

Brief word on the late Nancie González

Algunas palabras sobre la vida de Nancie González

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Anthropology is a little known discipline among us in Central America. The impressions are that it is a field of more interest to foreigners, who can afford the time and can get the necessary funds to do the studies. It is contrasted to other fields that can contribute to much needed jobs, such as medicine, engineering and computer studies. The late Nancie Gonzalez was an anthropologist who spent several years in Guatemala doing research and contributing a great deal to the understanding of culture in such areas as nutrition and overall well-being. She was one of the first to delve for several years on the Garifuna's welfare, a little known group of African-derived people found mainly in Livingston, Izabal. They are also along the Caribbean littoral of Central America from Belize to Nicaragua. More than any other anthropologist, Nancie dedicated most of her copious work to the Garifuna people.

The following are some of the topics on which Gonzalez elaborated scores of publications about the Garifuna:

1. the history of the Garifuna in the Caribbean and northeast portions of South America;
2. the patterns of domestic social relations between men and women;
3. following the Garifuna's migration from their homesteads in coastal Central America to North America;
4. the evolution of the concept of ethnicity among a minority of people.

Her studies have been of primary value to the field of anthropology and the larger area of the social sciences in Central America and overall in the New World.

By the time I met her in Belize in the mid-1980s I had read several of her writings. Yet she displayed a strong sense of familiarity as if we had known each other for several years. She fitted into our home quite easily and quickly engaged in a discussion that included my wife and two children, who were ten years old. She exuded that strong sense of being self-assured that I feel when meeting middle-age Garifuna women for the first time. So strongly had she learned interpersonal behavior that comes naturally from her informants.

