

513 & 514 Yanik and Lucia interview  
 Andrea Leland on camera and interviewing  
 Libby transcribing

TAPE 513:

12:41:04 A: ok so um, Hello. So you attended the conference, can you just tell me who you are and where your from?

12:52:12 Y: Yes, I'm Yanik Hugh and I'm a lecturer on cultural studies at the university of the west indies Cape Hill campus. And I was invited by Zoila to come and share some of my thoughts around issues concerning the Diaspora and tourism taking a kind of strategic approach, a policies approach. My research isn't strictly with in the Garifuna community but certainly um I deal with my marginal populations and Diaspora population. Across a broader circum Caribbean and inter Caribbean migration is part of that. So the Garifuna falls neatly with in this very rich history of migration that I've been exploring. So when the invitation came along it was a wonderful opportunity to think thru what it means in the context of tapping into this resource. This very broad and expansive diasporic resource for looking at the development of heritage tourism a Diasporic tourism in particular. So I came to share my thoughts .....

14:02:28 A: And how about you?

14:04:07 L: yes, I am Lucia (Ellis) from Belize. I am a community activist. I came to this conference at the invitation of the foundation, to share my experience on Garifuna spirituality and traditional medicine. These are two components of the healing that is required by the Garifuna community as well as other indigenous communities. And the experience has definitely shown the desire, the interest, the hunger of the indigenous people for this traditional knowledge. For obvious reasons, economic as well as the social and the identity that comes with it. So, its been a wonderful experience for me and it is definitely the beginning of something that can only grow. Because it is who we are, it is what will propel us to be self sufficient and it will propel us to the point where we can be whole again. and that is from the conference I sense, from the themes of the conference, that is the intent, and the reception at the conference shows it is going to keep going that way in that direction.

15:40:06 A: So, you went to Baliceaux, is that your first time and if so tell me bout that experience?

15:45:09 L: It was my first experience inside Baliceaux, I've been to St. Vincent three times before. However I didn't make it Baliceaux, I can't say why.

16:02:24 A: Ok so um, ok you were talking about

16:19:27 L: ok so Baliceaux for me was quite an experience, I've been talking about it, Baliceaux from the time I knew I was coming on this trip. And I knew it was a pilgrimage going to Baliceaux. And I gave some thought about what it would be like, I say oh well, I dismissed it and uh it started when I arrived in St. Vincent Friday evening. Where I landed, I said this is different from when I came previous times. I have different level of consciousness of my Garifunanness. So I landed on the, where the plane landed I realized oops this is not the usual going into a different country. I'm going to go shopping, no, I realized it had deeper meaning. So that each time the moment got closer for

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me to come to Baliceaux, I decided to feel these feelings. We got on a boat and you know I said alright let me experience what its like to be on this sea. From my last trip to St. Vincent, between my last trip and now.

17:50 I have been to my grandmothers homeland, that's my fathers mother, that's in Honduras. And I took that journey and it had quite an Impact on me in terms of understanding the struggle, that my grandfather had gone through. Then, I went to (La Bucca) which is in Guatemala, the homeland of my mother's ancestors, Immediate ancestors. And that didn't sort of a memory, revive a memory and so I was open now. Ok this is another level of connection.

18:37 Just open myself to receive what is meant. So going on the sea I thought a lot about what, I went into their spirit, I said what it was like for them to be traveling on those seas. Here I was on a luxury boat a catamaran, I was having these physical experiences of rough seas and building up nausea and watching people vomit. And all that and yes somebody come in and helped them. You know wipe their mouth and then I thought, I said no one did that for my people, nobody did that for them, nobody was there for them.

19:23 They had to be there for each other and also be their own, confusion and mess and you know all of this turmoil. And I thought of them going through that and I fell asleep on the boat. That's how I coped with it, I went to sleep. When the first group left the boat to go on the island, I was dozed off for a while and I woke up and realized they hadn't landed yet. Because of the rough waves, that also made me think wow, they were back and forth trying to find a suitable place to land because the nature of the currents.

20:09 I fell asleep again I woke up and they still hadn't landed. This happened about four times on that day with the first group that left, and um.

20:35 So you know the process I went through was the reflection it wasn't conscious , it just happened. you know, playing out. I saw this symbolism of that in terms of what my people must have gone through. However they didn't have a choice, they didn't have a choice to find options, they were probably told this is where you get off and thrown off over, get over the best way you can.

21:13 That happened the first trip, they finally figured it out. Then the second trip, then the third group was going to I said ok I going along. And I realized that some people were hesitant to go, you know it didn't matter to me who went or didn't go, I knew I had to go. So I went on the boat, I got on and I saw that (motivated) some other people and so we had quite a full boat by then because they built the confidence as that we were gonna be safe.

21:53 It was real reassuring by the first couple of trips. So going there and getting closer and experiencing the seas were really rough and it was windy. Not as rough as it could've been in a storm, but it was really treacherous and for me. for my experience so travelling across from where that catamaran had settled and making it through those waters, you know the sensation of pain and

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confusion just started to build up. Experiencing the feeling of some woman ancestor, I'm not sure who.

22:48 When I came off the boat everybody was trying to figure out how to get out and I watched how others did it. I followed and I got in the water. When I connected with the water, that water and the sea, Honduras, La Bucca and Belize. To me it completed a connection that nobody, I can't explain it to anybody, the fact that now I felt complete. So, then as I walked through the water I don't know what happened after that, I saw picture after that I was falling onto the beach I know I heard somebody say she prayed, she's praying.

23:48 I felt it from my gut, I felt a scream come from my gut, Releasing pain, anguish, frustration, confusion, and turmoil. And you know I dug into the sand and I wanted the sand to be a part of me you know. Like connecting me with who ever had been there and those spirits that were there. I wanted to be part of it, so I did that then washed myself in the sea with the salt water, of course tears and all that.

24:40 Then I felt light afterward, I felt so light, I felt so uplifted. And I looked at the picture taken by one of the PR person and I saw wow ok I've seen that look before in my lifetime, at a different stage of my life where I have been in a state of distress. Then I saw pictures taken about a half hour later and it's a different person. So, actually it was a healing experience. It was definitely a healing experience. I can't capture right now what it means fully, but it will play out, over the next, for the rest of my life, it'll play out. I think in afro American tradition it's called my afron it's called (Cofa). I think I experienced this (Cofa) a healing that comes with connecting to ones ancestry.

25:53:17 Y: no, but its really Important cause I didn't rough the seas as I am pregnant, but I would have loved to have had the experience. But even as I have said in the start of my paper the experience of those who traveled together and bonded together really captured the momentous occasion that this trip allows. And when we think about peoples not of their own doing but of the playing out of history whether it is you know Jew and the atrocities of Nazis. Or whether it's the transatlantic ships filled with Africans

26:55 , you have a situation where we don't realize how much we embody that pain. How much we carry it around. How it shapes how we interact with others and ourselves and our inner community. So to have moments where you could actually go to a site, its one thing to try and heal from an inside space without having something tangible. But here you had people have the water, that washed their feet, they had the collective support of those who braved that channel with them.

27:39 But then moving onto that site and actually feeling that soil that feeling the rocks and feeling the emotion because space, especially land it Imbues all of those feelings. Those intimate deep feelings and energies that go beyond what we can even remember. Call to memory in a moment but once you are able to go there, take you back to a place and a feeling you wouldn't have been able to actually resurrect outside of being in that site.

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28:18 That's why Baliceaux is such an Important icon of what it means to be Garifuna. And what it means to survive, what it means to retrace and live and be part of a much wider Diaspora. And that is the most Important aspect. And I think the pilgrimage should be, ought to be a part of the broader Diaspora world with the Garifuna. and beyond could actually come to appreciate a much greater detail and with the greater empathy. Because I hear on that boat or catamaran your rocking back and forth, you can be transported to another time easily. And its that sense of being transported where you have to let go of those inhibitions that you feel all the emotions of the past. They come back and they meet you in the present and complete the cycle.

29:27:14 L: speak in a meaningful way. and that is one of the things about Garifuna (daughters). we have that commitment to go back to where we came from. whether it's, Baliceaux is the ultimate, but we do make journeys back to La Bucca to visit, we do make journeys back to Honduras and even within Belize Garinagu will go, if moved to the urban centers we make a point of going back to our community at some point on a regular basis. And that is the connection is so critical to Garifuna people there are some who chose not to do that and the alienation, the experience is profound.

30:22 I want to link that to social issues. Because we, I have observed and I need to do scientific research that many of our disadvantaged or our delinquent youth have not been able to, it is because they have not stayed connected to the culture. To the community they move to the city and they get Immersed into that environment and their sense of identity becomes erased, becomes distorted. So they don't know who they are and as a result they cannot be disciplined or managed with in the protocol of that exists within the Garifuna community. There is a protocol that we have in terms of how people are disciplined the elders, the interpersonal relationships, the accountability to one another is very Important, we are indebted to each other.

31:36:16 A: so given that how do you think, what have you found here on St. Vincent then do you feel like they have a connection or do you feel, to their land, or do feel that your coming back here and sort of, is helping them get connected? Can you speak to that a little bit?

31:55:05 Y: I find that when your speaking about the land or coastal region has meant many things in many different ways in terms of how we value it but one of the striking things coming to this conference I've discovered was sobering and hearing this is a sense of loss. This tremendous sense of loss that Vincentians have communicated, in a different way on different levels and the hurt that accompanies that sense of loss,

32:35 Also a sense of disconnection and displacement, so there is a lot of bitterness a lot of sadness and there's a lot anger and passion and we've heard that in the community's voice being articulated. It was really important to hear that because it kept our intervention very real, we had to always be checking into what are people feeling on the ground. In terms of being here and being, their history being completely dismissed as anything valid and being told that your people aren't any good. When you have that level of annihilation of identity you see how it has detrimental physiological Impact and it completely severs the self and the broader community.

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33:29 So I think this is essential gathering of people that share history. And for them to see the Vincentian Garinagu people to see the broader Impact that this land has for them as people coming back that sense of homecoming, would overtime instill and empower them to realize you know, what we really have here is essential. We need to continue those conversations. So the most touching part for me in this two or three day encounter has been when yourself and (Salio (the Honduran) went to the students, out of, it was so spontaneous and that's the thing about being together and sharing. It was so spontaneous (Salio) went to the children who were all there this morning to open amazing center and started to speak to them in the tongue of their ancestors.

34:32 And I think that anyone from this land has to claim's Garifuna as part of their ancestral heritage, whether they can trace the lineage in their blood or not. The fact that the words vibrated in their eyes, they're looking and absorbing all of this at five years old and being, smiling and the sense of pride when they said the word properly. Or when they got a smile back from Salio and saying that's right, now say it again louder. Its all that level of really showing that there is something of worth that you can completely take as your own and celebrate and share.

35:13:09 L: I want to add to that, I had a young woman approach me two days ago, she went to Belize for an exchange and expressed that when she mentioned that she was from St. Vincent and she was in Dangriga people say WHAT! You're from St. Vincent, people say what you from Yurumein and she realized how much people valued Yurumein. When she came home she was like wow you come from somewhere. It is so amazing that something as simple as that instill a sense of pride.

35:53:12 Y: it works both ways.

35:57:01 L: to be able to meet someone from your homeland and you to go and meet someone who has left. I did this analogy with the youth earlier, you know, whenever people are separated there are losses on both sides.

36:13:15 Y: but its reclaimable, it is something that and I really wanted to Impress and I'm hoping that in the various occasions that of the conference that people went away knowing that a loss always brings about regeneration. That its part of the cycle of life, that its cycle of death and rebirth.it may take a couple of generations for that rebirth to become, to exist and flower into its fullness. But what we see amazing rebirthing an amazing kind of reclamation of self. It's gonna take time and it's gonna be wrapped up in all kinds of things, politics and otherwise. But once the feeling is there it will continue.

37:03:06 L: that is one of the philosophies of Garifuna that whatever we do its going to result in good. The suffering will result in good, its not something we take kindly to because of Christian, we are doing sin and evil. But the suffering is ordained for one form of expression and so every disappointment brings good. So even in our suffering, we laugh, we dance, we celebrate. We speak about negative things in an environment of celebration because we know.

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37:47:30 Y: I remember when Andy Palacio passed and to see how the communities across central America mourned and celebrated. It was incredible on the level of celebration that there was a clear sense that there was a time to be sad. But there was a moment where it was time to celebrate life and the commitment. That is a minute example of something that goes much broader, so its true we begin to celebrate what still exists.

38:25:29 L: yes things are bad but we will preserve and we will overcome and we will be better because we have children. Children are so important in the Garifuna tradition and our children is what drives us. Our ancestors laid the foundation and we must not forget them. Because they laid the foundation, do we honor them for what they have provided for us and it is our duty because they have laid the foundation for us to present at this very moment. To be able to function and have all of these resources, we have a duty to pass it on to our children.

39:14:00 A: so, I have a question then when you were on Baliceaux first of all it is very well said all of what your saying, its very important. When you were on Baliceaux it is important to honor your ancestors, how are you honoring your ancestors you on Baliceaux?

39:35:02 L: ok what we did there was we did a libation we said prayers we invited them to be with us in spirit. Through prayers we invited an elder Joseph Belize to lead us in that. The rest of us joined in and then there was drumming, there was singing, dancing and you know and even being present. There were some artists who shared poetry, it was all so, people came with the intention of doing that and there was no program. It just happened. This is the way, you know, the beauty. The interesting thing about it is that, it started to rain, the rain were truly showers of blessings.

40:33 I mean we had no where to go, there was no shelter there, then its, the rain it passed and the sun came out. Isn't that typical of what happened this morning? no just stay there receive the blessings, I mean it was so powerful, so powerful and it was our first coming together we didn't know each other, but it just jelled, the unison, the unity and the knowing what to do. I thought about it and you know yes our ancestors landed on Baliceaux ill-equipped or they were just put there they made due. They knew what to do they were creative they were resourceful so as to survive that. So that when the British decided to move them from there, they had I think they had a plan already. I know they had a plan, so that when they got to Roatan they knew how to manage the situation.

42:00:04 A: well I didn't know that

42:05:06 Y: it also prepared them for valuing the coast as a part of, so its very difficult separate what the water and the coast means for the identity of those people. because that has been so much a part, that kind of fluidity, that movement and water linking all of these territories is something that is extremely important.

42:35:04 L: and you know umm, if I may, our rituals, we honor that indicatively, especially we go to the depth of the sea for the food to be included in the rituals. That food, its because the depth of the sea is where just as many of them perished. So when we bring that food its, the food is symbolic, we

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cant bring food that from the Immediate coast, it has to from the depths of the sea. We also bring to the ritual cassava which is the Amer-Indian connection, and it has to be prepared in the traditional way. in most cases, in all cases and then the ground provisions, everything that is linked you know.

43:38 all of that is symbolic of our connection and our respect for the natural resources that have allowed us to survive. In all of our rituals even in our reenactments are formed by this ritual base separate from the wealth of ritual knowledge.

44:07 Y; Ritual knowledge is what informs in a palatable ways a lot of these so called secular celebrations, in fact there is a real blurring of what could be considered secular or profane. And the two come together in unison in a very Important way. the comment one of the ladies made that she thinks of her ancestors thru doing things in an ancestral type of way, in a way that her ancestors would have. I think that's one of the highest, not necessarily the highest, a very Important way of which ancestral veneration becomes a part of quoted life. this ability to recall through showing a child how you cook in a certain way. how to pick a certain fruit in a certain way. what time of year you do certain things. All of these actions keep the ancestral knowledge alive and make their presence.

45:15:15 Y: ok the question of tourism is delicate especially when your dealing with trauma. But its something that can be explored in interesting ways. One of the things is not to approach the history and the use of Baliceaux strictly from a touristic point of view. There has to be acknowledgements of its (ecrality ? ) and Importance and heritage site first.

45:50 So there has to be a respect for its sacredness and an understanding that this is a space of history, but it is also a space of emotion and of ritual and that there are, it goes beyond just a land the significance the symbolic significance of what the land is.

46:21 So its not just merely a landscape or an island off the coast of St Vincent it is symbolically rich as a site of history, as a site of heritage. And when we think about what does it mean to create a product in which to, there could be some economic gain, we have examples from across the globe in terms of heritage sites that are also part of a larger circuit of tourism. I think it is to approach it from a level of it being heritage a symbol of the past and to create pilgrimage tours, and not necessarily call it cultural tourism, even though it would fit, it could fit under that brand.

47:13 But if you see it as a pilgrimage, that it's a tour around a set of histories and memories and identities, linked to specific peoples, then it becomes something beyond just taking a walk in the sand. That there is a purpose, a distinctive purpose for being there and is commemorative, Take a team that would understand that there is a plaque that was placed on the landing spot. That becomes a site of remembrance and that these rights of remembrance are wrapped up into the tours that take place at specific times.

48:02:18 A: so, how do you feel about that being sold, or for sale or for developers, I mean

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48:09:23 L: I think it is tragic, unacceptable and it is, but given the legal framework it has been set up where it is private land. There needs to be a grassroots movement, to create the demand for it to be reclaimed.

Y and Lydia together: And St. Vincent is not enough, it needs to be the Garifuna nation collectively has to lobby for this land, And insistently and consistently.

48:50 L: From what I know of British law, use Belize as an example, it is possible it can happen because they are able to reclaim land for community purposes in British, there's a clause there I don't think St. Vincent law is far different. It requires an advocacy, it requires research, it requires a framework, a plan, a plan of action.

49:25 I think one of the presenters gave a very good, a wealth of information, Dr. Newton gave a, both Newton and Best talking about the use of land

Y; those are things I think were gonna have to enter into a policy framework and into different lobbying strategies.

L: Then there's also international arrangements, international treaties that would give credence to that kind of movement, It requires some work and some putting together of strategies of plans

50:02 Y and even seeing where (UNESCO) could go in terms of, because its one thing to be designated a masterpiece of intangible oral and traditional. But there's also a site also a physical site that goes hand in hand in tandem. Because it was from this site that these people were displaced and then moved to another.

50:30:07 A: so, who owns the land, do you know who owns it, or how it got to be owned by somebody or is it the Vincentian government?

50:40:13 Y: it's a Vincentian owner

50:41:25 A: So, It's a Vincentian owner?

50:42:26 Y: it's a private owner, privately owned by the person from St. Vincent

50:51:00 A: but we don't know how that person got it?

50:52:24 Y: no there are other land owners within the grenadines that are privately owned like mystique but um so it is you see how that came about.

51:06 L: We have to put it in context that it is recently that this sense of awareness and desire for reclaiming our heritage. So that land may not have been acquired long ago. It was to reclaim Balliceaux is there, that doesn't mean its not I'm possible. Because of the ILO convention 169 which speaks about tribal people having the right and if we acknowledge that historically we were denied an understanding of our true selves. Then we are justified, now we know we are connected to this.



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52:10 Y: but that knowledge has always been there, it has been there. Whets Important is the knowledge that has been transferred is seems to be in that sense of seeing it, seeing it's a space and not just this mythic, you know there's one thing to have it exist in the level of folklore as a mythic space, that doesn't have a tangible physical place. And you have that

52:37:01 A: so, its only recently that people are really only starting to go back to Baliceaux, so can you, you know how long-ago people started to go back?

52:44:20 l: This is the first one

52:50:24 A: no it isn't cause I went to one in 2005 as a pilgrimage, yes I was with the Honduras delegations. Its really recent within the last ten years.

53:14 L : I am thinking in terms of the interest and the passion the commitment to claim it. You know that is a recent thing the awareness may have been there but what was the big deal, what was the point? But now with the Garifuna nation consolidating itself the St. Vincent people are feeling a connection and the people from Honduras and from Belize and La Bucca are influencing this interest. I think there is a restlessness now, that ok we want more than just to know, we want to own it. And I'm sure there are models of that.

54:13:20 A: So there's gonna be a new airport. You both know that, there's gonna be a new airport, with that comes all kinds of things. I'm thinking about you know your gonna have a lot more people coming in. I think from outside including more Garinagu which I think more people might come in so I , can you speak about the Impact of what that airport and also what Impact that might have on the actual culture positive or negative?

54:49:09 Y: just from the conversation yesterday there were tensions for sure. Because while St. Vincent is a space for kind of homeland for Garifuna **( interview cuts off in mid-sentence)**

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00:12: Y: It's quite um, its intense to think about the actual extent to which it changes things. In good ways and also complicated ways. And so the question of ownership is one that will always be part of the debate for Baliceaux and the government may see it as a potential cash crop. You know something that to really reap the benefit from in highly material ways. But really, I think there has to be a voice from the broader Diaspora and to really speak in the indigenous peoples globally. To speak about the significance of land for their identity I think there's a disconnect sometimes between policy makers and government officials, in terms of understanding issues that they may think are soft. Right, to so, the question of land and identity and sanctament are seen as soft issues, what do you mean, how do you mean?

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1:13 Y: But there is a way, which there can be revenue generated, through sensitive programming and use of Baliceaux. And so it's a kind of think through kind of how that is done. Well, I think about comparatively when we think, for example comparatively of um, (thanel) tourism, which is dark tourism. Which is where people go back often times to sites of war, of violence.

1:55 Y: So in Cambodia there are all these tours of the killing fields. And it is a really important voyage that many take especially those who have been exiled, who had to leave Cambodia. And their return to that space, to begin the process, and there is a local historian that takes them through the site. There are people there and it branches off, it gives those who have lost appendages somewhere where they can work and where they can be part of this community of healing.

2:32 Of using the tragic to begin to restore a sense of history and healing. So, there, there, I don't think that tourism necessary is the kind of death now for Baliceaux and for the history. There are ways that which you can creatively use that history to actually, and also to generate a revenue but to also have a means to restoring a sense of pride, history, memory and all of those things wrapped up.

03:00:12 L: um, I think about the health issues, the importance of human resource development when I think of Baliceaux. And the need why it's so important to save Baliceaux and to Garinagu all over the world, that if we are recognized as contributors to society it is the responsibility of our governments help us to heal so we can be productive. I also

3:42 when I think of(donor) agencies like World Bank I've done projects with them. And IDB, they are now developing frameworks for indigenous involvement and accountability of nations to indigenous people and cultural development. So we don't look at it as, I a negative way. we need to do our homework and find out what is the platform we can use in order that we can negotiate from a position of strength. And

4:19 that is one of the responsibilities of any organization, the foundation, the (daco), and that the (Daco) is one of the models that we can look to. Daco in Honduras of which Sellers is the president, they have been able to use different frameworks that they donor agencies have developed. In order to secure the rights of the ethnic groups and marginalized groups in Honduras that applies all over the world. We need to do our homework cause it's there.

04:58:14 Y: it's there and it's not, it would be, I think a worse issue if there was one island but the fact that the Grenadines you have a chain of islands. So I mean one, I mean one could be used in a different type of way, especially because tourism thrives on difference. It's not, you don't want to go Tobago Keys and Bequia and Union and find the same thing and have the same experience. And that is what u, Baliceaux Has a different history and therefore the experience and interaction with the space has to be different. =