

# Kalinago Ethnicity and Ancestral Knowledge

**Kathryn A. Hudepohl**

Western Kentucky University

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The *Kalinago* of Dominica have engaged in various efforts at cultural renewal in the past three decades. In this paper I examine one particular activity, recreated traditional dancing, and analyze how performers combine current and past cultural practices from their own community together with knowledge garnered from other indigenous groups to reinvent dance performances. Such performances represent a recent manifestation of successful cultural renewal in which community members use known resources to re-imagine and recreate meaningful tradition(s). Analysis of recreated traditional dance performances provides insight regarding how some members of the Kalinago community think about and utilize the ancestral knowledge base that forms the wellspring of their identity and reveals the regional and global exchanges that contribute to and enrich processes of cultural renewal. Performers interpret this type of cultural borrowing as a positive strategic maneuver because situating the community in a regional indigenous context bolsters claims to a strong, vibrant Kalinago identity. In this context, both the act of borrowing and the final product are expressions of indigeneity.

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Protected from the heat of a Caribbean afternoon by the steeply-pitched roof of an open-sided longhouse, three traditionally dressed dancers from the Carib community in Dominica move across the raised stage as they perform a series of dances. Four additional individuals, dressed similarly, ring the back of the stage providing musical accompaniment on drums, a mounted piece of bamboo, and a *shak-shak* (similar in function to maracas). The director of the ensemble, dressed in western-style clothes, introduces the group and each song to provide cultural context. The performance, staged for the benefit of French tourists visiting the *Kalinago Barana Autě* (Kalinago cultural village), concludes with a song during which audience members are invited to dance on stage with the performers.

A remarkable feature of this event staged in summer 2007 is that as recently as thirty years ago traditional dancing was not performed in the community. Traditional dance performances constitute evidence of ethnic renewal in the community. Members of the Karifuna Cultural Group (KCG), whose dances are the subject of this paper, are some of the most self-consciously indigenous members of their community, indicated in part by their preferential use of the term

"Kalinago" in place of "Carib" when referring to community members and their identity. A primary objective of KCG and its members is to promote awareness about and pride in Kalinago history and culture, particularly among community youth. Reclamation of traditional dancing and the teaching of it to youth (generally aged 16-22) who perform it publicly is one specific activity resulting from this goal. KCG members recreate dances and, to a lesser degree, costumes, by examining historical documents and the traditional practices of regional indigenous populations, a fact often noted by the emcee during his introductory comments at the beginning of public performances. Members interpret cultural borrowing associated with recreated dances as a positive strategic maneuver bolstering claims to a strong, vibrant Kalinago identity and reject the notion that such borrowing should be interpreted as evidence of diminished indigeneity. Closer examination of performances reveals that although dancing is newly recreated, some performative aspects, such as musical and narrative elements, exhibit continuity in the community, showing up in a variety of other contexts. Dancing, then, constitutes a recent manifestation of successful cultural renewal in which community members use existing forms and known resources as creative building blocks to re-imagine and recreate tradition. Embedding borrowed cultural elements in a local framework reinforces claims about the indigenous nature of Kalinago identity.

Heritage can be defined simply as the contemporary use of the past (Graham et al. 2000). KCG uses dance performances as a self-conscious display of heritage aimed at insiders and outsiders alike. This type of public cultural performance creates an interpretive framework for lived experience and constitutes social interaction at local, national, and global levels. Both the public admission of borrowed elements and the use of practices (dormant and active) from within the community are meant to heighten awareness of the indigenous nature and quality of Kalinago identity – a signal meant to be received by insiders and outsiders alike. Through such performances, KCG members reify their sense of self, their sense of community, and their understanding of their place in a global context.

### **Background**

Dominica is a small island in the middle of the Lesser Antilles. The majority of the 74,000 inhabitants are of African descent; the Kalinago represent the largest minority and constitute approximately 4% of the total population. Most Kalinago reside on five square miles of land owned communally by the group. This land, known as the Carib Territory<sup>2</sup>, was granted to them in 1902 through the British administrator of the island, Henry Hesketh Bell<sup>3</sup>.

The Kalinago community both self-identifies and is labeled as a distinct community within the larger nation state of Dominica. Salient symbols of identity, identified through a series of semi-structured interviews conducted from 1996-1997 (Hudepohl 2002), some of which were also noted by earlier ethnographers (e.g. Layng 1983; Owen 1974), include: a sense of shared history, the land, the office of

the chief, phenotype, and handicrafts. This list represents only the attributes most frequently cited by informants in response to questions asking them to identify important symbols of Kalinago identity. Additionally, community members' opinions do not exhibit uniformity in terms of the relative value of each quality. For instance, although nearly 90% of informants mentioned that "looking Indian" was valued by "some people" in the community, many denied the importance of this attribute for determining ethnicity. Community members did agree that "Indian" phenotypic attributes include, in order of importance, light skin color and straight hair. Examination of each symbol, even the controversial quality of phenotype, reveals that connection to indigenous ancestors, in action and/or appearance, is an important core quality. The rhetoric and symbolism of ethnic groups often reference links to the past, functioning both to prove ethnic heritage to outsiders and, equally important, to heighten the emotional investment of insiders (Cornell and Hartmann 1998; Nagel 1997). A shared sense of tradition can be a powerful force promoting social unity and social action.<sup>4</sup>

For instance, one attribute cited by many Kalinago as a marker of community identity is a sense of shared history with an emphasis on group struggle. The Kalinago are proud of their ancestors' defiance of European domination and the current community's present-day resistance to assimilation into larger Dominican society. Often emphasized in discourse on this shared sense of history is the parallel circumstance of struggle for survival, physical and cultural, faced by ancestors and descendants alike. This situation creates a bond among living Kalinago and enhances the feeling of connection to ancestors. For example, in memory of the quincentenary of Columbus' arrival in the region, the Kalinago painted slogans on buildings in their community stating "500 years of Columbus a lie, yet we survive." This public display of their collective memory and experience of persecution and defiance illustrates John Gillis' discussion of commemorative activities as being both social and political in nature (1994:5). The slogans constituted a statement by at least part of the community for the entire community about their understanding of their own past. In addition, the slogans represent a type of discourse between the authors and the larger national and global society about persistent falsehoods surrounding activities of an internationally known historical figure and those of the less well-known Kalinago population.

The fore-grounding of ancestral ties is expected as an attribute of ethnic symbols, but, for the Kalinago, proving connections to indigenous ancestors competes in importance with the cultural behavior itself. Consideration of the social context of the community within the larger nation state provides insight regarding the necessity, or at least the perception of the necessity, to reaffirm and to prove indigeneity to community members and outsiders alike.

The status of the Kalinago as a viable indigenous group has been challenged periodically by the state in part because Afro-Dominicans, also called Creoles, would like to farm or otherwise develop parts of the Carib Territory. For instance, land disputes between Creole and Kalinago farmers are pronounced on the southern and western boundaries of reserve lands and were the basis of community land

rallies in the 1990s. Additionally, some past national-level political regimes have taken the stance that citizens should be Dominican first and any affiliation with alternative identities has been viewed as a threat to national sovereignty (Smith 2006; Eguchi 1997; Layng 1983).

Creole individuals and the Dominican government justify their challenges to Kalinago ethnicity based on the degree of culture loss suffered by the group. Despite having retained aspects of ethnic identity, the Kalinago have lost elements of their traditional culture and are, in some ways, a microcosm of the larger society. They no longer speak a traditional language; instead, like the larger population, they communicate in English and French Creole. According to national census data, sixty-five percent of Kalinago claim to be Roman Catholic and thirty-five percent claim affiliation with some sect of Protestantism; a pattern mirrored in the larger society. In terms of subsistence, the Kalinago rely on banana production for export as their main source of cash income, as does the larger population. And finally, even in terms of phenotype, Kalinago run the gamut from looking “indigenous” in their features to looking “African” in their features.

Peter Hulme states that “...the theme of impending disappearance” has been associated with the Kalinago since colonial times (1993:30). In addition to popular views, culture loss and assimilation has been a common theme in scholarship about Kalinago ethnicity (e.g. Baker 1988; Layng 1983; Owen 1974). Scholars working in the 1970s (e.g. Layng and Owen) were influenced by the then still-prevalent theory about ethnicity that was based on ideas about primordialism and inevitable assimilation after culture contact. Consequently, even though the Kalinago have successfully maintained a distinct identity solidly grounded in the previously mentioned symbols, the attention by outsiders to lost traditional practices fuels a need to prove indigenous identity. In this light it is not surprising that new efforts undertaken by the community as part of ethnic revitalization, such as traditional dancing, continue the pattern of highlighting connections to ancestors as a fundamental goal of the activity.

### **Ethnic Renewal and “Traditional” Dancing**

Partly as a result of fears of continuing culture loss and partly in response to challenges to identity, various subsets of the Kalinago community (e.g. Ocean 4, an environmentally conscious youth group; and Waikada, a community-based NGO) have engaged in sporadic efforts at cultural revitalization since the 1980s. Many of the activities have focused on both retaining and reclaiming traditional knowledge, and ties to ancestors are often explicitly emphasized as proof of an enduring, vibrant identity. Joane Nagel (1997) uses the term “cultural construction,” broken down into four specific processes, to describe such actions. Her definition includes both newly invented and historically based practices (Nagel 1997:46-48). According to Nagel, the major forms of cultural construction include revival, restoration, revision, and innovation. Revision and innovation refer to alteration in meaning of existing forms and creation of completely new forms, respectively. Revival and restoration involve

reintroduction of forgotten or infrequent cultural forms. An excellent example of “cultural restoration,” the specific process of cultural construction in which fading knowledge is reclaimed, was the Carib Cultural Preservation Project undertaken in the early 1990s. The project involved interviewing community elders to document their knowledge on a variety of topics including traditional food processing, little-remembered myths, and uncommon handicraft production techniques and styles. Some of the interviews were videotaped and stored, along with other data from the project, in the Chief’s office, a central location meant to enable community access. Unfortunately many of these resources have “disappeared” into individual households. Waikada supported construction of a community-run radio station as a means to build community and instill pride in Kalinago culture and heritage. Supporters completed the building, located in Crayfish River and referred to locally as “the platform” for its street-level covered platform, but were never able to secure a broadcasting license. Currently, KCG members currently use the platform for meetings and practices. Other efforts at cultural construction include reclaiming, to the point of recreating, lost practices; defined as a “cultural revival” in Nagel’s (1997) schema. Her term closely parallels the concept of “invention of tradition” discussed by Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983). Both terms refer to newly created practices, or at least those with an uncertain historical pedigree, that become established and, through real or imagined connections to the past, help to build social cohesion. Recreation of traditional dancing by KCG constitutes an example of cultural revival. KCG<sup>5</sup> originated in the 1970s as a Catholic youth group and evolved into an ensemble dedicated to preserving Kalinago culture. In interviews and casual conversation the Kalinago community identifies long-standing KCG members, members who determine most of the group’s activities, as important community leaders. Additionally, some past and current members have served as Carib Chief and/or Carib Councilors. KCG members today meet regularly to plan activities, discuss Kalinago culture and history, and practice dance performances. The group is primarily associated with dancing, though it also engages in other projects related to cultural renewal such as *larouma* cultivation for handicraft production. In fact, the group views dancing as much as a fundraiser to sponsor other activities as a creative expression of identity used to educate each other and their audience.

KCG usually open their performances with “*Nou se Kalinago.*” The title of the song, also the refrain, combines Dominican Creole (Kweyol) with traditional Kalinago vocabulary and translates as “we are Kalinago.” When performed for non-Kalinago audiences, the emcee often introduces the song by first teaching the audience words from the nearly forgotten, traditional language such as *mabwika*, which means “welcome”. The dance performance, through words and movement, describes ways that the community sustains its ethnic identity: Kalinago still maintain traditional practices such as herbal medicine, they cultivate an intimate connection with nature, and they continue to produce traditional handicrafts. This dance utilizes Kweyol and traditional Kalinago vocabulary as a tool to highlight ethnic distinctiveness. The sentiments expressed include a simple yet powerful

assertion of identity particularly evident in the title and song refrain. Less obvious to the outsider is the significance of the use of Kweyol, as this is not explained by the emcee.

Karifuna members self-consciously utilize Kweyol (a form of French Creole) throughout many songs. Islanders, Kalinago and non-Kalinago alike, generally grow up learning Kweyol and English in the home, though English is the official national language and used almost exclusively in formal settings such as school, the workplace, and in legal proceedings.<sup>6</sup> Several informants, including former Chief Hilary Frederick, stated that a distinguishing feature of Kalinago culture is that Kalinago use Kweyol more frequently than other Dominicans. It was not uncommon in the recent past to meet Kalinago community elders who, due to their limited interaction with (and perhaps limited access to) formal settings in larger Dominican society, including school, never became fluent in English. The perception of the community about the relative importance of Kweyol conveyed in interviews was confirmed in a focus group (Chambers 1994). For this reason, Kweyol is an important symbol to the community of its recent past and its long history of social marginalization. In addition to Kweyol, KCG members make an effort to incorporate into performances vocabulary from their nearly-forgotten traditional language. It is fascinating to observe a case in which an indigenous population, nearly devoid of its traditional language, still recognizes and exploits the power of language – indigenous and non-indigenous – as a cultural symbol to highlight indigeneity. And to see Kweyol used side by side with traditional lexical items makes the situation that much more striking. That being said it is common when speaking to any Dominican that in one sentence they switch back and forth between English and Kweyol. Karifuna members are thus utilizing a familiar pattern, choosing to substitute traditional language elements and pairing them with Kweyol, rather than English, because of its closer association with the historical social context of the community.

Another dance that asserts a forceful statement about Kalinago identity is the “War Dance.” Several explanations provide insight to why this title is in English. First, an aspect of many ethnic displays is that they are meant to convey information to insiders as well as to outsiders. In that light, it is not surprising that Karifuna uses English to convey information. In point of fact, Karifuna does choose to perform at times for outsiders and not only includes some English in their repertoire of songs but also uses an emcee to ensure that the audience understands the meaning embedded in specific dances and songs. The group clearly states that part of their goal is to enlighten outsiders about Kalinago culture and history. Secondly, one Karifuna member observed that the languages in the songs aptly reflects the history of individual members as indigenous citizens of a country that was at different times through history a colony for France and Britain until its independence in 1978. It was not clear from his comments if this was a deliberate plan by the group from the beginning, or if he reinterpreted already established practice. Finally, at least for now, the community does not have sufficient knowledge to compose and sing entire songs in the traditional Kalinago language.

During the “War Dance,” performers brandish bows and spears and thrust them menacingly at the audience. Compared to the other dances, this performance is aggressive, rough and intimidating. When performed for tourists, the emcee introduces it by stating that although today they are welcome guests, if they had come uninvited (as white people had done in the past), they would have met an unpleasant welcome. The emcee emphasizes the point that the Kalinago people were never conquered by the invading Europeans, effectively linking the dance to one of the salient symbols of Kalinago ethnicity. As with the use of Kweyol in songs, the significance of this aspect of the performance is not fully apprehended by outsiders in the audience, but it does resonate strongly with community members attending the performance.

Another song, “*A fina gona*,” commemorates traditional reverence for the moon. According to Karifuna members, Kalinago ancestors believed in nature deities: sun, moon, and stars. The moon was the most important, and during an eclipse, Kalinago ancestors feared the moon would permanently disappear. They danced and prayed that the moon would return. During “*A fina gona*” performers reenact dancing that would have been performed during an eclipse.

All three of these songs implicitly or explicitly demonstrate a thriving ethnicity with strong connection to ancestral ways. To outsiders they communicate KCG’s ideas about Kalinago identity. To insiders they say, know about and take pride in your heritage, its roots and current state. The meaning transmitted to insiders is not just intended for audience members. In learning the dances for performances, the youth who join KCG simultaneously learn aspects of their culture and history that they may never have encountered elsewhere. In this intense form of experiential learning, empowered youth take ownership of and authority over powerful ideas about identity.

These first three dances also illustrate a fundamental property underlying both the songs and the dance moves: they are oriented to the group, not the individual. There are no solo performances. Performers move and sing either in unison or in complementary ways. This quality, above all others, was derived primarily from knowledge about performances of other indigenous groups. For instance, in describing a dance she choreographed, one community member described watching women in a Venezuelan village sitting together while processing manioc (an edible tuber). This experience, coupled with the knowledge that manioc was a traditional staple food of her ancestors, led her to develop a dance centered around mimicking women’s movements when processing this food.

The final dance analyzed here returns to a property derived from an unbroken traditional practice – drumming. The dance, “*Son tomboula*,” refers to the sounds of the drum. According to Karifuna members, drumming exhibits a continuous history in the community, and, with the exception of Karifuna performances, drumming is primarily heard in the community at Carnival when bands travel up and down the road singing and playing instruments. One informant, the current director of KCG, described drumming and playing the flute as forms of meditation, a means by which the Kalinago awaken their heritage. Thus, drums evoke a special

connection between the Kalinago and their ancestors; both the instrument and its music creating a bridge that collapses time, connecting past to present in one moment.

Recreation of traditional dancing is an ongoing effort that involves weaving together knowledge of abandoned ancestral practices and elements borrowed from neighboring indigenous populations with existing practices from Kalinago culture.<sup>7</sup>

One obvious resource for renewal is the cultural practices of other indigenous communities, particularly those in contiguous regional areas who are most likely to be distantly related. In an interview in 1996, then Chief Hilary Frederick stated that contact with other indigenous populations is an invaluable community resource. He further stated that he particularly supported interaction that promised cultural exchange and facilitated information flow that promoted indigenous rights nationally and globally. He noted that the reactivation of the Caribbean Organization of Indigenous Peoples (COIP) in 1996 presented a tremendous opportunity for exchange. The promise of that event hosted on Dominica was never fulfilled because, despite a successful meeting, COIP has yet to meet again.

Connections between the Kalinago and Native North Americans have existed at least since the 1970s when Hilary Frederick was sent as a boy to be educated in the United States. While in the U. S., Frederick took notice of the North American indigenous rights movement. “Frederick’s time in the USA coincided with the growth of the American Indian Movement, and Frederick began to realize what the Dominican Kalinago had in common with other Native American groups” (Hulme and Whitehead 1992:282). Frederick eventually returned to Dominica and served two five-year terms as chief, the first beginning in 1979 and the second in 1994.

The attachment to South America is stronger in terms of its emotional bond. Karifuna members feel they have a connection to all indigenous people, but they consider South America to be their homeland because it is their ancestors place of origin.. To this end, members of the Kalinago community participated in a project in 1996 to sail from Dominica to South America, retracing their ancestors’ journey, in reverse, making stops along the way to raise awareness about the Kalinago people. Upon reaching South America, project members planned “...to retrieve and research aspects of Kalinago culture now forgotten, such as language, dance, games and traditional practices” (GliGli Outline and Update: 1996). During a formal speech at the inaugural launch of the canoe used for the project, Chief Hilary Frederick specifically compared the Kalinago attachment to South America as their homeland to Dominicans of African descent looking to Africa as their homeland. The documentary film, “Quest of the Carib Canoe,” chronicles the successful journey. Subsequently, there have been additional visits and cultural exchanges between various individuals of the Kalinago community and several indigenous communities in Venezuela. For instance, a couple, each involved in cultural performance groups, has traveled to Venezuela twice to meet with indigenous communities. The woman makes some of the costumes for dance performances and both help develop new dances for their respective groups.



Fewer contacts have been initiated with the Garifuna, a historically related group residing in parts of coastal Central America, though there has been some interaction. Garifuna individuals, as part of COIP, have visited the Carib Territory for meetings. One Kalinago elder, now deceased, was one of the last surviving community members with extensive (though not fluent) knowledge of the traditional Kalinago language. During an interview he recounted a story about working outside his house one day and hearing people pass on the street. It suddenly struck him that he was listening to two people speak fluently in his traditional language. He called out to them, and they identified themselves as Garifuna. In one of my first interviews with Chief Hilary Frederick, I asked him about the potential for cultural exchange with this group especially regarding language and religion. His answer was noncommittal and indicated that purer traditional forms would come from South America. Perhaps this attitude results in part from ideas about the relative value of phenotype in defining indigenous heritage; because of their history, the Garifuna look more African in their features (Gullick 1976, 1985). Alternatively, it may reflect the known fact that the immediate ancestors of the Kalinago migrated from South America. Regardless, clearly there is potential for fruitful exchange to the north as well as to the south. In that vein, a Kalinago canoe voyage to Central America has been proposed, this time with two canoes – the existing GliGli canoe used for the South American trip and a new one to be named *Sisserou*.<sup>8</sup>

The Kalinago community, including KCG members, have also visited and been visited by Caribs from communities in St. Vincent and Trinidad. These exchanges establish important and ongoing relationships but, for the Kalinago of Dominica, have not generated cultural resources for use in reclaiming lost tradition. According to Forte (2005), who has extensively documented the rise of the indigenous consciousness among the Arima Caribs of Trinidad (e.g. 2005, 2002, 1999), representatives from the Kalinago community of Dominica and the Arima have visited each other at least ten times, including a stop during the GliGli voyage.

Chief Frederick's statement about the community looking to South America as the origin place of its ancestors opens consideration of how the term diaspora may apply to the Kalinago population. Neither in casual conversation nor interviews has anyone expressed a sense of displacement from nor a longing for residence in South America, two qualities that Brown (1998) has noted as basic components in some definitions of diaspora. As much as the community understands that their ancestors came from South America, every community member to whom I have spoken describes Dominica, and other islands of the Lesser Antilles, as their homeland, their rightful place of residence. They explain that their ancestors were the original inhabitants of the Lesser Antilles, and in fact community members, including two former chiefs, have argued that because they are descendants of the earliest inhabitants of the region (not just of Dominica), they should be allowed to travel freely to its different modern-day countries without the constraint of having to use passports or obtain visas. Emigration and fantasies of return experienced by modern-day migrants are different types of experience than that expressed by those

community members who identify culturally with the origin place of ancestors. An additional complicating factor is the cultural affinity expressed for indigenous groups residing in locales outside of South America.

Brown proposes that definitions of diaspora need to be more flexible and allow for motivations and sentiments other than loss and displacement from place of origin (Brown 1998:294). For instance, in discussing Black Britons, Brown notes that community members don't just think about and look to Africa as a source of inspiration, but they also look to and appropriate resources (cultural and political) from other African diasporic populations, particularly Black America. She asserts that "black communities post-slavery search for freedom, citizenship, and autonomy link them globally" (Brown 1998: 294). Similarly, James Clifford (1994:309) states, "...transnational alliances currently being forged by Fourth World peoples contain diasporic elements. United by similar claims to 'firstness' on the land and by common histories of decimation and marginality, these alliances often deploy diasporist visions of return to an original place..." Solidarity expressed in these terms conveys emotional bonds based on shared experiences and goals derived from a common social identity. When trying to understand and explain feelings of cultural affinity expressed by some Kalinago (e.g. KCG members) to indigenous populations in South America and beyond, it is productive to think of the Kalinago as part of an imagined, global ethnic community. Imagined in the sense that there is no unifying physical space at the global level, though specific population clusters may control their own territory and do develop local cultural forms within the nation-states in which they reside. In his discussion of the Arima Caribs of Trinidad, Forte (2005) proposes interpreting globalization of indigeneity as a "virtual meta-indigeneity" stemming from spread of motifs, practices, products, and ideologies. "Indeed, globalization processes have provided some of the raw materials, conditioning processes, and impetus for developing indigeneity in the Caribbean..." (Forte 2005:220).

Besides contact with extant indigenous groups, another source of information for recreating traditional practices is historical accounts made by Europeans.<sup>9</sup> For instance, several European missionaries working individually in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries compiled detailed records of Kalinago customs, practices, and language (e.g. Labat 1724; Du Tertre 1667; Breton 1665). Another European source of inspiration is historical images made by eighteenth century artist Agostino Brunias who resided temporarily in Dominica (Honychurch 2004). Reproductions of Brunias' work are available from a variety of sources throughout the region including some souvenir shops. Finally, written and visual records made about other indigenous groups provide historical documentation. Upon request, I purchased and delivered two volumes (Hathaway 1990; Naylor 1975), one containing historical photos of Native North Americans and the other Native American designs, to a performer who also creates costumes.

Based on data from the sources cited above, performers (male and female) wear long loin cloths known as *waiuku*; the women also wear a strip of cloth tied across their chests - a non-traditional item added for modern-day modesty. All

performers go barefoot, wear necklaces made from colored seeds, and wear head bands. They also use face and body paints in black, red, and white. Each dancer wears the same basic costume but many add personal elements to express individual style. For example, although use of face and body paints is standard, designs are individually determined.

Consideration of the contents of each song and dance yields several patterns. For instance, the creators did not limit themselves to one type of information. Inspiration for song themes comes from myths, historical events, culture-hero legends, and the value placed on connections to nature. The diversity of topics indicates the level of creativity at work and the wide net cast in search of meaningful content. Furthermore, regardless of the particular source for the themes, they are all Kalinago-specific cultural expressions, not generically indigenous. In other words, elements of the performance, whether they consist of existing features found in the larger community (e.g. drumming) or not (e.g. dance moves), are clearly embedded in a Kalinago context. Thus, new or existing forms of expression in the performance convey familiar ideas, values and images.

It is notable that the audiences for performances may be either community members or outsiders. Karifuna has performed at important community events such as the launch of the Caribbean Regional Environmental Programme (CREP) in the Carib Territory in summer 2004<sup>10</sup> and the annual Carib Week held in Dominica each fall to celebrate Kalinago culture and history. In terms of performances directed towards outsiders, Karifuna members have traveled internationally to perform at festivals as well as performing for tourists in the Carib Territory, such as at the Kalinago Barana Autê (Kalinago Cultural Village). In fact, the audience for most performances is tourists. This need not provoke cynicism as to the cultural legitimacy or purpose of the activity. Decades ago Fredrik Barth (1969) noted that ethnicity often becomes pronounced rather than diminished during interactions with outsiders because it is at the boundaries with other groups that ethnic differences take on their greatest relevance. Indeed it could be said that Karifuna has both a public orientation and a more private one. In a sense, KCG is a self-designated defender and ambassador of Kalinago ethnicity. The more public side brings a movable cultural boundary to the “other” to promote awareness of Kalinago culture. The more private side supports and promotes cultural activities within the community. One community leader stated, “The [Karifuna] cultural group is mainly involved in the preservation, promotion and teaching of Carib culture and traditions. The group also presents the plight of the Carib people or issues which arise from time to time using popular education methods, locally, nationally, and internationally” (Burton 1993:18).

Another element associated with performances is that Karifuna members readily admit that, unlike handicrafts, there is no continuity of practice with dancing. The emcee who introduces Karifuna dances usually states this as part of his remarks at the beginning of each show staged for tourists as a way to give context to the performance. The audience is often surprised to learn that the style and structure of the dances are creations based on knowledge gathered from other indigenous

groups. As part of my research documenting Kalinago ethnicity and efforts at ethnic renewal, I followed the Carib Heritage Tour – a package that includes Karifuna performances – numerous times and interviewed tourists in addition to performers, tour guides, and craft vendors. Tourists invariably enjoyed the performances, but because of the admission of cultural borrowing some expressed doubt about whether they were “real.” From the tourist perspective, the admission of created tradition cast doubt on whether they had encountered the authentic exotic “other” they had come to see.

The topic of authenticity, addressed from a variety of perspectives, appears regularly in scholarship about tourism activities and ethnic renewal. Because of the emphasis on cultural forms, “...ethnic tourism brings with it the special problem of authenticity” (Van den Berghe and Keyes 1984:345). Some scholars, particularly those working early in the history of the topic, focus on evaluating the historical accuracy of cultural representations. Regina Bendix (1989) provides a brief overview of the early history of authenticity scholarship and notes a trend over time that “...shifts the analytic focus from the event [or object] to the agency of those involved in its creation and maintenance” (1989:132). Rather than evaluating the accuracy in replication of historical precedents, this alternate approach emphasizes the choices made by artisans and performers when engaging with, creating, and presenting their culture. In that vein, Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and others (e.g. Handler and Linnekin 1984; Jackson 1995; Nagel 1997) assert that invention of tradition is a normal, rather than anomalous, process by which a population identifies and utilizes relevant aspects of its past, real or perceived, in the present. Similarly, Gillis (1994) asserts that memory and identity are fluid, subjective representations of reality constructed in the present for a particular purpose. The following statement by Jean Jackson (1995) about identity provides insight into understanding the cultural legitimacy of re-created traditional practices, such as Kalinago dancing.

It is helpful sometimes to see culture as less like an animal’s fur and more like a jazz musician’s repertoire: the individual pieces come out of a tradition, but improvisation always occurs...This analogy emphasizes the agentive aspects of culture; we cannot speak of a jazz musician as “having” jazz, and, for the most part, speaking of people as “having” culture occludes the interaction between those people and their tradition. The analogy also underscores the interactive aspects of culture; just as a jazz artist’s music depends on engaging an audience and fellow musicians, so does a culture come into existence because a ‘we’ and a ‘they’ interact. This may also prove to be a more genuinely respectful – as well as correct – view of present-day indigenous groups in their struggles to preserve their self-respect, autonomy, and a life with meaning. (Jackson 1995:18)

Insights garnered from Hobsbawm (1983) further elucidate a basis for an alternative criterion by which to evaluate new cultural forms. Hobsbawm points out that “...

invented tradition is based on ideology, not the technical base” (1983:3). Within such a framework, manifestations of tradition have the potential to be infinitely variable in the present because, although influenced by the social environment (context), they are not limited by existing material forms. His assertion echoes Jackson’s (1995) analogy of the jazz musician’s repertoire. The premise for evaluation is not accuracy in replication of past practices – objects or behavior – but rather resonance with current cultural identity and lived experiences embraced by at least part of the community. Daniel (1996) agrees with Handler and Saxton (1988) in suggesting that the performing arts in particular, as opposed to the visual arts, benefit from such an approach because of their fluidly creative nature.

KCG informants state that inauthenticity is not a valid criticism of Karifuna performances because although the dances constitute an example of reinvented tradition, they are created by Kalinago community members who combine indigenous elements, both from inside and outside of the community, past and present. Community members’ comments indicate an interpretive framework in which the authenticity of performances rests not in perfect simulation but rather in the validity of relying on certain types of knowledge as resources; specifically, the authority/power of a general indigenous body of knowledge that Karifuna members, as indigenous people, claim a right to access as a source of inspiration for new forms. Within this framework, the purpose of explicitly acknowledging recreated traditions (inspired by an indigenous knowledge base beyond everyday practices, but not ideology) of the present-day Kalinago community is to weaken the legitimacy of any doubts about authenticity at the same time that it reinforces the indigenous status of the community on Dominica. Hobsbawm’s and Jackson’s statements illuminate the community’s approach to its own identity and its efforts at cultural revival. Other indigenous groups and their cultural practices are viewed as legitimate sources of knowledge because they are part of an indigenous tradition to which the Kalinago also belong. To put it in Jackson’s terms, “...the ...pieces come out of a tradition...but improvisation always occurs” (Jackson 1995:18).

This is not to suggest that all Kalinago agree with the value of Karifuna performances. More than one informant expressed concern that such performances give outsiders a misleading impression of modern-day Kalinago life. One specific criticism addressed the clothing of the dancers. The body image presented in dances raised fears that the outsider stereotype of Kalinago people as half-naked savages who worshipped nature would be confirmed. Ethnicity, or any type of social identity, is not a monolithic enterprise. The choices made by Karifuna reflect the attitudes and goals of one segment of the community. Lack of universal support within the community is expected because, as noted by Graham et al (2000), heritage is a signifying process that establishes cultural norms within the community. As such, Karifuna performances are not merely recurring ephemeral cultural displays, but they function also as a mechanism by which cultural standards for the entire community may shift or become established. Thomas (1992) presents an interesting discussion about traditions that reify cultural images and stereotypes deemed undesirable by part or all of a given population. Notably, criticisms lodged

against Karifuna performances by Kalinago community members question neither the legitimacy of the process of cultural revival used nor the validity of the final product, but rather express concern about the possible negative consequences of the end product.<sup>11</sup>

Tacit support of the process, if not the end product, by the larger community indicates a shared understanding about sources of ancestral knowledge used for ethnic renewal. During interviews with both KCG members and the larger community, two specific approaches to culture loss and renewal were identified. One is based on the idea that, as the need arises, lost knowledge may be reclaimed, or in some cases, reinvented. From this point of view, ancestral knowledge is never completely lost, but rather it exists in some other place accessible through a variety of mechanisms specifically identified as dreams, meditation, and contact with other indigenous groups. A perfect example of this is illustrated in the Karifuna dance, "Maruka." Maruka is a Kalinago culture-hero, and the dance recounts how he was visited in a dream by a dead ancestor who instructed him about some of the lost traditions of the Kalinago. Upon waking, Maruka shared the knowledge with others. With this type of attitude, there is neither an overwhelming sense of loss nor urgency in preservation. Information merely lays dormant, waiting to be called into action when needed. While explaining the concept to me during an interview, one informant referenced the knowledge to make thread from screwpine and the use of certain types of twigs as toothbrushes to make the point that old ways change as better ways are introduced. However, if the need arises to make one's own thread again, then the old ways can be re-mastered...or recreated...or rediscovered. This also means that information appropriated by outsiders (e.g. missionaries or anthropologists) for their purposes can still be used by insiders. A Kalinago craftsman from the village of St. Cyr makes cassava squeezers using *larouma*. He was the only source for this item in the community. Assuming that he was the keeper of specialized family knowledge, I was interested to discover he had recently taught himself how to make them after seeing a photo in a museum catalogue, which he showed to me.<sup>12</sup> In summer 2007 I met a young woman from Salybia who learned basic clay techniques from a visiting ceramics artist. Her father identified two local sources of clay, and she has begun producing forms and styles derived from photos and drawings in archaeology texts that chronicle the material culture from prehistoric sites in the Caribbean islands. An alternative, more standard approach involves efforts, such as the Cultural Preservation Project, to preserve the existing knowledge of elders as a cultural storehouse for current and future use.

### **Conclusion**

The development of traditional dancing stands as an example of an ongoing effort at cultural renewal engaged in by KCG members. Although dancing can be described as newly recreated, it cannot be labeled as a completely new and original practice. Rather, creators draw from a variety of dormant and extant

cultural practices from within the community and from those of other indigenous groups. Combining these forms in novel ways, performers craft uniquely Kalinago expressions of indigenous experience. In this sense, Karifuna dance performances may be interpreted as a newly created tradition.

Looking to other indigenous groups as a model for behavior is not just about locating resources for lost traditional knowledge. It is also, in itself, an expression of ethnic identity; a conscious act which locates the Kalinago within an indigenous context. Due to a degree of culture loss and their particular political situation on Dominica, the Kalinago are especially interested in proving indigenous connections. The open admission of created “traditional” dancing illustrates a lack of concern about challenges to the authenticity of created practices. How can there be any challenge if the behavior is derived from an indigenous repertoire, even if not their own? Public admission of this type of borrowing - public performance of this type of borrowing - emphasizes the position of the Kalinago as legitimate heirs to indigenous ancestral knowledge. However, this is not performance of pan-indigenous identity because although inspired by knowledge gathered from other populations, Karifuna participants create a culture-specific product by incorporating into their dances elements considered to be relevant to their own experiences as members of a particular indigenous community from the circum-Caribbean region.

Analysis of these global interactions reveals an emerging hierarchy where local groups privilege certain sources of information over others.<sup>13</sup> For the Kalinago of Dominica, the preferential use of cultural knowledge from South America and North America may reflect partiality for cultural forms from established indigenous populations with ample traditional resources as well as preference for information from closely related populations (South America only). However, although the nature of interactions with the Arima Caribs of Trinidad or the Carib community on St. Vincent might be explained this way, the Garifuna of Central America have maintained numerous elements of traditional culture, such as spirituality and language, long absent from the Dominican population. A contributing factor to selective use of materials may be (perhaps unconscious) racialized notions of identity. This is a claim supported by the role, albeit controversial, of phenotype as a symbol of identity. Ironically, as noted by Phillips and Steiner (1999:9), cultural borrowing and the stylistic hybridity of resulting cultural forms “conflicts with essentialist notions...” of, in this case, identity. Another factor deployed in the hierarchical arrangement of cultural forms is noted by Forte who states that “... the dominant representations of indigenous issues and perspectives follow the broad contours of the center-periphery tension in the world system, with those indigenous groups that are active in the core countries (groups with financial resources and access to the international mass media) having a disproportionate prominence” (2005:202). He further notes that, to the degree that either or both of these circumstances (metropolitan orientation and/or racialized notions of identity) exist in reality, they act as hurdles which impede global networking (Forte 2005:212).

Forte suggests that renewed ethnic consciousness among the Arima Caribs, a result of global interactions, unfolds in a way that even as it grants the community a distinct identity, it simultaneously attaches the community to a national Trinidadian identity (2005:183). By contrast, I propose that, for the Kalinago of Dominica, a similar process of ethnic renewal stemming from global transactions with indigenous communities generates, at least for some community members, a sense of identity separate and parallel to a national Dominican identity, rather than nested within it. Davila provides useful concepts when she introduces the terms “cultural nationalism” and “domain of sovereignty” in discussing identity politics in Puerto Rico. Island leaders, thwarted in terms of achieving political sovereignty, turn instead to manipulation of cultural forms as a mechanism for asserting autonomy and difference (Davila 1997). Similarly KCG members establish a domain of sovereignty based on their control and manipulation of local indigenous culture that has been fortified through global cultural and political exchanges with other indigenous populations.

The resulting dance performances function as more than entertainment sold to tourists. First, the research involved in creating and learning the dances serves to heighten performers’ awareness of their own identity. Additionally, community members constitute the audience for some performances. Karifuna performers’ vision of Kalinago culture is not uniformly accepted, so each performance is an opportunity to influence the community. Even when performed for tourists, art as education is a primary goal. For that reason, Karifuna members structure performances to enhance audience understanding about aspects of Kalinago culture and history. In turn, most tourists I interviewed indicated that they chose to take the Carib Heritage Tour or to visit the Kalinago Barana Autë to learn about one of the last remaining indigenous populations in the Caribbean. Finally, as already mentioned, the Karifuna Culture Group engages in a variety of practices separate and apart from dancing. As with many cultural practices, the significance of dancing to performers and the larger community has multiple dimensions - economic, cultural, and political - and open admission of the use of borrowed elements stands as a symbol of identity in the same way as the dancing itself.

### **Acknowledgements**

A shorter version of this paper was presented at the Southern Anthropological Society annual conference in spring 2003, Baton Rouge, LA. Original material was collected during numerous research trips to Dominica between November 1993 and July 2007. Special thanks to members of the Potter College Writing Group who provided insightful comments on an early draft of this article. Thanks also to Patsy Thomas, Victoria Burton, and Marilyn Auguiste and their families for their support and guidance in all things. Finally, I am deeply appreciative of the helpful suggestions made by the anonymous reviewers.



## Notes

1. My experience while conducting research in the Carib Territory over the past thirteen years is that most individuals refer to themselves as Carib, not Kalinago. However, a growing handful of Caribs, particularly when discussing their ethnic identity, pointedly refer to themselves as Kalinago. For instance, a Carib cultural center once located in the capital of Roseau was called the Kalinago Centre, and an exhibit at the Native American Heritage Museum in Washington, D.C. refers to the Caribs as Kalinago. The term Kalinago may eventually replace the term Carib, much like the Black Caribs of Middle America have become known as Garifuna.
2. Until the mid-1980s the Carib Territory was known as the Carib Reserve. The Caribs asked that the name be changed because they felt it sounded like they were animals in a zoo.
3. There is an ongoing debate between the Kalinago and other Dominicans as to the exact boundaries of the Carib Territory. The Kalinago believe that the boundaries were changed when the first government took office after national independence in 1978. See Hudepohl (2002) and Layng (1983) for details.
4. See Cornell and Hartmann's discussion of ethnicity in terms of "reciprocal fluxion" (1998:72) and "constructed primordialism" (1998:90). The latter term is somewhat similar to the Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) use of "invention of tradition."
5. Karifuna is a term from the traditional Arawakan language that refers to the ethnic group. Other groups also use the term. The complete name for a community organized NGO, WAIKADA, is Waitukubuli Karifuna Development Agency. Waitukubuli (various spellings), the traditional Kalinago name for Dominica, translates as "tall is her body." As previously noted, a historically related group in Middle America, once known as Black Caribs, now refer to themselves as the Garifuna. Note that [k] and [g] are both velar sounds; one voiced, the other voiceless. Some state that Karifuna is a gender specific term (masculine) and prefer to use the term Kalinago instead to refer to the entire group.
6. In the past, Kweyol was looked down upon as the language of the uneducated. However, in the past seven to ten years there has been a growing national movement to value it as a symbol of national identity, and although English is still the language of official business, Kweyol is increasingly used in newspaper reports and radio shows (Paugh 2001).
7. The use of extra-local cultural resources as a resource for creativity and/or to strengthen identity is not unique to the Kalinago community of Dominica. See for example Kline-Silverman (1999) discussing the art forms in the Sepik River Valley, Niessen (1999) discussing Toba Batak textile repertory, and Brown (1998) discussing cultural forms of Black Britons. Mato (2000) discusses exchange between indigenous organizations, and Quinn (2005) examines how event organizers utilize extra-local connections.
8. Each canoe is named for a bird. The GliGli is a mythical bird of prey; the Sisserou is the common name for an endangered parrot indigenous to Dominica.

9. See Peter Hulme and Neil L. Whitehead (1992) and Hulme (1986) for discussions about and a starting place for source materials of various visitors to Dominica.
10. CREP is a stakeholder-based (i.e. “bottom up” model) ecological development program implemented by the Caribbean Conservation Association, authorized by CARIFORUM, and financed by the European Union. The Carib Territory was chosen as the locale for one of thirteen regional demonstration projects.
11. Addressing danger from a different angle, Charles Briggs (1996) discusses how communities might be harmed by scholarship on the concept of invented tradition. For example, people with a particular agenda who misunderstand the scholarly discussion may use the information to justify taking land, or other resources, away from a group by arguing that it’s not authentically ethnic (enough).
12. Cassava squeezers are long, narrow, tubular baskets constructed with a diagonal weave. Each end has strong, looped handles, and one end is left open. These items were used to process bitter manioc, a root food that is deadly if the poison is not leached from it. The root is grated into a mash, the squeezer is compressed from either end to create a wide space to load the mash, and then it is hung from a tree branch, open side up. A weight is often attached to the loop on the other end. The poisonous liquid is pressed out as the basket slowly resumes its original shape. The remaining flour can be used in foodstuffs. Bitter manioc is used by indigenous peoples in South America, and the Kalinago grow it today on Dominica in demonstration gardens - although I don’t know anyone who eats it. It is possible that Kalinago ancestors did eat this tuber and may have had similar baskets for processing it.
13. Brown (1998) discusses a similar hierarchy in the exchange and use of cultural and political forms within the African diaspora.

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