

Part I

Colonizing the Maya

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Unsettling the Colonial Geographies of Southern Belize

The history of the subaltern classes is necessarily fragmented and episodic; in the activity of these classes there is a tendency toward unification, albeit in provisional stages, but this is the least conspicuous aspect, and it manifests itself only when victory is secured. Subaltern classes are subject to the initiatives of the dominant class, even when they rebel; they are in a state of anxious defense. Every trace of autonomous initiative is therefore of inestimable value.

Antonio Gramsci, 1930¹

In 1918, John Taylor, former warden of the colonial prison and then District Commissioner of the relatively new “Toledo District” of southern British Honduras (as Belize was then known), typed these words regarding the “Indian question” to his superiors:

Much could be written on the subject of [the] Indian population, – they are interesting, – I for one would like to see an improvement in this (to my mind) – fast decaying Race, – they are, especially youngsters Bright and Quick to learn, – and although these kiddies when in school appear to me studious, and seem to enjoy it, yet they much prefer – the Boys – to shoulder a Machete and strut off with Father to the Milpa. Any improvement in their mode of living, or agricultural methods, can only be brought about by others foreign to them, either by example or inducement, – Force beyond a certain point will not do.²

By the time Taylor typed these lines in his Punta Gorda office, British policies and positions towards the Mayas in Belize were well established.

The Mayas were to live within Indian reservations, supervised by *alcaldes* who were incorporated into the colonial state. *Alcaldes* were responsible for collecting land taxes and enforcing colonial law. Living in settled villages and attending school were mandatory (though education was left to the Catholic church). To sum up British policy in a word – one that appears frequently in the colonial archive – the Maya were to be *settled*.

Like many of the colonial texts of the era, Taylor's comments are replete with the essentialist tropes about those he was sent to govern. Unelected and racist he may have been, John Taylor was the sole legal authority and magistrate of the Toledo District for more than ten years. Even the minor texts and statements of such colonial officials had concrete effects. For instance, Taylor's claim that the Mayas are by nature "childlike" and "fast decaying" calls for the intervention of a paternal state to act as trustee for the Maya, frames the Maya as racialized subjects, and solicits the state as a development institution (to end the decay). We must pay attention to such texts, since it is by analyzing colonial discourse that we may come to understand colonial hegemony, understood in Gramsci's sense as the forms of moral and intellectual leadership ramify through cultural practices and sustain unequal social relations.³ Social groups compete for hegemony in order to consolidate projects that facilitate capital accumulation to their advantage. Taylor's argument that "force beyond a certain point will not do" stands as evidence of Gramsci's insight. Taylor was keenly attuned to the problem of calibrating the use of force: hence his qualification that "Force *beyond a certain point* will not do." Force is needed, but only to a point. How is the point defined? Not ethically, but in terms of efficiency. Beyond a certain point, the costs and difficulties of coercion – including the likelihood of provoking resistance – outweigh the benefits of the desired change. Hegemony names this "certain point." It is the constellation of forces that "will do" – that produces consent. The British colonial state was authoritarian, but it could not maintain overwhelming force or rule through explicit coercion. The colonial state there – like colonial power generally – needs consenting subjects and territorialized spaces. This chapter aims to discern these forms of colonial hegemony, subjects, and territorial spaces.

The Colonization of Southern Belize

Two narratives orient the historiography of Belize: one tells of the heroic victories of the British settlers in their conflicts with Spain and

the Mayas; the other relates the unfolding discovery of the nation's geography through scientific exploration and description. Both narratives are geographically deterministic insofar as they suggest that Belize's history is a function of its geographical location, climate, and resources.⁴ Moreover, they frame Belize's history teleologically. Thus colonialism and capitalism are quite literally *naturalized*. Consider Lucas's summary of Belize's history:

From an historical point of view, British Honduras is a very interesting instance of the evolution of a colony. It began with private adventurers, who held their own in spite of a strong foreign power [Spain] and whose success practically obliged their own government to afford them some measure of recognition and protection. It originated with trade, trade begat settlement, and settlement brought about in fullness of time a colony.⁵

Framed in this way, the historical development of Belize is reduced to the mechanistic unfolding of colonial capitalism, a natural development. Insofar as agency is attributed to historical actors, it is located with the British settlers – and, to a lesser degree, their Spanish competitors. Contingencies in the flow of this history are attributed to heroic Europeans. This sort of teleological historiography justifies colonialism and marginalizes non-European subaltern voices.

British buccaneers from Jamaica settled at points along the Central American coast in the 1650s, including the delta of the Belize River, where they began cutting logwood for export to England. Two centuries later, this outpost of colonial capitalism became the capital of the British colony of British Honduras.⁶ The Spanish claim, legally recognized by England until 1798, delayed the development of state institutions.⁷ The territorial status of the area now known as southern Belize was especially unclear, since treaties between England and Spain only covered the land as far south as the Sibun River near the center of the country. Although contact between Mayas and Europeans in southern Belize may have occurred as early as the 1520s, when Cortés marched southward through the area now known as the Guatemalan *Verapaz*, southern Belize had not been settled by the Spanish; uncolonized, it remained a contested space, claimed by two European states yet inhabited by Manche Chol and Mopan Mayas.⁸

British efforts to colonize southern Belize did not commence until the colonial state was at war with Mayas in other regions of the colony. Although Maya people lived in southern Belize before the 1880s, the

state had no contact with them.⁹ The area south of the Sibun River was essentially *terra incognita* to the colonial state:

*The Southern portions of our territory have never been explored, and according to the Crown Surveyor they contain inhabitants who, he believes, have never yet been seen by European or creole. The rivers south of the Sibun have their source in the mountains whose line of water-shed forms the division between ourselves and Vera Paz. Adown these streams . . . Mr. Faber has seen floating, rough wooden bowls and other implements which testify to the existence of some inhabitants utterly unknown to us.*¹⁰

The search for mahogany by European loggers drew capitalists, and the liminal colonial state behind them, towards the source of these wooden bowls. Between the 1840s and 1880s, logging crews came into occasional contact with Mayas in southern Belize, but contact between the state and the Mayas was infrequent and did not decisively shape state policy toward the Maya (there were as yet no state institutions in the south).¹¹

The event that eventually caused the British to recognize the existence of Mayas in southern Belize was the flight of landless peasants from the Alta Verapaz into the lands around the present-day communities of Pueblo Viejo and Aguacate in the 1870s and 1880s. During this period, Guatemalan land and labor laws were changed to facilitate the expansion of capitalist agriculture. The effect of these policies was felt immediately in the Alta Verapaz (a region inhabited mainly by Q'eqchi'- and Mopan-speaking Mayas) through the explosive growth of coffee plantations. Between 1858 and 1862 alone, 75 coffee fincas were created on lands that had been held in common by Q'eqchi' communities around Cobán and Carchá. By the 1880s, thousands of Mayas had fled the Verapazes to the north, into the Peten, and to the lands along the rivers in the east. Exile denied labor to the coffee estates.¹² The existing Maya communities in southern Belize – a heterogeneous group of Q'eqchi', Mopan, and Manche Chol-speaking Mayas – grew with the influx of migrants. By the 1880s, 1,500 Maya people were living in what is today the Toledo District – a political space that did not yet exist.¹³

During this period, the accumulation strategy of colonial Belize had two major elements: the export of forestry products to the US and England and the import of food and manufactured goods from England for consumption in Belize. These paired movements produced a regular flow of capital to British capitalists. Capital generated from exporting primary commodities to the US went to British manufacturing

capitalists, since most of the capital generated through exports was used to import commercial goods from England. The main benefactors within the colony were the large shipping houses in Belize City that imported and sold food and manufactured goods (particularly cloth and clothing). What made this accumulation strategy especially profitable for British capital was the fact that the two most important factors of production, land and labor, were derived through primitive accumulation.¹⁴ From the perspective of British capital, the effectiveness of this strategy can be measured by the fact that the forests of Belize were almost entirely cut over twice before any substantive buildings, roads, or state institutions – apart from taxation and policing functions – were built in the colony. Throughout the nineteenth century, unprocessed mahogany logs accounted for more than half of the total value of exports from the colony. These exports peaked in the mid-1840s, a period when the European railway boom led to consistent demand for mahogany. This mahogany boom was followed by a bust triggered by overproduction: within the colony, mahogany had been overcut; and internationally, prices declined as exports to Europe and the US increased from other regions.

The boom and bust cycles of overcutting and land speculation occurred in the south later than the north and west. Maps from the surveyor's department indicate a mahogany boom throughout southern Belize in the 1860s.¹⁵ Figure 1.1 shows the location of 22 concessions to log mahogany on the five southernmost rivers in Belize. At this time the land along the Golden Stream, Rio Grande, and Moho rivers was divided into logging concessions.¹⁶ These maps suggest that the extent of the logging did not go far inland, at least before 1861. (Figure 1.2 shows an overlay of the 1861 map, transformed with a GIS using the rivers as control points, onto a contemporary map of southern Belize.) The forestry concessions led to the first concerted attempt to parcelize private estates and created southern Belize's first real estate market. By 1868, almost all of the land in a 10-mile strip near the coast, between the Temax and Deep rivers, was privately held (see figure 1.3). Many of the boundary lines of these new estate properties correspond to the boundaries of the earlier logging concessions.¹⁷

There is scant evidence that any of the capital generated by slavery and logging in the nineteenth century was reinvested in productive activities within the colony.¹⁸ Surpluses were typically invested in land speculation, which contributed to Belize's longstanding land monopoly. In 1787 twelve settlers "owned almost all of the land" in British Honduras.¹⁹ Initially these monopolies did not cover the land in the Toledo



Figure 1.1 Sketch map showing logging concessions, 1861

Cartographer : Eric Leinberger, 2005



Figure 1.2 Sketch map showing logging concessions, 1861 (Transformed)

Cartographer : Eric Leinberger, 2005

UNSETTLING COLONIAL GEOGRAPHIES

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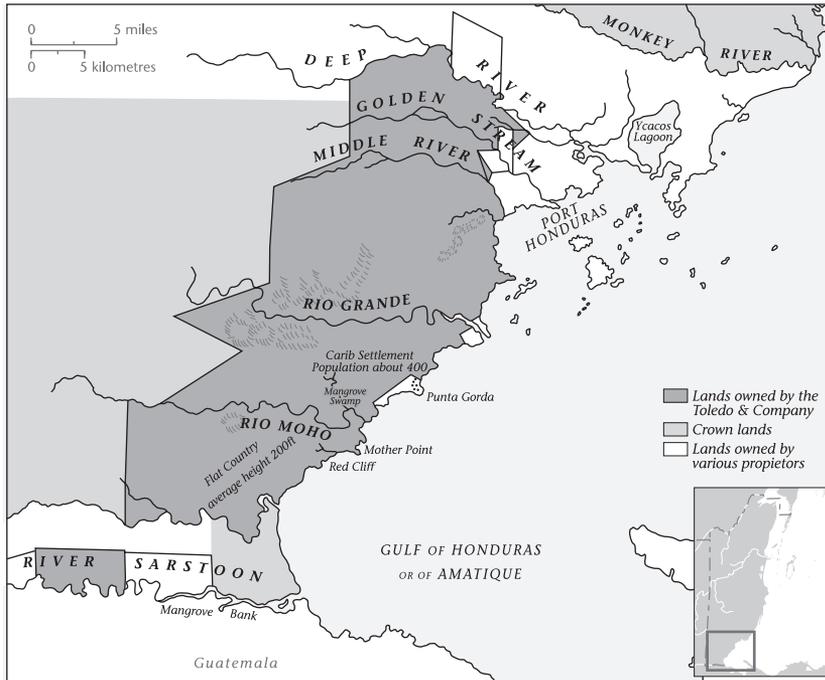


Figure 1.3 Map of Crown and private lands, 1868

Cartographer: Eric Leinberger, 2005

District (which did not yet exist as such) since the lands south of the Sibun River lay beyond the treaties with Spain. Most of the land that remained was not converted into private estates until the mid-nineteenth century. Multinational firms that held sufficient capital to take advantage of the decline of mahogany in the 1850s benefited by accumulating land titles from smaller settler-owned firms. By 1881 one company, the Belize Estate and Produce Company (BEC), owned over a million acres of land – roughly half of all the private land in the colony.²⁰ Unlike the relatively independent, small settler companies, the BEC used their power to lobby the British government to convert their logging concessions into titled property, thereby gaining power relative to the settlers and the colonial state.

One of the first companies that gained ground in southern Belize was the Young, Toledo, and Co., founded around 1839. The company accumulated extensive properties after the 1854 passage of the first Land

Titles Acts, which converted mahogany concessions into titled property rights. By 1871 the company had acquired more than a million acres of land, including most of the private land available in southern Belize. The boom was brief. The company overextended its reach, went bankrupt in 1881, and lost its properties to the Crown.²¹ The colonial state thus became the main landowner in southern Belize, unlike in the north and west. The colonial state in turn sold off many of its holdings as private lands. The major benefactor of these sales was a German colonist named Bernard Cramer, who became wealthy in the 1860s and 1870s through land speculation in northern and central Belize. In the early 1880s he appears to have purchased most of the logging concessions for southern Belize, including several from Young, Toledo, and Co.²² Around 1891, Bernard Cramer's son Herman established an estate on the Sarstoon River in the southwestern corner of the colony, which soon became the largest agricultural estate in southern Belize, producing all the coffee for the colony, as well as rubber, cocoa, and bananas. (Cramer's estate employed a number of Q'eqchi' Mayas who lived in and around a village known as San Pedro Sarstoon.)

For roughly a half-century, between the 1880s and the 1930s, a wide range of goods was exported from the Toledo District: mahogany, logwood, and chicle from the forests; sugar and rum from the sugar estates along the coast; bananas in the Rio Grande and Monkey River watersheds; and cocoa, rubber, coconuts, copra, plantains, and coffee from the estates and Maya communities in the interior. The forests and laborers of southern Belize also produced chicle, cacao, and cohune nut oil for export to the United States until the Depression, when export prices crashed.²³ Yet the extensive production of southern Belize during the colonial period generated almost no local capital accumulation. The colonial state did little to counteract this unevenness. Almost no tax revenue was collected from the land and timber monopolies, and there is no evidence in the colonial record or on the landscape that there was any investment in rural Toledo.

Even into the twentieth century, state institutions remained weak in the Toledo District, partly as a result of the area's reputation as the most unhealthy and remote in the colony. Although state institutions in southern Belize were small, the local state consistently ran deficits, especially during periods of economic growth. The mean annual revenue for the Toledo District between 1914 and 1920 was a paltry \$6,889, and expenses were \$18,373 – producing an average annual deficit of \$11,484. Although the forestry sector dominated the colonial economy, the colonial state generated little revenue from forestry

exports and did almost nothing to regulate forestry practices. Two major colonial reports signaled the danger of the overcutting of mahogany and dependence on forestry exports. The crisis arrived with the Depression. Between 1927 and 1932, the value of forestry exports fell by over 90 percent, and to compound the crisis, on September 10, 1931 a major hurricane devastated Belize City and much of the mahogany-rich forests of northern Belize.²⁴ When export earnings collapsed, officials turned to London for Imperial grants. But at the request of the BEC and large estate-owners that owned most of the colony's wealth, the state reduced taxes on timber and chicle exports. To make up for this lost revenue, the state increased taxes on small landowners and peasants. London's concern that the colony would remain a major drain on resources led to a study of the colony's finances, conducted by Pim in 1932. He sought to impose strict limits on all state spending except for that related to agriculture and forestry in order to cut "the administrative organizations to the utmost extent," but without "postponing the prospects of development, both of agriculture and of the forests, which is essential if the Colony is not to remain a burden on the Imperial Exchequer."²⁵ To protect England from the burden of sustaining the colony's welfare, state spending must be reduced and exports must increase.

The limited data that are available from southern Belize give us a sense of the subsequent austerity and expropriation. In 1926–27, the District Board of Toledo brought in a revenue of \$1,868, mainly from land and alcohol taxes.²⁶ After the price of Toledo's exports crashed, tax revenue more than *doubled* by 1931–32. The 1930s are one of the few decades since the establishment of a capitalist state in southern Belize when state revenue consistently surpassed expenditure. Depression, hurricane, and war accentuated weaknesses in the colonial accumulation project, which depended on the export of mahogany to generate foreign exchange and investment. Almost all of the land was owned by a few estate companies. Low land taxes gave no incentive to these companies to invest in developing their lands or secondary industry. Timber was exported essentially unprocessed; astonishingly for a "timber colony," the first sawmill in Belize was not built until 1932.²⁷

Agriculture had always lagged far behind forestry as the major source of export revenue. Between 1882 and 1885 an average of only 12,661 acres of land were cultivated in the entire colony. Three main factors limited the development of agriculture: the lack of capital in the colony; the tiny internal market; and the land monopoly. Capital scarcity was both a cause and effect of underdevelopment in agriculture.

Under these circumstances, only the state could reorganize the means of production through agrarian reform, as occurred elsewhere in Latin America during the twentieth century. World War I restricted the colony's access to food imports, forcing the question of state agricultural and food policies. Studies by colonial agricultural scientists Sampson (in 1929), Smart (1929), and Stockdale (1932) all called for the state to create agricultural stations, but they focused on the need for the state to educate farmers. The colonial state thus interpreted the underdevelopment in agriculture as a result of a lack of knowledge by peasant farmers.

The landed elites who held the near monopoly on land and the logging companies and merchants that profited from the urban proletariat's food dependency (especially for imported flour) inhibited the development of a large agriculture sector and perpetuated the colony's import dependency. The land monopoly prevented middle and large peasant households from growing into commercial production for the internal market. A thoroughgoing land reform would have been needed to stimulate dynamic growth, but the colonial state avoided agrarian reform and land taxes that would have provoked the large timber companies and landowners.

We should pause to consider the long-term effects of the accumulation project of the colonial era on the development of productive capacity in the south. Belize's position in the colonial system was such that the potential profits from resource exploitation peaked during the mid-century mahogany boom, the colony's strategic importance was negligible, and the indigenous resistance to colonial intervention was considerable. The rates of capital accumulation associated with mahogany booms of the mid-nineteenth century and the 1920s never returned, and what value was accumulated flowed out to England and the US (British capital never substantively invested in the forces of production). All this contributed to a profound underdevelopment of the forces of production and state capacity. Although forestry exports gave way to agriculture in the 1950s behind expanding exports of citrus and sugar, the state never committed itself to a thorough agrarian reform, and the basic colonial structure of the economy has not changed.²⁸ Today the Toledo District continues to lag in agricultural production, and state capacity is the lowest in the country. Most Maya people still lack secure land tenure, and the area remains one of the poorest in Central America. The present-day demands for indigenous land rights – to which the state offers capitalism qua development as a salve – must be traced to this period of colonial extraction.

Hegemony, Settlement, and Territorialization

The ongoing struggles for indigenous land rights are strongly rooted in colonial political economy. These struggles largely concern lands that were claimed by the colonial state and institutions that were established to “settle” the Maya and win hegemony over them: in particular the *alcaldes* and Indian reservations.²⁹ These were created in the wake of the major mid-century conflicts with Mayas in the north and west of the colony, a period when the foremost concern of the colonial state was the territorialization of its space. Lieutenant Governor Longden argued for Indian reservations in 1868 in these terms:

There are upon the Sibun River some villages inhabited by Indians, and until last year there were similar villages in the Western District, San Pedro, Santa Cruz, Chumbalche, San Jose, Nranjal, Quam Hill, etc., – several of these villages are situate upon the Lands claimed either by the British Honduras Company or Mssers. Young Toledo & Co., but wher-ever they are situate on Crown Lands I think the villages and a sufficient surrounding space should be reserved in the hands of the Crown for the use of the Indians, – no marketable titles being issued to them to enable them to dispose of such lands, – but the land being divided amongst them, from time to time, by the Alcalde or Chief man amongst them, as may be most convenient.³⁰

This letter comprises the earliest attempt to justify a reservation policy. Three points are important to note. First, the question of rule by “Alcalde or Chief man” was linked to reservations from its first inception; these institutions were linked in colonial policy. Although *alcaldes* already existed in Maya communities, their precise powers and positions would change as a result of their incorporation into colonial “local rule” policies (see figure 1.4). The second point is that these policies were intended to address the problems faced by the two largest landholding and timber companies in the colony. Since the Mayas happened to be found by Europeans “upon the Lands claimed either by the British Honduras Company or Mssers. Young Toledo & Co.,” the colonial state took up the responsibility of settling them somewhere. In light of the battles fought between the state and the Maya of the previous two decades, Longden desired settlement to reduce the likelihood of further Maya attacks. Third, Longden specifies two key provisos to the argument that “the villages and a sufficient surrounding space should be reserved . . . for the use of the Indians.” On one hand, the land should not



Figure 1.4 Photo of an Alcalde's court, ca. 1948

Source: Annual Colonial Report for 1949. The photographer is not credited.

be held by the Mayas but must remain “in the hands of the Crown.” On the other, the Mayas should have no means to convert the land into “marketable titles” that may “enable them to dispose of such lands.”

In the spring of 1884, the government sent despatches to the colonial office on the subjects of the “appointment of Alcaldes in Indian Villages” and the “working of Crown Lands Department.”³¹ Although these three despatches were treated as independent concerns, they reflect a common challenge: to win hegemony over the Mayas. In September 1885, the Colonial Secretary, Henry Fowler, wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies: “our relations with the differing tribes of Indians on our frontiers are at present of a satisfactory character, and I see no reason to anticipate any change, provided the good understanding that has been established is encouraged, and some pains are taken *to cultivate the goodwill of the Indians.*”³²

Fowler's emphasis on cultivating goodwill marks an important shift from a mode of colonial hegemony that emphasized consent and territorialization more than military power. It was during Fowler's tenure as Colonial Secretary that the colonial state extended in southern Belize. When the state found unknown and ungoverned Mayas in the south,

they moved to create state institutions that could win “the goodwill of the Indians.” Colonial Secretary Fowler’s despatch on the alcalde system to the Secretary of State for the Colonies in London offers a lapidary statement about the state’s approach to the Maya; the challenge, as he put it, was to convert “the natives . . . from passive and indifferent subjects into loyal and willing subjects.”³³ Fowler’s letter goes on to detail the merits of the alcalde system: “the natives would appreciate a jurisdiction exercised over them according to their native customs. Leaving them to their own devices, or attempting to govern them directly by means of Magistrates and negro policemen has not worked satisfactorily.” As evidence, Fowler cites a report from the District Commissioner (hereafter DC) of the Western District:

The payment of salaries to the Alcaldes of the various villages causes great satisfaction and the anticipation of a staff of office and a flag to be hoisted before the Alcalde’s house on Sundays and Fiesta days makes them feel that they will not be inferior in display to their neighbors in the Republics – Without these advantages it would be difficult to exact any service from the Alcaldes or to support their authority among a *people so childishly dependent upon ceremony*.³⁴

Fowler argued that incorporating the alcaldes would bring several advantages. The alcaldes would be less expensive than police.³⁵ They could maintain order in rural areas by projecting the power of the colonial state through the manipulation of symbols. Thus, when Governor Harley wrote to the Colonial Office to express his thanks for their support of the recognition of the alcaldes, he proposed that “a staff of office – a cane – similar to those issued to friendly Chiefs on the Gold Coast, to be held during their tenure of Office.”³⁶ As much as the alcaldehood was regarded as a “native” institution, in the sense that it already existed in Maya communities, it involved extending colonial power into rural Maya communities where the state could not go. By recognizing the alcaldes as indigenous leaders – as leaders who derived some authority from an indigenous political institution – the colonial state transformed them.³⁷ As with the establishment of reservations, the alcalde policy was intimately tied to the territorialization of the colony, fixing of boundaries, and delineation of Crown land.

By 1888, these policies had been accepted in London, but there were still no Indian reservations, though provisions were made for such in the Crown Lands Ordinances of 1872, 1877, and 1886.³⁸ Their materialization was delayed by two questions: whether the Mayas actually

would pay land taxes on the reservation lands (the Colonial Office wanted to be sure that they did) and whether the lands for the reservations were actually within the colony.³⁹ To prepare the reservations, the Surveyor General wrote a report⁴⁰ and mapped the proposed reserves (see figure 1.5). Three Indian reservations were proposed: one in western Belize, near the Cayo, to be located “between the two branches of the Belize River... this would cause the various Indian communities scattered about the Western Frontier to settle within the reserve.”⁴¹ The second was to be in the north on Crown lands. The third was in the south, for San Antonio.⁴² The map gives important clues about the spatial order imagined by the colonial state in 1888. The three proposed reservations not only touch the border in each case; they are well separated from each other on the periphery of the colony, which was centered on Belize City. In each case, the reservation is figured as a small, black rectangle – a *container* set aside for the Mayas – on the territory’s margins (see figure 1.6). The reservations were thus imagined as spaces that made the colonial territorialization of Belize viable: spaces that would reduce conflict with the Mayas and naturalize the national borders by settling the Maya *inside* the territory of the colony.

Although the colonial state hoped that the Maya would stay within the borders of these three reservations, the state had no means (apart from the alcaldes) to actually police the borders. In southern Belize, colonial officials responded to the fact that Mayas refused to settle in one place by creating new reservations where they found Maya communities. Over the course of the subsequent two decades, the mismatch between the state’s spatial order and Maya livelihoods led to the creation of several new reservations.⁴³ This practice continued up through the 1930s, until the Interdepartmental Committee on Maya Welfare signaled the end to creating reservations and a shift toward a new approach: to incorporate the Maya into the life of the colony and teach the Maya about their “connection with Britain and the Empire” in order to make them “Empire conscious.”⁴⁴

“The Indian will Require Patient and Sympathetic Treatment”

As the Depression set in and taxes were *reduced* for the large timber and chicle firms, the peasants of Toledo were asked to shoulder the burden. With one-fifth of the population, Toledo had the greatest number of households paying land taxes – mainly Maya and Garifuna peasant

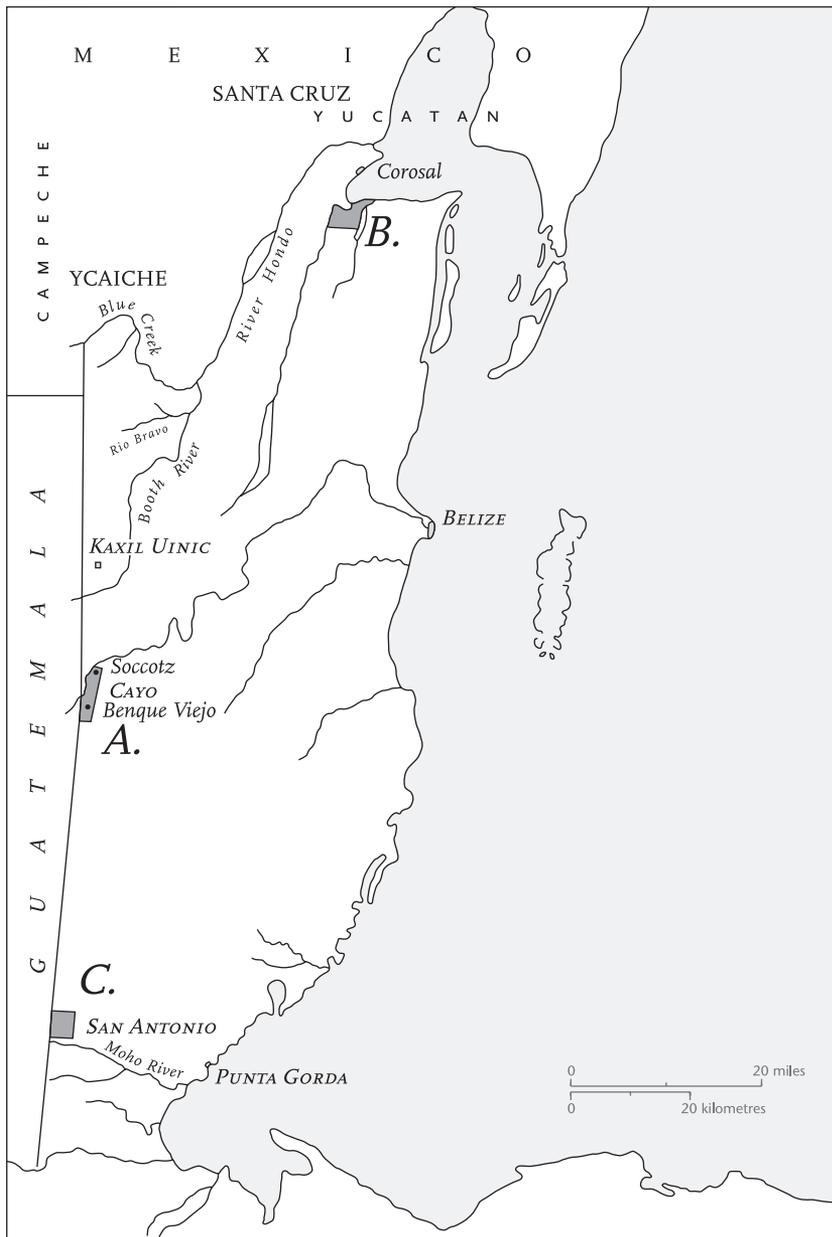


Figure 1.5 Map of the Plan of Indian Reservations, 1888

Cartographer: Eric Leinberger, 2005

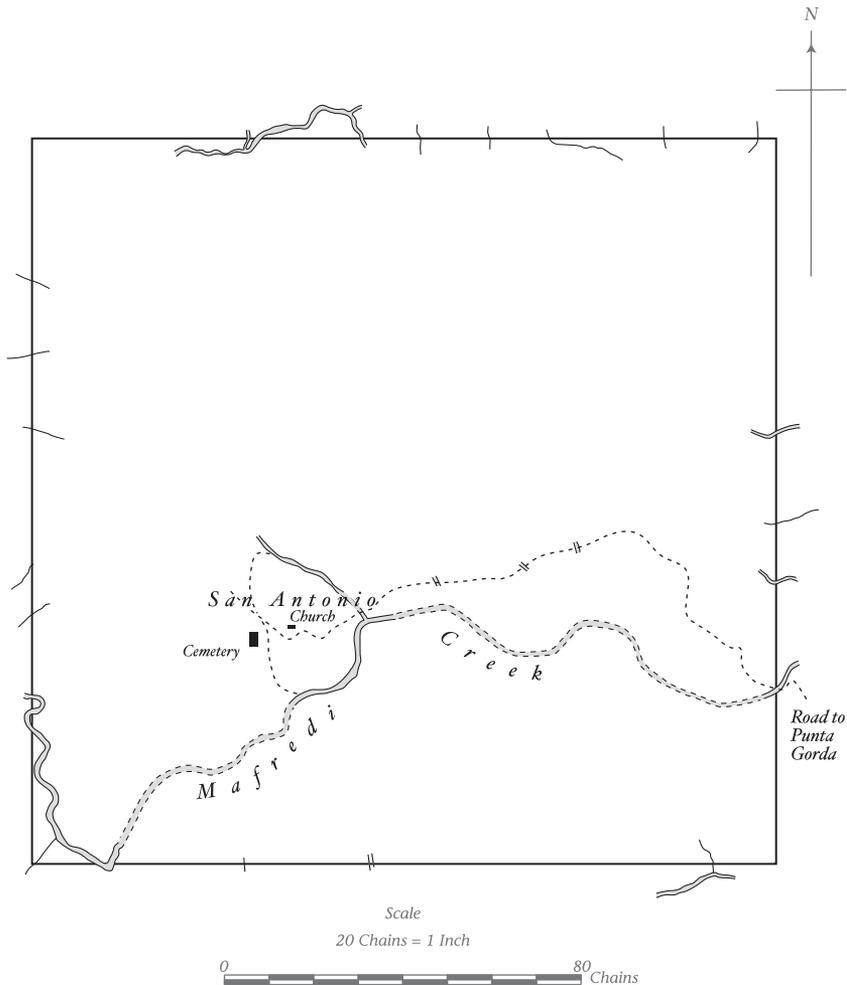


Figure 1.6 Map of the Plan of the San Antonio Reservation

Cartographer: Eric Leinberger, 2005

households – who paid over half of all the Crown rents collected in 1932–1933. Although they were the poorest households (measured in cash income), the Maya of Toledo paid the highest *rate* of land taxes in the colony. In 1933, Pim argued that land taxes were decidedly unbalanced: “A large proportion of the arrears are due from some of the most important land-holders in the Colony, and the criticism that they have

been treated with greater consideration than the petty tenants of the Crown lands is therefore not without substance.”⁴⁵ The Land and Property Tax Ordinance set the annual tax for Mayas cultivating Crown lands in Toledo at \$10 per year, “out of all proportion to land rent elsewhere which was 30 cents an acre.” This amounted to at least two months of labor at the prevailing wages – presuming one could find work.⁴⁶ After 1929, wage-work was hard to find, and prices for agricultural goods sold by Maya farmers crashed. Many peasants tried to avoid paying taxes, but the state vigorously pursued Crown rents, often threatening criminal suits. The rate of criminal cases per capita was 63 percent higher in the Toledo District than the national average, with a “large majority of the Criminal Cases tried summarily... for recovery of arrears of Crown rents.”⁴⁷

By March, 1932, the situation had grown so severe that more than a hundred Mayas walked from San Antonio to the Catholic Mission in Punta Gorda to plead for assistance. The Bishop wrote to the colonial government: “Some sixty Indians from San Antonio came to me about an hour ago – as a delegation of the whole pueblo, over one hundred being in town here right now – to explain their distress.” He described the dilemma:

The general depression and consequent want of a market for their usual produce – hogs and agricultural produce now esp. beans – makes it impossible for many to pay their rent to the Government (\$10 a year). Many are in arrears for 1931. Instructions have been received by the DC from Belize... not to issue any permits for cultivation for 1932 to those who have not paid the arrears of 1931. Many have been summoned, the cases being heard right now whilst I am writing this. The Indians are *willing* and *anxious* to do all in their power to pay. To make the necessary money they want to ask for two things: (1) a market for their beans etc. be taken in kind... The poor men came here backing their sacks the 25 miles & can't sell them after not for 5cts a quart. (2) Work from the Government on the San Antonio road. Both the San Antonio & (branching off) the 10 miles San Pedro Columbia road are in sorest need of work. They would gladly work for 25 cts a day and rations much cheaper than the work the Government does with its usual workers. – The money would go back to the Government in form of taxes.⁴⁸

In response, the state asked the DC for a report on the status of the health of the Mayas: “The Bishop... tells me that the people in San Jose are starving... It might be worth while taking payment in kind...”⁴⁹ When the Council asked the DC of Toledo to investigate “the economic

condition of the Indians in the Toledo District,”⁵⁰ the DC duly reported that “the Indian has not yet felt and realized the full pinch of the world’s depression.” Since the Mayas “have invariably paid up their occupancy and habitation fees without a quibble,” he reasoned, “the payment of habitation or occupancy fees [cannot] be waived.” And since conditions were worse in Guatemala, the Maya had no choice but to pay the state: “I feel absolutely certain that enforcement of the payment of the fees will not drive them across the border to Guatemala.”⁵¹

As the local representatives of the colonial state, the *alcaldes* were placed in a difficult position. Some tried to use their authority to persuade the state to assist them. In February, 1932, the *alcalde* of San Antonio wrote to Taylor:

We the poor and industrious farmers of this village get our income and our living chiefly through or from the sale of our pigs and our commodities. From last June to the present time, we could not have demand for our market, and consequently, we are unable to meet our obligation in paying our rents in due time. This is an unusual circumstance on our part as Government may know. We have our pigs, beans and corn up here in abundance, and no buyers would come and buy in great quantity as before, and no place where to go and sell.⁵²

Taylor’s response was to turn to the new Agriculture Department to assist in “finding a suitable market for the commodities.”⁵³ But the Commissioner of Forests, drawing from research recently conducted by the nascent Forest Department,⁵⁴ argued that the Maya farmers were to blame for their problems: “the difficulty [is] not so much lack of buyers but the *refusal of the Indians to reduce prices*.”⁵⁵ If the state assisted Maya farmers with access to capital or markets for their goods, he worried:

The Indians would probably take advantage of assistance given to raise the amount of the occupancy fees only and then cease cooperation. The Indian will require patient and sympathetic treatment before he will produce regularly for an established market. . . . [O]n no account should the payment of occupancy fees be waived.⁵⁶

Having been called to order for asking the agriculture specialists to assist him, Taylor rushed to reassure his superiors that “the question of waiving the occupancy fees has not arisen. These are being collected and defaulting occupants have been proceeded against by law.”⁵⁷

At least 18 Maya farmers were imprisoned in September, 1932, for failing to pay their \$10 land tax.⁵⁸ Reviewing the decision to jail the

farmers, a state official who approved their sentence said: “Yes in this case, but no more imprisonment for no payment.” His concern was not that their imprisonment was unjust. It was that “taxes must be worked off.”⁵⁹

Conclusion

Driven from their ancestral lands, the Q’eqchi’ and Mopan Maya of southern Belize encountered a less violent, but nonetheless authoritarian, colonial state. In the forests and fields where they produced their livelihoods, their lands and labor were partly incorporated into the capitalist wage economy of the timber companies and agricultural estates. These companies took possession of most of the colony through an act of primitive accumulation involving a pair of deceits: first, that the lands taken for logging were not already held by the Maya; and second, that the logging claims should be converted into private property.⁶⁰ British colonialism meant the extraction of surplus through land occupancy fees, which forced Mayas to work at low wages for the timber, chicle, and agricultural companies that offered occasional employment. Unable to purchase the land that they paid for annually, the Maya communities saw no capital accumulation despite their years of labor and the production of a consistent agricultural surplus. Mayas resisted these forms of exploitation by avoiding taxes, moving frequently, living far from the state, and by trying to secure title to land through leasing.

The state complemented these processes of capital accumulation by attempting to settle the Maya. As a way of spatially fixing their subaltern economic position, the colonial state, logging companies, and the Catholic church collaborated to encourage the Mayas to settle in permanent communities where their resistance could be more effectively mitigated. The resulting hegemony that enabled colonialism was therefore doubly geographical. It was constituted on the basis of spatial forms of political power: settlement, land taxation, and territorialization. These in turn became hegemonic as they were naturalized and sedimented into common understandings of the geography of southern Belize. Notwithstanding the ongoing Maya resistance to colonial *settlement* (in its compound sense), the geographies of southern Belize came into being through colonial practices – at once political, economic, and geographical. As the ongoing struggles over these lands reveal, the very territorialization of southern Belize as such is an unfinished project. The colonial geographies of southern Belize remain to be unsettled.

NOTES

- 1 Gramsci (1996): "History of the dominant class and history of the subaltern classes" (Notebook 3, note 14, p. 21). Gramsci revised this note in notebook 25, note 2.
- 2 Taylor, 1918, "Inducements to Indians to live in the Villages of the Toledo District." AB, MP 2427–18.
- 3 Under such leadership, subaltern (or "lower rank") social classes may give consent to their own exploitation in the absence of explicit repression. For Gramsci, the state is a site where hegemonic leadership is made possible and a locus of struggle for hegemony: the state "urges, incites, solicits, and 'punishes'" its subjects in order to create the conditions "in which a certain way of life is 'possible'" (Gramsci 1971: 247). Within this view, the capitalist state is a complex social relation that is both the product of particular struggles and contradictions of capitalist development, and also the most important arena for struggles to produce hegemonic projects (see Jessop 1982b: 100).
- 4 Texts written in the first decades after British Honduras became an official colony served to produce "the colony" and "British Honduras" as a space of resources. The history of this object thereby becomes told as an unfolding of knowledge about these resources. See especially Cockburn (1875); Fowler (1879); Morris (1883); Gibbs (1883); Bellamy (1889); Avery (1900); Lucas (1905); Collet (1909); Burdon (1927). There is a double move at work in the expression "the geography of Belize": this sign indicates both the mode of description of the surface of the space of "Belize" and the facts of the space so described. The joining of the discipline and its subject in a common sign contributes to the apparent naturalness of both the facts themselves and the proper process for deriving them. The challenge is not so much to deny the existence of geography but to read it always as a verb, as a process of becoming: not the world itself, but the production of worldliness.
- 5 Lucas (1905: 320).
- 6 Spain opposed the presence of these settlers but had no interest in going to war with England to drive them out. The practice was legalized after the 1763 Treaty of Paris, where Spain recognized the rights of British settlers to cut and export logwood from Belize but maintained Spanish sovereignty; the Treaty of Versailles (1783) extended British control over Belize on the land between the Sibun and Hondo rivers. The Spanish claim to Belize effectively ended after their 1798 defeat at the Battle of St. George's Caye. Although the prohibition on agriculture did not prevent British settlements, it slowed the development of capitalist agriculture.
- 7 Shoman (1995: 193). The small rivers of southern Belize were a second factor inhibiting the colonization of the area; the absence of deep rivers capable of navigation discouraged logging expeditions. The earliest British

colonial state institutions date to 1765, when the Location laws were formulated by the settlers to formalize their rights to land at logging camps. In 1786 these rules were codified into Burnaby's Code, the first civil law. The first Superintendent of British Honduras, Colonel Despard, was appointed in 1786. The first constitution and Legislative Assembly were established in 1854. Belize was declared a colony in 1862 and became a Crown colony in 1871. Although British Honduras was governed by a colonial state before 1862, it was dominated by the settler community and not the Colonial Office in London. In this chapter, by "colonial state" I refer to the ensemble of institutions that ruled British Honduras after 1862. The first Magistrate for the Southern District (which comprised the area south of the Belize District) was appointed in 1865. The Southern District was divided into the Stann Creek and Toledo Districts in 1882. The best source on colonial British Honduras is Bolland (1977).

- 8 It is beyond the scope of this chapter to discuss the Manche Chol, whose presence in the area is documented in the Spanish records. Recognizing Chol loan words in the Mopan and Q'eqchi' spoken in southern Belize, Maya historian J. E. S. Thompson reviews the records on Spanish efforts to pacify "Chol country" in the 1670s (Thompson 1938). As he explains, in 1677 a Dominican father named Joseph Delgado was sent from the Bacalar to find an overland route north to Merida – a trip that brought him within present-day Toledo: "In 1677 Father Delgado and companion traveled down the Yaxal (Mojo [Moho]) River from Pusilha, and struck northwards along the coast of British Honduras." On June 7, 1677, while on the banks of a branch of the Moho River, Delgado wrote a memorandum describing the settlements and the land through which he passed (Thompson 1988: 35–9; see also Thompson 1938). His memorandum specifies the existence of a Maya community called *Cantelac* between San Antonio and Pueblo Viejo, near the "*Yaxal*" (i.e., *Yax Ha'*) or Moho River. Elsewhere I have argued that this memorandum contributes to the pattern of evidence that suggests that the present-day village of Santa Cruz is very near the probable location of a Maya village called *Cantelac*, probably home to Mopan-speaking (and possibly Manche Chol-speaking) people at the time of the arrival of the Spanish in the New World (Wainwright 2007).
- 9 In 1859 the Superintendent of British Honduras said of the Mayas: "We know but little of these people" (Seymour 1859, cited in Burdon 1935: 221–2). Seymour became the first Lieutenant Governor of British Honduras in 1862. What they did "know" was that Mayas might attack logging companies or burn mahogany-rich forests. Speaking of the Mayas of northern Belize, Seymour says that they "have learnt to respect the mahogany tree in their clearing operations so there is peace between them and our woodsmen."
- 10 Ibid. This statement reaffirms that the area had not been explored, as it is not the case that the "line of water-shed" of the Maya mountains "forms

the division between ourselves and Vera Paz.” In many of the maps of this era, the divide of the Maya mountains is drawn along a north-south line. Also note that the verb “to contain” is crucial here, since it allows Seymour to suggest that the land is the *container* of “certain inhabitants” as opposed to their property or homeland (or simply a space that is already inhabited).

- 11 The early District Commissioners took no special interest in finding all the Mayas, let alone visiting the largest communities. The few reports written by colonial officials between the 1880s and 1920s suggest that trips outside of the three main coastal settlements (Monkey River Town, the Toledo Settlement, and Punta Gorda) were rare and brief. Reports by state officials as late as the 1930s indicate that trips to the rural Mayas villages were on the order of one brief tour per year to the main villages.
- 12 As the head of Alta Verapaz complained, with Mayas fleeing “it is very difficult to collect hands for agriculture” (Solórzano 1977: 288, cited by Handy 1984: 288).
- 13 Although most Mayas were living outside of recognized towns, the 1891 census counted 1,343 “people of Central American origin” in Toledo. At the time of the April 1891 census, rural southern Belize was an uncolonized region where timber companies were departing after over-cutting the forest. The 1921 census counted 2,169 Mayas. Many of the Q’eqchi’s who migrated in the 1880s settled on land owned by German planters, who produced coffee, cacao, and nutmeg for markets in Belize City and Germany. But not all the Mayas settled on Cramer’s lands, or in permanent communities. Maps from the area are marked with references to *milpas* and “Indian trails” along the rivers, suggesting that some Mayas refused to “settle” and sell their labor, preferring to make a livelihood off the land. See also Wilk (1997); Grandia (2006).
- 14 African slaves were brought to Belize via Jamaica by British settlers as early as 1720. Although the African slave trade was abolished by Parliament in 1807, slavery was not abolished in the colony until 1834, and the system of advanced-wage payment, combined with the few political or economic options for mobility among former slaves, insured that labor conditions changed only slightly after the end of slavery. Substantive changes in the work in the forestry sector did not occur before the decline of the forestry sector in the 1930s. Both slavery and wage slavery were consistently resisted; slave revolts are recorded in 1765, 1768, 1773, 1795, and 1820. On slavery in Belize, see Bolland (1997); also Shoman 1994: 43–63.
- 15 I found no records of exports from Toledo during the mid-nineteenth century in Punta Gorda, the Archives of Belize, or the Public Record Office. Such records are undoubtedly missing because there were no colonial state institutions in southern Belize at that time. Charles Wright once noted that there was a mahogany boom between 1825 and 1835, when land along the rivers near the coast were first sold in large blocks, leading to the first

- major round of speculation (Wright, ACS. 1995. AB, CHW/20). This is plausible, but I have found no evidence to support Wright's claim.
- 16 The map shows the locations of the concessions: one in the southwest corner of the colony, next to the Sarstoon; four on the Moho River; five on the Rio Grande; one along the coast, just north of Punta Gorda; four along the coast to the north of the Rio Grande; and eight on the Golden Stream. In each case, the mouth of the river is reserved as Crown land, as are all of the lands to the west of the last concession, which on the Temax, Moho, and Rio Grande end about 10 miles from the coast. Note that the maps, like others from early in the century, are spare with details about the topography or geological features of the Maya mountains in the interior. This is further evidence of the lack of geographical knowledge of southern Belize by the colonial state. (For a case study on the production of geographical knowledge in southern Belize, see Wainwright and Ageton 2005.)
 - 17 A series of maps in the archives from the 1880s reveals that this process entailed sending a government surveyor to the area to determine the boundaries around logging concessions granted in Belize City and later converted into private estates. See: Anon., 1887. "Plan of boundary of the Crown and B. Cramer & Co. on Moho River," AB, map, no catalog number; Anon., 1889. "A Plan for surveys of the Tidmash river made at the request of B. Cramer," AB, map, no catalog number.
 - 18 Slavery was formally abolished in 1834, but as Bolland has documented, the social relations in the mahogany industry changed little with the end of slavery: see Bolland (1977, 1997).
 - 19 Shoman (1995: 193).
 - 20 Ibid., p. 197. In 1933, 6 percent of the landowners in Belize owned 97 percent of the land.
 - 21 After Belize became a Crown colony, a Crown Lands Ordinance was passed that led to the reacquisition of some lands by the state. The law was most effective in southern Belize, where most Crown lands were accumulated. By 1900 over half the land in southern Belize was Crown land.
 - 22 Based on maps from the 1880s and Minute Papers from the 1910s in the AB, it appears that Cramer owned almost every private parcel of land in southern Belize at one point, but held few of them for long. He speculated in land and tried to subdivide his parcels for sale or lease – often to peasants with Maya surnames.
 - 23 Bananas were a major agricultural export from Belize between the 1890s and the early 1920s. Although the industry was centered around the Stann Creek valley during this period, the Toledo District was deeply involved in the banana trade. The industry was destroyed by Panama disease, first introduced in 1914. On the history of the banana industry in Belize, see Moberg (1996). Chicle exports from Belize to the US crashed with the Depression, with exports falling from over 4 million lbs. in 1930 to

1 million in 1932, and revenue from chicle duties crashing (from Bz \$61,000 in 1930–31 to Bz \$7,000 in 1932–33). Cacao exports also collapsed. Throughout the 1910s and 1920s cacao was grown in rural Maya communities (25,000 lbs of cacao were exported in 1913), but the price of cacao crashed during the Depression, falling from 50 cents to 4 cents a pound between 1928 and 1930. Plans to export cohune oil dried up in the same period. In 1929 the Tropical Oil Products Company purchased a 46,000 acre estate and attempted to export cohune oil. The project created a settlement of several hundred workers in rural Toledo. It had just become operational when cooking oil prices crashed, and the scheme was abandoned around 1939.

- 24 Grant (1976: 62).
- 25 Ibid.
- 26 The District Board was comprised of nine people – mainly elites appointed by the Governor, and headed by the DC.
- 27 Government of Belize, 1934, cited by Camille (1994: 122). The mill was built by the BEC in Belize City for milling logs into boards.
- 28 Before the 1950s, the state's lack of interest in promoting commercial agriculture was usually explained with reference to its peculiar colonial history of dependence on forestry. Successive PUP governments have made some progress in reducing Belize's food import ratio: food imports accounted for 31 percent of imports as late as 1974 and only 14 percent in 2000. This decline masks the fact that most of the processed food consumed is still imported and much of what is eaten – especially chicken, wheat, and soft drinks, “Belizean” staples today – is typically imported and/or controlled by expatriate or Creole families. On Belize's development strategy 1960–1980, see Palacio (1996); on the colonial roots of Belizean cooking, see Wilk (2006).
- 29 On the history of the Indian reservations, see Bolland (1987); Berkey (1994).
- 30 Governor Longden, 1868. Despatch No. 39 of 1868, cited in Despatch No. 8 of 1884, PRO CO 123/172.
- 31 PRO CO 123/172. The alcaldes despatch was written on January 24, 1884, the same day as a despatch announcing new measures for securing “prison discipline.” The control of the Mayas and the prisoners were debated at the same time.
- 32 Fowler, H. 1885. PRO CO 123/1885/Despatch 134, letters discussing the “grand revolution” of Yucatan. Italics mine.
- 33 Fowler, H. 1884. “Appointment of Alcaldes in Indian Villages,” PRO CO 123/172.
- 34 Millson, A. 1883. “Report on the Western District, 7 December 1883”, PRO CO 123/171, p. 7. Millson elaborates:

This probable influx of Indians [from the Guatemalan side of the border] makes it advisable that the question of an Indian Reserve should be considered. It would be unadvisable, and to some extent dangerous to eject those at present

settled in the towns above mentioned, but, at the same time to avoid future difficulties from the encroachments of cattle from the mahogany works upon their Milpas, as well as to provide a refuge for those who are desirous of settling in the Colony, it would be wise to set apart some well defined tract of Government Land for their undisturbed possession; such lands might either be chosen, in the neighborhood of San Antonio, stretching back into the Great Southern Pine Ridge, or between the two branches of the Belize River from The Cayo to Garbutt's Falls, and more northerly position being in too close a proximity to Yaloch and Ycaiché. The chief objections to selecting the land between the River branches for such a Reserve are its proximity to The Cayo and other Creole Settlements, and the somewhat limited extent of land available for *people of such nomadic habits as the Indians*, who, *depending as they solely do upon the practice of their Milpas*, and totally unacquainted with any means of fertilizing the ground they cultivate, are *forced to move from place to place* as the soil of their plantations becomes exhausted. (My italics)

From the earliest stages on planning the alcalde/reservation system, the colonial state hoped to transform Maya agricultural practices. Colonial rule and the formation of hegemony called for such development. I take up the discourse on Maya farming in the next chapter.

- 35 In his estimates for 1923–24, the Toledo DC noted the costs for the District staff. More was spent on the DC's stationary (\$25) than a second alcalde would have received for an annual wage (McCall, T. 1922. "Estimates for the year 1923–24." 14 November 1922. MC 956 (this MP is misfiled: it is actually 3051–22).
- 36 Anon. 1882. "Indian Affairs". PRO CO 123/168, 30 December 1882.
- 37 Alcaldehood thus became a site of the intense and polyvalent reworking of colonial power, as it remains today. Today the Toledo Alcaldes Association is a registered NGO.
- 38 Fowler, H. 1884. "Crown Lands Department. Forwards report on working of by Surveyor General." PRO CO 123/172, Despatch 40/1884. Fowler elaborates:

The Committee of the old House of Assembly recommended certain lands to be secured to Indians and Caribs and sufficient lands be reserved for Churches, cemeteries, and other buildings. The Crown Lands Ordinance of 1872 provided for "lands being reserved for the use of Indians and Caribs and for permit being issued renewable yearly to occupy lots," and Section 24 of the Ordinance provides for "Indian and Carib villages being surveyed and reserved for the use and enjoyment of Indians and Caribs" . . .

I am very strongly in favor of forming Carib and Indian reserves as a mere act of justice on the grounds of former recognition of the claim of these natives. As regards the Indians the only step taken in the matter was in 1880 to lay out two Indian villages and to sell the lots at \$2.00 each. This was approved by Sir M. Hicks-Beach in despatch No 26 of 7th April 1880 but nothing further has been done. The whole question requires careful consideration and in a systematic manner. I respectfully submit that due

provision should be made therefore by a simple amendment authorizing the Lieut-governor in Council to reserve portions of Crown Lands for the use and enjoyment of Indians and Caribs subject to the sanction of the Secretary of State and to make regulations for the management and government of such reserves subject to the approval of the Secretary of State.

At this point in the text he elaborates on the 1877 Ordinance:

In 1877 an Ordinance to amend the law in this respect was passed on the grounds that the Caribs had disregarded the above provisions and they were repealed. Nothing is said about the Indians, and the Lieut-Governor was authorized to lease lands within Carib reserves for any term not exceeding 10 years at such rent as he may deem proper, or grant the same in fee for not less than 5/- per acre. This Ordinance was repealed by the present land ordinance in which no mention is made of either Carib or Indian reserves, so that these natives are now subject to the same provisions as other people. Such rights as they may have secured under the previous laws, although stipulated were not to be affected by the present law, in the absence of any records thereof, have been simply ignored. The imposition of a rental of \$2.00 for each Carib house in Stann Creek in 1878 nearly caused serious disturbances. The District Magistrate reporting that the Caribs threaten to make “a day of it” if the Crown bailiff attempted to “enforce the rents,” and Mr. Downer “thought it high time to cease moralizing with such savages – that it is common talk among the Caribs that they do not know why they are to pay rent as Stann Creek is their place, that long ago the land was given to them and they settled the place.” These rents have been collected as best they could since, but there is little legality for such proceedings since the repeal of the 1877 Ordinance by the 1879 Act.

- 39 Consider the following notes from a November 1888 minute prepared in London:

[T]here are in the Northern District Indians who consider it belonging to them, land which when the Mexican boundary is settled will be part of the Colony. If so, it may be necessary or expedient to provide a reserve for them either at the place marked B on the map annexed to the written report or somewhere else in the North West of the Colony when the Boundary Convention with Mexico is signed. . . . With regard to the proposed reserve at the place marked B in the map I see no reason why Indians already renting land from private persons should have free grants there. It may be convenient to settle there any Indian that may come into the Colony from Yucatan, but I am not prepared at present to approve of their being given the land or allowed to occupy it rent free. I should be glad to know whether the ordinary tax on cultivated land is paid by the Indians on their milpas. It should be ascertained whether San Antonio is within the Colony and if it is within the Colony a reserve should be marked out.

Although it was later determined that San Antonio was within Belize, the first map of the Indian reservations shows the community to be on the border with Guatemala.

- 40 Miller, W. 1888. "Proprietary Rights of Indians." PRO CO 123/190, Despatch 129, 28 September 1888. Miller's report is enclosed in a letter sent by Hubert Jerningham to Lord Knutsford on September 28, 1888.
- 41 Ibid.
- 42 See Miller, W. 1888. "Report on Indian Reservations." PRO CO 123/190. The state had little idea in the 1880s where Maya communities in southern Belize were located and whether they were even "within" the territory of the colony. Miller writes of San Antonio: "[T]hey pay nothing for their lands. There is some doubt in my mind as to whether San Antonio is actually within the limits of the Colony as the journey to it occupies three days from Punta Gorda. The road is said to run due West and the Colony is only 30 miles broad at that point."
- 43 ICMW (1941). Some Mayas also leased land from the colonial government. Leasing appears to have been common since the 1890s. The process of applying for a parcel of leased land required the supplication of the would-be leaser to the DC, who would then submit the application to the Surveyor General. Maps from the archives indicate the leasing occurred in the late nineteenth century, and Minute Papers from the early 1900s indicate the same. For instance, in 1905 Victoriano Pow applied to lease 100 acres of Crown land to the north of the San Antonio reservation. When the Surveyor General checked his files, he found that three of the acres Pow was applying to lease were already leased to another Maya farmer. The Surveyor remapped the proposal and granted 97 acres to Pow. This and other applications by Mayas from this period were treated as routine. It is difficult to estimate the extent of leasing, but in 1921 there were no fewer than 120 applications to lease land in the Toledo District, and 24 of these came from people categorized racially as "Indian." (Taylor, J. 1922. "Annual report for the Toledo District for the year 1921." AB, MP 1766–22. Taylor notes: "as soon as they get here [from Guatemala], and find out about land matters, they apply to lease.") The fact that Mayas could lease land underscores the fact that the state was mainly interested in settlement and the collection of land occupancy fees.
- 44 Ibid., Appendix I. Not incidentally, the ICMW report also called for a development policy aimed at replacing "the *milpa* system," an object I discuss in the next chapter.
- 45 Pim (1933: 43).
- 46 In his report on the District for 1921, Taylor reported that while calculating the acreage leased by Mayas since 1914 "would take up too much time . . . the increase is fairly large. Roughly, taking the Toledo District as a whole, and including the Monkey River – (which has no Indian population) – the value of the Country lands rent roll in 1914 was about \$1,800, and now it is very close on \$4,000." In 1921, when the rent roll for Toledo was \$4,000, the population of the Toledo District was estimated at 5,242, of which at least 2,169 were Mayas. The latter would have comprised the majority of

- land leasers. Taylor notes that the average monthly wage in 1921 for mahogany work is \$15, and for agriculture, \$10 (Taylor, J. 1922. "Annual Report for the Toledo District for the year 1921." AB, MP 1766–22).
- 47 Pim (1933: n.p.).
- 48 AB, MP 1060–32. We should be skeptical to take the Bishop's word on this (the church could not adequately represent the desires of the Maya). It is difficult to know whether the Bishop's claim that the Maya were "*willing and anxious . . . to pay*" shows that many Mayas consented to paying their land taxes, even under the most difficult of circumstances.
- 49 Anon. 1932. "Authority to write off amount for which Indians served imprisonment for non-payment of occupancy fees during 1931." AB, MP 2068–32. The problem was simply that "The Indians must learn that prices of primary commodities have fallen and that they can no longer hold out for fancy prices" (Anon. 1932. AB, MP 2068–32).
- 50 AB, Minutes of the Executive Council, May 11, 1932.
- 51 Alcoser, A. 1932. AB, MP 2068–32.
- 52 Anon. 1932. AB, MP 508–32.
- 53 Taylor, J. 1932. AB, MP 508–32.
- 54 Fearful that Maya peasants would cheat on their taxes, the Forest Department studied their production and consumption habits in 1936. The August 1936 research conducted by Forest Ranger Hope (compiled with commentary in Minute Paper 266–33) comprises the first thorough, modern census of the Maya of southern Belize. State sponsorship of research on the Mayas was from the outset oriented toward statistics and tax accounting. From this research we know that Maya households may have suffered serious losses during this period. The 1948 Annual Report for the colony reports the "abnormally high" death rates of 1931–1946 among Maya communities in southern Belize, which may well be attributed to the acute poverty of this period.
- 55 Ibid., my italics.
- 56 Anon. 1932. "Difficulties being experienced by the San Antonio Indians in marketing their produce." AB, MP 508–32.
- 57 Ibid.
- 58 The \$180 they owed to the state was written off, as they had paid by their time in jail. (Anon. 1932. "Imprisonment of Indians for non-payment of occupancy fees for the year 1931." AB, MP 2068–32.)
- 59 Ibid.
- 60 Although the state is the largest landowner in Belize, private ownership of the land is highly concentrated. In 1977, 85 percent of the private land in Belize was owned by only 42 people (Bolland and Shoman 1977: 7; data from Lands Department land tax rolls).