

GARIFUNA SETTLEMENT DAY: TOURISM ATTRACTION, NATIONAL CELEBRATION DAY, OR MANIFESTATION OF ETHNIC IDENTITY?

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This article focuses on the way the government of Belize, a postcolony nation in Central America, has to maneuver between its aim to work towards a nation-state mentality and the existence of local ethnic manifestations, which emphasizes the internal diversity in this multiethnic society. The government and all kind of (non)government-related organizations in Belize promote Belize as an attractive tourist destination. In doing so it is important to promote the variation of possibilities that are available in the country. Ethnic celebrations are one of them. As a tourist attraction these ethnic-related manifestations do have an economic value not only for both the government and business organizations, but also for local entrepreneurs. The authors suggest that the government has three arguments to encourage ethnic-related manifestations. As a result, the ethnic groups are able to take advantage of their special celebrations to attract tourists. In addition, these events are also an opportunity for local entrepreneurs to sell their ethnic merchandise to tourists. Finally, these special celebration days are a possibility for the tourists to get acquainted with local indigenous cultures.

Belize; Nation building; Ethnicity; Ethnic tourism; Authenticity

Introduction

“Where the Hell is Belize.” This slogan—written on the front of T-shirts and baseball caps—implies that Belize sells itself as a rather unknown country. This slogan, but also others such as the phrase “Discover Hidden Belize” on the cover of a magazine (Philips, 1994, p. 11), gives this country in Central America the image of a place that is unique, unspoiled, and somehow exclusive. The immediate

question that arises is what is so unique and unspoiled in Belize? Sutherland (1998) states that the “recent ‘discovery’ of Belize by foreigners as a tourist Mecca and destination for the ‘authentic’ experience could only happen because in the past, Belize was undeveloped, under populated, unknown” (pp. 92–93). She connects authenticity directly with being undeveloped and unknown.

In this article we want to further explore this relationship by analyzing the revival of Garifuna cul-

ture, an ethnic group of mixed indigenous Caribbean and African descent that makes up 11% of the country's population. We chose the Garifuna case because the Garifuna have always been a rather invisible ethnic group to most tourists (Roessingh, 2001, p. 156). The number of tourists exploring Belize is increasing. Amongst these tourists are also visitors who are interested in Belize's culture and its ethnic groups. This has created a situation in which different ethnic groups have become more prominent in the image making of Belize as a tourist destination. As a result of this, ethnic groups feel the need to differentiate themselves from other groups. Therefore, the Garifuna are rethinking their ethnic background and trying to capitalize on it.

The revitalization of ethnicity in this context does not only apply to processes of self-awareness and politics, but also to the notion of economic opportunities. An important actor in this process is the Belizean government. How does their effort to create a sense of national identity correspond with revitalization of culture on a local level? What is the content of the Belizean national identity and how does the Belizean government steer this process of nation building? After a short introduction to Belize and its tourism development, we elaborate on ethnic tourism (Van den Berghe, 1994), the importance of authenticity in this type of tourism, and the role of the state. With the Garifuna case, and more precisely the analysis of Garifuna Settlement Day, we illustrate the processes discussed earlier in more detail.

Belizean Tourism: The Garifuna Case

Dangriga, formerly called Stann Creek, is the district capital and the largest town in southern Belize. It's also the cultural centre of the Garifuna, a people of mixed indigenous Caribbean and African descent, who overall form about eleven percent of the country's population. Since the early 1980s Garifuna culture has undergone a tremendous revival; as part of this movement the town was renamed Dangriga, a Garifuna word meaning "sweet waters"—applied to the North Stann Creek flowing through the centre. The most important day in the Garifuna calendar is November 19, Garifuna Settlement Day, when Dangriga is packed solid with expatriate Belizeans returning to their roots and the town erupts into wild celebration. The party begins the evening before, and the drumming and punta dancing pulsate all night long. In the morning there's a re-enactment of the arrival from Honduras, with people

landing on the beach in dugout canoes decorated with palm leaves. (Eltringham, 2001, p. 187)

The above paragraph in *The Rough Guide to Belize* focuses on a town, Dangriga (8814 inhabitants) (Central Statistical Office, 2000a), in the southern part of Belize. Actually, there is not much to do in Dangriga. You can take the boat to Tobacco Caye. In front of the Belizean coast there is a long-drawn-out area of coral reefs. These coral reefs rise above the water in many places and form chains of "exotic" islands that, in Belize, are called "cayes." These "bounty islands" are the largest attraction for tourist and have the reputation of being gorgeous places to snorkel and dive.

But if you are in Dangriga it seems there is nothing interesting to do. No beautiful Maya temple, no howler monkey or jaguar reserve. At first sight Dangriga is a simple small town, nothing special. Often tourists are not aware that they are in an area in which a separate ethnic group, the Garifuna, is in the majority. Their perception is that they are in a place where a remarkable number of Afro-Belizeans are living. The atmosphere is more Caribbean than Latin American.

The Garifuna are an invisible ethnic group to most tourists (Roessingh, 2001, p. 156). That idea declines once the unsuspecting tourist meets one of the "I-am-your-best-friend" types (for no apparent reason). These are young men hanging around near the bus station who can sense that tourists are in Dangriga for the first time. They take you to the best and cheapest hotel in town or they accompany you on a walk through the town for your own safety. However, the "I-am-your-best-friend" type also needs to make a living, so he gladly receives Belizean dollars in return for his help. Too few or no dollars will lead to an enormous flood of abuse; too many and you will not get rid of them (Roessingh, 2001, p. 156). These entrepreneurs are not the prototype grass-roots professional guides who pass on cultural information (Bras, 2000; Cohen, 1985; Volker & Sorée, 2002) and point out to the tourist that Dangriga is more than just a Belizean town with an Afro-Caribbean tint to it. Nonetheless, the trademark of these small entrepreneurs is the Garifuna culture. They are often a source of firsthand information, approaching outsiders and, commercially motivated, pointing out that Dangriga is a Garifuna town. Because the

Garifuna have an Afro-American appearance and can also point out that they have an Indian background, most middlemen know that they have a more or less surprising story (Roessingh, 2001, p. 156). Actually, these young men play their uncontrolled part in a more complicated network in which tourism is incorporated, because the government of Belize has their own more controlled way of using different kinds of cultural expressions from ethnic groups for their tourist policy.

On September 21, 1981 Belize, the former British Honduras, became independent. This date is the formal end of a process of gaining independence that took 17 years. In 1964, British Honduras received the right to internal self-government and in 1973 the name of the country was changed to Belize. The government of this multiethnic country, with a population of 232,111 inhabitants (Central Statistical Office, 2000a), strives toward national unity. So the first signal to the outside world is an image in which the various ethnic groups are happily living together in a nation-state. This implies that the inhabitants of Belize have or ought to have a common national interest, amongst others to improve the economic situation of the country.

Belize is not a very rich country and natural sources are scarce. In spite of this, its economic position is quite favorable in comparison to countries such as El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. The country had to deal with many economic setbacks once it had acquired independence. In this period (the 1980s) Belize's export consisted mainly of products from the agricultural industry, such as sugar, molasses, citrus fruits, and bananas. Due to high oil prices, low sugar prices, and a declining world market, the country was on the verge of bankruptcy in 1981 (Barry, 1995, p. 39). Today, Belize depends largely on the economic situation in the US. Much of the agricultural produce is exported to the US (Barry, 1995). Due to the fact that the Belizean dollar is linked to the US dollar, an economic setback in the US hits Belize hard, making it economically very fragile.

During the last decade there has been some change in this relationship. The new policy of the US to cut in aid programs has had its influence on the aid program for Belize too. "The Peace Corps is much reduced in numbers, and the USAID and U.S. Information Service no longer exist. Interestingly, the

United Nations Development Programme and European Community aid programs continue, and both Taiwan and Japan are larger providers of foreign aid than the United States" (Sutherland, 1998, p. 62). This situation confronted the Belizean government with the need to explore new economic possibilities of their country.

A large number of Belizeans depend on the many service and government institutions in the country. Much of the labor is seasonal. This means that many employees only work during limited periods of the year or as day laborers and consequently have no fixed income. The difference between rich and poor, which is becoming more visible, and the unrest that is caused by a chronic shortage of employment are causing much dissatisfaction (Roessingh, 2001, p. 37). Problems caused by unemployment, the political and economical marginal role the country has in the region, the everlasting conflict over land with Guatemala, and the fact that Belize is a young, independent country makes it necessary for the government to create a sense of internal self-awareness on a national level. One of the tools the government uses to develop a national identity is the use of symbols related to "sources of income for the country." These symbols are, for instance, Belizean rum, sugar cane, citrus, shrimps, or lobsters. For tourism the government uses the natural environment and wildlife as symbols. "With its natural resources of forests and coastline and its multicultural, English-speaking population friendly to the United States, Belize is an important tourist destination for the alternative tourist and the eco-tourist, as well as the recreational 'sun-sea-sand-sex' tourist" (Sutherland, 1998, pp. 92-93).

In his article "Imagining Belize," Philips (1994) describes in detail the role of tourism advertising in the image making of Belize. Philips states that "Belize has become imagined as the ideal tropical paradise, a place where eco-tourism flourishes among pristine flora and fauna" (p. 11). This image is prominent since the mid-1980s. At that time ecotourism was strongly embraced as the new, rapidly growing form of tourism (Belize Archives Department, 1998). The number of tourist arrivals in Belize in 1991 was 77,542 visitors. This number increased to a total of 180,795 in 1999, an increase of 2.3% over the previous year. Since 1991 there has been an average annual increase of 2.7% in the

total number of tourist arrivals (Central Statistic Office, 2000b). On the one hand, the latest figures show no remarkable growth (185,705 tourists visitors in 2001). But, on the other hand, when taking into account the cruise ship visitors (48,116 in 2001 and 319,690 in 2002), there is an explosive growth between 2001 and 2002 (www.belizetourism.org).

Ethnic Tourism and the Role of the National Government

In the shadow of the development in which different kinds of tourists explore the country, the “meeting ground” with the Belizean people has become more occupied. Like the small Garifuna middlemen in Dangriga, representatives of other ethnic groups in Belize have become more visible. Showing one’s ethnic background became attractive. As a result of this, tourist programs are designed with a strong emphasis on the culture of specific (regional local, ethnic) groups. These programs are characterized by cultural differentiation and tend to promote the cultural or ethnic “uniqueness” of a place. They are inextricably linked with local or regional efforts to revitalize a region’s heritage and attractions. In different places in Belize the “culture thing” is going on. Whether it is the way people dance or make music or the way they produce handicrafts, all these “culture things” can be very characteristic for the identity of an ethnic group.

In the region of Belize, Guatemala, and Chiapas (Mexico) the weaving products made by the Mayas are not only popular among the tourists, but are also characteristic for their identity. The drums and baskets have the same position among the Garifuna. They represent their identity but are also products that are interesting for the tourist market. Most of these ethnic products and artistic expressions are visible on market days and days that the ethnic community collectively emphasizes its common background. In Belize, organizations like the National Garifuna Council and the Toledo Maya Cultural Council represent the historical and cultural aspects of the two ethnic groups rather than their political interests. It seems that these kinds of organizations try to preserve their own cultural heritage but also work towards a climate in which there is space for the demands of the ethnic tourist. Van den Bergh (1994) describes this kind of tourist: “This tourist

wants unspoiled natives, not bilingual waiters and beachboys. The native is not merely a host, a provider of creature comforts, a servant, but becomes, quite literally, the spectacle” (p. 9).

The demands of ethnic tourism are described as the eagerness of tourists to discover the real life as experienced by people of different cultures and the urge to participate in some aspects of daily life. Alienated tourists go abroad in search of other lives. This quest for authenticity is considered by some to be a prominent motive of modern tourism, which wells up from a feeling of alienation (MacCannell, 1976). Whether or not these tourists will succeed in their search for authenticity, the result of the arrival of tourists in an area is that local communities become the spectacle.

If the native is the spectacle, who is the provider: the National Garifuna Council, the Toledo Maya Cultural Council, or the government? Besides the influence of the ethnic group self there is another important player—the government. Many scholars (Bras, 2000; Hooker & Dick, 1993; Kipp, 1993; Picard, 1997) interpret this focus on cultural and ethnic diversity as part of the process of nation building. The way different cultures are displayed for a domestic and foreign audience is defined by the state, whose main interest is to create an indigenous national culture. This national culture is defined as “a combination of high points . . . a hybrid mix of the best of existing cultures in the nation” (Hooker & Dick, 1993, p. 4). This focus on cultural and ethnic diversity as part of a nation-building process has been one of the main issues of the Belizean government since independence. Until a few years ago the policy of the government was focused on the attitude of “being a Belizean.” This means that for a long time the government has been working towards an image that accentuates what is “common” to all inhabitants. The context in which this communality takes form is the nation-state and inside this context the interest of the government is national unification, in which the various ethnic groups work towards the consolidation of a community of interests of the “citizens” (Baud et al., 1994, p. 50).

The message of being a Belizean reflects on the way people deal with questions of nationality. During conversations in Dangriga, the question of whether the country was developing into a nation-state or not was generally answered positively. In-

formants liked to suggest to the outside world that there is a national identity. It was striking that they based their national identity on the natural state of the country. Respondents could passionately argue that Belize is the most beautiful country in the world. "Once you have drunk Belizean water it is certain that you will come back one day." Beside these kind of remarks of individual Belizeans, the government uses ceremonial "moments" and national symbols as signs in which the unity of the state is represented. Independence Day, for example, is celebrated on September 21 in Belize. Another Belizean holiday is all about patriotism and heroism. On this day, the Belizeans remember that a group of colonists, who had strong ties with the British kingdom, beat the Spaniards in the battle for St. George Caye on September 10, 1798. The crew of a Spanish squadron was victim of a surprise attack by the local militia, which resulted in their surrender in spite of their material and military superiority (Dobson, 1973, pp. 77–78). This victory is still regarded as the historic moment that signaled the freedom of the British colony from the Spanish claim to this region. Therefore, many Belizeans regard St. George Caye Day as a day that reflects the British colonial rule and is primarily treasured by the descendants of the first colonists. This group can be found within the Creole community and is a subgroup within the nation with a certain status. In Dangriga, hardly any attention is paid to St. George Caye Day. This day is seen as a typical Creole celebration. Like Garifuna Settlement Day on November 19, St. George Caye Day is a national holiday initiated by the government. But in spite of the nation-building efforts of the government both national holidays are also related to historical events that are colored by ethnicity.

Beside these ceremonial "moments," which can be used as a political instrument by the government to make unification tangible, there are monuments in which the nation-state is symbolized. In Belize City there are three historic buildings, the Government House, the courthouse, and St. John's Anglican Church, which represent monumental value. The National Assembly in Belmopan is built on Independence Hill and is inspired by Maya architecture. Also due to the design, the parliament building is the symbol of the centripetal power of the nation-state. Some of the Maya temples, like Altun Ha, Lubaantun, Xunantunich, and lately the site of

Caracol, are, besides their tourist value, also symbols of national identity. On Tuesday February 5, 2002 the official opening of the museum of Belize took place. The ruling government-related newspaper, *The Belize Times* of Sunday, February 10, 2002 printed the following phrase on the front page under the title "The Cultural Revolution Cometh":

A major cultural milestone was reached last, Tuesday, with the official opening of the Museum of Belize. One hundred thirty-eight years ago the slaves of Belize attained freedom. Twenty-one years ago Belize attained political independence. And now in 2002 Belize has finally broken the shackles of cultural slavery and attained artistic independence. Cultural freedom.

This article expresses an awareness of national identity and emancipation. During the elections of 1998, one of the popular political slogans, "Belize for the Belizeans," was scrawled on many walls. These slogans express the internal dissatisfaction among the Belizeans with national policies. Issues at stake were: the admission of refugees from Guatemala and El Salvador, the possibilities for foreign investors to buy and own land in the country, and the influence that the US had on internal affairs.

The media also plays an important part in the process of nation building. It is primarily Radio Belize that creates the impression that Belize has national unity. The various programs provide the listener with an image of a unique state in which the multiform compilation of the population assures a varied content of the nation-state. Radio Belize is primarily directed to internal current affairs. The various independent newspapers in Belize, such as *The Belize Times*, *The Reporter*, and *Amandala*, show the same tendency. Belizean television is just starting off. Its broadcast is just a few hours a day and the programs are primarily focused on offering national subjects to those that are watching. Through this the impression is given that Belize is a friendly, democratic country in which each Belizean is treated equally.

Another area in which the processes of nation building in Belize are discussed is the academic world. On May 25 and 26, 1987, the First Annual Studies on Belize Conference took place in Belize City. The theme was "Ethnicity and Development." During this congress, Bolland (1987) presented his article "Race, Ethnicity and National Integration in Belize." In his analysis of the multiethnic Belize his

point of departure was the fact that the majority of the Belizeans descend from migrants (Bolland, 1987, p. 1). This is one of the problems for policy-making officials in turning the different ethnic groups into an integrated whole, the principal of a nation-state.

Bolland (1987, p. 1) calls the process of working towards a nation-state nation building. He places the mutual ethnic problems that stagnate the formation of the nation-state in a historic frame. In a revised edition of the above-mentioned article, he states that the colonial state promotes racial and ethnic stereotypes by placing different ethnic groups against each other and mutually playing them out. People had to look up to the elite, because they had the political and economic power (Bolland, 1988, p. 200). Belize has to deal with this inheritance that is primarily based on political and social-economic class stratification. The country has wound up in a process of decolonization. Ethnic contrasts mostly manifest themselves in the political and economic arenas. Bolland (1988, p. 200) does not deem it likely that the process of decolonization in Belize will go hand in hand with interethnic and/or class violence, because Belize does not have such a tradition.

At the same congress, the late Belizean scientist, Topsey (1987), presented an article entitled "The Ethnic War in Belize." In this article Topsey expressed his concern for the strong increase of ethnic interest groups, such as the Toledo Maya Cultural Council, the National Garifuna Council, and the Belizean Creole organization Isiah Mortar Harambee. He thought it probable that these organizations might strengthen mutual prejudices and therefore have a polarizing effect. In time this could result in ethnic separatism. A year later, on March 26 and 27, during the National Cross-Cultural Awareness Conference in Belize City, Palacio (1988) stated in "May the New Belize Creole Please Rise," that the academic discussion on the ethnic differences plays the first fiddle too much in Belize. Attention should be paid to the large differences in living standards between the social-economic classes and not to the lack of a clear national identity. Palacio's opinion is that two important obstacles must be overcome on the road to the "new Belize Creole." In the first place, ethnicity must be emphasized less as characteristic for a group. After all, the creolization process has been going on for three centuries, and in the cities many people are offspring of parents with

diverse ethnic backgrounds. In the second place, people in Belize will have to accept that both phenotypic and cultural characteristics of the different ethnic groups represent the national identity of what Palacio calls the new Belize Creole. Belize's identity has always been based on a national "us-feeling" of an ethnically heterogeneous population that was threatened by "them" from outside. The contrast in appearance of the various ethnic groups in Belize is much more visible compared to its Latin-American neighbors. But still when we follow Wilk (1995) in his "Learning to be Local in Belize: Global Systems of Common Difference" this "we-they" mentality did not emerge a consensus on the intrinsic meaning of the concept of "national identity." There is the sense of this "national identity," but nobody knows precisely what it contains. So what is sold to the tourists: the natural beauty of the country, the beaches, and the different cultural elements of some of the ethnic groups, which is a part of what is supposed to be the national identity of the people in this country.

The Belizean government's role is a dual one. On the one hand, their general interest is the well-being of the nation-state. By supporting specific Garifuna art and commemoration days, the government can underline the multiethnic face of the country in a harmless manner. It is not culture in its broadest meaning that is cultivated for tourists, but those aspects of regional culture that can serve as tourist objects, like rituals, dances, and architecture. Several scholars (Acciaoli, 1985; Kipp, 1993; Picard, 1996, 1997) have called these the "showcase" elements of culture; those elements that are harmless in the sense that they do not conflict with the government's ideas of a national identity and have gained acceptance as an original form of national culture. These "showcase" elements are suitable to be transformed and translated into tourist attractions. As Sofield (2000) stated: "culture is increasingly the province of the state rather than the community, its definition rendered not by its people but by its governments for political ends, with the energetic involvement of a number of agencies of the state including national tourism organizations" (p. 109; see also Leong, 1997). On the other hand, the national government also regards the cultural expressions of some of the ethnic groups of Belize as important sources of income. It provides them with the

possibility of transforming Garifuna culture into a product for the tourist market. The expectation of high economic returns is another way to legitimize the special attention for ethnic groups in their creation of a national identity.

Garifuna Settlement Day

Several days before November 19, the festivities that finally explode on Garifuna Settlement Day start in Dangriga. This “national” holiday is dedicated to the day that a large group of Garifuna refugees in 1832 established themselves in the Stann Creek District. Garifuna Settlement Day is officially a national holiday. Nevertheless, this festival is primarily celebrated in the four Garifuna villages and in the places Punta Gorda and Dangriga. This celebration is so strongly entwined in the historic and cultural background of the Garifuna that it is practically impossible to transform this day into a national Belizean celebration, which could be shared by all ethnic groups in the country. The founder of this day of commemoration was Thomas Vincent Ramos (1887–1955). In 1941, he organized the first Settlement Day in Stann Creek. The initiative was embraced so enthusiastically that all of the other Garifuna places followed the example in 1942. The following year, Ramos requested the governor of British Honduras, Sir John Hunter, to give November 19 an official status. This was granted on the understanding that Settlement Day would first only be recognized as an official holiday for those places in which the majority of the population was Garifuna. In practice, this meant that there was practically no economic or administrative life in the largest places in the Stann Creek District and the Toledo District in the days before and after Settlement Day. It is likely that due to this inconvenience and to stimulate the process of nation building, this commemoration day was upgraded in 1977 and became a national holiday. With this act it seems as if the national government has recognized the position of the Garifuna as an ethnic group within Belize. By doing so, they basically admit that cultural and ethnic diversity is part of the process of nation building.

Garifuna Settlement Day is completely dominated by two elements. First, it is a commemoration upon which the landing of 1832 is reenacted. Furthermore, like the days prior to it, this day is one continuous

celebration. Today, Garifuna Settlement Day has expanded and become an exhibition of what being a Garifuna is all about. Several elements of their culture are highlighted. A lot of attention is paid to various dances like the Punta and the John Canoe. And a Garifuna queen contest is organized in which the competitors have to show their ability to perform all kinds of Garifuna songs and dances and their knowledge of the Garifuna culture. The whole town is crowded with small food stalls selling Garifuna specialties like *hudut* (banana porridge with fish) and *ereba* (cassava bread). The whole celebration is accompanied by heavy drinking. Besides Garifuna from other parts of Belize, Honduras, Guatemala, and the US, tourists (read outsiders) account for a considerable part of those present.

The official part of Garifuna Settlement Day starts at sunrise on November 19. Garifuna men and women decorated with palm tree leaves sail in from the sea and up the North Stann Creek in canoes and motorboats. The quay is filled with spectators. Both in the boats and on the wharf, participants and spectators wave the yellow, white, and black Garifuna flag. After those on the water arrive ashore, they offer cassava and other ingredients of traditional Garifuna food to thank *Bungiu* (God) and the ancestors for the safe and successful crossing. Then the procession, led by a few drummers, heads for the Catholic Church where a mass is held in front of the parish. This is done in Garifuna. The nice thing about this service is that certain cultural influences that the Garifuna have absorbed from three very different cultural areas in time come together. These cultural areas are the South American, the West African, and the West European. After the church service, musical performances are held on every street corner, the pubs are open, and everything is festive.

In the afternoon, dignitaries who represent various parts of the community interrupt the revelry. Their speeches can be accompanied by a lot of rhetoric. In general, the content is linked to the historical context of the day. The speeches also always emphasize the importance of the nation-state and democracy. It is usually clear what the speaker’s background is. Political figures do not shy from, for example, praising their own party and attacking the opposition. All of this is happening during a commemoration, which accentuates the common descent of the ethnic group. During the day, a tractor with a

trailer rides up and down Dangriga. It is the heart of the parade. On the trailer there are countless people dancing. In between them, hardly visible, there is a band. In front of and behind the tractor there are people singing loudly, dancing, and cheering. Besides these commemoration days and holidays with the status of a “national” day off, there are a number of regional festivities in which an ethnic group, for instance, expresses its “religious gratefulness” or internally organizes a competition.

These days generally contain events that have received a permanent position in society and it becomes clear that dance and musical expression, art, and all kinds of ethnic handicrafts are cultural symbols with an internal binding message. Roessingh (2001) showed in his research that Garifuna who live in, for example, Belize City and participate on Garifuna Settlement Day in Dangriga figuratively walk up front during the parade in order to show to the audience that they are conscious of their ethnic identity. In a way, this conspicuous expression of “belonging” is a sort of ethnic confession. It is not at all remarkable that these feelings of confession are expressed at commemoration days, because many of these people live in other non-Garifuna places and generally do not advertise their ethnic background. Outside of their geographic ethnic area, socioeconomic and politically correct expressions are used and one’s life strategy is based on a low-profile attitude. It is no surprise that these people then grab Garifuna Settlement Day as a chance to openly express themselves as a Garifuna.

At the same time, a commemoration day such as Garifuna Settlement Day creates an interesting possibility to attract outsiders to the area. This new audience consists of a variety of people: Garifuna from other areas (expats), domestic tourists, and foreign tourists. Until now, foreign tourists only came across this event by accident. The Garifuna are still relatively unknown among foreign tourists. As a result, expressions of their daily life and cultural heritage are not yet commercialized for tourism. Nonetheless, Dangriga has its share of tourism growth. Mainly responding to tourism, investors have opened a considerable number of new hotels and guesthouses (Humphreys, 2002). This probably suits the tourist who is interested in ethnic groups as they come to see a manifestation of an “authentic lifestyle.”

Conclusion

How “authentic” is Garifuna Settlement Day? Is this day a local ethnic celebration or a day in which the government presents itself as strategic spin-doctor with the ability to use this ethnic celebration day in a two-level way? Or is the public attention for Garifuna Settlement Day the result of a revitalization process of the ethnic identity of the Garifuna? And what is the role of the tourist in this arena?

For the Garifuna this day is a commemoration day. This means that it represents the symbolic recollection of the day the Garifuna arrived at the shores of a country that was dominated by the British Crown. The most striking fact is that the colonial power that deported the defeated Garifuna from their native island, St Vincent in the Caribbean Sea, was the British Crown (Gonzalez, 1988). This day is a historical and emotional reminder for the Garifuna of their past and their position as ethnic minority in this country. All the symbolic and ritual parts of the celebration were invented by a committee as a reflection of the moment that a large group of Garifuna refugees in 1832 established themselves in Stann Creek. Garifuna Settlement Day is the outcome of this historical event. This kind of “authenticity” is based on essentialistic feelings and the revitalization of ethnic identity, which is reflected in the construction of ceremony and the celebration of a historical event. In the end this event was not created as a tourist attraction, but the tourist came anyway. Besides the fellow countryman and Garifuna people from abroad, a new audience of foreign tourists can be recognized.

The tourists are looking at what Goffman (1959) calls the frontstage, but in Goffman’s perspective there is also a backstage. The tourists who are spectators of an ethnic-oriented celebration, the frontstage, are maybe not aware that the other side, the backstage, of this celebration is deeply rooted in historical and politically complicated susceptibilities. Officially the National Garifuna Council organizes this day as a cultural and not as a political manifestation. The invitation for outsiders to celebrate this day together with the “indigenous” Garifuna is open. The cultural status of this manifestation makes it less problematic to join the party. Settlement Day is not designed for mass tourism, like Chichen Itza, the Maya site in Yucatan, Mexico,

and the fun-sun-beach mass tourism in Cancun in Quintana Roo, also in nearby Mexico, or to a lesser degree the beaches and diving opportunities in the village of San Pedro on Ambergris Caye in Belize. Settlement day is an event for the accidental tourist, the backpacker who is traveling through or the tourist who is spending his time in another place but is attracted to the scene because of its well-known eruption of festivities. More and more Dangriga is the place to be if you want to experience a manifestation of ethnic identity in the context of a national celebration day.

The government's most important task is to work towards a nation-state mentality in this multiethnic society. At the same time, the government has to deal with the internal relationship between the different ethnic groups and ethnic minorities and their collective intrinsic sentiments about the past. From this perspective the government uses this celebration day not only in a two-level way, but even in a three-level way. First of all, the government recognizes this day as a national holiday, which makes it more cultural and less political. Garifuna Settlement Day is an ethnic manifestation but it is integrated in a politically neutral discourse about "indigenous national culture." The second level is based on controlling the position of the Garifuna community in the country. The National Garifuna Council is an important instrument for the government. This organization is "spokesperson" for the cultural needs of the ethnic group. As long as the National Garifuna Council puts itself in the position of the representative of the cultural heritage and the culture of the Garifuna community, the government will support them. The Garifuna community in Belize is politically strongly divided, which makes it easier for the government to control the situation. The Garifuna are culturally united and politically divided. This means that the government is focusing on the cultural aspects of this ethnic minority. It gives the government control over the "showcase" elements of their local culture. Finally, the government uses Garifuna Settlement Day as a tourist attraction. It is one of the billboards by which the country puts itself in the spotlight on the tourist market. By making it attractive to spend a holiday in Belize, the government creates an interesting "source of income for the country." On this level Garifuna Settlement Day is an attractive sales product. Economically, Garifuna Settlement Day is

an opportunity for the Garifuna to sell their ethnic merchandize. The government uses the "indigenous national culture" as part of a representation of the nation-building process in which the tourist is not confronted with threatening situations but rather with the relaxed party atmosphere of this hidden country. "You better Belize it."

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