

# THE COLONIZATION OF THE MAYA OF SOUTHERN BELIZE

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## ABSTRACT:

*How did the British colonize southern Belize? Six processes were foundational: territorialization, making private property, establishing Indian Reservations, enrolling the Alcaldes into the colonial state, creating a rudimentary local state apparatus, and working with the Church to 'settle' the Maya into permanent communities. The paper briefly reviews these processes. Since many of the effects of these processes continue to shape southern Belize, and because the Maya movement has confronted these effects, it follows that the movement is carrying forth the struggle to decolonize southern Belize.*

**KEYWORDS:** Colonialism, British Colonial State, Indigeneity, Toledo, Belize

## INTRODUCTION

The 2015 BAAS meetings were accompanied by an historic event: the Consent Order of the Caribbean Court of Justice (hereafter 'CCJ Order'), signed April 22, 2015 between representatives of the Government of Belize and the Maya communities of Toledo. The CCJ Order (CCJ 2015) states:

1. The judgment of the Court of Appeal of Belize [recognizing Maya land rights] is affirmed insofar as it holds that Maya customary land tenure exists in the Maya villages in the Toledo District and gives rise to collective and individual property rights within the meaning of sections 3(d) and 17 of the Belize Constitution. ...
3. ... [T]he Court accepts the undertaking of the Government to, in consultation with the Maya people or their representatives, develop the legislative, administrative and/or other measures necessary to create an effective mechanism to identify and protect the property and other rights arising from Maya customary land tenure, in accordance with Maya customary laws and land tenure practices.

Simply put, the Maya won. The CCJ Order should mark a decisive step in the history of the relations between the Belizean state and the Maya communities. But while the Order resolves many issues, we cannot expect it to end conflict between the Maya and the state. This is not only because of the real potential for non-compliance

(the state's recent record is lamentable) but also because of what the CCJ Order cannot resolve. On 4 July 2015, Cristina Coc, spokesperson for the Maya Leaders Alliance, gave a speech in Golden Stream where she explained the stakes of their struggle:

[O]ur struggle has long centered on land—on securing the land that we have customarily and historically used to produce our livelihoods. ... Why are powerful people in Belize so threatened by our claim to the land that we have always used? The simple answer is that they do not want to see people who have long been marginalized ... stand up for themselves and refuse to allow the continued theft or plunder of our land and resources by the powerful. ... [I]n most of the Maya communities the land is still managed in common by the community. In other words, land for us is not just a commodity. The very idea that we could continue to live with the land, and each other, in a dignified way, that is not defined by the market, that respects our ties to our Earth as something greater than a means to an end, a way to make a dollar, as mere real estate—this idea threatens the elites and the powerful of this society, who have always enriched themselves by controlling the land (Coc, 2015<sup>1</sup>).

Like others at BAAS, I did not hear Cristina's speech. Thanks to the initiative organized by

Timoteo Mesh and Filiberto Penados, I was in Cayo, discussing questions raised by the resurgent Maya movement: what does it mean to be indigenous to Belize? Who exactly is seen *as* indigenous and on what basis?<sup>2</sup>

Confronting these questions with care and commitment is essential today. Doing so, I contend, requires that we reexamine the experience of British colonialism. It was the colonization of British Honduras that set the stage for the contemporary struggles surrounding indigenous peoples and their lands. So in this paper I review archival evidence on the origins of the British state and state strategies to colonize the Maya of southern British Honduras in the late 19th and early 20th century.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately most works of Belizean history largely ignore southern Belize, where indigenous politics are most intense today. This lacunae is understandable because colonization proceeded distinctively in the South. But as a consequence, Toledo is marginalized not only economically (it remains the poorest district) but also in historiography.

## THE COLONIZATION OF SOUTHERN BELIZE: SIX PROCESSES

I contend that six processes were fundamental to the colonization of southern Belize. While these processes unfolded together, it is useful to disaggregate them for the sake of analysis. Each involved non-state actors: especially foreign and domestic capital, subaltern social groups, and the Church. But here, as in colonialism, emphasis should be given to the state, which coordinated these processes. My theoretical approach to the colonial state is indebted to Antonio Gramsci, who emphasizes struggles over hegemony and the evolution of an ‘integral state,’ which includes the social actors and institutions which abut the state (narrowly defined). As Gramsci explains, a robust conception of the state “includes elements which need to be referred back to the notion of civil society (in the sense that one might say that [the integral] state = political society + civil society, in other words hegemony protected by the armour of coercion)” (Q688; 1971, 262-3). This is a crucial insight in this context for two reasons. First, in colonizing southern Belize, the British never acted alone, and the state’s coercive apparatus played a limited role. Second, once we grasp that colonization required the production of

an ensemble of social relations – which together comprise the integral state – we may understand how colonial hegemony lives on in southern Belize.

## Territorialization

For the colonial state to make the forest lands of southern Belize amenable to logging and the extraction of value, the unknown forest lands needed first to be claimed *as* territory. Thus the first practice of colonialism is the very act of claiming the area *as* British Honduras, i.e., making it state space, British territory. I refer to this as ‘territorialization’, a bundle of practices which have evolved in time and space but always includes a performative claim, mapping, and the spatial realization of state power (see Wainwright 2008, Hoffman 2014).<sup>4</sup>

Contact between the Maya and Europeans in southern Belize may have occurred as early as the 1520s, when Cortés marched southward through the area now known as the Guatemalan *Verapaz*. Yet southern Belize remained uncolonized, and we have few colonial records prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> The focus of historiography therefore lies in the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>6</sup>

Until recently, Belizean historiography suggested that all of the Maya people living in (what is today known as) southern Belize were killed before the British arrived—and that the land remained essentially empty until the 1880s. This justified primitive accumulation, the separation of the living Maya from their forests, on the grounds that there were no indigenous people around at the time of colonization, hence no land rights. This political position, never coherently elaborated in post-Independence Belize (but attempted by Sosa 2011, drawing from the work of Jaime Awe), has been rigorously undone by the work of numerous scholars (especially Rick Wilk, Richard Levanthal, and Grant Jones). In fact, the British state had practically no knowledge of Maya communities in the south until long after it had claimed the territory. For example, in 1859 the superintendent of British Honduras said of the Mayas: “We know but little of these people” (Burdon, 1935b, 221-2).<sup>7</sup> In most maps of 19<sup>th</sup> century, southern Belize is drawn almost blank, with mountain ranges misplaced and clear statements that the area was ‘unexplored’ (see, e.g., Figure 1).

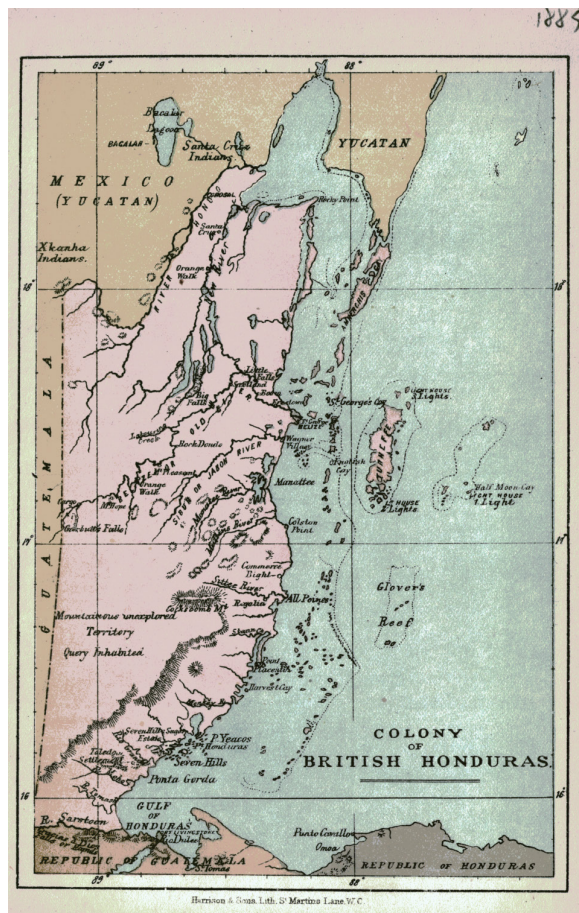


Figure 1: Map of the Colony of British Honduras (1885, Harrison & Sons). Source: author's collection. Note that the interior of the Toledo District is labelled "Mountainous Unexplored Territory Query Inhabited."

In material terms, the territorialization of Belize was driven by the slow plundering of the forests, a process executed by slaves for the benefit of European capital (Bolland 1977; 2004[1988]). After clearing the most accessible logwood and mahogany from along the major rivers in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the settlers sent their logging teams far into the interior. Conflicts often erupted as logging teams came into contact with Maya communities, threatening the stability of the industry. Reports of state officials from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century reflect an acute anxiety about the lack of hegemony over Maya communities.<sup>8</sup> An 1873 report on the state of the defenses of British Honduras found that "the country on the whole is indefensible" (Burdon, 1935a, 331-2). The settlers and the Colonial Office in London responded differently to the challenge of Maya resistance to logging. The settlers wanted the colonial state to defeat the Maya with force;

the Colonial Office in London sought to bring Mayas into closer relations, to win hegemony and stabilize the state's territory. This dispute oscillated without clear resolution throughout the early-to-mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Protracted conflict in the north showed London that the Maya could not be eliminated with one violent attack, yet the settlers were unwilling to tax their lands sufficiently to pay for a standing army. A new approach was needed.

### Private property and commodity exports

A decisive shift occurred during the last quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a period when the colony was brought more fully into capitalist economic relations.<sup>9</sup> While the state's colonial policy vis-à-vis the Maya was developed for the West and North, it was only fully implemented down South. It was no simple act to transform the forests of southern Belize into *property*, i.e., to bring the land into capitalist social relations. The state played the key role in this process by demarcating forest concessions on maps and legitimating land purchases through legal relations. The conversion of logging concessions into property claims created the rudiments of a market in private land (Bolland & Shoman, 1977). This process created a highly uneven market in real estate, as the largest European firms gained logging concessions and came to own much of the colony's land (this pattern is still largely intact, albeit with more US-based owners today). The Maya were formally excluded from owning land; the forests they occupied were claimed by the state, which taxed Maya farmers for making *milpas*. By ceding the forests to logging firms, the state thus facilitated primitive accumulation and extracted a surplus from the Maya peasantry (land rents). Maya farmers who could not afford to pay their land taxes suffered incarceration (Wainwright, 2008, 54-59).

Between the 1880s and the 1930s, a wide range of goods were exported from the Toledo District: mahogany, logwood, and chicle from the forests; sugar and rum from the sugar estates along the coast; bananas in the Rio Grande and Monkey River watersheds; and cocoa, rubber, coconuts, copra, plantains, and coffee from the estates and Maya communities in the interior. Yet the extensive production of southern Belize during this period generated almost no local capital accumulation. The landed elites who dominated



the local state held an effective monopoly on land (Bolland & Shoman, 1977), and the logging companies and merchants that profited from the urban proletariat's food dependency inhibited the development of a large agriculture sector and perpetuated the colony's import dependency. The land monopoly prevented middle and large peasant households from growing into commercial production for the internal market. A thorough-going land reform would have been needed to stimulate dynamic growth, but the colonial state avoided agrarian reform and land taxes that would have provoked the large timber companies and land owners.

Although forestry exports gave way to agriculture in the 1950s behind expanding exports of citrus and sugar, the state never committed itself to agrarian reform, and the basic structure of the economy remains unchanged. Toledo lags in agricultural production, state capacity is extremely limited, and the District is the country's poorest. Demands for indigenous land rights are one response.

### Indian Reservations

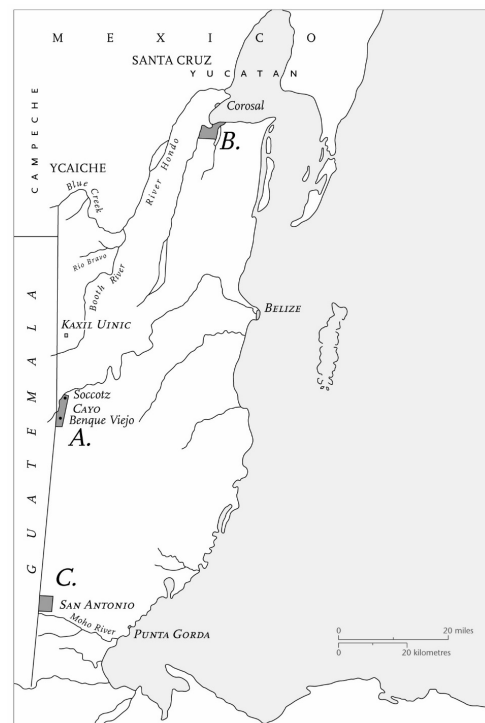
If the Maya could not own land, where would they live? Lieutenant Governor Longden argued for Indian reservations in 1868 in these terms:

There are ... some villages inhabited by Indians ... situate upon the Lands claimed either by the British Honduras Company or Mssers. Young Toledo & Co., but wherever they are situate on Crown Lands I think the villages and a sufficient surrounding space should be reserved in the hands of the Crown for the use of the Indians, – no marketable titles being issued to them to enable them to dispose of such lands, – but the land being divided amongst them, from time to time, by the Alcalde or Chief man amongst them, as may be most convenient (Longden, 1868).

This letter comprises the earliest attempt to justify a reservation policy. Three points are important to note. First, the question of rule by "Alcalde or Chief man" was linked to reservations from its first inception; these institutions were linked in colonial policy (see subsequent section). Second, these policies were intended to address the

problems faced by the two largest land-holding and timber companies in the colony. Since the Mayas happened to be found by Europeans "upon the Lands claimed either by the British Honduras Company or Mssers. Young Toledo & Co.," the colonial state took up the responsibility of settling them somewhere else. In light of the battles fought between the state and the Maya in the previous two decades, Longden desired settlement to reduce the likelihood of further Maya attacks. Third, Longden specifies two key provisos to the argument that "the villages and a sufficient surrounding space should be reserved ... for the use of the Indians": the land should not be held by the Mayas but must remain "in the hands of the Crown," and the Mayas should have no means to convert the land into "marketable titles" that may "enable them to dispose of such lands".

These policies were accepted in London by 1888, but there were still no Indian reservations, though provisions were made for such in the Crown Lands Ordinances of 1872, 1877, and 1886. To prepare the reservations, the Surveyor General wrote a report (Miller, 1888) and mapped the proposed reserves. Colonial planners imagined constructing a trio of spaces (Figure 2) where the Maya were to be geographically enclosed within the margins of the colony's territory and



effectively excluded from its polity (Bolland, 2004[1988]; Berkey, 1994; Wilk, 1997a, 54-63;

Wainwright, 2008, 51-56). Reservations were first demarcated in the South. The original plan for the Indian Reservation at San Antonio (Figure 3) suggests how the Reservations were imagined by colonial cartographers: as rectilinear spaces, drawn independent of social life and landscape features, intended to bring spatial order to the scattered and itinerant Maya.

Figure 2: Map of the Plan of Indian Reservations, 1888 (Cartographer: Eric Leinberger, 2005)

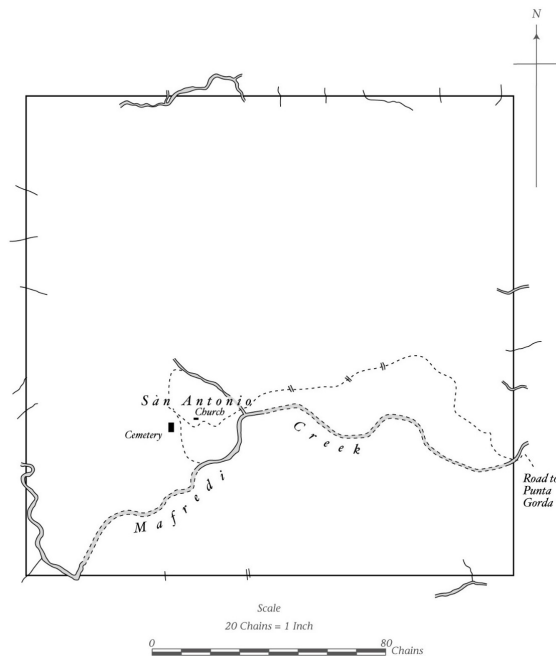


Figure 3: Map of the Plan of the San Antonio Reservation (Cartographer: Eric Leinberger, 2005)

Although the colonial state hoped that the Maya would stay within the borders of these three reservations, the state had no means to actually police the borders (see following sections). In southern Belize, colonial officials responded to the fact that Mayas refused to settle in one place by creating new Reservations where they found Maya communities (ICMW, 1941). This practice continued up through the 1930s, until the Interdepartmental Committee on Maya Welfare signaled the end to creating Reservations and a shift toward a new approach: to incorporate the Maya into the life of the colony and teach the Maya about their “connection with Britain and the Empire” in order to make them “Empire conscious” (ibid, Appendix 1).

### Local colonial state [a]: Alcaldes

Who would *govern* these Indian Reservations? At the end of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the colonial

state did not have any capacity in the Toledo District—indeed, it barely existed. Therefore the colonial government moved to incorporate Maya village leaders, known as ‘Alcaldes’, into colonial administration.<sup>10</sup> Alcaldes already existed in Maya communities in southern Belize, but in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, they became the local state, literally ‘a system’, formally attached to the empire. They were charged with maintaining law and order, judging certain crimes, collecting taxes, and keeping watch over the territory. In short, the Indian Reservations were intended to territorialize southern Belize for the British; the Alcalde system was formalized to govern the Reservations without maintaining a colonial military.

In the spring of 1884, the Government sent despatches to the colonial office on the subjects of the “appointment of Alcaldes in Indian Villages” and the “working of Crown Lands Department” (Fowler, 1884).<sup>11</sup> Although these despatches were treated as independent concerns, they reflect a common challenge: to win hegemony over the Mayas. In September 1885, the Colonial Secretary, Henry Fowler, wrote to the Secretary of State for the Colonies: “our relations with the differing tribes of Indians on our frontiers are at present of a satisfactory character, and I see no reason to anticipate any change, provided the good understanding that has been established is encouraged, and some pains are taken to *cultivate the goodwill of the Indians*” (Fowler, 1885, *italics mine*).

During Fowler’s tenure as Colonial Secretary, the colonial state extended in southern Belize. When the state found unknown and ungoverned Mayas in the south, they moved to create state institutions that could win “the goodwill of the Indians.” On 24 January 1884, Fowler wrote a 29-page letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies on “the question of extending the [Alcalde] system [so that] the natives can ... be converted from passive and indifferent subjects into loyal and willing subjects” (Fowler, 1884). Fowler’s letter details the merits of the Alcalde system: “the natives would appreciate a jurisdiction exercised over them according to their native customs. Leaving them to their own devices, or attempting to govern them directly by means of Magistrates and negro [sic] policemen has not worked satisfactorily.” Fowler cites a

report from the District Commissioner (hereafter, DC) of the Western district:

The payment of salaries to the Alcaldes of the various villages causes great satisfaction and the anticipation of a staff of office and a flag to be hoisted before the Alcalde's house on Sundays and Fiesta days makes them feel that they will not be inferior in display to their neighbors in the Republics – Without these advantages it would be difficult to exact any service from the Alcaldes or to support their authority among *a people so childishly dependent upon ceremony* (Millson, 1883, 7, my italics).

Fowler argued that Alcaldes would be less expensive than police, maintaining order in rural areas by projecting the power of the colonial state.<sup>12</sup> Their role in the colonial state was emphasized symbolically. When Governor Harley wrote to the Colonial Office to express his thanks for their support of the recognition of the Alcaldes, he proposed that “a staff of office – a cane – similar to those issued to friendly Chiefs on the Gold Coast, to be held during their tenure of Office” (Harley, 1882). By recognizing the Alcaldes as *indigenous* leaders who shared authority with the colonial state, alcaldehood underwent a decisive shift. The role has continued to evolve.

### Local colonial state [b]: State institutions<sup>13</sup>

The colonial state's structure was narrow and hierarchical and thoroughly British-imperial with no pretension of democracy. At the top of the hierarchy was the governor, officially the local representative of the Crown. Most governors arrived with prior colonial and/or military experience in British colonies in Africa and the Caribbean. Like commerce, political power was spatially concentrated in the British zone of Belize City. Beyond the city, each district was governed by the DC who served as magistrate, tax collector, customs agent, and so on: the *de facto* local sovereign. In remote Punta Gorda, the colonial headquarters in southern Belize after 1884, the DC effectively served as the sole representative of the Crown. Two years earlier, the boundaries of the Toledo District had been defined and its first magistrate, Francis Orgill, appointed. In four subsequent decades, all

DCs were British; an uneven transition to use of “local” staff—meaning Caribbean-born, upper-class Creole men—started in the late 1920s. The first Belizean to serve as DC to Toledo was S.B. Vernon, a Creole man elected chair of the Toledo Legislative Council in 1943. But when and how were the rudimentary forms of the local colonial state established?

In 1868, a group of Confederates settled north of Punta Gorda. The Confederate settlers purchased land from the colonial government and planted sugar estates, looking towards PG to purchase labor. Yet they encountered difficulties attracting laborers from the Garifuna community, which after hundreds of years of struggle against slavery and colonialism had secured a measure of autonomy. Nor were Maya people in rural villages drawn to work for the Confederates. But without labor, their sugar estates and their colony would fail. So the Confederates made a series of appeals to the colonial state for help with their so-called ‘labor problem’. The British state officials clearly regarded the Confederate settlers at Toledo as natural allies, due to their race, language, and desire to build agricultural estates. In 1872, the state facilitated the importation of laborers from India; their descendants are today known as ‘East Indian’. Yet even after importing low-wage laborers, the Confederate estate owners were unsatisfied. They repeatedly turned to the colonial state, asking the Governor to deputize one of them as the local magistrate so that they could discipline their laborers with the force of law.

The Governor sympathized and expressed his support for their cause:

[The settlers] are praying for the appointment of a paid District Magistrate. ... At present, [Toledo] is only visited once in three months by the Magistrate of the Southern District [based in Stann Creek Town] who remains there for a day or two. Such visits are productive of good will but the presence of a resident Magistrate is necessary *if only for cases between masters and servants* which can only be dealt with by a paid magistrate. ...

The memorial was presented to me by a deputation specially sent, who

represented that labor is in such demand and wages so high, that the men employed are so independent as to be almost beyond control – that if a dispute arises and cannot be amicably settled, it has to wait the visit of the District Magistrate, perhaps, for a period of nearly three months or the master has to proceed to the headquarters of the District, procure a summons, return for the hearing of the case, and probably expend a considerable sum in addition to the loss of time .... And when this is done, the servant, if dissatisfied with the result, will probably not return to his work and will evade arrest by proceeding into the boundaries of Spanish Honduras or Guatemala, which can be reached in a few hours (Barlee, 1882, my italics).

Thus, the Confederate colonists who wanted to create sugar plantations spurred the state to create a District Magistrate (subsequently Commissioner) at Toledo. The first, temporary post was offered to one of the Confederates, James Hutchison, with the understanding that a British DC would be appointed later. The Colonial Office was reassured that the revenue collected by the DC “will more than repay the expense entailed.”

The earliest state institutions were founded at the behest of colonists from the defeated Confederate States to facilitate labor discipline over their workers. Once established, local state officials sought to learn about and gain influence over Indigenous communities. So, from its inception the state was organized around race and class relations. Rudimentary state institutions—staff, postal service, policing, and so on—accumulated slowly in the South. Up to the 1940s, the state had few buildings, staff, or capacity. Before then, the most important colonial institution was the Catholic Church.

### **The Catholic Church<sup>14</sup>**

Belizean historiography has long deemphasized the role of the Church in colonialism. This is unfortunate because, as throughout Central America, the Catholic Church was fundamental to the extension and establishment of colonial power. In southern Belize during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, Jesuits from Italy and the USA

administered the Church. The Jesuits, a teaching order, emphasized education as a means to approach indigenous communities. In 1862, the year that British Honduras was declared a Colony, Father John Genon of Belgium moved from Livingston, Guatemala, to Punta Gorda, to establish the first Catholic residence in southern Belize. The Catholic Church was beginning to build its infrastructure in southern Belize during the same period that the Colonial Office shifted its strategy toward Indian reservations and Alcaldes. Indeed, one key author of these policies, Colonial Secretary Henry Fowler, was president of the British Honduras Catholic Association from its 1879 founding (Hopkins, 1918; Buhler, 1976).

British colonial policies did not prescribe any specific role for the Catholic Church in southern Belize. Yet the limits of state capacity (see previous section) in the growing Maya communities created opportunities for the Church. It carried out official roles – ministering to the Mayas, providing some rudimentary education, registering births, deaths and marriages – and also often served as a mediator between the Maya communities and the state. When Maya communities held grievances, they often sent delegations to the Church leader who would assist in writing a letter to Government House in Belize City—or simply ‘represent’ the Maya himself, through his own letter.

While both the state and Church sought hegemony over the Maya, and the aims of the Church and state were often complementary, Church fathers and state officials had different approaches, capacities, and motivations. Between the 1890s and the 1940s, records indicate that the two institutions clashed over an array of policies concerning alcohol, education, and taxation. The differences between the Catholic Church and the British colonial state – in their aims and approach to winning hegemony over the Q’eqchi’ and Mopan Maya – were ultimately accommodated by a tacit agreement: that the Maya must be *settled* in permanent communities. The church’s approach centered on drawing Maya households out from ‘the bush’ to live in permanent settlements where they would be disciplined through church-led education.

For instance, in 1913-14 the Church fathers wrote to Belize City, asking the Governor to



compel the Maya around San Antonio to settle permanently in the village. Rather than submit a mere letter from the father, which had previously failed to convince the colonial government to act, Reverend Hopkins forwarded a petition to the Colonial Secretary in London, presenting the church's arguments as a call for order on behalf of the Maya of San Antonio, who signed with Xs next to their names:

There are many Indians in the district surrounding our village who live hidden away in the bush like so many wild animals. These men simply refuse to obey the summons of the Alcalde, who seems to be unable to enforce his orders. They respect no authority.

The undersigned, therefore, humbly beg that some steps be taken by the Government of this Colony to force all the men of this vicinity, whether they live in the Town or not, to obey the Alcalde and to do their share in keeping the roads and streams in proper condition.

It would be as great a benefit to those ignorant people as to those who now live in the Villages, and ultimately, to the Colony itself, if by some scheme these isolated individuals, – there are many of them – could be induced to live in the Towns. Once in the Town, they could easily be made to respect some authority, and to bear their just share in works affecting the public good; and their children could be made to attend school [–] no small advantage (Hopkins, 1914).

The Church fathers (Hopkins and, later, Tenk) could not convince the colonial state to respond exactly as they wished. While the Church enjoyed free rein in educating and preaching to the Mayas, the state did not bend to the Church on most matters and protected its relative autonomy. For the state, the Maya of the south were principally peasant farmers who played a dual role as providers of agricultural surpluses for the Belize City proletariat and as occasional workers in rural, southern Belize. They were also a source of capital for the state, collected through land rents. And to complement these elements, they were seen as political subjects to be transformed

“into citizens with at least elementary ideas of political rights & duties,” as Tenk put it in a 1913 letter (Wainwright, 2009).

The Church and the state agreed upon the goal of settling the Maya by compelling them to move into Reservations where they would attend school and pen their pigs. In the discourse on development, education and agricultural settlement are explicitly conjoined (Wainwright, 2008, 69-98). Emphasizing education, Bishop Hopkins begged the state to intervene in a 1918 letter: “The compulsory law in Indian villages is therefore, I think, necessary, and where fully carried out, sufficient. Six years in school should be sufficient for an Indian child” (Hopkins, 1918). Bishop Hopkins, aware that his appeal would be regarded as an effort to apply state resources to support the Church's hegemony, framed his appeal with two familiar and persistent concepts. The first was *citizenship*: “Every encouragement should be given to the Indians to stay in the pueblos for thus they become better and more useful citizens” (ibid). The second was *land rent*: “an Indian can lease a lot of land in the ‘bush’, can then sub-let portions of it, and so get the land for nothing, whereas the town Indian has to pay a yearly rent for his holding besides suffering from other disadvantages...” (ibid). So in framing his letter as an appeal for the suffering Mayas, Hopkins aligned the necessity of their compulsory education with the promise of regular tax collection. Joining these three elements – education, taxing, and citizenship – was the task of producing spatial order from the forests of Belize, which is to say, the task of settling the Maya. Through colonialism the Maya inherited the duty of living in a town, or at least a proper, recognized, settled village—one where the Church and the state could do their work.

## CONCLUSION

I have offered a concise summary of six processes through which southern Belize was colonized.<sup>15</sup> Reflecting upon them, it is only logical to ask: why? Why colonize southern Belize? The region does not seem particularly attractive as a colony. It was a politically contested space (first with Spain, then Guatemala), lacking precious metals, humid, malarial—why bother? Answering this question requires a theory of imperialism, a complex field beyond the scope



of this paper, and a more detailed consideration of social and political-economic processes.<sup>16</sup> But here is a concise answer: Belize was colonized as part of a global strategy that made England the center of the capitalist world. The colonial accumulation strategy in Belize had two major elements: the export of forestry products (which was not initially capitalist, involving plunder and slavery<sup>17</sup>) to the US and England, and the import of food and manufactured goods from England (and its colonies) for consumption in Belize: shipping houses in Belize City profited by importing food, clothing, and other status goods (Wilk, 2006). These paired movements produced a flow of capital to England, consolidating its capitalist class structure, including the proletariat-consumer class. They also created the class structure within the colony, where subaltern social groups – slaves (later, ex-slaves), small farmers, fishers, and peasants (including indigenous peoples), and so on – were governed by a local elite: European colonists and their descendants, including, over generations, leading Creole families in Belize City. The latter were the de facto beneficiaries of the colonial state and eventually took control of it through decolonization.

Yet decolonization, as Cristina Coc's speech reminds us, was a process suspended, interrupted. This is one way to approach the question posed by Filiberto Penados and Timoteo Mesh about the meaning of indigeneity in Belize today. The question of indigeneity is burning today for several reasons: one is that the Maya movement has taken up the challenge of continuing the struggle against colonialism. And the movement has demonstrated that we cannot take up the question of indigeneity or the demands of the Maya without confronting the experience of British colonialism. Colonialism was – remains – the crucible for the conceptions of indigeneity we find in Belize as well as the political economy that is challenged by the movement. Each of the six processes through which southern Belize was colonized lives on and continues to shape the region today. In this sense we cannot say that colonialism ended in 1981. Insofar as the Maya movement is confronting the afterlife of colonialism, it follows that the movement is struggling to decolonize southern Belize. Is there a way of conceptualizing Belizean-ness that allows for non-indigenous Belizeans to join this cause?

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#### Notes:

<sup>1</sup> The event was covered by the main media houses. See, e.g., Isani Cayetano for Channel 5: <http://edition.channel5belize.com/archives/115697>; Paul Mahung for Love FM: <http://lovefm.com/2015/07/03/maya-leaders-hold-meeting-to-state-their-position/>

<sup>2</sup> I thank Filiberto and Timoteo for organizing these productive, important discussions.

<sup>3</sup> Although this paper emphasizes the Maya, we should recall that the colonization of southern Belize involved violence to diverse social groups. Recall, too, that the categories “Maya” and “indigenous to Belize” are not equivalent. The Garifuna have a different but legitimate claim to indigeneity.

<sup>4</sup> Sections 1-4 selectively reproduce passages from Wainwright (2008) and (2009): see these for fuller argument.

<sup>5</sup> According to the *Handbook of British Honduras for the year 1925* (Metzgen et al., 1925) the boundaries of the Toledo District were defined, and the first Magistrate appointed, on March 24, 1882.

<sup>6</sup> Elements of a British colonial state date to 1765, when the Location Laws were formulated by British buccaneers from Jamaica settled the delta of the Belize River, where they began cutting logwood for export to England who wished to formalize their rights to land at logging camps. In 1786 these rules were codified into Burnaby's Code, the first civil law. Belize was declared a colony in 1862 and became a Crown colony in 1871 (see Bolland, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> In recent decades, scholars have sifted through different forms of evidence – linguistic, toponymical, archaeological, plant ecological, folkloric, and oral-historical – which demonstrate long-standing patterns of continuity between the present Maya residents and pre-contact Maya

communities. See, e.g., Jones, 1997; Wilk, 1997a, 1997b.

<sup>8</sup> See Burdon, 1935b, p. 101-4, 118, 127-8, 132, 143, 196-9, 202-3, 207-9, 230. These citations cover the period 1848-1861. During this period the colonial state in Jamaica oversaw the government of British Honduras; British Honduras became a Colony in 1862.

<sup>9</sup> The distinction between pre-capitalist and capitalist economic relations has not been emphasized sufficiently in Belizean historiography. Though slavery was formally abolished in 1834, until the mid-to-late-19<sup>th</sup> century economic life was still fundamentally shaped by the peculiarities of a forest-plunder economy based on slavery. Capitalism emerged fitfully in every sphere: capital-labor relations (regular sale of labor power for a wage), money relations (including banking), the insertion of commodity circulation into global markets, and so on.

<sup>10</sup> On 4 June 1877 the Colonial Secretary wrote to District Magistrate of Orange Walk to convey that approval have been granted for “the system of appointment of Alcaldes and Constables in the Indian and Carib villages throughout the Colony and the exercise by the Alcaldes of a voluntary jurisdiction subject to the District Magistrate” (Burdon, 1935b, p. 338). ‘Alcalde’ is a Spanish term derived from the Arabic word for judge. On the incorporation of Alcaldes into the state, see Bolland, 1987; Moberg, 1992, 1-19.

<sup>11</sup> The Alcaldes despatch was written on 24 January 1884, the same day as a despatch announcing new measures for securing “prison discipline.”

<sup>12</sup> In his estimates for 1923-24, the Toledo DC noted the costs for the District staff. More was spent on the DC’s stationery (\$25) than a second Alcalde would have received for an annual wage (McCall, 1922).

<sup>13</sup> This section reproduces passages from Wainwright (2015). See original text for fuller argument.

<sup>14</sup> This section reproduces passages from Wainwright (2008). See original text for fuller argument.

<sup>15</sup> Other elements, from language policy to gender and education and beyond, were also involved, but space does not permit elaboration.

<sup>16</sup> There is a vast literature on the theory of imperialism and the British case. I hope to examine this question in a sequel to *Decolonizing Development*.

<sup>17</sup> African slaves were brought to Belize via Jamaica by British settlers as early as 1720. Although the African slave trade was abolished by Parliament in 1807, slavery was not abolished in the colony until 1834 (see Bolland, 1997; Shoman, 1994).

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