the surrender, the

diseases, the inhuman conditions, and the long period in the belly of men o' war on the way to Roatan, I wanted the little ones to know the very strong mettle of their forefathers and to be proud of them. I also wanted them to know that I was among the first Garifuna to bring my family and settle in this country.

"Now let me take you back to Honduras and my experiences there leading to my escape across the gulf to this country. I arrived at Roatan at the age of 24. There I met a man whose surname was Lambey and got married to him. Together we raised our thirteen sons. Life was not easy for our people in Honduras. The Spaniards had a great distrust of us, although we tried to be nice to them. For some reason they suspected us to be spies. Under this spurious charge, they arrested me and were going to shoot me when a senior officer came by and intervened. It turned out that he was one that my sons and I had cared for after his fellow soldiers had left him for dead at the beach near our house. On being set free, I immediately rounded up my boys to leave that country forthwith and escaped to Belize. The crossing was so dangerous in our sailing dory with the heavy ocean swells that one of my sons was washed away and we could not rescue him.

"Running away from danger would seem to be my destiny in life. It first started in St. Vincent where we had fought back the British who wanted to take away our land. It was especially dangerous for my family because my father Joseph Chatoyer was the leader of our people in war. In the battle he was killed along with my brother and several other relatives. It was the British who eventually loaded the survivors into men o' war and set sail this way. They stopped on an island that was bare and threatened to dump us there. However, our men responded that they would destroy the ships and nobody would

escape from the dreadful place. The British agreed to continue the journey but they were still cruel to us during the crossing.

"The war was a devastation on our way of life. Before then we had been fairly self-sufficient going fishing and trading and growing our own food. We planted cotton from which we made thread. We used the *guruguru* tree bark which we scraped to make cloth to cover our loins. We sold our produce for cash. One of the coins, which we called *chungua*, got lost in my belongings and ended up with me here in Belize.

"We also had our own way of relating with our own people. They were in all six tribes which lived in different parts of the island. There were the *Awawaruguna*, *Oreyuna, Masiragana, Sawaina, Habaruguna,* and *Arawaga.* Each tribe had its own unique characteristics and there were distinct rules of marriage among them. But all of these practices we lost, as we lost even our land, homes, and dories. In the end we arrived at Roatan a homeless and landless people."

Techniques and Methods in Oral History

The question in what format to present the results of oral history research – whether to do so in the first person as we have done in the above case – gets us into the larger issues of techniques and methods. Using Higman's definition (1985: 1-29), techniques refer to the actual data gathering while methods refer to tasks of interpretation and explanation. The simplest way of refining the differentiation is that the former functions at the level of logistics and strategic decision making about conducting the fieldwork while the latter is at the level of post-field cleaning, collating, and inserting the

data into frameworks of analysis. Obviously a thorough grounding in both areas is a prerequisite for proficiency in the craft of oral history.

In discussing techniques I cover the following topics – my determination to use oral sources, carrying out the fieldwork, and overcoming the dilemma of data recording.

Thanks to the archival research done mainly by Gonzalez (1988), Kerns (1984: 95-114), and Camille (1996: 45-64) and also by Gullick (1985), Kirby and Martin (1972), and Taylor (951), we know a great deal about the details of the last few decades the Garifuna spent in St. Vincent, the Caribbean crossing, and the early years in Central America. The Belize Archives reveal information about their numbers in Belize, their use as manual labour in the logging camps, and the institutionalized colonial discrimination against them. But there is still relatively little known about their early years in the country, stretching for a greater part of the nineteenth century. The silence extends to their kinship and family structures, the role of women and children, the places where they arrived, the settlements they formed, their livelihood, and their relations with other people.

My assumption was that filling this gap could only come from oral information that would have descended from one generation to another as individuals attempted to teach their offsprings about themselves. And from several family stories we could piece together a pattern extending among the larger Garifuna community. Before putting the pieces together, however, I had to find at least one informant who would be willing and able to do an interview. In short I had to plan to do oral history fieldwork.

Within the region of southern Belize, where most Garifuna are found, I had acquired a heightened level of familiarity with the people after my more than twenty years of ethnographic research among them. Not only had I built the interplay of reciprocity so necessary to maintain researcher/informant rapport, I also knew the informal protocol of doing field investigation – the times, how to introduce the topic, the types of questions to ask, how to ascertain the flow of discussion, and so on. Furthermore, I was able to conduct discussions in any of the three vernaculars within the region – Creole, Garifun**a**, and Spanish. With such a background I was able to find my main informant for my new project on oral history within half an hour of arriving in her community. Besides, she agreed to be interviewed on tape almost immediately.

The difficulty came from the nature of the subject matter, which necessitated a switch from an ethnographic approach to one with focus on oral history. Firstly, I was highly impressed with the wealth of detail that informants knew and the sequential framework in which they were able to place it. The challenge lay in systematically collecting material, which demanded a higher level of interaction with the same informants than normally needed for ethnographic information. It was a time consuming procedure requiring a first, second, and even more interviews with the same person to correct, elaborate, and add details. Besides, the average time for each detail interview was an hour and half. There was an extensive referral system available that was virtually inexhaustible within the limited time available. The result was to arrive within several loops of information that made each interview always multidimensional and not always predictable. Keeping a mental note of all of these procedures has come from hindsight and after reading Adenaike and Vansina's volume on the experience of historians with

fieldwork (1996). Needless to say, my fieldwork continues and this paper is about a small part of what has been done so far.

The researcher of oral history is at the mercy of his informant, who can unload what he or she wants to say. Indeed, the unwritten norm of protocol is that informant feel unrestrained enough to delve into areas about which he knows with minimal interference from the interviewer. Further below I will subdivide the content of my main informant's interview into three analytic units. It is worth emphasizing here that genealogy became the outline on which hung much of the information that I received. It was partly in response to my questions and partly the obsession of the Garifuna with genealogical details as a rule for interpersonal behaviour past and present. For a similarly high interest on genealogy among the Tory Islanders see Cohen (1982: 50-71).

Genealogy provided names in real and relative chronologies. It highlighted relations between spouses and among them and their offsprings and other relatives. From this web the extrapolations were almost endless. For example, it led to detail information about partners, who were invariably more than one for both men and women, their place of birth, and movements from place to place. It was also an easy extension to livelihood, the cash and non-cash forms of exchange, the size of settlements, and their subdivision, and so on. From a series of bonds could come as much social information as one is prepared to pursue.

Keeping track of so many names, many of which were repeated in lines of descent, meant carefully recording everything that was said. I used a hand held portable tape recorder to record Mrs. Francisco. Surprisingly it was sufficiently sensitive to

overcome at most times the noise of the television set that always remained on. The language we used was Garifuna, although Mrs. Francisco could hold her own in English. I deliberately did so to be able to capture the full impact of the narrative, its nuances, idioms, and voice intonation. Besides, there are Garifuna expressions that cannot be easily said in English.

The transition of information into data for analysis coincides with the transition from the phase of fieldwork into post-field cleaning, collating and editing. Transcribing the raw field material is the bridge within this two-way process of transition. I listened to the tapes and did the translation into English as I typed. I knew that this way the original material lost some of its meaning. But this is the sacrifice that one has to make in using a language in the field that is not fully literate, a situation that no doubt occurs frequently in working with minority peoples. My own consolation is that the tapes have been lodged in the Belize Archives, where they will be available for future use by scholars, some of whom may be able to transcribe the text in its original language.

I placed the translation in binders. The index I used to extract information as in Table 1 was to divide the text on each page into three horizontal segments. The arabic number refers to the number of the page; it is followed by a dot and the number referring to the segment on each page.

Having experienced the exhilaration of data collection in the field, the researcher needs to reinforce himself to confront the less glamorous task of editing the transcribed data to ascertain that it accurately represents what the informant had said. I also sent a copy to my informant partly for her own editing as well as to deepen the reciprocity

between us. It was then that I was fully ready for what Higman (1985: 1-29) refers to as the methods of research – the tasks leading to interpreting the information and ultimately presenting it as a finished draft for publication. In reviewing this process I start with an initial subdivision of the text into levels of abstraction. I proceed with my informant's reason for sharing with me the story of Gulisi and continue with analytic subdivisions of the text. While the second and third topics fall within the purview of historical research methods, my fourth topic, the sociolinguistic significance of Garifuna words, falls under the framework of anthropology.

Probably the first time that the researcher starts to get a realistic scope of his data is putting it into a matrix as done in Table 1. The material in the Table covers only the text referring to Gulisi's experience in St. Vincent. There is much more in the transcription referring to her crossing and life in Honduras and Belize. These are "verbal messages" (Vansina 1985: 27-31) extracted from a large body of text. In the adjoining column there is the next level of abstraction called "themes". From "themes" one can proceed to "norms" of social behaviour, which is not included as a separate column. Rather the terms underlined in themes provide the connection to norms.[4]

Table 1

LEVELS OF ABSTRACTION FOR THE TEXT

Source	**Verbal Message**	**Theme**
Tape 1		
Pg. 1.1	Name of the captain of the fleet	<u>Traveling</u> the ocean under British control
1.2	Enroute more ships with clearer	Awareness of <u>shades of skin colour</u> as

	skin persons sink	marker
1.2	British killing some during crossing	Cruelty of the British and Garifuna resistance
	Chatoyer and Beni sinking first ship	**Bravery of the two leaders**
	There were 24 ships	Traveling in a fleet
1.3	Gulisi as first person to land and settle in Belize	Personal heroism of matriarch seeking refuge
2.1	Chatoyer killed in St. Vincent	Bravery – casualty of leader in war
	Chatoyer and Beni as neigbours in St. Vincent	Familiarity and friendship between the two leaders
2.3	Garifuna changing names on arrival at Roatan	Linguistic changes on arrival in Cent. America
3.1	Gulisi being clear skin but wide variation in skin colour among her descendants	Variation in pigmentation from one generation to another
3.2	Gulisi's brother impregnating African woman	Inter-ethnic mating in St. Vincent
Tape 2		
2.2	Subdivision into tribes	Intra-ethnic stratification
2.3	War strategies	**Bravery and resistance in the face of war**
3.1	Characteristics of the tribes	**Sub-groups with distinct sub-cultures**
3.2	Growing own food and other crops	The economy: cash and non-cash
5.3	Gulisi age 24 on leaving St. Vincent	Marker of permanent dislocation
9.3	Physical characteristics	Awareness of phenotypic differences among the same people.

An example how to read the matrix is as follows. The first verbal message is the name of the captain of the fleet. The appropriate theme here is traveling the ocean under British control. The corresponding norm is traveling, which re-occurs throughout the entire body of the material. By continuing to read horizontally one can follow the same procedure of moving from a message and arrive at the norm of social behaviour being underlined. Some major questions arise. One concerns the use of message, theme, and norm as varying degrees of analysis. It is part of normally accepted sociological analysis,

in this case applied to a historically derived text. The other is about the actual selection of verbal messages. The answer is that it arises from what one is looking for, which in turn is informed by one's original research design. It is also necessary to underline that one's discipline and experience have a great deal of impact on one's orientation to data explanation.

Mrs. Francisco had her own agenda in agreeing to be interviewed. She wanted the world to know the history of the Garifuna as she had learned it from her grandmother[5]. More specifically she wanted to assert unequivocally that Gulisi and her twelve sons were the first Garifuna to arrive and settle in Belize. She often said, "My grandmother wanted me to tell this story so that future Garifuna could know how much their ancestors suffered; and that it would make them feel proud of themselves." At such moments I felt privileged to be a listener in the chain of story telling embedded in Mrs. Francisco's family for several generations. Finally, I was able to correlate my strong reason for resorting to oral history with the equally strong family mission that the story be told. In short, it was not to be a casual piece of investigation. It would be a serious exercise in diffusing a long held family heirloom with great personal, family, and Garifuna wide significance.

When we started the first of our several interviews, it did not take anytime for Mrs. Francisco to dictate the division of labour that would underlie our relationship. She spoke and I listened. I minimally guided the discussion to topics I deemed appropriate. Afterwards in carefully dissecting the several pages of transcripts I arrived at three

analytic units in the discourse. They are editorial statements, oral history, and oral traditions.

Editorial statements refer to Mrs. Francisco's repeated syllogism about the modern day Garifuna not living up to the glory of their ancestors' self-esteem and cultural pride. Several times she paused and said, "What has happened to us now; who will carry forward our culture for which our ancestors fought so hard." The refrain became a validation of the need to tell the story.

Oral history and oral tradition are primary concerns of historians and for further elaboration I defer to them. To Vansina, the champion of the use of oral history, oral history is "reminiscences, hearsay, eyewitness accounts about events and situations which are contemporary, i.e. occurred during the lifetime of the informant." (1985: 12). On the other hand, oral tradition is "verbal messages which are repeated statements from the past beyond the present generation" (1985: 27). Most of the narrative that I present in Table 1 falls under the category of oral traditions.

There is further subdivision within the oral tradition category according to historians. As the story of one person about her ancestors Mrs. Francisco's narrative falls into the subgroup called 'personal tradition' (Vansina 1985: 18). Because of the heavy attrition among such stories, Vansina relegates them to a lower level of importance than 'group tradition', which to him are the staple of oral tradition. There is, therefore, a need for more research from other persons who could provide additional information corroborative of Gulisi. The body of information that we have subsequently done following original leads from Mrs. Francisco yields more information about Gulisi's

descendants than about her. A work plan covering communities in the other two countries where Garifuna are found – Honduras and Guatemala - will have to be drafted to engage in interviews with those whose memories include oral traditions dating more than 200 years ago. It will follow the leads forthcoming from our current work in southern Belize.

Although it may be only 'personal tradition', there is no gainsaying the significance of the Gulisi story not only to the history of the Garifuna but also to the history of population movements along the coast of Central America in the mid-1800's and interethnic relations. Vansina provides more clues. Gulisi's falls into a 'tradition of migration' (Vansina 1985: 21-22), the cataclysmic movement from place to place in search of refuge and permanent resettlement among hosts that were not only unsympathetic but were invariably hostile. Such traditions are not to be confused with those of 'origin or genesis' However, they could also serve to generate the worldview of collective re-birth. Gonzalez's volume (1988) uses the arrival and movements in Central America as the watershed of Garifuna ethnogenesis. Further oral history research will no doubt reveal the internal logic that the Garifuna themselves have formed to account for this process.

So far we have delved into the motivation factor of the narrator and the various genres of oral history within the wide range of interpretation in the study of history. There is a need, however, to follow my earlier lead to bring the services of various disciplines toward the intricate task of analysing the field data. Because they are primarily nuggets of social and cultural data, the assistance of anthropology is

appropriate. Furthermore, because the field of anthropology itself is a composite of several disciplines, it easily lends itself by allowing for several foci. In this case the focus is sociolinguistics.

As a speaker of the Garifuna language I was able to detect unusual words during the interviews with Mrs. Francisco. There was a total of thirty-two, with the vast majority being the proper names of persons. Table 2 is a list of the words, their reference point in the narrative, the context within which they were found, and some comments. A review of these words reveals two concurrent cultural processes taking place – transformation and retention – during a period of over 200 years.

TABLE 2

Unusual Garifuna Words in the Narrative

Reference	**Word**	**Context in the Narrative**	**Comment**
Tape 1			
1.1	Gulisi	Grandmother of main informant's grandmother	She was the first narrator
1.1	Majorer	Captain of the British fleet taking exiles to Roatan	Archival information has the name as Barret
2.2	Gamasbeidi	First permanent Garifuna settlement in Belize	In English Commerce Bight
2.2	Pensaneguru	Community settled by Gulisi's sons	In Spanish Punta Negro
2.2	Pensacaca	Ditto	In Spanish Punta Icacos
2.3	Amahuni	Granddaughter of Gulisi	Her christian name: Victoria
2.3	Dwabasi	Ditto	Her christian name: Victoriana
2.3	Alenu	Ditto	
3.1	Picculi	Great grandson of Gulisi	
3.1	Gobanere	Grandson of Gulisi	
3.1	Asane	Granddaughter of Gulisi	
3.1	Aruwarire	Grandson of Gulisi	
3.1	Guladigu	Ditto	

5.1	Yonton	Resettlement site for people from Commerce Bight	In English New Town
5.1	Yugadan	Village south of New Town	
5.2	Sabigi	Main informant's father's maternal uncle	Traveled from Trujillo, Honduras to Belize
Tape 2			
1.1	Rubadan	Island of first arrival in C. America.	In English Roatan
1.1	Yurumein	Home island in the Caribbean	St. Vincent
1.3	Galin guzman	White man owning property at Commerce Bight	He adopted Amahuni
2.2	Arawaga	One of the Carib tribes in St. Vince.	Probably Arawaks
2.3	Oreyuna	Ditto	Probably from Owia, a village in St. Vincent
3.1	Awawaruguna	Ditto	Ditto for Ouararawarou, a previous community in St. Vinc
3.1	Oligin	Ditto	
3.1	Masiragana	Ditto	Ditto for Masiraca, the Mesopotamia area of St. Vincent
Tape 1			
2.2	Duna chirrit	Potable water	Garifuna term for Dangriga
Tape 2			
2.3	Tigama	Loin cloth	A term no longer used
4.1	Chungua	Silver coin	Coin then used in St. Vincent
4.1	Guruguru	Tree in St. Vincent whose bark was used to make cloth	

A people's language is a main index of the twofold nature of culture change – to always acquire new elements while retaining a base that remains constant over an extended period of time. The pressures for change of the Garifuna language were, however, overwhelming. It came from their own minority status under the domination of the speakers of three European languages – English, French, and Spanish – and being smaller in number relative to other groups with whom they frequently associated, the Miskito, Creoles, and peoples speaking various Maya languages. Survival furthermore

meant learning these languages and perforce incorporating words and grammatical structures into their own. Inevitably the language had to incorporate the wide range of flexibility that was overtaking the larger socio-culture.

The first order of transformation was within the language itself. Words spoken in St. Vincent inevitably underwent some changes. Not having any text of the language in St. Vincent before they came we do not know what the changes might have been. However, there are some indications from the names of places in St. Vincent being similar to the names of the subgroups of the Garifuna as Gulisi mentioned. There are three such names identified in Table 2, which correspond to the names of communities whose chiefs had surrendered to the British in 1772 (Gullick 1985: 80). The word *Oreyuna* meaning 'people from Oreya' in Belize Garifuna might actually have come from Owia, which is the name of a community in northeastern St. Vincent. Similar extrapolations can be made from *Awawaruguna* to Ouarawarou, and *Masiragana* to Masiraca. Further studie**s** of linguistics and the logic of changes over time could help shed some light on this suggestion.

Another type of transformation took place when Garifuna heard a foreign language and adopted it to suit their own mode of pronunciation. The following are possible examples. *Majorer* the word for 'Barret' which was the British captain of the trans-Caribbean fleet; *Gamasbeidi* the word for 'Commerce Bight'; *Pensaneguru* the word for Punta Negra; Pensacaca the word for Punta Icacos; *Yonto*n the term for New Town; and *Rubadan* the term for Roatan. Apart from Barret all the names refer to places that no doubt already had names before the Garifuna inhabited them.

Under the umbrella of retention there are three parameters that I could identify. The first is reference to terms that are now archaic Garifuna words. They include *tigama* loin cloth worn by women during the wars; *guruguru* the name for a tree whose bark was used to make cloth; and *chungua* used for the silver coins used in St. Vincent.

The second and third parameters refer to the names of persons. The Garifuna brought along their mostly French first and surnames on their arrival. Gonzalez (1988: 66) mentions several examples. The surname Chatoyer, who Gulisi claimed to be her father, was indeed the name of the renowned leader in war. There is not in Gonzalez's list the name of Beni, whom Gulisi identified as the friend of her father and who Garifuna tradition has as one of the leaders who requested from the British permission to settle in Dangriga. The name of Gulisi; could it be a version for Marie-Louise?

Finally, there are several non-European names, which make up most of the words in Table 2. Examples include *Amahuni, Dwabasi,* and *Alenu.* They were first names that the Garifuna used for each other. For at least the first three generations in Central America they might have co-existed with European first names until they lost predominance in favour of Spanish names. The practice of Garifuna names having more currency than European names still persists up to now. However, today the Garifuna would be termed nicknames or secondary names. Earlier the pattern might have been reversed with the Garifuna names being the real ones and the European the nickname.

These few indications of patterns of transformation and retention in the language are merely examples of analysis that sociolinguistics could do in greater depth.

Conclusion

Having justified why I needed to use oral history to uncover information not currently available about the Garifuna during most of the nineteenth century, I have described in a didactic manner what techniques I used in the field and the post-field methods of analysis. At both levels I have extracted from the twin disciplines of history and anthropology.

During the fieldwork I resorted to my extensive ethnographic experience to expedite the prerequisites of interacting with villagers and, most especially, to be able to select a main informant within a very short time. The demands of the historian for validity and representativity have led me to interview more people and to prolong the fieldwork among the communities in southern Belize.

Again the twin disciplines have been most helpful at the stage of analysis. Selecting the genre of oral tradition appropriate to my data has facilitated a high degree of comparability with other studies. The added advantage is that I have extended to the Caribbean some of the tools of the craft of oral history that have been popularized mostly in Africa. Finally, the anthropological subfield of sociolinguistics has been most helpful in illuminating the two procedures of transformation and retention among the Garifuna stretching from St. Vincent to Belize.

At the end I have been able to achieve some of my objectives in resorting to oral history. But it obviously is a study that has its own rythm, time frame, and mechanics that need to be understood properly to be able to achieve a great deal. Quite contrary to uninformed opinion, which may overly glamorize it, oral history needs to be studied and applied critically. But does the story of our people deserve any the less?

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[2] In this paper the Caribbean refers primarily to the CARICOM region. However, I do make oblique references to other non-CARICOM as the need arises

[33] I use the tern 'Carib' to refer to the aboriginal peoples who resisted European expansion into the Lesser Antilles. From as early as the mid-1600's they had already mixed with escaped Maroon slaves (Gullick 1978: 283-290). By the mid-1700's there were by far more of the results of the Amerindian/African mixture than the Amerindian in St. Vincent. These people are called Kalinago (Beckles 1992: 15-18), Black Caribs, or Garifuna as their descendants call themselves in Central America. In this paper I more often use the term 'Garifuna' as I am referring in most cases to the descendants of the intermixture.

[4] This framework of arriving at levels of abstraction is used often by ethnologists (Spradley and McCurdy 1975: 366-367). It is an attempt to arrive at the people's system of internal logic underlining their social behaviour. Historians no doubt also have their own levels of abstraction that may not function in a similar way of explanation.

[5] The version normally accepted by most Garifuna is that Elejo Beni together with a number of persons was the first to arrive in Belize.

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