

Differential Experiences of Displacement in Transit through Mexico. The Ethnic Bridges among Garífuna and Honduran-Latino Groups

Experiencias diferenciales de desplazamiento en el tránsito por México. Los puentes étnicos entre los grupos garífuna y latinos-hondureños

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the differential experiences of migratory displacement between two ethnic groups from Honduras; the Afro-American Garífuna and Latinos. It seeks to compare the differential migration strategies of these two ethnically distinct displaced populations from the same country. Both move towards the same destination starting with transit through Mexico and then attempting to reach the United States. The manuscript is based on fieldwork conducted in migrant shelters within the irregular migratory route in Mexico, also, in New Orleans and Houston, two major destinations for the Garífuna population in the U.S. The paper consequently focuses on the case of the Garífuna, for whom it identifies the processes of territorial exclusion in which they are involved from the origin, nevertheless put the Garífuna population at an advantage over their non-Garífuna countrymen Latinos concerning the migratory process and their migration networks, specifically for having a better previous integration in the country of destination.

Keywords: Garífuna; Ethnic bridges; Honduras; Latinos; Transit Migration.

RESUMEN

Este artículo se centra en las experiencias diferenciales del desplazamiento migratorio entre dos grupos étnicos de Honduras: los afroamericanos garífunas y los latinos. Trata de comparar las estrategias migratorias diferenciales de estas dos poblaciones étnicamente distintas desplazadas desde el mismo país. Ambas se dirigen hacia el mismo destino comenzando por el tránsito a través de México para luego intentar llegar a Estados Unidos. El manuscrito se basa en trabajo de campo realizado en varios albergues para migrantes dentro de la ruta migratoria irregular en México, pero también, en las ciudades de Nueva Orleans y Houston, dos de los principales destinos de la población garífuna en EE.UU. El trabajo se centra consecuentemente en el caso de los garífunas, para quienes se identifica cómo los procesos de exclusión territorial en los que se ven envueltos desde el origen los terminan colocando con ventajas frente a sus compatriotas latinos no garífunas, en relación al proceso migratorio y sus redes de migración, específicamente por contar con una mejor integración previa en el país de destino.

Palabras clave: Garífuna; Puentes Étnicos; Honduras; Latinos; Migración en Tránsito.

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INTRODUCCIÓN

In the field of migration studies, there is some research on the migration of the Caribbean Garifuna population, some of them are the works of Karen Fog Olwig (2003), Gabriel Izard (2004), James Chaney (2012), Carlos Agudelo (2013), Sarah England (2019), Miguel Navarro-Lashayas (2021) and Juan Vicente Iborra (2021). But specifically on the transnational trajectory of this group and their support networks from Honduras, then in transit through Mexico to the United States as their final destination, there are gaps in texts.

The displacement of both Garifuna and Latino populations is deeply rooted in historical forms of economic and social marginalization and while comparisons can be drawn about the population's experience of this marginalization varies by their respective social statuses within their country of origin as well as the population's perception in the third-transit country, as Mexico is. As the two groups traverse Mexico, their differential statuses and experiences shape their navigational options and choices.

The main differences between these two groups are as follows, starting with the Garifuna:

1) Their journey through Mexico lasts no more than fifteen days, which means a faster transit migration, but no less risky by no means. 2) In the migrant shelters in Mexico, no matter the location, they do not stay more than two or three days, that is, they only use these places for basic services: food, new clothes and shoes, rest, and sleep, but not for geographic or legal information or support. 3) They are not interested in starting any documented migratory process. That is, they do not request the international protection of political asylum that the Mexican State is supposed to guarantee. 4) They move throughout their migratory transit in groups of 3 to 6 people, no more, rarely traveling alone. 5) To reach the United States, they use the Mexican Gulf route, the shortest one in terms of geography but the most dangerous because it is controlled by the strongest and most violent Mexican criminal gangs. 6) They are not interested in staying in Mexico, this is, they have no interest in getting a job during their migratory transit to raise money to continue having resources to move up north. With all the above they seem to be sure of their final destination in the southwest of the United States.

The rest of the Hondurans are considered here as Latinos:

1) Starting with what we consider to be "Latinos"; it is an abbreviation of the Spanish word "latinoamericano", which refers to anyone born in Latin America or with Latin American ancestry. In other words, Latinos or Hispanos are considered to be those who have very similar cultural and historical ties and ethnic traits as a result of the biracial between Spanish and Indigenous, that is "mestizos". They are mostly Catholic and Spanish-speaking thanks to a common history of colonization by Spain. 2) Their transit through Mexico to the United States can last from two to three months, sometimes much longer. 2) Their journey can be just as risky as that of the Garifuna, a risk that increases with longer duration. 3) In the migrant shelters they can last weeks, even months, getting to have different functions within these places, especially in maintenance work, because they become trustworthy people who will not charge for their services. This is more common in shelters run by the catholic church. 4) They are quite interested in requesting international protection through political asylum, even though they do not have consistent asylum cases. Most of them argue that they are fleeing from the systematic violence of the gangs, same, they are interested in geographic information on Mexico. 5) The vast majority travel alone, only in the case of women, and some minors are accompanied by their companion, who is their "coyote" or trafficker. 6) Not only do they use the Gulf of Mexico route, but also the other two traditional migratory routes; the Central and the Pacific, despite being much more extensive geographically. 7) They do not rule out the idea of staying in Mexico permanently, especially if they find a minimally decent job. Obtaining a job can be a two-edged sword; either to be able to continue the journey and move on or if the job is good to stay permanently in Mexico. 8) In general, most of them have very little economic and social capital

to be able to get to the United States, what should be a Mexican transit becomes something semi-permanent exposed to begging in the streets of the main Mexican cities, they are more prone to destitution than the Garifuna. 9) Last but not least, the reinforcement of national identity abroad is greater for Latinos, pride in the homeland and the flag is at the surface for them. But not so for the Garifuna, they prefer their own flag and culture, that is, the collective enjoyment of shared cultural and historical assets as a culture marked in the traditions that unite them as a group, not in the Honduran homeland that has actually marginalized and expelled them.

Considering all of the above differences, this paper aims to compare and contrast the differences in the migration experiences and strategies of these two ethnically distinct displaced populations migrating from Honduras through Mexico to the United States. What I call the “ethnic bridges”. The guiding research question is; which sociocultural ties favor Garifuna as a displaced population in a third country, such as the dangerous Mexican transit, and which resources may benefit Garifuna over their Latino counterparts in reaching and assimilating their final destination in the United States more quickly and effectively?

Methodological challenge

I have conducted fieldwork in migrant shelters in Mexico since 2016, in order 1) Casa de Migrantes in Saltillo; 2) "Camino a la Vida" in Aguascalientes; 3) Casa de Migrantes San Luis Potosi, “Caritas”; 4) "Uno de Siete Migrando" in Chihuahua; 5) “Casa Emaús” in Ciudad Acuña; 6) "Casa Nazareth" Nuevo Laredo, 7) HIAS, an aid society serving the border city of Ciudad Juarez, Mex and El Paso, TX., and 8) Casa Marianela, at Austin, TX.

I employed a qualitative approach gaining access to residents through volunteer work with these shelters. Much of my fieldwork is based on participant observation from an ethnographic perspective. A key challenge that can present in implementing this work with diverse migrant populations is relative access to populations based on differential behavior. Shelters are a convenient and relatively safe space to access migrants in Mexico and the U.S.

For a second moment, I have conducted fieldwork with Garifuna communities in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Houston, Texas, two destination cities of this migrant population in the U.S. The decision to move to these places in search of more evidence of the Garifuna migratory network was precisely because of the comments made by these people inside of the Mexican’s shelters. Which I corroborated while in these cities, talking with members of this community, who even with more confidence than the transit migration stood more open to express themselves.

In this method, analyzing two different groups but belonging to the same nationality it is possible to find and analyze factors such as border control politics and similar migratory networks, based on ethnic studies that determine and give meaning to the specific characteristics of these movements. Given the relative challenge of observing Garifuna migrants, compared to their Latinos Honduran counterparts. I sought out key informants to deepen my understanding of and access to the population, these key informants, in general, were the ones who led the Garifuna groups, although during the interview with these leaders I tried to have an open conversation to get everyone talking, a sort of “focus groups” with cross-questions, nothing indeed structured.

Through these contacts, I was gradually able to identify more participants in the study and collect interviews that helped to balance the research problem within this comparative study. Then, conducting fieldwork within the network of migrant shelters in Mexico run by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), allowed me to identify similarities and differences between populations of the Honduran diaspora in Mexico. Being able to observe firsthand and distinguish between these populations’ lived experiences of migration, is what in turn allowed me to dare to affirm that there are ethnic bridges that connect the Garifuna migrant community from Honduras to established Garifuna communities in the United States, especially in Houston and New Orleans.

Theoretical approaches

The ethnic bridges could be reflected by Fog Olwig (801), through an ethnographic study of dispersed family networks of Caribbean origin explored, with the trajectory of migratory practices involving the nature of the sociocultural system that emerges as they migrate between places. Fog Olwig argues that the active ties that Afro-American Caribbean people maintain with their homes while becoming “New Yorkers” make it possible for them to develop dual-place identities (803).

Thus, we can conceptualize and theorize the ethnic bridges in a variety of senses, For example, from a classic and traditional transnational level with social unit or transnational social relationship, such as communication between a migrant and their families abroad. These units are socially constructed with practices such as the exchange and trade of goods and information across socio-geographical units.

It seems that with modern transportation and communication infrastructures available to large population groups, as Pries (8) states, they make the migratory experience more than possible in an open manner for all, even across great geospatial distances. The truth is that transnational theory, as Fog Olwin articulates, can't simplify the complexity of migration processes and the cultural values that underlie these processes (805). It is a fact that the interest in transnational socio-cultural systems has its variant on immigration since the development of these systems considers the attempts of immigrants to avoid submitting to the discriminatory structure of race, ethnicity, and nationalism that tend to place them in a marginal position in the receiving society (Fog Olwig 806).

Here, the question arises as to what happens when the physical borders between countries at different levels of development break with such transnational social unity and transnational socio-cultural systems. In this sense, one approach to the concept of ethnic bridges is the concept of “transit migration”. Especially for the application of restrictive policies on human territorial mobility, very characteristic of the Mexican State with the Central American migrants, regardless of ethnicity and the historical ties that bind these countries together.

The concept of ethnic bridges likewise can be linked to “ethnicity in migration networks” or be embedded in what Garcia *et al* call a “diasporic affiliation” (510), which is vital to influence the construction of a multicultural society that provides a framework of Afro-American identity, through which to integrate the “other” (such as the Garifuna) into the concept of the Honduran nation. Or feasibly, as scholarly research on the New Orleans Garifuna community shows through the work of Chaney, as that of a general identification with “global racial blackness” (121).

But it is important to point out that the outset of the concept of ethnic bridges differs from that of “ethnicity in migration networks” or even the “global racial blackness” because we are talking about the ethnicity of the Garifuna in movement. This is present in the migration project as a factor that generates greater gears and strategies to migrate than their fellow countrymen Latinos in the same migration system, and not the ethnicity *per se* of the Garifuna.

For this reason, it is necessary to develop the concept of ethnic bridges and link it to that of ethnicity in migration networks, for which a more detailed review of migration and ethnicity is required. Agudelo mentions that the Garifuna tradition has always been accompanied by a rich, complex, and sometimes contradictory circulation of ethno-racial symbols (47). These have been present since the forced arrival of their African ancestors to the Caribbean islands.

The construction of identity, Agudelo, remains to point out, sustained to manifest itself in the other transit to Central America as black Caribs, in a transnationality of territorialization, and the more recent presence in the United States. In the case of the Garifuna, their exceptionality compared to other groups of African descendants in the American continent was based on the historical evidence of their Amerindian origin and the fact that they have preserved a language that is characterized by being predominantly Amerindian (Agudelo 51).

The ethnic bridge as an ethnicity in migration networks underlies the recent mobilizations. González (*From* 28) argues that the passage from black Carib to Garifuna occurred within a framework for a process of politicization under the influence of the black movement in the United States through Garifuna emigrants. A process that first associated the Garifuna with the movements against racial discrimination and then gave way to the vindication of African and, to a lesser extent, Amerindian roots.

In the specific case of the Garifuna, there was already an intermediate level between the transnational and the national. This is directly related to the combination of their claims as citizens of each country in which they have settled - less so in Mexico - articulated with their transnationality as Garifuna people, with the importance of their presence in the United States and the political dynamics that arise from this multi-localization.

For the Garifuna people, the importance of their presence in the United States through the political dynamics that arise from this multi-localization is also presented with all the claims against racial discrimination and equality. Inspired in part by the influence of the United States, where the struggle for the territorial and cultural rights of the Garifuna will also be incorporated. A sentence that establishes Duany (167), taking the Puerto Rican immigrant population as an example, is that immigrants quickly realize that the societies to which they immigrate already have ethnic groups and racial labels ready to be assigned to the newcomers. An aspect that might seem negative but for the Garifuna is another advantage in relation to the Latino migrant, even beyond the rough Mexican transit.

Moving on to the concept of transit migration, it is a very transcendental topic, not incidental, because it has become a turning point, even a new paradigm for both migratory systems and unauthorized immigration itself. It is also the stage between migration and settlement, according to Papadopoulou (2). For Marconi (2), transit must be temporary and limited at all times in the migratory project, although in practice it is often long and semi-permanent, if not "permanently temporary" by converting people passing through into this condition, as is currently happening in Mexico with non-Garifuna population, precisely as a result of restrictive anti-immigrant border policies.

Transit migration is defined mainly by the dynamics of migratory flows, the most important being their containment, together with the policy, jurisdiction, and temporality. In other words, as Marconi pointed out, transit countries are almost exclusively those bordering rich or developed countries (3). As an example, in the Honduran case, a large part of Central American immigration that crosses through Mexico to try to reach the United States previously crossed through territories belonging to nations that are not considered transit countries but that in practice they are. Guatemala is another country with these characteristics. But, in this migratory system, the transit space traditionally corresponds to Mexico, largely due to the magnitude and evolution of its migratory patterns and the enormous border share with the United States.

Ivakhniouk refers to transit migration as an intermediate point that occasionally finds itself in uncertain and insecure conditions (23). This inexorably brings to mind irregular migration, i.e., the condition of irregularity predisposes to the notion of a transit country. As Marconi states, not only is it almost impossible to determine the boundary between transit and irregular immigration, but unfortunately the term transit migration has become a code word for "undocumented" immigration (8).

Despite the difficulties, Duvell lists three criteria applied to define transit migration: one, the intention to enter and cross a certain country to reach another; two, to do so in a limited period; and three, not to integrate and therefore temporarily immigrate to this country (216).

However, this same author recognizes that all these criteria are problematic. Still, the study of transitory migrations questions the efforts to classify migrants according to their motives and the time spent in certain countries, since the time thresholds are problematic to establish, but the motives and intentions of migrants to reach their

destination are not always. Duvell therefore suggests categorizing flows and individuals separately, this is also a good opportunity to establish ethnicity (218).

We have to say that the urgent increase in the number of immigrants in an irregular situation in transit countries has demonstrated the inability of public policies to deal with unauthorized immigration. It has also called into question the recognition by governments such as Mexico of having signed international treaties that recognize the human rights of immigrants. In the same way, the classic governmental hard line in terms of factual policy in the face of the arrival of more immigrants in an irregular situation especially denotes the lack of existing governance over the Mexican territory, which makes migrants have to create strategies of resistance and faster and more effective migration.

Honduras, the bridgehead of the ethnicity in the migration network

Originally from the Caribbean Island of San Vicente, where they were enslaved, the Garifuna fled the continental mass of English colonialism in the 18th century along with other "Red Caribs and Black Caribs". Especially after the departure of the British ships from the island of Roatan in 1797, when the Spanish saw the landing of the Black Caribbean as a new British invasion. From there, black Carib settlements spread west and east along the Atlantic coast of Honduras and Belize, and in reduced numbers on the Pacific coast of Guatemala, settling in remote villages (Bateman 12).

Since then, they have suffered severe harassment and exploitation, but this has been going on ever since Afro-Americans escaped bondage no choice to the Central American societies on the fringes of the plantation economies in which they had been again semi-enslaved, brought about by the expansion of a kind of "ethnogenesis" of the Afro-American colonial tribes, or rather a phenotypically African but culturally owes much to the island Caribs (Bateman 13).

The recent migratory process and the paths followed by the Garifuna from Honduras to the United States, passing first through Mexico, can be compared to the previous migratory processes of other African American Caribbean communities, equally marginalized and exploited, as the ties that members of the Jamaican community established from the United Kingdom. Seeing in the whole migratory process, even in their new places of residence, a continuous extension to continue living their lives in the Caribbean from the outside (Fog Olwig, 808).

For the Garifuna, due to displacement by violent territorial dispossession by tourism investors and Honduran public authorities, who continue to deny the agreements and collective property rights of this community, this community has been encouraged to continue with the bonds of ethnogenesis, as stated by Bateman (14). This has a lot to do with the fact that the Latino population, which is the vast majority in Honduras, identifies the Garifuna as an indigenous people because they speak an "indigenous language" -Creole- and because they have cultural practices that for them are the exclusive result of an indigenous origin. Also, in terms of the same migration patterns, many Garifuna, when working outside their communities of birth, return home to reaffirm their identities as Caribs, speaking their language and following the practices of Carib cultures that distinguish them from "other races".

The current economic situation in Caribbean Ceiba, the Honduran region from which the Garifuna originate, but which is in general the situation throughout this country, has been sustained by fractured financial structural relations. Established for the groups that control the national economy as internal forces, in subordination to the relations of economic dependence imposed by the economic power of the United States. As a result, economic inequalities and marginalization have grown within Honduran society, resulting in high levels of poverty (López 77).

This economic situation is one of extreme disparity of wealth, when a majority of the population lives in extreme poverty the related marginalization of this majority foments a breeding ground for criminal and state violence, a reality reflected in the nation's homicide rate which has become one of the highest globally (Canales y Rojas 37). These conditions generate a sustained forced migration of thousands of people, who without any other remedy try to reach the United States. However, the displaced must cross the entirety of Mexico with all the dangers that the journey entails.

Notwithstanding the economic situation in Honduras, several other additions deepen the backwardness in the Garifuna region. Another major challenge is the tourism industry because the Ceiba is almost on the Caribbean Sea, a blessing but lately, it has also become a curse, everyone who has power wants to have a place on the beach, and the Honduran government has initiated tourism megaprojects. The displacement of communities and the loss of cultures that comes with tourism development is increasing, this coastal tourism development threatens not only local communities' environmental sustainability, but also coral reefs, mangroves, seagrass, strands, and other marine and coastal ecosystems².

In this context, the Garifuna community divided their time between fishing and farming, planting on the outskirts of the community, by the time the Honduran government handed over the Garifuna's ancestral territory to the U.S. multinational Standard Fruit Company, which covered the land with bananas and left the community with no place to farm, throwing it back into the sea. Standard Fruit exploited the land for decades, and when it was finished, returned it to the State, which still has not returned it to the Garifuna³.

Then, came a series of regulations issued "in the name of ecological conservation" that prohibited hook and line fishing in the cays, as well as the use of gill nets, amounting to a complete ban on fishing for the Garifuna. As if this were not enough, the state then made it illegal to collect wood on the two largest islands (Útila and Roatán) in the area, making it almost impossible for the Garifuna to build their huts, collect firewood, or catch the crabs that had sustained them for generations. In return, the Honduran state completely abandoned the local education in the Garifuna community⁴.

This reality reflects an ethnographic factor of discrimination that leads Honduras' Caribbean ethnic communities, such as the Garifuna, to enter into the same patterns of outward displacement to the United States, first crossing Mexico, as their Latino Honduran country fellows have done since the 1980s and 1990s. This growing increase in the migration of both Honduran groups through Mexico takes on a broader connotation if we consider the processes of intervention and dispossession inherent to the state violence that reigns in Honduras in collusion with the smuggling industries, which have recently forged parallels with the trafficking of irregular migrants.

The context of Honduras' current economic situation compounds the country's struggles with the endemic territorial and cultural segregation of local ethnic groups. Violence against ethnic enclaves such as the Garifuna people and the Latino population of Honduras, closely related to the multiculturalism of the entire Central American region, is the result of population dynamics segmented by patterns of exploitation and economic accumulation.

The Garifuna region reflects exactly where transnational capital is trying to take more resources from indigenous peoples. Those with wealth wanted to take land and resources, all these resources are being taken from the Caribbean Honduran Ceiba. The mono-cultivation of some of these crops, formerly for Standard Fruit Company's bananas and now for bio-fuel, requires thousands of millions of acres of land in Honduras, enormous environmental

² Interview with Miriam Miranda, Garifuna's rights activist and general coordinator of the Black Fraternal Organization of Honduras (OFRANEH, Spanish acronym). Whom I interviewed for this paper while doing stay research at University of Osnabruck in 2022.

³ Idem.

⁴ Idem

and social damage has arisen and other agricultural interests cutting down the original forests and replacing them with monocultures that have very low biodiversity.

The other kind of migrant group from Honduras, Non-Garifuna, considered for this study as “Latinos”, the majority mestizo population in this country. They belong to a society with the highest rates of marginalization and violence and have a higher incidence of their transit through Mexico, which has become, as López (66) refers to, a complex and multifaceted displacement, conceptualized as “compulsive and forced” of this population. López's argument is based on the economic evolution of this country, from typically colonial structures to integration into the capitalist market in conditions of open subordination and dependence. Which has affected the Honduran population in general.

The reality of this sector of the Honduran population is located in an inhabitant historically impoverished by an obsolete industry producing goods with low added value, which ended up expelling this cheap labor force. However, this sector of the working class generates an important transfer of remittances, which in the end become vital resources to try to compensate for the conditions of extreme poverty and marginality in Honduras.

We are talking about a Latino population, which historically has had scarce financial resources due to its reprimanded economy, hence its poor labor market insertion and growing insecurity due to gangs that directly affect this sector of the population. This sector of Honduran society has lived in a context of generalized violence because their fundamental rights have not been respected by the economic power groups into the local elites with their alliances with the different governments, who have implemented instruments of social control and repression, which is certainly not very different from the experiences of land plundering suffered by the Garifuna.

With all of the above, the relationship between indigenosity and ethnicity in the Honduran case, with two groups of migrants migrating north, is assumed as synonymous to draw a bridge between the Garifuna and the blacks in the Honduran case, which differentiates it from Latinos by presenting a history of greater persecution but that the culture is more resilient when it is on the move.

The Mexican's transit and the “blend in” at destination

The case of Honduran migration, in general, reveals in recent years the full spectrum of violence that irregular migration is leaving in Mexico due to the punitive anti-immigrant policy of the Mexican State. For this reason, migrants have to be linked to a variant of the human trafficking network that acts more as a form of “coyotaje system”⁵ than trafficking or smuggling, to be more effective in terms of the speed of their mobility.

Through participant observation, sighting the Garifuna have a unique human coyotaje network, more effective in terms of the speed of their mobility relative to other Honduran-Latinos networks. The comparative advantage of their migratory system concerning other Honduran migrant groups is due to the Afro-Caribbean racial origin of the population. As Nancie L. Gonzalez (Sojourns 55) highlights this had been going on since the early nineteenth century, when the Spanish used the deliberate seduction of slaves to undermine the British presence in Central America. As a result, the Caribs were quickly but clandestinely recruited and soon became unrivaled smugglers (Gonzalez, *Sojourns* 55).

⁵ Probing a more or less accurate definition for the “Coyotaje” through the provision of their services to Honduran migrants, both, Garifuna and Latinos. These are people associated with the existence of socioeconomic and cultural structural factors in Mexico, which have favored all the current demand for immigration not permitted. Even the Mexican authorities allowed this illicit activity of the trafficking mafias to grow towards migrants, taking root among the migrant society until they became part of it, a kind of “necessary evil” for no-authorized migrants in the face of the anti-immigrant policies of persecution and criminalization of Mexican State.

This efficacy of the Garifuna network is largely due to their Afro-American Caribbean origins, which over the decades have come to form a kind of aforementioned ethnic bridge between Honduras and the United States passing through Mexico. This is an ethnical context within the same migratory process that determines a bipolar status for this group, especially presenting in their transit for Mexico, as a lightning rod for increased discrimination and in their destination country the US as a resource to facilitate integration.

In this context, Garifuna suffer the effects of this discrimination, which unfortunately is present in Mexico, and therefore arguably are even more marginalized in Mexican society than the Non-Garifuna population, because they endure more nested levels of discrimination based on their status as migrants; undocumented (outside the law, i.e., legal discrimination); Central American migrants (from the Global South, i.e. socioeconomic discrimination); and African-American migrants (i.e. racial discrimination).

The Garifuna's Afro-American ethnic identity impacts their experience in Mexico by amplifying the levels of discrimination and racism to which they are subject. However, once they arrive in the United States, their situation changes radically because they manage to "blend in" with the rest of the African Americans, an indication of ethnic affinity that strengthens extraterritorial migratory ties (Andrade-Eskhoff and Silvia 75).

This type of blend or camouflage was witnessed in an interview in Houston's Greater Fifth Ward with Mirna Lacayo, who opened the first Garifuna store in the United States (Wadani Garifuna Store & Products). The Fifth Ward was "one of the poorest ghettos in Houston" in the 1970s and 1980s, now about 7,000 Garifuna live there⁶. Mirna claims to represent the new generations of Garifuna transcending new and different aspects of her people's culture, beyond music. Mirna spoke to me about the strength of unity through identity, which helps to have concrete goals for the Garifuna, such as migrating to specific places such as Houston's Fifth Ward.

This last testimony is a good example and is important to continue looking for clues to new cases that are transforming Garifuna's migratory networks through their cultural identity. It draws attention because it represents a new type of "coyotaje" throughout the migratory path. That is compared to the routes and alternatives available for the Honduran Latino population, which are the same for both, but for the Garifuna network, is more efficient in terms of speed due to ties in the United States.

As evidence of this are Anthony, Rommel, and Abraham, three Garifuna migrants from Santa Rosa in the Ceiba region, who told me about their journey to the U.S., especially outstanding was what Anthony, the uncle and experienced adult who knew very well about their arrival on the "other side" in just a couple of days on the day of our interview into the migrant shelter settled in Casa de Migrates Saltillo. Without fully revealing his sources, he only referred that there is a strong brotherhood of Garifuna, in Texas and Louisiana (Morales 180).

This goes back to Bateman when he asserted that this growing solidarity with other African Americans in different places represents a historical expansion of their identity (14). Another interpretation could be that it represents the formation of an Afrodiasporic consciousness and solidarity, both seeing themselves as "brothers" and members of an Afrodiasporic community. Something we had previously discussed with Chaney about the identification of a "global racial blackness" (122).

As well as the transnational Garifuna organization of their community ties, which is crucial to understanding how ethnicity, or ethnogenesis⁷, is preserved and maintained even across borders. Bateman, mentioned since the

⁶ <https://www.houstoniamag.com/news-and-city-life/2022/09/houston-garifuna-population-and-culture>

⁷ Nancie L. Gonzalez expressed that the *ethnogenesis* of the modern Garifuna took place on the Central American coast in the 20th century. In particular, by the linguistic, genetic and ethnographic studies that documented the American roots of this people, to which she said that everything is "garifunized". Because in a way, it could be thought that they, the Garifuna, have adapted to a world in which international migration has begun to break the rigidities of nationalism. Gonzalez acknowledged that many Garifuna have become U.S. citizens, but consider themselves members of two societies, especially, since they constantly travel back and forth frequently and, upon retirement, many return to their hometowns, as did their parents and grandparents (Gonzalez, *Sojourns* 27).

mid-1990s for Black African American Caribbeans throughout Central and North America, the developing awareness and recognition of their African roots and kinship with other African American societies seem more like a radical approach to their long-standing identity as an indigenous group, because of “their long history of fierce protection of their ethnic uniqueness’s” (Bateman 14).

The presence of many Garifuna associations based in the United States could be appreciated, as well as their integration into the trade union environment, in associations of local political participation and links with North American black movements. This is valid for the generations of migrants up to the 1980s. Nonetheless, throughout the history of this migration, family and ritual cohesion has been maintained (Agudelo 17).

Remittances from the first generations of emigrants to their families in Honduras include ritual expenses, in other words, the presence in the United States has been a factor of cultural rescue. Migrations to the United States expand the spatial dimensions of the Garifuna network, this phenomenon is maintained and can even be said to be reinforced by the gradual increase in the possibilities of circulation.

The greater capacity to mobilize resources (capital and political) for the Garifuna migrants in the United States, joined by family and ritual networks that keep them linked to Honduras, has been an important factor in the networks that keep them linked as a determining factor for political dynamization and their objectives of cultural preservation both in the United States and in Honduras (Agudelo 18). This is because specific ties of solidarity sustain ethnic bridges because the Garifuna claim their status as an Afro-descendant people linked to more global networks that link them to sectors of the Black movement in the Caribbean islands and the United States.

But what also seems true, moving away from ethnicity, is that once out of Honduras, the two displaced populations, Garifuna and Latino, must navigate through a third country with increasingly militarized security institutions and anti-immigrant policies resulting from binational border security agreements between Mexico and the U.S. These restrictions on migration have led to increased involvement of organized crime mafias in the growing human trafficking and smuggling industry within migration. These restrictions on migration have only led to an increase in the participation of organized crime mafias in the growing and multi-million-dollar human industry within irregular migration.

The origin of this violence against irregular migrants, while they are in the Mexican transit, is rooted in a group of actors imbricated in this society, constituting a “State of corporate mafia”⁸. This is to say that the violence actualized by organized crime and security agencies generates a context of generalized violence that has consequently developed a culture of violence rooted within Mexican society. But all this has been the result of the less favored sectors of the ethnic communities having been atrociously violated, because fundamental human rights have not been respected on the part of economic power groups, such as local elites, the bulk of the population, government security agencies and the mass media.

⁸ Amnesty International calls “Corporate Mafia State” due to the powerful lucrative interests that protect illegal activities, it is collusion between large companies organized in multinational corporations, local businessmen, who use their influence with the judicial and military authorities to manipulate justice (Amnesty International 36).



Map 1. - Mexican migratory transit routes

Any migrant in transit through Mexico, considered as “irregular” or “undocumented” poses a risk to general opinion through a kind of “antisocial behavior”. All of which is the product of the outrageous anti-immigration persecution policy of the Mexican government, in this sense, it is impossible not to remember the xenophobic result of the migrant caravans in 2018 and 2019. Garifuna, by the way, were also inglorious for not participating in any of those Central American caravans.

For this reason, the migrants in transit face the risk of preventive police detention, and those who do make it to the Mexican north border, face monitor systematic surveillance by the US border patrol. As a matter of fact, the Mexican State betrayed all the principles of humanitarian political asylum, it reversed those principles, as a result of the caravans by accepting to be a "safe third country", "despite not respecting the most marginalized members of society, such as irregular migrants who are considered like "aliens" to the community and who face the power of the State and the drug cartels that control half of the territory.

For these reasons, migrant shelters have become a kind of "community emergency" (Morales 190). While in the shelters, I noticed a significant difference in the amount of time Garifuna migrants spent in the facilities, as opposed to Honduran Latinos, and even the rest of the Central American, Salvadoran, Nicaraguan, or Guatemalan migrants. Garifuna migrants often spent only a couple of days in any single shelter.

This has been because Garifuna’s community has developed a network to expedite their people’s migration. This network exists in a liminal space and can be defined as operating somewhere between smuggling and trafficking because facilitates the Garifuna’s destination to the United States. An important facet of Garifuna's identity that serves as a survival tool once they reach their U.S. is that the vast majority of Garifuna are bilingual; they speak Spanish and English, in addition to Creole which is their native mother tongue.

This structural imbalance is a kind of Garifuna extraterritorial bond product of their unique social networks and ethnic characteristics, which we have tried to endorse in this research as the ethnic bridge. In fact, for the sociology of migration, an element that traces a peculiar mode of incorporation that goes from belonging to the ethnic enclave to the intermediary group, as Portes (149) considers.

Yet, it is necessary for the Mexican transit to further qualify these categorizations towards the mafias that traffic and smuggle with the Garifuna, which represents a true dichotomy today with the so-called “coyotes” because they have played a complex and multifaceted role for their peculiar “intermediation services”. Still part of the Mexican and Central American mafia who for decades trafficked with the Mexican immigrants to the same destination; the U.S. Which gave them an important experience, and above all, territorial baggage, that is, a true cross-border geographic knowledge.

Paco, a 46-year-old Garifuna man, whom I also met at the shelter in Saltillo, says he is a former reservist of the Honduran national army in the nineties, which in his own words has given him some of the best knowledge that anyone could have. Something that undoubtedly helps him in his dangerous work of helping other nationals to move through the irregular migration route from his country through Mexico, which he has been doing for at least the last 10 years. He has already been in the United States, knowing marvelously the paths of the migratory route, which makes him a clever unauthorized “guide” over the Mexican territory due to his geographical knowledge of the country (Morales 184).

These characters are intrinsically linked to irregular transnational migration networks between the countries of the Central-North American migratory corridor to the United States. The network operations on the ground constantly modify the geographical routes of migration in transit through Mexico, an example of new migratory patterns emerging from the geopolitics of capital in the whole region of Central-Northern America.

Another risk factor for any immigrant in transit through Mexico is the corruption of Mexican institutions that have generated a wave of violence against irregular immigrants. Recently, discrimination against migrants has gone beyond mere criminal acts of organized crime groups and acts of extortion by government authorities as reflected in the displays of hatred and rejection of the local Mexican population. Rejection by the general populace further challenges the Garifuna and Honduran Latino migrant’s ability to integrate socially in Mexico.

Everyday forms of xenophobic violence though less perceptible, have permanent effects by conditioning especially the Garifuna migrant, who remain not only uprooted and exiled due to the lack of access to political and social rights but also subordinate. This form of violence normalizes the ethnic migrant’s lack of access to justice and a better quality of life. Hence the speed of their transfer to their destination and the need for more effective migratory networks during transit compared to the rest of the Honduran Latino migrants.

Conclusion

The objective of this article was to compare the migratory trajectory between the Afro-American Garifuna and their Honduran Latino countrymen. This leads us to question the results generated by the anti-immigration and border control policies of the Mexican State. It highlights the violence experienced by these groups of migrants at the hands of the organized crime mafias that traffic and smuggle them.

This analysis is supported by the theoretical-ethnic approach that will be referred to as ethnic bridges, supported by other concepts such as transit countries, due to the paradigmatic and overwhelming situation that

Mexico is experiencing about the mishandling of hundreds of thousands of migrants that transit through its territory. Short of, both journeys, the Garifuna and Latino, are equally risky and vulnerable, but the Garifuna journey is less time-consuming and usually avoids fewer risks, but does not allow for any kind of integration into Mexican society.

What we can consider is that the Garifuna's migratory trafficking network, understood here as a type of "coyotaje", is different and linked to their ethnic characteristics that have benefited this Afro-American group in terms of reaching and assimilating more quickly to their final destination. Especially when they have managed to blend in with the rest of the community of the Afro-American society in the United States.

For the Garifuna, an extensive kinship network as a "marked culture" continues to provide support throughout the migratory system, this has been contributing to the maintenance of their cultural identity through the continued expression, now on the move. It is within the concept of ethnicity for this group, as Nancie L. Gonzalez (*Sojourners* 77) well indicated, understood as a cognitive structure and as the notion of tradition upon the forms that must be linked to a particular people, and what makes people particular in their cultural heritage.

Therefore, it becomes a structural principle; and as such, in the stereotypes of ethnic identity, which should be considered part of the social fabric of everyday life and as an aspect of the objectifiable world, i.e., a history and a culture embodied in them even while in motion. As well we can observe that the political dynamization of the Garifuna had very marked transnational influences. The echoes of the struggles of the blacks in the US, which came from the migrants in their comings and goings, helped a lot in this sense. It also helped that the Garifuna knew English and did not look like Latinos to "camouflage" or "blend in" themselves among black Americans, facilitating their economic insertion into society.

However, despite the parallel increases in anti-immigrant control measures, there will continue to be a continued displacement of Honduran migrants, whether Garifuna or Latino, who suffer increased violence during transit. This violence produced by the migrant trafficking network is closely proportional to the policy of surveillance and persecution, and in the case of the Garifuna proportional to ethnicity and intersectionality between the countries of origin, transit, and destination.

It is important for our purposes as "ethnic bridges" that some of them continue to be interested in diasporic culture and participate in Black Caribbean cultural events. In this way, research on socio-cultural aspects of migrant transnationalism should continue to focus on identity issues, as the same Fog Olwig (2003) suggests; on transnational socio-cultural systems that need to be complemented by ethnographic research on culturally defined livelihoods, the movements in which they participate, the fields of social relations and cultural values that these movements engender, and the kinds of places that are constructed in the process.

In fact, the Garifuna I was able to interview in the shelters in Mexico and the streets in Houston and New Orleans, identified with their Caribbean place of origin in Honduran Ceiba, through the family network that provided them with their most concrete and immediate migratory link to the Caribbean. Indeed, their sense of African-American Caribbean identity in Mexico continued to be mediated by the family network maintained through these transnational family interrelationships, which we have defined as the most effective variant of the coyotaje network to reach the United States.

The detached of this paper was not to underline the need to seek new units of analysis as a reference for transnational migration studies. But rather, from empirical and methodological transnationalism to try to open the possibility of incorporating specific groups of migrants from their ethnic linkage, to explore the dimensional

meaning of ethnicity and transnational scope of the network ties between the best organized groups, such as the Garifuna and their migratory process to the United States.

In this vein, the concept of the transit country would be important to ethnographic studies of migration because migrants become trapped or stranded in these countries through which they only intended to transit, as both Honduran groups reported here. Especially for the Honduran-Latino who became involuntary immigrants in Mexico, and even though they do not have the same networks as the Garifuna, they are still an involuntary “undocumented” immigration in a transit that instead of being temporary is becoming semi-permanent.

Thus, the adapted conceptualization within transit country and ethnic bridges leads us to shed certain preconceived ideas, for example, the usual error of understanding ethnography as a mere addition of peripheral perspectives to the usual subaltern approach to marginalized groups, which in the present century are the most prone to displacement. It could be an interesting variant if we add the movement of these groups between the different nations that make up the migratory systems they transit, especially between countries with marked levels of development, such as Honduras, Mexico, and the United States.

It seems that to have a more effective migratory network, given the conditions of risk and clandestinely in the Mexican transit, the key is to have better previous integration in the country of destination, for which it is necessary to have more deeply rooted cultural ties between the whole communities. However, the question that remains open for future collaborations is whether the Garifuna's migratory process sustains and fosters their cultural ties, as seen in the shelters in Mexico it seems that it does, their migration process is like a new plane of struggle and resistance that contributes to the historical cultural rootedness of the Caribbean Garifuna community.

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