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Racialization in Honduras: A critical examination in regards to race, place and media representations of smaller ethnic communities.

Introduction.

Honduras is an ethnically diverse country in Latin America, although it is much more developed than some of the other countries in this area, it has one of the highest murder rates in the world and a large percentage of its population are in poverty. Alongside these societal problems, there is another large problem which is underplayed in academic writings and media publications and this is the presence of racism within society. In a publication by the United Nations, it has been said that the estimated population is around 6.5 million people. This population is made up of 90% mestizos which are recognized as the main ethnic group in this country, however the background of these people is very varied as the majority have mixed heritages and tend to come from some sort of Spanish background. The other 10 percent fall into two other categories – these are known as the indigenous people and people of African descent. (UN, 2005). However, these two groups are subject to very negative racist views from the majority of the population which will be explained in this report. Firstly, this report will look at the historical overview of Honduras and how these small ethnic groups came to be in the country. The creation of a racial hierarchy during the banana plantation era will be examined and what impact this had on the people of African Descent such as the Garifuna. Secondly, the displacement of the Garifuna will be examined and show how racist attitudes from the population and also the government have helped to displace these people from their villages and their homes through the creation of tourist industries which have in turn, exploited these people due to their race and cultural backgrounds.

Continuing with the explanation of racist attitudes, media representations of these smaller ethnic groups will be explained. The media has played a key role in presenting these racist attitudes to the wider society and linking crimes to these smaller ethnic groups. Also, 2009 military coup will be examined and how the media reported this event. Finally, this essay will explore the under representation of much smaller ethnic groups that haven't integrated fully into society such as the Arab Palestinians and also the governmental strategies that were put in place to stop many different people from entering the country. By looking at these themes and ideas, it will show how Honduran society was, and still is subjected to racist attitudes through many different parts of society.

The Creation of a Racial Hierarchy during the Banana Plantation Era.

Firstly, the integration of the Garifuna community will be explored and how they have slowly been accepted into Honduran society in the past 100 years. The Garifuna "... are a people descended from marooned African slaves and indigenous peoples of the Caribbean. They were deported from the island of St. Vincent to the coast of Central America in 1797, eventually settling in present day Honduras..." (Anderson, 2007:388). At this time there was a lot of racism due to slavery and this is why this ethnic group settled in Honduras to get away from this racism. Many of these people tended to settle on the coastal areas of the country and make a living off the land. Vacanti-Brondo (2013) explains that many Garifuna communities had a large presence on the coastal areas and took control

of the land in this area as a way to separate themselves from the wider society. However, she explains that by doing this and creating their own spaces to live in, this separated them from the majority which meant they would never be fully integrated and therefore they remained at the bottom of racial and class hierarchies and were seen as the lowest in terms of labour. (Vacanti-Brondo, 2013). However, perhaps it was not by choice that the Garifuna were separated from the mainstream society.

During the 1920's and 1930's the banana production industry was Honduras' main form of industry and this therefore created an economic boom in the country. However, it has been explained that "the fruit trade began to develop in Honduras in the 1860's, attracting immigrants from within and beyond the nation" (Dzid Zienyo and Obler, 2005:104). This meant that many young men were moving from the coastal areas to work in this industry, yet when they began to become involved in the industry, they were met with racialized attitudes from the majority of the population which are referred to as the mestizos. Due to their presence in this industry, they were seen as much harder workers for these companies, yet this upset the majority of the population and perhaps it could be suggested that this is where racism became a key part of Honduran society (Vacanti Brondo, 2013). Members of the Garifuna were seen as separate from the rest of society and this is where a social hierarchy began to be formed due to this industry. This could be because the "...Garifuna were in many ways treated as second-class citizens throughout the first half of the twentieth century." (Dzid Zienyo and Obler, 2005:104). This explains why there has been so much animosity between the Mestizo and Garifuna, because they were treated badly and subjected to racist attitudes. Therefore the Honduran elite used these ethnic differences to segregate and discriminate based on skin colour which has similarities to the tactics which were used during the colonial era. (Mendoza, 2006). Due to Honduras previously being colonised, perhaps these attitudes have been continued from this era and these attitudes from British white supremacy rule have been internalised by the Honduran elite. They were subjected to very harsh overt forms of discrimination and were "denied access to public parks and pressed into menial labour such as clearing the street of dead dogs." (Anderson, 2007:391).

In regards to making a racial hierarchy in Honduras, the Garifuna community were subjected to this hierarchical discourse and by the early 1900's wider society referred to the Garifuna as 'Moreno' which translates to them being placed at the bottom of the colour continuum which is very discriminatory. (England, 2010). Due to this term being coined by the majority of society, the Garifuna reacted to this name and in the 1950's they protested this and therefore protested the racism that was present in Honduran society. However, it has been explained by England (2010), that the term Garifuna does not actually refer to their skin colour, but it refers to the language that they speak and their ethnic identity which identifies with their roots in St. Vincent and by embracing the term Garifuna, it has been used as a tactic to try and combat this racism and therefore remove themselves from the colour continuum which they have been placed on.

This racial hierarchy has had damaging effects on the black people who live in Honduras because people now identify with the "colour variations which approximately correspond to the range of social and economic status." (Mellafe, 1975:1). This could explain why the Garifuna community are regarded as unimportant in society and perhaps why they had to take up work on the banana plantations as it was exploitative work which meant that they would work long hours for very little money, yet they were happy to do this as not many other people would employ them due to the racist views that have been passed down from the government and this has had a substantial effect on the black and indigenous people of Honduras.

The government have tried to deny the creation of this racial hierarchy, however a lot of research has shown that in fact, they are the ones promoting this and making life even worse for these people who are subjected to these racialized views. The state has mainly focused on the strengthening of the Mestizo and it has been suggested that "the state does not celebrate blackness as part of the national identity unless it can be subsumed under the category of the mestizo (todos somos mestizos, we all

have a little African blood) or the category of autochthonous” (England, 1999:21). This shows that the state have tried to create the perfect society and by doing this and saying that the mestizo is the ideal population, it could be seen as an attempt to push the black communities out of society and perhaps even make them leave if they feel very unwelcome. Although this is a much more modern concept and the tactic has been used in recent years, it shows ideological similarities with the immigration laws of 1929 and 1934 as they were created in an attempt to push people out of society and these racial ideologies are infused with the devaluation of blackness (Mollett and Faria, 2013). It has also been explained that the government “...promote contradictory projects that seek cultural homogeneity while favouring the reproduction of ethnic differences in which the class system relies” (Kearny, 1996, cited in Martinez Novo, 2006:60).

Displacement of the Garifuna Community through struggles for Land.

In more recent years, the Garifuna community have faced more struggles in regards to segregation and unfair treatment because of their racial origins. The latest struggles that the Garifuna have faced are in regards to their land and where they live. As previously explained, many of these people tend to live on coastal areas and make their living by fishing and through other agricultural means (Minority Rights Group, 2016). However, in recent years the government have expressed that they want to recreate the country and create a tourism industry which could be seen as the Modern Day Cancun (Mollett, 2014). When creating these tourist destinations, the main concern was the displacement of the Garifuna and what the tourism industry could do to their communities.

Although the tourism industry may not directly link to the concept of racism and racialisation, some of the tactics that were employed by the state when trying to redevelop the country and create a tourist industry could be seen as very racist. In regards to the creation of a modern Cancun, this was attempted in an area known as Tela Bay. Mollett (2014) explains that this area is home to more than 25,000 people who identify as being part of the Garifuna. When trying to create this area, a lot of land which these people lived on was sold off to major corporations in an attempt to create this modern paradise, however it has been explained that this land was sold off to these companies due to a post-colonial narrative which has problematized blackness. (Mollett, 2014) Due to the Garifuna not participating in the economic sector as much as the majority of the population, the land they were living on was seen as wasted land and by buying this land, it could regenerate the economy. This shows that there have always been negative attitudes towards this community and by selling the land that they lived on, it has created further segregation for these people and therefore, “...state development practices make visible that tourism development equals land displacement.” (Mollett, 2016:425).

Due to the government trying to create a perfect society, they have brought in neoliberal economic reforms in recent years. These reforms have placed African descent lives, life ways, cultures, access to economic independence and food security in danger (Mayes, 2014). These neoliberal reforms link directly to the tourism industry because they are pushing people out of the areas that they inhabit which will benefit the elite as they can build the tourism industry and generate a better economy, however the Garifuna do not really benefit from this industry because they tend to participate in more agricultural jobs. However, due to them being pushed out of this area, they are unable to live off the land and have therefore had to resort to jobs in the tourism industry.

However, it is not always a negative image regarding the tourism industry. It has been hypothesised that “these Garifuna do not mind tourism, in fact they want more of it.” (Burell and Moodie, 2013:283). These people may favour tourism because it can provide the younger generation with jobs which are not land based and they can earn more money this way and this can therefore strengthen communities. Although this community may be benefiting from the jobs, it has led to “the founding, dispersion, and fragmentation of the Garifuna people” (Gahndi et al, 2015:1560). This may not be a negative thing as people are now able to freely move around, but this community are now facing

stigma in regards to their sexual partners. Research has shown that “multiple sexual partners were more prevalent in our sample of Garifuna adults than in the general Honduran population” (Gahndi et al, 2015:1567). However this research is underdeveloped and there are not many studies which have reported the same findings but it shows that they are being discriminated against because of their race and cultural practices as they tend to have more sexual partners. This shows that there are even more negative attitudes against them, which does not always include their race.

When booking a holiday to Honduras, the brochures may feature pictures of the Garifuna community yet they receive no economic benefit for this and the large resort of Palma Real Beach Resort and Casino, “offers snorkelling tours to the nearby cays (the Cayos cochinos), largely by passing local fisherman and inhabitants.” (Burell and Moodie, 2013:284). This shows that although on the surface it may look like the tourism industry could help to close the gap and create a more harmonious environment for the residents of Honduras, it has in fact done the opposite and segregated many black communities even further because they are not considered as the main population and therefore are subjected to this discrimination from outsiders as well as the general population.

As explained, the areas that have been subjected to tourist development tend to be on the coast in these areas and “for these tourists, the Garifuna community may have elements of a quaint, traditional fishing village but ultimately it signifies something too familiar, a place that is poor, scary and black, with the threat of violence lurking in the corners.” (Dzid Zienyo and Oboler, 2005:102). Although Honduras is a violent country and does have a very high murder rate, it would be unfair to assume that these violent acts are from the Garifuna community and therefore this explanation could be misrepresenting this community just because they are black and therefore subjected to these negative connotations due to the racial hierarchy in this country that has previously been explained.

Lasa Pulan is another area that has caused problems for these smaller ethnic groups. Although this is not specifically linked to touristic developments, there have been frustrations in this area due to overlapping boundaries between the Garifuna and other ethnic communities (Mollett, 2013). There has been troubles with land grabbing and these land invasions were made illegal in 1992 and therefore “legislation is a cause for celebration” (Mollett, 2016:413). It took a long time for this legislation to be developed and this is why the Lasa Pulan struggle is both a material and symbolic consequence of the racialized ideologies of Garifuna identities. (Mollett, 2006).

Media Representations of Racial Violence.

Violence in Honduras has become so normalized because crime rates are significantly higher than the rest of the world, yet the violence that is experienced, tends to be experienced by the ethnic minorities and in particular, the Garifuna. Although the violence in Honduras has been increasing in recent years, the Garifuna were subjected to racial violence in the banana plantation era. Vacanti Brondo (2013) explained that there was a key event in 1924 which could have potentially marked the start for racial violence. As previously explained, the Garifuna community had become a key part of the banana plantations as they were regarded as hard workers yet the mestizo did not like this. Therefore on the streets of Trujillo, July 1924 riots broke out and the mestizo were protesting against the presence of the Garifuna community. These riots quickly became violent and many of the mestizo population began to threaten the black workers with machetes and threatened to kill them if they did not leave the country. Throughout these riots, two black workers were killed and many more were stabbed, therefore this event could be seen as the turning point for racial violence in Honduras (Vacanti Brondo, 2013).

After this, people began to have hostile attitudes towards these people and therefore racial violence escalated. In regard to the tourism industry, in the touristic development of Tela Bay, there were examples of racial violence against the Garifuna community as they were being forced out of this area and they did not want to leave. Extreme examples come in the form of the harassment of a Garifuna

leader, Jessica Garcia who was threatened at gun point to sign her land over and 3 young members of this same community were killed in 2006, however police were charged with these killings. (Minority Rights Group, 2016). Other intellectuals in this area have reported similar findings by explaining that "...Garifuna activists endure innumerable death threats, having homes burned down and leaders assassinated." (Mollett, 2016:425). This shows how racist attitudes towards this community are extreme and it could be argued that "human rights violations have and still are being committed against the Garifuna people in all the countries where they reside. Most of its discrimination due to their ethnicity." (Wellington, 2014). This could explain why there are so many violent offences committed against this community and due to these people being of African descent and not being seen as part of the Honduran community, the police are not actually investigating these crimes properly because of the racist attitudes that they hold.

Therefore, because the crimes against the Garifuna people are not dealt with effectively, "in 1998 the news reached Honduras that an organization called Transparency International had ranked it as the third most corrupt country in the world." (Pine, 2008:46). This obviously did not sit well in Honduran society and the government obviously denied these claims. Perhaps it is not a matter of corruption but what is shown in the media that could heighten these racist attitudes as it has been argued that there has been excessive "...talk of gangs and death porn in the media..." (Pine, 2008:76).

The media has depicted the Garifuna as a separate community that are not integrated into main stream society which is true to an extent and perhaps the violence that occurs is because there is a problem with over exposure of the crimes which could make them therefore seem more acceptable. However, there are some showings of the black community in the media in regards to football. Although Honduran football is not shown as widely as most westernised countries, it has been said that "...roughly 50 per cent of the players are of African descent" (Nadel, 2013). The amount of black players in the national football team is not representative of the wider population which on the surface could look like the black community are being given more of a chance in this area, however it has been explained that if a player "made a mistake on the field, fans used racial epithets and threw rocks" (Nadel, 2013). This shows that they were still subject to very racist ideas and even though in the media it was made to look like they were seen equally in society, this was very far from the truth.

The media also played a key role in reporting the 2009 military coup. During the 1970's and 1980's there was a lot of "overt violence that scarred Central America..." (McIlwaine and Willis, 2002:76). During this period there was a lot of political instability and it has been reported that during this time "the U.S military intervened at least thirty times..." (Feres Junior, 2010:47). Therefore this intervention just shows how much violence there is in this area and the roots of it tends to be centred on racist ideologies. In 2009, the military coup rejected America and the help it had previously offered to the country.

In particular, the leader of Honduras at the time, Colindres was extremely discriminatory towards President Obama and he was "repeatedly using the term 'Negrito' and 'Negrito del batey' which translate into 'little black boy' and 'little black sugar plantation worker', respectively." (TransAfrica Forum, 2009). These racist attitudes which were displayed by the Honduran leader just show how badly the problem of racism in society is and an important question that was raised during this time was that "if the chancellor dares to call the president of the first world power a 'negrito', what treatment should be expected for the poor, afro-Honduran on the ground?" (TransAfrica Forum, 2009). This shows how negative and racist the leaders in this country are and the media portrayal of the events did not help to settle the fears of black people as at this time they may have felt like they were being accepted. However any hopes of being accepted were crushed when "Colindres concluded his government's racist assault by associating blacks with queers, prostitutes and leftists..." (Thompson, 2009). Therefore this shows that black people were still not accepted and white

supremacist rule will always have an advantage over the black people and due to the media being controlled by these elites, there will always be racist images within the media.

Under-representation of smaller minority groups and Governmental strategies.

Although this report has looked at the main ethnic groups in Honduras, such as the Garifuna and the Mestizo, there are a lot of under – represented ethnic groups within the country that are not considered important due to their small numbers, however these groups have made a vital contribution to the economy, mainly the Arab Palestinian community. During the 1920's many Arabic people began to migrate to Honduras due to the banana exportation industry that has previously been mentioned. During this time period, many intellectuals described "...the early Palestinian arrivals to Honduras are travelling merchants who sold a variety of products such as brooms and dry goods over a wide area of the country." (Zabel, 2006:1200). This small but wealthy community began to make their mark on Honduras and this therefore created anger within the wider population and because of the hostility that was shown towards them, they therefore experienced major segregation. It has been explained that "the Arabs have remained culturally distinct by keeping many of their own traditions alive." (McGaffey and Spilling, 1999:69). However, this explanation of Honduras and the many ethnic communities that are present shows a very subjective view and does not reveal the true nature as to why these communities are segregated. Perhaps one reason why these communities fail to integrate fully is because of a language barrier, "... Honduras has a single dominant language, Spanish, that is nearly universal" (Dendinger, 2008:63). However, this may have been true for first generation migrants, yet the children who are born in the country will learn the language in their education and then will be able to integrate so perhaps this is not the best way at looking why these communities are segregated.

When looking at the segregation of these communities, the government played a role in making sure that these immigrants did not get into the country, yet if they did then they would be met with racist and negative attitudes. In 1929 and 1934 severe immigration laws were introduced to stop immigrants from coming into the country (Dario, 1995). These laws were highly discriminatory and they stopped the entry of black people and restricted Arabs, Chinese and other groups as a means to erect the discourse of the mestizo. (Mendoza, 2006). Upon entry to the country, immigrants had to pay a large sum of money, around \$2500, to be able to gain access and due to the economy of the world at the time, this was highly unaffordable for many migrants which therefore slowed down the rates of immigration into Honduras. However, for the immigrants who were present in the country before this legislation, there were other policies and tactics in place to make them feel unwanted in society.

Upon completion of government census' data throughout the 1900's, it has become evident that many groups have been excluded from this data as a way to empower the mestizo discourse. This government tactic has been used to exclude groups and perhaps make them feel like they are not welcome in Honduran society. It has been shown that in the 1920 and 1930 census in particular, the government used the census records as a way to construct the ideal population and classify people according to their race (Dario, 1995). Therefore it has been argued that "the events show that, far from being an assimilated group, Palestinian immigrants and their descendants are still perceived as a culturally distinct group in Honduras..." (Rivera, 2014:58). This is because of the governmental strategies that were employed during the 1900's and this has had an impact on the integration of these groups.

Some intellectuals who have explored this area have argued that perhaps the government left the Arab Palestinian population out of the census data is because they are only a small group and their numbers are not significant enough in society. However, new estimates have shown that 175,000 of the population in Honduras in 1988 were actually from this group, which is around 4%. (Dario, 1995). Therefore this shows that there are higher numbers of Arab Palestinians in society that first thought and therefore they should be included in the census as a separate population as they are "a culturally

distinct group in Honduras” (Rivera, 2014:67), therefore they should be treated this way and not be subjected to conforming to the governments ideal of the mestizo.

However, the Arab Palestinian population has been very successful despite the negative racist attitudes they have faced from the government and the wider population and “today after more than 100 years of immigration, the Palestinian community is not only known for being successful merchants and entrepreneurs, but many are also part of the economic elite.” (Rivera, 2014:59). This shows that despite the racial discrimination they are up against, they have thrived under this and created a good life for themselves in Honduras, regardless of whether they are segregated or not. Although this is good for the Arab Palestinians, the same can’t be said for the other groups which have been explored in this report. Perhaps the reason for these heavily racist attitudes is filtered down from the government ideal of the perfect mestizo person and due to being told that this is the ideal, “...many Hondurans also unleashed their anger through xenophobic remarks on online forums...” (Rivera, 2014:58).

Xenophobia and racism have become part of normality in Honduran society and in regards to these small under-represented groups it has been explained that “never mind these people are Honduras citizens who’s families have been in Honduras for generations; their last names mark them as enemies of the nation.” (Altschuler, 2011 :??). This racism that is felt, generally tends to be felt by these minority groups such as the Arab-Palestinians because they are so culturally distinct and are very different from the majority mestizo population in terms of their names and heritage. However this does not mean that they should have to experience this type of racism yet it has been explained that the first targets for this type of racism do tend to be from the Arabic population and therefore, the leaders in Honduras need to condemn these racist ideas, (see Altschuler, 2011) and perhaps instead of trying to create one perfect population; they need to instead, accept the ethnic diversities as a positive thing as this could strengthen the culture and therefore the country.

Conclusion.

Overall, this report on the racialization of ethnic minorities in Honduras has shown that there has always been an underlying problem with racism in society and more should be done to combat the racist attitudes that are filtered down into society. Due to Honduras being an ex-colonial country, there will always be attitudes that white people are supreme and that is why the government and the elites have tried to create the perfect discourse of the ‘mestizo’, however this discourse is discriminatory and perhaps it should be abandoned as a way to include all of the other ethnic minorities which make up this very interesting society.

However, the problem with this country is that the government do not accept that there is any racist attitudes within society, yet the research and personal experiences of black people and other ethnic minorities views differ from this. Goldberg (2006) explains that race is not just a set of ideas or understanding but it is actually a way of being and a way of living. These ways of living tend to differ across space and time which is why race should be considered on a larger scale and the differences between all of the ethnic minorities should be taken into account. By taking this approach, it could explain why the Garifuna choose to reside in coastal areas and live off the land. Therefore if this approach is taken, it would show how discriminatory it is to push people off the land that they choose to reside on as it is therefore an insult to their race.

However it has been shown that “race is and has been a fundamental principle of social organization throughout the globe, and racism, or the ideologies and discourses that congeal around that principle, are the justification and rationale for a social organization” (Johnson, 2003:599). Therefore this could explain the practices which have taken place in Honduras since the rise of the banana plantation and possibly even before. More action needs to be taken in this country to combat racism and perhaps the best way to combat this would to broaden the governments attitudes to the black population as they

are by far the worst discriminated against. By changing government opinion, these opinions would filter down into society and therefore perhaps change the views of the wider society. Perhaps UN intervention would be the best option as there is a problem and if this problem is not dealt with effectively and quickly then this could increase the racial violence in society and then perhaps destroy the tourism industry which has been a very controversial move by the government but the idea that there is racial violence may put tourists off because it could make it seem like an undesirable place to go. Overall, more action needs to be taken in regards to the racist discourse that has been internalised by the majority of people in Honduran society, but this report has highlighted the problems which are faced by the Black community every day and has highlighted many underlying issues which have not been previously explained as a whole.

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