

**Redefining Ethnicity in Post-independent  
Belize:**  
*a case of the Garifuna and Creole*

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## **ABSTRACT**

I conducted this study for a M. Sc. Degree in Urban Studies at the University of New Orleans in 1995. Ethnic definitions and identity based on the colonial school of thought remain the main component for identification in post-independent Belize, notwithstanding the prevalence of interethnic marriages resulting in offspring, partly due to increased geographical mobility. This study singled out two elements in ethnic re-definition, the Garifuna and Creole, in Belize City. As two black peoples their offspring share the same basic phenotype. As a result, physical differences are not distinctly visible relative to other groups, to objectively define ethnic identity. This paper examines the self-identity and ethnic affiliations of these offspring, which do not fit into the existing antiquated ethnic definitions. This study utilized the qualitative research method to allow for extensive face-to-face assessment using open-ended inquiry. It also applied the social constructivist/interpretivist theory in narrative analysis to elicit from respondents the stories of their lives as they perceived them. Identifying as both Garifuna and Creole, I applied the Feminist Standpoint theory and the theory of Indigenous Anthropology. Both theories support the need to research your own, as the “situated knower” or the insider. This emic perspective as embraced by the study, may be a novel undertaking in the literature on ethnicity in Belize.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	1
Feasibility and Limitations	1
About Belize	2
METHODOLOGY	3
Research Design	3
Interviews/Discussions	3
TARGET GROUPS	4
Garifuna People/Garinagu	4
Creoles	5
Some Commonalities	6
RESEARCH FINDINGS	7
Creole/Garifuna Relations in Belize City	7
Ethnic Identity—Who They Say They Are	8
Whose Cultural Characteristics	10
CONCLUSION	12
New Identity Formations—A Shift in Ethnic Identity	12
Further Implications	13
REFERENCES	14

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	9
Table 2	11

## INTRODUCTION

### Feasibility and Limitations

As Belizeans emerge from the initial stages of political independence, one of their most compelling concerns is that of self-identity. The social organizations that kept groups of peoples apart before independence, are disappearing in the wake of economic and political developments in post-independent Belize. With the narrowing of geographic distances, increased exposure to others, new ethnic identities have formed. Social scientists (Gonzalez, 1959, 1989; Sanford, 1974; Palacio, 1976, 1988; Macklin, 1986) have pondered over ethnicity in Belize through themes such as interethnic ties, and ethno-history. However, none has looked at Peoples' self-definition, and the underlying changes in the composition of ethnic identities. Scholars have conducted studies on poverty (Lewis, 1994), and other contemporary urban phenomena in post-independent Belize (Palacio, 1982; Edwards, 1994; Young 1994, Palacio, 2001), but continue to identify ethnic groups by etic denotations. The Belize Census reports categorize Peoples in the traditional, colonial, taken-for-granted images of ethnic identity (Palacio, 1995).

The topic re-definition of ethnicity, connotes a change to delineate clearly what constitutes each ethnic group, as defined by the actors themselves. Therefore, the primary goals for this investigation is to look at the phenomenon of ethnicity from an emic perspective, to explain the forces causing interethnic marriages—the political ethos and value climate, to determine whether there is assimilation, and to examine the self-identity and ethnic affiliations of the offsprings. This study contributes to the field of urban studies in the areas of social planning and community development, and to urban anthropology in the area of ethnicity; as well as to theory and rigour in research methods. It was conducted in Belize City, Belize in 1995 as a prerequisite towards a Master of Science Degree in Urban Studies, specializing in social policy/planning, at the University of New Orleans, New Orleans Louisiana.

This study singled out two elements in ethnic re-definition, the Garifuna and Creole, in Belize City. As two black peoples, their offspring share the same phenotype, and physical differences are not distinctly visible relative to other groups, to objectively define ethnic identity. Identifying as both Garifuna and Creole, and being a member of the community studied, I applied the Feminist Standpoint theory and the theory of Indigenous Anthropology. The former places importance on personal knowledge; that is lived experience, over the objectifying tendencies of traditional sociological practice. Conducting research in one's own community, referred to as "indigenous anthropology" by Bernard (1994), can be both advantageous and disadvantageous. The important benefits are not having entry level problems and as an "insider", no "social distance". My lived experiences in the "nuances" of both cultures, offered distinct perspectives on the society to be able to formulate concepts (Standfield II and Rutledge, 1993).

While objectivity is surmounted by the discipline of training, its biggest test occurs when you study your own culture, due to the possibility of overlooking characteristics that outsiders may not. Feminist theorists however, do not speak of objectivity in research, because it "...discredits and deprives [the researcher] of the authority to speak for those who know society

differently....” (James and Busia, 1993: 27). Feminist scholars theorize that when researchers separate themselves, they do so also from respondents’ subjectively lived experiences (Smith, 1987; Tong 1989). My presence as the investigator facilitated the shaping of knowledge, and my assessments remain sympathetic to the actors. It is an attitude which has not been frequently attempted in the literature on ethnicity, most of which retains an etic and impersonal viewpoint. The emic outlook embraced, may be a novel undertaking in the literature on ethnicity in Belize. The analysis did not generalize for the population of Belize City nor Belize. Both groups of respondents are primarily of low socio economic status, however, there are Garifuna and Creole households in the upper strata of Belize City society.

Race was not a variable in this investigation. In February 1995, race as biological differentiation was declared “no longer valid” by geneticists at Stanford University (Alvarado, 1995). Race has been “...considered neither a rational explanation nor a scientific basis for the study of human differences...” (Shanklin, 1994: vi, 5). The focus was on ethnicity, with culture as the main ingredient; emphasizing the analysis of cultural traits to benefit responses to cultural change, cultural accretion, and the interpretation of cultural borrowing (Barth, 1969). For the purpose of this study, ethnicity involves the “selection of symbols for purposes of self-identification and for the identification of others from a range of symbols” (Howard, 1990:120). The study embraces three concepts of ethnicity, namely, **ethnic group**, **ethnic culture**, and **ethnic identity**. **Ethnic group** is a collection of persons who perceive themselves as alike, due to common heritage and historical origin. **Ethnic culture** includes the beliefs, customs, traditions, traits and patterns of behavior that makes one group different from the other. **Ethnic identity** is a sense of belonging to, and/or affiliation with an ethnic group. The first and second concepts are social and cultural respectively. The third is symbolic in that it is about, 1. “perceptions of differences” among ethnic groups, and 2. “feelings of attachment and pride” in one’s ethnic group (Spratt, 1994: 316).

## About Belize

Belize, a 9,000 square mile expanse, lies on the northeast coast of Central America, bordering on the south and west with Guatemala, and on the North with the Mexican State of Quintana Roo. Belize is a democratic country, which attained political independence from Britain in September 1981. Belize’s economy is dependent on foreign markets through the export of commodities, such as sugar, citrus, fishery, banana, forestry, and since 1989 on tourism, which ranks among the top foreign exchange earners. Belize is a multi-ethnic country whose present population of 324,528<sup>1</sup>, comprises largely of Mestizo, Creole, Maya, Mennonite and Garifuna. Ethnic distinctions are to be found in language, dress, religion, food, belief systems and geographic boundaries.

Belize City is the target site for this investigation as it is home to the Target groups. It is the commercial concentration and political center of the country. Social stratification has widened since the attainment of independence, ushering in increased suburbanization. In Belize City, the

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<sup>1</sup> Belize Census Report 2010; other Census reports—1991 is 192,877; 2000 is 248,916

present expansion of suburbia is ubiquitous and demonstrates wide socio-economic differences. Invariably, residents are identified by residential pattern and location, and dictates where children attend school.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The qualitative research method was utilized to allow for extensive face-to-face assessment using open-ended inquiry. Narrative analysis was applied to further socially construct or interpret meanings of the respondents' personal stories. I also conducted environmental scans and scientific participant observation of the neighbourhoods identified. Field work and focus group study were two research strategies utilized. A structured questionnaire instrument was not used as interviews were more in the form of discussions or conversations.

Households of interest were those whose residents in inter-ethnic marriages, Garifuna with Creole, resulting in children. A preliminary field test was conducted for one week with two households to develop questions for further investigation. The actual field work took approximately 6 weeks, and initially three households were identified by community workers or 'knowers', based on their availability. Utilizing snowball sampling, each respondent recommended three additional households for inclusion in the study; and process continued until data saturation. Most interviews were conducted in the home setting, which provided a relaxed ambience for open dialogue, and ideal for scientific participant observation.

Respondents from 18 households totaling 78 were selected, consisting of parents and their offsprings, 14 to 19 years of age. Others included for purposes of triangulation were: 4 leaders from each of the leading ethnic organization, the National Garifuna Council (NGC) and the Belize Creole Council (BCC); 2 community leaders from each of the ethnic groups as identified by the actors; the *Buyei*<sup>2</sup> of Dangriga; government personnel and journalists from the local media houses. The 18 households were evenly distributed by ethnicity of the mother, 9 Creole and 9 Garifuna. Most of the households were of stable marital union<sup>3</sup>, with four women-headed households managed by Garifuna women. Three households had mothers who were full-time homemakers; and four households were extended family households, headed equally by Creole and Garifuna women.

### Interviews/Discussions

I encountered no problems in gaining entry and the respondents were beneficent with their time. Several reasons for the willingness to participate surfaced in the discussions. One was that it served as a confession of sorts, as persons admitted "guilt" in passing as Creole, or "embarrassment" in identifying as Garifuna. Therefore, some interviews necessitated a high

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<sup>2</sup> A Garifuna spiritualist leader who presides particularly over the Dugu ceremony

<sup>3</sup> Union recognized by the Actors whether legal, common-law or visiting.

degree of confidence between myself as investigator and the respondents. The knowledge of my dual ethnic background helped greatly to ease discomforts in some instances. Also a young peer counselor of mixed parentage, Garifuna and Creole, assisted in many of the interviews with the youths.

Genealogy was the starting point of life stories, commencing with ego, the parent respondent. Genealogies were plotted on paper, and the respondents participated in drawing relationships, which they used as a point of reference. Discussions were based on ethnic identity, cultural practices and the social and cultural environment of childhood neighbourhoods. The next favourite topic of conversation with adult respondents was their children—how they identify ethnically, how different they are from them socially and culturally, as well as education opportunities available. The conversation then moved to ego's parents, and by this time the dialogue was flowing with inputs from other resident adults. By being participatory, the presence of respondents was preserved as “knowers” and “subjects”, rather than objects of the research (Smith, 1987; Collins, 1990). For purposes of manageability, I divided the offsprings into three focus groups by day and time of availability.

## TARGET GROUPS

### Garifuna People/Garinagu

The Garifuna people formally called Black Caribs, were an amalgam<sup>4</sup> of some French and primarily three groups, Carib, Arawakan Indians, and African slaves marooned on the eastern Caribbean island of St. Vincent. Having lost the Carib War (1795-1796) for control of their homeland St. Vincent to the British, the Black Caribs were exorcised from their native land. In 1797 some 2,026<sup>5</sup> Black Caribs, landed on Roatan in Honduras, and subsequently settled along the Atlantic and Caribbean Coasts, including Belize (Gonzalez 1988). In Belize they again encountered the British, and were allowed to settle only in the uninhabited south of the country, which was still under dispute according to the 1786 Convention of London or Anglo-Spanish Convention<sup>6</sup> (Bolland, 1987). To the British, the Black Caribs made convenient allies against the Spaniards, and valuable as logwood cutters due to lack of replenishment of slaves at the time. Their isolation by the British helped in the maintenance of their African and Amerindian cultures. Culture is alive today in language which is primarily Cariban and Arawakan; foods, some of which are African in origin like the *hudut*<sup>7</sup>; and others Amerindian, as the *ereba*<sup>8</sup>; a mixture of both as in Garifuna spiritualism. Legitimized in the mid 1970's by Garifuna leaders, Garifuna and not Black Carib is preferred as a way of expressing self-identity.

The population count of 1860 showed approximately 2,300 persons of Black Carib descent, and approximately 25% had mixed with other groups, particularly Creoles and ‘Indians’ (Cosminsky,

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<sup>4</sup> Colonial description of Garifuna people, presently used.

<sup>5</sup> Represents one half of those banished; others perished on Balliceaux and during the journey.

<sup>6</sup> Agreement with Spain gave the British rights to cut logwood; but Spanish incursions continued.

<sup>7</sup> Green plantain boiled and pounded in a mortar, then served with a gravy of coconut milk and fish.

<sup>8</sup> Bread made from the bitter cassava tuber.

1984). Land was not readily available, and men had to leave their communities for long periods of time as migratory wage labourers; and whatever agriculture and fishing they did were primarily for subsistence. Economic activities took the men to logwood camps by the British; then to rural Belize to spread Roman Catholicism by the Roman Catholics; later to Puerto Barrios in Guatemala during the heights of the banana industry; and as merchant marines or contract labour to Panama, Great Britain and the United States (Young, 1994; Palacio, 2001). The 1991 Census Report shows that there were 12,274 Garinagu in Belize, representing 6.6% of the total population. Where once they resided primarily in the rural areas of the southern districts (65%), they now predominate in the urban areas including large numbers (23.2%) in Belize City (Palacio, 1993b). This demographic shift from traditional coastal communities to Belize City and abroad is significant to this study.

### **Creoles**

Around 1724, African slaves were brought in from the West Indies to work the logwood trade (Bolland, 1987). They were sent to remote areas north and west of the country for months at a time, under an advance scheme<sup>9</sup> of payment, after emancipation. Land distribution was discouraged by the British after emancipation, “for fear that allowing the ex-slaves to obtain land might discourage labour for wages” (Bolland, 1987: 66). Like the Garifuna, whatever agriculture undertaken was for home consumption. The Census data by the late 1700’s indicated a mixing of Africans and the British colonizers, giving birth to a new group, the Creoles in Belize Town (Bolland, 1987). The term originated from the Spanish word *Criollo*, meaning “native of locality”. It gained currency in Belize Town in reference to being non-Amerindian and non-Asiatic, but born and settled in the area (Grant, 1976: 8). Creoles were defined as an amalgam<sup>10</sup> of African and English, born in Belize, and carried English surnames. Many Creole communities were established along the banks of the Belize River during the logwood days. But Belize Town, later named Belize City, became the main concentration of Creole people and the home of Creole culture.

Skin colour and other physical traits were principal determinants of social occupational status in Belize Town. Europeans, “persons of light complexion” and those perceived as having closest “social and cultural affinity”, were compensated with top positions in the civil service and prestigious businesses. The Creoles “readily emulated the colonial values” (Grant, 1976: 9); and gradually lost most of their African heritage<sup>11</sup>, when they assimilated that of the colonizers’. According to Howard, assimilation occurs through a process of selection of “symbols for purposes of self-identification” (Howard, 1980: 120). At the same time the reinforcement of African heritage was interrupted in three avenues—the fire of 1819 that gutted Eboe Town, the

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<sup>9</sup> Dependency forced by the British on the labourers.

<sup>10</sup> Presently the colonial description used for the Creole

<sup>11</sup> It is a common perception believed even by the Creoles themselves that Creoles do not have a culture.



home and cultural center of the Creoles; the halt of the arrival of fresh slaves after emancipation; and the draconian laws of the time which prohibited the practice of the African culture<sup>12</sup>.

Creole culture is distinctive in values, language, lifestyle, food and occupational pattern. Rice and beans a Creole dish, as well as the language are alive today as contributions of Creole people to Belize. The Creole elite, and those of high socio-economic status, were the lawyers and civil servants, the middle socio-economic group were the professionals, and those of lower income brackets embraced forestry operations, domestic, and positions in the construction industry (Grant, 1976: 9). The Creoles in this study were persons primarily from the latter socioeconomic group. Since the 1960's, emigration was partly responsible for the drastic decline in the Creole population, via mass exodus to the United States, Canada and England for economic reasons (Young, 1994; Palacio, 2001).

### **Some Commonalities**

African or black Belizeans are persons of African descent, born or naturalized citizens of Belize and who identify as Garifuna or Creole. Together they comprise 36.4%<sup>13</sup> of the population, 29.8% and 6.6% respectively. They reside primarily in Belize City<sup>14</sup> and Dangriga, where they remained apart physically and socially until the mid-1960's. Their separation and differences were perpetuated by the British 'divide and conquer' tactics. This allowed negative myths to grow, prompting insidious tension and stigmatization (Palacio, 1990). Prior to the 1960's, offsprings from interethnic mating invariably did not identify due to discrimination by both groups; and mating was customarily censored.

The African Belizeans however, share commonalities often overlooked by scholars: both groups were formed in the Caribbean region, are of African ancestry, underwent the same scheme of dependency system in the logwood trade of the mid to late 1800's (Bolland, 1987); denied land; and both were useful to different groups of colonizers before self-government. The Roman Catholics recruited Garifuna males as teachers in the remote expanse of the country to spread Roman Catholicism (Palacio, 1976b; Enriquez, 2017). Simultaneously, the Creoles were recruited as civil servants by the British administrators. Also both groups emigrated in large numbers to the metropolitan centers of the United states to improve their economic situation by the early 1960's (Young, 1994; Palacio 2001).

Both groups experienced heightened integration in three distinct historic periods, which resulted in interethnic mixing. These were 1830-1870 and beyond, when groups worked together in logwood camps for long periods, fueling a process of acculturation<sup>15</sup>; 1931, as aftermath of the September 10, 1931 hurricane, Creole refugees from Belize City were accommodated by the leaders of the Carib Development Society in Dangriga (Cain, 1932: 127). Another period of heightened integration was again economic in the 60's and 70's, linked directly the sugar

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<sup>12</sup> Beating of drums and chanting, and the practice of obeah.

<sup>13</sup> 1991 Census; 2010 Census shows a decrease for both, Creole 25.9% and Garifuna 6.1%, totaling 32%.

<sup>14</sup> 56.5% Creole reside in Belize City; similarly, Garifuna 27.5% in the Stann Creek District.

<sup>15</sup> Cultural change through adoption between cultures

industry in the north, and later on as members of labour unions and political parties (Brockman, 1985; Howard, 1987).

## RESEARCH FINDINGS

### Creole/Garifuna Relations in Belize City

The households were located in what is now the Southside<sup>16</sup> Belize City, with two large clusters residing in dilapidated areas. A few lived on “captured”<sup>17</sup> land in two swampy areas on the outskirts of the City. They constructed small, makeshift houses on stilts, carved out pathways, and constructed wooden bridges to access their homes. Basic service, such as water was only available by way of a public water pipe several hundred yards away from their homes. All respondents were of lower to middle social status, but skewed towards the former, and gives the impression that those in the higher echelon of society tend to marry or mate among their own ethnic group members. The Garinagu brought with them some traditional cultural practices and values. Their children are the first generation Belize City born, a highly valued characteristic, and who quickly assimilated the culture of the City.

Respondents claimed that while the discrimination remained insidious, their relationship had improved over time, as the prevalence of interethnic mating heralded new social openness. However, myths on behavioral and physical appearances by either spouse, oftentimes brought about surprised reactions. For example, even when respondents claimed not to see any physical differences between both groups, yet when prompted to give a description of a Garifuna or Creole, the responses generally remained the same stereotype such as the comparative list below.

#### Creole Features and Mannerisms

1. narrow face
2. sharper nose
3. proud
4. always aspire to be better
5. secure attitude, bombastic
6. tough afro hair
7. bregging walk
8. consumption ethic
9. family disunity

#### Garifuna Features and Mannerisms

- broad face
- broad nose
- smart
- very educated
- reserved
- quality afro hair
- shuffling walk
- puritan type ethic
- strong family unit

The Creoles emphasized that Garinagu are “smart”, “more educated”, have a “more stable family life”, and often credited the Garifuna genes when an offspring performs well academically. The perception of the Garifuna is that the Creoles want to be “superior” or “better”. This view is interpreted through defensive responses that the “*Giou*”<sup>18</sup> are not to be trusted. It appears

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<sup>16</sup> Generally, connotes poor & low income

<sup>17</sup> Illegally squatting on land; the action demonstrates empowerment.

<sup>18</sup> Garifuna term for Creole. Oftentimes the intent is to be derogatory.

contradictory, as the respondents were in a marital union with children. Compounding the contradiction, both groups agreed that the Creoles were “better looking”, as they were perceived to have the near white features, such as “narrow face”, “sharp nose”; that the Garifuna has “better quality hair”. All respondents are black in skin colour, yet they placed importance on the non-black component of their ancestry over their common African heritage. The “lighter skin” colour and “quality” hair was also reflective of the leaders’ views. One Creole leader, who could not identify a source, defined Creole as one who is 70% black, 23% white and 7% Indian; and the Garifuna as one who is 70% black, 23% Indian and 7% white. The blackness or Africaness at 70% was overlooked for the 23%, with the white prevailing over the Indian in value. The marital union pattern revealed that skilled Garifuna women such as teachers and office workers intermarry with blue-collar Creole men. While it was the same for the Garifuna men in marrying with Creole women, this pattern of intermarriage “below” ones perceived socio economic status, had a more profound effect on the women.

### **Ethnic Identity—Who They Say They Are**

Belize is a patrilineal society and the child oftentimes bears the father’s name. Due to the historical formation of both groups, Creoles have English names, such as Smith, Hyde; while Garinagu have Hispanic names, as Martinez and Castillo, due to experiences in Honduras; but some French names as Franzua and Botiz due to the experiences on St. Vincent. The surname was probably the only distinction for cultural identification between these two black groups. Table 1 exhibits offsprings’ choice of ethnic identity by household, and the responses indicate individual rather than household determination. The primary reason was personal experiences as outlined in the six-points below.

1. Discrimination by Garifuna relatives—One respondent felt strongly that as a child she was treated differently than other grandchildren at the grandparents’ household.
2. Through the influences of friends and the community—One frequent response was, “because of my looks, my teacher and friends consider me Creole, so I choose Creole”.
3. The value attached to one group over the other—The perception of higher social acceptance of the Creole over the Garifuna prevailed with older offsprings.
4. The surname tells all, so why “run away from it”. This attitude also reflected how individuals are received by others.
5. The perception of not having a culture—Creole’s have been socialized that this is so and the Garifuna and other groups have used it against them.
6. For solidarity with the female nurturer, was the most frequent response.

Table 1  
OFFSPRING'S CHOICE OF ETHNIC IDENTITY BY HOUSEHOLD

#	Father's Identity	Offspring's Ethnic Identity (Gender – Ethnic Choice)				
		1	2	3	4	5
1.	Creole	Male Garifuna	Male Garifuna	--	--	--
2.	Creole	Male Creole	Female Creole	Female Garifuna	--	--
3.	Creole	Female Garifuna	Male Garifuna	Male Creole	Male Garifuna	--
4.	Creole	Female Garifuna	Female D.K.	--	--	--
5.	Garifuna	Female Garifuna	Female Creole	Male D.K.	--	--
6.	Garifuna	Male Creole	Female D.K.	--	--	--
7.	Garifuna	Female D.K.	--	--	--	--
8.	Creole	Male Garifuna	Female Garifuna	Male Creole	Male Creole	--
9.	Creole	Female Creole	Female Creole	Female Creole	Male Garifuna	--
10.	Creole	Female D.K.	Male D.K.	Male D.K.	Female Garifuna	--
11.	Creole	Male Creole	Male Creole	Male Creole	Male Garifuna	Male D.K.
12.	Garifuna	Male Garifuna	Female Creole	Male Creole	Female Creole	Male Creole
13.	Garifuna	Female Garifuna	Female Creole	Male D.K.	Female Creole	Male D.K.
14.	Garifuna	Male Creole	Female D.K.	Female Creole	Female Creole	Male D.K.
15.	Garifuna	Female Creole	Female Garifuna	Male Garifuna	--	--
16.	Creole	Male Garifuna	Male Garifuna	Female Garifuna	Female D.K.	Female Creole
17.	Garifuna	Female Garifuna	Male Creole	Male Creole	--	--
18.	Garifuna	Male Creole	Female Creole	Male Garifuna	Female Creole	--

Table 1 also demonstrates that no one ethnic group overwhelmingly dominates ethnic preference. By individual's option, the choice of Creole was more frequent—27 to 23; and by household preference, there were 7 households (household #s 2, 9, 11, 12, 14, 17, 18) whose members chose Creole, with 4 households (Household #s 1, 3, 15, 16) whose majority showed Garifuna. Only Household #1 overwhelmingly (100%) selected one ethnic group in identifying with the mother. There were 13 individuals from 9 households who responded with 'Don't Know', as they refused to identify with neither of the groups. Household #11 was an exception all male children of a Garifuna mother identified as Creole. She was socialized in Belize City, and opted to live away from the Garifuna community, minimizing her participation and identification as Garifuna. Four observations for Table 1 are of great import to the objectives of this investigation as follows.

- Ethnic identity by surname is now an unreliable marker. In Household #1 the male offsprings bore their Creole father's English surname, but identified as Garifuna.
- Change in ethnic composition—should the offsprings of #1 identified as Creole, it is still contradictory to the currently used composition of the colonial era, and not the present reality of peoples' self-ascription.
- Among siblings of the same household, ethnic identity varied, as in the case of households #s 2 to 6
- The direction toward opting to identify as Creole though not overwhelming, indicated a preference.

The parents, particularly the Garinagu were at times charged with emotion in defending their ethnic identities and culture. Their children however, were not as serious about this “ethnic thing”, and generally dismissed it as “no big deal”. They related varying their ethnic identity to ‘officials’ to ‘fit’ the occasion.

### **Whose Cultural Characteristics?**

The mode of communication in all the households was Creole, or some form of it. It was common for older Garinagu to express themselves with a combination of both languages. Also the Creole language spoken was mixed with numerous North American slang intrusions favoured by the youth. It was the first language of all offsprings, as well as the language of the immediate neighbourhood. None of the offsprings spoke Garifuna, while two from different households claimed to comprehend the language. Among the many excuses given by offsprings for not speaking Garifuna were: “it (Garifuna language) is too hard to learn”; “my parent no teach we”; “I was not brought up speaking Garifuna”. Generally, the respondents claimed that the parents use the language against them to speak “secret”.

The respondents shared a list of eleven cultural items from each ethnic group, of which only three were in current use. The first a *hana*<sup>19</sup>, was owned by a Garifuna homemaker, which she claimed was often borrowed by friends and relatives, both Garifuna and Creole. The kneading bowl which was ‘handed down’ by a grandmother, was owned by a Creole homemaker. Some implements were shared by both groups, but most were claimed by the Garifuna as the respondents found it difficult to recall Creole implements.

Included in the cultural traits discussed were food items, whereby respondents were asked to identify cultural dishes, and to select the ones they consumed at least five times per month (Table 2). The table demonstrated overlapping in some food items consumed, particularly those claimed as belonging to the Creoles. Rice and beans was the most popular food item by all, next were *boil-up* and tamales. Tamales and corn tortilla however, are Mestizo food items, now Creolized or Belizeanized by both groups. *Hudut*, *sere*, and *matilda foot*<sup>20</sup> were dishes considered time consuming to prepare and created “unnecessary work”. This is indicative of a continuous social process of exclusion and borrowing of cultural traits and symbols.

Table 2  
LIST OF DISHES AND FOOD ITEMS

FOODS/DISHES	CLAIMANTS BY ETHNICITY	CONSUMERS BY ETHNICITY
Rice & Beans	Creole	Both
Home made bread	Both	Both
Flour tortilla	Both	Both
Corn tortilla	None (Mestizo)	Both
Game meat	Creole	None
Hudut	Garifuna	None
Ereba	Garifuna	None
Fish	Both	Both
Sere	Creole	None
Matilda foot	Both	None
Boil up	Both	Both
Tamales	None (Mestizo)	Both

<sup>19</sup> Mortar made of wood and use to beat green boiled plantain in preparation of the *hudut* dish.

<sup>20</sup> Sere, matilda foot, boil-up are dishes shared in the logwood camps

## CONCLUSION

### New identity formations—A Shift in Ethnic Identity

Blu (1981) proffered three options to legitimately claim ethnic identity. The first is that an individual may claim an ethnic identity if her/his immediate ancestors possess such an identity. Secondly, if an individual's ancestors have several ethnic identities, he/she is entitled to select from among various choices. Lastly, an individual may identify with all her ancestors' ethnic identities. In the case of the offsprings studied, their choices in ethnic identity are legitimate. Already traditional Creole surnames are legitimized as Garifuna by persons who ethnically identify as Garifuna and vice versa. The offsprings who identified as Creole do not comprise of the same ethnic elements as their Creole parents, and vice versa. So the etic perspectives offered by the literature is a mal-categorization of peoples, which should remain in the past. Not one individual or family opted for both identities, and a small group of Don't Knows (DK's), opted not to identify with either group. Contrary to Cosminsky's (1984) experience, I did not encounter the terminology "mix" or "half and half" to describe ethnicity. The respondents did not see themselves as "half breed" as have existed in the literature on ethnic mixtures (Kerns, 1984; Spikard, 1989).

There were three groups of offsprings were identified; those who are Garifuna-leaning (GL's); those who are Creole-leaning (CL's), and the Don't Knows (DK's). I did not observe behavioural qualities that were distinctly traditional Creole or Garifuna, as recalled by the parents. The predominant socio-cultural features presented were some form of Creole, so as to remain within the identities offered by the respondents. The culture symbols that the offsprings embraced were more a North American type of lifestyle in dress, foods, language, and some values. It is a copy of large, ghetto, urban centers such as South Central Los Angeles where both groups predominate. They have deconstructed Creole culture and constructed a *Kriolism*<sup>21</sup>, as a result of residing in the largest, most politically powerful urban community in the country; and the affinity to the United States. One respondent labelled the offsprings GariKriol. The GariKriols have absorbed and adopted a "web of significance" and meanings partly produced and shaped by "meaning making" institutions such as the mass media (Denzin, 1994). They have based their affiliations not so much on the biological given, but on a choice that diminishes Creole/Garifuna significance in the traditional sense. These exemplify influences on the direction of identity formation, and with a rise in this type of household, what is forging is an emerging Belizean identity. Groups are defined "...as much as by who they are not, as who they are" (Glick, 1985: 240). As GariKriols, theirs is a new socio-cultural formation worth researching, for its own form and lifestyle. Both groups downplayed their obvious phenotypical similarities and possible strength, their blackness or Africaness, by giving credence to the small percentage of non-blackness.

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<sup>21</sup> Kriol is offered by leaders of a Creole language group as the emic spelling for Creole, but did not take traction.

## **Future Implications**

Belize like the rest of the English speaking Caribbean has not experienced serious ethnic conflicts (Glick,1985). It is a multi-ethnic country much like Guyana and Trinidad and Tobago. The loss of cultural distinctions and borders between the two target ethnic groups is occurring in other groups, an indication that Belize is undergoing the process of assimilation and acculturation, much like Jamaica and other Caribbean nations. With the target groups, interethnic marriages brought together two ‘roots’ peoples from different social spectrums—an urban grassroots, the Kriol, hardworking but poor by Belize City standards; and the village grassroots, the new urban Garinagu, the ‘nouveau poor’ (Bender and Leone, 1994) of Belize City. The fusion of these two was a meeting of “chronic inadequacy” and “poverty of opportunity” (Bender and Leone, 1994). In creating new identities ethnic poverty, and gender poverty were also formed in the now Southside. Symptomatic of poverty are the “noises, the smells, the fears and frustrations” of living in a metropolitan area with inadequate incomes and living spaces (Sackrey, 1973: 27). This has serious implications for the future as poverty undermines the “...productive capacity, family life, social integration and ultimately social and political stability” (Jenks, Peterson, 1991: 9).

The investigation has just tipped the iceberg from the perspective of ethnic identity. To understand the ethnic realities of Belize, similar studies on possibly four more ethnic groups can be conducted and then combining all results for a tripartite comparative evaluation. How people see themselves is important to participation in nation-building; as awareness of identity is intrinsic to human empowerment for social change. Peoples’ identity is important particularly at this time when community participation is posited as the way to development of poverty-stricken areas. Along with changes in ethnic identity, genderizing and ethnicising of poverty are relatively new urban challenges, and the latter implies disequilibrium. All have social/urban policy implications, and disequilibrium should not be ignored for the common good of society.



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