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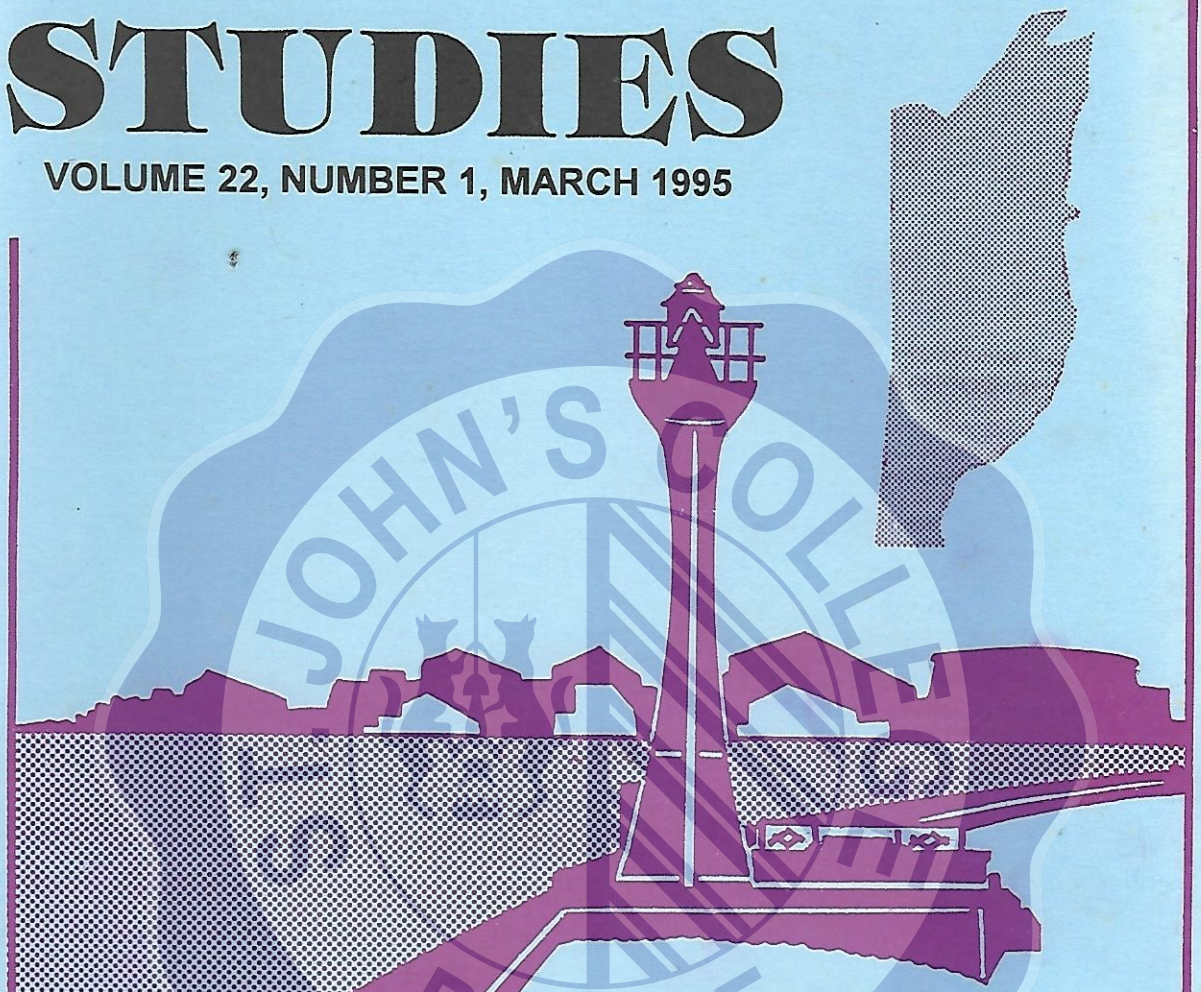

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And More ...

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A JOURNAL OF SOCIAL RESEARCH AND THOUGHT
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Dear Reader:

After a year-long break in publication, *Belizean Studies* is back on track. We would like to thank all of our subscribers for their patience and continued support.

Dr. Carla Barnett, a Belizean economist and the acting governor of the Central Bank of Belize, presented the Fifth Annual Signa L. Yorke Memorial Lecture, established in honour of the distinguished Belizean educator, the late Signa L. Yorke. Her lecture, *Looking Beyond the Year 2000: The implications of Developments in Belize's Economy in the 1980's and 1990's,* launches this issue of the journal. After a summary of Belize's economic history, Dr. Barnett argues that by the end of the colonial period Belize had an economy dependent on export trade with domestic food production being minuscule thus creating a heavy dependence on the importation of consumption goods--a trend that has persisted to the present. In an attempt to better explain developments in the 1980s she analyzed three periods: the first period, 1981-1985, she described as a period of macro-economic instability and decline; the second, 1986-1990, was one of stabilization and rapid growth with some diversification, and the third, 1991-1993, was one in which the Belizean economy experienced slower growth with some fiscal stimulus. Economic developments in Belize, particularly since independence, continues to attract considerable attention, and the need for informed commentary endures. Carla Barnett's incisive discussion is one such source.

In *Abortion, Family Life, and Economic Development in Belize*, Gary Chamberlain, a theologian at Seattle University, looks at the interplay of socio-economic issues and that of family life, abortion, and contraception in Belize. His essay extends considerably an earlier discussion of this issue in Belizean Studies(Volume 20, No. 1, May 1992). Drawing fundamental principles from Catholic Social teachings and the Constitution of Belize, he argues for a wholistic Christian ethic of family life issues which respects and dialogues with divergent cultures of the country. He hopes that such an ethic could provide the impetus to promote social justice for all, especially women, a more vibrant family life, and a decline in the use and need for abortion.

The third essay comes from the pen of Sarah Woodbury Haug. In *Historical Narratives and the Interpretation of Belizean History* she compares three versions of the history of Belize on the basis of the different purposes and backgrounds of their authors. She maintains that "fact" or "truth" in history is not fixed, but rather is dependent upon who records the past. Furthermore, her essay seeks to question the rejection of "fiction" as a valid genre of historical work based upon the evaluation of the truth-value of this form of narrative. Ms. Haug suggests that the history of Belize can be found not only in scholarly historical works, but also in works of fiction and narratives tales, told by Belizeans. In continuing the historical discussion, archaeologist Marc Thompson provides an insightful commentary on *Modern Myths, Misconceptions, and the Maya of Belize,* and Assad Shoman reviews Curtis Berkey's *Maya Land Rights in Belize and the History of Indian Reservations*.

Herman Byrd, Editor

Fifth Annual Signa L. Yorke Memorial Lecture

LOOKING BEYOND THE YEAR 2000

The Implications of Developments in Belize's Economy in the 1980's and 1990's

By Carla Barnett

This paper begins with an examination of the present structure of the economy of Belize. On the basis of this, it proceeds to discern the challenges of the 21st century. We should make it clear from the outset that when we speak of "the economy", although we may be talking in abstract terms of production and consumption, investment and saving, diversification and concentration, we also need to bear in mind that we are speaking of the people in society who are producing and consuming, investing and saving and individually contributing to the trends which we, as economists, try to measure, understand and predict.

Economics, after all, is a social science, no matter how strenuously some of us try to insist that it is a "hard" science. As a social science, the principal objective is to understand how the society functions as it produces, consumes, trades, saves for the future, or spends future income by borrowing today.

Carla Barnett, Ph.D is the Acting Governor of the Central Bank of Belize. A version of this article was presented as the Fifth Annual Signa L. Yorke Memorial lecture.

This is the objective - whether we seek this understanding on the micro-level by examining how individuals make decisions about what to consume and how to organize business activity, or on the macro-level by examining how the sum of individual economic decisions are reflected in the overall level of economic activity.

While some seek this understanding of society out of intellectual curiosity, for many the search for this understanding arises out of a desire to seek solutions to the problems of society and a realization that the best solutions come out of rigorous investigation of society. It is in this context, then, of economics as a science of society that this paper is presented. It is divided into three parts. Firstly, it examines significant aspects of Belize's economic history for, it is my belief that, we must first understand from whence we came, if we are to predict, with any chance of success, where we are going. Secondly, it discusses economic developments in the current period - which I define as beginning in the 1980's. Lastly, the paper attempts to outline the challenges for the rest of the 1990's and beyond the year 2000.

A BRIEF ECONOMIC HISTORY

Since the arrival of the British in the seventeenth century and up to the mid-twentieth century, the economy of Belize was dominated by the export of forest products - first logwood, then mahogany and chicle. The activities of the British colonizers were geared, not to production but to the acquisition of land and the extraction of its forest resources. The intention was not to engage in settled agricultural production as was undertaken on the plantations of the island colonies of the Caribbean. Nonetheless, like the other British colonies in the Caribbean, the economy of Belize was characterized by the production for export and the location of ownership of the local economy in the metropolitan economy.

The organization of the economy was very simple at that time: all goods for consumption and for input into production were imported and all produce was exported. The profits earned from the extraction of forest resources were also exported or retained abroad. Much of the land in the territory was held idle and undeveloped by the large landowners who also controlled the imports and exports of the economy. The extraction of forest products was undertaken with little effort at reforestation and agricultural activity was insignificant.

Government policy throughout the crown colonial period spoke of promoting agricultural production either along with or instead of forestry, so as to strengthen and broaden the economic base through the expansion of opportunities. However, a number of factors worked against this possibility. Arguably the two most important of these factors were the landowners and merchants who earned significant profits through forestry operations and the import and export business;and, the colonial state through the kind of land and agriculture policies which it sought to implement[1].

With an economy dependent on imports for almost all of its consumption goods and placing all its production on the export market, the role of the middleman was, of necessity, important. In the early days of the settlement, importing and exporting activity was undertaken by the landowners themselves. As the forest industry came to be dominated by a few firms, some forest operators moved fully into commerce and the commercial sector evolved separately from forestry. Although the uneven distribution of privately owned land was frequently cited[2] as a major constraint on agricultural development, there were no serious attempts to change this distribution. Rather, some attempts were made to encourage large landowners to bring idle land into productive use by building roads and railways by various incentive schemes.

The choice between agriculture and forestry fluctuated with the profitability of forestry and the availability of imported food supplies[3]. At times the choice was influenced by the belief that the supply of labour was not sufficient to meet the demands of both agriculture and forestry together.[4] Wherever it was suggested that agriculture and forestry could be developed simultaneously,the need for population settlement schemes involving new immigrants was seen as a prerequisite. Colonial agricultural policy tended to promote large scale export production with much less emphasis on small scale food crop production. Government provided support through the development of infrastructure, such as railways and roads, and through the negotiation of access to guaranteed markets.

Both sugar and citrus developed with strong impetus from colonial government policy. The development of the modern sugar

industry followed the assignment to Belize of a sugar export quota to Europe under the Commonwealth Sugar Agreement in 1959.[5] Since the quota was larger than Belize could fill at the time, the colonial government sought to create the conditions for filling this quota in two ways. One was to bring in Tate and Lyle to play the leading role in sugar cane cultivation and sugar production.[6] The other was to redistribute land acquired by government from private landowners to small scale cane farmers in the two northern districts.[7]

In the case of citrus, although attempts to produce oranges and grapefruits in the Stann Creek Valley date back to very early in the twentieth century, sustained growth in the industry dates to the 1940's with the activities of the Colonial Development Corporation in establishing new citrus orchards.[8] In support of this industry, government replaced the railway in the Stann Creek Valley, which had earlier been built to promote banana cultivation by United Fruit Company, with a motorable road from the valley to the wharf.

In contrast, there was a low level of policy support for food production. Aside from establishing the Marketing Board in 1948 to purchase rice and corn, very little else was done. Since food production took place on small farms, it seems logical to conclude that very little was done for small scale food producers.[9] Over time, many small scale food producers shifted into production of sugar and citrus.

Sugar and citrus production consolidated their hold on the economy during the 1970's. Sugar, in particular, rose to dominate domestic production and exports in the 1970's. These two industries dominated both agriculture production, through the activities of the farmers, and manufacturing, through the activities of the sugar factories and the citrus processors.

This recounting of the major aspects of Belize's colonial economic history should be telling us several things about the structure of the economy when Belize headed into political independence at the beginning of the 1980's. Firstly, the economic activity was based on the production of primary products - i.e.. agriculture or forestry. Secondly, the economic base was very narrow. Sugar and citrus production accounted for the largest blocks of domestic production and over 80% of export earnings by 1980. Domestic food production was secondary. Thirdly, the economy of Belize at the end of the colonial period was heavily dependent on trade. Goods for consumption and for input into production were largely imported and goods produced were exported and, fourthly, the major export, sugar, was sold either under preferential quotas over which Belizean producers had no control or on the world market where Belizean producers were price takers. This then leads us to ask: What changed during the decade of the 1980's and the 1990's so far?

THE DECADE OF THE 1980'S AND THE 1990'S

A snapshot of the composition of domestic production[10] in 1981 and 1993 shows that over the 14 years, the contribution of the three categories of activities into which we divide domestic production has not changed significantly. In 1981 primary activities (that is, agriculture, forestry, fisheries and mining) accounted for 21% of domestic production. In 1993, these same activities accounted for 20%. Secondary activities (manufacturing, electricity and water supply and construction) accounted for 29% of domestic production in 1981 and 26% in 1993. The third category of domestic production, services, increased

its portion of domestic production from 54% in 1981 to 58% in 1993.

Clearly there have not been significant changes in the general structure of domestic production. There were, however, significant changes within the sectors themselves as the economy grew and new kinds of activities were initiated. We will examine these changes by dividing 1981-1993 into three periods. The first period is 1981-1985. This period experienced macro-economic instability and decline. The second period, 1986-1990, saw stabilization and rapid growth with some diversification. The third period, 1991-1993, saw slower growth with fiscal stimulus.

PERIOD 1:1981 TO 1985 - MACRO ECONOMIC INSTABILITY AND DECLINE

At the beginning of the 1980's, the international environment was unfavorable to small open economies such as Belize. The major industrial economies were in deep and prolonged recession and interest and inflation rates were at historically high levels. The weak recovery in the industrialized world in 1984 was short-lived and by 1985 growth in these economies slowed again. With world market prices for commodities such as sugar on the decline, the terms of trade was moving decidedly against the producers of primary products in the developing world.

Mexico, up north, was in deep economic crisis brought on by its heavy debt burden and was about to devalue its currency several times. This would result in the virtual collapse of Belize's re-export trade across the northern border and a rise in undocumented trade with a consequent fall in government revenue from taxes on trade. In Central America, political and economic crisis erupted into civil unrest and war with the spill-over effects of migrants and refugees seeking peace and the opportunity to work in Belize.

Belize entered these unfavorable 1980's having experienced average growth in domestic production of about 5% between 1978 and 1980. The sugar industry, in particular, had earned significant surpluses in the late 1970's. By 1981, however, there were unmistakable signs that there were troubled times ahead. Sugar prices weakened considerably in 1981 and 1982. Therefore, notwithstanding the expansion in production in 1982, earnings from the industry fell substantially in 1982 and leveled off before declining again in 1985.

With the other major export products not performing much better, export earnings fluctuated on a downward trend from $149 million in 1981 to $129 million in 1985. The citrus industry was the exception to this dismal performance with earnings almost doubling to $24 million between 1981 and 1985 as citrus prices increased on the world market. Domestic production which grew by about 2% in 1981, declined by about 1% in 1982 and 1.5% in 1983. The situation turned around slowly in 1984 but by 1985, domestic production was still growing by less than 1%.

Developments in government finances, labour and unemployment, international trade and payments and the financial system reflected the downturn in domestic production. A slowdown in revenue collection and a sharp expansion in expenditure on salaries, debt servicing, capital programmes and transfers to statutory corporations, such as the Electricity and Marketing Boards, resulted in government's overall deficit[11] rising from about $1.6 million in 1981 to $18 million in 1985.

Government financed a significant portion of its deficit by borrowing from the domestic

system and, as a result, commercial bank loans to government rose from $4.2 million in 1981 to $16.7 million in 1985. In fact, during this period, government increased its portion of total loans in the commercial banking system from about 4% to about 12%. Over the same period, borrowing through the issue of Treasury Bills was increased to the statutory limits and the borrowing limits from the Central Bank were exhausted. During this same period, external public debt grew to $176 million.

Although official labour and unemployment statistics have not been regularly and rigorously collected and published, a survey undertaken in 1984 indicated that the overall unemployment rate was about 14%, with the highest rates being: 24% in the Stann Creek District, 18% in the Toledo District and 16% in the Belize District. Unemployment rates tended to be significantly higher in the urban areas and in all districts female unemployment rates were significantly higher than male unemployment rates.

While no studies which seek to relate unemployment levels to migration rates have been found, there are indications that there was significant employment of immigrants and migrant labour at the same time that there was high unemployment of residents of Belize.

In the financial system, the rate of growth of deposits and credit slowed and the balance of payments deteriorated considerably as imports of goods and services grew faster than exports. This resulted in a steady decline in the Net Official Foreign Reserves from $20 million in 1981 to $5 million in 1985.

These difficulties prompted the adoption of an International Monetary Fund Standby Arrangement in 1985. Government also obtained significant assistance from the United States government through a USAID Economic Stabilization Programme. Under these arrangements, Government undertook to implement policies to strengthen fiscal performance and restore the Official International Reserves position.

These policies included fiscal tightening through raising revenue and restraining government expenditure, particularly on social services and tightening in the financial sector through higher interest rates.

PERIOD 2:1986 TO 1990 STABILIZATION AND RAPID GROWTH

The IMF Standby Arrangement and the USAID Stabilization Programme framed the developments in the economy during the second period,1986 to 1990. Over this period the economy stabilized, the balance of payments and international reserves recovered, government's fiscal operations strengthened, inflation declined and domestic production began to expand by unprecedented rates of growth. At the same time, however, the reduction in government expenditure on social services implied a reduction in the quality and quantity of these. The external public debt expanded significantly to $266 million as government, and the rest of the public sector, borrowed primarily from international financial institution (such as the World Bank) and foreign governments (through, for example, USAID) for balance of payments support and capital projects. The debt service ratio increased to about 7% but at this level remained well below levels in other economies of the Central American and Caribbean region.

In 1985 the economic decline bottomed out. In 1986, domestic production grew by about 3% and continued to grow, on average, 10% per year over the next four years. Growth was experienced in all sectors

with new significant areas of activity being initiated. Growth continued to be led by agricultural activities which grew, on an average, by about 7% annually between 1986 and 1990. Sugar export earnings were boosted from $46 million in 1985 to $85 million in 1990 by improved prices under quota arrangements. Citrus industry earnings jumped from about $24 million to $43 million as production and prices improved. Banana earnings grew from $7 million to $20 million over the same period. Total commodity exports expanded from $129 million in 1985 to $209 million in 1990.

This period saw a major transformation in the organization of production of the major agricultural exports. In the sugar industry, Tate and Lyle withdrew totally from the production side of the industry while maintaining an interest in the marketing side. Citrus producers began to make significant investments in establishing new citrus groves to take advantage of the duty free access into the United States which citrus concentrate from Belize would enjoy under the Caribbean Basin Initiative implemented in 1981. Citrus groves, for the first time, began to be established on a commercial scale outside of the Stann Creek Valley, particularly in the Cayo District.

In the banana industry, there was significant consolidation as the larger producers bought out many of the smaller producers and also established new banana plantations. Much of the labour utilized in the expansion of the citrus and banana industries during this period was migrant, originating across the western border. There were also the beginnings of what we call non-traditional activities on a relatively large scale. The more significant of these were shrimp farming and papaya production.

Growth in secondary activities [manufacturing, electricity and water and construction] was also significant. The expansion in manufacturing, at an annual average rate of about 6%, reflected mainly, but not totally, the expansion in citrus processing. There were also increases in small manufacturing and beverage production. Among the secondary activities, however, construction, with annual average of about 17% between 1986 and 1990, saw the strongest rates of growth. This growth reflects the expansion or construction of major hotels in Belize as well as a notable rise in home construction, particularly in the newly expanding urban areas.

It was in the services sector, however, that significant transformation occurred. Average annual growth in the sector was about 10% during the period, with growth peaking at 13% in 1989. Growth was very strong in the areas of "trade, restaurants and hotels", "transport and communications" and "finance and insurance". Growth in "trade, restaurants and hotels" reflects the significant rise in tourist arrivals from about 40,000 to about 100,000 over the period as Belize began to establish itself as an eco-tourism destination.

The expansion in transport and communication at an average annual rate of 16% reflects increases in travel abroad by Belizeans, shipping services and telecommunications services. Finance and insurance services also grew significantly during this period and, although this growth was somewhat erratic, it reflected the expansion of domestic and offshore financial services.

As domestic production recovered during this period, so did government finances, international trade and payments and the financial system. Government recorded an overall surplus on its operations every year between 1987 and 1990, inclusive. The surplus was particularly large in 1988 when

the first phase of the privatization of Belize Telecommunications Limited was implemented and a significant addition to capital revenue was recorded as a result.

The balance of payments moved into surplus in 1985 and remained so until 1990. This reflected not only strong improvements in export earnings but also significant inflows under loan and aid programmes, and private sector foreign direct investment. Net Official International Reserves rose to $130 million at the end of 1990.

Deposits and credit in the system grew sharply in this period and changed significantly in character. Whereas between 1981 and 1985 private sector deposit growth was slow, the rate of increase accelerated sharply between 1986 and 1990. Public sector deposits also grew in this period as the operations of the Social Security Board yielded substantial surpluses which were largely placed in the banking system.

On the credit side, government reduced its loans from the commercial banking system significantly after 1985. At the same time, large deposits, amounting to $23 million at the end of 1990, were held with the Central Bank.

In the area of labour and unemployment, however, there were mixed results as a significant portion of the expansion of the domestic economy bypassed local labour in favour of lower-wage migrant or immigrant labour. Migrant labour was used heavily in the expansion of citrus and banana production and replaced some labour in the sugar industry of the north. Migrant and immigrant labour was also used in the expanding construction sector. Therefore, although formal studies have not been done to affirm this assertion, there is evidence to suggest that the rapid growth experienced between 1986 and 1990 did not filter throughout the economy.

PERIOD 3:1991 to 1993 SLOWER GROWTH WITH FISCAL STIMULUS

In the early 1990's the world economy was once again in prolonged recession. In Belize, after experiencing macroeconomic instability and decline between 1981 and 1985; and stabilization and rapid growth between 1986 and 1990, the economy shifted gears again in 1991. Growth slowed and the government injected significant funds into the system to stimulate activity.

Arguably, the high rates of growth experienced between 1986 and 1990 were not sustainable and, in the medium to long term, would have resulted in rising inflation. From average growth in excess of 10% annually between 1986 and 1990, domestic production grew on average by about 5% between 1991 and 1993. In other economies, this rate of growth would have been welcome. In Belize, however, with such rapid growth rates up to 1990, the slowdown was more notable than the fact that reasonable growth rates were still being experienced.

Moderated growth was recorded in all major categories of activities. Growth in primary activities slowed from an annual average of 10% in the preceding four years to about 5% between 1991 and 1993. Among primary activities, growth in agricultural production slowed to 3%, from 7% in the previous period, reflecting the inconsistent performance of the citrus industry, as it faced fluctuating production and prices, and the effects of disease on the banana industry. The sugar industry, still the single major earner of foreign exchange, experienced stable production levels, although earnings fluctuated somewhat along with market prices. Fisheries production, however, grew consistently during the period,

averaging 18% annually as compared with 3% in the previous period. Moreover, there was a decided shift away from lobster and sea shrimps towards farmed shrimp as the major source of fisheries export earnings. In fact, by 1993, farmed shrimp had surpassed lobster tails as a foreign exchange earner.

Among secondary activities, construction and manufacturing slowed, but expansion in electricity and water supply accounted for the significant growth which occurred in the sector. Rural electrification and water supply projects undertaken by government in this period were the sources of this expansion.

Growth in the services sector slowed in this period with expansion in transport and communication being the major impetus. This development reflects the performance of the telecommunications industry as well as travel and transportation activities. Indications are that tourism arrivals continued to grow in this period although there appears to have been a slowdown in 1991 which is attributable to the slowdown in the world economy.

Notable, during this period, government operations recorded a decline in the overall surplus to about $2 million in 1991 and an overall deficit of about $50 million 1992 and $49 million in 1993.[12] On the revenue side, growth in tax revenue slowed considerably, while significant capital revenue was recorded from the second phase of the privatization of the Belize Telecommunications Limited and the first phase of the privatization of the Belize Electricity Limited. On the expenditure side, growth in wages and salaries and capital projects was high.

Government financed its deficit by drawing down on foreign funded project loans and by borrowing from the domestic financial system. External public debt totalled $318 million of 1993 and there was a decided shift away from official sources to suppliers' credit which rose from $4 million at the end of 1990 to $32 million at the end of 1993. This resulted in a significant increase in the cost of loans and in future debt servicing requirements.

There were important developments in the financial system during this period. Growth in deposits and money supply slowed for the three consecutive years of this period. With growth in private sector deposits on average increasing, the slowdown in deposit growth reflects the performance of public sector deposits as both government and Social Security Board slowed their rate of accumulation of deposits in 1992 and reduced their deposits in 1993 to finance investment and expenditure. The decline in government deposits in the commercial banks occurred, notwithstanding the shift of government deposits from the Central Bank into the commercial banking system.

On the credit side, there was significant expansion in 1991 and 1992 as credit to both the private and public sector increased. This increase, however, was weighted towards the public sector as government changed its position from that of a net lender of finances to the system [in an amount of $19 million at the end of 1990] to a net borrower of resources from the system [in an amount of $66 million at the end of 1993]. This expansion in net credit to government resulted from increased borrowing from the Central Bank and the reduction in deposits at both the Central Bank and the commercial banks.

Official International Reserves peaked in early 1991 at about $150 million. Since then, the combined effects of increased domestic financing of the fiscal deficit and the continued growth in imports has been a decline in Official Reserves to about $77 million at the end of 1993. Late in 1993, liquidity requirements in the financial system were tightened to support the International

Reserve position which has since stabilized at around $72 million.

The question we pose again is: What has changed during the 1980's and the 1990's so far? Firstly, is economic activity still based on the production of primary products? Yes, but there has been some diversification into non-traditional products and aquaculture. Secondly, is the economic base still very narrow with sugar and citrus accounting for the largest blocks of domestic production and export earnings? Is domestic food production still secondary? Yes these are both true, although there are now significant other sources of foreign exchange earnings. Thirdly, is the economy of Belize still heavily dependent on trade, with goods for consumption and for input into production being largely imported and goods produced exported? Absolutely, this is true. Fourthly, are the major exports still sold either under preferential arrangements over which Belizean producers have no control or on the world market where Belizean producers were price takers? Of course, this continues to be true.

THE CHALLENGES AS WE MOVE TOWARDS THE 21ST CENTURY

It is clear, therefore, that although Belize's export base widened somewhat during the 1980's, at the end of the decade, Belize still depended heavily on a narrowly defined group of agricultural commodities for its foreign exchange earnings. If we look at the destination of our exports, we also see that our markets are not only narrowly defined[13], but they are also heavily protected by various trading agreements which guarantee prices which are significantly higher than market prices.[14] If these preferential arrangements were removed, many of our producers would not be able to survive.

Fundamentally, therefore, although there has been significant growth in the services sector - especially tourism, finance and telecommunications; and although there has been significant diversification within agriculture, through the recovery in the production of traditional crops such as bananas and citrus and the successful introduction of non-traditional crops such as papayas, the economy of Belize remains open and vulnerable.

On the broadest level and in the long run, the economy is vulnerable to the fluctuating performance of the world economy particularly, the industrial economies, where the bulk of our exports are sold at prices our producers cannot affect and from where all of our imports come with the inflation rates of the industrial economies built in. On a narrower level and in the short run, the economy remains vulnerable to fluctuations in fiscal operations.

This is to say that, whereas, there is not much that we can do to change our relationship with the international economy in the long run, we can influence our own economic performance, both negatively and positively, by fiscal operations in the short run.

GLOBALIZATION

The real challenge to us is to successfully insert ourselves, with all our historical baggage, into a world economy caught up in a process globalization which is taking place through international financial integration and technological advancement.

As we move towards the 21st century, the global framework within which Belize operates is not to be expected to become any more favourable than it was in the early 1980' or than it is now. There is an acceleration in the development or

revitalization of regional co-operation agreements on trade such NAFTA in North America, MERCOSUR in South America, the European Single Market. Even the CARICOM Single Market is under discussion at this time.

The impetus for regionalism lies in the fact that by creating a larger area in which commodities, capital and labour circulate freely, a common market releases industry from the constraints of trade barriers and economic nationalism. Producers are better able to access cheaper inputs into production and sell to a larger market. We, therefore, need to see globalization as the process by which the "windows of opportunity" are widened beyond the limits of the national economy as producers seek greater choices in sources of labour, capital and technology, and new markets for their output.

FINANCIAL/CAPITAL MARKET DEVELOPMENT

Integration of financial markets in the developing and industrial economies is fundamental to the process of globalization. Barriers to capital movements are being dismantled as fast as they are being circumvented through the use of new and improved telecommunications technology.

At the same time there is a shift in the pattern of global financial flows towards private capital flows in the form of securities.[15] The implication is that countries in the game of attracting foreign investment need to develop their domestic capital markets in order to be able to compete for available private sector funding. It also means, however, that developing countries, as they seek investment financing through securities markets development, become increasingly vulnerable to a highly integrated capital market which facilitates rapid and frequent movements of large sums of money in search of the best returns.

TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCEMENT

The pace of technological change is boosting the pace of globalization in this era, taking the revolution in information processing to unprecedented heights. There is immediate access to information on developments around the world as they take place. Therefore the range of factors influencing decisions at the micro level is constantly widening. Production technologies and consumption patterns are being transformed ever more rapidly.

In Belize, although we are keeping up with global changes in consumption patterns, we are not necessarily keeping up on the production side and are in danger of being left further behind if we do not become more integrated in the ongoing technological revolution.

We face these challenges in a world where the dominant economic tradition has fashioned a set of policies which are often presented as the solution to our problems. These policies generally fall under the headings of "liberalizing the economy to take advantage of the efficiency of the free market forces" and "broadening the export base". Although these policies are generally rational and necessary, they have to be implemented with great care.

ECONOMIC LIBERALIZATION

At this juncture there is a general acceptance across the globe, of the "free market" as the preferred approach to socio-economic development. As we move in this direction, however, we need to ensure that the necessary conditions for the efficient

operation of the market do exist. In the language of economics, this means that there must be large numbers of buyers and sellers and free access to full information which is vital to decision-making in the market. In the absence of these conditions, the invisible hand will not work.

After more than 170 years of conventional economic wisdom that there is a net benefit to be derived from free trade, economists in the advanced industrial economies are finding that it is really not that simple. In the United States, this conclusion comes from the realization that free trade bears much of the blame for an unprecedented surge in income inequality between the most- and the least- educated halves of the U.S. work force in the 1980's.[16]

As low-paying and low-skilled jobs moved overseas, fewer high paying high skilled jobs were created. This realization has prompted policy makers to divert attention to the problem of ensuring that the benefits of free trade are more evenly spread.

BROADEN THE EXPORT BASE

We should aim to broaden the export base and increase productivity not only in agricultural production but also in the rest of the economy. Whereas in the past we seem to have been more concerned with increasing production to take advantage of protected markets, as we move into the 21st century we need to increase productivity to reduce our dependence on them. In choosing production methods we must take into consideration that Belize is not a low labour cost economy. To seek to hinge our future development on industries which require cheap labour, such as garments and free zone manufacturing and other kinds of labour intensive industries, is implicitly to assume that lower-cost labour will be imported, or that the society can bear the strain of declining living standards.

Successful broadening of the export base requires not only identifying those commodities which we can produce competitively and engaging in extensive and appropriate marketing activity; it also requires improving human resources through education and training; improving the management of human resources; and acquiring and properly utilizing the best available and appropriate technology.

Finally, we need to see development as an ongoing process of expanding opportunities within the society and of broadening choice for both producers and consumers. In addition, we need to see the economic development, which in a very fundamental sense arises from the struggle between humankind and nature, as an attempt to ensure that the society we leave for our children is at the very least as good as the one we inherited from our parents. §

Notes

1. These themes are well developed in Bolland, 1971, Bolland and Shoman, 1971 and Barnett 1992.

2. See, for example:Pim, 1934, *British Honduras Financial and Economic Position*, pp. 126-127;Wright et. al, 1959, *Land in British Honduras, Report of the British Honduras Land Use Survey Team*, pp. 262-265;Durrant, 1965, *A Development Plan for British Honduras*, pp. 2-4;Economic Commission on Latin America, 1975, *Basic Issues of Belize's Agricultural Development Policy*, pp. 1-3.

3. The 1917 Agricultural Commission, for example, was established during war-induced scarcity, to investigate the possibility of increasing domestic food production. This Commission found that "the scarcity of Foodstuffs (sic) growing in the colony has existed for many years" and that "the inhabitants have been and are dependent for the major portion of their foodstuffs on imported articles". Report of Agricultural Commission, 1917.

4. "The supply of agricultural labour is exceedingly inadequate to meet the demand" ... "The planting interest is not sufficiently strong to continue for the purpose of importing labour and the wood-cutting interests do not care to encourage planting in the absorption of the labour of the colony in such a capacity". 1888 Handbook p. 197-8.
5. Department of Agriculture, *Sugar Cane Production in British Honduras, 1960-1964.*
6. Consultants Report, Keller, Arthur G., *The Sugar Industry of Belize and Its Investment Potentialities.*
7. Tate and Lyle, built its first sugar factory in Belize and acquired large land holdings for the planting of cane to supply a significant portion of its needs. In a little over a decade, this company stopped growing sugarcane, which it found to be unprofitable.
8. The Colonial Development Corporation disposed of its orchards in the 1950's to one of the two companies which grew to dominate the citrus industry. Colonial Secretariat, *Colonial Development Corporation of British Honduras, 1955.*
9. While the extension service provided by the Agriculture Department may be cited as an exception, the limited budget of the Department constrained its contribution. *Report of Progress in the Development and Welfare of British Honduras, 1948-1954,pp. 6-10.*
10. Domestic production is defined as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at factor cost in constant 1984 prices. The source of the data is the Central Statistical Office, Government of Belize.
11. The overall deficit excludes Capital III projects which are funded by foreign loans and grants.
12. Government's fiscal year runs from April to March, although the analysis can be done, as it is here, on a calendar year basis. On a fiscal year basis, an overall deficit was recorded in fiscal years 1991/92 and 1992/93. An overall deficit is also expected to be recorded in 1993/94.
13. Over 80% of domestic exports go to the United States and the United Kingdom.
14. In 1990, for example, it is estimated the average price per ton of sugar sold to the US under quota arrangements was 1.6 times higher
than the US market price while the price per ton sold to the UK/EEC under the ACP-EEC Lome Convention arrangements were 1.5 times higher than the world market price.
15. International Monetary Fund, "Determinants and Systemic Consequences of International Capital Flows", *Occasional Paper 77,* March 1991.
16. *Business Week* August 10, 1992.

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ABORTION, FAMILY LIFE, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN BELIZE

"I don't want it, Beka. I don't want it. . . . All I want now is to graduate. Aunt Eila works too hard."
"I'll help you if it's a baby, Toycie. We'll live together when I leave school and raise it as best we can, and if it's a girl, we'll explain everything carefully about everything so that her life doesn't break down that way. And if it's a boy, we'll do the same (Edgell 1982:109)."

By Gary Chamberlain

In this poignant scene from her internationally acclaimed novel, *Beka Lamb,* Lee Edgell etches the inescapable tragedy surrounding teenager Beka Lamb and her closest friend, Toycie, fearful of a possible pregnancy. In a hint of what is to come, Toycie comes to symbolize the plight of many young Belizean women whose lives "break down" once pregnant and unmarried. Forced to leave high school and thus leave behind the only means to future economic security, Toycie has her child and over a period of time "breaks down" emotionally, physically, and psychologically. In this and in her subsequent novel, *In Times Like These,* Edgell describes in story form the struggles of Belizean women who must make difficult choices about abortion, family, men, and economic security in this third world country.

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Against the backdrop of a country which struggled for its political independence and is now struggling for its economic independence, Edgell sketches the struggles of Belizean women for independence from the dominating power of men and from a socio-economic system which maintains them in subordinate positions.

These powerful stories reflect the intersection of family life, abortion, contraception and other population issues with concerns for economic development, security, and independence. With its political stability and democratic form of government, its high fertility rate but small population and low population density, and its rich ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity Belize offers an excellent opportunity to study the interplay of socioeconomic, political, ethnic, cultural, and religious forces in discerning a moral and ethical basis for personal decision-making and public policy on family life issues, economic development, and the status of women.

I first visited Belize, a British colony at the time, in the summer of 1962 in the wake of Hurricane Hattie. After an absence of 30 years, I returned in spring, 1993, to study

issues of family life, abortion, and contraception and the relationship of the Roman Catholic Church to these critical questions. In addition to an examination of written analyses, studies, and other literature, I undertook a series of open-ended interviews with doctors, nurses, public health officials, teachers, government ministers, clergy and ministers, religious representatives, private citizens, and Belizean and foreign representatives of non-governmental organizations. The study of abortion in Belize by Manuela Lue and Sarah Hobbs in the May, 1992, issue of *Belizean Studies* was very helpful in this discussion. I am attempting to update and broaden their work. In these materials and interviews it quickly became obvious that these specific concerns were intimately related to the economic struggles of the country as a whole and to the struggles of Belizean women for economic and social justice in their own country.

The Constitution of Belize itself incorporates much of the influence of the Roman Catholic Church's teachings on social and economic justice. The principles involved in those teachings provide a helpful tool in the discussion of the more specific issues of family life. In particular, in its long tradition of social thought, the Church has found itself, in the words of Pope Paul VI in his 1967 document "On the Development of Peoples," arguing that "development is the new name for peace." Based upon the principle of the inherent dignity of each person, a just society can be measured in specific terms:

> Freedom from misery; the greater assurance of finding subsistence, health and fixed employment; an increased share of responsibility without oppression of any kind and in security from situations that do violence to their dignity as persons; better education--in brief, to seek to do more, know more and have more in order to be more: that is what people aspire to now when a greater number of them are condemned to live in conditions that make this lawful desire illusory. Besides, peoples who have recently gained national independence experience the need to add to this political freedom a fitting autonomous growth, social as well as economic, in order to assure their citizens of a full human enhancement and to take their rightful place with other nations (Paul VI:314-15).

Likewise the Belize Constitution assures its citizens of full economic rights and participation in the goods of the country. Based upon principles of social justice, the Constitution stipulates among a number of provisions:

> that the operation of the economic system must result in the material resources of the community being so distributed as to subserve the common good,that a just system should be ensured to provide for education and health on the basis of equality.

These principles then require policies which among other things "eliminate economic and social privilege and disparity among the citizens of Belize whether by race, colour, creed or sex." These principles in turn inform the discussion to follow.

Based on these principles of distributive and social justice outlined in Catholic social teachings and the Belize Constitution the thesis of this study is that the situation of Belize requires a Christian ethic surrounding family life issues which respects and dialogues with the divergent cultures of the country to ensure release from stifling poverty and to secure enough basic goods to provide

humanly for people and their families. In this context abortion often, although not exclusively, is the result of cultural and economic practices and policies which can be transformed through the economic and political empowerment of Belizean women. Thus before we move to moral judgments about family life, contraception, and abortion in Belize, we must understand the social ethos of values, attitudes, and practices which surround these complex issues.

BACKGROUND

Belize has such a small population, 189,392 people in 1990, and low density ratio of 21.1 per square mile that population problems are not a major issue. On the other hand the Total Fertility Rate is a high 4.5; 44% of the population is under 14; a great deal of work is seasonal, and thus unemployment in 1990 stood at 14%;emigration in 1991 alone involved over 3000 people, 55% of whom were between the ages of 15 and 24. In spite of its high fertility rate and almost universal education through eighth grade, Belize does not follow the dominant pattern in which high literacy correlates with lower fertility rates. Especially for adolescent women ages 15-19, Belize has the highest fertility rate, 137 births for every 1000 women, of any country in Latin America and the Caribbean after El Salvador and Guatemala. The population is expected to double in the next 26 years (1991 *Family Health Survey*:1; 1991 Population Survey:1-3, 14-15; "Teenage Births," 1993:4). In light of these conditions, the country is already feeling the strains of population pressures upon its economic vitality, especially in relation to the role and place of women. Joseph Palacio's recent article in *Belizean Studies* (May, 1993), "Social and Cultural Implications of Recent Demographic Changes in Belize," underscores many of the changes mentioned above with particular emphasis upon high fertility, high emigration, and high immigration rates.

Belize's rich cultural and ethnic diversity and its colonial history directly impact discussions of family life and abortion. Currently the Creole population is 29.8% of the total in 1990, down from 40% in 1980. On the other hand, due to recent immigration of some 15,000 to 20,000 people during the 1980's from Guatemala, El Salvador, and Honduras, the generally rural, Spanish speaking mestizo population is now the major population group with 43.6%, up from 33.4% in 1980. Maya/Kekchi in the north and south constitute 11.3% of the population, and the Garifuna 6.6% (*1991 Population Census*: 36). The cultural differences among these ethnic groups with different family structures and patterns of association add greater complexity to the beliefs and practices surrounding family life, contraception, and abortion, which in turn shape and are shaped by the continuing economic dependence and insecurity of women in Belize.

Religion cuts across ethnic lines. Fifty-eight percent of the population are Roman Catholic. By ethnic group, however, religion reflects patterns of colonization and immigration. Thus 60% of Creoles are Protestant, while over 90% of mestizos are Roman Catholic. The majority of Garifuna are Catholic, as are a majority of the Maya/Kekchi (*1991 Population Census:* 40). Finally, the Catholic Church extends its influence through the elementary school system and its private high schools, as well as St. John's College.

The major influence, however, in shaping the cultural and social ethos of Belize lies in its colonial history. Although the Spanish attempted to develop settlements in the 17th century, British logwood cutters set the pattern for the colonization of Belize. The

Different perspectives on family reflect an important factor in the discussion and assessment of the social and moral questions of family life, contraception, abortion, and economic independence and security in Belize.

Baymen soon begin to utilize the labor of African slaves, and over time sexual relations between masters and slaves in a plantation economy gave rise to the "mixed" race Creole. Slavery was no less oppressive in Belize than elsewhere. As historian O. Nigel Bolland notes, "the slaves' own actions, including suicide, **abortion**, murder, escape and revolt, suggest how they viewed slavery." Slaves could escape easily "if they were willing to leave their families (Bolland 1986:16-17)."

But after emancipation in 1838, the separation of families which had characterized the slave life of the 18th century when the men were sent off to the logging camps continued into the 19th century when logging, now of mahogany trees, continued as the country's principle export. Thus, the colonial patterns of broken families and corresponding isolation of men from family and family responsibilities and the dependence of women upon men for economic assistance in exchange for sex remain to this day, especially among the Creole descendants of the slave population.

FAMILY STRUCTURE IN BELIZE

Different perspectives on family reflect an important factor in the discussion and assessment of the social and moral questions of family life, contraception, abortion, and economic independence and security in Belize. Thus Mayan populations are characterized by relative isolation, self-sufficiency, lower educational levels and fewer opportunities for high school education, and traditional family life with roles of child-rearing and household work assigned to the woman. The Total Fertility Rate is highest among Mayan women. Parental authority is strong, and abortion and to a lesser extent contraception find little receptivity, although interest among Mayan women in contraception is increasing. The ethos of family life and their Roman Catholicism support large families and low divorce rates.

Mestizo culture reflects a similar pattern, although a large number of Mestizo have become a significant part of Belize's middle class and have moved to urban areas where they are influenced by the urban, Creole culture. The majority, rural Mestizo people continue a traditional pattern of many children in intact families as seen in the statistics for higher fertility rates, lower educational levels, low divorce rates, fewer women in the work force, especially in rural areas, and high currently married rates. Although Mestizo women report using contraception at twice the rate of Mayan women, the predominant method is female sterilization used by older women after a mean number of 5 children (*1991 Population*

Census:19; 1991 Family Health Survey: Tables 5-20).

Creoles and Garifuna reflect Caribbean patterns of family life with extended family networks where responsibility for rearing children is widely shared. In addition to legal marriages, common law and "visiting" relationships are prominent. In the latter men who move around from job to job or perhaps have no job visit a woman from time to time, have a child by her and then move on again.

A strong community and kin relationships support the nurture of children and provides security for the mother, especially among the Garifuna, who did not experience the traumatic breakup and separation of families during slavery as did the Creole. However, young women with children often find themselves in an economic struggle and in exchange for sex will find men temporarily who bring some stability and security into their lives. Among the middle class, "sweetheart" arrangements whereby married men secure mistresses provide these women with a greater measure of stability.

Like their counterparts in the Caribbean, the Creoles of Belize tend to encompass extended networks of aunts, uncles, grandparents, and cousins; relatives share in child care. Marriage is considered an event that may or may not take place later in life. Furthermore, attitudes about sexuality greatly influence family structure:

> Sexual intercourse is considered to be a normal and expected activity for both men and women (the lack of which can lead to illness and even insanity); therefore the definition of maturity includes sexual intercourse. . . . Further development of sexual maturation leads to parenthood, symbolic of maturity for women and virility for men (Smith 1988:137).

Regardless of parentage, adult members of households take care of children, and fathers may contribute to the financial support of children even though they do not live with them.

These differing senses of family, marriage, and legitimacy, then, combined with practices which reinforce them, provide a social ethos surrounding family structure which greatly affects the practices of contraception and abortion, patterns of social and economic security, and their social and moral assessment. However, when the kin-ship ties supporting extended families tend to break, when economic uncertainty and insecurity demand that women enter the work force in greater numbers, when large numbers of young people emigrate out of the country, when pregnancy rates for teens are on the rise and increasing numbers of teens are sexually active, when violence and sexual molestation in families continue, when 31% of urban households are headed by women (Perdomo 1993; "Tackling Rural Poverty" 1992:16), then it would seem that issues of family structure in Belize are related to the economic dependence of women and to children's and women's health and choices about family life, choices which involve moral values of equity, fair treatment, bodily integrity, and just distribution of resources. In this way family life, contraception, and abortion in Belize are strongly related to women's health and development.

CONTRACEPTION

Knowledge of contraception is high. According to the Belize Family Health Survey(1991) some 95% of women age 15-44 years had knowledge of at least one modern method. The most well known were oral contraceptives (93.1%), female sterilization (87.7%),

injectibles such as Depoprovera and Norristrat (85.8%) and condoms (81.7%), while the least known included diaphragms, withdrawal, and the Billings method. Contraceptive knowledge was lowest among women with less education, rural women, and women from the Maya/Kekchi groups.

Among all women aged 15-44 in the national survey, 33.5% were currently using some contraceptive method, with the highest usage among urban women who had finished primary education. Among the 63% of the women who were married or in a consensual (common law) union 46.7% used contraceptives, and their most popular form was female sterilization (40%) followed by oral contraceptives (32%), injection (9%), the rhythm/Billings methods (5.3%), and finally with very low usage reported, condoms and IUDs (4% each). These rates are comparable to other Central American and Caribbean nations.

The major reasons given for contraceptive usage were to space children and to limit family size, followed by financial pressures. Not surprisingly, usage increases with age and number of children; the mean age and mean number of children of first contraceptive usage are 27.9 years and 3.8 children. Only 4% of women surveyed felt that the number of children should be "left up to God," although this number increased to 17% among the Maya/Kekchi. Finally, in view of the Roman Catholic Church's strong opposition to forms of birth control other than rhythm and the Billings methods, it is interesting to note that less than one percent of those NOT using contraception gave religious beliefs as reason for non-use.

There is little difference in contraceptive use between Protestants and Catholics, even among the methods used. In fact, Roman Catholics showed a slightly lower use of the rhythm/Billings methods and a slightly higher use of female sterilization. However, there is a significant difference in timing: while Protestants, primarily urban Creoles, begin first use of contraceptives at age 22-23 and after 3 children, Roman Catholics, primarily Mestizos and Mayans, postpone first usage until 28-29 years and 4-5 children (*1991 Family Health Survey:* Tables 5:1-12, 22; 2-3, 24-25).

What is significant at this point in the discussion is the predominance of modern methods of birth control in this largely Roman Catholic country, and the small use of condoms or rhythms/Billings methods. Secondly, the religious teachings about birth control of the Roman Catholic Church appear to have most influence among mestizo and Mayan women.

ABORTION

The abortion laws state quite clearly that abortion is illegal: "Every person who intentionally and unlawfully causes abortion or miscarriage shall be liable to imprisonment for fourteen years." Every woman with intent to procure her own miscarriage and every person who unlawfully administers any poison or uses any instrument with the like intent "shall be guilty of a felony and being convicted thereof shall be liable to imprisonment for life." However, the law does provide for exceptions, namely, in the cases of:

> (a) risk to the life of the pregnant woman, or injury to the physical or mental health of the pregnant woman or existing children of her family, greater than if pregnancy were terminated, or (b) substantial risk that if the child were born it would suffer from such physical or mental abnormalities as to be seriously handicapped (Dickens 1980: 50-51)

The very illegality of abortion in Belize makes it impossible to ascertain accurate information. What statistics are available are confusing. Thus Lue and Hobbs in their 1992 study on abortion in Belize use government medical statistics to show that in 1987, for example, there were 879 "abortions" for 6,775 live births or a ratio of 1 out of 7.7, and in 1989, 825 "abortions" for 6,154 live births, 1 out of 7.5. That compares with 1 reported abortion for 2.7 live births in the US in 1988 (Lue and Hobbs 1992:22; *World Almanac*: 761).

However, in government statistics "abortions" refers to miscarriages as well as any legally procured abortions which take place in hospitals or clinics. On the other hand, illegal abortions are known by health authorities to take place in much greater numbers, and in Belize City the name and clinic of a major abortion practitioner are well known to city authorities, health officials, and prospective clients. There are other complicating factors: 1) a variety of people perform illegal abortions, including nurses; 2) some women have the option of obtaining abortions in the United States or in neighboring countries; 3) the actual reason for admission to a hospital or clinic for an early abortion may not be the stated reason. Health officials and others fear that the very illegality of abortion and therefore its clandestine nature lead to serious health problems for the woman and the foetus. A 1990 study of maternal deaths over a ten-year period did show that none of the deaths were attributed to abortion (Roberts, 1993).

In spite of the lack of information, the small survey by Lue and Hobbs of 40 residents of Belize City and Belmopan, and of another 21 legal, medical, and religious professionals provides some perspectives. Fully ninety-three percent of the respondents agreed that teenagers are the most common recipients of abortion. Eighty-three percent felt that abortion should be allowed in such cases as rape, incest, and threat to the mother's life, while eighty-one percent thought that abortion should remain illegal. The reasons given for abortion coincide with what this author found from other sources: in addition to unwanted teenage pregnancy, the "social stigma of having children out of wedlock, the financial burden of an added child particularly in single-parent homes, and termination of pregnancies which result from rape or incest (Lue and Hobbs: 22, 24)."

Abortion among teenagers is not surprising. Partly because of the high costs of schooling only 55% of teens start high school in Belize, but only 60% of those teens complete their secondary education (Cayetano 1992: 161). Thus a considerable number remain at home. The lack of employment opportunities, however, leaves both male and female teens with a great deal of time on their hands. Sexual activity is often one of the teen activities, a proof of virility for the boys while any consequent pregnancy is proof of womanhood for the girls. Furthermore, given the poverty of many families and the instability of some parental unions, many teens may go without basic necessities and security. Thus in return for sex a young girl can often obtain security, a safe place to stay, clothes, and food, particularly if the man is older and perhaps married. Then, if pregnant, a young girl may well resort to abortion rather than burden her family with another child. Adoption is not an acceptable alternative, primarily because kinship systems are dominant; nor is there yet an adoption program in place (Middleton 1993).

For those teens in high school, the situation is even more burdensome. With one exception, all high schools in Belize require a pregnant girl to quit her education; she may

not return. For young girls hoping an education will provide future economic security, expulsion would be a crushing blow. Abortion may seem the only solution. Such is Toycie's dilemma. In a historic irony, the school which Toycie attended in *Beka Lamb* now allows pregnant girls to finish their education, St. Catherine's Academy. In 1973 the Sisters of Mercy decided that these girls, who were largely from poor, single-parent families, needed their education. Mindful that the boys who were in relationship are not expelled nor disciplined and that from a religious perspective promiscuity, not pregnancy, is the sin, the Sisters allow a pregnant girl to complete her education. In follow-up studies, the vast majority of the pregnant girls finish high school, go on to college or a junior college, marry and are doing well (Lawrence 1993).

In addition to the health complications of a teen pregnancy, and perhaps abortion, "teenage mother are seven times as likely to be poor than mothers in their twenties, and their average income is half as much." Unemployment figures for female teenagers are already high, and pregnancy rates are highest among low income teenagers. Thus it is likely that a teen mother, unable to provide basic health and education for a child, "will perpetuate a pattern of poverty in which her child becomes an adolescent parent (BFLA 1992:4)."

GOVERNMENT, FAMILY LIFE, AND ABORTION

The only official family life program sponsored directly by the government is its support of one woman, a Roman Catholic nun, Sr. Mary Paul, who explains NFP techniques to small groups all over the country (Paul 1993). The government does allow Non-Governmental Organizations to provide information, examinations, and modern methods of birth control. And although abortion is illegal, no one has been prosecuted for performing or for obtaining an abortion.

The government has initiated sex education programs through the elementary schools, beginning in 4th grade, and most secondary schools also offer some form of sex education classes. The newly formed Department of Women's Affairs and a number of private organizations and NGO's such has Belize Family Life Association, Breast Is Best League, and the Council of Churches offer programs in child development, skill building and assertiveness training, as well as specific programs in vocational training for teen girls and women with families. In addition, BOWAND (Belize Organization for Women and Development) works with urban women to develop skills in job search, public speaking, and economic literacy (Middleton, Zetina, Flowers 1993).

The basis for a holistic approach to family life and women's development lies in the *National Policy Statement on Women*, issued by the Belize Government on March 3, 1992. In this remarkable document, the government recognizes that women do not benefit equitably from the development process and that "women's concerns and interests are seldom integrated in development policies and strategies." The document then states that "National policies must protect women's rights with regard to child-bearing and family life."

In addition to programs for affordable child care, breast feeding, maternal health service, and support services and shelters for women victims of violence, the government pledges to "protect the rights of women and girls to keep and/or continue their education and/or job during pregnancy, and will favor continuing education approaches for women

whose training and/or employment is disrupted by pregnancy (*National Policy Statement* 1993:4-9)," a policy which could help reduce teen pregnancies.

What is noteworthy in the document for this discussion is the connections made between family life and economic development for women as well as support for a variety of measures to ensure women's ability to choose appropriate forms of family life and to provide the resources to implement those choices.

THE ROMAN CATHOLIC CHURCH

The Church's opposition to any form of contraception other than natural family planning or the Billings methods is well known and was made clear when the Belize Family Life Association opened its offices in 1985 with the assistance of USAID and the International Planned Parenthood Association. In a pastoral letter to all Catholics on May 25, 1986, Bishop O. P. Martin stated that "artificial" birth control violates the "natural power of procreating life" and thus "violates the law of God and of nature." Importantly, Bishop Martin does acknowledge that the spacing and limiting of births is a part of Christian family life and thus a matter of choice. He then links the use of contraceptives in a "contraceptive society" to an increase in "prostitution, fornication, irresponsible approach to sex, infidelity, a total disregard for responsible parenthood, decreased standards of morality, and detrimental physical and psychological deterioration in the life of contraceptive victims." Finally, the Bishop declares that the availability of contraceptives in Belize is "blatant evidence of first world countries fabricating dehumanizing techniques to be applied on the humans of the first world (Martin 1986: 2-3)."

The Bishop's pastoral letter does argue for the importance of sexual responsibility. At the same time the church could continue to examine existing social, economic, and personal issues surrounding family structure, health, and choice in Belize. In particular, this means continuing the struggle with the questions surrounding teen pregnancy, the dangers of illegal abortions, rising numbers of single parent families, and women's health, social status and economic development.

Addressing the issue of abortion a year later in 1986, the Bishop wrote that human life begins at conception and therefore, "any violence. . .in favor of contraception or, even worse, of sterilization and procured abortion must be altogether condemned and forcefully rejected (in Lue and Hobbs: 24)." The statement reflects the Bishop's awareness that sterilization is a prominent form of contraception in Belize, but in linking contraception, and especially sterilization, with abortion the Bishop bypasses important distinctions necessary in the conversation for a moral analysis of these difficult situations.

THE CHURCH AS RESOURCE

With its influential position, its human resources, and its control over the elementary schools, the Roman Catholic Church is in a favourable position to support efforts for improvement in women's health and economic development. At the very least, the Church could commit further resources to NFP education, coordinate a comprehensive sex education program, and increase its commitment and resources to marriage preparation courses. Finally, the Church could initiate an adoption program as an option for women in troubled pregnancies.

With one policy, the Church could eliminate one of the major causes of abortions

among teenage girls, namely, allow pregnant girls to continue with their education and graduate from high school, the key to economic vitality for women. In addition, by strengthening its comprehensive education programs the Church could further address issues of abuse in families while continuing to address even more forcefully the concerns for the health of women, children, and families and the economic needs of women. In this manner the Church can make important alliances with groups such as BOWAND in developing programs for economic security for women.

The apparent contradiction between adherence to Church teaching on sexuality and actual practice lies in the complex web of attitudes and ideas that sexual activity is still a proof of virility, pregnancy still a proof of womanhood, and children an economic asset.

One of the major factors which challenge the economic growth of Belize lies in certain attitudes and practices surrounding family life and sexuality. Teachings on the equal partnership of married life, the role of "spacing" in family life, and with the advent of social security the decreased reliance upon children for security in old age could assist in helping families produce greater economic security for all members and reduce the stresses of family life connected with caring for large numbers of children.

In case of common law and "visiting" relationships, the post-independence Church has appreciated and recognized the strengths as well as the problems of these patterns, especially of kinship arrangements in the care of children. In these cases, the Church can develop programs and support already existing programs which help women build economic security, which teach men and women, fathers and mothers, skills in conflict resolution and ways to strengthen family life, and which address abuse and alcoholism as health issues. As Belize struggles with these difficult problems, the Church has a strong role to play with the development of positive programs about sexuality and married life along with the concerns for women's economic security and health.

SUMMARY

Throughout this study it seems evident that in the past Western actors, in particular the Roman Catholic Church and a colonial regime, had not sufficiently understood and been enculturated by Caribbean cultures:

> At present the Church [in Belize] has only an European model against which to measure non-western identity and practice. The existing model is based upon the Christianization of Europe and the subsequent Europeanization of Christianity...The job is now daily more and more to Belizeanize our Christianity (Hunter 1988: 11).

It is precisely at the present time that the Belize Church is poised to "Belizeanize Christianity." Under Bishop O. P. Martin, a Garifuna, Belizean priests, women religious and increasingly more active lay leaders, the Church of Belize more and more reflects the rich diversity of ethnic cultures in Belize. Although foreign priests and religious still provide important resources for the Church, they are now in much more of a supportive role. As recent Church national assemblies have shown, the post-independence Church shows more promise of addressing the complex issues of family life in Belize. These same dynamics and challenges of inculturation face the Church around the globe, not only in Africa, Asia, Latin America but even in different ways in the United States and Europe as well.

Another serious challenge arises from the Church's ability to incorporate the different meanings attached to sexuality in Belize. As Stephanie Kane comments in her studies of prostitution in Belize, ". . . to understand sexual practices in cultural context. . . analysis must recognize the different meanings that sex may have." Thus the sexual patterns in Mayan villages where sexuality is controlled by elders according to kinship and age categories differ significantly from Creole urban practices. As a warning, Dr. Kane notes that if cultural patterns of sexuality "are not conceptualized within a dynamic field of cultural contestation wherein ideals and practices are superimposed, contrasted, shifting in time and context, reciprocally structured and perhaps paradoxical, our knowledge, albeit quantifiable, shrinks from social reality toward measurements empty of human experience (Kane 1991: 122-23)."

The very ethnic and cultural diversity of Belize demands a careful examination of the body of beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors which form the cultural assumptions of each group and their commonalities and differences in the area of practical actions. Thus the varied colonial histories of the many cultural groups in Belize give rise to meanings attached to sexuality, family, and marriage with different weights in the assessment of moral behaviour. Raymond Smith's study of Caribbean societies noted the dissemination by churches rooted in their European origins, and in this context especially the Roman Catholic Church, of an assumption that a "normal family consists of a legally married couple and their legitimate offspring sharing a common home." Then, later American Catholic missionaries added their understanding of sexuality and marriage in middle-class life of the United States.

The apparent contradiction between adherence to Church teaching on sexuality and actual practice lies in the complex web of attitudes and ideas that sexual activity is still a proof of virility, pregnancy still a proof of womanhood, and children an economic asset. Marriages, especially legal marriage, are for later in life, and are usually equated with "being a Christian, leading a straight life, and submitting to control." Before that, a man can lead a sweetheart life and still retain the "freedom to come and go as he pleases, to be out on the street with his friends, and to have other women (Smith 1988: 41, 116)."

Although such a pattern has problematic implications for women and children especially, Smith argues that it is not an anomic structure, and in fact its highly structured nature leads to its continued vitality and resistance to the ideal pattern approved by the Church. An adequate social ethic would examine and affirm the strengths of these patterns which emerge in bits and pieces from daily life as morally good and support those factors which provide for the welfare and social good of those involved.

At the same time a critical dialogue among Creole and Garifuna people and church leaders would continue to lay the basis for an ethic which challenges the kinship pattern, and indeed any family pattern, in which physical and emotional abuse, alcoholism, economic hardship, financial insecurity, and limited family resources helped foster the continued subordination of women with children and worsened conditions of daily life. Such a religious ethic would support the full equality of women, empower women in education and work, embrace the health, beauty, and passion of sexual relationships, challenge male attitudes toward sex as merely pleasure, support responsible fathering, and foster the place of intimacy as the core of marriage and marital happiness.

On the other hand, among Mayan/Kekchi and Mestizo peoples the Church had long fostered an ethic of married life which included large numbers of children and subordinate roles for women as home-makers and child-rearers. That too is changing. In his pastoral letter Bishop Martin emphasizes the place for decisions about family spacing and limitation of children, and current Roman Catholic teachings on marriage foster a more supportive reflection on the joys of sexuality and communication in married life. An adequate Christian sexual ethic will support a view of sexuality and married life in which women and men are equal and can plan for a financially secure family.

Finally given the large segment of the population under 14 and the rising teenage pregnancy rate, with consequent high abortion rates of one out of every 30-35 teenage girls according to a BOWAND report, the Church's response can continue to explore the various meanings of sexuality among different ethnic groups and help develop the bases for greater understanding of the physical and emotional development of teens through comprehensive sex education classes and programs. Finally, an adequate sexual and social ethic would examine the relationships among issues of women's and children's health, economic development, and the empowerment of women in society. In the dynamic society of Belize today, many of the main actors in the largely inchoate development of such an ethic are Belizean women who organize and operate the many powerful NGO's around women's health, abuse issues, and women's economic development.

CONCLUSION

Christianity offers a view of the full dignity of the human person and of all persons which can respond to the needs of contemporary societies throughout the world. In the case of Belize, we have examined the difficulties in articulating and carrying out a sexual and social ethic adequate to pressing questions of family life, sexuality, contra-ception and abortion. In the recent past those difficulties had arisen in large part from the lack of a real dialogue with the cultures in which Christianity found itself. The result was often that in its Roman Catholic form, the Christian ethic had not gathered the insights and understandings which these cultures offer, such as kinship families, understandings which are not only compatible with basic Christian insights but could complement those insights in new ways. Secondly, often enough the abstract, formalist rigidity of such an ethic prevented its use in the prudent flexibility needed in the moral life. Today, the Church in Belize shows a vitality in its pastoral practices which gives evidence of such prudence in daily life. Also, the Church's challenging social teachings on economic development could serve as a basis for further relationships with women's groups

such as BOWAND which is struggling for greater security and development for women.

In my concluding remarks I have suggested some key issues which play an important part in a Christian ethic responsive to the dynamics of Belize today. Finally I would hope that the discussion has not only provided a critical comment upon the situation in Belize but can help create a Christian perspective which will join with other forces in society to bring about needed social justice for all, especially women, a more vibrant family life, and a decline in the use of and need for abortion. §

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HISTORICAL NARRATIVES AND THE INTERPRETATION OF BELIZEAN HISTORY

By Sarah Woodbury Haug

When listening to two different people describe an event that they have witnessed it is always interesting to hear their different perceptions of what occurred. The descriptions will almost always be slightly different from one another. This reality, although recognized when personal histories are recalled, has been all but ignored or discounted when official histories are written by authors who want to render a factual and truthful account of the past. More recently, scholars have begun to recognize that in history, as in all other disciplines, from physics to anthropology, it is as difficult to delineate the "truth" in an account, as it is to separate any rendering of history from the context in which it is written. As a means of explicating this point, I have drawn upon three works about Belize: Algar Gregg's *British Honduras*, O. Nigel Bolland's *Formation of a Colonial Society*, and Zee Edgell's *Beka Lamb*. The first two works are traditional historical narratives, and the third is a novel about a young girl in Belize City.

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Each book presents a different interpretation of Belizean history. I intend to demonstrate, in this paper, how a history is understood, interpreted, and used (or manipulated) by authors for different ends in their historical narratives, depending upon who is doing the narration. These comparisons illustrate that histories are neither "fact" nor "fiction," only interpretation, and that particular histories do not have exclusive access to "truth" or "reality". History is an ongoing process through which we attempt to understand and learn from the past.[1]

The purpose of a narrative, to a great extent, is to tell a story. The creation of a narrative also is a means of organizing reality such that it seems coherent to the narrator and the recipient of the narration. Historical narratives are stories about history that organize the past in order to make sense of it.[2] Historical narratives describe "events" and as with other storytelling occasions, one must grasp who is narrating, who is the audience, and what is the purpose of the narration in order to understand them (Georges 1969:316). Ana Alonso (1986:33), an anthropologist, maintains that historical narratives are central to the symbolic constitution of social groups and social identities. In other words, histories have a

social meaning and historical narratives are driven by present understandings and needs What is said, and how something is said, is never without purpose.

The works presented in this paper are of two types. The first is a traditional history, presenting dates and facts in an objective style, and the second is a novel, which relates historical events through the lives and thoughts of fictional characters. In the first type, when the author orders history chronologically, he "creates the illusion of unmediated reality" (Alonso 1986:36). In histories such as Gregg's and Bolland's, not only do preconceived criteria determine how the book is written, but cultural structures of expectation also influence what is viewed as tellable (Toolan 1988:164-65). In the thinking of the authors of traditional historical narratives, the goal of writing is to delineate the facts and the truth, and whatever cannot be (in their minds) adequately substantiated by "fact" has no place: Histories are facts; and novels, such as Edgell's *Beka Lamb* are fictions. Addressing this artificial distinction, Alonso writes:

> Representations of the past, whether professional or popular, printed or spoken, are defined as specific sorts of performances of texts through a series of framing devices. The way such reconstructions are framed configure their truth value by bringing into play the ideologically constituted status of different forms of knowledge. For example, since Balzac's studies of French society in the nineteenth century are framed as novels, they have a different truth value from that accorded to scholarly treatises on the same subject which are framed as histories. This is because in Western society, histories are conceived as being about 'facts' and novels about 'fictions'. Thus Balzac's account is viewed as being less factual than that of our imaginary historian who has ransacked the archives for data and amply footnoted his text . . .
> [Alonso 1986:35]

Thus, the historical narratives by British or American authors operating under this academic paradigm, such as Gregg and Bolland, are influenced by a set of typically Western cultural assumptions about how histories should be written. Authors must choose what they feel is important enough to include in this history, and what they care to leave out. In the course of this decision and in writing down history, they reduce the multiplicity of actors and voices in their data to one -- that of their own authoritative narration. In contrast, in Edgell's novel, the numerous identities and voices are given a place, and are crucial to her relating of history. Unlike in histories, novels by definition contain contested meanings, based on their heteroglossia.[3] In support of this view, Bakhtin writes, "It is precisely [this type of narration] that defines the utterly distinctive orientation of discourse in the novel--an orientation that is contested, contestable and contesting--for this discourse cannot forget or ignore, either through naiveté or by design, the heteroglossia that surrounds it" (1981:332). I do not deny the importance and validity of traditional historical works which attempt to portray Belizean history--or any history--clearly and concisely, but it is my position that relegating works such as Edgell's to the status of "fiction", and thus discounting their historical merit, is truly an error.

GREGG'S TRUTH

Algar Gregg wrote *British Honduras* as part of a project initiated by the British Colonial Office to provide information about British colonies to Englishmen. The books in the

"Corona Library" are intended "to be authoritative and readable, and to give a vivid yet accurate picture" (v). A foreword by Winston Churchill (writing in 1956) opens the book and I suspect it fully characterizes the attitude of the author and the publishers towards the book. Churchill begins by stating:

> Not since the days of the Roman Empire has a single nation carried so great a responsibility for the lives of men and woman born outside her shores as Great Britain does today. Within her forty or so dependent territories dwell eighty million people for whose welfare and enlightenment Britain is, to a greater or lesser degree, answerable.

In the eyes of Churchill, many critics have improperly belittled Britain's colonial "achievement" and its motives for maintaining ownership of colonies. Churchill invites these people to "look where you will, you will find that the British have ended wars, put a stop to savage customs, opened churches, schools, and hospitals, built railways, roads and harbours, and developed the natural resources of the countries so as to mitigate the almost universal, desperate poverty". He hopes that the books of the Corona Library series, of which *British Honduras* is one will "do even a little to clear away the clouds of misunderstandings and prejudice that have gathered round the very idea of colonial government".

Gregg's rendering of Belizean history is essentially the story of the British occupation of Belize as the British wanted it told at that time. He begins his account with a discussion of the origin of the name "Belize," for which he presents a number of alternatives based on accumulated evidence. This is followed by an account of the first Englishmen in the colony (Gregg 1968:7). History here effectively begins around 1650, when the first British people arrived. Gregg then details some important landmarks in Belizean history. He discusses a number of topics, including: the English loggers' (known as Baymen) gradual development of a code of law and the appointment of superintendents to the colony (1968:9); the brutality of the Spanish towards English prisoners they captured and the defiance such behavior created (1968:10); and the drawn-out disagreement between the British and the Spanish over who owned Belize (1968:8-18).

Throughout Belizean history, both sides have exerted much energy in this dispute over the ownership of the country. First the Spanish, and subsequently Guatemala,insisted that Belize belonged to them, not to the British. For the English, the decisive moment giving the British supremacy in their claim occurred in 1798 at the Battle of St. Georges Caye. In this historic battle, the British were outnumbered and outmanned, defending their land with 11 boats to the Spanish 32--and with 212 men (including blacks) to the Spanish 2500. Gregg describes the brilliant maneuvers of the British captains and the "derisive cheers of the Baymen, both black and white" when the next morning they saw the enemy ships sailing away (1968:15). This battle is significant for the Baymen not only because they defeated the Spanish ships, but also because it marks an occasion, recorded in history, where blacks and whites worked together for a common cause. Gregg elaborates on this theme, writing about the Negroes, "who went into action with great bravery, cheering as the Spanish shot went over their heads, and they engaged the enemy with spirit" (1968:15). Colonial Thomas Barrow, the commander of the troops, himself wrote,

> You will be astonished to hear that our Negro men (who manned the fleets) gave

> a hearty cheer, and in the midst of a firing of grape kept up upon them from the Spanish vessels . . . those Negroes in an undaunted manner rowed their boats and used every exertion to board the enemy.[Gregg 1968:16]

Captain Ralph Moss joins the chorus, writing further that, "The spirit of the Negro slaves who manned our small crafts was wonderful" (Gregg 1968:16).

Gregg admits that this behavior may seem inexplicable at first, given that the blacks were slaves. He points out, however, that despite this fact, their white masters felt comfortable enough with the slaves' loyalty to give them weapons. He considers this indicative of the quality of life among the blacks in Belize at this time. He writes that the reason for the reader's disbelief is because they picture slavery in Belize as reminiscent of the conditions of life which occurred in the American South, characterized by "a portrait of humble black virtue tyrannized by a Simon Legree, who enlivens reluctant movements with a big whip" (1968:16). This characterization is completely inaccurate for Belize, Gregg insists, where slavery was hardly slavery at all. He writes,

> It should be remembered that they were enslaved by people of their own race, who captured them in war. They were sold on the coast of Africa and again as part of a lot on the quayside of Jamaica. They were then bought by the loggers of Belize. That ended their purgatory for they entered into a new life. The Baymen required tall, strong men who could cut down trees three yards thick, and to make good use of these expensive operatives and maintain their strength, they had to be cared for. The camps were surrounded by hundreds of miles of trackless wilder-- ness, into which any recalcitrant slave could vanish, carrying with him equipment difficult and costly to replace . . . We find considerable evidence in the annals of Belize to show that rough comradeship existed between black and white; and if the law gave the white man a right to sell the black, it was seldom abused. [Gregg 1968:16-17]

Gregg does admit that their were some exceptions, but "on the whole, relations between races were excellent". This was largely due to the dependence of each race on the other--the blacks on the whites for employment, food, consumer goods, and the marketing and finance of the lumber trade, and the whites on the blacks for cutting of logs (Gregg 1968:17). Later in history, after the British Government freed the slaves, Gregg describes their participation in the local Belizean government. In some cases they engaged in commerce such that they could accumulate capital, ultimately qualifying themselves for admittance to the Public Meeting and the board of magistrates. Gregg writes, "That they should be mentioned at all as possible candidates is itself remarkable" (1968:24).

The remainder of Belizean history for Gregg is an enumeration of the process by which Belize became a Crown Colony. He remarks that "the people of Belize could be thankful that they had experienced and magnanimous men from London in the chief positions of executive authority" such that they "escaped the century of revolution, dictatorship, massacre and robbery that racked the infant nations of Central America with all the political horrors that unbridled republicanism can evoke" (1968:26). He describes the relinquishing of self-rule in the Public Meeting to the British government as the result of an inability of the Englishmen in the colony to accept the rule of any one of their number: Rich whites had ruled in

order to make more money, and the poorer whites resented this (Gregg 1968:27).

The conclusion of Gregg's narrative also includes a description of the people of Belize. Gregg writes:

> Most important to the Belizean is happiness around him; he knows that the worst enemy of happiness is envy of one's neighbour. Therefore he envies nobody, least of all speculators and the get-rich-quick fraternity. This does not mean that he does not appreciate a good standard of living, based on sound national finances and a healthy, growing economy. It is precisely this objective that engages so large a part of the energy of the government.To co-ordinate the efforts of people who help themselves by helping their neighbours is a gigantic task. The Creole and the Carib, the Mestizo and the Indian, are one in this ambition. All of them seem imbued with the spirit of Belizean nationality; they are willing to put the needs of the nation first. Of this spirit there are numerous examples, demonstrated in their daily tasks. Few people deny the essentially Christian basis of the impulse. When unselfishness is enthroned as a political principle, we can feel assured that the greatest good will come to the greatest number. [Gregg 1968:143]

BOLLAND'S REVISIONIST TRUTH

Bolland, to a great extent, writes his historical narrative about Belize to directly counter the kind of narrative which Gregg produces. In the opening chapter to another article about Belizean history, Bolland writes,

> The history of the people of Belize has not been written. Histories of "British Honduras" have all, to a greater or lesser degree, taken the view that the history of the country, a British settlement for about two hundred years until 1862 when it was declared a Colony, is a minor aspect of British colonial history. The chief topics in such histories are the relations between the British settlers and the neighbouring Spaniards, the problems posed for colonial administrators by the anomalous constitutional position of the settlement, and the development of the country's legislature, courts, and other institutions of British origin. Above all there is the legal dispute over territorial rights which has, significantly, for so long been defined as the concern of Britain and Guatemala, rather than as an object of the self-determination of the Belizean people. Though it is obviously true that British colonialism is a major factor in Belizean history, it should not follow that the only important historical matters are those which concern the British. [Bolland 1988:13]

This summary is not only an apt commentary on Gregg's work, but also illustrates my point that what gets written into a historical narrative depends on the purposes of the author. Bolland is an American social scientist, working in an American university, who has done field-work among Belizeans. Viewing the British colonial experience from an outsider perspective, he purposefully takes the condition and viewpoints of the non-white inhabitants of Belize as the most important, in opposition to the British colonialists. He is not a tourist attempting to display Belize to the world as one of Britain's colonial success stories. Bolland's preface, unlike Gregg's, begins, "It is apparent from even a cursory examination of the problems of development facing the emerging nation of Belize that these problems have their roots in a history of underdevelopment. The history

of the entire Caribbean area is a history of extended colonial domination and exploitation"(1977:x).

Like Gregg, Bolland discusses early in his narrative the origins of the British settlement in Belize. He too places the date at approximately 1650. But where Gregg devotes three pages, Bolland gives only a paragraph, and then dismisses the whole discussion with the comment, "Whatever the details, which will probably remain in doubt because of the paucity of early records, the purpose of British settlement was to export logwood, a tree from which a dye valued by the woolen industry was obtained"(1977:25). Significantly, the first chapter in his narrative, before he mentions the British settlements, is devoted to a discussion of the Maya Indians, who lived in Belize centuries before the British arrived and "founded" settlements.

In his book, Gregg claims that "There is no racial problem in British Honduras; no striving for white or black supremacy or equality; for social barriers do not exist. It is very probable that they never have existed in the colony"(1968:69). To Bolland, this is a wholly erroneous conclusion. To him, just because slaves were slightly less oppressed than in some other countries, does not mean that even the remotest form of social equality existed. He writes that such a simple conclusion ignores the most important aspect of slavery: the slaves' own perception of their situation and the meaning that they attached to their status and treatment (1977:72). Bolland goes on to compare the quotes about the good treatment of the slaves, to what he claims actually was occurring in the colony, namely "such desperate and drastic actions as suicide, murder of the masters, desertion, and revolt"(1977:72). Throughout the colony's history, there were continual desertions by slaves (which is why the British had to keep importing them from elsewhere), a consistent failure of the slave population to reproduce itself, and four slave revolts. Bolland juxtaposes previous accounts of slave "devotion" at the Battle of St. Georges Caye [1798], to numerous citations of masters fearing slave revolts, as well as complaints by masters that their slaves were deserting them. In one quote from 1792, a master writes:

> There is one circumstance which. . . serves to discourage our Industry & even threaten the total ruin of the Trade of this Settlement, & that is the Desertion of our Negroes to the Spaniards which increases daily & that of late to such an alarming degree, that no one Man however well disposed he may consider his Negroes, can think his property safe for a single Night . . .[Bolland 1977:77].

And in 1825 in the report of Superintendent Codd,

> From the Negroes own conduct, and declarations, my information is to the effect, that throughout the several works, the Negroes in their conversations among themselves make no secret of their thoughts on desertion; they speak freely, and it has been discussed whether it is not folly to desert to the Spaniards; as, when most of the *Whites* are scattered over the Country and where their avocations demanded their presence, they could be destroyed, without the Negroes leaving their families, or suffering any privation; for what resistance could the whites make when so situated . . . the total number of deserters as near as can be ascertained with those already mentioned is about one hundred and twenty . . . [Bolland 1977:78-79]

Obviously, concludes Bolland, the slaves were not as enthusiastic about their condition

in life as many historians, such as Gregg, have insisted.

Bolland also attempts to clarify the history of other ethnic groups in Belize whom he feels authors like Gregg represent inaccurately. Gregg's discussion of the Black Caribs is as follows:

> The Caribs are the descendants of Arawak Indians from the Orinoco who interbred with Negroes. They were a terror to sugar planters for two centuries, and many armed expeditions were sent against them. They lived in the island of St. Vincent until about the beginning of the nineteenth century, when they began to settle in Central America. . . .In 1797 they were on Roatan in the islands of the Bay of Honduras and in 1823 they asked for permission to settle in the south of British Honduras. This was accorded them. [Gregg 1968:65]

Gregg neglects to explain that Caribs are descended from Carib Indians living on St. Vincent and slaves who escaped to the island. The Black Caribs only battled sugar planters when the Europeans decided that St. Vincent belonged to them and attempted to remove the Caribs who were living there. After many years, the British triumphed and deported the Black Caribs to Roatan Island, which was unwanted because it was uncultivable in sugar. They subsequently moved from there to the Central American coast (Bolland 1977:132).

"FICTIONAL" HISTORY EDGELL'S BEKA LAMB

Although much of the point of Bolland's historical narrative is to challenge the narratives of previous historians by questioning the accuracy of their reporting, his attempt to record what occurred in the history of Belize uses the same method as Gregg. He searches for facts and seeks the truth, reporting in chronological order. This is the way American and British histories are understood to have happened. It would seem odd for us to read histories written in any other way. This is also the reason it is important to compare books such as Gregg's and Bolland's to historical narratives about countries such as Belize, written by authors from Belize who have less invested in that traditional view of history. Such is the point behind the comparison of these first two books to *Beka Lamb*, by Zee Edgell, a Creole-Belizean and a woman.[4]

Beka Lamb is a historical narrative about a fourteen-year-old Creole girl living in Belize City during the 1950's. The storyline covers her life over the course of one year, as she attends St. Catherine's Academy, attempts to conquer her tendency to lie, deals with the pregnancy of her best friend, and matures enough so that she views herself capable of winning, and in fact does win, the school essay contest. Interspersed with the main story is a view of Belizean history which is dissimilar from the historical narratives written by historians. First of all, it is much more specific and personal, focusing on the history of one Creole girl, living in Belize City. Secondly, because it is a novel, its style is very different from the historical narratives by Gregg and Bolland. Finally, *Beka Lamb* is different in its expression of what Belizean history is all about, and the events that occurred leading up to Beka's life in Belize City in 1955.

History for Beka Lamb is presented in two ways. The majority of the narrative is retrospective reflection--her personal history--of the past year.

At the same time, history to Beka is 'befo time', understood through the stories told to her by her grandmother, Miss Ivy, among

others. Beka's grandmother attempts to explain the present by relating stories about the past. In general, 'befo time' signifies an era where things were different, although not necessarily better. Beka's mother dislikes Miss Ivy's stories about what life used to be like in Belize because she is afraid that Beka will become caught up in the past and not live in the present to take advantage of present opportunities. When Beka wins the essay contest, her grandmother's response is "'Befo time' Beka never would have won that contest" because the prizes would go to bakras, panias, or expatriates (1982:1).

History in *Beka Lamb* is not about dates and important people. It is about social groups and identities--and how they are understood in the present in the context of history. At times, events are remembered only in reference to the date of the last hurricane (1982:28). The same events which Gregg and Bolland discuss in their historical narratives are talked about and analyzed in Beka's world, but they are discussed an a personal level. They are important because they affect and shape local people. Past events are not over, but are continually refreshed in people's minds and analyzed because the past has repercussions in and defines the present. For example, when Beka's family goes for a trip to St. George's Caye, Beka and her friend Toycie stare out at the reefs surrounding the caye and thoughts about the Battle of St. George's Caye run through Beka's head. The Battle of St. George's Caye, in this telling, is not about a historic occasion of black and white unity (Gregg 1968:15). Edgell writes:

> Somewhere out there in 1798, the battle of St. George's caye had been fought. A few British masters assisted by black slaves had beaten back a fleet of Spanish man-o-wars, and this event was celebrated throughout the colony on September Tenth each year. Granny Ivy said that Belize people liked to remember the battle, because it was one of the few things attempted in the country that hadn't broken down . . .The slavery part, what was known of it, Granny Ivy often commented, many liked to pretend hardly ever existed at all.
> [Edgell 1982:46]

Another time Beka's mother, Lilla, as a way of illustrating the importance of education over virtually anything else, tells Beka about a time when she was young and her father took her out of school. She says,

> My mother wanted me to go to the convent, so [my father] used to pay for me to go. I was the blackest and poorest one in my class . . . in those days most black children used to go to the Protestant schools. The majority of the girls at the convent were white skinned, either Mestizos, bakras, or children of foreigners. Nobody's fault, just the way it was. Sometimes my shoes had holes. I couldn't sport gold bangles or golden earrings, my clothes didn't look like theirs did . . . Well, one day, I said more or less what I am saying to you to my father and he said, "Well, Lilla, if those things are more important to you than your education, you'd better leave. My skin looks white, but I am a poor man." He refused to pay to let me finish school . . .
> [Edgell 1982:69]

What happened in the past--what life was like then-- is directly relevant to the present. In this case, not only is Lilla explaining to Beka why she should stay in school, but clarifying for her why Lilla is who she is. At the same time, this passage explains why Granny Ivy comments that 'Befo time' things

would have been different. It also leads one to suspect, contrary to assertions by Gregg, that disunity among the different ethnic groups does exist in Belize.

From these accounts it is clear that this world is not the world without racial tension in which Gregg lives. Gradually Beka becomes aware of animosity between Creoles and all other ethnic groups. To begin with, Granny Ivy teaches Beka that "people like us don't like the British anymore" (1982:54). At the time, this is news to Beka since "Things British had nearly always been things best". But Granny Ivy has definite rationale for her dislike. She spends much of her time involved with the new People's Independence Party which is fighting for independence for Belize (in "real" history, this is the People's United Party). She analyzes the land shortage in Belize as due to the British Lumber Company's habit of buying it all up so that people have to work for them for wages (1982:55). She sees the failure of the Creoles to farm the land as a result of being brainwashed by the British to think they can only cut mahogany--that they are not farmers. Unlike Winston Churchill in Gregg's book, Granny Ivy places the responsibility for the failure of the Belizean economy--the "almost universal desperate poverty"--directly on the heads of the British colonialists who made Belize a colony in the first place.

The Lamb family, as Creoles, does not feel comfortable with Mestizos either. The context for the tension is twofold. The first is a three-hundred-year old dispute between Guatemala (once the Spanish crown) and the British (now Belizean) government for control of Belize. The second reason for tension is the increasing affluence of Mestizos as compared to Creoles, both because they do farm the land, and also because they are willing to work very hard. On the local level, this is played out in interpersonal relationships. Toycie, Beka's friend, has a Mestizo boyfriend who gets her pregnant, but then cannot marry her because his mother expects him to marry a virgin. Toycie cries:

> He said he doesn't believe the baby can be his, if I am pregnant because his body didn't go into me and anyhow he could never marry anybody who played around with him like I did, because if I can do it before marriage, after marriage I would do it with somebody else and his mamacita would collapse if he married somebody that wasn't a virgin because she's so religious and she raised him to be a modest Catholic boy . . . [Edgell 1982:109]

Earlier, Toycie and Beka had gone to the Mestizo church and been ashamed by the behavior of a Creole woman who was angry at the priest for supporting the Guatemalan claim to Belize. Beka thinks she once "would have found the whole scene jaw-breakingly funny . . . today . . .It was a burning shame, Beka felt, that Miss Arguelles was letting creoles down" (Edgell 1982:104).

Beka's father talks about the difference between Mr. Ulric, the Creole storekeeper, and Mr. Gordillo, his rival down the street. Edgell writes that the groceries on Mr. Ulric's shelves were scanty because he did not have enough customers to justify increasing his supply, at the same time that the store owned by Mr. Gordillo was flourishing. Beka recalls that "Daddy Bill said *this* was because, much as he hated to admit such a thing about his own people, Creole shopkeepers did not seem to consider trade or business dignified, serving customers with an attitude of condescension indicating that shopkeeping was a temporary misfortune, an occupation they would abandon the moment some-thing better suited to their talents turned up." The

Mestizo shopkeepers, on the other hand, were not too humble to cater to customers or to live in the back of their shops, plowing the profits back into the business until they had built it up (Edgell 1982:82).

Creoles and Caribs are also at odds in Edgell's version of history. On one hand, Edgell presents a "true" picture of Carib history, learned by Beka from a Carib teacher. Edgell writes:

> To quiet a class, Miss Benguche, a Carib, explained that the Caribs were descendants of African slaves who escaped from West Indian plantations by paddling their way to St. Vincent. There, they mingled with the Caribans, originally from South America, adopting much of their language and some of their ways, but keeping many of the African traditions. The British wanted the land the Caribs occupied after a while, and so they were shunted to Roatan, in the Republic of Honduras, and quite a number, over the years, paddled to Stann Creek, and other towns along the Belizean coast, where they established towns and villages.[Edgell 1982:68]

This narration is juxtaposed to a discussion which takes place in Beka's home where an aunt plans a wake for Granny Straker.[5] Lilla is extremely upset because not only is it not Christian, but it is a reminder of a Belizean past which Lilla would prefer was not remembered. Lilla says, "I know all about the old days when Granny Straker was young. I know it by heart, and I don't need a wake to remind me. I am fed up with it. I don't want to remember. The old ways will poison the new" (1982:66). Lilla accuses Granny Ivy and Aunt Tama of wanting a wake because of all the Caribs they associate with. At this point, Beka interrupts, saying that her teacher told her that "Caribs have a lot of traditions that creoles give up, Mama. She thinks keeping them is a good thing if they don't do any harm" (1982:67). The scene escalates to the point where Beka cries, "When I grow up I am going to marry a Carib!" To which her mother responds by slapping her across the face. Later, apologetically, when Beka asks if obeah is the reason Caribs and Creoles don't associate, her mother replies:

> To tell you the truth, Beka, I don't rightly know. I doubt if many creoles could tell you. Nobody really remembers the reasons. We creoles are so different, one from the other, that it's hard for us to mix properly amongst ourselves, let alone among Carib people who have a lot more things in common. Maybe it's because Carib people remind us of what we lost trying to get up in the world. See, in the old days . . . the more you left behind the old ways, the more acceptable you were to the powerful people in the government and the churches who had the power to change a black person's life . . . [Edgell 1982:70]

The past creates contradictory feelings within Lilla. On one hand, she continually explains the present by the past--and recognizes the past as the impetus of much of what she does and who she is, as a woman and a Creole. But on the other hand, she feels that Beka must live for the present and understand that the present world is not the same as in former times. Not only do Creoles not practice obeah, but they do not have to conform to the standards of white people, which was the reason they stopped obeah in the first place. Lilla is torn between denial of past truths and acknowledgment that history shapes lives in the present.

CONCLUSION

BEKA LAMB illustrates a number of important points about the writing and interpretation of historical narratives. It shows how social identities and social groups construct and understand their past; and how the past, as made known to such people, in turn shapes identities and groups. This novel reveals the significance of allowing multiple voices to speak. It not only insures the avoidance of passivization (see Toolan 1988), but allows competing voices to speak in the same narrative. Through Lilla, and her conflict with Granny Ivy over what ought to be passed to the next generation, Edgell shows how what is remembered in the past is chosen. Remembering history can make Beka lose track of the present, but on the other hand, it can help to explain it.

This comparison of the ways in which different authors have remembered history has been to delineate not only the way history is understood by these different authors, but also to show how history is used. The value to be found in this kind of comparison is in realizing that history depends upon interpretation and the choice (either conscious or unconscious) of what to remember. For example, earlier in this paper I reviewed Gregg's discussion of the existence of slavery (or the lack thereof) in Belize and the overall good race relations which he insists are present. This belief I juxtaposed to the writings of Bolland and Edgell, who hold quite the opposite view. Because my point is not to search for the "true" Belizean past, I do not intend to deny Gregg the right to his interpretation. Instead, I take this example to show that he constructed this version of history because it conformed to his world view, both in the need to believe that the English were not a racist people, and also that England did not and does not exploit the people of Belize. Even had I lived in Belize during this time, my anthropological authority could not extend an assertion of "what really happened". Juxtaposing these various interpretations of Belizean history, however, allows one to decide (and interpret) which version or versions to believe, and by combining these works, to move closer to the "truth".

History is subject to shaping by the selective remembrances and opinions of those living in the present. From *Beka Lamb*, it becomes clear that the way history is remembered and understood by people is in bits and pieces of memories. The past is subject to interpretation and manipulation by all who remember it, and later historians who write about it. The historical narratives of Gregg and Bolland are as much works of fiction as the novel by Edgell. This fact allows us to draw closer to an understanding of historical events, and enables us to interact with those we study on their terms, with their understandings, without judgments or a determination to achieve "truth". It is not so much, as Bolland writes, that "the history of the people of Belize has not been written", but rather that we have been looking for that history in too few places. §

FOOTNOTES

1. And then, as will be seen, that interpretation is subject to your interpretation. From this, please note that I do not mean to imply that all interpretations are equally valid. Gregg's interpretation of Belizean History illustrates this very well.
2. One could ask, "why?" at this point. Much of the answer lies at the root of this paper: the need to understand the present. Such an understanding is impossible without interpreting the past. People "make sense" of the past to justify the present, to clarify it, and simply because they have an overpowering need to analyze.
3. This brings up the question of whether true multivocality is possible, given that in a novel, the different voice are made up by the author. At the same time, one could argue that those different voices are present in history, just not recorded by historians. Thus it is not a matter of their existence, but an exact recording of what they said. How important is precision?
4. I note this here because I believe that Edgell's status as a Belizean and a woman gives her access to aspects and understandings of Belizean life which more easily escape Bolland and Gregg. Her historical narrative is also about women, their concerns, their understanding of history--topics traditionally ignored in traditional historical narratives.
5. A wake in this context is not, in fact, Christian. The point of it (befo' time) is to subdue the spirit of Granny Straker who will wander around and harass the living if there is no wake.

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COMMENTARY

MODERN MYTHS, MISCONCEPTIONS AND THE MAYA OF BELIZE

By Marc Thompson

While Greek and Roman cultures flourished along the Mediterranean, the Maya merged in the mountainous highlands and tropical rainforests of Mexico and Central America. One described as the "Greeks of the New World," the Maya reached extraordinary levels of development in many areas including: art, architecture, urban planning, agriculture, writing, mathematics, calendrics and astronomy. The analogy to the Greeks is apt, because like the Greeks the Maya were inheritors as much as they were progenitors.The Maya were preceded in time by the Olmecs, much as the Sumerians preceded the Greeks. The Toltecs and later Mexica (Aztecs) rose to power in the wake of Classic Maya decline, much as the Etruscans and Romans followed the Greeks of the Old World.

Unlike the Toltecs and Mexico, the Maya were never united in an empire; like the Greeks they lived in city states characterized by shifting alliances, competition for resources, and armed conflict. The Precolumbian Maya realm was composed of the modern Mexican states of Chiapas, eastern Tabasco, Campeche, Yucatan, and Quintana Roo, and the countries of Guatemala, Belize and western Honduras and El Salvador. The Maya were united by language, religion, tradition and were part of a larger cultural sphere called Mesoamerica, as a large and well integrated cultural unit, ceased to exist after the Spanish conquest. Today the Maya area continues to exist geographically and culturally and is defined by the five million Mayan speaking Indians who live primarily on the Yucatan Peninsula, Chiapas, and the Central American countries of Guatemala, Belize and Honduras. Although marginalized by Euroamerican cultures, peasant agriculturalists of the highlands and lowlands retain many remnants of ancient Maya culture, religion and custom.

Cultural developments in the Maya area are nearly as ancient as any of those in Mesoamerica, beginning in the Paleoindian Period (ca. 12,000-7000 BC), continuing through the Archaic Period (ca.2000 BC) and to the origins of the Preclassic Period (ca. 2000 BC-AD I). Many people are most familiar with the achievements of the Classic period (traditionally dated to ca. AD 200-900), for it was the Classic Maya who embodied the "golden Age" with cities of 100,000 or more inhabitants, the erection of massive stone stelae depicting dynasties, and multilayered pyramids more than 200 feet high. It was also during the Classic Period (beginning as early as ad I and lasting until AD 1000) that Maya artisans produced masterpieces in wood, shell, jade and other stones, as well as polychrome pottery and figurines.

The greatest and most fully developed expressions of Classic Maya culture are those of the Late Classic Period(ca.AD 600-900) when populations throughout the highlands and lowlands reached all time highs. It is possible that as many as 20 to 50 million Maya may have inhabited the area at that time. The period following the so called collapse of the Southern and Central Maya lowlands

is known as the Terminal Classic Period (ca. AD 800-1000). It was apparently one of the flux, population movements, dramatic external influences, internecine warfare, abandonments and hybrid developments in northern Yucatan. Although the Maya were never truly isolated in Mesoamerica, Central Mexican influences are most apparent in architecture and graphic media such as carved stone and murals at this time.

The Postclassic Period (ca.AD 900-1519) is divided into Early (ca.AD 900-1200) and Late (ca. AD 1200-1519) components. After the abandonment of large city states, the Early Postclassic Maya are characterized as poorly unified and feuding groups. Walled cities and other late centers suggest a general lack of cohesiveness. More secular concerns such as coastal sea trade is exemplified by the concentration of small commercial centers along the Caribbean coastline of Quintana Roo, Mexico, and the cayes of Belize in the Late Postclassic Period.

In Precolumbian times the part of Central America now known as Belize comprised less than ten percent of the Maya area with an estimated population of perhaps two to five million. Today the country of Belize would fit comfortably within the Mexican state of Quintana Roo or the Guatemalan department of El Peten. Because of its topographic multiformity and Caribbean coastline, Belize reflects much of the cultural, temporal, geographical and biological diversity of the Maya area.

By 1526, Francisco de Montejo received permission from the Spanish crown to conquer Yucatan. But this process took until 1546, and the whole peninsula was never fully subdued. Following the conquest and throughout the Colonial Period, the surviving Maya of Mexico, Guatemala and Belize became virtual slaves gathered in from rural villages to harvest chocolate, indigo and sugar cane on Spanish haciendas. So many Indians died or ran away to the interiors of these countries that the Spanish began importing black Africans through Cuba as slaves to work the haciendas.

In 1847, the Maya rebelled and the Caste War of Yucatan began. At one point, the numerically inferior Spanish nearly lost the capital of Merida, then the Maya retreated to forest villages to plant, for it was nearly the rainy season. Distrust of the Spanish caused the Maya to be friendly with the Baymen of Belize, and British merchants traded arms and powder to the Maya which helped prolong the conflict. By 1850, the Maya were driven back to the east, but real peace did not come until 1912 when the rebel Maya were separated from Yucatan in the former territory of Quintana Roo and on the island of Cozumel.

Today the Maya retain much of their ancient heritage in language, native dress, ceremony and food. The Catholicism of the Maya is a syncretic religion blending Maya and Spanish influenced ritual observances. From the conquest on, however, Indian lands passed into the hands of **Mestizos** and remained there until after the Mexican Revolution of 1910.

Many Spanish customs are but a veneer over much older ways; although Spanish is the official language of Mexico and Guatemala, many Maya are bilingual and most learn a Mayan language at home. In Belize the coast is dominated by descendants of African slaves, Caribs, East Indians and Asians; English and Caribbean Creole prevail. The interior and southern portion of Belize is inhabited predominantly by descendants of indigenous and renegade Mayas and **Mestizos** from Mexico. Relict settlements, monuments, icons and elements of ancient Maya culture persist and help define what is the past, present, and future of Belize.

Because we now know the Maya used a written language, mathematical notations, astronomical observations and a calendar which may be correlated with ours, we refer to them as a Precolumbian or precontact society rather than a prehistoric culture. As our knowledge about the ancient Maya increases, we will begin to understand even more about their version of history as recorded on stone at archaeological sites and other documents recorded before and after contact.

MAYAN, MAYANS, MAYA, MAYAS, MAYAB

At the time of the conquest, **Chol** was spoken along the base of the Yucatan Peninsula from Chiapas, Mexico, to the Bay of Honduras. In the 1860's Benque Viejo, Belize, was settled by **Yucatec** speaking Itza Maya, but today **Mopan** is more common in Belize. Most Mayan speakers are still found in the contiguous Maya area described above, but the Huastecs of Veracruz and San Luis Postosi, Mexico, speak one of 30 recognized Mayan languages with considerable archaeological time depth (Thompson 1985).

The term Mayan is currently in use both as a noun and an adjective. "Mayan is an English language construct and refers exclusively to the language group, e.g. "the Mayan languages of Yucatec, Chol and Mopan," or "Mayan is the language of Maya." The people, culture, architecture, art and artifacts are Maya. Hence, one of the most popular icons or logograms of Belize (the Temple of the Masonary Altars, a.k.a:"Temple of the Sun God" or simply Structure B-4 of Altun Ha) pictured on Belikin Beer bottles and labeled "Mayan Temple" is a misnomer. Today, Maya words are found in use throughout Belize and beyond. Cigar is a Maya word (**sik'ar**): to smoke, from **sik'** (tobacco). The word hurricane is probably derived from the Mayan **hurukán** although English dictionaries seem to favor Carib or Arawak origins (see Tedlock 1985:343 for a discussion of the etymology). The famous Cayes or Keys of Belize likewise are thought to be derived of the Spanish **cayos** (islands, reefs), but many have been originally derived from Yucatec Maya **kay** (fish). It has also been suggested that the derivation of the word shark is from Mayan **xok** (shark, count or read). The varied meanings of **xoc** are a good example of Mayan polyvalence in which more than one value (e.g., nouns and/or verbs) may be assigned to a single word, depending on context. Other examples from Yucatec Mayan include: **baat** (hatchet, chop, wage war), **tun** (stone, testis, 360 day period) and **bak** (heron, bone or sacrificial captive).

Other common usage problems with Mayan words reflect a poor comprehension of the language and people, past and present. The Maya refer to themselves individually as **Maya'** and as a group as **Ah Mayab** (the people) or **Maya' Winiko'b** (native peoples); all others are **ts'ulob** (plural of **ts'ul**, i.e. non-Maya). "'Mayas," plural for Maya, is a spanish language construct. Likewise, the ancient causeways are not "sacbes" but **sacbeob** from **sacbe** (white road) and subterranean storage chambers are not "chultunes" but **chultunob** from chultún.

Maya place, plant and animal names (e.g., **Macal, Succotz, Sayil**) predominate in the Maya area and Belize, but most Maya site names are descriptive and recently fashioned in the Yucatec language. Some exceptions are: **Uxmal** (Thrice Built), **Chichen Itzá** (Mouth of the Well of the Itza) and **Lamanai** (drowned bug), or the more popular (submerged crocodile). Names such as Altun Há, Xunantunich and Cahal Pech are no more ancient than their exploration by modern archaeologists in the 1950s. **Altun Há** (Stone Water), for instance, comes from the previous descriptive name for the area, Rockstone Pond, a reference to the ancient artificial reservoir. Likewise **Xunantunich** (Lady Stone Face) refers to a stela depicting a woman, and **Cahal Pech** translates as "Dwelling of Ticks." The latter is a reference to ticks associated with Cattle in recent times. An excellent reference for Yucatec words is the **Cordemex Maya dictionary** (Barrera Vasquez 1980).

SUPERLATIVES AND COMPETITION FOR 'THE MOST IMPORTANT SITES'

Because many people view the Maya Lowlands as essentially homogeneous, archaeologists, and countries have competed for the titles of largest, oldest or other unique status for sites, monuments and artifacts. (Not surprisingly, there seems to be no competition for the title of smallest, least important or most redundant Maya site). However, the Maya lowlands are heterogenous with respect to elevation, biology, rainfall, water sources, building materials and foods. These differences are recognized in regional styles (e.g., **Puc, Chennes** and **Río Bec** of the Yucatan Peninsula) temporal differences and individual sites with features not found elsewhere in the Maya area. Very early dates from Cuello,

Belize, have caught the attention and bolstered the pride of Belizeans. However, the published Early Preclassic date of 2400 BC (Hammond 1982) is no longer accepted as more recent and accurate radiocarbon assays have corrected it to the Middle Preclassic Period, no earlier than 1100 BC (Andrews and Hammond 1990).

Recently, Caracol, Belize, has been touted as a site larger than Tikal. Recent work at Caracol (see Schele and Freidel 1990: 173-174) seems to indicate a defeat of Tikal by a king of Caracol accounting for the Classic Period 'hiatus' in monumental inscriptions at the former site (AD 557-692) and others in El Peten. These data should not be misconstrued to suggest that Caracol continued to dominate Tikal or become larger than the Guatemalan metropolis of the Late Classic Period.

Two archaeological facts bear on this and other problems in the Maya and other areas. First, archaeologists tend to find what they are looking for (the corollary to this is that we sometimes ignore the significance of or misinterpret the intended function of finds we do not expect). What else could account for the term "eccentric flint" or the fact that both Morley and J.E.S. Thompson published recorded Maya dates and astronomical data while ignoring or refusing to accept, respectively, ancient Maya writing as a fully developed and phonetic language (for an entertaining discussion of the history of decipherment see Coe 1992). Second, archaeological sites grow and expand with renewed attention and continued field work.

At present, Caracol is being characterized as "the lost city of the Maya." Although like Calakmul, Mexico, and El Mirador, Guatemala, it is somewhat isolated, it was never lost like the famous Temple "B" of Río Bec which was discovered in 1912 and not relocated until 1972 (the site could not be found for 60 years despite repeated attempts to do so). The isolation which currently gives Caracol its "lost city" ambiance will disappear with improved visibility and accessibility. Additionally, Caracol may continue to grow in size, importance and complexity as field work progresses.

In an attempt to order Central Maya Lowland sites by size Adams (1985) ranked Caracol as sixth of 27 sites within the Tikal Region and in the second hierarchical level of the region. Based on number of recorded courtyards, Caracol (17) was ranked below Tikal (85), Calakmul (42), Naranjo (42), el Mirador (32), Río Bec (24) Naachtún (21), Kinal (20) and Yaxá (20) in the Central Maya Lowlands. Caracol is currently the largest known site in Belize, but it remains to be demonstrated in a tangible manner if it even approaches Tikal in over all size.

Another Maya site which has received much attention is Colhá in the Orange Walk district of northern Belize. Although not yet on the tourist route, articles about Colhá have been published in nearly every organ known to the professional and public world of archaeology. Colhá is an important Maya site and was a major manufacturing center of chert tools. However, its uniqueness (if that exists) revolves around manufacture and distribution of what appear to be flaked stone adzes. These are uncommon in most parts of the Maya area and may be associated with rivers, the Caribbean coast and perhaps with dugout canoe manufacture or other woodworking activities yet to be documented. Flaked stone tool manufacturing centers have been intensively investigated at Becán, Campeche, Mexico, and elsewhere in the Maya area; they surely exist at other sites which have not been investigated for this purpose (for a discussion of these data see Thompson 1991).

A unique and important artifact which has received little public attention rests with many others in the vault of the Department of Archaeology in Belmopan. This relic is a Late Preclassic Maya hatchet (**baat**). Although many apparent celts (flaked, ungrooved ax blades) have been recovered from Belize and the Maya Lowlands, this example is the only one which retains the wooden haft or handle. The 41 cm-long (16.25") hatchet was recovered in 1974, preserved in the anaerobic fill of an ancient Maya canal near San Antonio, Orange Walk district by the late Dennis Plueston (personal communication 1978). The "Plueston Ax" of Belize is the only intact specimen of a most common and nearly exclusive Maya tool. Hafted celts are depicted on Classic Maya stelae, lintles, ceramic vessels and in the codices in the hands of Maya lords and mythical figures. They were apparently

used in warfare, for ritual decapitation as well as serving as the principal land clearing implement of the Lowland Maya. In short, the **baat** was analogous in ubiquity and versatility to the modern machete.

Another important artifact recovered in Belize is the famous "Jade Head" of Altun Há. This sculpted head is the largest elaborated greenstone monolith known from the Maya area. Like the structure (B-4) from which it was recovered, it is a prominent icon displayed in the upper right or left corner of Belizean paper currency. Because it resembles the face of **Kinich Ahau**, the Maya "Sun God," it has been assumed the elderly male buried with the head was a priest of the Sun God and that B-4 could be identified as a temple of the Sun God. The head is neither jade nor the Sun God. X-ray diffraction revealed the material to be primarily albite, one of a number of jadeite simulants or look-alikes with a chemical profile similar to, but distinct from, true jadeite. As described by Pendergast (1969:11), "ALBITE-JADEITE refers to objects of varying composition in which albite is the principal component, with jadeite a minor to very minor element." Because the head is primarily albite, rather than jadeite or nephrite, scientifically and legally it cannot be defined as jade (Wade 1987:314).

With respect to the carved image, the social role of the buried individual and the function of the structure in which the head and individual were found, Pendergast recognized several problems with describing the stone head as **Kinich Ahau**, the interred person as a "Sun God priest," and the structure as a "Temple of the Sun God"' (Pendergast 1969:passim).

Both the iconography and the context of the stone head argue against characterizing it as a depiction of **Kinich Ahau.** Among other inconsistencies, the head lacks primary elements associated with depictions of the Sun God. These include: the **kin** glyph, Roman nose, square eyes, and filed incisors. Additionally, the Sun God is normally associated with light, life and the Upperworld. The funerary context of the greenstone head suggests darkness, death and the Underworld. Distinguishing the burial chamber as the "Sun God's tomb" suggests the ultimate and permanent death of the sun which physically and metaphorically would signal the end of life and the world.

Coe (1989:111) identifies the stone head as a depiction of the giant **Vucub Caquix:**

> By far the leading figure in the crystallizing Maya pantheon as seen in Izapan monumental art, extending to the giant stucco masks of the Late preclassic temples in the Peten and Belize,is the monstrous form of Vucub Caquix, an anthropomorphic vulture who shows up in the Popol Vuh as the arrogant 'sun' of the creation preceding this one (Coe 1988:51).

Also known as The Principal Bird Deity and The Celestial Bird, **Vucub Caquix** (Seven Macaw) claimed to be the "sun" who was associated with the wooden people and the penultimate or fourth creation of the **Popol Vuh** (Tedlock 1985). In the Hero Twins saga of the **Popol Vuh,** Seven Macaw is wounded in the jaw by the twins and he tears off the arm of the elder twin. To retrieve the elder brother's arm, the twins disguise themselves as healers then pull the monster's teeth and blind him, thus they defeat (kill) the false sun of the previous creation.

Seven Macaw is depicted in many guises, but his association is consistently with the Hero Twins, death and moturary offerings, objects and architecture. As Coe (1989:164) has observed, "Many of the gigantic stucco heads which flank the staircases of Preclassic and Early Classic Maya temple-pyramids represent Vucub Caquix." Among these, the earliest (ca.300 BC) and largest (60 x 30') was recently discovered at Nakbé in northern Guatemala. Additionally, Seven Macaw is also represented as residing atop the **axis mundi** or world tree of Maya mythology as on the sarcophagous lid from the Temple of the Inscriptions and The Temple of the Cross at Palenque (see Coe 1989 for these and other illustrations of Seven Macaw).

Both Seven Macaw and the younger of the hero Twins are depicted in the accompanying figure. Note how the giant figure of Seven Macaw fills the frame of the shallow funerary bowl and the monster's

bloodied jaw and eye. The identity of the younger brother (on the monster's back) is confirmed by the presence of both his arms.

CONCLUSION

Due to the recent advances, primarily in decipherment of Classic Period writing, the ancient Maya have emerged from the mists of prehistory to take their place among other historic civilizations such as the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. One reason for the success of modern epigraphers is that Mayan is still spoken by descendants of the Classic Maya in Mexico and Central America. Maya Indians are second only to the Qechua speakers of the Andes living representatives of ancient Inca culture.

The Maya, their ancient architecture, art and artifacts persist and are linked to the past by language, custom and practice. As archaeologists continue to investigate, explore, and interpret the cultural manifestations of the Maya, we should be mindful of that the relative size, archaeological importance and perceived of these relics may be more apparent than real. Modern and ancient sites in Belize illustrate the problems with criteria of importance, e.g., many sites are larger than Altun Há, but few rival it with respect to the richness of grave offerings and Belize City is far larger than the capital of Belmopan.

The foregoing has reevaluated a few cherished icons, attributions and notions in light of current thinking about the Maya of Belize. These interpretations are subject to change as new theories or paradigms explain and incorporate more or different data. Finally, it is axiomatic that archaeologists, theories and explanations come and go, but the data do not, that is to say the data (as we unearth or understand them) do not change, but our interpretations of them will.

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BOOK REVIEW

Maya Land Rights in Belize and the History of Indian Reservations, Curtis Berkey, 1994: Indian Law Resource Center, Washington. 45pp.

By Assad Shoman

This little book provides an excellent summary of the question of the rights of Maya inhabitants to lands in Belize, and in particular in the Toledo district. Unfortunately for the Maya, its conclusion, from a strictly legal point of view, is that 'The Indian (sic) inhabitants do not seem to have a secure legal title on their lands...Indians occupy the reservations at the will of the government, despite their long and continuous aboriginal occupancy and ownership.

Although the focus of the book is perhaps excessively legal, it does provide a very good historical account of Maya occupation and dispossession of land in Belize. In particular, it uses the key available primary and secondary documents to substantiate propositions that are still, at this late stage, not generally assimilated into the dominant culture: that the Maya continuously occupied and owned the territory that is now Belize for thousands of years before the European invasion and settlement; that the Maya resisted, often by force, the incursions of both Spanish and British settlers throughout the invasion and until well into the 19th century; that the British usurped Maya lands with complete disregard for legal principles; and that the system of reservations established by the British over a period of a century (from 1867 to 1962) was one riddled with inconsistencies and ambiguities, the one constant factor being that the Maya themselves had no effective control over the land.

It is in the description of the establishment and nature of the reservations that this book is particularly useful, since very little is known about this mechanism that has been so critical to the control and impoverishment of the indigenous people in Belize.I Berkey correctly points out that "it is difficult to generalize about the original purposes behind the reservation policy"; he notes that at various times it seemed to include pacification, provision of more secure tenure for Maya communities (as against other claimants, not as against government); provision of a refuge for Maya immigrants from neighbouring countries and restitution for past violations of land rights. Perhaps one of the more important reasons, however, as Bolland points out, had to do with the concern of the colonial authorities to create an accessible supply of labour: "The Maya were not to be allowed to own the land on which they situated their villages and milpas, because it would make them too independent."2.

The reservation have been treated with such disrespect by governments that is not even possible to get an accurate idea of the land areas affected. A 1960 report lists 12 reservations with a total area of 76,727 acres, but after increases in 1962 the total rose to 79,237, only to fall, inexplicably, to 77,457 in 1965; no changes have since been made. Yet a "recent request" to the government for information (it is not clear by whom) produced the information that there were 9 reserves with a total of 70, 127 acres. Berkey exclaims in exasperation that "the confused state of information about the reserves, both inside and outside the government, makes the Maya's tenure and hold on the reservations all the more insecure."

One might ask, however, why this is the case; why is it that government, usually so precise about land acreage and ownership, should be so apparently confused with regard to the Maya reserves. The answer would appear to be incontestible: they are not taken seriously by government, at least as far as giving any rights to the Maya are concerned. The rules governing the reserves date back

to 1924, require payment of written permits and annual rents and fees; the Commissioner of Lands and Surveys has unfettered discretion to decide whether to grant or revoke any permit. Berkey rightly concludes that"these rules make Indians (sic) little more than tenants-at-will in their aboriginal lands. They occupy their lands at the whim of the government." Indeed, the government reserves the right to dispose of any unoccupied lands on the reserves in any way it seems fit and to anyone, and the rules make clear that "no compensation shall be paid to any Indian" for such disposal.

But while this book presents a clear picture of the "inadequacy of Belize law in guaranteeing Maya land rights"' and while it also clearly argues that international legal principles do guarantee legal rights to land to indigenous people, it does not provide the political context that will allow us to understand the issues involved nor to equip us to help in the process of attempting to have the Maya land rights respected.

The nationalist project has sought to establish a policy which proclaims that all Belizeans are equal and which therefore is unwilling to accept communal rights, and in particular land rights, that are exclusive of other communities or ethnic groups. While successive governments have so far respected the few and fragile rights embodied in the reserves and alcalde systems in Toledo, they have also tried to effectively abolish or at least render irrevelant the reserves by inducing the Maya residents in those areas to apply for and be granted freehold titles.

Apart from the nationalist ideology, the capitalist system of land tenure and capitalization also militates against any respect that may be accorded to communal rights. In addition, the Maya system of milpa farming is disqualified by the authorities on ostensibly scientific grounds, and even the environmentalists have now added their voices against this ancient communal practice -one that, incidentally, allowed a population many times the size of the present one to occupy the land that is now Belize. The Maya of Toledo, as isolated as they are compared to the rest of the population, are inextricably bound up in Belize's market economy; they need money to purchase most of their needs and to improve their standard of living, and no-one lends money on the basis of reservation rights.

What is at issue here is the claims by some Toledo Maya to communal lands. It must be recalled that the reserves were once seen as affecting lands in the north and west as well as the south, including "Caribs" (Gariganu) as well as the Maya, in other parts of the country, however, have been largely acculturated to the nationalist vision, and exhibit no tendency to claim communal land rights; neither do the Gariganu.

It is the Toledo Maya Cultural Council (TMCC), for whom this study was written, who for the past ten years or so have been calling on government to allocate 500,000 acres of land to the Toledo Maya as a community, with legaL rights vested in the community and not in government. Not surprisingly, their pleas have fallen on deaf ears, not only on the part of successive governments but also from any sector of the population. Only one civil organization (Society for the Promotion of Education and Research, SPEAR) sought, as far back as 1987, to give publicity and support to the TMCC's claim. It also sought to work along with TMCC to strengthen that organization and improve its capacity for advocacy of its claim.

Given the national political framework, however, it would take a very strong organization to challenge the status quo, and unfortunately TMCC is not yet such an organization. Apart from the tremendous national structural and cultural obstacles it must face, the TMCC has been plagued by enduring divisions between the Kekchi and Mopan Maya of Toledo. There is no way that it can succeed in achieving its objectives without forging a solid unity between these two major groups.

No-one can deny today, in the light of internationally accepted principles, that the indigenous peoples of the world have rights, including land rights, that have been denied historically and that must now be respected. Nor is it in dispute that the indigenous people of Belize are generally at the bottom of the socio-economic ladder; that is, that they are subject to greater exploitation than other groups. A paper presented by the government of Belize to the World Bank during the same month (May, 1994) that this book was published makes it clear (a first for a government in post-independence Belize, to the best of my knowledge) that the Maya are subject to "extreme levels

of poverty" and that health and other public services are not as readily available to them. Anyone visiting Maya villages in Toledo would regard this as an understatement.

While one can agree, therefore, with Berkey's conclusion that "there is an urgent need for a comprehensive review of the land rights of Maya communities under the law of Belize", such a review is neither sufficient nor possible without tackling the wider political, social and cultural issues that give rise to the condition of such communities in Belize today, not least of which is the question : Are Belizeans capable of agreeing that these communities have the right to be consulted and to decide how best to secure their identity and their future?

(1) An article by O. Nigel Bolland, "Alcaldes and Reservations: British Policy Towards the Maya in Late Nineteenth Century Belize" included in his book Colonialism and Resistance in Belize (1988: Cubola, ISER, SPEAR) is an excellent historical account of the genesis of the reservation system.

(2) ibid. page 135.