Elizabeth Calixtro, *Living on Scorched Earth: Violence, Conservation and Development in Guatemala*

The Garífuna people are a self-identified indigenous people in Honduras, Belize, and Guatemala. Scholars understood the Garífuna as an African Diaspora people because their histories were forged through colonial displacement and slavery. In recent decades, Garífuna people have struggled to gain legitimacy and land rights, challenging scholars to rethink society’s assumptions of legitimate indigenous people (Anderson 2009; Gordon, Gurdían, and Hale 2003). Through an analysis of recent court cases on land claims in Guatemala, I will examine the extent to which the Garífuna people successfully claim an indigenous identity in Guatemala.

The research will focus on the identity formation of the Garífuna people through contemporary land disputes primarily in Guatemala. In 1989, Guatemala ratified ILO Convention 169, which protects indigenous people’s land rights. I will use historical archives, books, and articles to provide context of the Garífuna people’s struggle for recognition as an indigenous group to claim rights through the ILO 169 and explain how their self-identification has shaped their activism in a struggle to gain land rights through the ILO 169. Specific court decisions will be scrutinized to find the impact that their arguments around identity have had in attaining or losing rights that they feel they are entitled to as indigenous people. I will investigate how a Garífuna people identity from the times of colonization, and their recent articulation as indigenous (Hall 1990). This will provide an understanding of the power that identity has over land rights and border disputes in Guatemala.

This project grows out of previous course work in American Ethnic Studies classes where I studied the history and identities of various indigenous peoples. I have always been interested in the construction of identities and the effects that colonialist events had in the formation of these identities. I have been particularly interested in studying how the techniques of imperialism and colonialism served as a tool to deconstruct the history and culture of native peoples as well as the implications of this. Participating in LARC will give me the opportunity to connect interdisciplinary research that incorporate Politics and American Ethnic Studies.

It is my goal to understand the connection and impact of issues like postcolonial identities and marginalization as I pursue a career in Politics. I consider issues of racial and ethnic identity critical in the political world, as well as in my personal life. I have, for many years been a community activist, and as a community activist I have had the opportunity to experience how grassroots organizing impacts government actions and policies. I have also experienced neglect from government officials towards certain issue areas that are particularly important to specific communities. This neglect has motivated me to run for office to address issues that are often overlooked. I believe that in order to do this it is crucial to understand how people’s identities shape activism and engagement with the state. In making a contribution to the literature about the Garífuna people, I will gain a better understanding of the relationship between peoples identities, and their political stance on certain issues like land rights.