

Garifuna Lives Matter: Intercultural Indigenous Solidarity in Post-coup Honduras

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Abstract

In what he calls the “radicalization of multiculturalism,” anthropologist Christopher Loperena has proposed that the political vacuum left by the 2009 Honduran coup allowed Garifuna activists to subvert and question the multiculturalism promoted by the State. Since the 1990s the state’s politicization of multiculturalism had shifted the traditional discourse of national identity away from a homogenous mestizaje to a “multiethnic nation.” State funded tourism commodified the culture of many indigenous groups, including the Garifuna (which self-identify as Afro-indigenous). Although this inclusion on the surface no longer “othered” these groups by giving them State recognition, it did not provide the room for an actual critique of the State’s continued marginalization of these communities. Loperena argues that the spaces of resistance produced a more visible and larger scale critique of multiculturalism that demanded discursive shifts from their indigenous counterparts and the State. Loperena’s “radicalizing multiculturalism” framework misses another important phenomenon: the creation of an intercultural movement in Honduras based on solidarity and completely removed from multiculturalism. My paper examines the limitations of radicalizing multiculturalism when understanding the activism of Garifuna grass roots organizations after the coup. I argue that the relationship between Garifuna activists and other indigenous groups tied to *la Resistencia* (the larger solidarity movement post-coup) demands an entirely new paradigm of intercultural indigenous solidarity, bridging culture and politics in a distinct way. I discuss the language and ideas that appear in collaborative documents produced on different occasions when OFRANEH met with other indigenous groups, and I examine discourses about systemic racism and solidarity on OFRANEH’S social media platforms. I also focus on the fusion of different cultural factors, such as music and tools of spirituality within different activist spaces post-coup. This evidence suggests that the post-coup context generated the emergence of a new solidarity movement between indigenous groups that uses decolonization tools through the centering of indigenous epistemology and intercultural sharing, committed to producing real systemic change.

Nine months after indigenous and environmental activist Berta Caceres's assassination, her daughter demanded justice at a talk hosted by the Latin American Studies Center at Tulane University. She not only demanded justice for her mother's assassination but she also highlighted the troubling relationship of indigenous peoples and the State in Honduras, emphasizing an increase of assassination's related to environmental-indigenous activism. Olivia Zuniga Caceres ended her talk exclaiming face "Black Lives Matter", calling for solidarity between all people fighting for their lives against oppressive forces of modern day colonialism and imperialism. The Garifuna, an afro-indigenous population located on the Northern Coast of Honduras, have historically represented Honduran blackness and diasporic African heritage.¹ Their grassroots organizing has usually been intrapersonal, separated even from other indigenous groups activism.² This is due to their unique and complex ethnoracial identity that operates within a black and indigenous framework, as they are of mixed African and Amerindian ancestry. In the past this has left them "othered" from the State rhetoric around national identity, constructed around the erasure and distancing of Honduran African heritage, and from other indigenous activism, as black and indigenous communities have usually been seen as separate. On top of this Garifuna's geographic location on the Northern Coast, has kept them distant from many other indigenous groups and the political sphere of Honduras (See Appendix A). Olivia's closing seemed to address a new shift to address systemic racism and a move to solidarize with many different marginalized populations, especially black communities. Is Olivia, as a Lencan indigenous member-an Amerindian population located in the South-Western part of Honduras

¹Mark Anderson, *Black and Indigenous: Garifuna Activism and Consumer Culture in Honduras* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009), 67.

² Ibid.

(See Appendix A), recognizing a new era of Honduran indigenous solidarity that works more closely and interconnected with the Garifuna and their blackness?

The anthropologist Christopher Loperena explored Garifuna activism after the 2009 Honduran coup d'état and their subsequent involvement in the resistance movement formed against the coup and its de-facto government.³ He makes the argument that Garifuna activism in these post-coup resistance spaces redefined and radicalized multiculturalism by reclaiming, on their own terms, cultural factors previously commodified by the State. Multiculturalism refers to the State rhetoric and subsequent policies, that shifted Honduras from solely identifying as a mestizo nation to identifying as a multiethnic and pluricultural nation. This came about during the 90s after a rise of indigenous mobilization demanding recognition in order to guarantee protection, ancestral land rights, and cultural survival. Scholars have critiqued that multiculturalism recognized these groups in a superficial way that benefited the State without engaging with the demands and needs voiced by these now “included” communities. It also painted their ethnoracial and cultural difference as unvarying categories that did not fluctuate with history and contemporary sociopolitical interactions, taking away their power of self-representation and agency.⁴

Loperena's argument is limited because it maintains a focus on multiculturalism, while my research suggests a complete rejection of multiculturalism and instead points to the development of a new indigenous movement entirely removed from the State. I argue that rather than the “radicalization of multiculturalism” the Garifuna in post-coup activism distanced themselves from multiculturalism which, silenced rather than recognized their demands, and,

³ Christopher Loperena, “Radicalize Multiculturalism? Garifuna Activism and the Double-Bind of Participation in Postcoup Honduras,” *The Journal of Latin America and Caribbean Anthropology* 21:3 (Sept, 2016); 518.

⁴ Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007).

joined with other indigenous groups to create an entire new movement, independent of the State, built through cultural sharing and the centering of Garifuna's afro-indigenous identity, which I coin intercultural indigenous solidarity.

In **Section A** I historicize the background that my proposed intercultural indigenous framework is rooted, discussing the 2009 coup d'état and the initial rise of the *Resistencia* to then ground the intercultural indigenous solidarity framework in decolonization theory and indigenous epistemology. **Section B** is divided into three different parts that back-up my argument. First, I look at Garifuna marches in post-coup Honduras that show the reclamation of their culture from the State through decolonization methods grounded in indigenous epistemology. Second, I analyze documents released on OFRANEH's blog that detail different gatherings between Garifuna and non-black indigenous groups post-coup to exemplify the makings of an intercultural movement. Third, I assess the way OFRANEH uses their Twitter and Facebook social media platforms to connect to a global intercultural movement based on transcultural sharing of indigenous mobilization and black liberation.

Section A

La Resistencia: Importance of the 2009 coup d'état

On June 28th, 2009 the President Manuel Zelaya was removed from the presidential house at six in the morning and put on a flight to Costa Rica. The Honduran congress would go on to proclaim this a democratic succession while much of the Honduran and International community recognized it as what it was, a military coup d'état. The 2009 coup d'état occurred for a multitude of reasons, deeply woven into the complex geopolitical history of Honduras that goes

beyond the scope of this essay.⁵ For this essay the coup d'état is important because of the “leftist” policy and seeds of indigenous solidarity that President Zelaya promoted, ultimately being a main reason for the coup, and the resistance movement formed in reaction to this rupture of democracy. Although President Zelaya is part of a land-owning family that has always held power in the hegemonic political sphere of Honduras, he made decisions such as raising the minimum wage and took away school tuitions for poor, working class families, that began to mark him as more “leftist” especially in the traditionally conservative framework of Honduran politics.⁶ The decision that marked his exit and propelled the resistance movement, was his desire to enact a nonbinding poll on whether to add a fourth ballot box in the upcoming November elections. This fourth ballot box, if the majority voted yes, would have led to a constitutional convention to restructure and change the constitution. For the conservative Honduran elite this was a challenge to their hegemonic dominion as reforming the constitution could change the entire political structure of Honduras and dismantle their economic/political positions that have been carefully maintained throughout history. This was also the exact appeal for many different social justice organizations including indigenous activists, that saw their chance in creating a constitution that was equitable and encompassing of their rights and voice. Congress deemed the referendum illegal and the day it was to be taken place, enacted the coup using the military.

This propelled the rise of a resistance movement, popularly known as *la Resistencia*. The inclusion of a wide range of communities, organizations, and people made this movement one of a kind in Honduran history. Political figures across the mainstream political ideological

⁵ If you want to read more on the coup d'état: Julia Tais, “Political crisis and coup d'état in Honduras and democratic setback in Latin America” *Boletim Meridiano* 47:107 (June 2009): 22-23.

⁶ Ibid.

spectrums, feminist organizations, LBTGIA organizers, *campesinos*, working class community members, labor unions, teachers, students, indigenous groups, all came together to demand the reinstatement of Mel Zelaya. Not only was it about the illegality and corruption of democracy but it was the want to reform the constitution that fueled this movement. This desire to reimagine the sociopolitical paradigm to the desires of all these marginalized groups that created the space that brought all these groups together. On July 1st, 2009, three days after the coup d'état, fourteen leaders of indigenous and Afro-descendant organizations released a joint statement condemning the coup:

“We will never abandon our historic struggle for a reform of the political constitution of our country to recognize the multicultural and multilingual state of Honduras; the particular rights of our peoples; [...] the recognition and legitimate defense of our territories and natural resources; the selfdetermination of our peoples; as diverse international treaties, conventions, and declaration establish, principally in Convention No. 169 of the ILO and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples”⁷

This exemplifies the unifying reaction that the coup d'état had on these indigenous groups, which sought a position in the reforming of the Honduran constitution based in the historical contextualization of their peoples and the rights of indigenous, proclaimed on a national and international level. This statement directly post-coup sets the foundational ground on which my argument of an intercultural indigenous solidarity movement is built on.

Intercultural Indigenous Solidarity: Framework based on Theory and Indigenous Voices

The Intercultural indigenous solidarity framework is grounded in decolonization theory that centers indigenous ways of knowledge production, otherwise known as indigenous

⁷ “Posicion Politica de los Pueblos Indigenas de Honduras,” *CIMCA*, July 3 2009, <http://www.aporrea.org/tiburon/a81496.htm>

epistemology. Specifically, in the context of Latin America and indigenous movements, decolonization theory moves past post-colonial theory in recognizing the way “colonial legacy and its relationship to nation-state formation have systematically undermined the historical presence of indigenous peoples, eliminating them physically, betraying, ignoring, and coopting them into the most degrading levels of existence”.⁸ This emphasizes the way power structures and ethnoracial hierarchies constructed during the colonial period presently live on in the current sociopolitical paradigms that support the consistent dehumanization and violence against indigenous people, as there was never a complete overturn of colonial systems in the independence and then democratization movements merely transitional reforms. Decolonization aims to decenter these exact Eurocentric ways of knowledge production rooted in colonial legacy.

I also draw upon decolonization scholars that engage with the way the process of decolonization is inherently interwoven into indigenous ways of life, and their activism. As indigenous scholar Mallory Whiteduck states, “knowing ourselves means knowing our home, our ancestors, and where we came from; accomplishing such a feat is both the first and the final step towards decolonization”.⁹ This specific understanding of the process of decolonization goes in line with indigenous ways of knowing that emphasize the importance of passing down intergenerational ancestral knowledge through sharing of cultural elements that historicizes these communities and emphasizes the relationship of people and their surroundings/all living things.

Using the words “decolonization”, “solidarity”, and rooting them within indigenous ways of knowledge is a way to center the Garifuna voices and attempt to maintain their self-

⁸Guillermo Delgado, “Ethnic Politics and the Popular Movement: Notes on Decolonizing Politics in Latin America,” *Latin American Faces the 21st Century* (California: University of California, 1993), 6.

⁹ Mallory Whiteduck, “‘But it’s our story, Read it.’: Stories My Grandfather Told Me and Writing for Continuance,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 2:1 (2013); 82.

representation agency within this paper. Throughout my research they called upon solidarity between other indigenous groups and the larger African diaspora as well as talked about resisting modern colonial structures of the State. I focus on their specific indigenous ways of knowing by highlighting their cultural factors of difference such as their *tambores* and the way they incorporate those into their activism at multiple levels. Understanding this reinforces the widely accepted notion within anti-colonial theory that indigenous communities are the loco of decolonization theorization.

The use of the “inter” prefix reflects various connotations that are important in understanding why this framework not only opposes multiculturalism but works against the State-rhetoric of multiculturalism. “Inter” indicates the action of bringing together knowledge to reach a more comprehensive understanding and create something new within this “in between” space. It is an integrative process that tackles complex issues through the recognition of difference.¹⁰ Adding this prefix to cultural, a core knowledge producer of indigenous communities and self-determination, represents the building of unity around sharing of cultural differences. This framework does not privilege “unequal intercultural relations” but works to center equity with the tools produced by bringing together different cultures.

Methodology: Combining Historical and Anthropological research with Indigenous Epistemology

My research uses history to understand why this intercultural indigenous movement formed now and the foundation, preceding the coup d'état and encompassing the larger part of the XX century, which it is built off of. History is a crucial tool in providing the analytical frameworks to understand what is happening within these activists space. Contextualizing the

¹⁰ Allen Repko, “Defining Interdisciplinary Studies,” *Interdisciplinary Research: Process and Theory* (Texas: SAGE Publications, 2011).

use of *tambores*, makes the difference of it solely being seen as an instrument to it being seen as a way of reclaiming and re-centering indigenous ways of knowing and resistance outside the colonial grasp of the State. Combining this the anthropological research of OFRANEH's different platforms from their marches to social media, helped me construct my intercultural indigenous solidarity framework and argue that this went beyond Loperena's own anthropological research, but attempted to dismantle multiculturalism in the hopes of a new movement of self-determination. Adding the decolonization theorizations rooted in indigenous epistemology, discussed previously, centered my argument in the perspective of the indigenous voices I hope to honor.

Garifuna Activism Post-coup: Decolonization through the reclamation of culture from the State

After the coup d'état, Loperena highlighted the Garifuna's participation within the larger scope of the Resistencia marches. They made their differential presence clear with cultural markers such as medicinal herb smoke and *tambores*.¹¹ He saw this as an act of reclaiming from the State what has been commodified during the rise of tourism amidst State-invested multicultural practices. He also observed the mockery or complete rejection by many mestizo march attendees of these cultural differences, which he notes is an example of the racialized tensions between Garifuna and non-Garifuna demonstrators that have taken part of this larger Resistencia.¹² Although this is an important observation, layered in the racialized history of mestizaje as the accepted ethnoracial Honduran national identity marker, it does not take into consideration the way Garifuna activists used the marches, and other spaces of activism, in the post-coup era to center themselves and their blackness outside of the State arena. Reclaiming

¹¹ Loperena, "Radicalize Multiculturalism," 518.

¹² *Ibid*, 520.

their cultural markers outside of the State arena is not an act of radicalizing multiculturalism but an act of decolonization, where difference is articulated through the centering of indigenous thought. In multiculturalism, difference is recognized in relation to the centering of Eurocentric cultural norms representative of the colonizer, where any “difference” simply becomes a reductive deviance instead of its own embodiment of humanity, something that anti-colonization scholars argue decolonization does offer.¹³ These acts of decolonization with a repositioning of difference, through reclamation and storytelling are apparent in Garifuna’s activism post-coup. To understand this, I look at a specific march organized by *OFRANEH*, on April 11th, 2011, almost two years after the coup. The title of the march was “*No hay nada que celebrar*”, “There is nothing to celebrate”. It opened up with one of the main leaders of *OFRANEH* stating:

Nuestros mismos tambores, símbolos de la Resistencia, armas de la lucha, en el marco de la celebración de la conmemoración de la mes de afro-descendiente, no podemos celebrar las violaciones de derechos humanos, celebrar sería una afrentación”¹⁴

This opening statement not only expresses the tools of the protest, tambores, but the overall stance of this subset of Garifuna activism. In acknowledging that this march is occurring during the celebration of African Heritage Month while defiantly stating that they refuse to celebrate, a viewpoint emphasized with the title of their march literally translating into “there is nothing to celebrate”, they are taken a direct stance against multiculturalism. In 2002, the government passed a legislative decree that established April as the official African Heritage Month, a sign of

¹³ Aman Sium, Chandi Desai, and Eric Ritskes, “Towards the ‘tangible unknown’: Decolonization and the Indigenous Future,” *Indigeneity, Education, and Society* 1:1 (2012); 5.

¹⁴ English Translation: “Our own **drums, symbols of the resistance**, arms of the fight. **In the framework of celebrating the commemoration of the Afro-descendent month, we can’t celebrate** the violations of human rights, celebrating would be an insult” *OFRANEH*, “No hay nada que celebrar,” *OFRANEH* (blog), April 10, 2011, <https://ofraneh.wordpress.com/2011/04/10/no-hay-nada-que-celebrar>.

multicultural policy that intends to celebrate difference within the Honduran National.¹⁵

OFRANEH rejected this celebration, by stating that there is no celebration when human rights are violated because of their African heritage and the inequities they suffer due to their ethnoracial difference. Within this opening phrase he also acknowledges the tools of the protest which are traditional Garifuna instruments that have their roots in West African instruments and rhythms. *Tambores* are Garifuna hand-carved wooden drums that have become to symbolize their ethnic difference.¹⁶ This march used 216 tambores, to honor the 216 year arrival of Garifuna to Honduras.¹⁷ This is not only a way to engage with their ancestral history, a form of musical storytelling, the sounds from this ethnic instruments create a space where resistance can be focused and acknowledged. Playing traditional music by the indigenous communities, is an act of self-determination and preservation of indigenous knowledge that resists cultural homogenization and persecution.¹⁸ The *OFRANEH* organizers recognized this intrinsic value of music beyond the colonialist exotification of difference, stating

Declarado el estado no ha hecho ningun esfuerzo de fortalecer nuestra cultura, ha que evidentamnete comercialize y retorna como foclor...homogenizacion social entre la dictadura mediatica.¹⁹

¹⁵ Tatyana Kleyn, "Cultural Mismatch in Honduran Garifuna Communities: The Role of Culture, Race, and Language in Schools," *Diaspora, Indigenous, and Minority Education* 4:4 (October 2010); 220.

¹⁶ Loperena, "Radicalize Multiculturalism," 519.

¹⁷ The Garifuna descend from West African slaves who escaped to various Caribbean islands and mixed with the Arawak Indians inhabiting these islands. Through this mixture the term "Afro-indigenous" descriptor comes, in acknowledging their plural racial-ethnic identities. The British relocated them to the Honduran Bay Islands and they were eventually moved by the Honduran government, who wanted to mercantile the islands, to the Northern coast. Mark Anderson, *Garifuna Activism and Consumer Culture in Honduras*, 48.

¹⁸ This references decolonization theory that sees music as a means to engage with difference outside of the colonial framework as well protecting culture from colonial grasp. It creates and makes meaning tied to resistance. Peter Dunbar-Hall and Chris Gibson, *Deadly Sounds, Deadly Places: Contemporary Aboriginal Music in Australia* (Sydney: University of New South Wales, 2005), 296.

¹⁹ English Translation: "We declare the state has not made any effort to strengthen our culture, it must clearly commercialize and return as national folklore... social homogenization between the media dictatorship". *OFRANEH*, "No hay nada que celebrar".

Within this declaration they specifically call out the way the state has not fortified their culture, “*no hecho ningun esfuerzo de fortalecer nuestra cultura*”, but attempted to homogenize it through the commercialization of their cultural practices by the larger media dictatorship for profit. The “media dictatorship” represents the monopolization of mass media sources by a few powerful business figures tied to the political sphere. The homogenization process through commercialization, references the development of the tourist industry simultaneously occurring alongside the State legitimized multicultural rhetoric. Garifuna communities, and their distinct African cultural factors, were pinpointed as a marketable tourist attraction in the late XX century.²⁰ Charles Hale would go on to coin this relationship between multiculturalism and free-trade based economic policy as *neoliberal multiculturalism*.²¹ The Ministry of Tourism commissioned women clad in traditional Garifuna dress, also of West African roots, to advertise for tourist companies and tourist merchandise such as post cards. Entire tourist trips were created around visiting Garifuna communities, eating *pescado frito con cassava*, and dancing traditional dance known as *punta* along the beat of the tambores (See Appendix B). This commodification for profit of Garifuna culture, steeped in their African-black heritage, simultaneously occurred while the State sold off their ancestral land and denied their lived experiences in relation to racism and inequities tied to their blackness.²² In 1996, underneath the

²⁰ To read more about the historical relationship between Garifuna communities and the Honduran tourist industry check out Chapter 3 in Mark Andersons *Garifuna Activism and Consumer Culture in Honduras* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2009) and Elizabeth, Kirtsoglou, “‘They Are Taking Our Culture Away’: Tourism and Culture Commodification in the Garifuna Community of Roatan,” *Critique of Anthropology: A Journal for the Critical Reconstruction of Anthropology* 42:2 (June 2004); 135-57.

²¹ Charles Hale, “Neoliberal Multiculturalism,” *PoLar: Political and Legal Anthropology Review* 28:1 (May 2005): 10-9.

²² OFRANEH throughout the 1980s till present day have mainly focused on seeking legal defense of their ancestral territory throughout the coast, which has been persecuted by the State and multinational corporations seeking to develop this land for African-palm cultivation and tourist destinations. This resulted into the organization adapting an indigenous framework to have more legal legitimacy in using the ILO Convention 169 and other national/international documents that were meant to protect indigenous rights. To learn more about the relationship between land struggles and Garifuna activism, an issue that is still prominent today, check out Chapter 6 in

Presidency of Carlos Reina, Honduras was declared a “multiethnic and multicultural country” and just a year later he also stated: “In Honduras there does not exist sectarianism, xenophobia or apartheid and for all this we are a marvelous country of tolerance”.²³ Multiculturalism fuels this framework and disconnect. It celebrates and recognizes difference as part of the national identity while simultaneously silencing difference, that evokes critique and shifting of power within the structures and systems the State is built on.

Another important element of this march is the place it was situated in and how it manifested a symbolic severing of ties to the state and the development of a movement outside of the State realm. The march ended in front of the *Catedral de Tegucigalpa* located in the Central Park of the historic district of the capital of Honduras, Tegucigalpa. These infrastructural elements and the occupying of this space by the Garifuna, point to reclamation and decolonization. This Catholic church began its construction in 1765 while Honduras was still under Spanish rule. Its positionality in the center of what today is known as the historic district is the commemoration of colonial rule, preservation of historical architecture and honoring of Spanish architecture.²⁴ This space is not just a testament of national history, tourist attraction, and a conservation project but a protection of “abstract space”. Abstract space refers to the “commemoration of a colonial ideology and its implicit racial-cultural logic”.²⁵ The church and the park are symbolic of power structures put in place centuries ago under colonial rule but, much like the infrastructure, their legacies are still present in the ethnoracial hierarchies that marginalize indigenous populations. During colonization Garifunas ancestors were enslaved

Andersons *Garifuna Activism* and Eva Thorne, *Land Grab – Green Neoliberalism, Gender, and Garifuna Resistance in Honduras* (TUCSON: University of Arizona Press, 2013).

²³ Anderson, *Garifuna Activism*, 109.

²⁴ “La Catedral de Tegucigalpa y su historia,” *Vuelve al Centro*, last modified December 15, 2016, <http://vuelvealcentro.com/la-catedral-de-tegucigalpa-y-su-historia>.

²⁵ Robbie Goh, *Contours of Culture: Space and Social Difference in Singapore* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2005), 135.

people, and indigenous people were part of the *encomienda* system or killed off/pushed out of their homes to conquer land. Taking up space in a place that honors a history that continues the oppression of their communities is a tactic employed by many indigenous movements. It is performative opposition that centers the voices of the people this system has attempted to obliterate and disenfranchise.

The note that the march ends on reinforces the creation of new movements and systems without participating in the State structure. The last speech given denounced the *sistema educativo colonial* (colonial system of education). The Garifuna claim the intercultural bilingual education programs put forth by governments Ministry of Education are not about rescuing Garifuna language but a modern day colonization tool of domestication and assimilation.²⁶ The speaker from *OFRANEH* called on the creation of the first Intercultural Garifuna University that would support the recovery and maintenance of cultural factors and not enforce the colonial structures of the State. They emphasized the need to support Afro-indigenous educators to represent and pass on the knowledge of the communities. This is an important element needed to combat State cooptation that attempts to weaken communal ties, disempower Garifuna as political and social agents of change. Fostering indigenous epistemology, outside the confines of State structures, is a key method of decolonization. It merges the theory and praxis of decolonization rooted in anti-colonial movements by centering indigenous ways of knowing, collective organizing, and grassroots survival strategies. The centralizing of the reclamation of cultural factors outside the frameworks built by the State in a space disrupts multiculturalism

²⁶ For more information about this state funded program that came out of multicultural reforms during Carlos Reina's presidency in 1999 check out: Luis Enrique Lopez, "Reaching the unreached: indigenous intercultural bilingual education in Latin America," *Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2010* (2010);10-24.

completely. It is not enough to say there is just a rejection of multiculturalism but a new indigenous movement is created on this rejection in post-coup Garifuna activist setting.

Indigenous Intercultural Solidarity: Dismantling the oppressive separatism of multiculturalism

In this section I focus on the creation of an indigenous intercultural movement post-coup that deconstructs the rigid walls of difference defined by multiculturalism. One of the strongest critiques against multiculturalism is the way it “solidifies differences” and “denying them [ethnic minority groups] the chance to cross cultural borders, borrow cultural influences”.²⁷

Multiculturalism policy creates rigid box of authentic indigenous performance that limits interaction or bridging of communication gaps between different indigenous groups falling underneath this colonizer-homogenous term. The post-coup gatherings between various indigenous groups saw the continuation of the previously pronounced declamation of unity right after the coup, that showcases commitment in working together and disbanding boxes of identity constructed by multiculturalism. These gatherings were not happening only a year after but are still continued presently. The first one I will focus on is the most recent one, the International Gathering of People titled “Berta Caceres Vive” (Berta Caceres Lives On). It was held from the 13th to the 15th of April of 2016 where people from over 130 organizations, 22 countries, and dozens of Honduran movements joined together to speak out against Berta Caceres assassination and the development of a framework of a larger solidarity movement.²⁸ There was discussion and strategizing on how to deal with different issues such as racism, militarism, and territorial the need for territorial sovereignty of the people.

²⁷ Anne Phillips, *Multiculturalism without Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 87.

²⁸ “OFRANEH participa en el Encuentro Internacional ‘Berta Caceres Vive’,” *Red-DESC* (blog), April 15, 2016.

Olivia Zuniga Caceres representing her mother and the Lencan population stated, “Let’s get together. Let’s unite. Let us separate divisions, differences, sectarianism. We only have the path of unity”.²⁹ Miriam Miranda representing *OFRANEH* and the Garifuna population said something similar, “Only by joining together can we confront this monstrous capital, this oligarchy, these groups of economic power, these policies of destruction of the planet”.³⁰ These leaders of different ethnoracial identities were using a similar tone of action that revolved around moving past differences and coming together. This is a clear example of the way this call to action for solidarity is breaking apart multiculturalism that intends to maintain fixed differences. As Mark Anderson notes, “contemporary multiculturalism in Latin American often reproduces a dichotomy between indigenous and black subjects”.³¹ This separation of ethnic-minority groups maintains struggles for resources, land, access between groups distracting the focus from the hegemonic powers that are exerting control over all these different groups. Therefore, to have two different ethnoracial indigenous leaders speak on the necessity of coming together and moving past these differences, highlights the problematic nature of multiculturalism maintaining them separate and “so different”, that they are unable to cross cultural borders. As Miriam Miranda emphasized the only way to defeat these larger systems of oppression that the State was founded on and presently preserves to unify and act in solidarity.

This gathering was not only an abstract voicing of solidarity but there was an actual sharing of culture that reinforces the **intercultural** component of “indigenous **intercultural** solidarity”. A makeshift altar honoring Berta Caceres life was built during the timeframe of these meetings. It invited all people to express their grievances and honoring in whichever way they

²⁹ OFRANEH, *Red-DESC* (blog).

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Anderson, *Garifuna Activism and Consumer Culture in Honduras*, 110.

deemed fit. Garifuna's, although not part of the same indigenous groups or exact spirituality of Berta Caceres, honored her by bringing *humo* (spiritual herb smoke) and other representations of their spirituality. Other Honduran indigenous groups such as the Chorti, Tolupanes, and Miskitos followed suit. This way of honoring this indigenous activist, whom believed strongly in the power of unity and whose daughter continues on this message of the necessity of unity, is an act of cultural sharing that surpasses the barriers of difference that multiculturalism puts up. This does not ignore the differences of these communities, as they each brought a piece of their cultural and ancestral heritage. This is powerful and important as it not only breaks away from multiculturalism but also this assimilationist notion that solidarity has to be built solely on similarity. The act contributing culture in a place that is meant for grassroots organizing and movement building, provides a new space of resistance that allows for different indigenous groups to interchange their ways of knowing and understanding the world outside the sphere of the State.

This intercultural solidarity movement goes beyond just sharing cultural elements but also disseminate different ways of indigenous knowledge production. Four years earlier, after meeting for two days on the coastal city of La Cieba a statement was released titled: *Declaracion del Foro sobre Acaparamiento de Territorio en África y América Latina* (Declaration of the Forum on Land Monopolization in Africa and Latin America). Here Garifuna women and men from 46 different communities located throughout the Honduran Northern coast, different members of *OFRANEH* and other Garifuna civic organizations, non-Garifuna indigenous members such as the Lencas through *COPINH*, Tolupanes, Miskitos, and other *campesino* and Feminist groups came together to discuss the modern-day exile of black people, as they phrased

it, within the Honduras context and the larger global context.³² The two-day forum consisted in contextualizing the fight over land rights by the Garifuna in Honduras, calling out the neoliberal model for being racist and patriarchal, calling out the coup d'état for the exacerbation of the violation of human rights and the failure of the state, and creating a list of demands centering the Garifuna people.³³ The fact that this forum was held in the home of the Garifuna people, and many different indigenous groups traveled from all over the Honduran area to participate even though they were not centered in this specific conversation, emphasizes the dismantling of multiculturalism and the creation of an indigenous intercultural solidarity movement. As historian Dario Euraque notes, the construction of the mestizo Honduran national identity in the early XX century defined a homogenous mestizo that was only representative of the mix between Amerindians and Europeans. Therefore this national identity excluded and erased the black populations of Honduras including the afro-indigenous North Coast Garifuna communities.³⁴ This is important because in Tegucigalpa, the capital of the nation and emblematic of the homogenous mestizo ethnoracial identity, the North Coast “was imagined as both black and foreign”, a distant land not part of the Honduran sociopolitical imaginary.³⁵ Historicizing this racialized spatial separation emphasizes the importance of the forum, consisting of more than just black Honduran community members, occurring in the center of the North Coast. It attempts to eradicate this spatial distancing but it also centers the black Honduran community members and their indigenous lands. This centering is important as they have historically been “othered”, not only within the State framework, but even in indigenous activist spaces.

³² OFRANEH, “Declaracion del foro sobre acaparamiento de territorio en America Latina y Africa,” *OFRANEH* (blog), August 20th, 2011, <https://ofraneh.wordpress.com/2011/08/20/declaracion-del-foro-sobre-acaparamiento-de-territorio-en-america-latina-y-africa>.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Dario Euraque, *Estado, poder, nacionalidad y raza en la historia de Honduras* (Tegucigalpa: Ediciones Subirana, 1996).

³⁵ Loperena, *Radicalize Multiculturalism*, 523.

The theme of the forum itself centered black people in Honduras and the challenges they face around land appropriation by the State and multinational corporations for business purposes. The calling out of systemic racism and pronouncing what the State does as modern-day colonialism emphasizes this want and need to move outside of the frameworks that the State offers. The word the official statement used to acknowledge the non-black organizations and indigenous groups was “*acompañados*” (accompanied), meaning that they are present and supporting but are not the focus. This demonstrates, along with the clear delineation of the purpose of the forum being for black people and the location where it was held, the demands by the Garifuna and other Honduran black populations of non-black community members to recognize their blackness and the systemic racism that is rooted in anti-blackness, impacting everyone. Mel Zelaya’s presidency and the rise of the Resistencia, brought in a new wave of demands by the Garifuna for not just the State and the larger mestizo population, but also for their indigenous counterparts, to engage in conversations about racial prejudices within their own communities. As Mark Anderson notes with his ethnographic research in Garifuna communities since the 1990s, there have always been conversations about anti-black sentiment and racism between themselves and their intrapersonal activism.³⁶ With the coup and the development of this new intercultural indigenous solidarity movement, these conversations were had amongst non-Garifuna and non-black Honduran indigenous leaders and community members. This is another way of bridging the strongholds of difference that multiculturalism supports built on a legacy of racist and separationist policies, while still legitimizing and acknowledging difference. Discussing and strategizing around these interpersonal differences helps tighten the bond of intercultural solidarity.

³⁶ Anderson, *Garifuna Activism and Consumer Culture in Honduras*, 76-94.

The forum emphasized the idea of joining knowledge together to save ancestral land and resources in order to protect the various indigenous groups, revealing the way indigenous epistemology is an implicit component of this indigenous solidarity movement. As noted earlier their relationship to land and all living things are crucial components of the Garifuna's way of life and it guides their activism. Bringing these similar frameworks of understanding community while still validating cultural differences is a crucial act of decolonization where various ways of knowledge production are validated and acknowledged without ever centering Eurocentric norms of knowledge.

The official statement of the forum ended by stating solidarity with the African countries of Somalia, Ethiopia, and Kenya who are suffering due to climate change and the wars created under neocolonial rule. It also stated that it did not agree with the declarations of the World Summit on Afro-descendants. This recognition of the larger African diaspora, emphasized by the "and Africa" component of the forum's title, leads to the third component of this paper which argues that post-coup there is a shift into connecting to a larger Global and diasporic movement of indigenous-black liberation through social media.

OFRANEH Social media platforms: Global movement of black-indigenous resistance

The evidence used in the last section came from mostly OFRANEH's blog and other indigenous blogs. Therefore, highlighting the way social media becomes a platform of self-representation and the use of their own voice to construct their narratives. OFRANEH's Twitter page and Facebook page are excellent resources to understand their voice in the global sphere of the internet. Due to the scope of this project I was not able to quantitatively and empirically analyze the amount of posts that centered certain topics over others. I noted two important things

that argue against the radicalization of multiculturalism and the transition into a larger indigenous intercultural solidarity movement; 1- the expression of solidarity with other indigenous and social justice movements through Latin America and the World and 2- the specific focus on black liberation that centered conversations of anti-blackness that allowed for fluidity and intraracial sharing of understanding around blackness.

In terms of showing solidarity with other indigenous groups, I did an advance search over the last three months' usage of this account, fixating on the three phrases "indigenous, *pueblos indigenas* (indigenous people), and indigenas (indigenous)", and 200 posts talking about indigenous movement's outside of Honduras appeared. Just to give an example, on November 17th they retweeted the new Colombian Peace Accords from the National Colombian Indigenous Organization's account and on November 15th they retweeted from the International Rivers account the ACLU petition to end the militarized response against Standing Rock. These two retweets, amongst the 200 examples, express the way this social media platform is a way to create a global intercultural solidarity movement where indigenous knowledge and narratives, produced by themselves, can be shared instantly. Their social media platform provides the Garifuna the chance to connect, understand, and interact within this larger indigenous movement, continuing to break down multicultural barriers. They are still able to create their own identity and platform that recognizes their specific difference and intersections while acknowledging and supporting others. The sharing of various petitions, as the Standing Rock example shows, is a way to provide tangible action to their virtual support. This virtual solidarity movement reinforces this notion of intercultural sharing that has and will have continue to impact how these grass-root movements build, resist, and attempt to decolonize. It surpasses not only racial-ethnic barriers of difference but land, distance, language, and time barriers of difference.

Facebook consists of similar content found on the Twitter account except through this platform they are able to share live-streaming, which is a tool to counter the monopoly of mass media corporations. As Turner notes “the use of the internet gives indigenous peoples the possibility of manipulating their own representations”.³⁷ With the mainstream media and the State attempting to create a certain image and representation of these groups, social media is a tool to define political agency and the creation of a platform outside of the State agenda. Social media helps shatter the barriers placed around these indigenous groups by multiculturalism and the larger colonizing and imperialist power structures. They are able to separate their identities from the State rhetoric that either commodifies or criminalizes them, both tools of dehumanization, and present themselves the way they please on a global platform. This self-definition of culture and history is crucial in resisting assimilation and erasure of their communities. The countering of mass-media depictions of their struggles also allows for the Garifuna to receive international support and for a counter narrative to be constructed. There were fifteen petitions tweeted between November 24th and November 30th, where each were retweeted a minimum twenty times, around the illegal arresting of a young Garifuna women activist. This exposure can potentially be crucial in garnering support and visibility needed to apply pressure in protecting these communities and stopping the State. The virtual solidarity movement is able to center and support their needs with these tools.

On both Twitter and Facebook, using the advance search tools, the phrase “black lives matter” appeared simultaneously with the rise of the U.S. based Black Lives Matter movement after Trayvon Martin’s murder in 2012. I noticed a multitude of articles posted by *OFRANEH* that discussed police brutality in the U.S. and the criminalization of black bodies. By 2013

³⁷ Bryan Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism* (Singapore: Routledge, 2002), 184.

OFRANEH's Facebook portal also connected to a separate Facebook page titled "Garifuna Lives Matter" (GLM). On top of the internal indigenous intercultural solidarity movement there is a transcultural indigenous movement forming that centers blackness, spurred by the centering of systemic racism by Garifuna activists in larger indigenous activists' spaces as well as the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement in the U.S. that has now connected through this virtual space of communication and sharing. The founder of the GLM page spoke about the transnational relationship between U.S and Honduras, GLM has partnered with OFRANEH in creating programs around the Garifuna struggles in Honduras and the U.S. Mark Anderson also touches upon this transcultural sharing that has reimagined Honduran Garifuna blackness in relation to U.S. blackness and allowed for a shift in cultural understandings of African heritage and black identity. Chapter 5 in his book, Garifuna Activism and Consumer Culture in Honduras, is titled "This Is the Black Power We Wear: Black America and the Fashioning of Young Garifuna Men". This chapter explores the way Garifuna men in Honduras consume U.S. blackness through hip-hop and certain clothing that connotes the empowered symbolic blackness of urban U.S. spaces while also using iconography of Caribbean blackness such as Bob Marley, to self-define their blackness combining these different movements. Although this chapter was written way before the creation of their twitter and facebook pages, they elude to this sentiment that Garifuna blackness and their complex relationship to indigeneity cannot be defined statically. It is fluid and transcends the barriers the State and others attempt to impose on it. Not only has social media allowed for global solidarity and the tools of self-defining and political agency outside the States hegemonic hold, but also it has allowed for the space of reclaiming and redefining or creating blackness and African heritage that goes against the rigid boxes of multiculturalism on a transnational level.

This increase of social media usage occurring simultaneously after the coup d'etat, allows for Honduran Garifuna activism to interact with the African diaspora in a way that centers blackness as a core tenet of their social movements and allows for transnational activist exchange around a collective black identity. Robin J. Hayes argues “institutions indigenous to the African diaspora help facilitate transnational exchanges between Black social movements”. Using this understanding, OFRANEH’s social media pages become “institutions” that help “facilitate” this exchange that surpasses all types of barriers and led to a larger unity around blackness. Like the intercultural indigenous solidarity movement, allows for the dismantling of close offed definitions of blackness and engages with the complex discourse of blackness throughout the global African diaspora in attempts to provide support and unity in their individual resistance efforts. The idea is not to join under one definition of black identity politics or melt into one understanding, as multiculturalism attempts to through its essentialization of difference, but creates conversation and decrease the chasms of communication in order to provide a greater understanding of inequities that are tied to common systems of oppression such as the centering of Euro-centric norms or White supremacy.

The joint statement released on July 1st, 2009 was the first sign of a shifting that would encompass the rise of a new intercultural indigenous solidarity movement, bringing together indigenous communities formally separated by multiculturalism policies and ethnoracial barriers in the hopes for a more equitable future. Loperena observed a crucial shift in Garifuna activism that met traditional multiculturalism with disdain and the power of reclamation. His argument did not go far enough to encompass the process of decolonization and the creation of new indigenous activist movements centered on politics of cultural difference that were unified by the desire for survival and true systemic change that was occurring post-coup. This was not

radicalizing multiculturalism but a disbanding of this rhetoric and policies that had attempted to silence these grassroots movements while still make a profit of their cultural heritage.

Strengthened by the vacuum left by the coup d'état to reimagine a constitution that disbanded the colonial legacies, Garifuna and other indigenous groups responded with the centering of indigenous epistemology to fuel the strategizing and construction of a movement never before seen in Honduras. Embedded in Garifuna activism, whether it in the streets, in forums, or social media platforms, was a complete rejection of multiculturalism and the rise of intercultural solidarity on a national and global scale. In engaging in a more extensive ethnographic research with the activists on the grounds and continuing to follow their multiple platforms to see where they move forward in the future could potentially provide the tools for other indigenous movements to build similar movements. The humanity and livelihood of so many is at stake. Olivia Zuniga Caceres's exclamation of, "Black Lives Matter", rings with much more clarity and purpose now.

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