This event appeared to me as particularly exquisite because it celebrated, like far too few events linked to black communities and of African origin, an identity without pouring into the "pathos", and by this, I mean that this event was centered on the celebration of a culture, an identity, that of the Garifuna nation, without being a display of tragic history and historical violence. Indeed, although the history of the Garifuna people is marked by wars and by exile, the event focused on the celebration of their present, of the vitality of this nation, a celebration of the existence which never sank not in the blind glorification of the past, rather in a remembrance of it as a way to move forward as a people still fighting for their rights that we will further mention.

As soon as the band stepped in the room, singing and dancing, what stroke me the most is the strength of the African heritage, and specifically of the Malian heritage. Indeed, the iconography mobilized was so blatantly African, the symbols, such as plantain and cassava in the basket, and even valorization of curves, of "well-fed women" to quote the West African common phrase I have heard so many times growing up in Southern Paris. These roots were, to me, most visible in their chants: their vocal technique is the exact same I have been mesmerized by during Malian weddings I have attended, which is the tradition of the *Griot's chants*: the *Griots* (feminine: Griotte) are, in Mandingo societies (such as Bambara and Malinké people), a cast of people dedicated to chanting the glory of families and their ancestors (sometimes recognizable by their last names ending in "-até" like the famous Diabaté family). And this insistence, in Castillo's songs, to recall the glorious Garifuna past of struggle against European colonists and the ongoing one against giant multinational corporations, appears to me as being linkable to the Malian tradition of *battle-telling*, again by the griots, who serve as the traditional historians of the community, and recount the exploits, the battles, the feats of arms and the great historical episodes of the Mandingo nation. The figure of the Griot in Mandingo

cultures is even seeable in Alex Haley's *Roots*, that does a good job at recreating the traditional organization of Mandingo societies in casts; therefore, it appears logical that such a preeminent figure like the Griot would be infused in the musical tradition of the Malian-descending Garifuna nation.

The second enormous segment of my understanding of the Garifuna nation through this event has to do with the singularity of the Garifuna Black experience. In fact, as Rhodees stressed it, "Garifuna people were never enslaved", descending from Malian navigators, which contrasts with all other Afro-Caribbean or any other Black experience in the Americas. Indeed, we have seen how Haitians for example have forged their identity around liberation from servitude, and even Jamaicans have built their national identity by praising their longstanding Maroon tradition, which is to say: slavery has been, for virtually all other non-immigrant Black communities in the Americas, the alpha of their experiences there. The Garifuna nation's case interestingly pushes us to operate this dichotomy between Afro-Caribbean history and Slavery, to consider the fact that slavery was not the absolute alpha of the Black experience in the Caribbean, but rather it has been depicted as such by an ethnocentric white-centered development of historical discourse. This singular experience as a black people in the Americas pushes us to reconsider our automatisms, one being of associating longstanding Black presence anywhere out of Africa as necessarily a relic of slavery – therefore, pushing us to distance ourselves with the deeply engrained idea that Blackness and Slaveness are concomitant: we shall fight actively against this White supremacist idea so deeply entrenched that it became a habit to suppose slavery whenever the experience of a Black person outside of Sub-Saharan Africa is considered.

And finally, I was marked by the insistence of Castillo to stress the importance of *ownership*, both through his speech – "we were never enslaved, we know where we come from"- and his

song titles such as “We Have Arrived”. In fact, it appeared to me as a double affirmation of self, and the importance of that affirmation of self as a nation: the Garifuna people does not only claim ownership of its space, of Garifuna lands violently threatened by the greed of multinational corporations, but also ownership of their time, by which I mean ownership of their past, of their history as well as of their vivid present – in other terms, the Garifuna affirmation is powerful to me because it is dual: owning their time, as Africans knowing where they came from contrarily to the vast majority of Blacks in the Americas, and owning their space, as a people struggling to keep sovereignty over its historical land.

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Female *griot*: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5iEdphR12Nc