

**The Kalinago of Dominica: Establishing an indigenous framework
for the UNESCO ICH Convention**
'Reflections from the field'
**Case Study for AHRC/ESRC GCRF Indigenous engagement, research partnership
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Introduction and Background

The Kalinago, who were for an extended period was known as *Caribs*, are the indigenous people of Dominica and occupied the island as early as 1000 BCE, before its current Afro-Caribbean nationals. Located in the Lesser Antilles and part of the Caribbean archipelago, the Commonwealth of Dominica shared a common European colonial history with the other islands. Thus, with the region interconnected by the nomadic movement of the first inhabitants (Aguilar and Frederick 2017), Dominica quickly became a refuge for the Kalinago retreating from the surge of French, English and Dutch colonists as they continued to be pushed from their ancestral lands throughout the islands in the 17th century (Ali 2009). As fighting over the island persisted the people retreated to the furthest extremities of the nature island's fortress. They were initially allocated 232 acres along the coastal mountainous and rocky shoreline of Salybia. In 1903 the "*Carib Reserve*" was established by the British (Honychurch 2009), the Carib Chief officially recognized, and the land expanded to 3700 acres (a testament to the fierce defence of their lands) providing a safe space for sustainable livelihood. Much later, it became protected by legislation of the Carib Reserve Act at the island's political independence in 1978.

The Kalinago Territory, home of roughly 2208 indigenous people, was renamed in 2015. The area was first officially known as the Carib Reserve, and unofficially from the 1980s, the Carib Territory. The name change was initiated by the Kalinago in an effort to embed pride and dignity in their history and to recapture core elements of their indigenous heritage. The Territory is situated on the north east of the island between two villages; Atkinson to the North and Castle Bruce to the South and now totals approximately 3782.03 acres of land. As opposed to Dominica (being sited on a Sunday), the Kalinago called the island fortress '*Wai'tukubuli*' (tall is her body) in-keeping with the rugged and mountainous terrain of the country.

From time immemorial the Kalinago were highly skilled craftspeople: making canoes (hew) dug out from huge trees; weaving baskets; and specialised in cassava bread and flour making. They had great knowledge of herbal medicine; understood the signs of weather changes in the environment due to their strong relations with nature; spoke their own language; and worshipped the spirit of their ancestors.

For much of the early to mid-twentieth century the jurisdiction was isolated with livelihood mainly dependent on fishing; farming and crafts. There was a major shift for a period during the banana economic boom until the late nineties when preferential agreements in the Lomé conventions ceased

(Stancioff et al 2017). At that point focus turned towards the tourism sector which aligned to the nationwide tourism drive. Presently even the tourism market in the territory is in decline, though tourists often buy Kalinago crafts in the city, Roseau (Mullaney 2009). This has recently been further impacted by the passage of Hurricane Maria which devastated the island in 2017.

In 2014 the Kalinago population was approximately 3,000 (Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2014) with most residing within the unique indigenous reserve (Bureau of Democracy 2014).

Table 1: NON-INSTITUTIONAL POPULATION IN THE KALINAGO TERRITORY 1991 – 2011

CENSUS 2011			CENSUS 2001			CENSUS 1991		
Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
1212	933	2,145	1247	939	2,186	916	759	1,675

Adapted from 2011 Population and Housing Census, Commonwealth of Dominica

This is an increase from 2,145 reported in the 2011 Population and Housing Census conducted by the Central Statistical Office of the Commonwealth of Dominica. Now, however, though undocumented, numbers may be much less due to migration since Hurricane Maria in 2017.

Kalinago Territory

The jurisdiction is the only known politically organised Caribbean island settlement of indigenous descendants, and the area where the majority of Kalinago reside. Nonetheless, pockets of descendants evidently reside in other coastal areas of the island such as Good Hope, San Sanveur, Petite Soufriere, Petite Savanne and Bagatelle (Honychurch 2009). Within the boundaries of the Territory the Kalinago rights and heritage are protected by law and practice under the governance of the Kalinago Council.

The Caribbean Development Bank (2008-09) reports that 49.8% of the Kalinago lived below the poverty line. This is more than 20% higher than the countrywide average. However, this reflects an improvement from 70% in 2003. In recognition of the high level of poverty in the Territory the government of the late Prime Minister Roosevelt Douglas took legislative action to enact safeguarding measures.

Currently there is a Ministry of Kalinago Affairs as part of the national political system of governance which allows the Kalinago first-hand influence in decision-making about themselves, their land and resources (Bureau of Democracy, cv 2014). Two separate elections for Chief and Council members respectively, are held every five years, when registered indigenous people above age 18 vote for the Chief and six members of the Kalinago Council. The people also partake in the wider national elections and elect a member of parliament under the Westminster system of government.

Various government initiatives support primary education, school feeding and transport programmes, and entry into Higher Education via the Dominica State College, University of the West Indies and

international institutions. Nevertheless, the Kalinago language is almost defunct with only a few surviving words and phrases, while Kalinago history is taught sparingly at the national level.

Throughout the peoples' history they have suffered genocide, cultural discrimination and challenges of alcohol abuse due to high poverty levels, low skills levels and unequal opportunities. Unemployment continues to be below the national average with women impacted the most, and the peoples' inability to access financing from commercial banks due to lack of collateral is a long-standing limitation in the Territory as the land is communally owned.

A recent study by Aguilar and Frederick (2017) indicates that indigenous history and heritage (IHH) formed part of the social studies and Caribbean history curriculum for the Eastern Caribbean region. Thus, IHH is not taught as a distinct subject within the secondary school system which is focused on preparation of students for the Common Entrance Examination in accordance with policy position/agreement of the OECS Education Sector Strategy (OESS). Arguably there is limited opportunity within the formal education system in passing on the local history and heritage of Dominica's indigenous people.

Furthermore, in recent decades there have been many changes due to modernisation. Hence, new education opportunities have led to a rise in Kalinago moving out of the Territory and settling in other parts of the island particularly in the city, Roseau. Moreover, the Kalinago traditional laws require women who intermarry to move out of the settlement.

According to a *Kalinago Barana Autê* report, from 2009 government provided focused support via an \$8.6 million East Caribbean Dollar (XCD) (\$3.2 million) developmental project for roads, cultural education and civil society capacity building.

Government Cultural Policy

The current National Cultural Policy states:

“The role and importance of the Kalinago people in the history and culture of Dominica needs to be utilised more effectively in the promotion and preservation of Dominican culture. The potential of the Kalinago culture within cultural and tourism programmes needs to be maximised so that the island on a whole and the Kalinago people in particular can benefit from greater opportunities for self-promotion and economic gain. In that regard the government of Dominica seeks to:

1. Identify additional resources to establish, expand and upgrade... research and document all aspects of Dominica's history and culture.
2. Support research, documentation and promotion of Kweyol and Kalinago language.
3. Support and promote efforts aimed at the preservation and development of Kalinago arts and culture.
4. Enact legislation for protection, preservation and development of our tangible and intangible heritage and put measures in place to enforce these laws and update them on a regular basis.
5. Foster and promote activities geared at the protection and development of our natural cultural heritage through the automated work of all the agencies responsible”.

(Excerpt from the National Cultural Policy of the Commonwealth of Dominica March 2007 p.30-33)

Methodology

It is a well-known phenomenon that indigenous communities worldwide have been over researched (Smith 1999) employing a westernised, neo-colonial research model which as argued by Bessarabb and Ng'andu (2010) show little regard for matters of culture and faith methods of engagement. Social researchers generally practice a downward strategy versus working up or horizontally on the premise of giving 'voice to the voiceless' (Al-Hardan 2017). This positionality is arguably a result of the 'Westernized University' based on global colonial divisions of academic labour; giving rise to many critics of universities capacity to support indigenous research (Morgensen, 2012). Decolonising research offers an alternative approach of engaging with indigenous peoples in an attempt to reclaim research by training researchers within these communities and ensuring community-based vetting. In that regard, Al-Harden (2017 p4) posits a few key questions should be asked when embarking on indigenous research projects as follows:

- Whose research it is?
- Who owns it?
- Who will benefit from it?
- Who has designed the questions and frame its scope?
- Who will carry it out? Who will write it up?
- How will results be disseminated?

Reflecting on these perspectives and their relevance for the work at hand, a Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) approach was adopted in collaboration with the yarning method to establish what were the key elements (from an indigenous perspective) of the intangible cultural heritage of the Kalinago community and is elaborated on in the section that follows.

Yarning:

Yarning is an indigenous, culturally safe and legitimate form of conversation used for adopting a qualitative approach (Laycock et al 2011). It is useful in establishing relationships with indigenous participants prior to gathering their story from storytelling and also as a narrative. According to Bessarabb and Ng'andu (2010) it is an informal and relaxed discussion which allows both researcher and participant to engage on a journey together visiting places and topics of interest of relevance to the study. It lends itself to development and advancement of relationships that are accountable to indigenous communities.

Conversations:

As a major form of communication conversations (Kovach 2010) take place in different formats: oral conversation; written conversation where people converse through letters; memos and/or emails; and lately social media. As people talk to each other they convey information, and/or receive data which once processed leads to different understandings of the concept at hand. Arguably, varied rules, language and protocols for conducting conversations exist within different cultures. For example, for indigenous people respect for elders is pivotal and therefore, developing protocols prior to engaging in communication is essential as it is disrespectful to interrupt elders during the interview process.

Method

The Case Study

This project is commissioned by the Arts and Humanities Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council under the AHRC/ESRC GCRF Indigenous engagement research partnership and knowledge mobilisation project. The project offers current awardees reflective space and opportunity for documenting their role in engaging with indigenous communities while undertaking their GCRF award. This project ran from August 1, 2018 to October 31, 2018. The following objectives drove the data collection for the case study:

1. **The main objective of the study was** to explore and understand the role of Kalinago in preservation and promotion of Dominica's creole heritage. The community have been traditionally known to speak **Kreyol** extensively over and above the official English language spoken throughout the rest of the island.
2. **A second key objective was** to discern the core cultural elements deemed pivotal to safeguarding and sustaining Kalinago cultural heritage.
3. **Another key objective was** to analyse what core strategies could be employed in sustaining Kalinago heritage in the current socio-political and cultural tourism environment.

Researching among indigenous cultures

Upon arrival in the field it quickly became evident to me that despite being Dominican by birth, but not of Kalinago descent, I would face some challenges during data collection. I needed to bridge the gap often experienced by insider-outside researchers. This posed particular difficulty in overcoming the mistrust of the indigenous population. It was therefore essential that I set aside some of my previous 'learned' knowledge and beliefs about the Kalinago and bring to the fore values and skills useful to researching indigenous cultures.

Acknowledging the issues around relationships between nationals and the diaspora as well as the Kalinago and the majority black population became paramount. The view on the island by some social activists was that if one does not live on the island, he/ she have no right to come in and want to change things, resurfaced in my thoughts. I quickly realised I needed to appreciate the strong feelings the Kalinago held about being marginalised by what they deemed the second settlers (blacks) on the island.

In addition, the value and relevance of western epistemology and methodologies for this work needed to be reassessed. The Alaska native saying: "researchers are like mosquitos; they soak your blood and leave" (Cochran et al 2008) quickly came to mind. Employing a state of self-awareness, shedding of my academic status and prior childhood 'Dominican' experiences and knowledge to become embedded in the local community was key in gaining access and confidence for the research prior to engagement, during the field research and at the post field work phase.

A vital part of the process was securing entry via consultation with elders and community officials. It was a matter of decorum but more significantly it was in-keeping with strong traditions of respect upheld for these leaders within their hierarchal system of governance. Thus, having to seek permission to conduct my study was much more than the standard methodological and ethical exercise, but one which demanded respect for authorities and elders within the community as an established norm. This long-standing tradition upholds an unspoken sense of control and order among the Kalinago.

Upon gaining access and approval, it was then a most welcoming experience working and living within the community and I was eventually hosted by a family member of one Kalinago elder. The actual field work took place in two phases as discussed below.

Pre-visit:

A visit was organised by the local lead researcher (of Kalinago descendant) with elders in the community in April 2018. The main purpose was to meet the leaders and to create awareness of the project; its objectives and key outcomes. The meeting was quite informal and held at the residence of one of the elders. Three of the community leaders we

re available on that day and participated in introductions and conversations around the project purpose and goals.

As is the norm we partook in the tradition of having a short strong drink on entering the grounds leading to the property [what an experience], along with other practices that helped bridge the gap and shed artificial boundaries between us. We also had the pleasure of witnessing some local traditional cooking of black pudding (made from animal blood) and had an opportunity to purchase some of the handmade crafts produced by the Kalinago.



FIGURE 1: INFORMAL VISIT WITH KALINAGO ELDERS

This initial visit did not resemble any typical western-style pilot study but was quite significant in breaking down barriers and making inroads to build the necessary relationships that would later facilitate the main field work.

Field visit:

For this phase, the local lead was not on island and therefore he made prior contact with the elders and councillors to prepare them for my visit. This took the form of a residential over a period for three days within the Kalinago Territory. The benefit of having the earlier visit was clear at this point, as the absence of the local expert meant I had to negotiate my own journey and schedule as an insider-outsider researcher within the Territory.

On the first evening, guided by a Kalinago councillor, we travelled around the community and met a few of the elders informally and engaged in yarns and conversations. Discussions around the myth that indigenous people represent a problem to be solved and that they are passive objects that requires assistance from external experts (Cochran 2008) surfaced and had to be addressed to overcome barriers to entry in the research process. Once again, it was obvious that traditional western style research approaches would be ill-suited during the field work. Much of the yarns and conversations were arranged around snowballing and based on which of the elders were available to participate in the data-collection process.

Focus group meeting:



FIGURE 2: MEETING WITH KALINAGO ELDERS

A more formal meeting was held with the leaders of the community; present were the chief, the Ministry of Kalinago Affairs Development Officer, and other elders. The meeting took the format of a blend between a focus group and conversation with the elders.

Individual conversations:



FIGURE 3: HOME VISIT & CONVERSATION WITH KALINAGO ELDER

Individual conversations were also held with key community leaders. These were all conducted at their homes employing the snowballing technique as elders were always keen to find out who I had visited and advising of others of the Kalinago heritage that I must speak to before leaving. This meant a house-to-house exploration which was fascinating.

Core dimensions of Kalinago traditions

The Kalinago people partake in a very simple lifestyle rooted in their economic material condition and hold a unique place in the country's heritage and culture. As such, the government in recent years has made a concerted effort to focus on their advancement as a people and instilling pride in their rich heritage as the last remaining establishment settlement within the region. In 2017, a Kalinago Country Conference was held at the Kalinago Barana Autê (Kalinago Village by the sea) in collaboration with the University of the West Indies. It brought together academics, researchers and scholars, most of Kalinago heritage to debate and discuss matters of relevance to indigenous people of Dominica under the theme "*Reclaiming Indigenous to Define Kalinago*".

Governance:

Currently the community is governed under the ILO convention and is an independent territory though still part of the national electoral political system. The territory is administered by a Kalinago Chief and Council and is represented in national parliament by a Minister for Kalinago Affairs. This is a very recent ministerial department established by the current Labour Party government.

In addition, the Kalinago are governed locally by a council which operate under the regulations of the Carib Act of (1978) as the use of the indigenous name has not been made law. As in section 24:

- 1) The Council shall have the custody, management and control of the Reserve, for and on the behalf of the residents of the Reserve.
- 2) The Council shall provide for the expenditure for the Reserve of all money authorised by law to be raised for such purpose; to provide the good government and the improvement of the Reserve; and to enforce the provision of this or any other Act relating thereto, and also of all Regulations By-Laws made under this or any other Act.
- 3) The Council may endeavour to settle disputes among people resident in the Reserve but shall not have the right to try cases or impose fines on persons in the Reserve, other than under section 29(4).

Land ownership:

In 1978 government reaffirmed the boundaries of the Kalinago Territory, and the lands are held in trust by the Council on behalf of the indigenous people and was facilitated a certificate of title for the lands (William "Para" Riviere 2013). As cited in The SUN's article (Oct 8, 2013), no person outside the territory can take possession of or otherwise acquire it. Moreover, the lands cannot be sold, exchanged, mortgaged, encumbered or disposed without the written permission of the Prime Minister. The Council has the authority to prevent settlement by persons who do not normally reside therein from occupying or cultivating these lands.

Craftsmanship:

The Kalinago are well known for their artistry and craft work. More specifically they are skilled in basket weaving using a reed called the *larouman*-thought to have transported the Larouma plant to Dominica from South America over 1000 years ago. Common products produced are: embroidered bottles, baskets, caps, and hats, sifters, squeezers, mats and finger traps. The people also produce carved products out of bamboo, white cedar, calabash and coconut, and these have come to hold a distinct place in the nation's tourism industry.

Cuisine:

Although there has been noticeable decline in production and use of cassava, a tradition staple, it has been part of the Kalinago diet for centuries. The people continue to utilize several other ground provisions like *tania*, *dasheen* and *yams*. Currently, cassava is used mainly for cassava bread and commercially as part of the tourism product.

Farming:

Livelihood has largely been based on subsistent farming, although there was once a vibrant banana industry; also, Dominica coconut products then helped boost the income from the agricultural sector. However, both sectors have experienced severe decline and the Kalinago have had to change focus to penetrating the tourism economy.

Fishing:

The Kalinago are also known for traditional fishing methods which were passed on over generations. Younger fishermen now operate out of a fisheries complex in the neighbouring community of Marigot. This is based on the fact that the traditional landing sites are unable to accommodate modern crafts with engines.

Storytelling:

Storytelling is pretty much a way of life for indigenous people and is evident in the number of legends that are part of their tourism product. Several popular sites in the Territory therefore retain Kalinago names and are famous heritage sites. There is one major compilation of the myths and legends which are currently used in schools and within the public domain.

Cultural groups:

Cultural revival exists in three cultural groups: '*Karifuna*', '*Karina*' and Kalinago Dancers. The objectives are to research and demonstrate traditional dances and other aspects of the visual performing arts. These groups have travelled both nationally and internationally promoting Kalinago aspects of heritage. A primary focus is to train the youth and ensure continuity of their art form.

Tourism:

Cultural and heritage tourism currently form a key aspect of life in the Territory. These traditions date to much earlier days when the community and its indigenous population were held in awe and branded as an exotic treasure on the island by its visitors. Today this image has shifted as the people have become more open to the tourism market and fully engaged in tourism trade through craft and cultural practices. The Kalinago brand and image is commonly used as a strong selling point for the island's tourism at a national level.

Kreyol language:

During the 1920s the Kalinago rapidly experienced replacement of their traditional language with French Creole, and later, to a lesser extent English. Currently, the Kalinago rarely speak the traditional language except for a few common words and phrases. Interestingly, numerous words within the creole language are of Kalinago origin and include village names like Berricoa, Bataca, Calisbishie,

Toucarie; flora and fauna to include names such as cocoa, manioc, papaya, maniocou and numerous others.

Disappearance of the Kalinago language is notable, with the most devastating impact around European invasion on the island. The flow of European immigrants, along with forced labour imposed on the indigenous people helped diffuse the language and culture (Division of Culture Government of the Commonwealth of Dominica, accessed online 2019).

The Kalinago Barana Autê(KBA):

The KBA is a government sponsored heritage initiative established to honour the diversity, history and heritage of the Kalinago people representing their customs and traditions to visitors. The site offers a scenic view from the *Barana Neupatae* (Viewpoint) on the *Binalecaall Mapou Wêvê* (Old Mapou Tree Tail) as it is located along the banks of the Crayfish-River near the *Isukulati* Falls. The establishment consist of a reception center, snack bar, gift shop, a communal space, sample dwellings and other traditional buildings. The *Karbet* (communal space) is used for cultural and theatrical performances and traditional activities at the village include canoe building, cassava processing, basket weaving and herb collection and preparation. An immersive experience includes a guided tour which begins at a footbridge across the river and gives way to a circular trail leading to a series of small huts throughout the village. The experience also involves craft demonstrations, dance performances, herbal medicine garden stop, construction techniques displays utilising axe, water and hot rocks which are still practised today.



FIGURE 4: AWARD PRESENTED TO KALINAGO ELDER

Kalinago Barana Autê offers visitors the opportunity to shop from a wide variety of their handcraft and produces (Barana Autê, accessed online 2019).

Conclusions:

As advised by Cochran et al (2008) given the negative impact of inappropriate practices when conducting indigenous research there is need for specialised and tailored ethical approaches based on consultation, strong community participation, and methods that acknowledge indigenous ways of knowing. As such, the more commonly advocated approaches such as yarning and conversations were employed for data collection.

The study was impacted by the devastation of Hurricane Maria in September 2017, which limited access to the island and the timing of the data collection, as well as reducing the available time for both participants and the research team to engage collaboratively. Despite these shortcomings the project was well received, and support was provided by the leaders and elders of the Territory.

From the data collected it can be confirmed that many of the values and challenges surrounding researching among indigenous populations are pertinent to working with the Kalinago. As cited by Kirkness and Barnhardt (2001) the core principle of respect, reciprocity, relevance and responsibility must be understood and applied in an ethical manner.

Further, from the perspective of the elders any indigenous research conducted and its corresponding outcomes, had to be appropriate and address current needs and interests of the wider community. In the case of the Kalinago community these can be discussed under the following broad themes derived from the data and presented in the table below.

TABLE 2: FRAMING INDIGENOUS INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE

ESTABLISHING KALINAGO INTANGIBLE CULTURAL HERITAGE	
Core Underpinning Indigenous Values	Pillars Framing Intangible Kalinago Cultural Heritage
Importance that elders and hierarchy are consulted, and their knowledge respected to give authenticity to findings	A collaborative research process embracing indigenous knowledge
Research is relevant to local community, their interests and needs	Direct benefit to local community
Community is not used to obtain data but intimately involved in the decision making and outcomes	Pride in indigenous heritage (with reference to ILO Conventions)
Self-worth and identity	Safeguarding of the indigenous language (embracing ICH)
Pride in heritage and traditions	Framework for reviving traditions
Concerns of marginalisation	Resources and support for advancing established dimensions of Kalinago heritage

The Kalinago elders repeatedly emphasised the need for collaboration, relevance and appropriateness of the project and its outcomes. The determining factor for participation was that the community would benefit directly from the work done. The importance of safeguarding core elements of their traditions in the area of farming, fishing, artisan, language and dance were pivotal. It was also deemed important that more formal support and structures were further developed to facilitate greater self-sufficiency and governance. The currency and significance of UNESCO and ILO Conventions were often highlighted.

It can be confirmed that much of the body of work in advocacy of new ways of researching in indigenous populations is pertinent and worthy of continued exploration and advancement. Doing this project has unearthed in me a new perspective on indigenous values and the challenges of researching them, and a desire to pursue more collaborative methodologies which places indigenous people at the forefront of the body of indigenous research.

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“MA Remembrance”

Thank You!