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Lauren Poluha

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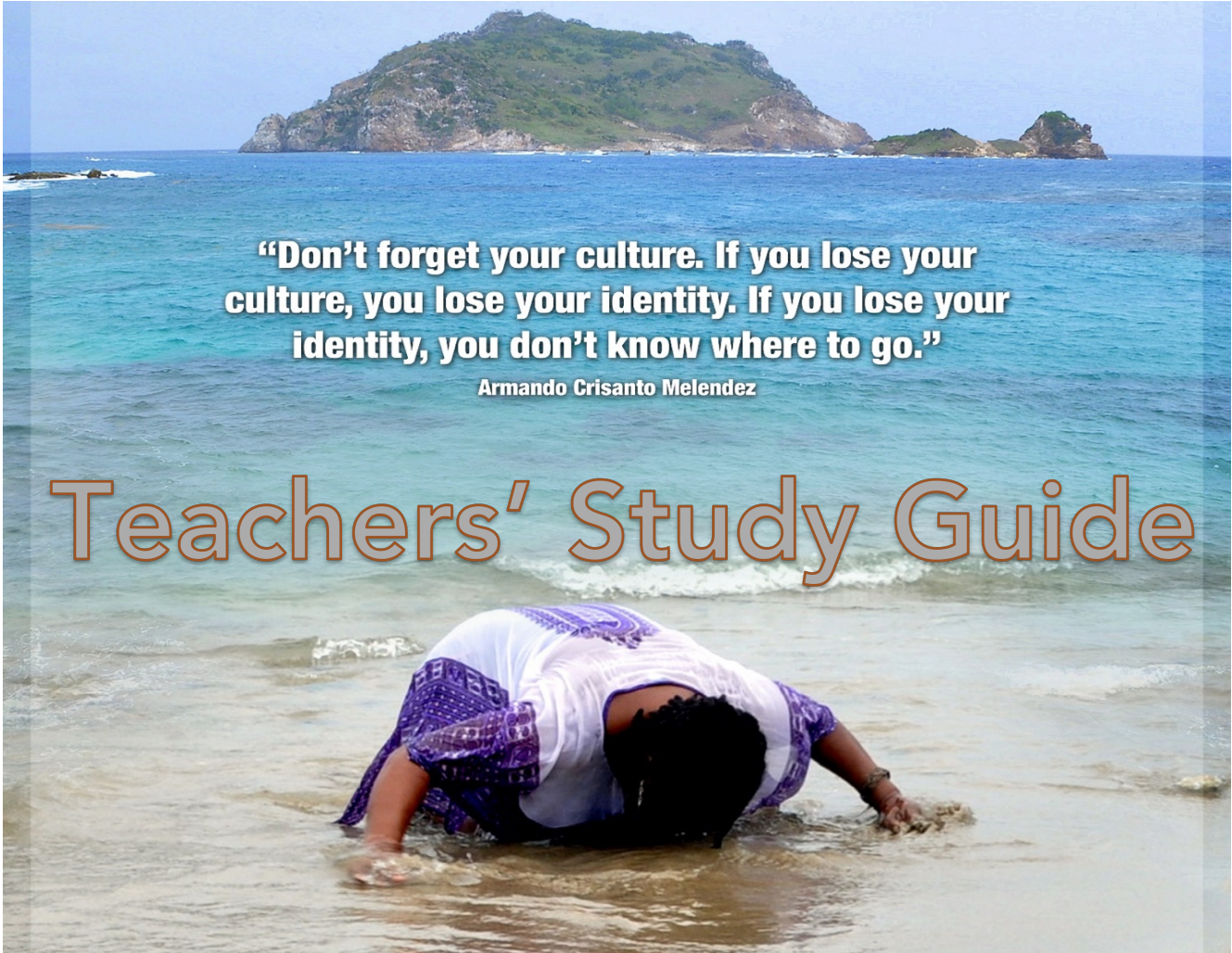
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**“Don’t forget your culture. If you lose your culture, you lose your identity. If you lose your identity, you don’t know where to go.”**

Armando Crisanto Melendez

# Teachers' Study Guide

## **YURUMEIN HOMELAND**

**Resistance, Rupture & Repair:  
The Caribs of St. Vincent in the Caribbean**

A Documentary Film by **NINE MORNING PRODUCTIONS** and **ANDREA E. LELAND PRODUCTIONS, INC.**

Producer, Director, Camera: **ANDREA E. LELAND** Additional Camera: **FABIAN GUERRA / GORO TOSHIMA**

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Photography credit: Kingsley Roberts

# Teachers' Study Guide

## YURUMEIN – HOMELAND

### RESISTANCE, RUPTURE & REPAIR: THE CARIBS OF ST VINCENT

A documentary film by Andrea E. Leland

#### Contents

Acknowledgements.....	3
Introduction .....	4
About the filmmaker.....	5
Featured in the film.....	5
Concepts and definitions.....	6
Discussion: Tradition and Identity .....	7
St Vincent and the Grenadines .....	8
Activity 1 .....	8
Activity 2 .....	9
The Garifuna Story .....	10
Activity 3.....	11
Activity 4.....	12
Activity 5.....	13
Discussion: Historical narratives.....	14
Cultural revival in St Vincent.....	14
Activity 6.....	16
Activity 7.....	16
Activity 8 .....	18
Discussion: Cultural heritage .....	19
Pilgrimages to St Vincent and Baliceaux.....	19
Discussion: Cultural Trauma.....	20
Ceremony for the Ancestors.....	20
Discussion: Ritual and Identity.....	21
Appendix: Notes on the Yurumein soundtrack.....	22
Discussion: Music and Meaning.....	25
Selected references for teachers.....	26
About the authors.....	28

## Acknowledgments

I owe much to the Garifuna Heritage Foundation of St Vincent for initially bringing me to the island to present my film *The Garifuna Journey*. It was on that journey that I met the Carib community that inspired me to make this film, *Yurumein*.

I cannot express enough appreciation to Dr Cadrin Gill, a Carib tradition bearer from St Vincent, whose passion for his culture is contagious and inspiring. His guidance, friendship and support has been instrumental in seeing this project through to completion.

On St Vincent, Laurent Bernard "Ras" Jacobs was a superb guide within the Carib community. He introduced me to tradition bearers Augustine "Sardo" Sutherland, Nixon Lewis, historian Edgar Adams, and other members of his extended family. Empress Modupe Olufunmi-Jacobs shared true friendship.

The crew and support team for this documentary have been thoroughly professional and encouraging throughout. Fabian Guerra was cameraman par excellence and Kingsley Roberts graciously shared his beautiful photographs of the events on Baliceaux. A special thank you to artist Greg Palacio, who provided the drawings from which we produced the film's animation. The music of Rhodée Castillo, Abuza, and Andy Palacio have helped tell the story with poetic cadence. Hussein Castillo kept up the social media end of the project and brought the Garifuna community into the discussion. Egbert Higinio has been by my side throughout with comments, suggestions and assistance with getting the word out.

A special thank you to Lauren Poluha and Paula Prescod, who have demonstrated brilliant work in putting this study guide together. I am grateful to my husband, Joel, for his constant patience with my passion for filmmaking and all that it brings.

I am grateful to all the Garifuna people who have allowed and helped me tell their story. My hope is that the Garifuna Nation continues to embrace the people in the homeland, *Yurumein*, in word and action, thereby bringing to light the very rich culture that they were deprived of.

Andrea E Leland  
Petaluma, CA  
June 2018

## Introduction

*Yurumein – Homeland: The Caribs of St Vincent* is a documentary film that explores the historical and spiritual significance of St Vincent and Baliceaux to Garifuna and Carib communities. In this documentary, Andrea Leland explores what it means to be Carib in St Vincent, the birthplace of the Garinagu who were exiled to Roatán in 1797. The **Caribs** themselves are said to be descendants of a South American group who identified themselves as Galibi. They became known as **Island Caribs** once they had settled in the islands scattered in the Atlantic Ocean. As will be shown later in this guide, the Island Caribs, whose daily existence was inextricably linked with that of the Arawaks both in Central America and the islands, were also called **Kalinago**. Today, the term Garifuna is used for the Central Americans and Kalinago or Carib for the Vincentians.

For centuries, the Kalinago people lived freely on the Caribbean island of St Vincent. There, they enjoyed a relatively peaceful, prosperous existence. The advent of colonialism marked the beginning of a difficult conflict between Kalinago and European forces, and for many years the Kalinago successfully fought off their oppressors. In 1797, after the defeat of their valiant chiefs, Chatoyer and Duvallé most Kalinago were killed or exiled to Central America aboard a fleet of British ships. Only a handful of Kalinago remained in hiding on St Vincent, and for the next two hundred years, their culture was all but lost on the island. Meanwhile, those who survived the passage to Central America became known as the **Garifuna** people, or Garinagu (the plural for Garifuna in the Garifuna language), and have reconstructed their culture through oral histories, music, song, food, and religious rituals.

Inspired by recent cultural revitalization efforts among native groups in the United States and the increasing visibility of Garifuna culture worldwide, St Vincent's Kalinago are becoming aware of the communities where the culture of their ancestors is still lived and celebrated, and have begun taking steps toward cultural reclamation. *Yurumein – Homeland* captures the efforts of Vincentian Kalinago to recover their unique linguistic, musical, and spiritual heritage as they connect with their brethren across the Garifuna Diaspora. It also documents the experiences of Garifuna men and women as they make pilgrimages to the islands. They journey for two reasons: to seek a spiritual connection to the land of their ancestors, and to introduce their culture to St Vincent's Kalinago communities. Through these interactions, both Garinagu and Caribs are working to develop a positive cultural identity and overcome destructive stereotypes that have plagued their people for centuries.

The movement to bring Garifuna/Kalinago culture back to St Vincent and reconnect Garinagu to the homeland of their ancestors is crucial to the vitality of Garifuna culture. The Garifuna story is an inspiring example of a people's resistance to colonial domination and cultural hegemony.

- You can find the film's website here: [www.yurumeinproject.com](http://www.yurumeinproject.com)
- Follow us on Facebook: "Yurumein Garifuna Movie" [www.facebook.com/yurumein.movie](http://www.facebook.com/yurumein.movie)
- The study guide for Leland's film *The Garifuna Journey* can be downloaded here: [www.newday.com/film/garifuna-journey](http://www.newday.com/film/garifuna-journey)

## About the Filmmaker

**Andrea E. Leland** is a filmmaker and artist. For nearly 30 years, she has been producing documentary films that explore the history and culture of Caribbean island communities. Leland's approach to filmmaking is what she calls "insider/outsider collaboration." Her films are created in dialogue with culture-bearers and prioritize the voices of the communities in which she works. In Leland's films, social, artistic, and political actions are placed within the context of their culture, imploring the viewer to confront old myths and discover new perspectives.

## Featured in the Film

**Dr Edgar Adams:** A historian born on the Grenadine island of Bequia, now residing on mainland St Vincent, Dr Adams has written extensively on St Vincent and the Grenadines from socio-economical, socio-historical and cultural perspectives.

**Lucia Ellis:** A Garifuna author and cultural activist from Belize, Central America, Lucia Ellis has published several books that trace her family history and explore Garifuna spirituality.

**Dr Cadrin Gill:** A Kalinago originally from Sandy Bay, a Carib village in St Vincent, Dr Gill is a physician living in Los Angeles. He is the Honorary Consul General of St Vincent and the Grenadines.

**Nixon Lewis:** A Kalinago man who runs a tailoring business in Sandy-Bay, St Vincent, and a hobbyist historian, Nixon Lewis has done a lot of research on the history of St Vincent. One of Mr Lewis' sons, a Community College student, also shares some of his experiences as a Carib in St Vincent.

**Armando Crisanto Melendez:** A Garifuna from Honduras, Mr Crisanto Melendez is the founder and artistic director of the *Ballet Nacional Folklórico Garifuna de Honduras*, a professional Garifuna dance troupe from Honduras, Central America. Melendez and his troupe, which includes his daughter **Ashanti Crisanto**, have travelled the Americas performing traditional Garifuna drumming, song, and dance and raising awareness about Garifuna history & culture.

**Leon "Banjo man" Nero:** A Kalinago musician from Sandy Bay, St Vincent, Mr Nero sings a song honouring Carib Chief Chatoyer in the film.

**Augustine Sutherland:** A Kalinago man from St Vincent, Mr Sutherland has spent years researching the buried history of his people and cultivating pride in his Kalinago heritage. He has taken on the role of a cultural ambassador for the Kalinago community in St Vincent.

**Odette Sutherland:** A Kalinago woman from St Vincent, Ms Sutherland who reflects on what she, as a Carib, learnt about her people at school and in books.

## Concepts and Definitions

### DIASPORA

Diaspora can be defined by the following criteria:

- The dispersal of people across the boundaries of at least two nation-states
- A sense of alienation from the new host land along with a real or imagined relationship with the homeland
- Self-awareness of a group identity that persists across multiple generations

Diasporas are usually caused by some greater force such as war, political change, the need for labour and income, or industrialization (Safran 1991).

The "African Diaspora" refers to the dispersal of people of African descent throughout the world, particularly forced migrations around the Atlantic Basin due to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. For many people who identify as members of the African Diaspora, the continent of Africa is conceptualized as a homeland, and a sense of group identity and shared roots exists among many people of African descent throughout Africa, Europe, and the Americas.

Likewise, many Garifuna people speak of a "Garifuna Diaspora" because the Garifuna people live throughout Central America, North America, and the Caribbean. Originally, this migration was also forced as Garinagu were forcibly removed from the island of St Vincent (more on this below). St Vincent is conceptualized as an ancestral homeland and the birthplace of Garifuna culture. People throughout the Garifuna Diaspora have a shared sense of identity as Garifuna, and many share linguistic, spiritual, musical, and other cultural practices. This transnational "Garifuna Diaspora" is also referred to by many as the "Garifuna Nation."

### TRADITION

Tradition can be defined as "a process of cultural construction" (Glassie 1995:396) that naturally evolves and develops over time. Its opposite is not change, but oppression (the stifling of its natural evolution).

### RITUAL

A ritual is an event that involves a specific group of objects, actions, symbols, and words. Rituals are usually associated with some aspect of a community's or individual person's spiritual or social life. For example, there are rituals for religious events, rites of passage, seasons, political events, weddings, funerals, births, holidays, and more.

All of the world's societies contain rituals. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, anthropologists have studied rituals in cultures all over the world. Some, like Malinowski, argued that rituals play an important role in individuals' psychological needs. Others, like Radcliffe-Brown, argued that rituals are essential to constructing and maintaining functioning societies. In other words, rituals fulfill both personal and societal needs.

## PILGRIMAGE

A pilgrimage is a religious or spiritual journey. Pilgrims—people who are on pilgrimages—often travel to sacred sites as an act of devotion. Pilgrimages can be done by groups of people, or by individuals. “Pilgrimage” can also be used to describe a person’s journey into their own inner being or their own faith.

## IDENTITY

Identity can be defined from different perspectives. In the context of the film *Yurumein - Homeland*, self-identity, social identity and cultural identity are important concepts.

*Self-identity* relates to my view of myself, how I see myself, what I think of myself. This view of myself may result from an individual process of reflexion and choice. It may be the discourse I use to empower myself and is often referred to as self-awareness, self-image, self-esteem. It has a psychological component, (Rogers 1961) and this is often what allows the individual to identify with a larger group, thus the idea of collective identity: the way we see others can draw us to those we categorise like us.

We may take on specific (social, professional) roles in our interactions with others which come to form our *social identity*. Sometimes, we may not have a say in the construction of our *social identity* as this may be imposed from outside the group we identify with. We may therefore be seen in a different light than the way we identify ourselves. *Social identity* is inextricably tied up with ethnic, social, political, historical and economic factors and may reflect stereotypes. Acknowledging that we share values, traditions and rituals, symbols and characteristics of language, religion or ethnicity, with other individuals and groups of individuals gives us a sense of self, of who we are culturally.

*Cultural identities* are tied up in memory and also need myths, fantasy and narrative to be constructed (Hall 1990:225) In a subsequent publication Hall writes “identities are about questions of using the resources of history, language and culture in the process of becoming rather than being: not 'who we are' or 'where we came from', so much as what we might become, how we have been represented and how that bears on how we might represent ourselves.” (Hall 1996:4).

### DISCUSSION: TRADITION & IDENTITY

In groups of 4, take turns asking and answering these questions:

1. Make a list of all the different groups you belong to—think about family, school, religion, nation, etc.
2. Which of these groups do you most strongly identify with?
3. How would you describe your personal identity?
4. How do you think others—both people you do and do not know personally—would describe you?



## St Vincent and the Grenadines

*Yurumein*, the Garifuna name for St Vincent, is said to mean “the beauty of the rainbows in the valleys.” Although we have been unable to assert the accuracy of this translation, we do have information from Father Breton’s dictionary on two related words, bearing in mind that *Yurumein* seems to be derived from *louloumain*.

- The term *Máina* is given as the equivalent of *garden*.
- *loulouca* is trickier to ascertain. It is recorded to mean *God* in Father Breton’s dictionary. It must be noted that this is not the only word translated as *God* since one also finds *Chemijn* in the dictionary. Think of the similarity in sound between *Chemijn* and *Shaman*, which refers to the being who has control over good and bad spirits. Maybe “*Spirit helper*” is a more appropriate translation for all these words.

Whatever the case might be, *Yurumein* holds a central place in the minds, hearts, and spiritual lives of Garinagu in the diaspora today. It represents a utopian homeland, a place of spiritual rest, the place from which the Garifuna people emerged. Within Garifuna spirituality, St Vincent is often mingled with the idea of *sairi*, the verdant afterworld of the Garinagu.

### ACTIVITY 1

In his bilingual (Carib/French) dictionary of 1665/6, the French Dominican priest Raymond Breton entered *louloumain* as the name used by the Caribs to refer to the island now known as St Vincent.

Try to pronounce *louloumain* and *Yurumein* successively.

1. What similarities and differences can you identify?
2. Can you suggest a reason for the differences in pronunciation?

**St Vincent and the Grenadines** is a nation composed of several small islands and cays located in the Lesser Antilles, in the Caribbean Sea. The nation as a whole has a population of approximately 110,000 with a quarter of the total population residing in Kingstown, the capital city. Formerly a British colony, St Vincent and the Grenadines gained its independence on October 27, 1979. It is now a constitutional monarchy and a member of the British Commonwealth. The official language is English. Many Vincentians speak a dialect of English called Vincentian, others speak Vincentian Creole (Prescod 2010, 2015).

According to the Statistical Office of St Vincent and the Grenadines, about 70% of the population is of African descent; about 20% is Creole (of mixed European and African descent). The remainder of St Vincent’s population is mainly European, East Indian, and Chinese; about 3.6% of Vincentians identify as Kalinago/Garifuna (stats.gov.vc). The religious affiliations of Vincentians are: over 75% Protestant Christian (including Anglican, Methodist, Pentecostal, Evangelical, Jehovah’s Witnesses and Baptist),

and ~13% Roman Catholic. The remainder of Vincentians either practises another religion, such as Hinduism or did not state a religious affiliation on the national census. Religious practices may also include Rastafarianism, Islamism, the Bahá'í Faith and Mormonism.

St Vincent contains an active volcano that erupted in 1902 and 1979. The ash from these and previous eruptions has made St Vincent's soil particularly fertile, and the island was therefore highly sought after for agricultural purposes during the colonial era. Agriculture continues to form the backbone of St Vincent's economy; the country cultivates and exports bananas, arrowroot, sweet potatoes, plantains, coconuts, and milled flour and rice. Some Vincentians also make their living in the fishing industry, manufacturing and, increasingly, tourism.

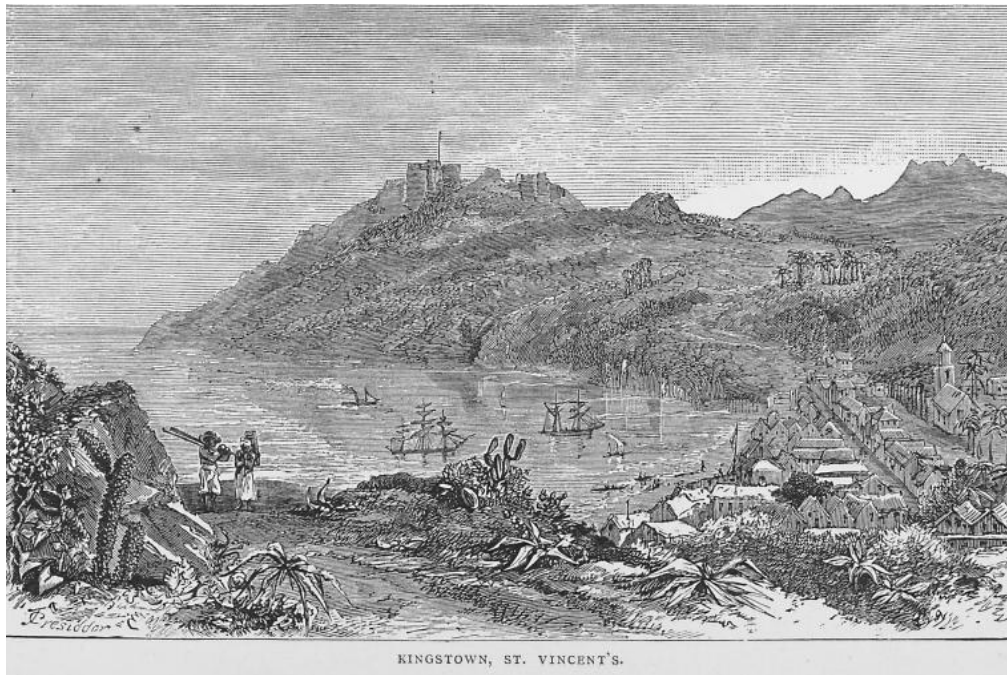


Figure 1: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Jean Blackwell Hutson Research and Reference Division, The New York Public Library. "Kingstown, St Vincent's." *The New York Public Library Digital Collections*. 1876.

## ACTIVITY 2

The Grenadine islands belong to the nations of St Vincent and Grenada. Among them are:

Baliceaux, Ballowia, Bequia, Caille Island, Canouan, Carriacou, Fort Duvenette, Frigate Island, Isle à Quatre, Large Island, Mayreau, Mustique, Palm Island, Petit Canouan, Petit Mustique, Petit Nevis, Petit Saint Vincent, Petite Dominique, Pigeon Island, Pillories, Ronde Island, Saline Island, Sandy Island, Savan Islands, Tobago Cays, Two Brothers, Two Sisters, Union Island, White Island, Young's Island.

Which islands are part of the St Vincent Grenadines?

## The Garifuna Story<sup>1</sup>

The Garifuna people are descendants of West African and Carib and Arawak people from South America, whose story begins on the island of St Vincent in the Lesser Antilles.

The designation “Caribs” is said to be a corruption of “Galibi” which Christopher Columbus perceived as “Caribe.” Galibi itself may have been a term of self-ascription used by the South American groups that sailed through the islands. Today, “Kali'na” seems to be the preferred term.

History has it that prior to the arrival of Christopher Columbus, Carib parties raided many Arawak villages, enslaving or killing the men and capturing the women. The two societies merged and became known as the **Kalinago**, or “Island Caribs” as Europeans called them. Caribs, originally speakers of Kali'na, a language indigenous to the northern half of South America, adopted much of the Arawak language, on which the present-day Garifuna language is based.

There are two theories regarding the origins of African history in the Americas. First is the assertion, ascribed to by most scholars and historians, that Africans first reached the Americas as a result of the European-controlled transatlantic slave trade. This historical narrative is supported by many Caribbean oral histories (including that of the Garinagu) and European historical documents. The second is the Pre-Columbian Theory, which argues that Africans had been trading and settling in the Americas since Malian leader Abubakari II sent expeditions in the 14th century. This historical narrative is supported by a small group of scholars such as Ivan Van Sertima, Leo Wiener, and Clyde Winters, but has had trouble finding widespread support from archaeologists and anthropologists.

Some Garinagu adhere to the Pre-Columbian Theory. They assert that the first interactions between Africans and Caribs in St Vincent occurred prior to Christopher Columbus' arrival in the Americas. This theory is appealing to some because it further diminishes the experience of slavery within Garifuna historical narratives.

However, according to the dominant Garifuna historical narrative, Africans began arriving on St Vincent in the 1500s, after surviving the Middle Passage aboard slave ships. Some were brought to the island as slaves, and others reached the island in the mid-1600s after surviving shipwrecks near St Vincent. Over the next hundred years, enslaved Africans who escaped from plantations on surrounding islands steadily made their way toward St Vincent, which became known as a haven for maroons. In fact, in her 1833 publication, Mrs Carmichael, the wife of a Scottish planter who prided herself in having close contact with her African domestic and field slaves wrote that the latter often referred to the Carib Country as “the land of milk and honey” (Carmichael 1833/II:46).

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Garifuna history, please refer to the study guide for *The Garifuna Journey*, available for free download on the New Day Films website ([www.newday.com/film/garifuna-journey](http://www.newday.com/film/garifuna-journey)). The *Garifuna Journey* is a documentary film on the Garifuna of Belize, produced and directed in 1998 by Andrea E. Leland and Kathy L. Berger.

By the middle of the 1700s, Africans and Kalinago had mixed to the point where Europeans began referring to them as the Black Caribs, a cultural group distinct from the “original” Island Carib society. The descendants of the Black Caribs are known as the **Garinagu**.

### ACTIVITY 3

Father Breton’s dictionary states that the people living on the island called themselves *Callínago* and the women used the term *Callíponan*.

In some languages, the sounds corresponding to the letters *l* and *r* may seem similar to the untrained ear, like in Japanese. We may also perceive as vely, the way some people in Britain pronounce the word very.

The sound of a *p* can be aspirated to the point where it sounds like an *f*, like in Chinese.

1. What similarities and differences can you identify when you say *Callínago* and *Garinagu* out loud? What about *Callíponan* and *Garifuna*?
2. What does Dr Adams say about the word *Garifuna* in the film? (Time code 40:55)
3. Do you agree? Do you get the impression that the word *Garifuna* is more often used than *Carib* in St Vincent and the Grenadines?

In the 1700s, there was a steady stream of conflict between Caribs and Europeans on St Vincent, and the island was ceded to Britain in the Treaty of Paris (1763). From 1763-1797, there were nearly constant skirmishes between Carib and British forces; the Caribs were usually the victors.

The British were afraid of the Caribs not only because of their military expertise, but because they feared the Caribs’ love of freedom would infiltrate St Vincent’s slave populations and cause an uprising. So, in 1797, the British took drastic action to permanently rid the island of the Black Carib “threat.” At the end of the Carib War of 1795-96, more than 4,000 Caribs surrendered to the British after the death of their great leader, Chatoyer.<sup>2</sup>

For centuries, Carib/Garifuna people have been burdened by negative stereotypes, including the myth that the Caribs were bloodthirsty cannibals. This misguided association of “Carib” with “cannibal” has its origins in one of Columbus’ journals (J. 146, in Hulme 1986) when he meets an individual “que debía ser de los caribes que comen los hombres” (who must be one of the Caribs who eat human flesh). The cannibalistic label is still applied to the Caribs up to this day, despite the fact that no Caribs practice cannibalism now, and historical evidence that shows if the Caribs ate human flesh, it was not gratuitous cannibalism but rather a ritualistic act performed as a sign of victory and merit over their adversaries (Labat 1722:238f, Petersen 1997:129, Fabel 2000:154).

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<sup>2</sup>For more on Chatoyer, see Dr Adrian Fraser’s 2002 book entitled *Chatoyer (Chatawae), the First National Hero of St Vincent and the Grenadines*.

Detained on Baliceaux, a small, barren island near St Vincent, nearly half the group perished. In April 1797, approximately 2,200 Caribs were boarded onto a fleet of British ships and displaced to the island of Roatán, Honduras. Throughout the early 1800s, the Caribs/Garinagu relocated along the coasts of Honduras, Nicaragua, Guatemala, and Belize, where Garifuna culture has survived for the last two centuries.

Today, more than 400,000 Garifuna people live in Central American and urban centres in the United States. A handful of Kalinago/Garinagu, descendants of those Caribs who hid in the mountains or who were not considered "black" enough to be subject to exile, still live in St Vincent (Gonzalez 1988:23). Despite the fact that most Garifuna people were forced out of St Vincent more than two hundred years ago, there are still some shared customs among the Kalinago of St Vincent and Garinagu of Central America.

#### ACTIVITY 4

A stereotype is a preconceived, oversimplified idea that we have about what groups of people are like, especially an idea which is wrong, and which may lead to treating them in a certain way.

In the film, Dr Gill says, "In my days it was not fashionable to be called Carib." (Time code 6:18). Odette Sutherland describes discrimination against Caribs when she says, "There were times when you couldn't even come in town to go in stores and buy a tv or chair set." (Time code 10:00) Nixon Lewis says, "Some of these people used to deny the fact that they were Garifuna people." (38:00)

1. What are some of the stereotypes that we hear in the film about the Caribs of St Vincent?
2. Do you think that cultural practices can be lost because people who do not share the same practices have negative attitudes towards them?
3. How has your behaviour been influenced by the negative attitudes other people have towards the Caribs?

Later in the film, Augustine "Sardo" Sutherland says, "I started to put on my Carib outfit, walk with my spear. Doing things people think are strange but it is what was handed down from my grandparents." (Time code 35:00)

4. How have the attitudes of Caribs, and other people in St Vincent, changed in recent years? What things have caused this change in perception?



Figure 2: "Chatoyer, the Chief of the Black Charaibes in St Vincent with his Wives" by Agostino Brunias (1773)

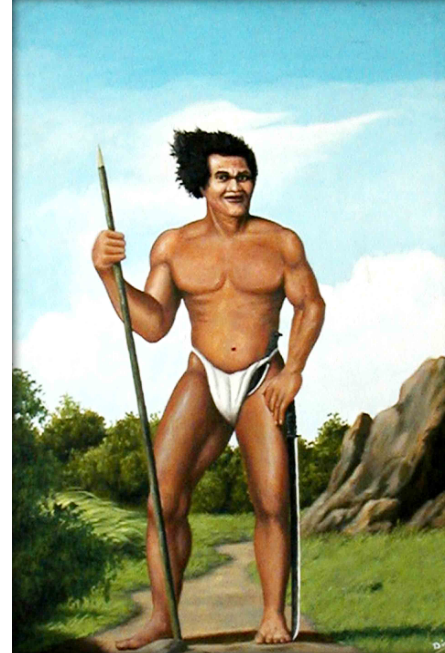


Figure 3: "Carib Chief, Chatoyer" by Lennox 'Dinks' Johnson (2002).  
Reproduced with permission from the artist.

#### ACTIVITY 5

In the film, Dr Gill states, "The name Chatoyer is revered among the Caribs, He is like magic to the Caribs." (Time code 19:01).

1. Why is this so?

Figure 2 was painted in 1773 by Agostino Brunias, an Italian artist. Brunias travelled to St Vincent and other Caribbean islands as an employee of Sir William Young, a British plantation owner. Brunias's job was to document the flora, fauna, landscapes, and people in the Caribbean.

Figure 3 was painted in 2002 by Lennox 'Dinks' Johnson, a well-known singer and artist from St Vincent. In 2017, the Prime Minister of St Vincent and the Grenadines named Dinks a cultural ambassador for the nation.

2. Compare the way Chatoyer is portrayed in each of these paintings.
3. How might the ethnicity, nationality, culture, and/or motivation of each painter impact the way that he portrays Chatoyer?

### DISCUSSION: HISTORICAL NARRATIVES

There is a saying that “History is written by the winners.” Indeed, for many years, Garifuna and Carib history was not included in textbooks or school curriculum in St Vincent or Central America. Instead, shallow stereotypes that cast Caribs as uneducated cannibals were perpetuated by myth, legend, and popular media.

1. In the context of this film and Carib history, what does this saying mean?
2. If history is written by its “winners,” then whose stories are not being told? How can we explore the stories of people who weren’t necessarily the “winners” in history? What is gained by doing this?
3. The lyrics of the song “*Luagu Ubouhu Baliceaux*” in the Appendix of this study guide are an example of art that tells the Garifuna historical narrative. How would the British telling of this story (the Garifuna genocide & exile) differ from that of the Garinagu/Kalinago?
4. Find an example of a people or history that has been marginalized or silenced, and do some research about it. How does what you’ve learned contradict, agree with, or add to the dominant historical narrative about the people, time, or place you researched?

## Cultural Revival in St Vincent

There is currently a “Garifuna Renaissance” underway across the Garifuna Nation, as Garifuna language, music, dance, and history, along with issues of ethnic identity, politics, and indigenous rights are receiving increased international attention from Garifuna activist groups, cultural organizations, artists and academia. In 2001, UNESCO recognized the Garifuna language, dance, and music as a Masterpiece of the Oral and Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. This recognition has spurred the ongoing Garifuna Renaissance.

Technology and the relative ease of international travel are mobilizing the Garinagu in increasingly efficient and significant ways. More *dügüs* (ceremonies for the Garifuna ancestor spirits) are being held now than ever in Central America, offering increased opportunities for Garifuna communities to gather and celebrate their history and identity.

Artists and performing arts groups like the Ballet Nacional Folklórico Garifuna de Honduras, whose members are featured in the film, along with internationally popular Garifuna musicians like Andy Palacio, Aurelio Martinez, the Garifuna Collective, and C-Wills (Clayton Williams), have played an important role in creating cultural pride and bringing Garifuna culture to international stages. See the Appendix for notes on the soundtrack of *Yurumein*.

“The Garinagu who saw my films commented that they felt proud, finally, to be Garifuna once they saw themselves and their culture portrayed in a film positively. Up until they saw the film, they had only seen negative images of themselves in popular media. This was the first time they saw positive images on screen. The response overall was very emotional.” – Andrea Leland

Most Vincentian Caribs still have little or no knowledge of the rich culture of their ancestors, nor are many of them aware that the culture still exists on the western edge of the Caribbean basin. As a result, the Vincentian Caribs generally have very little awareness of their sense of self. Throughout the occupation of St Vincent and the Grenadines by European forces, and in the early decades of local government, the Caribs were not involved in the construction of their story and many of them experienced cultural subordination and social exclusion.

In recent years, a cultural renaissance has begun to take root in St Vincent and the Grenadines. For example, several years ago St Vincent instituted National Hero’s Day during the month of March in honour of their first national hero, Chatoyer, the Carib chief who fought so valiantly against the British to preserve the Carib homeland and who is believed to have been slain on March 14, 1795. A plethora of musicians, scholars, and educators have since travelled to the island, bringing with them Garifuna art, language, and music.

In 2001, Zoila Ellis Brown, a Belizean Garifuna now living in St Vincent, founded the Garifuna Heritage Foundation (TGHF), which organizes Garifuna-related workshops and conferences in various “Carib” (Kalinago) villages on the island. Since 2014, TGHF has been collaborating with the Ministry of Education to stage the Schools Garifuna Folk Festival.



Figure 4: Reconstruction of a Carib hut. Heritage month, March 2016, Kingstown. © P. Prescod



## FOOD

In cultures all over the world, food is an integral part of creating community. Cooking and eating together binds people together, and the smells, flavours, and ingredients of one's favourite foods can provide comfort, nostalgia, and pride in one's culture. One custom that continues to be practised by Kalinago/Garinagu in both St Vincent and Central America is the making of cassava bread. Cassava, also called yucca or manioc, is an edible tuber indigenous to South America. In its raw form, cassava contains cyanide, so it must be cooked or processed before people can eat it.

### ACTIVITY 6

In the film, we can see the process of making cassava bread at 41:00. One woman is asked, "How did you learn to make cassava bread." She replies, "By my own self." (Time code 41:24)

In small groups, discuss these questions:

1. Are there dishes that you have learnt to prepare? How did you learn: by intuition or did someone teach you?
2. Are there any foods that have special meaning to your family? What are they? When and why do you prepare or eat these foods?

In Central American Garifuna communities, cassava is traditionally harvested and then finely grated, using a handmade grater called an *egi*. Then, this cassava flour is stuffed into a long, woven basket called a *ruguma* hung from a tree branch. As the flour settles down into the basket, the toxic cassava juice leaks out from the basket. After this liquid has been extracted, the cassava flour is spread across a thick iron skillet baked into cassava bread, or *ereba*. Traditionally, women lead every part of the *ereba*-making process, from harvesting to baking. Some Vincentians use the term *bam-bam* to refer to cassava bread. Other Vincentian culinary delights we may owe to the Caribs are *madongo dumplings*, *tri-tri cakes*, and *dukana*.

### ACTIVITY 7

Have members of your family ever made cassava bread?

Watch the following video clips on the way cassava bread is made in Honduras

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BHxyjqqr3CM>

and Dominica

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fqtp7QnP2OU>

Compare their ways of making cassava bread to what you are familiar with.

Finally, look at Sebastian Cayetano explaining to some children how to make cassava bread.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PvMI2NFr9Uo>.

## FASHION

In *Yurumein*, we see several types of traditional dress being worn by Garifuna men and women. In the ceremonies at Baliceaux, Lucia Ellis and the other women wear the traditional “Garifuna outfit” commonly seen in Central America. It is made of a tailored peplum shirt over a pleated skirt. Some of the men wear a dashiki. Augustine Sutherland sports a much older style of dress (See Figure 4): the red loincloth and beads that his Kalinago ancestors would have worn centuries ago. When Garifuna/Kalinago men and women wear these clothes, it is a statement of who they are. It also connects them to their ancestors.



Figure 5: Augustine Sutherland in his Kalinago attire. 2005, Baliceaux.  
© K. Roberts. Reproduced with permission.

## LANGUAGE

The Garifuna language is derived from a South American Carib language family (Kali'na) and the Arawakan language family, with loanwords from French, Spanish, English, and arguably, some West and Central African languages. Traditionally, the Garifuna language was divided into two social dialects: female and male. This division reflects the Arawak and Carib interaction on continental South America and in the islands that led to the formation of the Garinagu. The female component of Garifuna is more strongly grounded in Arawak, while the male ~~version~~ variety utilizes a greater number of Kali'na-based words. In fact, the language spoken by the ancestors of the Garinagu is said to have incorporated a mixture of words and structures from Arawak and Kali'na (Taylor 1977:98; Alleyne 2004:13). Children were socialized in the women's language and from the age of 5 or 6 years old, boys would follow their brothers and fathers, which allowed them to learn the men's language (Rochefort 1665:395; Gonzalez 1988:26). Today, the female dialect forms the basis of daily Garifuna conversation.

British colonial policy severely restricted the speaking of this language in schools, churches, and other public places. Very few Kalinago/Garifuna people in St Vincent have retained knowledge of their ancestors' language. Since 2011, however, in response to UNESCO's proclamation of South American Garifuna language, dance and music as a masterpiece of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity, Garifuna Language and Cultural Retrieval Summer Programmes have been organized in an effort to teach Vincentians more about the Garifuna language and culture.

## MUSIC

Garifuna music is based on an ensemble of drums, called *garawoun*. There are two sizes of drums used in this music: the *primero* (smaller, improvisatory lead drum) and *segunda* (the larger bass drum that plays a steady repeated pattern). Garifuna musical ensembles also features shakers called *sísira*, hollow turtle shells which are struck with sticks, and conch shell trumpets. Traditionally, Garifuna women compose songs and are the primary dancers, while men are drummers. The three most important rhythms within Garifuna music are the *punta*, *paranda*, and *hüngühüngü*. Teaching this music tradition to Kalinago in St Vincent has proven to be a very important aspect of cultural reclamation.



Figure 6: A set of *garawoun* (Garifuna drums): the *primero* (left) and *segunda* (right). 2010, Hopkins, Belize. © L. Poluha.

### ACTIVITY 8

In the film, Armando Crisanto Melendez says, "Don't forget your culture. If you lose your culture, you lose your identity." (Time code 1:57)

What, according to you, are some of the cultural elements that the Caribs in St Vincent should try to maintain?

### DISCUSSION: CULTURAL HERITAGE

1. Does your family have any special kinds of food, music, dance, or clothing that help you celebrate your family's heritage?
2. What types of music, or what specific songs, are meaningful to you, your family, and your country?
3. Why is it important to keep these cultural traditions alive?
4. Look at Appendix 1 for details on the song "Ámuñegü." Why do you think the filmmaker chose this song as the opening music for the film? What kinds of images and text does this song accompany?
5. How do the lyrics of the three songs in Appendix 1 relate to the main themes in the film?
6. How do you begin to effectively "re-teach" a lost culture to people? What are other examples of cultural reclamation movements throughout the world?

In the film, Dr Gill says, "Any remnant of the Garifuna civilisation, of the Carib civilisation was wiped out, no history, no language, no culture nothing at all." (Time code 21:50)

7. Do you think that learning our ancestral or native language can give a sense of identity? Do you think this allows us to connect with our heritage?

## Pilgrimages to St Vincent and Baliceaux

In 2012, when much of the footage for *Yurumein* was shot, members of the Garifuna Nation were invited to visit St Vincent to participate in the first International Garifuna Research Conference and perform traditional Garifuna dance as part of the festivities. These people, many of whom you see in the film, found the experience of visiting St Vincent to be quite different than they had imagined. They arrived, excited to reconnect with other Caribs in their idealized homeland, but in reality, found few remnants of the culture they so cherish. This realization resulted in sadness, frustration and disappointment.

In *Yurumein*, Lucia Ellis disembarks from the boat and falls to her knees on the island of Baliceaux, wailing in the sand and waves as she mourns for her ancestors. Recounting this experience, she says, "Getting on the beach, I felt pain on the bottom of my womb, the suffering and the agony, the disbelief." (Time code 32:45) The pilgrimage to St Vincent and Baliceaux was a healing, cathartic experience for Ellis and the Garinagu with whom she travelled.

## DISCUSSION: CULTURAL TRAUMA

In the film, Ashanti Crisanto describes a range of emotions that overwhelmed her on arriving at Baliceaux. (Time code 29:35).

1. How does she describe what she felt?

“Historical trauma” or “cultural trauma” is a concept developed by Lakota scholar and social worker Maria Yellow Horse Braveheart. It is a term that describes “the cumulative social-cultural trauma spanning across generations which stems from massive cataclysmic events” (Pearson and Knabe 10).

The Garifuna genocide and exile from St Vincent is an example of an historical trauma. In the film, Lucia Ellis says: “The Garifuna genocide is a trauma that each Garinagu carries. Whether they want to believe it or not, we each carry it. And doing a pilgrimage like this is an opportunity to heal from that trauma, to recognize that yes, we were put here, but look, [after] 215 years, we can come back.” (Time code 29:45)

2. Why is it important to acknowledge the traumatic past of a cultural group?
3. How can events like the Garifuna exile, that we didn’t personally experience, affect us individually and communally?
4. What other groups of people can you think of who have experienced historical trauma? Has your family or your ancestors experienced this type of trauma?
5. In the film, how are people shown healing from the genocide and exile and of their ancestors?
6. What are other ways that communities can heal from historical traumas?

## CEREMONY FOR THE ANCESTORS

While some of the Garifuna men and women featured in *Yurumein* were disappointed by what they saw and felt in St Vincent, most felt more of a spiritual connection on the island of Baliceaux. There, the group held memorial services for the ancestors (Time code 30:20). This ceremony is an example of a ritual: an event that involves a specific set of objects, words, instruments, movements, and songs. Many of the ritual elements in Garifuna ceremonies, including this one, acknowledge the presence of the spirit world and help to open a connection between the living and the dead. In the film, you will see these ritual elements:

**Spraying rum.** At the beginning of the ceremony on Baliceaux, we see Armando Crisanto Melendez spraying rum from his mouth toward the men and women present. This, along with blowing tobacco smoke into a sacred space or over ceremony participants’ heads, is common in rituals throughout the African Diaspora. Two of the most important ceremonies in Garifuna culture are called *dügü* and *chügú*; both of these rituals are held to honour and communicate with family ancestor spirits (*áhari*) and to unify family members. In both of these ceremonies, a Garifuna spirit helper, or *buyei*, sprays rum within the sacred space of the Garifuna temple, or *dabuyaba*. Spraying rum or blowing smoke from the mouth

“activates” a space so that interactions between the living and the spirit world may take place (Johnson 2007: 95). It is also common to pour some rum onto the ground as a “libation,” or an offering, to the ancestors.

**Tossing fruit toward the sea.** In *dügü* and *chügú*, food is placed on an altar inside a special temple, called the *dabuyaba*, as an offering to the ancestor spirits. In the film *Yurumein*, we see women throwing fruit toward the sea as an offering to the ancestors who perished on the island of Baliceaux during their detainment there in 1796-7. Food offerings are an act of remembrance and a way to honour the ancestors during these rituals. The offerings also show the ancestor spirits that they have not been forgotten.

**Burning copal.** In pre-Columbian Meso-America, many societies including the Maya burned the aromatic resin of the copal tree during religious ceremonies. Today, many indigenous communities throughout Central America still burn copal incense during ceremonies. The incense flows throughout the ritual space and, like blowing rum or tobacco smoke, prepares the space for the ritual, clears the minds of participants, and facilitates communication between the living and the spirits.

**Drumming, dancing, and singing.** In Garifuna rituals, drumming, dancing, and song have several functions. Music and dance help to unify participants as they sing and move together as a group. The rhythms and vibrations of the *garawoun*, or Garifuna drums, help to prepare a space for spiritual connection. There are certain rhythms that drummers play—one in particular is called *hüngühüngü* — that encourage the *áhari* to come and commune with their descendants. The shakers, or *sísira*, are an important instrument in Garifuna spiritual ceremonies, as they also summon the ancestors.

#### DISCUSSION: RITUAL AND IDENTITY

Every culture, society, and community has its own rituals. Some are elaborate, expensive, and involve many people, while others are small and simple. Rituals help us experience and understand important events, changes, and transitions in our lives such as birthdays, graduations, holidays, weddings, and funerals.

1. Make a list of the rituals or traditions that are important to your family, community, or nation.
2. How might these rituals help you understand who you are? In other words, what role do they play in your identity?

## Appendix: Notes on the Yurumein Soundtrack



### **“Luagu Ubouhu Baliceaux” (On the island of Baliceaux)**

This song uses the same melody as the popular song “Rivers of Babylon,” which was first recorded by the Jamaican reggae group The Melodians in 1970. “Rivers of Babylon” is a well-known anthem of the anti-colonial, pan-African philosophy of Rastafari. The lyrics of this song are based on Psalms 19 and 137 from the Old Testament of the Bible.

In the Rastafari worldview, “Zion” symbolizes a tranquil homeland that is often conceptualized as the African continent. In contrast, “Babylon” refers to oppressive centres of government and religion, or any other institution or establishment that seeks to oppress alternative voices and historical narratives. In “Rivers of Babylon,” The Melodians draw parallels between the African experience of enslavement in the Americas and the experience of Jews during the 6th century B.C., who were exiled from their home in Israel and taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (II Kings, Old Testament).

Because it uses the same melody as “Rivers of Babylon,” the song “Luagu Ubouhu Baliceaux,” draws a connection between the experience of the Garifuna people and other people of African descent whose ancestors were abused, dominated, enslaved, or killed by European colonial powers. It also remembers the sacrifices of the ancestors and thanks them for their sacrifice. The lyrics, composed by Sebastien Cayetano and Dale Guzman, lament the destruction of Garifuna society and exile of Garinagu from St. Vincent in 1797.

*Luagu ubouhu Baliceaux  
Ñei wañura  
Ñei wayahuaha  
Ladüga súfuri*

*On the island of Baliceaux  
There we sat down  
There we wept  
Because of suffering*

*Aba hachagaruniwa Ingleisi  
Luagu Baliceaux,  
Lun hagumuchaguágüdüniwa  
Ida luba gi wadaünrüni wagarawoun lídan  
fulasu lira?*

*The English dumped us there  
On Baliceaux  
To exterminate us  
How are we going to play our drums in that  
place?*

*Dimurei le lídagiñe wayuma,  
Luma saminaü le tídagiñe wanigi  
Gadünama la ligibugiñe bagu  
Wawagurügü*

*These words are from our mouths  
And these thoughts from our hearts  
May they be acceptable to your eyes  
Just for our sake*

### **“Ámuñegü” (In Times to Come) by Andy Palacio (2007)**

The music you hear at the beginning of the film *Yurumein* is a Garifuna song called “Ámuñegü”. This song comes from the album *Wàtina* by the popular Garifuna musician Andy Palacio (YEARS). Palacio worked tirelessly to promote Garifuna culture on stages all over the world by blending Garifuna rhythms, instruments, and lyrics with musical elements from the blues, reggae, Afro-pop, and soul. Since Palacio’s untimely passing in 2008, he has been revered with nearly saint-like respect throughout the Garifuna Nation.

The song “Ámuñegü” conjures feelings of Garifuna pride by listing important cultural practices of Garifuna communities. It also reminds listeners of the importance of celebrating and passing on the Garifuna culture to their descendants. Because it was composed by the beloved Andy Palacio, this song evokes feelings of cultural solidarity and positive identification as Garifuna people. This song also brings to light the fear or anxiety that exists for many Garifuna people who worry that their culture will not survive into the future. It is both a song of hope, and a song of warning.

*Ka ba funa san anüga wabute ámuñegü?*

*Who might make our cassava bread for us  
in times to come?*

*Ka ba funa san ayanuha Garifuna numa  
ámuñegü?*

*Who might speak Garifuna with me in times  
to come?*

*Ka ba funa san arumaha numa ou  
ámuñegü?*

*Who might sing arumahani songs with me  
in times to come?*



*Ka ba funa san adügüraha wau ou  
ámuñegü?*

*Who might heal us with the dügü in times  
to come?*

*Ageindaguan wayunagu lun  
habagaridun kei Garinagu —  
Wagia me san aferidirei wagaburi?  
Madüga wamei*

*Our ancestors fought so they could live as  
Garinagu—  
Will we be the ones to lose our way of life?  
Let's not do it.*

*Aganba humana, agüburigu, harufudaha  
houn isanigu  
Wererun luma weremuhan, wafien luma  
wabinahan*

*Listen to me, parents, teach the children  
  
Our words and our songs, our beliefs and  
our dances*

*Chülühali dan lun lareidahoun  
Chülühali dan lun lareidahoun  
Chülühali dan lun lareidahoun  
Feridiwa ña liñei gumugu bei*

*The time has come for it to be preserved  
The time has come for it to be preserved  
The time has come for it to be preserved  
Or it will be lost completely*

### **“Weyu Larigi Weyu” (“Day by Day”) by Andy Palacio (2007)**

This is another song from the album *Wátina*. In *Yurumein*, we hear this song 40 minutes into the film after an interview with Nixon Lewis, a Vincentian Carib man who has devoted tremendous amounts of time and energy to learning about the history and culture of the Carib/Garifuna people. This is a culture that, as Caribs, is their inheritance, but was stolen from them through the Garifuna exile of 1797 and the subsequent marginalization of the Carib people in St Vincent. Nixon Lewis says that by learning everything they can about Garifuna culture, he is “preparing my kids for that journey- the journey to recover our heritage and culture.”

*Waguchi Bungiu, aganbabei wamamali  
Watiwa buagu. Iderabawa  
Arihaba hawagun bisanigu ubowagu, Úguchili.  
Gibeti megeiti. Furieigitiwa bun au*

*God, Our Father, hear our voices  
We call on you. Please help us  
Look upon your children on Earth, Father  
So much has gone wrong. We pray to you*

*Fuba garabali wawagun (weyu larigi weyu)  
Ruba derebugu wouni (weyu larigi weyu)  
Fegegudabeitia wagu (weyu larigi weyu)  
Duragudabatia wau (weyu larigi weyu)*

*Blow a breeze over us (Day by day)  
Give us strength (Day by day)  
Open our eyes (Day by day)  
Make us wiser (Day by day)*

*Waguchi Bungiu, aganbabei wamamali.  
Watiwa buagu. Iderabawa*

*God, Our Father, hear our voices  
We call on you. Please help us*

*Binibana birahunu afientian buagu, Aburemei  
Suntigabafu. Rutiwa seremei bun au*

*Bless your faithful children, Almighty Lord.  
We give you thanks.*

*Wabureme gounigibawa (weyu larigi weyu)  
Ruba ibagari wouni (weyu larigi weyu)  
Faradiu, dundeibawa (weyu larigi weyu)  
Lidoun lemeri buit, (weyu larigi weyu)*

*Lord, protect us (Day by day)  
Give us life (Day by day)  
Oh Father, guide us (Day by day)  
Into the path of righteousness (Day by day)*

#### DISCUSSION: MUSIC AND MEANING

1. Why do you think the filmmaker chose "Ámuñegü" as the opening song for the film?
2. What kinds of images, words, or text does this song accompany?
3. How do the lyrics of these songs address the main ideas or themes presented in the film?
4. What types of music, or what specific songs, are meaningful to you, your family, and your country?
5. Why is it important to keep music traditions alive?

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