Continuity in Body and Soul

Between Yurumein (St. Vincent) and Central America

March 10 to 14, 2012.

Abstract

The setting up of the International Garifuna Research Centre (IGRC) in St. Vincent is an appropriate time to spotlight the need for research about ourselves as Caribbean people. In this address I highlight some research we did in Belize about Gulisi, a daughter of Chief Joseph Chatoyer, who arrived among the 1797 exiles in Roatan, present day Honduras, and made her way to southern Belize. The study reveals the tenacity of kinship and other links that exist between St. Vincent and Central America. Such links can contribute toward stronger people-to-people exchange between Saint Vincent and Central America.

Dedicated to the Memory of Felicita (Ms. Baby) Bernardez Francisco, a sixth generation descendant of Paramount Chief Joseph Chatoyer, who lived most of her life in Dangriga, Belize. Date of birth – Feb. 21, 1914; date of death – December 25, 2011.

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Statement of Invocation in the Garifuna language

Introduction

In this paper I explore continuity between the Garifuna people in Saint Vincent and those found along the northeast coast of Central America in the countries of Belize, Guatemala, Honduras, and Nicaragua. I build the continuity using the twofold concept of body and soul borrowed from our Garifuna spirituality. In our theology the human being consists of two parts – the physical body, called *úgubu* in Garifuna and the soul called *uwani* or *áfurugu*. While we are here on earth, the *úgubu* takes priority insofar as it has to be fed for its sustenance. The *áfurugu* assumes priority after we die for it provides the glue of cohesion between ourselves and the ancestors, who have gone ahead of us. After a while and with proper care the *áfurugu* joins the ancestors in Seiri (our name for heaven) from where they provide eternal protection over us. The spirits of the ancestors, therefore, provide a direct and personalized connection between the living and the dead. Further below we will see how this connectivity is collectively put in place as an essential ingredient of the Garifuna nation.

By now you will observe that I bring to this presentation a heightened degree of indigenousness (also called indigeneity) together with some doses of anthropology. For over forty years I have been both an activist and academic person in anthropology and Continuing Studies, working within the larger Circum-Caribbean region, incorporating Central America and the Caribbean.

The indigeneity that I am proposing contrasts greatly with the several approaches to establish linkages among us, the Caribbean people – whether found on the mainland or in the islands. Almost all the efforts at integration that have taken place in the Circum-Caribbean have been dominated by the economic and political sectors toward trade and governance (Girvan 2003). These efforts include the Organization of American States (OAS), Caribbean Community (CARICOM), CaribCan (Caribbean-Canada Trade Agreement), Association of Caribbean States (ACS) and more recently ALBA (the Bolivarian Alliance for the Americas). As helpful as they have been, by and large they have had relatively limited impact on alleviating the grinding poverty found in all our countries. Furthermore, they have had negligible direct impact on people to people interaction either through exchange visits and invited self-learning or cultural linkages, so we could better appreciate what makes us one extended Caribbean family.

Nowhere is the need to help people overcome their severe socio-economic challenges and deepen their sense of cultural identity as in the twin areas of the Eastern Caribbean and the Caribbean coast of Central America, two subregions where the Garifuna people abide. If our national governments are sleeping on the proverbial steering wheel, agents of multinational corporations are busy designing long term plans to stimulate their own participation in what they call these "new" frontiers of development. In coastal Central America, the ambitious Plan Puebla Panama (PPP) (Grandia 2011) originally put in place by Mexico but now receiving support from international financing, envisages a coastal Central America fully integrated into the rest of the mainland through modern highways and electrical grids. Of greater significance is that the natural resources of this subregion will be far more accessible for fast-track exploitation through logging, oil exploration, hydroelectricity, fisheries, and any other natural resource that could be put to sale. There may not be a similarly overly ambitious plan in the Eastern Caribbean like the PPP. But there are heavily funded financial interests with their eyes wide open to jump at whatever predatory opportunities may seem available. The financing may originate in China, South Korea, and Indonesia; or more closely in Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, or Venezuela. From wherever they originate their radar is set on what they can reap at our expense – and nothing else. Of course, the worst and most pernicious example of such mentality comes from drug cartels that target the entire Circum-Caribbean as main corridor from primary producer to primary consumer.

While the world of capitalism is not in our favour, unfortunately we have to add that the long term climatic projections are also not in our favour. The upsurge of cyclonic activity that has ravaged so much destruction has become what Norman Girvan has called a primary existential threat to the Caribbean. Not only have the storms become more frequent and unpredictable, they have also generated more destruction. The situation along the coast of Central America is no different. In 1998 Hurricane Mitch, described as one of the worst hurricanes to hit the Atlantic, ravaged much destruction in Honduras, Guatemala, Nicaragua, and El Salvador, leaving scores of villages swept away by the winds and floods. Up to now fourteen years afterwards parts of coastal Honduras have not fully recovered, especially as they have been hit by subsequent storms.

In the rest of this presentation I examine how mainly individuals with limited institutional support have attempted to maintain different types of exchanges between Central America and Saint Vincent. A form of continuity becomes revealed in the study of oral history and tradition on Gulisi, a daughter of Joseph Chatoyer, who found her way to Belize. Using the themes of body and soul, I analyse the significance of the Gulisi story. Finally, I refer to the launch of the International Garifuna Research Centre (IGRC) here in St. Vincent as providing a unique opportunity where Caribbean students can improve their people-to-people research skills.

Continuity – Methods of Understanding

Both international capitalism and climate change reflect intrusions that are beyond our control. Let us explore what we can do that is within our control to generate people-to-people exchange and socio-cultural continuity over space and time between coastal Central Americans and St. Vincentians.

Fortunately, the account of the last Carib Wars in St. Vincent together with the exile to and early settlement in Central America has been well recorded, giving us the reputation of being probably the most documented in the transition from one geographical area to another in the New World. Among those who have contributed to the literature are Arrivillaga (2005: 64-84), Fabel (2000), Kirby and Martin (1972), Gonzalez (1988), and Palacio, Tuttle, and Lumb (2011). Adding to the cold narrative have been various efforts of the Garifuna themselves that reflect the deeply emotional feeling of suffering and survival that only those who are the products of the actual experience of violent deterritorialization can best describe. One of the best examples using the medium of drawing is the picture drawn by world famous Garifuna artist Pen Cayetano depicting his imagination of the last embarkation from Balliceaux on the way to Central America[1]. I strongly recommend that all Garifuna people everywhere place in their living room a copy of this tear-jerking painting (see Pen Cayetano's drawing).

Indeed, to all of us in Central America, St. Vincent (or Yurumein as we fondly call our original homeland) remains our Mecca, a place to visit as an effort to see from where our ancestors were driven away. In their popular monograph on the events leading to the exile Kirby and Martin (1972) described such an emotional visit by the father of a Belizean then working with the University of the West Indies campus at St. Augustine, Trinidad & Tobago in the 1960s. With the greater ease of air travel over time, several of us from Central America have visited St. Vincent. And I am happy to say that many persons from here have come to spend time with us in Central America. There have been efforts to move away from casual visits to deepen the relationship, such as school children from here establishing pen pals with their peer in Belize; teachers of the Garifuna language from Belize coming on tours of duty here. In 2001 musician and painter Belizean Pen Cayetano came on a UWI Visiting Scholarship and established rapport with many persons here in the fields of music and painting. In 2011 James Lovell and Eleanor Bullock from New York conducted workshops in music and dance that were very well received. I was moved when I saw the video resulting from their work, showing young men and women from St. Vincent singing and dancing to traditional Garifuna music, which they were experiencing for the first time. It shows that when we try, we can move the mountains and ocean that separate us.

[1] For eight months between October 1796 and March 1797 the British imprisoned 4338 Garifuna men, women, and children on the barren island of Balliceaux, during which time more than 2000 died before being exiled to Roatan, Honduras. To all Garifuna people Balliceaux represents the most challenging episode in our collective experience of survival.

To a large extent all of these efforts have been individually motivated with minimal institutional support. As a result, their main impact has been more to indicate to us the potential for sustained people-to-people contact. It is our prayer that the Garifuna Heritage Foundation, which is based in St. Vincent and is sponsoring this Gathering, will lay the infrastructure for much follow up in the near future. Let me also mention that from the diaspora – with reference to sisters and brothers in the USA – Jose Avila with others has been leading an effort with some institutional support to consolidate linkages between our people in New York and St. Vincentians.

Family Tree Extending from St. Vincent to Central America

At the bottom of any people to people bonding is the need to explore whether there are any family ties and which individuals can be identified as roots extending from one place to another. This was exactly the question that I sought to unravel in late 1998. Being aware of the rich folklore among our people in Belize and the strong currency of St. Vincent in our oral tradition, I wanted to know whether there was anyone in Dangriga, the largest Garifuna community in Belize, who might have heard about their own family ties extending to St. Vincent. This question contrasts with Nancie Gonzalez's assertion. I quote from a footnote that she mentioned in her 1988 volume about doing ethnographic research among the Garifuna in Central America. "Genealogical investigation has been frustrating in the extreme… Time depth was shallow, and no informants could tell me about relatives more than four generations removed from them; and most of these people did not know the names of more than one of their great-grandparents (usually their mother's mother's mother…" (1988: 73).

When I asked my question about family ties between St. Vincent and Belize, I did not know that cultural geographer Davidson had done research among a family in Nicaragua whose last name, Sambula, had been found in the list of the 1797 arrivals in Roatan (Davidson 1980: 31-47)[2]. While the Davidson study was fortunate enough to have access to the archival record as guide to family continuity, I started off with no such reference but with the strong hunch that the memory of some individuals could be jogged hard enough to reveal family ties between St. Vincent and Central America. I am happy to say that I did not have to do much jogging.

The Gulisi Story

I started by consulting my long term friend, colleague, and compadre[3] Roy Cayetano if he knew of such a person in Dangriga. His quick reply was that he had heard an elder refer to

[2] Gonzalez (1988: 33) confirms the name of Sambula as one of the leaders among the 1797 arrivals in Roatan.

[3] Spanish term for the godfather of one's children.

her own family roots going back to the daughter of Paramount Chief Joseph Chatoyer. I could not believe my ears. He further said that although the elder had passed on, her younger sister was still alive and that she might have some information.

I immediately rushed to the elder's sister to whom Roy referred. I paid respects in our language and could hardly help myself as I asked her the question. She obviously saw the anxiety in my face and in true fashion of an elder to a younger inquisitive student, she humoured me by saying, "Oh, my son you come too late! The one person who really knew everything was my sister Emelia, who passed on some time ago. She was much closer to our grandmother *Amáhuni*, who gave us the story of the suffering of our people in Yurumein, their crossing to Roatan, and their next crossing to Belize. Besides, Emelia was smarter than me and had better recall. But, if you want, I could share the little bit of foolishness [4] that I still remember." She could barely finish her sentence when I pleaded, "Can we start now?"

My informant opened the door and allowed me into her home. She introduced herself as Felicita Francisco, better known as "Ms. Baby". She added that *Amáhuni* was her mother's mother and that *Amáhuni* was the granddaughter of Gulisi[5], who was the daughter of Joseph Chatoyer. Through her short and concise introduction Mrs. Francisco anchored the research question that had driven me to her. I should add that from the very first of my several visits with her, Mrs. Francisco made it plain that she saw my interest in collecting her information as a unique opportunity to record what her great great grandmother had passed on and reaching her as a fifth generation descendant. Gulisi wanted to make fully certain that her descendants – and indeed the entire Garifuna nation – become aware of the suffering and survival of herself and her children and that they were sacrifices made for the survival of all Garinagu[6] everywhere.

Here I have to pause to say something on how I became sure that Mrs. Francisco was really what she claimed to be, a great great granddaughter of a daughter of Chatoyer. This is germane to the larger issue of validity in scientific inquiry in using oral sources. My main form of confirmation came from asking several of the descendants that Mrs. Francisco identified whether they had heard about their direct links to Gulisi. Many confirmed that indeed they had heard so, although most did not know how.

I should also mention that I know the communities that Mrs. Francisco mentioned quite well, giving me a fairly strong intuitive conclusion that there was much fact in what she and other sources were divulging. In doing oral history research one's grounding in social anthropology, especially ethnohistory, is essential to do the tasks of triangulation so

[4] In Garifuna small talk a more appropriate translation of the "foolishness" would be "my little two-cents worth".

[5] My impression from my limited linguistic skill is that *Gulisi* is a Garifuna version for the French name Marie-Louise. I remain open to suggestions.

[6] Garinagu is the plural form of Garifuna.

necessary to establish validation (Erim and Uya eds. 1985 and Vansina 1985). Finally, for those who want bibliographic references about my Gulisi story, here are some (Palacio 2005: 43-63 earlier published in the Journal of Eastern Caribbean Studies 24 (1) and Bolland (1988). I also include a map showing the movement of the exiles from St. Vincent to Central America (see Map of the Exile in PowerPoint projection).

The Soul

In my use of the term "soul" I extend from its use in Garifuna spirituality to refer to the primary core of a given socio-culture. Other synonyms include "soul" as the genre of African American music; the gist, *eje* in Spanish, and *léiganana* in Garifuna; or simply what makes one tick. While earlier in this presentation I have referred to *áfurugu* as part of an individual, I am now making a jump to the worldview as collective *áfurugu* for the Garifuna nation. From the oral information that Gulisi passed onto her children and grandchildren I make brief abstractions about the internal structure of the society and inter-ethnic relations as well as the domestic economy that prevailed during her time mainly in St. Vincent.

It is necessary to deviate slightly to use written history as backdrop to better appreciate Gulisi's account. She got married at the age of 24 in the area of Trujillo in present day Honduras. Since the Garifuna arrived in Honduras in 1797 and if we assume that she would have gotten married shortly thereafter, then we could further assume that she would have been born in the 1770s. This was the period when the hostilities between the British and the Garifuna shifted from being intermittent to becoming the state of full blown war between 1772 to1796 (Kirby and Martin 1972). Gulisi grew up in these very delicate times, especially aggravated by her father becoming the leader of her people in war. She would have had to move from one hideout to another as she became an early witness to the deprivations, killings, and overall dislocation of war conditions.

Even before the intensification of war there were well drawn measures of stratification with which Gulisi had to deal. At the highest level the British, who used their slaves as scouts to identify the whereabouts of the Garifuna, were the enemy of the Garifuna[7]. Gulisi's account of inter-ethnic hostilities in St. Vincent extended to her experiences in Honduras. Her reason for commandeering her sons to leave Honduras and settle in Belize probably during the 1840s was that she was being harassed by the authorities. Because she was from St. Vincent the authorities suspected her of being a spy[8]. After such an incident when she was almost killed, she decided to leave Honduras and make the long treacherous boat trip from Puerto Cortez in Honduras to the area of Dangriga in Belize. During that trip one of her sons

[7] The use of African slaves to attack the Garifuna in St. Vincent placed an animosity between non-Garifuna black people and the Garifuna, traces of which are still found in Central America.

[8] The allegation of being a spy in Honduras probably arose from being French speaking and associated as Haitian, the source country of the violent revolution against slavery in the Americas taking place at that time.

was washed into the sea. A deep awareness of the several opposing sentiments against her and her people in St. Vincent and Honduras became a way of life for her.

Back in St. Vincent there were also intertribal differences among her people, about which Gulisi gave an account. Mrs. Francisco described six groups, who lived in different areas but were close enough to each other for their distinctive characteristics to be well known. There were the Oreyuna[9], the Awawaraguna, Oligin, Masiragana, Habaraguna, and Saiwaina. Some were well known as good fighters, while others were lazy. Others were clearer in complexion, while others were filthy in their public health. The hardest working were the Oreyuna. These subgroups were also endogamous with restrictions against intermarriage being maintained among them.

In terms of socio-economy the Garifuna were self-sufficient for most of their daily needs, according to Mrs. Francisco's information. They grew their own food consisting mainly of cassava from which they made their own bread and wrapped it in wild leaves. They made their own cloth from cotton and the bark of the *gurumurei* tree. They sold what they grew to get cash. Mrs. Francisco recalled seeing one of the coins, called *chungua*, which Gulisi brought from St. Vincent to Dangriga.

The heightened emphasis that Gulisi gave to providing full details about life in St. Vincent, according to Mrs. Francisco, was to ascertain that her descendants never forget about St. Vincent as the crucible of their identity as a nation. She would wake the children late in the night to repeat to them the saga of St. Vincent and end with the scolding. "You cannot forget the hard times that my family and I underwent in St. Vincent. I will do all that I can to make sure that it becomes fully engraved in your memory for life."

The Body

Gulisi's admonition to her children and grandchildren not to forget the epic struggle and survival that formed them is a fitting introduction to the body as the counterpart of the soul. The framework that gives substance to the soul is the body. I have selected genealogy as an often used expression of the body within the family network. When any two Garifuna persons meet for the first time, they immediately ask questions about each other's genealogy. The frequencies by generation seen in Table 2 are a shortcut to understanding the spread of some of Gulisi's offsprings.

After marrying a man surnamed Lambey in the area of Trujillo, Honduras, Gulisi gave birth to thirteen sons before crossing over to southern Belize. It is interesting to speculate where the Lambey man originated from. There are two possibilities. One is that he came from Haiti and met Gulisi in Trujillo. There were several Haitians that had been brought to work in Trujillo in the late 1700s (Payne 2004). The other possibility is that like Gulisi he

[9] I assume that Oreyuna could refer to people from the general area of present-day Owia.

was one of the exiles from St. Vincent. All the offsprings referred to in Table 1 from the third generation onward were born in Belize starting from about the late 1840s. The biographical information originally came from Mrs. Francisco, who gave several references that we subsequently followed in both Dangriga and the nearby village of Hopkins. Through such snowballing we ended up with a total of 207 persons spread over four generations as seen in Table 1. Needless to say, this compilation is a work in progress with a continuing need to identify the remaining nine sons and their progeny.

So far we have arrived at six generations of Gulisi's descendants, with her as the first generation, not included in Table 1. From the twelve sons she had we were able to identify only three by name – Marugufino, Emmanuel, and Meriwa. We have not found the names of four others, although we were able to identify some of their descendants. These sons are tentatively listed as Unknown Lambey 1 to 4. Mrs. Francisco fits into the fifth generation in Table 1, being among the scores of grandchildren of Gulisi's sons. It is not surprising that the son with the largest number of known descendants (72) is Marugufino, who was Mrs. Francisco's great grandfather.

Table 1

The Frequency of Some Descendants of Gulisi By Generation

Gen. 2	Gen 3	Gen 4	Gen 5	Gen 6	Total
Marugufino	4	8	29	31	72
Emmanuel	8	10	14	24	56
Meriwa	1	6	4	2	13
Unknown 1	1	4	14	0	19
Unknown 2	1	8	6	8	23
Unknown 3	6	0	0	0	6
Unknown 4	1	1	10	6	18
Total	22	37	77	71	207

Table 2

Traditional Names Among Gulisi's Descendants

Name	Gender	Generation	Western Name
Marugufino	Male	2	
Amahuni	Female	3	Victoria
Dabaneri	Male	3	
Guladigu	Male		
Gayobineri	Male	3	
Aruwarire	Male	3	

Asane	Female	3	
Aruyeri	Male	3	
Dwabasi	Female	3	Victoriana

Among the several bits of ethnographic analysis forthcoming from Mrs. Francisco's information is the topic of name change over generations. *Meriwa* would have been a name brought over from St. Vincent. He was the third son in Table 1. There were several such names in the list, some of which are found in Table 2. From the eleven names only four were for females. As expected, Gulisi's sons, the generation arriving in Belize, were the ones most often giving traditional names to their offsprings. The transition from the traditional to the modern becomes clearer in that two of the women with traditional names were also known with English names – *Amáhuni* was also known as Victoria and *Dwabasi* as Victoriana. Both were grandchildren of Gulisi's sons. Gonzalez (1988: 63-64) adds that in St. Vincent the Garifuna would have used only one name. The practice of having two names – a first and a surname – came on being christened in Central America. The first is the patron saint's name for a given day when one was born and the surname was acquired from one's godparents, all of whom at the point of being first christened would have been Hispanic. There are several examples of the earlier names retaining the St. Vincent influence in Table 2. They include Dabaneri, Guladigu, Gayobineri, and Aruwarire[10].

It is interesting to note that we end this discussion on body within the family network with changes in naming that the Garifuna have undergone on leaving St. Vincent. The inevitability of change among a people, including acquiring new names, was no doubt a main reason why Gulisi did her best to embed among her descendants the source of their Garifuna identity.

Conclusion

I have stressed continuity of the Garifuna people across the wide expanse of the Caribbean Sea from the Eastern Caribbean to Central America. My reason is that these are two marginalized subregions in the New World, where the small woman and man are being challenged by powerful hegemonic interests. Furthermore, climate change effects are increasing the vulnerability of the people within their narrow coastal zones. Finally, efforts at formal regional integration are not delivering in contrast to the fanfare that they generate among the governments. Actually, the Garifuna are only a metaphoric representation of the black, the poor, the indigenous, and the disenfranchised in coastal Central America and the Eastern Caribbean.

[10] For more information on the use of names brought from St. Vincent see Palacio, Carlson, and Lumb (2011: 22-25).

The main thrust of my presentation has been to show the power of one type of social science research – ethnohistory and more specifically the study of oral history and tradition. I would assert that there are still many Mrs. Franciscos in our communities, who could provide reams of data about our social and cultural history. Introducing this study has been most appropriate for the launch of the International Garifuna Research Centre (IGRC), one of the primary events that has brought us together here.

There are two messages that I would like to leave with the IGRC. One is to continue pushing the need for as much research as it is humanly possible. I refer again to my experience with the study of our Garifuna people where information about them has helped to change the way social scientists have looked at our region. The Garifuna have shown that there are still indigenous people in the Caribbean, where for decades the cry has been that we had all died out. Secondly, we have shown that being a hybrid people - part Amerindian, part African, and part other – is not a disgrace. This counters the colonial mentality still prevalent within the Caribbean that says, "yes, we are all hybrid but the closer one's pedigree is to the Caucasian the better one is". There is another version of this exhortation found mostly in the Eastern Caribbean that says, "yes we are all hybrid but the clearer your complexion the more Amerindian traits you can demonstrate." In Central America pigmentation is not a sole indicator of being Garifuna. On the other hand, we have shown clearly that socio-culture and not colour is the primary determinant of Garifuna identity (Palacio 1995: 25-40)[11]. Thirdly, the Garifuna have shown that survival for the small and relatively powerless is possible in the dialectic of struggle within opposing forces. A small group of people challenged the mighty British imperialistic design in the nineteenth century here in St. Vincent. And miraculously the descendants of those who were banished from here can come back to celebrate the heroism of Joseph Chatoyer, our common ancestor.

The late Professor Rex Nettleford, with whom I worked in the School of Continuing Studies of the University of the West Indies, used to tell us that we do not take the people of this region seriously enough to study them. The people who are to be involved in the IGRC need to be reminded that it is not so much what you study; it is how you study. Do you put your body and soul into your research, making it indelibly your own as a Caribbean person as against that of our visiting colleagues passing through our region for only a short while?

Thank you!

[11] The country where the issue of skin colour has caused the most discomfort among mixed race peoples is the United States of America. To counter that curse the National Museum of the American Indian published a volume on African-Native Americans entitled Indivisible – African-Native American Lives in the Americas (Tayac 2009).

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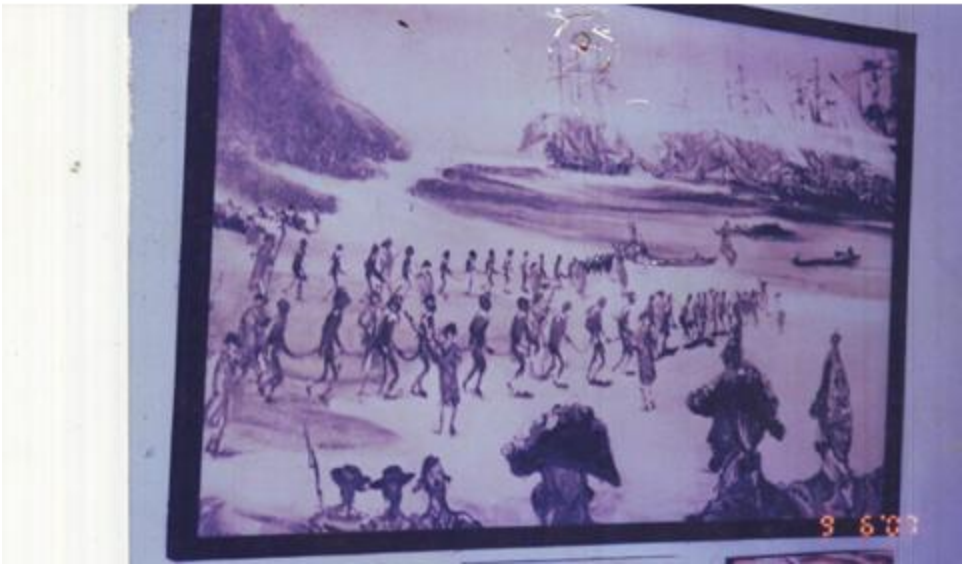
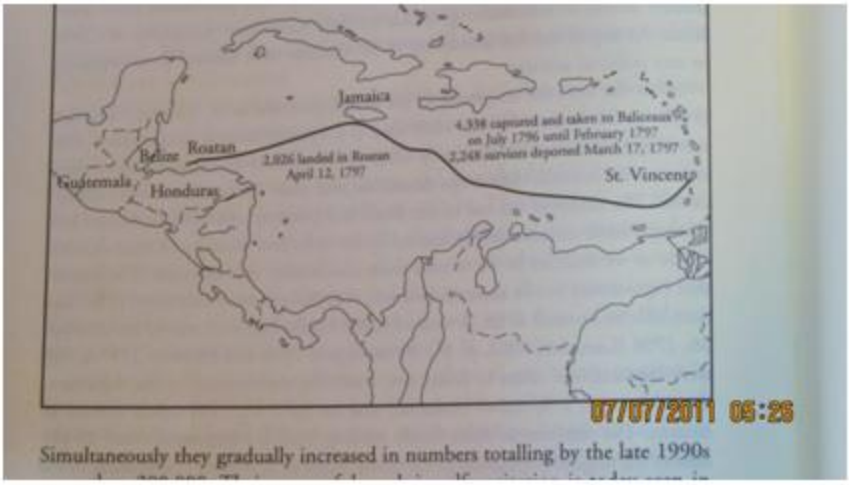
Map of the Circum-Caribbean

Pen Cayetano's Balliceaux



Map of Exile



Simultaneously they gradually increased in numbers totalling by the late 1990s