



CHAPTER 8

Garifuna Sustainable Development

The last two chapters described a Maya idea of sustainable development that has been emerging from Guatemala's Western Highlands. This involved a detailed look at the cultural, discursive, historical, and material roots of the idea, as well as a description of the idea itself. This chapter uses the same method, but moves the focus southward into the contested Garifuna territories of coastal Honduras. Much of this chapter is based on ongoing fieldwork that I have undertaken since 2011. This work is beginning to show a complex and contested Garifuna sustainable development ideal that is emerging around the concept of food sovereignty. Just as with the study of Maya sustainable development, an indigenous political institution will be used as a locus around which to describe an indigenous idea of development. In this case, the story will revolve largely around ideas and activism associated with the Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH). The story of Garifuna activism stands as another exemplar of the transmodern nature of indigenous development ideas that are merging in Latin America during a period typified by neoliberal multiculturalism.

THE HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF GARIFUNA

The Garifuna case study allows, more than most, a clear example of the co-constructed nature of indigeneity and modernity. Processes of colonialism actively created the Garifuna subjectivity while Garifuna subjects

helped build the modern nation of Honduras while possibly adding force to the percolation of European enlightenment ideals such as national sovereignty, personal freedom, and human rights. Currently, Garifuna activism contributes to environmental, indigenous rights, and food sovereignty movements while being, at the same time, at least partially, created by them. There is no distinct pre-Columbian Garifuna culture, rooted in a deeply associated territory, to appeal to in this discussion. It was colonialism, and resistance to it, that produced the Garifuna.

In 1675, a ship carrying Mokko people, destined to be slaves, from present-day Nigeria, was wrecked near the Caribbean island of St. Vincent. The indigenous *Kalinaku* were known for resisting British and French attempts at colonialism. The widely known success of this resistance attracted escaped slaves from throughout the Caribbean, and within a few generations of intermarriage amidst an increasing Afro-heritage population, an emergent Garifuna culture began to take form—combining elements of African and *Kalinaku* culture. Perhaps due to the historical shock of the Mokko escape from slavery, and the famous resilience of the *Kalinaku*, the islanders were fiercely independent and resistant to colonialism. St. Vincent continued to be a beacon for anti-slavery movements as *Kalinaku* and Garifuna worked together to repel attempted invasions by both the French and English in the eighteenth century (Taylor 2012). Although the island was officially granted to Britain by the French in the Treaty of Paris of 1763, continued resistance of the local inhabitants delayed the British colonization of the island until 1796. St. Vincent was the last of the Caribbean islands to be subjugated by colonial rule (Taylor 2012; Anderson 2009).

When British colonial rule did arrive, it was brutal. Although the population of St. Vincent was intermixed by 1796, the colonial administration chose to abruptly and arbitrarily disrupt the solidaric community. The population was sorted along a binary of lighter and darker skin colour, and 5000 of the latter were deported. This tore both immediate and extended families apart, but also solidified the separate indigenous category of Garifuna. These darker coloured Mokko/*Kalinaku* (mixed with other Maroon Afro-descendants) were relocated by force to the smaller island of Roatan—just off the coast of present-day Honduras. Only half made it there alive. Those who survived the perilous forced migration, increasingly identified as Garifuna as they faced harsh conditions on Roatan, which had limited arable soil.

At this time, the Spanish were intent on maintaining their land holdings in Central America. After the injuries of Spanish colonialism all but depopulated the North Coast of Honduras, the Empire was in a tenuous situation—having to hold on to a large expanse of land without a settler population. Creating an unlikely alliance, the Garifuna petitioned the Spanish to allow them to occupy the mainland of Honduras. Since the Spanish were eager to fill the underpopulated territory with Spanish subjects, the majority of the country's North Coast was granted to the Garifuna (Taylor 2012). Although Garifuna life on the North Coast was disrupted from time to time by colonial trade, their de facto title to the North Coast of Honduras was relatively stable until the late twentieth century.

This colonial history created the Garifuna through the fusing of Mokko and *Kalinaku* DNA and culture. The injustice and injury of colonialism based on slavery, conquest, and forced relocation also forged Garifuna subjectivity. The Garifuna are at once an indigenous African people and an indigenous Caribbean people who have been dislocated to new territory in Northern Honduras, with which they have developed a deep felt relationship. As a result, Garifuna remain fiercely independent—often reiterating that they are the only Afro-descendent peoples in the Americas that have never been slaves. They consider themselves as indigenous, and are legally recognized as such. The Garifuna also have a deep cultural relationship with the land of the North Coast—to which many insist they still hold title.

These historically driven proclivities are obvious in interviews of Garifuna villagers who often assert their independence as never having been slaves, as inheritors of indigenous land title, and as having relative autonomy within the Honduran state. Many of these assertions find their official home in OFRANEH—the main Garifuna political organization in the country. Although OFRANEH is the largest, most active, and most radical Garifuna organization, it is not the only one. The Garifuna do not have a singular voice. OFRANEH is, however, the main conduit through which ideas of indigenous Garifuna sustainable development are articulated. It therefore holds a central role in this chapter.

Often speaking through OFRANEH, Garifuna activists strongly assert their indigenous culture. For them, this is an essential part of their cultural and political identity. This is vital for the movement, as there has been a move by the national government to deny the indigenous part of the identity by designating Garifuna as simply “Afro-decedent” in national

statistics. This is a discursive move that threatens to bleed into popular culture, putting into question claims to indigenous status, along with land title. These important implications for land tenure and political rights are apparent in an OFRANEH (2013) memo:

In the decade of the 30s, the Trujillo intellectual *Sixto Cacho* maintained that the Garifuna people were black skin but indigenous culture. To date we have managed to preserve a good part of the cultural heritage despite the homogenization promoted by the state, through the education system and the mass media ... In recent decades, the cultural scam has been promoted to eradicate the Garifuna identification to replace it with the vague term of Afro-descendant, discarding the cultural patrimony of our ancestors by a simple identification of supposed race, denying this form the genetic hybridism of which we are carriers ... The difference of visions between the Garifuna and those who call themselves 'Afro-descendants' is abysmal, the first ones seek territorial autonomy and defense of our communities, the second ones are satisfied with an insertion within a corrupt system and the power handouts of the satraps (foreign-controlled dictators).

This memo suggests that the cultural hybridity implicit to Garifuna identity is both a valued cultural trait and a political resource to many Garifuna. The identity encapsulates a felt history of independence and resistance that propels the political activism of a people who have never been slaves and still refuse to become so. This is combined with an understanding of cultural distinctiveness and indigenous cosmivision. This political identity is evident in the words of Mirian Miranda, OFRANEH's president:

Things like spiritual recognition and cultural identity are important to our people. We think our cultural identity can also be a route to revolution ... in a country where we have a uniform model of living, where there is definitely a tendency to believe everything white is better, that white is perfect. (Brigida 2017)

This Garifuna Afro-indigenous identity is entangled with territory as well. This assures that this indigenous resistance is not limited to the cultural sphere, but inhabits the material one as well.

A THREATENED LAND BASE

In interviews, North Coast and Garifuna assert a strong historical right, and cultural connection, to the land. Stories of the survived attempt at enslavement, the expulsion from St. Vincent, and the granting of title on Honduras' North Coast are common. Alfredo Lopez, a Garifuna leader, articulates the relationship with land clearly:

The Earth is our mother; the sea is our father. When this relationship is broken, we are no longer Garifuna peoples. We make our living from fishing and navigation. We don't use fertilizers because we don't want to offend the earth. What do we do? There is a model of working, its called *Barbecho*. We work five years in one area, then we let it ferment and fertilize, and then we occupy another space. This is why our property is collectively owned. Because we need this space, which relates to our functional habitat ... so the cultural and ancestral life we are accustomed to can continue. Rights are collective; there is no private property in our way of thinking. (Matamoros 2016)

As the following statement by OFRANEH's leader shows, the organization works actively to protect indigenous title while underlining the connection between the land of the North Coast and Garifuna culture:

Without our lands, we cease to be a people. Our lands and identities are critical to our lives, our waters, our forests, our culture, our global commons, our territories. For us, the struggle for our territories and our commons and our natural resources is of primary importance to preserve ourselves as a people. (Miranda 2015)

Anthropological studies have noted this connection between land and identity while describing the indigenous Garifuna tenure system. Garifuna beachfront communities were traditionally built at a distance from agricultural and hunting lands, so that food sources were separated from living spaces. This left much Garifuna land to appear unsettled and unused in the perception of non-Garifuna. The *barbecho* rotating crop system that involved leaving farming plots fallow for numerous years contributes to this impression (Brondo 2010).

All Garifuna land was traditionally tenured collectively, creating vast territories that were governed internally via Garifuna communal councils and tribal leaders. According to Garifuna norms, no land is transferable

without the approval of local councils. These internal governance and subsistence practices had the historical effect of distinguishing Garifuna territory from the dominant Mestizo society with its European-sourced national governance structure and private tenure traditions (Taylor 2012). This common title, cultural identity, and territorial distinction were reinforced through repetition and lived experience. The distinct Garifuna language, kinship structures, matrilineal inheritance patterns, subsistence farming, fishing and hunting practices, governance structures, dance, and other cultural practices all created a repeated lived experience rooted in the land (Euraque 2003).

Garifuna tenure was challenged, especially in the late twentieth century. This was often interpreted by Garifuna as a direct attack on the people and culture. Although the large territorial grant of the North Coast was essential in the establishment of the Spanish colony and later the state of Honduras, the state did not officially recognize Garifuna title or customary law. Nor were subsistence practices thought to be important when compared to production for international markets. As a result, the state granted large amounts of Garifuna territory to international banana companies in the early twentieth century. This injury was met with strong Garifuna opposition. Garifuna preferred to continue subsistence practices on limited land rather than to join the Mestizo-dominated labour force (Euraque 2003). As a result of Garifuna resistance, the *Instituto Nacional Agrario* (INA), which administered titling nationally, began to recognize the collective right of Garifuna to their remaining lands in the 1970s. This was officially only a permission for occupation of the land, not ownership. This legal ambiguity facilitated multiple and continued encroachments on Garifuna land by local elites and foreign investors (Brondo 2010).

As neoliberal development policy became hegemonic in the late twentieth century, the push for clear land-ownership institutions became stronger in both Honduras and in the rest of the world. With this, official titling on Garifuna lands began in 1990 (Brondo 2010). These policies privileged individual title as the primal component of market-led development. A UNHP project at that time mapped and demarcated Garifuna communal land—limiting it to those tracts that were most obviously settled and recently used. Due to the prevalence of *barbecho*, this restricted the Garifuna land base a great deal.

Official collective title meant that Garifuna land could not be sold without community agreement, but this title was applied to a very limited geography. It has been estimated that as much as 80 percent of Garifuna

traditional land was lost by the end of this titling process (MacNeill 2017). In addition, Decree 90–90 was enacted in 1990 to develop the North Coast as a Caribbean tourism destination by allowing foreigners to own beachfront land. The privilege was formerly limited to Honduran nationals. This decree, therefore, brought a new threat to Garifuna territory—foreign capital aimed at tourist industry investment.

This history of land titling and dispossession has had a major impact on Garifuna indigenous development and political identity. Leaders, especially those associated with OFRANEH, describe a continual history of “land stealing” by “colonizers” who use their economic power to bend the Honduran state and judiciary to their advantage. For example, Garifuna protesters at a trial of Canadian investor Randy Jorgensen in November 2015, shouted, “no more sales of Garifuna land; no more theft of Garifuna land” (Rights Action 2015). The lawyer representing the Garifuna at the trial cited reaffirmations of Garifuna title in 1901, 1934, and 1995 by the Honduran government. Garifuna activists claim that dispossession is the result of a failed state and judiciary that have been corrupted by wealthy elites and foreign capital, despite official protection by law. “We could say the rule of law in Honduras is corruption,” said Garifuna protestor Carmen Alvarez, “All the way from the Supreme Court to the local court here in Trujillo, and everything in between, is corrupted ... but we Garifuna are not going to give up” (Rights Action 2015). OFRANEH continues to hold the ultimate return of all traditional lands as an explicit goal (OFRANEH 2019).

Oligarchy, repression, and dictatorship were the prominent forms of government in Honduras historically. By 2008, however, the Honduran resistance movement, including OFRANEH and other Garifuna groups, had become powerful enough to influence national politics (Shipley 2013). This inspired the then president Manuel Zelaya to pursue numerous progressive policies. Honduras joined socialist and social democratic national governments in the *Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America* (ALBA). The minimum wage was raised by 60 percent. Numerous pro-poor policies were undertaken. A moratorium was placed on the granting of mining concessions until environmental impact assessments were completed. The lands of poor *campesinos* were increasingly protected, and some was redistributed (Gordon 2010). The Garifuna were not explicitly mentioned in land reform initiatives, but drew hope from these conciliatory politics (Brondo 2013).

These reforms threatened the interests of national elites as well as Canadian and American investors who were heavily involved in the mining, agricultural, tourism, and manufacturing sectors. These elements conspired and successfully removed Zelaya via military coup in 2009. Successive oligarchic post-coup governments reversed the changes of the Zelaya administration. This inspired poverty rates to increase from 58 percent before the coup, to 68 percent in 2016, and then to drop slightly to 66 percent. Unemployment rates moved from 3 percent to 7.3 percent in that same period, dropping to 6.5 percent in 2018 (INE 2019). Social spending was also dramatically curtailed, the minimum wage was reduced to pre-Zelaya levels, and the proportion of people employed below that wage increased from 28.8 to 43.6 percent (Johnson and Lefebvre 2013).

Sustained political crisis and repression have permeated post-coup Honduras. This has famously inspired large numbers of Honduras to flee their country towards the United States. Politics on all levels have traditionally been controlled by an oligarchic group of ten powerful families. This control was solidified with the coup. Additionally, national policy has regularly been influenced by foreign governments and business interests (MacNeill 2017). This too intensified after the coup. Oligarchic and foreign capital control was extended via the assassination, torture, and repression of large numbers of oppositional politicians and activists, including members of the Garifuna community. For example, North Coast Garifuna residents have accused Canadian investor Randy Jorgenson of having Garifuna land rights activist Vidal Leiva shot three times in 2015 (Cuffe 2015). More recently, the resistance movement's de facto leader, Berta Caceres, was assassinated in 2016, followed by two other high-profile members, Lesbia Janeth Urquía and Nelson García (Lyengar 2016; Agren 2016).

Violence and corruption have become an understood inevitability in the country. Post-coup Honduras became the most violent in the world outside a war zone. Political and legal systems are so extensively compromised that the national government is instituting a plan to carve out multiple localities from the official Honduran judicial and political system in order to offer stability in some areas to international investors (Government of Honduras 2017). Most Hondurans consider their government to be highly corrupt, while it ranks as one of the worst in the world when regarding the abuse of public power for private gain. Transparency of government finances is characterized with the lowest distinction of *scant or none*

and the country rates extremely low on *Press Freedom* and *Voice and Accountability* (Transparency International 2017).

Garifuna land tenure has been a notable flashpoint in the post-coup climate. Much Garifuna activism has been occurring in the Trujillo area, and complaints are largely aimed at the Canadian investor Randy Jorgensen, and his companies *Life Vision* and *Banana Coast*. Complicating this local confrontation, there are established links between this investment consortium and the post-coup government. OFRANEH and local Garifuna claim that these links have facilitated foreign acquisition of Garifuna lands (MacNeill 2017). Specifically, OFRANEH has accused Canadian investors of illegally usurping lands belonging to the villages of *Cristales* and *Guadalupe*. Furthermore, Garifuna activists charge that the entire population of *Rio Negro* was illegally evicted to allow for the construction of *Life Vision's* Banana Coast cruise ship port.

Construction of the port began in 2011, and it was completed in 2014. Former residents are difficult to find locally. According to local accounts, many have scattered to other parts of Honduras or have fled the country. To OFRANEH, who insist that “the majority of these transactions were carried out under pressure,” the usurpation of *Rio Negro* is a “fraud carried out against the inhabitants” of the town (OFRANEH 2011). The writ of *eminent domain*, used by Jorgensen in the eviction, was obtained through bribery and corruption according to OFRANEH. Jorgensen, and the Canadian investors, insist that the town had been “a waterfront eyesore and a habitat for disease.” They also insist that the town had been legally removed to make way for “a project that would create community wide benefits” (Jorgensen 2014).

Jorgensen’s nearby *Campa Vista* housing project is subject to similar accusations of land grabbing. In this case, it is traditional Garifuna hunting and farming territory just south of the community of *Cristales* that is in dispute. Both ILO 169 and the Honduran constitution require Garifuna community consensus prior to the sale of pertinent land. Jorgensen claims that a consultation was held in which the community allegedly agreed to sell 20 hectares to a third-party business associate of Jorgensen (Jorgensen 2014). This associate paid the community president of the time, Omar Laredo, \$5000 US dollars for the land. Community members allege that they never received this money. Laredo immediately left town and has not returned. Jorgensen then purchased the land for \$20,000 from his associate and actually fenced-off 62 hectares of land. Over the next few years, he

sold the lands, parcel by parcel, to Canadians as vacation home lots, for a total of approximately \$8.5 million.

There are other land disputes between Jorgensen and Garifuna communities in two other barrios in the Trujillo area. There are also disputes involving other Canadian land investors (Aqui Abajo 2017). Jorgensen is adamant that the land in each case was legally obtained, and that it was not being productively used by the Garifuna anyway. He also rejects the authenticity of Garifuna land rights saying, “they are foreigners; they are immigrants to Honduras” (Hadden 2016). Local Garifuna and OFRANEH insist that they have the same rights of any indigenous group in Honduras, that the lands were essential to their subsistence food practices, and that they were illegally sold (Cuffe 2015).

Accusations of police intimidation and state corruption and violence are also related to these land disputes. One Garifuna, a self-proclaimed “land defender,” claims she was arrested and tortured by Honduran police and military for opposing a Canadian tourism project (Aqui Abajo 2017). Others claim to have been shot and/or intimidated by Jorgensen’s “hit-man” (Rights Action 2015). The barrios of Cristales and Rio Negro have attempted to bring criminal charges against Jorgensen for illegal possession of Garifuna lands, but these charges were granted a five-year stay in a Trujillo court (Rights Action 2015). Truth and legality are difficult to discern in these murky events. However, it is clear that many local Garifuna assume as a quotidian fact that the police, local government, and Honduran state are corrupt and operating in the interest of foreign investors and local elites. This implies that any indigenous Garifuna development project will need to be undertaken via strong mobilizations towards Garifuna territorial autonomy and self-direction.

FOOD SOVEREIGNTY, ENVIRONMENTALISM, AND INDIGENEITY

The 1990s saw the erosion of Garifuna territorial rights due to neoliberal reforms and the encroachment of foreign tourism interests. Perhaps precipitated by the Zapatista movement in Mexico and the now global Via Campesina movement, a global indigenous rights movement emerged in this period as well. Garifuna thought on indigenous sustainable development both informs and is animated by this movement. The Honduran ratification of the International Labour Organization’s Convention 169 Concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, in 1995, granted the Garifuna official indigenous status (ILO 2017). Importantly, it contains protections

for language and culture while asserting indigenous control over economic development and territorial administration. These territorial rights were not limited to regularly used human settlements, as any lands used in traditional subsistence practices are also protected (ILO 1989).

In 2007, these commitments were reaffirmed via Honduras' adoption of United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. These conventions require that development projects be designed "with respect to peoples' right to healthy food, to water, to forests for foraging ..., and ability to continue traditional small-scale agricultural customs" (ILO 1989, p. 183). The Garifuna, especially through OFRANEH, fought hard to pressure the Honduran state to become a signatory to these international indigenous rights conventions. Their adoption is an essential part of Garifuna sustainable development, and the discourse contained in the conventions has become essential to Garifuna ideas of indigenous development.

Adding to the discursive power of indigenous rights instruments, UNESCO took an unprecedented step in 2001 when it recognized Garifuna culture as the first "masterpiece of oral and intangible cultural heritage." The UNESCO proclamation explicitly noted the cultural centrality of land and subsistence practices (UNESCO 2001). These conventions and international recognitions are key to Garifuna sustainable development initiatives. True indigenous development, Garifuna leaders claim, is not possible without the land protections integral to ILO 169 (Rights Action 2015). It is clear that OFRANEH considers such conventions to be protections from the imposition of culturally and environmentally destructive development projects. A 2012 memo clearly articulates this:

The Right to Consultation in Honduras, and we can say in the rest of the continent, has become a defense mechanism for indigenous people in the face of the advance of 'development' based on the ideology of the accumulation and the destruction of the environment and the planet. (OFRANEH 2012)

Local Garifuna that I interviewed in the Trujillo area were all aware that their culture had been designated a "masterpiece of cultural heritage." One local, for example, asserted that, "there is no culture like the Garifuna. We have our *punta* [dance and music], *serre* and *budut* [foods]. We are original in the world." OFRANEH makes these claims explicit by citing the UNESCO designation repeatedly on their website (OFRANEH

2019). This distinction gives force to the idea that development organized from within Garifuna culture would be substantially different from development imposed from without.

Given the cultural significance attached to *Barbecho* and the determined resistance to territorial loss exhibited by Garifuna activists, the concept of food sovereignty has become central to Garifuna sustainable development. In October 2015, OFRANEH was awarded the 7th annual Food Sovereignty Prize from the U.S. Food Sovereignty Alliance. The prize purposefully emphasizes grassroots culturally appropriate organization of local food systems in juxtaposition to the homogenizing, environmentally destructive, and disenfranchising practices of the neoliberal world food system.

OFRANEH insists that locally controlled subsistence practices have been severely threatened by modern development. In some areas, such as the marine coastal reserve at Cayos Cochinos, subsistence practices are relatively strong. In others, they are greatly diminished. In Chachahuat— the main Garifuna settlement on Cayos Cochinos—47 percent of those I surveyed in 2016 practised subsistence farming or fishing. Some traditional fishing rights have been protected, although the loss of land and subsistence there has been severe (Brondo 2013). In contrast, only 17 percent claimed to engage in these traditional food production practices in Garifuna settlements in the Trujillo area. No traditional fishing remains in the Trujillo bay, and much farmland has been lost.

As this note from OFRANEH's director Miriam Miranda suggests, autonomous food production based on traditional practice is key to Garifuna sustainable development:

Our liberation starts because we can plant what we eat. This is food sovereignty. We need to produce to bring autonomy and the sovereignty of our peoples. If we continue to consume [only], it doesn't matter how much we shout and protest. We need to become producers ... It's also about recovering and reaffirming our connections to the soil, to our communities, to our land. (USFSA 2015)

She continues:

Without our lands, we cease to be a people. Our lands and identities are critical to our lives, our waters, our forests, our culture, our global commons, our territories. For us, the struggle for our territories and our

commons and our natural resources is of primary importance to preserve ourselves as a people ... There's more pressure on us every day for our territories, our resources, and our global commons ... [T]hey're taking land that we were using to grow beans and rice so they can grow African palm for bio-fuel. The intention is to stop the production of food that humans need so they can produce fuel that cars need. The more food scarcity that exists, the more expensive food will become. Food sovereignty is being threatened everywhere. (USFSA 2015)

The idea of food sovereignty was cited as a goal by Garifuna leaders in the Trujillo area during interviews I conducted in 2014. For example, speaking of actions being taken by local Garifuna to reclaim traditional lands, one leader stated “this land contains our cultural heritage, without our lands we cannot have food sovereignty, we cannot be self-sufficient, we lose our traditions.” The village of Vallacito, east of Trujillo, is actively attempting a Garifuna sustainable development programme, which has food sovereignty as its centrepiece. The village is under regular attack from drug cartels, palm-oil plantation owners, and charter cities—a government-directed plan to usurp local land and form islands of modern development. Even in this volatile locale, communal kitchens, organic gardens, and a coconut plantation have been established with plans to grow medicinal plants, rice, and beans in adjacent areas according to the practice of *barbecho*. The idea, according to Garifuna leaders associated with OFRANEH, is sustainable development based on self-sufficiency (Clark 2018).

Food sovereignty is central to Garifuna activism and ideas of development. The national resistance movement, of which OFRANEH is an important member, has been built around an existing national civil society network that centralized and even incubated the concept of food sovereignty. Boyer (2010), for example, has shown that the Honduran resistance movement has played a vital role in the creation and popularization of La Via Campesina—the global movement that is most commonly associated with food sovereignty. From 1996 to 2004, La Via Campesina maintained its international headquarters in Honduras in the offices of CONOCH (The Honduran Coordinating Council of Peasant Organizations). CONOCH included Garifuna activists and was attached to the civic Council of Popular Indigenous Organizations of Honduras (COPINH). COPINH, which includes Garifuna groups such as OFRANEH, emerged from Honduran indigenous coalitions of the 1970s

and has centralized the idea of food sovereignty since the 1990s (Frank 2010; Boyer 2010).

In May 2016, La Via Campesina reaffirmed their connection with Garifuna in particular when they issued a statement of solidarity with the “Afro-Indigenous” Hondurans. The statement affirmed that La Via Campesina was “extremely troubled by repeated violations of ... human rights” against the Garifuna. They continue to denounce “violations of the human right to life as well as of the right to food sovereignty” in Garifuna Honduras (La Via Campesina 2016).

As with most indigenous groups, environmentalism is deeply connected to Garifuna politics of indigeneity and food sovereignty. One of the major concerns made by Garifuna representatives about land titling projects reflects this. A 2006 report from the World Bank’s Honduras Land Titling Project documents Garifuna dissatisfaction with land titling. The report shows how Garifuna considered World Bank designed title, instituted under the guise of an indigenous development project, a limitation of their “functional habitat” as opposed to a protection of title. The Garifuna complaint was partially connected with environmental concerns—asserting that Garifuna had preserved the land of the North Coast for centuries, and the titling project would leave the territory open to environmental degradation. Garifuna livelihoods and culture, according to the complaint, are connected intimately to the natural environment. Therefore, Garifuna patrimony equates to environmental protection (World Bank 2006).

Being one of the largest indigenous groups in Honduras, the Garifuna are appropriately active in the Council of Indigenous Peoples of Honduras (COPINH). COPINH is central to the Honduran environmental movement, considering itself and members to be “environmental defenders.” In the current political climate of the country, such environmental activism is incredibly dangerous. Consequently, numerous COPINH members have been assassinated, tortured, jailed, and surveilled. COPINH is not alone in its struggle for territorial and environmental defense, however. The groups are connected to a network of organizations that are integral to the global environmental movement.

Global Witness is an organization that exists to “protect human rights and the environment by fearlessly confronting corruption and challenging the systems that enable it” (Global Witness 2019). In a 2017 report, the organization pronounced Honduras to be “the deadliest country in the world for environmental activism,” claiming that 120 environmentalist had been assassinated since 2010 (Global Witness 2017). OFRANEH

(2019) and its leaders reiterate this distinction regularly, purposefully positioning themselves on the frontline of the global fight for indigenous and environmental defense. In addition to the Food Sovereignty Prize, the organization has recently won the *Nota Sol* Award for defending human rights and promoting sustainable development, and the Carlos Escaleres Environmental Award after OFRANEH launched its “Defense without Fear” environmental and territorial protection campaign. Following this, a diversity of large global environmental organizations have used Garifuna as an exemplar of strong environmental activism and indigenous stewardship. Some of the more notable of these organizations are the Sierra Club (Gibler 2017), the Rainforest Action Network (2016), Friends of the Earth (2017), and the World Watch Institute (2019).

This positioning of Garifuna culture and land tenure as positively related to ecological protection is not fanciful. Multiple studies have found evidence that indigenous farmers tend to maintain more ecologically diverse farms than do their non-indigenous counterparts (Brush & Perales 2007; Perreault 2005). This has been found to be true with Garifuna communities in particular (Williams 2016). This does not necessarily mean that Garifuna culture is essentially pro-ecological diversity, however. It would be more accurate to say that Garifuna identity is a node upon which global food sovereignty, indigenous rights, environmental movements, a felt history, and marginalizing political economy exert significant interpolating pressure. These pressures form and are formed by Garifuna subjectivities in a way that substantiates—in fact—that Garifuna-controlled agriculture tends to promote ecological diversity.

CONCLUSION

Garifuna is a people and subjectivity forged in both colonialism and resistance to it. Their resistance on the island of St. Vincent, along with slave revolts in other locales, is likely to have had a larger impact on the British anti-slavery movement and discursive force of enlightenment ideals than Eurocentric histories will admit. Their very existence helped to secure the land required to forge the modern state of Honduras. Their heritage is simultaneously indigenous and modern in a more obvious way than is the case with any other group.

Territorial claims based on international rights agreements such as ILO 169 are commonly used in Garifuna politics. Furthermore, the Garifuna also hold on to an idea of development—one rooted in food sovereignty

and political autonomy within modern Honduras. Garifuna culture has clearly been forged via colonialism, and this colonialism continues in the form of land grabs. Thus, Garifuna politics constitutes, and is constituted, in relation to “modern” ideals such as freedom, rights, and progress as they mix within global indigenous, environmental, and food sovereignty movements.

Garifuna sustainable development requires cultural, economic, and political autonomy. This stems as much from their independent history as much as the coercive weight of the current Honduran and international political economy. Garifuna, like most people, strive for a better life—some form of development. But development controlled by national elites and foreign investors has only depleted their land base without yielding local benefits (MacNeill and Wozniak 2018). They feel that a distinct Garifuna form of development will naturally embody environmental protections because of their cultural relation to nature.

Connecting to, and caring for, the land of the Honduran North Coast is integral to this idea of development. Similar to Maya ideas of sustainable development, the Garifuna have had little opportunity to enact their own version of culturally embedded progress. The idea involves food sovereignty, but this programme is embroiled in a politics of land protection as a prerequisite to the flourishing of local indigenous ideas and policies. This land protection, as with the Maya, is the first order of business in the quest for a culturally embedded sustainable development. Only then, when what Garifuna activists call their “functional habitat” is protected, can a sustainable development based on collective title, food sovereignty, and the revival of *Barbecho* be established.

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