Hegemony Without Dominance:

Racial Ideology and the Colonial Project in British Honduras, 1847-1867

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Abstract

British Honduras' (modern-day Belize) nineteenth-century colonial administrators operated in a state of hegemony without dominance. They lacked the resources to effectively assert their control over much of the colony, but nonetheless had to uphold the appearance of dominance. Their official, racial ideology premised the legitimacy of their rule on the supposedly innate aptitude of "Anglo-Saxons" for governance and their ability to shield their subjects from the instability of post-dissolution Central America and the Caste War of Yucatán, the latter of which drove thousands of refugees into the colony. This ideology was fundamentally high modernist, dividing the colony's complex social milieu into legible racial groups, each with an "ideal" place in the colonial economy and a justification for their subjugation. In practice, however, residents of all backgrounds regularly behaved in ways which flew in the face of the official racial schema. They forged interethnic bonds which challenged the rigid categories envisioned by administrators and repeatedly refused to play the part of obedient subjects. The British, for their part, were typically reluctant to exercise the authority or military might they boasted about possessing. In the end, the colony's administrators clung to this mirage of mastery even as reality proved it to be illusory.

General Summary

The colonial administration of mid-nineteenth-century British Honduras (modern-day Belize) was severely underequipped. Consequentially, British authority was severely lacking in much of the colony, especially its northern and western frontiers. Nonetheless, the legitimacy of their rule depended on their ability to project an air of authority and defend the territory and its peoples. As such, officials developed racial ideology which divided the colony's population into simplified racial categories, each with a defined role in its economy and a justification for their subordination to the British. However, these classifications did not reflect the reality of life on the ground. The colony's inhabitants constantly behaved in ways which contradicted their prescribed characteristics, and the colonial government regularly failed to live up to its self-appointed duties of benevolent government and defense. As such, British authority in Belize was largely performative.

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Chapter 1:

Introduction

Reading along the archival grain draws our sensibilities to the archive's granular rather than seamless texture, to the rough surface that mottles its hue and shapes its form. Working along the grain is not to follow a frictionless course but to enter a field of force and will to power, to attend to both the sound and sense therein and their rival and reciprocal energies. It calls on us to understand how unintelligibilities are sustained and why empires remain so uneasily invested in them.

—Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain, Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*

I had got to shoot the elephant. I had committed myself to doing it when I sent for the rifle. A sahib has got to act like a sahib; he has got to appear resolute, to know his own mind and do definite things. To come all that way, rifle in hand, with two thousand people at my heels, and then trail feebly away, having done nothing – no, that was impossible. The crowd would laugh at me. And my whole life, every white man's life in the East, was one long struggle not to be laughed at.

—George Orwell, "Shooting an Elephant"

April of 1861 was a low point in the career of Thomas Price, the Acting Superintendent of British Honduras (BH, present-day Belize). Upon hearing rumours of an impending raid by the Santa Cruz Maya, he made haste for the northern town of Corozal. Upon his arrival, however, he was shocked to find the settlement nearly abandoned. He reckoned that about three quarters of the town's 2000 residents had fled. Likewise, "the surrounding country, in which [there] were probably four thousand [residents] a few days previously, was, with the exception of one or two ranchos, utterly deserted." Worse still, the state of the Corozal's defenses seemed to validate the population's exodus. Prior to Price's arrival the town's 80-man garrison had hastily erected a wall around the magistrates' houses and commissariat. He regretfully recounted, "we found at these barricades of dial boards [sic] laid flat on the ground to the height of three feet, three pieces of what, in the early days of invention, might have been denominated ordinance." Seeing Corozal nearly abandoned and with only a paltry garrison, low wall, and antiquated

cannons for defense had a profoundly demoralizing effect on Price. “I never felt so thoroughly small as when I at last awoke to the conviction that there was no confidence in our power of protection,” he later confided to Charles Henry Darling, the governor of Jamaica.[1]

It was not the looming threat of invasion which troubled Price the most, but rather what the abandonment of Corozal meant for the legitimacy and prestige of British rule in Belize. His account of the affair reveals a deep preoccupation with upholding the image of the British Empire. It is telling that the first action he and Major Edward Conran of the 3rd West India Regiment took upon seeing the town’s defences was “to remove these evidences of terror and weakness,” a measure for which Price “was devoutly thankful.” Both bureaucrat and military officer prioritized *appearing* strong, over taking practical steps to improve their position. In fact, one could argue that removing the barricades and guns, inadequate as they were, only disadvantaged them further. The next day, they compelled the remaining population to clear the forest which surrounded the town. This was a necessary step as the thick brush would provide easy cover for a hostile approach. However, Price still insisted on framing it in terms of Britain’s reputation. He explained, “if the Indians did come we were probably at their mercy, unless the bush were cleared, and nothing but a bold push would, I thought, save our prestige and restore confidence.”[2] This focus on upholding British prestige betrays an underlying anxiety, the source of which is not immediately obvious.

Ultimately, the panic was for naught. By early May, Conran could report that “the inhabitants [had] everywhere resumed their lawful pursuits and occupations and there [was] no

[1] Thomas Price to Charles Henry Darling, May 1, 1861, Colonial Office records at the National Archives, Kew (hereafter, CO) 123/105.
[2] Ibid.

reasonable grounds for any attacks from the Indians."[3] Yet, Price's initial response suggests that there was more at stake than the straightforward protection of the colony. Why was the episode so affecting for him? Corozal was a refugee town, largely inhabited by persons who fled the Caste War of Yucatán, a bloody conflict which rocked southern Mexico in the latter half of the nineteenth century. The British conceived of Belize as a safe haven amidst the political instability of its neighbours. In fact, they partially rooted the legitimacy of their rule in this self-perception. British administrators pointed to the Caste War, as well as the upheaval which accompanied the dissolution of the Central American Republic, as evidence of Spanish Americans' inability to govern themselves. By contrast, the supposed safety of Belize demonstrated the benefits and necessity of British rule in the colony. Thus, when Price found Corozal vulnerable and abandoned it put the colonial project in doubt.

Reality frequently clashed with the fantasy Belize's administrators constructed for themselves. The desertion of Corozal in 1861 was merely an extreme example of the sort of challenge colonial ideology faced on a regular basis. In this case, the dissonance was so great that Price was forced to acknowledge it. Most of the time, however, colonial officials were able to assimilate contradictory information in ways which did not threaten their preconceptions. Even in this case, Conran was able to do so. He reported to Price, "what has been done to deter the Indians from entering our territory on this occasion may be the means of doing much to restore confidence amongst our easily alarmed subjects the Yucatán Spaniards."[4] In his estimation, it was simply in the refugees' nature to overreact. Through this racialized lens he was able to, at least partially, turn the onus for the panic back on the Corozaleños. If they were not so

[3] Edward Conran to Thomas Price, May 8, 1861, CO 123/105.
[4] Ibid.

"easily alarmed" they would have never behaved in a way which contradicted the colonial narrative.

A Case of Spurious Hegemony?

This thesis is about BH's administrators use of racial ideology to aid their colonial project during the mid-nineteenth century. During the period in question, the colony's northern frontier became host to a diverse array of peoples from a multitude of different backgrounds. In this context, ideas about the colony's peoples, administrators, and the relationship between them underpinned colonial governance in Belize. Racial taxonomy allowed administrators to break this complex social milieu into a handful of comprehensible categories. These classifications were constructed in ways which justified the subordination of its non-white population and lent legitimacy to Britain's tenuous claim on the territory. However, these representations were little more than a fantasy which presented the colony's inhabitants as its administrators wanted them to be: legible, productive, and dependent. They had little basis in reality. By earnestly promulgating such views, BH's administrators had built themselves an epistemological house of cards. As Price's response to the panic of 1861 suggests, the ideological foundations of Britain's rule were constantly at risk of being undermined by proceedings within the colony. In a different colony this might not have been such an issue. As James C. Scott observes, governments *are* often able to bring reality in line with official narratives through the organs of state power.[5] However, the colonial state was extremely weak in BH. The colony was quite marginal in the grand scheme of the British Empire and, as I explore in chapter two, its ill-defined status made British officials reluctant to take any step which might be construed as an assertion of

[5] James C. Scott, Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 3.

sovereignty until the mid-nineteenth century. In practice their power did not extend far beyond the capital of Belize Town and, to a lesser extent, Corozal.

Before proceeding, I must better define the subject of my inquiry. By "colonial project," I refer broadly to the administration's goals and the steps it took to realize them. In mid-nineteenth-century BH, it generally revolved around two perennial demands: the need for labour and the need to shore up its legitimacy by securing its frontiers. The first was straightforward, Belize's population was tiny, and workers were required for its timber-based economy and burgeoning agricultural sector. The second was a matter of foreign affairs and the source of many a domestic headache. BH was a truly liminal space, lacking a clear status within the British Empire until 1862. Even then, its borders were unclear and contested, particularly in the north and west. Given the weakness of the colonial state, its means to practically address these problems were extremely limited. As such, the construction of an idealized racial schema was one of the few tools left the colonial project's arsenal. But this was a fantasy version of the colony they were largely powerless to bring into existence.

Yet, Belize's administrators generally seem to have accepted this vision as reality. This poses the question, how could they believe something which was so obviously untrue? Ranajit Guha's examination of British India provides a template to answer this question. He describes British rule in India as "dominance without hegemony." By this, he means that the British Raj maintained its rule without winning support of the Indian masses. In his book of the same name, he presents a general outline of how governments rule their subjects. *Dominance* is rooted in a combination of *coercion* and *persuasion*. *Hegemony* exists when the state can rely on the latter

more than the former.[6] Thus, when Guha describes the raj as having "dominance without hegemony," he means that its governance was premised upon the use of force. British bureaucrats did not necessarily see it this way, however. As Guha explains:

> The justification of Britain's occupation of India by the right of conquest was subjected before long to a dialectical shift as colonialism outgrew its predatory, mercantilist beginnings to graduate to a more systematic, imperial career. . . . Corresponding to that change, the exclusive reliance on the sword, too, gave way to an orderly control in which force . . . had to learn to live with institutions and ideologies designed to generate consent. In other words, the idiom of conquest was replaced by the idiom of Order.[7]

That is not to say India's governors put down the sword in favor of the olive branch. Guha describes a litany of instances where the raj deployed force in the name of order. He plainly states that "within the British tradition, as indeed in bourgeois politics in general, Order is enforced by the coercive apparatus of the state."[8] However, the author is cognisant of the inherent tension within this statement. If the bourgeoisie's liberal conception of order involved consent, it was immediately invalidated by the autocratic violence of colonial rule in India. Yet, this contradiction seemed to bounce off Britain's thinkers and bureaucrats. Guha argues that this cognitive dissonance stems from what he calls "the universalizing tendency of capital."[9] He writes that capitalism's "function is to create a world market, subjugate all antecedent modes of production, and replace . . . the entire edifice of precapitalist cultures by laws, institutions, values, and other elements of a culture appropriate to bourgeois rule."[10] The adherents of capitalism and its culture had an unshakable faith in its superiority and benefits, as well as the inevitability of its spread. To acknowledge bourgeois culture's inability to attain hegemony in

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[6] Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), xii, 23.
[7] Ibid., 25.
[8] Ibid., 25-28.
[9] Ibid., 12, 66-67.
[10] Ibid., 13-14.

India would undermine its universalist pretensions. It would reveal that the bourgeois ideal did not have the self-evident allure which its purveyors attributed to it and that it was coercion rather than persuasion which kept India tied to Britain. Refusing to grapple with this revelation, British thinkers simply continued to believe in a liberal rule which did not exist. Thus, they took refuge in a "spurious hegemony."[11]

Like their counterparts in India, I contend that BH's administrators conjured up a *spurious*, or in other words *false*, hegemony. The behaviour of many Caste War migrants suggests an interest in British protection, but not British rule. Likewise, it is doubtful that Black Belizeans felt any affinity for a state which continued to marginalize them, even after formal emancipation. However, the two colonies differed greatly in their coercive power. The governors of India deluded themselves into believing that their bourgeois "order" was not maintained through force. Nonetheless, they *did have* the coercive apparatus to support their dominance over the subcontinent. The colonial state "boasted one of the largest standing armies of the world, an elaborate penal system, and a highly developed police force."[12] The same could not be said for Belize, a far more marginal colony. Here, the colonial state was weak, underserved, and gun-shy. Until 1884, the superintendent/lieutenant-governor of BH was subordinate to the governor of Jamaica.[13] However, the latter was generally reluctant to provide long-term military support. Consequently, troops would be dispatched in moments of crisis and quickly withdrawn. Even in situations where BH's viceroys had the legal authority to act, they were extremely hesitant to do so. Lacking both persuasive and coercive power, it is fair to say that the British did not have dominance over large swathes of the territory they claimed. Whereas India's spurious hegemony

[11] Ibid., 14-16, 72-73.
[12] Ibid., 25.
[13] The Crown's chief representative in Belize held the title of superintendent from 1749-1862, lieutenant-governor from 1862-1884, then governor until the colony became independent in 1981.

existed to cover the fact that Britain had "dominance without hegemony," BH's concealed that they had little dominance at all. Here it was not just a spurious hegemony, but a *hegemony without dominance*. Colonial subjects consented to British rule not because they accepted British racial taxonomies or owing to British military might but because colonial rule offered access to certain advantages while permitting individuals to operate independently of the state.

In this thesis I make two interconnected primary arguments, each intended to break apart the racialized aspects of the British Honduran colonial project. Firstly, I argue that the colonial project in BH had a liberal high modernist character. As such, a major part of it was the development of a racial taxonomy which artificially underpinned the colonial project by simplifying its complex social milieu into a handful of categories, each with an economic role and a justification for their subjugation. This included highlighting the different groups' supposed aptitude for certain forms of labour and disinclination for others. It also meant framing groups as incapable of self-governance and thus in need of British rule. However, these categorizations were incongruous with the colony's social reality and the government lacked the resources to bring the latter in line with the former. Their racialized colonial policy repeatedly failed to produce the desired results. Following from this, my second argument is that administrators' continued belief in these categories was a form of *spurious hegemony*, one which barely had a pretext to dominance. Despite its obvious falsehoods and contradictions, officials needed to believe in the racial ideology they had constructed lest they undermine the colonial project's legitimacy. As Price and Conran's experience in 1861 shows, they had to maintain an aura of authority even in the face of contrary evidence. A final corollary to these arguments is that change in Belize tended to be the product of external developments, as opposed to the internal decisions of colonial authorities. Occurrences such as the Caste War or the fluctuation of

the mahogany market had a far greater impact on BH's historical trajectory then any colonial decree.

With this thesis, I make interventions into two bodies of literature. The remainder of this introduction examines both in turn. First, is the relatively small, yet rich, historiography of nineteenth-century Belize. I trace a shift in this corpus from histories of British dominance to ones which stress the limits of colonial power in BH. In doing so, I contextualize my thesis as a continuation of scholarly efforts to critically examine the colony's colonial project. The other is the more general literature concerning the formation and operation of culture and ideology state/colonial projects. I pick this thread up again in chapter two where I examine the connection between high modernist ideology and nineteenth-century imperialism.

Belize in Historiographical Perspective

Any discussion of Belizean historiography should start with the contributions of O. Nigel Bolland. His 1977 book, *The Formation of a Colonial Society: Belize, from Conquest to Crown Colony*, looms large over all studies which have come since. The frequency with which it is cited attests to its import. As its title suggests, *The Formation of Colonial Society*, is a broad work which traces Belize's history from the arrival of Europeans to its attainment of crown colony status in 1871. Despite this, there are common threads which tie the work together. Most of the developments he describes stem from elite desires to extract logwood and mahogany. As a result, a considerable portion of the book is dedicated to the interrelated issues of land and labour. In the eighteenth-century the colony's settler elite, known as the "Baymen," addressed the "labour problem" by importing enslaved Africans. Bolland compellingly highlights how the systems which kept formerly enslaved subjugated after emancipation (1838) originated decades prior. The Baymen leveraged their political power to consolidate their control over the colony's land.

This was a deliberate measure to prevent BH inhabitants from eking out a living as subsistence farmers. Furthermore, systems of advance and truck kept Black Belizeans trapped in a cycle of debt peonage. This system was eventually extended to the Maya and Garínagu populations.[14]

The pre-eminence of domination in Bolland's work cannot be understated. In his seminal book he suggests that the social structure of BH was essentially unchanged by emancipation.[15] His aptly named article, "Systems of Domination After Slavery," elaborates upon this point. He starkly states that historians of the British West Indies "need to abandon the concept of the antinomy of slavery and freedom and to seek to promote the comparative study of transition from slave to wage labor, in terms of varieties of labor control, as an aspect of the transformation of systems of domination."[16] In doing so, he recasts "the nineteenth century as a period of transition from one system of domination to another."[17] This sentiment is far from wrong. Throughout both the works mentioned thus far Bolland provides detailed and compelling arguments which shine light on the mechanisms of control exercised by the Baymen and colonial administration. At this juncture, his personal interest in tangible systems of control should be noted. It is this interest which sets him apart from later scholars.

What then, does Bolland have to say about culture, of which racial ideology is a part, in Belize? His approach is best described as materialist. He acknowledges that elite conceptions of race characterized non-white persons as inferior. In the case of the Black population, he points out that whites disparaged their culture and continued to associate them with slavery. These

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[14] O. Nigel Bolland, *The Formation of a Colonial Society: Belize, from Conquest to Crown Colony* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977), 194-195.
[15] Ibid., 196.
[16] O. Nigel Bolland, "Systems of Domination after Slavery: The Control of Land and Labor in the British West Indies after 1838," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23, no. 4 (1981): 593.
[17] Ibid., 617.

beliefs, he argues, were part of the system which kept Creoles subordinated. At the same time, he explicitly asserts that "the persistence of structural discrimination" is "more important than these cultural traditions."[18] In this context "structural discrimination" refers to tangible, formalized structures such as the law. As previously discussed, Bolland sees these structures as arising from Belize's timber-based economy. However, his theoretical frame is more nuanced than rote determinism. In fact, in "Systems of Domination After Slavery" he criticizes "crudely deterministic theories."[19] In their place he offers a dialectical model. In his own words: "dialectical theory promotes examination of the interrelationship of social factors, including cultural and political, as well as of economic and demographic aspects, in the totality of a social system, which is conceived as an ongoing and changing structure of relationships."[20] Thus, Bolland's materialism takes a very specific and novel form. One cannot simply predict the particulars of a society based on its material underpinnings. While Bolland may place economic concerns at the root of the structure, he suggests that societies are molded by a complex web of interrelated factors. His mention of culture as part of the dialectic system is also noteworthy. Its inclusion indicates that that by 1981 Bolland had recognized that culture has a potential to be a major piece of the puzzle. This is likewise indicated by his call for scholars to examine "the race factor." Nevertheless, at the time Bolland's eyes were firmly fixed on economic factors and their consequent coercions. As he writes, "it is clear that the control of land and the control of labor in Belize were but two aspects of an interrelated totality, of a changing but persistent structure of domination."[21] His primary interest was tangible systems of control.

[18] Bolland, *Formation*, 195-196.
[19] Bolland, "Systems of Domination," 617.
[20] Ibid., 614.
[21] Ibid.

As a whole, Bolland's attempts to examine culture are rudimentary or underdeveloped. As its title would suggest, culture is a more explicit focus of his 1997 essay collection, *Struggles for Freedom: Essays on Slavery, Colonialism, and Culture in the Caribbean and Central America*. The collection includes a number of essays, covering variety of topics, time periods, and locales, several of which were first published elsewhere, such as the aforementioned "Systems of Domination After Slavery." Of particular note in the essay, "'Indios Bravos' or 'Gentle Savages:' Nineteenth-Century Views of the 'Indians' of Belize and the Miskito Coas," which follows the seemingly contradictory attitudes held towards Indigenous persons in Belize and Nicaragua. For the purposes of the essay at hand, only the section pertaining to the former will be discussed. Bolland argues that European opinions of the Maya alternated between violent "savages" and cheap, docile potential labourers. As he concisely intimates: "when the Amerindians resisted colonization and exploitation, the were viewed as 'Indios Bravos' who had to be pacified, to become once again, 'gentle savages' or cheap labour."[22] He follows this trend throughout the nineteenth century in Belize. He observes that as Mayas made incursions into mahogany works at the turn of the century, their supposedly violent character was emphasized. By contrast during the 1820s and 1830s, a period with relative lack of contact, the prevailing stereotypes highlighted their peaceability. In the ensuing decades another turnabout occurred with the outbreak of the Caste War of Yucatán and the Icaiche Mayas' raids into British-claimed territory.[23] That the racial ideology of Belizean elites would adapt to their circumstances is perhaps unsurprising. Regardless, the contents of *Struggles for Freedom* indicate an increased interest in matters of culture. That said, Bolland approaches culture through the lens of

[22] Bolland, O. Nigel, *Struggles for Freedom: Essays on Slavery, Colonialism, and Culture in the Caribbean and Central America*, (Kingston: Ian Randle Publishers, 1997), 96.
[23] Ibid., 85-86.

domination and its economic underpinnings. The scholars who succeeded Boland slowly drifted away from this approach, even as they investigated constructions of race.

One such scholar is Melissa Johnson. In many ways her 2003 article, "The Making of Race and Place in Nineteenth-Century BH," builds upon Bolland. She argues that "the racial formation of Belizean Creoles was tightly associated with the "bush" and mahogany cutting, and with an "aversion" to agriculture, and served to limit the economic possibilities available for Belizean Creoles."[24] This largely coincides with Bolland's description of race as a tool of colonial oppression. Likewise, her affirmation that race is constantly reshaped by local circumstances[25] echoes Bolland's dialectical model and his study of attitudes towards the Maya. However, Johnson diverges by acknowledging that Creoles also adapted this identity for their own purposes. They defied racial expectations by engaging in small-scall agriculture. At the same time, they embraced dwelling in the wilderness or "bush" as part of their identity.[26] Thus for Johnson, race is not only a tool of control, but also a powerful source of shared identity for oppressed groups.

Johnson's theoretical and methodological approaches root her article more firmly in the cultural turn than any of Boland's works. She investigates discourse through textual analysis. She selects three documents published at different points of the nineteenth-century to trace the evolution of racial discourse.[27] She is specifically interested in how the ways white writers described Creoles changed over time. Her analysis is still, in large part, rooted in the same material concerns as Bolland's. After all, much of the article is focused on the role racial

[24] Melissa A. Johnson, "The Making of Race and Place in Nineteenth-Century British Honduras," *Environmental History* 8, no. 4 (2003): 598-599.
[25] Ibid., 599.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid., 603.

ideology played in limiting the opportunities available to Creoles. At same time, she specifically places culture at the centre of her writing. Unlike Bolland, she identifies the immense power of informal, cultural structures and does not downplay their significance relative to institutional ones. She understands that important conclusions about a society can not only be drawn from its labour and land tenure laws, but also the writings of its thinkers. "The Making of Race and Place" foreshadows later studies which devote most of their intention to the thought processes of historical actors.

But there is also another way in which Johnson's article presages later works: its emphasis on place and territoriality. As its title indicates, a major component of the article is the role of the environment in shaping conceptions of race and vice versa. Creole labourers worked in the bush and transformed the landscape. Likewise, the forest helped constitute their racial identity. Johnson identifies a place-related hierarchy. By associating them with the bush, elites were also highlighting the alleged primitiveness of Africans. This stood in contrast with the town or city. She explains that Creoles use the word "bush" to refer to "areas of the natural environment that have not been altered by humans, but it also refers to rural areas in general, taking on cultural connotations of rurality in opposition to urbanity, black as opposed to white, illiterate and 'duncy' as opposed to educated and cosmopolitan."[28] It is impossible, at least in the Belizean context, to separate notions of race from ideas about place and the environment. Later writers took an increasing interest in role played by Belize's geography and the ideas actors mapped onto to it. As for culture, Johnson helped move it from the periphery of Belizean studies and towards the centre.

[28] Ibid., 598-600, 607.

It is worth briefly discussing "From Colonial Domination to the Making of the Nation: Ethno-racial Categories in Censuses and Reports and their Political Uses in Belize, 19th-20th Centuries." The article published in 2013, serves as a suitable conclusion to this discussion of the historiography of race in Belize. It can be seen as the culmination of the shift in focus from concrete social conditions to culture in and of itself. Elizabeth Cunin and Odile Hoffman explicitly acknowledge this shift:

> We will not be working on the categories created and used by social actors in their daily interactions or in specific mobilizations, which led to the publication of numerous works. . . . Our main objective is to study census categories, not as a result or a cause of social dynamics (what they are of course), but in their autonomous administrative rationale.[29]

This is precisely what they do throughout the piece, examining changes in Belizean censuses over time in relation to the aims of colonial officials. They observe that at the beginning of the century censuses were rather simple, distinguishing between persons of African and European descent and primarily focusing on the administrative centre of Belize Town. The authors characterize this as an official attempt to navigate emancipation. By 1861, the nature to the census was influenced by the arrival of refugees from Yucatán. At this point, the administration took an atomized approach to tallying the population. It contained some 42 categories, reflecting ethnic, national, and linguistic differences. However, for the remainder of the century the census was once again simplified. Cunin and Hoffman attributed this to a shift in administrative attitudes. They saw themselves less as governing people and more as governing the territory itself.[30] An idea which appears subtly throughout the article is the notion of an "imperial project."[31] The authors do not take British domination for granted in the way Bolland does. In

[29] Elisabeth Cunin and Odile Hoffman, "From Colonial Domination to the Making of the Nation: Ethno-racial Categories in Censuses and Reports and Their Political Uses in Belize, 19th-20th Centuries," *Caribbean Studies* 41, no. 2 (2013): 32-33.
[30] Ibid., 39, 49-50.
[31] Ibid., 45.

their words they are interested in "the capacities and strategies of the colonial, then national state apparatus."[32] Censuses then, are tools employed by administrators in order to realize a particular vision. The fact that the colonial administrative had to continually engage in such projects reveals that they were locked in a struggle for control. For Bolland, the realization of this control was a forgone conclusion. More recent scholarship has revealed just how tenuous that control really was. The remainder of this section will examine some of those works.

As studies of race shifted their focus towards the minds and experiences of their subjects another, related trend emerged. Increasingly, historians of BH have emphasized its liminality and the administrators *attempts* to extend their control. While not for lack of ambition on the part of the British, Belize's nineteenth-century history is littered with colonial failures and compromises. Mark Moberg's "Continuity Under Colonial Rule: The *Alcalde* System and the Garifuna in Belize" is early example of a scholar highlighting the administrations lack of control. Likewise, the 1992 article deals with a curious cultural solution to this problem. The alcalde emerged in Spanish America from a synthesis of Spanish and pre-Columbian customs. In Mexico and Guatemala, alcaldes functioned as local leaders. Unable the exert control directly over Maya villages, the British adopted the system in 1858. Under the Alcalde Act, communities would nominate an alcalde who would then be confirmed by the British superintendent. Critically, Moberg finds no evidence of the administration ever refusing to confirm a candidate. Likewise, the government in Belize Town never attempted to impose legislation which ran counter to local custom. By 1877, the administration extended to the alcalde system to the Garifuna despite that custom being foreign to them.[33] Moberg argues that the introduction of indirect rule throughout

[32] Ibid., 33.
[33] Mark Moberg, "Continuity under Colonial Rule: The Alcalde System and the Garifuna in Belize, 1858-1969." *Ethnohistory* 39, no. 1 (1992): 4-5.

the colony was a matter of pragmatism. He writes, "the colonial government's willingness to extend some local autonomy to [the Garifuna and Maya] also reflected their remoteness from town, the absence of interior roads, and the paucity of administrative personnel in the colony."[34] Like the census, the alcalde system was one scheme introduced as part of the larger colonial project. As described by Moberg, this method of control can paradoxically be taken as evidence of Britain's lack of control in Belize. The change in emphasis sets him apart from scholars like Bolland.

Another shining example of this focus comes from Rosemarie McNairn's 1998 article, "Baiting the British Bull: A Fiesta, Trials, and a Bullfight in Belize." It deals with a fiesta held in the Northern District village Xaibe in 1865 and its fallout. From this singular event, McNairn draws an impressive number of conclusions. A major theme is the British' inability to ascribe agency to Yucatecans or meaning to their customs. To the latter point, she invokes the semiology of Clifford Geertz to assess the symbolic significance of bullfighting at the fiesta. Poor harvests had prevented a fiesta from being held the year prior, the Icaiche Maya were a looming danger, and the importation of Chinese labourers threatened their employment. Against these circumstances, the celebration of 1865 was a chance to fulfill religious obligations that would ensure divine protection. The proceedings also fostered a sense of solidarity amongst the traditionally hostile Mayas and Mestizos. Moreover, McNairn argues that the bulls themselves may have symbolised British authority, with the participants taking the opportunity to vent their anger towards the government.[35] However, British officials did not see the local significance in the fiesta. They maintained that the events were little more than entertainment. For *them*, argues

[34] Ibid., 4.
[35] Rosemary M McNairn, "Baiting the British Bull: A Fiesta, Trials, and Petition in Belize," *The Americas* 55 no. 2 (1998): 248, 258, 261.

McNairn, the bullfights in Xaibe were an extension of "earlier, metropolitan class warfare" against the leisure activities of the poor in England.[36] Both sides were working from very different intellectual frameworks.

After the fiesta, Magistrate Edwin Adolphus attempted to prosecute the individuals involved. The community responded with a petition signed by some 400 people, asserting their right to observe their religious customs.[37] McNairn uses the British' response to the petition to demonstrate their failure to see agency in the actions of non-whites. Adolphus came to see the petition as a plot orchestrated by his fellow magistrate, John Carmichael. In his eyes, the petitioners clearly must have been cajoled by another European.[38] McNairn counters this by pointing out that the use of petitions was longstanding tradition amongst Mayas under Spanish rule. They would bypass local authorities who believed to be abusing their power, and appeal to higher ones.[39] In recognizing the sincerity of the petition, McNairn restores agency to subaltern, agency evidently overlooked in their own time.

Compared to the historiography which preceded it, "Baiting the British Bull" is remarkable for just how little control it ascribes to the British. The author describes the outcome of the Xaibe trials. The Supreme Court ultimately ruled that English laws banning bullbaiting did not apply to Belize. The local legislature could pass a new law, however the *prosecution*, cautioned against doing so for fear of agitating the populace. As McNairn starkly writes, "like the bulls at Xaibe, English law had been rendered impotent."[40] The British could not enforce their will over the colony. This is far from the only example the author provides. The trial

[36] Ibid., 255-258.
[37] Ibid., 240.
[38] Ibid., 254.
[39] Ibid., 263.
[40] Ibid., 272.

revealed that handful of constables present during the bullfighting stood idly by for three days before intervening. They feared that any attempt to break up the fiesta would cause populace to riot and kill them.[41] This is perhaps the most striking theme throughout the article. Rather than focusing on British domination, she focuses on the British' inability to dominate. This can partially be attributed to the events she describes occurring in the colony's north. However, as revealed by Moberg, the British faced similar troubles elsewhere in the colony.

The last thirty years have seen a number of historians follow in the same vein as Moberg and McNairn. However, no scholar represents the culmination of this trend, and potential future of the field, as Rajeshwari Dutt. Her 2020 monograph, *Empire on Edge: The British Struggle for Order During Yucatán's Caste War, 1847-1901* is masterstroke on par with Bolland's *The Formation of Colonial Society*. However, the book's name immediately sets it apart from the older historian's work. It makes it clear from the outset that control is something the colonial administration had to *struggle* for. It also alludes to her greatest contribution: a new theoretical lens through which to analyse the history of northern Belize. She reframes the region as a borderland and frontier. By borderland, she refers to northern Belzes contested status. This was a region where multiple empires jockeyed for dominance. Her definition of frontier is fundamentally cultural, however. The interactions of person from diverse backgrounds produced a unique culture. Connecting these two concepts, she argues that it was precisely the lack of government control which engendered such close interethnic bonds.[42] She writes that "the Belizean frontier was a leveler. It was a place where black men like George Fantesie could peddle ammunitions to the Maya rebels alongside great merchant firms like Vaughan and

[41] Ibid., 251-252.
[42] Rajeshwari Dutt, *Empire on Edge: The British Struggle for Order in Belize During Yucatan's Caste War, 1847-1901* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 26-27.

Christie."[43] And at the utmost extreme of interracial solidarity, merchants like Fantesie fought alongside the insurgent Maya on occasion.[44] Dutt highlights the liminality of the Belizean frontier and the immense complexity of the society which developed there. She characterizes the region as one where imperial rule and conventional racial boundaries did not extend. Unlike many of her predecessors, her narrative is not one of domination, or even resistance by dominated peoples. Rather she identifies relative autonomy as *the* defining feature of much of the colony during the nineteenth century.

More broadly speaking, *Empire on Edge* is an examination of the colonial project in northern Belize. In the book's introduction she states that its central question is "how . . . does Empire operate in frontiers and borderlands during times of conflict?"[45] She identifies a multitude of tactics the colonial government employed while trying to expand its influence. Dutt explains that officials sought "to impose coherence at the frontiers of the empire by deploying a wide variety of tools – from legal prescriptions, policing measures and military interventions to specific ways of using language, categorization, mapping, censuses, surveys and even stamps."[46] As this list indicates, she lends equal weight to both tangible and cultural modes of control. The significance of steps like military action are quite obvious. However, the role of something as innocuous as a stamp is much harder to discern. To that point, her brief examination of a stamp towards the end of the book is a great example the way she analyses various aspects of the colonial project. She argues that during the late nineteenth-century officials reduce complex notions of race down to simple binary of loyalty and disloyalty. During that time, a stamp was proposed to commemorate the one hundredth anniversary of the Battle of St. Georges Caye. It

[43] Ibid., 47.
[44] Ibid., 48.
[45] Ibid., 4.
[46] Ibid., 8.

featured a Black man and a white man engaged in a handshake, a sign of the loyalty of the then-enslaved to their owners. Dutt even suggests that the white man's mustache may be meant to acknowledge Mestizo Belizeans.[47] This stamp is just one of the ways Dutt identifies as an attempt to realize a certain colonial vision. Her book is rich, building on what has come before, while also charting a course for histories such as mine. I proceed from her contribution by looking specifically at racial categorization.

Toward a Theory of Belief

This thesis began from a desire to make sense of certain contradictions within the beliefs of BH's colonial administrators. The most notable was the paradoxical attitudes they held towards Mayas. As revealed in the previous discussion of Bolland, Mayas were simultaneously conceived as "Indios Bravos" and "gentle savages." The former was highly reductive but coherent considering contemporary events. However, the latter ought to have been untenable. How could administrators describe the Maya as docile and peaceful while, at the same time, presenting them as a major threat to the colony? More baffling still, administrators expressed this view even as thousands of Mayas rebelled in neighbouring Yucatán. As discussed in chapter three, officials did try to reconcile these views, primarily by attributing Mayas less agency. Nonetheless, these contrary ideas could, and did, coexist within the official mind. In this section I synthesize the ideas from several authors about the formation of and operation of culture, of which racial ideology is a part. I continue this thread in chapter two where I hone in on the epistemological dimensions of modern statecraft/colonial rule.

[47] Ibid., 155.

The terms *culture* and *ideology* are deceptively simple. Most people have an instinctual understanding of what they are, yet it is difficult to ascribe them with workable definitions and trace their formation. I take as my starting point, Marshall Sahlins' concept of the "structure of the conjuncture," which attempts to explain how people come to hold the views which they do. He defines the "structure of the conjuncture" as "the practical realization of the cultural categories in a specific historical context, as expressed in the interested action of the historic agents."[48] This schema strikes a balance between structure and agency. As they go about their lives, humans navigate the world by adapting their cultural framework to their current circumstances. This process inevitably leads to the redefinition and misrepresentation of the culture. As he explains: "in the action or in the world—technically in acts of reference—the cultural categories acquire new functional values. Burdened with the world the cultural meanings are thus altered. It follows that the relationship between categories change: structure is transformed."[49] Culture then, is "precisely the organization of the current situation in terms of a past."[50] It is a collection of ideas, narratives, and values which are generally accepted by a group of people. Members reach into this cultural body as necessary, but come away with different interpretations, thus affording room for cultural change.

One consequence of this *ad hoc* interpretation and transformation is that cultural bodies are often rife with inconsistent ideas. It is worth repeating Charles Sewell's reminder that "cultural worlds are commonly beset with internal contradiction" and "loosely integrated" with beliefs not being applied equally across different facets of life.[51] The writings of Antonio

[48] Marshall Sahlins, *Islands of History*, (London: Tavistock Publications Ltd, 1987), xiv.
[49] Ibid., 138, 151.
[50] Ibid., 155.
[51] William H. Sewell, *Logics of History: Social History and Social Transformation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 170.

Gramsci throw further light on these paradoxical beliefs. Like Sahlins he recognizes that "one's conception of the world is a response to certain specific problems posed by reality, which are quite specific and 'original' in their immediate relevance."[52] This immediacy is key to understanding how individuals, and societies at large, can voice contradictory opinions. As Gramsci explains, "the personality is strangely composite: it contains Stone Age elements and principles of a more advanced science, prejudices from all past phases of history at the local level and intuitions of a future philosophy which will be that of a human race united the world over."[53] As products of history, cultures contain disparate beliefs haphazardly leftover from the past, even as those ideas no longer make sense or carry the meaning they once did. To work from this mass uncritically, would be to draw from what Gramsci calls "common sense." Common sense need not be coherent; it simply must feel intuitive in the moment. People acquire it ambiently via the society they are immersed in. Gramsci explains: "in acquiring one's conception of the world one always belongs to a particular grouping which is that of all the social elements which share the same mode of thinking and acting. We are all conformists of some conformism or other, always man-in-the-mass or collective man."[54] By contrast "philosophy," as Gramsci understands it, attempts to prune the tangled mass of common sense and arrive at a coherent worldview. He explains that to "be a philosopher" one must "have a critical and coherent conception of the world."[55] The racial ideology of BH's administrators formed an uncritical common sense which served their interests. Even the briefest attempt at philosophy would have revealed its contradictions, undermined the colonial project.

[52]Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci*, eds. and trans. Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell-Smith (London: Lawrence & Wishart Limited, 2005), 324.
[53] Ibid., 324.
[54] Ibid., 324, 348.
[55] Ibid., 324.

With an understanding of culture in hand, we may now turn to ideology. Geertz identifies and critiques two competing conceptions of ideology. The first, the "interest theory," views ideology quite cynically. Ideology is simply a means to an end: the argument an individual or group puts forth to justify and/or expand their political power. Geertz rightfully observes that this approach is far too reductionist. It assumes that humans are motivated solely by rational self-interest, a prospect which is not necessarily reflected in empirical observation.[56] This is the sort of "crudely deterministic" theory which Bolland cautions against. People regularly hold beliefs which run counter to their interests, whether those are defined personally, by class, or some other metric. Moreover, as Geertz observes, it frames ideology as a tool to be consciously and cynically deployed.[57] This precludes the possibility that the adherents and evangelists of any given ideology *can* earnestly believe in what they preach. Perhaps then some solace may be found in the "strain theory." This latter approach frames ideology as a response to the incongruities which inevitably exist within a society and its culture(s). In adopting or forging an ideology, one attempts to relieve the existential dread which arises from the realization that contradictions exist within and between their beliefs and the institutions which shape their lives. These resulting ideologies will generally be shared amongst a group of people because of the "presumed commonalities in 'basic personality structure' among members of a particular culture, class, or occupational category."[58] Geertz's issue with the strain theory is that ideology often fails to provide the relief it is supposed to. Instead, it merely shifts the object of frustration and despair elsewhere. He ultimately concludes that "the function of ideology is to make an autonomous politics possible by providing the authoritative concepts that render it meaningful,

[56] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 201-202.
[57] Ibid., 202-203.
[58] Ibid., 203-204.

the suasive images by means of which it can be sensibly grasped."[59] In doing so, he configures ideology as a response to strain, particularly that which arises during periods of social upheaval. In other words, ideologies "are, most distinctively, maps of problematic social reality and matrices for the creation of collective conscience."[60]

Geertz is mostly correct. Nonetheless, there are some critiques and adjustments which must be made. To begin, his critique of the strain theory reveals that he expects far too much from ideology. To demonstrate this, it worth taking a closer look at one example he provides. He posits:

> The petty bureaucrat's anti-Semitism may indeed give him something to do with the bottled anger generated in him by constant toadying to those he considers his intellectual inferiors and so drain some of it away; but it may also simply increase his anger by providing him with something else about which to be impotently bitter.[61]

Geertz moves past this example far too quickly to appreciate the forces potentially at play. It is true that the bureaucrat is left angry. The critical error, however, is assuming that the function of his ideology is simply to quell his frustration. Could his antisemitism serve some other remedial purpose? Geertz does not explicate the precise discontinuity the bureaucrat is experiencing, nonetheless it may be extrapolated. He resents being in a subordinate position to "those he considers his intellectual inferiors." There must be *something* for his subordination to chafe against in order for there to be strain. Thus, the implication is that his workplace reality clashes with his belief in meritocracy. In his mind, it is he is more qualified and thus should be in charge. Whether his antisemitism is the root of his sense of superiority, or a rationalization of why his alleged merit has not been rewarded, is ultimately irrelevant as they feed into each other in a

[59] Ibid., 206-207, 218.
[60] Ibid., 219-220.
[61] Ibid., 206.

continuous cycle. He is supposedly superior because he is not Jewish, meanwhile professional subordination is taken as evidence of a plot against him. In this light, an alternate explanation emerges. The petty bureaucrat, confined to a lower station than he "deserves," perceives his situation as unjust and has someone to blame. In the case that he believes that the world, or at least the society he lives in, is fundamentally meritocratic, the stakes are far more dire. In that case, he is forced to consider the possibility that he is not as competent as he first believed. But he pushes these thoughts aside and imaginations that "the Jews" have subverted the just order of things. That this is also a contradiction eludes him because, as previously discussed, the totality of one's beliefs need not be coherent. Antisemitism may not quell his anger, but it does potentially give him a target for it, a sense of superiority, and/or a remedy for his doubts. And there is some comfort in each of those outcomes.

Geertz presents the case of the antisemitic bureaucrat to demonstrate the insufficiency of strain theory. He takes umbrage with how it presents "a pattern of behavior shaped by a certain set of forces [which turn] out, by a plausible but nevertheless mysterious coincidence, to serve ends but tenuously related to those forces."[62] This explains why he criticizes the fact that the bureaucrat's antisemitism does not address the professional frustration which spawned it. Therefore, the two appear utterly unconnected. However, a closer look reveals potential connections. A real-world example, such as the one I examine throughout this thesis, affords the opportunity for a more specific examination. Nevertheless, it is Geertz's search for clear connections which lead him to focus on ruptures. For him, ideology stands in opposition to cultural tradition, emerging when the latter can no longer adequately order social life. His classic example is the French Revolution which was, for its time, "the greatest incubator of extremist

[62] Ibid., 206.

ideologies . . . because the central organizing principle of political life, the divine right of kings, was destroyed."[63] He cements this point by arguing that even conservative and reactionary ideologies only arise when their cherished status quo faces opposition.[64] This is correct, however Geertz errs in imagining that there could ever be a time when the prevailing order did not have to ideologically defend itself. Guha reminds readers of "the absurdity of the idea of an uncoercive state."[65] The ubiquity of force implies the ubiquity of dissent. No matter how persuasive a given regime is, it will always face resistance. By refusing to submit to the authority, dissenters implicitly or explicitly imply that the regime is illegitimate and not worthy of reverence. These challenges must be met with justification. Therefore, Geertz's antagonism between ideology and tradition is entirely fictitious. The divine right of kings is just as much an ideology as liberalism, fascism, or socialism. In fact, by framing ideology as a response to the displacement of traditional belief systems, he misses the link between traditional beliefs (common sense) and ideology. Political tradition does not spring into existence fully formed like Athena from the head of Zeus. Rather, it starts as a response to a particular conjuncture and becomes hegemonic over time. Liberalism, for instance, was revolutionary in the eighteenth-century as it legitimated the political ascension of the bourgeoisie. However, it has since entered the canon of common sense in much of the Western world. As such, it has ceased to function as a radical force, instead becoming a hegemonic one. Thus, ideology is not the sole province of social ruptures. They often emerge under mundane circumstances and in service of the prevailing order.

All of this said, it is not my intention to advocate for a reversion to the strain theory, but instead to highlight how ideology can be molded by strains of all shapes and sizes. In truth,

[63] Ibid., 219-220.
[64] Ibid., 220.
[65] Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony*, 23.

ideology can be the product of strain, interest, or both. It is true that a monarch may cynically propagandize themselves as divinely appointed to rule. At the same time, they may fully believe in, and uncritically accept, that narrative which has been repeated to them since birth. Likewise, the colonizer may *need* to believe he is bringing "civilization" to "savages," lest he be forced to reckon with his complicity in exploitation. At the very least, he must see colonized peoples as unworthy of consideration or deserving of ill-treatment. Even so ardent an anti-imperialist as George Orwell could not stop his self from believing "that the greatest joy in the world would be to drive a bayonet into a Buddhist priest's guts" while serving as a colonial police officer in British Burma.[66] To summarize then, culture is a reservoir of discordant ideas, narratives, symbols, and tropes. Individuals draw from this well in an *ad hoc* fashion to makes sense of, and navigate, their present circumstances. In doing so, they create new cultural materials which may be recycled once more down the line. It follows that ideology is a specific invocation of culture (the structure) mobilized in service of a particular objective (the conjuncture), broadly defined. This can be an active or passive process. Importantly, this conceptualization leaves room for human agency. The way one navigates the structure of the conjuncture can vary greatly depending on the individual and their circumstances. The petty bureaucrat was not preordained to be an antisemite simply because of his professional frustrations. In theory, he could have adopted a Marxist critique of wage-labour, found solace in a religious conviction that a higher power would ultimately reward him for his toil, or any of the other number of ideological permutations. A different person may not have even taken issue with the work arrangement. Inevitably, each member of a culture will have different understandings of its content and will

[66] George Orwell, *Inside the Whale and Other Essays*, (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2001), 92.

hold more closely to some threads than others. Ultimately, one's ideological disposition is a matter of what cultural bees buzz loudest in their bonnet.

Methodology

The structure of the conjuncture poses epistemic conundrums for the historian. As E. H. Carr polemicizes, "the facts of history never come to us 'pure,' since they do not and cannot exist in a pure form: they are always reflected through the mind of the recorder."[67] In other words, every text is shaped by the structure of the conjuncture. This process is best understood through Scott's concept of "public transcripts." In *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, he explains that the public transcript encompasses all contact between dominant and subordinate groups which occurs in a public forum.[68] This includes the vast majority of the sources which historians work with, excluding private sources such as unpublished diaries. However, public transcript sources have a noteworthy flaw. As Scott explains:

> In ideological terms the public transcript will typically, by its accommodationist tone, provide convincing evidence for the hegemony of dominant values, for the hegemony of dominant discourse. It is in precisely this public domain where the effects of power relations are most manifest, and any analysis based exclusively on the public transcript is likely to conclude that subordinate groups endorse the terms of their subordination and are willing, even enthusiastic, partners in that subordination.[69]

The public transcript has led many scholars of BH astray. As an example, McNairn characterizes the relationship between Hispanics and Mayas in the colony as "mutually hostile, ambivalent, but interdependent," continuing "economic and social boundaries would be crossed."[70] This description makes racial crossing out to be begrudging and reluctant. This is wrong on two

[67] Edward Hallet Carr, *What is History?*, (New York: Vintage Books, 1961), 24.
[68] James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 2.
[69] Ibid., 4.
[70] McNairn, "Baiting the British Bull," 259.

counts, both of which I counter throughout this thesis. For one, British authorities had a very reductive view of the Caste War, understanding it solely as a race war and paying little attention to its underlying causes. Such a view presumed an inherent animosity between those deemed "Spaniards" and those deemed "Indians." This leads into the next error: McNairn takes the categories outlined by colonial sources for granted. BH's administrators *imposed* racial taxonomies in order to make sense of the colony's milieu and justify the subordination of its peoples. Such impositions are why Marissa Fuentes characterizes the archive as a site of epistemic violence which skews perceptions of its subjects. Writing about enslaved women in eighteenth-century Barbados, she argues that "enslaved women appear as historical subjects through the form and content of archival documents in the manner in which they lived: spectacularly violated, objectified, disposable, hypersexualized, and silenced."[71] These depictions are all impositions, caricatures of the subordinate as the dominant desired them to be. By uncritically adhering to the sources extant in the archive, scholars risk repeating this epistemic violence *ad infinitum*.[72]

So, what is the historian to do? Undeterred by this knowledge, one might be tempted to seek out new sources, uncorrupted by the official gaze. However, this is unrealistic. The subaltern leave few sources of their own precisely because contemporary elites silenced their perspectives. To devote one's efforts solely to finding new sources, ones which likely do not exist, is to perpetuate silence.[73] But not all hope is lost. Included in what Ann Laura Stoler calls

[71] Marissa Fuentes, *Dispossessed Lives: Enslaved Women, Violence, and the Archive* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 5-6.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 6.

"the studied ineloquence of bureaucratese" are "uncensored turns of phrase, loud asides in the imperative tense, hesitant asides in sotto voce."[74] She continues:

> In the brutal immediacy of a murder, in the panic of an impeding attack, in the anxious rush to fulfill a superior's demand for information (and for proof of one's vigilance), in the concerted effort to ward off disaster, words could slip from their safe moorings to reappear unauthorized, inappropriate, and unrehearsed. These are not outside the archival field. Nor are they outside the grids of intelligibility in which those documents are lodged, but rather the subjacent coordinates of, and counterpoints within, them. Such confusions and "asides" work in and around prevailing narratives as they push on the archive's storied edges.[75]

Stoler's remedy is to read sources "along the grain" as opposed to against it. By this, she means acquiring an intimate familiarity with the archive's tricks and tropes in order to deconstruct them. This is specifically meant to avoid falling into the trap of assuming the taxonomies contained within were stable and uncontested. Moreover, it shifts the focus away from grand ruptures to the smaller, more quotidian challenges to officialdom.[76] A building on the verge of collapse may look structurally sound at a distance. If one wants to obtain a clearer picture of its condition, they must look closely for the cracks in the façade, hastily covered up and plastered over.

To extend the metaphor, the state of Government House near the end of the period in question was emblematic of the British colonial experience in Belize. In 1864, newly arrived Lieutenant-Governor John Gardiner Austin complained that "there was no prospect of any comfort for myself or family" at his official residence.[77] He explained that the offices "were very dilapidated" and the grounds "were open to the tides," making the estate "generally swampy and unhealthy."[78] Here was the centrepiece of colonial rule in BH falling into disrepair and sinking

[74] Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), 23.
[75] Ibid., 23-24.
[76] Ibid., 50-51.
[77] John Gardiner Austin to Edward John Eyre, October 5, 1864, CO 123/117.
[78] Ibid.

into a miasmatic swamp. Surely it did not project the authority one would expect from what was supposed to be the world's most preeminent empire. One need not look very far to find the cracks in the British Honduran colonial façade. The Empire at large simply did not provide the colonial state with the resources necessary to effectively realize the colonial project which was expected of it. Yet, the metropole would not leave the colony totally adrift. When Austin found Government House in bad shape, he could petition the Colonial Office for $500 from the Crown Fund to pay for repairs, a sum which he hoped "[would] not be unreasonable."[79] Its administration was not bereft of power *per se*. Rather, its power was often difficult to access. It is important to remind oneself of Bolland's adage that "colonial societies are not autonomous social realities."[80] BH was still part of the world's preeminent empire, and its administrators could appeal to the might and prestige which came with that association. In theory, they had access to the support of the West India Regiments and Royal Navy fleet stationed in Jamaica. However, the governors of Jamaica were typically hesitant to dispatch military aid, except in moments of crisis. For the most part, the colonial state was left impotent.

It is precisely the colonial state's weakness which makes BH ideal for a study such as this. In a colony such as India, state power could muffle discordant voices effectively enough to maintain an air of order and hegemony. Such was not the case in Belize where the masquerade of colonial administrators was eminently transparent. Challenges to official narratives were around every corner, forcing themselves into the archive with unusual frequency. If anything, the greatest challenge the historian of nineteenth-century Belize is that the state was too anemic, the bureaucracy spread too thin, to produce many sources about life at the frontier. There is a severe

[79] Ibid.
[80] Bolland, "Systems of Domination," 593.

paucity of sources concerning the border region and the people who lived there for the first decade or so of the Caste War. Even in 1858 Seymour reported that there were:

> Tribes of Indians within our borders who come in contact with civilization but once a year. They cultivate maize somewhere in the depths of the forest, and fatten pigs, whose surplus produce they annually bring to some village market, procure what they require, principally salt and annis, and disappear again. We know but little of these people.[81]

Nonetheless, I spend the duration of this thesis reading along the archival grain of racial ideology in BH. I primarily draw upon official correspondence between the viceroys of Belize and the governors of Jamaica which contain what Stoler calls "the measured tone of official texts."[82] I read these texts along the grain to understand the official ideology deployed by their authors, then identify counternarratives within them. Colonial officials sought to project confidence and authority, but often betrayed their insecurity and vulnerability. I also utilize published travelogues and accounts of colony, such as those written by John Lloyd Stephens and B. R. Duval. These sources typically provided a perspective which was "lower to the ground," including more details about everyday life in BH. Moreover, works written by outsiders, especially that of Stephens, tended to acknowledge realities of life in the colony which were unnoteworthy to residents. In chapter two, I place the nineteenth-century British Honduran colonial project within its historical context, examining the conditions under which it emerged. Next, chapter three outlines the liberal high modernist ideology of Belize administrators and breaks down the racial schema they produced in accordance with it. Finally, chapter four looks at those cracks in the colonial façade to attain a more nuanced view of colony and the interactions of various groups within it.

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[81] *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1858* (Part I. W. Indies and Mauritius), London: G.E. Eyre and W. Spottiswoode for H.M.S.O., 1860, 10.
[82] Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain*, 41.

A Note on Terminology

A project such as this, which deals with the historical classification of peoples, must be equally conscious and critical of its own use of terminology. As historians, we find ourselves in a position not so dissimilar to the colonial administers at the center of this study. We too look at complex societies and attempt to make sense of them. Since it is impossible to examine beliefs and actions of our subjects on an individual basis, we must divide them into categories for analysis. Inevitably, these categories will be imperfect. Many people will not fit neatly fit into one category or another. Moreover, there is no guarantee that they will identify with their associated classification. In the end, these categories are nothing more than convenient generalizations: analytical tools which may be used to draw conclusions about the contours of a given society. We must be aware of they are always, to varying degrees, artificial and imposed. To mistake their simplicity and comprehensibility for a definitive reality would mean making the same mistake as BH's colonial administrators.

The term "Maya" is particularly troublesome. As Quetzil E. Castañeda observes:

> Ethnographers of Yucatan quickly learn to overcome and then forget their shock when they first hear a monolingual Maya speaker tell them that he or she is not a Maya, that all the Maya are long gone (they are the ones who built the pyramids), and, in the same breath, that the real Maya live in a town "just over there" where "they" speak the *bil hach*—or authentically true, "really real"—Maya. Yet if one goes "there," "they" will tell you the same story about some others who live elsewhere, and who are indeed the real Maya.[83]

This tendency for the modern Indigenous inhabitants of Yucatán to reject the label of "Maya" should give outside researchers pause. For his part, Castañeda recognizes that identity is complex, and the meaning of terms may vary across space and time. He stresses that scholars

[83] Quetzil E. Castañeda, "'We Are Not Indigenous!:' An Introduction to the Maya Identity of Yucatan," *Journal of Latin American Anthropology* 9, no. 1 (2004): 41.

should not take their understanding of such concepts as universal or assume that they are static.[84] Mathew Restall and Wolfgang Gabbert assert that Yucatec Mayas did not have any sense of shared ethnicity until the twentieth century. Moreover, they make a compelling case that the term "Maya" originally referred to the ruling class of the pre-Columbian city of Mayapan who, ironically given its more general modern usage, used the term to differentiate themselves from their common subjects. "Maya" appears quite infrequently in either Maya or Spanish sources, regardless.[85] Castañeda, Restall, and Gabbert all demonstrate the inadequacy of categorizing people in Yucatán as "Maya." Nonetheless, each still uses it as their primary descriptor for its first inhabitants and their descendants. The exonym still encompasses a valuable and observable category of analysis. Restall and Amara Solari capture this best when they write, "there was never a single, unified Maya state or empire, but always numerous, evolving ethnic groups speaking distinct Mayan languages. . . . Yet something definable, unique, and endlessly fascinating—what we call Maya culture—has clearly existed for millennia."[86] The key is recognizing that this is a scholarly observation, not a reflection of a discrete, self-conscious group identity.

I touch more on identity in Yucatán and BH in chapter two. For now, it is sufficient to note my approach to terminology. I generally follow the template set out by Dutt, who advocates for specificity when referring to various Maya groups. This means including the place at which they were based.[87] Thus, the Maya who centered around the village of San Pedro in the Yalbac

[84] Ibid., 40-41.
[85] Matthew Restall and Wolfgang Gabbert, "Maya Ethnogenesis and Group Identity in Yucatán, 1500-1900" in *"The Only True People:" Linking Maya Identities Past and Present*, eds. Bethany J. Beyyette and Lisa J. LeCount (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2017), 91.
[86] Mathew Restall and Amari Solari, *The Maya: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 1, 3.
[87] Dutt, *Empire on Edge*, 20-21

Hills would be the *San Pedro Maya*. Likewise, the primary Caste War rebel group based out of Santa Cruz are referred to as the *Santa Cruz Maya*. When referring to the Spanish-descended persons, she uses the more precise term *Hispanic* as opposed to *Spaniard* or *Yucateco*, which were more common historically.[88] There are two more ethnic signifiers which should be explained further. *Creole* initially referred to Belizeans of mixed European and African descent. However, by the post emancipation period it was used to refer to anyone with African heritage.[89] The Garifuna are a group with mixed African and Indigenous ancestry who originated the island of St. Vincent. Following a failed uprising, the British deported them from their home and many settled in Belize. It should be noted that primary (and older secondary) sources refer to them as "Black Caribs," a term which has fallen out of use.[90] While British officials included them in the colony's racial schema, they do not feature heavily in this thesis as they were primarily concentrated in the colony's south.

Finally, the colony's lack of clear status makes referring to it difficult. To use the term *British Honduras* to discuss events prior to its formal recognition as a colony in 1862 is somewhat ahistorical. At the same time, *the Settlement in the Bay of Honduras* does not capture the extent of Britain's territorial claim. *Belize* is also imperfect since it historically only referred to *Belize Town*.[91] In the interest of convenience, I use both "British Honduras" and "Belize" interchangeably to refer to the entire region claimed by the British Empire. When referring to the colony's primary settlement I denote it as "Belize Town."

[88] Ibid., 10.
[89] Johnson, "Making of Race and Place," 598, 607.
[90] Moberg, "Continuity Under Colonial Rule," 2-4.
[91] Dutt, *Empire on Edge*, 21.

Chapter 2:

An "Open and Peculiar Country:" The Origins of the Colonial Project in British Honduras

If he wants to establish boundaries, the historian will have more hesitation than the geographer.

—Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*

In point of fact we have no legal right beyond that of actual possession to the tract of land between the rivers Siban and Sarstun [sic] which formerly belonged to the ancient Kingdom of Guatemala.

—Charles Lennox Wyke, British Diplomat, 1859

From its inception, British Honduras was outlier amongst Britain's West Indian colonies. As mentioned, it did not receive the formal status of colony until 1862. Prior to that point, the area was referred to as the "Settlement in the Bay of Honduras." This ill-defined status within the Empire combined with the centrality of forestry to its economy to give the settlement a unique historical trajectory. In order to understand the development and goals of the colonial project in BH, one must first examine the conditions they took shape under. Starting from the beginning to European settlement, this chapter contextualizes BH's condition during the first two decades of the Caste War.

Uncertain Foundations

The circumstances surrounding BH's establishment cast uncertainty over its status and the legitimacy of Britain's claim to the territory. It was not the British government which spearheaded settlement in the region. Rather, it was the initiative of a group of buccaneers known as the "Baymen." This fact obfuscates precisely when the Baymen first became involved in the region. As Mavis C. Campbell explains, "the fact that Belize 'just grow'd' – and not in the usual normative colonial fashion but by downright squatting and therefore stealth – compounds the

problem of documentary evidence for any early historical construction of this country."[1] She acknowledges that most scholars date the coming of the Baymen to the seventeenth century but argues that sporadic British settlement actually began in the mid sixteenth century, St. George's Caye being their first major settlement.[2] Regardless, what is clear is that the Spanish claimed Yucatán as their possession. As such, they met the Baymen's incursions with force. Bolland suggests that it was probably this violence which led the Baymen to withdraw to a more defensible position at Belize near the end of the seventeenth century.[3]

While their new home was more secure, it was still nominally Spanish. The Spanish Empire's involvement in Belize dates back to the early sixteenth century when the explorers Vicente Yáñez Pinzón and Juan Díaz de Solís sighted its coast. Throughout the ensuing decades, the Spanish conquered, with varying degrees of success, much of Mexico, Central America, and their peoples. Establishing control over the Gulf of Honduras proved particularly challenging. Over the following two centuries, the Spanish made several futile attempts to assert dominance over the Maya peoples in the region. In 1531 Alonso Dávila led an expedition southward from Yucatán. However, Maya resistance prevented him from establishing a colonial presence at Chetumal. The villages of Belize's swampy north retained their autonomy.[4]

Things were different in the south. There too, in what is today the Toledo District, the Spanish made several attempts throughout the seventeenth century to "pacify" and proselytize the local population. Each time the Maya eventually rose in revolt again, burning churches and hiding in the forest. By 1689, however, the Spanish colonizers had had enough and forcibly

[1] Mavis C. Campbell, *Becoming Belize: A History of an Outpost of Empire Searching for Identity, 1528-1823* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2011), 95-96.
[2] Ibid., 96.
[3] Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 26.
[4] Ibid., 17-19.

relocated the area's inhabitants to highland Guatemala, leaving it "practically deserted."[5] This decision was, in a certain sense, an admission of defeat. The Spanish could not control the population *in* southern Belize, so they moved them to Guatemala where colonial power was better entrenched. There, the Spanish could keep a closer eye on the Maya. Meanwhile, their efforts in the north unequivocally failed. These first colonizers never achieved dominion over what is now Belize, and only partially dominated its Indigenous inhabitants. As Bolland summarizes:

> The priests and soldiers who penetrated the area certainly affected the Maya, though not to the catastrophic extent that they affected the neighboring regions of Petén and Yucatán. Though the Spaniards never settled within Belize, their *entradas* may have reduced the indigenous population and certainly resulted in some social disorganization particularly in the south.[6]

Spain's difficulties with Belize during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, especially at the northern frontier, foreshadowed Britain's in the nineteenth. There, life was marked by relative autonomy and mobility, interspersed with brief shows of colonial force. Neither empire truly controlled it, although both *claimed* to.

This competition between rival powers further complicated any efforts to administer the region. The first official recognition of the settlement came with the 1763 Treaty of Paris. Importantly, this agreement affirmed that the region formally belonged to the Spanish Empire but permitted British settlers to extract logwood.[7] The Treaty of Versailles (1783) and Convention of London (1789) were more specific about the rights of the Baymen. The former limited their operations to the area enclosed by the Belize, Hondo, and New Rivers. The latter allowed the Baymen to cut logwood and mahogany between the Belize and Sibun. They were not to erect

[5] Ibid., 18.
[6] Ibid., 20.
[7] Campbell, *Becoming Belize*, 179-181.

fortifications or engage in agriculture. Twice a year Spanish commissioners would be able inspect the settlement and ensure the British were honouring their treaties.[8] On paper, the Spanish controlled Belize, a fact which the British government recognized. In practice, however, the Baymen were not so obedient. As Bolland puts it, "the British government was reluctant to take any action that might be construed as an assertion of its own sovereignty over the territory," meanwhile "the settlers themselves were not so inhibited, and they frequently evaded the effects of Spanish sovereignty, both in their growing assumption of freehold rights and in the extent of land they actually occupied."[9] By the 1820s, the Baymen had worked their way as far south as the Sarstoon River.[10] As I discuss shortly, the Crown's commitment to upholding international law, and the settler elite's insistence on breaking it, was emblematic of a growing rift between the two parties. Regardless, the complex relationship between Spain, Britain, and the Baymen set the stage for later disagreements over jurisdiction and sovereignty.

The convulsions which rocked Central America in the first half of the nineteenth century only further complicated the situation. First, Mexico and Central America won its independence from Spain in 1821, forming the First Mexican Empire under Agustín de Iturbide. Two years later the Central American Republic split from Mexico but had dissolved into five separate republics by 1840 (the most notable of which for this study is Guatemala). Yucatán was temporarily independent from Mexico between 1841 and 1848, and the Caste War consumed the peninsula in 1847, leading to the establishment of the independent Maya state of Santa Cruz. Spanish American independence and its aftermath brought questions about BH's status and limits to the fore. Which state now had sovereignty over the territory and where did it end?

[8] Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 31.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Ibid.

Both Britain and Mexico agreed that the Rio Hondo was the dividing line between BH and Yucatán. However, in the west the river has two tributaries: the northern Blue Creek and southern Rio Bravo. Britain argued the former was the proper border while Mexico championed the latter. Attempts at compromise fell apart during the Second Mexican Empire (1864-1867). During Maximillian's reign, imperial commissar Salazar Ilarregui attempted to stem the flow of weaponry to the Caste War rebels by asserting that BH was rightfully Mexican. For a moment, in 1866, Mexico and Britain agreed to negotiate about the future of Belize. Then the monarchy fell. Benito Juárez assumed the presidency, cutting off diplomacy with Britain and repudiating their existing treaties in retaliation for Britain's initial involvement in the intervention which had brough Maximillian to the throne. The situation remained frozen in this state until the rise of Porfirio Díaz as president in 1877.[11]

BH's western border with Guatemala was even more liminal. The Treaty of Paris established the New River as Belize's western boundary. However, in 1856 William Stevenson blithely admitted that his predecessors had made "(improper?) 'grants'" for the extraction of lumber "far beyond the limits defined by the treaty of 1783."[12] The 1859 Wyke-Aycinena Treaty attempted to formalize the border between BH and Guatemala. Starting from the south, it had the border running along the Sarstoon River, then pivoting at Gracias á Dios Falls, again at Garbutt's Falls, then ending at the Mexican border.[13] However, this plan was thwarted by the most unlikely of provisos. The treaty's seventh article called for the establishment of a road to connect Guatemala City with the Atlantic. From the Guatemalan perspective, the treaty was a transaction:

[11] Dutt, *Empire on Edge*, 6-7, 15-16.
[12] "Improper?" is Stevenson's own parenthetical interjection. William Stevenson to Henry Labouchere, December 18, 1856, CO 123 93/196.
[13] Brett A. Houk and Brooke Bonorden, "The 'Borders' of British Honduras and the San Pedro Maya of Kaxil Uininc Village," *Ancient Mesoamerica* 31, no. 3 (2020): 555-556.

they would give up a tract of land in exchange for assistance in constructing the road. In the end, this road did not materialize. Therefore, Guatemala declared, and still considers, the Wyke-Aycinena Treaty to be invalid.[14]

The answer to the question of sovereignty was not always clear in BH either. For instance, in 1848 Superintendent Charles St. John Fancourt related the case of a Mr. Stirling to whom the colonial government sold a licence to cut two hundred mahogany trees. However, Stirling "demurred to the payment when his acknowledgement became due, on the grounds that the property was the property of the Queen of Spain."[15] In this instance, Stirling utilized the structure of the conjuncture in attempt to avoid paying for his licence, a task in which he was ultimately unsuccessful.[16] To focus solely on this failed ruse would miss a greater point, however. The colonial government was charging cutters to harvest trees on land it had recognized as Spanish just a few decades prior. This was a tacit assertion of British sovereignty. A decade later, Frederick Seymour made a similar implication. He reckoned that settling the colony's boundary would require a mutual agreement between Britain, Mexico, and Guatemala. However, the superintendent disagreed with the Earl of Clarendon, the foreign secretary, about how to handle mahogany works "in the occupation of British subjects altho' beyond our proper limits."[17] Clarendon hoped that "the neighbouring states may be asked to concede [logging rights] as a privilege," while Seymour asserted "that all such newly sanctioned possessions should be protected by British jurisdiction alone."[18] While their opinions differed on operations outside of BH's "proper limits," both shared the common assumption that Belize was under

[14] Ibid., 556.
[15] Charles St. John Fancourt to Charles Edward Grey, February 10, 1848, CO 123/74.
[16] Ibid.
[17] William Stevenson to Henry Labouchere, December 16, 1856, CO 123/93.
[18] Ibid.

British jurisdiction and protection. The exact process by which Britain came to see Belize as one of its possessions, as opposed to a foreign concession, is one potential avenue for future scholarship. For now, it is sufficient to observe that the change occurred gradually during the first half of the nineteenth century. As I address momentarily, this reversal was accompanied by the Crown increasing interest in the settlement's affairs. Regardless, by the time Britain declared BH a colony in 1862, imperial officials held it to be unambiguously British.

King Mahogany and Mahogany Kings

In 1720 Nathaniel Uring, captain of a merchant vessel, shipwrecked in Belize while on his way to deliver Jamaican rum and pick up logwood. Consequently, he spent the several months living with the Baymen. His description was less than flattering:

> The Wood-Cutters are generally a rude drunken Crew. . . . Their chief Delight is in Drinking; and when they broach a Quarter Cask or Hogshead of Wine, they seldom stir from it while there is a Drop left: It is the same when they open a Hogshead of Bottle Ale or Cyder, keeping at it sometimes a Week together, drinking till they fall asleep; their general Drink, which they'll sometimes sit several Days at also; and as soon as they awake, at it again, without stirring off the Place. Rum Punch is their general Drink, which they'll sometimes sit several Days at also; they do most Work when they have no strong Drink, for while the Liquor is moving they don't care to leave it. I had a very unpleasant Time living among these people.[19]

If Uring is to be believed, the Baymen worked in sporadic bursts, devoting most of their time to carousing. In the settlement's early days, the settlers performed the work of logwood cutting themselves. The labour required was relatively low as logwood was small and grew specifically along rivers and coasts. Once cut, it could easily be transported to merchant ships for sale by dumping it in the nearby river and floating it straight to the coast.[20] However, Uring's sojourn in Belize came on the eve of two interrelated changes.

[19] Quoted in Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 28.
[20] Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 29, 49.

The first was the introduction of slavery as a source of labour. It is unclear when the first enslaved Africans were brought to BH. However, by the middle of the seventeenth century they made up the numerical majority. By 1745, there were 120 enslaved persons in the colony compared to 50 free settlers.[21] By 1779 the number had risen to 3000 enslaved people, making up 86% of the total population. When the Slave Trade Act of 1807 cut off the supply of the new enslaved labourers, the population began to decline. By the time the Abolition Act was passed by Parliament in 1833, the population had fallen to about 1,000.[22] The Baymen's rapid investment into slave labour was closely tied to the second major change: the rise of mahogany as the colony's primary export. The second half of the eighteenth-century saw both a depression in the logwood trade and boom in England's luxury furniture industry. Despite not obtaining the right to do so until 1789, the Baymen quickly adapted by reorienting their operations around mahogany cutting. This luxury hardwood supplanted logwood as colony's *raison d'etre* by the 1770s.[23] The mahogany tree posed far greater challenges than logwood, however. It was taller, wider, heavier, and grew in a more dispersed fashion. Dividing into too small of pieces would degrade its value, yet it needed to be transported over a greater distance.[24] The effort required to simply find suitable trees should not be understated. Gangs typically included a member which specialized in precisely this task. As Archibald Robertson Gibbs observed in the late nineteenth century, "about the month of August, the huntsman or tree-finder starts, machéte in hand, to cut his way through the thick brush to some rising eminence, and, climbing the highest tree he can find, examines the surrounding forest. . . . The trees are not found in clumps, but singly."[25] All of

[21] Melissa A. Johnson, *Becoming Creole: Nature and Race in Belize* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2018), 30.
[22] Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 49, 51.
[23] Ibid., 26-27.
[24] Ibid. 43.
[25] Archibald Robertson Gibbs, *British Honduras: An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Colony From its Settlement, 1670*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, and Rivington, 1883), 120.

this made the endeavour more labour-intensive, and thus more costly. Whereas the Baymen's logwood gangs were small, mahogany gangs ballooned in size. Gibbs provided a sense of how large and complex these operations became during the nineteenth century:

> To a gang of forty hands there will be a compliment of six trucks, with a team of seven or eight pairs of oxen, and two drivers to each truck. The mahogany logs are elevated on the trucks by inclined platforms, the logs having been sawn into sizes to equalize the loads for the yokes of oxen. Twelve men are told off, in trucking, to load, and sixteen to cut food for the teams and to perform miscellaneous duties on the works.[26]

The nature of the mahogany business had profound consequences for the historical development of the colony.

For one, it meant that the colony largely consisted of a "hollow frontier." The cutters established temporary works in the forest but did not establish much in the way of permanent settlements or infrastructure.[27] The British presence was centred almost entirely on Belize Town, the start and endpoint for such expeditions. The costs of mahogany cutting also led to the concentration of the forestry industry into increasingly few hands. The prohibitive levels of finance and labour required to cut mahogany meant only the wealthiest Baymen could do so effectively. They used their wealth to entrench themselves in the settlement's political institutions and used this influence to expand their wealth in a circular fashion. In 1787 the Public Meeting, the settlement's legislature, passed a series of resolutions which restricted the privilege of "locating" a mahogany work to those who owned at least four enslaved men and allotted 2000 square miles, four-fifths all the territory outlined in Britain's treaties with Spain, to just twelve cutters.[28] The oligarchs severely restricted eligibility for the Public Meeting in 1808. To qualify, one now had to be a "male British subject who, if white had to prove one years residence and

[26] Ibid., 122.
[27] Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 2.
[28] Ibid., 33, 43.

own £100 in visible property; if coloured, a candidate had to prove five years' residence and possession of £200 in visible property."[29] This prevented all but the wealthiest residents, especially free people of colour, from participating in the colony's primary political institution.

The next major evolution was the partnership of the so called "Principal Inhabitants" with metropolitan merchants. The cutters had always had business relationships with merchants in London, but in the mid-nineteenth century they formalized these ties by founding jointly-owned firms. The most notable came into existence when James Hyde, his son James Bartlett Hyde, and the merchant John Hodge formed James Hyde and Company. Such enterprises had access to greater levels of capital and thus could expand their operations to unsustainable proportions. Bolland argues that the participation of absentee investors led to "a get-rich-quick mentality that fostered a drastic exploitation of the forest resources. With a complete absence of planning or any attempt at reforestation, the expansion of production into less accessible areas and severely depleted forest reserves."[30] As iron began to replace wood in shipbuilding in the 1850s, mahogany prices dropped, and the market entered a depression. This combined with the increased cost associated with transporting trees from deeper in the forest made business unprofitable for all but the largest firms. As the smaller operations went insolvent and perished, the major houses grew even larger by scavenging their carcasses, buying up their assets at auction. In 1859, James Hyde and Company registered as joint stock company and rebranded as the British Honduras Company (BHC). The trend towards monopolization concluded upon the bankruptcy of Young, Toledo and Company in 1880. The BHC's last great rival had fallen, giving the company the opportunity to acquire nine of its mahogany works in the aftermath.[31] In

[29] Ibid., 172.
[30] Ibid., 182-183.
[31] Ibid., 174-175, 183, 186.

the span of century, the mahogany trade had come completely under the control of a single company.

But mahogany trees do not fell themselves. The rapid expansion of forestry in the nineteenth century would have been impossible without an adequate supply of hands. Even as slavery came to an end in the British Empire, the Baymen devised new ways to maintain control over their Creole labourers. BH's frontier nature, combined with the fact that it abutted Mexico and Guatemala where slavery was abolished after independence, meant that it was relatively common for enslaved workers to escape into the bush. By the time of emancipation, about half of the colony's population were already freed, indicating "that the masters preferred a free black laborer to a runaway slave."[32] What then, were these systems which replaced formal slavery? They were a predatory combination of "advance" and "truck." The former involved paying labourers in advance upon signing their contracts. It was convention to renew when the gangs were back in Belize Town for Christmas holidays. This season, the rare part of the year when mahogany workers were at home, was known for jubilant celebrations and lavish spending. These festivities often burned through their advances which were ostensibly meant to cover the cost of supplies. Thus, out at the works the labourers faced the second system, truck. It was common for workers to receive part of their compensation in credit at their employer's store. In the isolated forest, the goods on offer were typically sold at prices well over their market value. Stuck within these systems the labourer would sink further into debt, one which he had to work off the next season. The result, for many, was an unending cycle of debt peonage.[33] Gibbs provided a lengthy account of this cycle:

[32] Bolland, "Systems of Domination," 605.
[33] Ibid., 608; This phenomenon was not unique to Belize. Kurt Korneski explains how British merchants in Newfoundland and Labrador used truck systems to much the same effect. See Kurt Korneski, "Cosmopolitan

> The labourer engages himself some time during the Christmas holidays for the ensuing year at say nine dollars per month. But he has just entered upon, or is in the height of, his few weeks' annual festivity, and he and the woman he lives with, and the children, if any, require money "to keep Christmas." He applies for, and is granted four months' advance of wages; probably taking three to begin with; and spending it out, returning for another month's advance. But by his agreement he is bound to take half of his wages in goods from his employer, who keeps in his store a stock of such goods as his hands require, and of a certainly inferior quality. First of all there is an undue advantage on the employer's side, allowing that the majority of employers are contented with nothing beyond legitimate percentages of profit. But even in extreme cases, where less conscientious employers are not over tender in conscience, the evil of his purchasing in the dearest market, instead of being allowed to take his money where he likes, is the lesser one only; the greater is that he receives these goods and the cash in the middle of a saturnalia of dissipation, and the consequences are the hard cash disappears like butter before the sun, finding its way into the tills of the rum-sellers. The goods are next sold at one half what he is charged for them; that money, or the greater part of it, also disappears, and another advance follows. On the works the same rule of half goods half cash is pursued, but he sees no more cash although he gets goods. The book-keeper of the gang keeps his account, debiting so much for every day he is absent from work, even from sickness, and exacting fines rigorously, the contract being in every way a tight one for the labourer. It is hardly necessary to add that when his season's work is over he finds himself in debt when he comes down to Belize for his Christmas spree.[34]

The elite's domination of land aided their domination of labour. The point was not simply to exploit the land itself, the big cutters and firms controlled far more land than they could hope to make use of with the colony's tiny population, but rather to deny it from everyone else. Without access to land, the colony's Creole population was rendered dependent upon the mahogany lords for their livelihoods. This state of affairs was, in fact, made possible by the nature of the timber business. The colony lacked a system of land tenure until The Laws in Force Act of 1855. The new system allowed the firms to retroactively claim all the works established by their predecessors over the previous century as private property.[35] The nomadic nature of forestry in

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Engagements: Class, Place Diplomacy in the Gulf of St. Lawrence Fisheries, 1815-1854," in *Reappraisals of British Colonisation in Atlantic Canada, 1700-1930*, eds. S. Karly Kehoe and Michael E. Vance (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020); Kurt Korneski, "Planters, Eskimos, and Indians: Race and the Organization of Trade under the Hudson's Bay Company in Labrador, 1830-50," *Journal of Social History* 50, no. 2 (2016).

[34] Gibbs, *British Honduras*, 176-177.

[35] Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 43-44.

Belize inadvertently paved the way for the mahogany elite to exercise a firm grip over land and labour.

The Baymen and the Crown

It is important to draw a distinction between the Baymen and the representatives of the British Crown. One should not assume that these two parties shared the same goals or were allies. In fact, the efforts of successive superintendents to assert their authority over the colony was its primary conflict for the first half of the nineteenth century. When the first official representative of the Crown was appointed in 1784, he came with a mandate which immediately put him in conflict with the Baymen. His primary instructions were to uphold Britain's treaty with the Spanish. Thus, Superintendent Edward Marcus Despard was shocked to learn that settlers claimed and operated in land beyond the official limits for years.[36] The relationship between the Baymen started as hostile with little hope of improving. This tension was rooted in the unofficial nature of the colony's founding. Where did executive authority rest? The settlers had their own governing body, the Public Meeting, where they elected magistrates and passed legislation. Meanwhile, from the late eighteenth-century onwards, there was Crown appointed superintendent.[37] However, Britain was hesitant to assert control over the territory due to its previously discussed diplomatic peculiarities.[38] Fancourt's blue book report for 1847 was emblematic of the ongoing struggle between the mahogany elite and the Crown. He complained that:

> The real governing body consists of five or six mahogany houses in Belize, whose operations are almost entirely dependent on certain other houses in London, who have usually a managing partner here. . . .

[36] Ibid., 32.
[37] Dutt, *Empire on Edge*, 11.
[38] Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 40.

> These merchants, already masters of the legislative body, are the persons who have been recently supplicating Her Majesty's Government to be invested with the executive power also, which would be an anomaly in Government, and productive of the greatest evils.[39]

Likewise, he despised their use of the truck system. Responding to the Consul General of Mosquitia William D. Christie's inquiries about mahogany cutting, Fancourt described the practice of paying labourers partially in goods. He cautioned Christie, writing "this most pernicious and in its effects most demoralizing system, I take the liberty of recommending you discourage as much as possible."[40] By far his most radical proposal came when he voiced that he would "infinitely prefer the old system of making the Public Meeting a public meeting of the inhabitants at large, without any restrictions whatever as to country, race, length of residence, or pecuniary qualifications, to that which at present exists, which is, in point of fact, an oligarchy."[41] It is unclear if Fancourt was motivated by a legitimate commitment to democracy or a more calculated desire to undermine the mahogany elite, although they are not mutually exclusive. Ultimately, despite both being "British," the Baymen and the Crown often did not get along.

It is worth stating that the settler elite was just as much a target of the nineteenth-century colonial project as the racialized majority. I elaborate on the liberal high modernist ideology of the Colonial Office in the next chapter. For now, it must be pointed out that slavery ran counter to the liberal ideology and capitalist economics of the newly ascended bourgeoisie. If their great nemesis at home was the old feudal aristocrat, his West Indian analogue was the slaveholder,

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[39] *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions*, 1847, London: W. Clowes & Sons for H.M.S.O., 1848, 162.
[40] Charles St. John Fancourt to William D. Christie, March 12, 1849, CO 123/76.
[41] By "the old system," he likely meant that which existed before the 1808 membership restrictions. Blue book. *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1847*, 162.

ruling his plantation like a fiefdom. Writing about post-emancipation Jamaica, Thomas C. Holt suggests that:

> It was recognized that men born or even long-resident in a slave society developed not just different economic interests but different mores and values from those of even the absentee planters. This is perhaps in part what [Colonial Office staffer James] Spedding had reference to in defining the other half of the problem of freedom from the British perspective, that is, to transform "a slave driving oligarchy, deformed and made fierce by their false attitude, into a natural upper class."[42]

In Jamaica, the Colonial Office desired to mold the former slaveholders into a "proper" bourgeois upper class. Although it was never articulated so clearly, the same impulse contributed to the animosity between the cutters and Crown in BH. On paper at least, the domination of the mahogany oligarchy over the settlement and its people ran counter to the values of free labour and free markets. As I explore in the next chapter, these values frequently clashed with the reality of capitalist society both at home and abroad. Nonetheless, this ideological component helps, in part, to explain the character of the rivalry in the nineteenth century.

In broad strokes, the Colonial Office slowly but surely won out. In 1832 the superintendent gained the power to appoint magistrates. Eight years later, English law was officially determined to extend to BH and in 1854 the settlement's first formal constitution came into force. The Public Meeting opted to disband itself, being replaced with a partially elected, partially appointed, Legislative Assembly. In 1862, Britain recognized BH as a colony, before finally declaring it a crown colony in 1871, assuming direct imperial control. Bolland attributes these changes to the economic depression which took root in the 1850s and the rise of metropolitan ownership which undercut the power of the settler elite. Meanwhile, the task of defending the colony in the context of the Caste War, and its associated costs, facilitated greater

[42] Thomas C. Holt, *The Problem of Freedom: Race, Labor, and Politics in Jamaica and Britain, 1832-1938* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), 91.

imperial involvement in the territory.[43] However, this shift towards metropolitan political and economic dominance does not mean the struggle between public and private interests came to an end. Rather, the locus of private power shifted from Belize Town to London. During the mid-nineteenth century, the remains of the settler oligarchy and the associates and representatives of metropolitan interests, were entirely capable of causing headaches for the colonial government. For instance, in 1866 the proposal of a land tax led two members of the Assembly to resign in protest. They were soon joined by several others, the ringleader of which was "a troublesome American of no character whose object was to bring about as much confusion as possible by the reversal of . . . all other resolutions to which the House then stood pledged."[44] The revenue raised from the proposed tax undoubtedly would have helped fund the colony's defense. Thus, as was common, private interests conflicted with the colonial project.

"On the Sole Ground of His Mother Being a Woman of Colour:" Race Relations and Mixed-Race Belizeans

Arriving in 1839, the American diplomat, traveller, and antiquarian John Lloyd Stephens was struck by the racial makeup Belize Town. One of his first observations was that "the town seemed in the entire possession of the blacks. The bridge, the market-place, the streets and stores were thronged with them, and I fancied myself in the capital of a negro republic."[45] Presumably due the questions of slavery and race-relations sweeping his own country, Stephens took an even greater interest in Belize's apparent lack of prejudice. His first brush with Belizean race-relations began before mere moments after stepping on land. Since Belize Town lacked a hotel, it was

[43] Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 10.
[44] John Gardiner Austin to Henry Knight Storks, July 9, 1866, CO 123/122.
[45] John Lloyd Stephens, *Incidents of Travel in Central America, Chiapas, and Yucatan* (London: John Murray, 1842), 1: 11-12.

recommended he check with a woman who might be able to rent him a room. Stephens was shocked to learn that this rentier, who had been described as a "lady," was "a mulatto woman."[46] Evidently, BH operated off a different set of assumptions about race and class than Stephen's hometown of New York.

Passages like this make Stephens a useful window to examine race relations in BH prior to the Caste War. As an outsider, he included details about Belizean society which a resident might have taken for granted. Moreover, his preoccupation with race led to descriptions overflowing with commentary on it. Thus, his account provides valuable insight into the racial baseline which the colonial project took shape amid.

After securing lodgings, Stephens attended a small gathering at an unnamed merchant's home. Here, he was again struck by the man's company: "the gentleman sat at what one side of the table and his lady the other. At the head was a British officer, and opposite him a mulatto; on his left was another officer, and opposite him a mulatto."[47] As an American, Stephen's found this interracial cordiality quite unusual. He notes that he sat "between the two coloured gentlemen," despite the fact that others from his country may have refused.[48] During the ensuing conversation, his companions informed him that the people of Belize had allegedly transcended racial prejudice. He recounted:

> Before I had been an hour in Balize [sic] I learned that the great work of practical amalgamation, the subject of so much angry controversy at home, had been going on quietly here for generations; that colour was considered mere matter of taste; and that some of the most respectable inhabitants had black wives and mongrel children, whom they educated with as much care, and made money for with as much zeal, as if their skins were perfectly white.[49]

[46] Ibid., 1: 11.
[47] Ibid., 12.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

Such a statement should not be taken at face value. For one, Stevenson was clearly tying what he witnessed to the racial questions at the forefront of his American readership's minds. Regardless of potential exaggeration on his part, this sentiment can also be found in British sources. For instance, in 1856 Superintendent Stevenson wrote to the Aubrey George Spencer, the bishop of Jamaica, concerning the procurement of a missionary for BH's northern district. In his letter, Stevenson remarked "that among the more educated and intelligent classes, color in not in the least degree considered now. . . . There have been so many intermarriages and connections between the leading people of this place and persons of color, that the distinction is rarely thought of, and never made."[50] Evidently, leading figures within the colony projected an air of racial agnosticism.

In order to understand this apparent colourblindness, it important to consider precisely *who* Stephens and Stevenson were writing about. The latter plainly stated that it was the "educated and intelligent classes" who lacked racial prejudice. In fact, as I further discuss in chapter three, he believed that the predominantly non-white lower strata which would only accept a white missionary.[51] Regardless, the manner and interests of Stephens' biracial companions also firmly place them as members of the cutter/merchant class. He described, "both were well dressed, well educated, and polite. They talked of their mahogany works, of England, hunting, horses, ladies and wine."[52] These men did not belong to the labouring masses, rather they were the sons of Baymen who formed unions with Black women. Thus, the "great work of practical amalgamation" which Stephens and Stevenson refer to, only existed amongst a particular privileged class. As I will address momentarily, the elite did not extend the same

[50] William Stevenson to Aubrey George Spencer, July 11, 1856, CO 123/95.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Stephens, *Incidents*, 1:11.

goodwill to lower-class Creoles. Nonetheless, the authoritative presence of mixed-race Belizeans in economic and political life should be investigated further.

The day after his arrival, Stephens attended a session of the Grand Court. Once again, he was met with diverse company. As he described:

> Five of the judges were in their places; one of them was a mulatto. The jury was empanelled, and two of the jurors were mulattoes; one of them, as the judge who sat next me said, was a Sambo, or of the descending line, being the son of a mulatto woman and a black man. I was at a loss to determine the caste of a third, and inquired of the judge, who answered that he was his, the judge's, brother, and that his mother was a mulatto woman.[53]

This passage suggests that it was common for the mixed-race sons of the forestry elite to hold positions of authority. The casual manner in which the judge answered Stephens' question about his brother reveals that this quite normalized by the end of the 1830s. The judge was quick to assure Stephens that "in Balize [sic] there was, in political life, no distinction whatever, except on the ground of qualifications and character; and hardly any in social life, even in contracting marriages."[54] This social integration, at least among the upper strata, hides the presence of mixed-race individuals. British sources generally do not make mention of their race. Moreover, unlike Hispanic and Maya Caste War migrants, their ethnic identities can not be inferred from their names. Nevertheless, their participation in public life can be assumed from the instances where they *are* mentioned. For instance, in the early nineteenth century the most prominent slaveholders were James Hyde "and his 'colored' son, George."[55] The latter received an education in England and along with his father, owned over 100 enslaved labourers.[56] It appears that people of colour continued to important positions during the Caste War period. For instance,

[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid., 1: 17.
[55] Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 165.
[56] Ibid., 165.

in 1858 Seymour offhandedly described James Hume Blake, a magistrate of the Northern District, as "a coloured gentleman."[57] Beyond this one mention, I have not found any other mentions of Blake's parentage, despite holding a position afforded him a considerable presence in the archive. Such a silence, combined with the egalitarian image put forth by prominent Belizeans, suggests that appointment of mixed-race individuals to government posts was generally unremarkable.

Nevertheless, the words of the Baymen should not be taken for granted. The greatest strike against this heady feeling of tolerance expounded by elites was the rhetoric biracial Belizeans used to achieve political equality in 1831. Rather than opposing the colony's racial hierarchy, the mixed-race population actively affirmed by arguing that they were entitled to equal rights because of their whiteness. As such, they were apathetic when the free Blacks' parallel movement failed to advance that group's social position. As Bolland summarizes "the free colored accepted the basic social distinctions of the society and exploited them, in order to differentiate themselves from the blacks."[58]

Returning to Stephens' visit to the colony, the most revealing insight on race relations came not in a merchant's parlour or the courthouse. Rather, it came when he visited the town's "negro schools." Here he was informed that "the brightest boys, those who had improved most, were those who had in them the most white blood."[59] Likewise, the schoolmistress in charge of educating the female department explained, "though she had many clever black girls under her charge, her white scholars were always the most quick and capable."[60] Any goodwill the white

[57] Frederick Seymour to Charles Henry Darling, October 17, 1858, CO 123/97.
[58] Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 94.
[59] Stephens, *Incidents*, 1: 16.
[60] Ibid., 1: 16-17.

settler elite showed to the mixed-race population stemmed not from a sense of egalitarianism, but rather from the proximity to whiteness of that class. Even George Hyde, a wealthy merchant in his own right, had reason to petition Britain Parliament in 1827, lamenting that:

> Though his exertions might acquire him wealth, he must remain in a condition of relative degradation, on the sole ground of his Mother being a woman of colour, he his excluded from serving as a Magistrate, from holding a Commission in the Militia, or from filling any Public Office of Trust, or Honor.[61]

By the time of Stephens' 1839 state visit, a man like Hyde could hold such offices. Perhaps he was one of the men Stephens spoke with or witnessed in court. Nonetheless, the racial permissiveness described by his interlocutors only extended to a privileged class, tied to the settler elites by common blood and white identity.

The Caste War Comes to Belize

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a detailed treatment of the Caste War, its course, and causes.[62] The latter in particular have been debated since the outbreak of the conflict. As Gilbert M. Joseph summarizes, recent scholarship tends to view the conflict through socioeconomic class issues rather than a race war, as contemporary observers did.[63] For an example of the race war rhetoric of Yucatec elites, see the pleas of Yucatec President Santiago Méndez. By March 1848, the president was desperate. Writing in apocalyptic terms, he informed British Minister Plenipotentiary to Mexico Percy W. Doyle that the peninsula would be doomed without foreign intervention. To this end, he offered to submit to either Britain, Spain or the United States in exchange for help in quashing the rebellion. In making this petition, he

[61] Quoted in Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 92.
[62] For a detailed narrative history, see Nelson A. Reed *The Caste War of Yucatán*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001).
[63] Gilbert M. Joseph, "From Caste War to Class War: The Historiography of Modern Yucatán (c. 1750-1940)," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 65, no. 1 (1985): 116-118.

explained: “the white race, the civilized class of this state are being attacked in an atrocious and barbarous manner by the indigenous caste, who rising simultaneously by a ferocious instinct are waging a savage war of extermination.”[64] According to Méndez, the Caste War was simply an expression of Maya “savagery.” Moreover, their end goal was to completely annihilate Yucatán’s white population. This “betrayal” was made all the worse by being targeted against “the generous people who aspired with so noble a resolution to improve their [the Maya’s] physical and moral condition.”[65] The war certainly had a racial component, but to frame it as a “race war” is reductive. One need only look at the writings of its original leaders to see that they had clearly articulated class-based grievances. In 1848, for instance, the *batab* of Tihosuco Jacinto Pat, explained to the British Hondurans Edward Rhys and John Kingdom that “the whites began it, because what we want is liberty and not oppression, because before we were subjugated with the many contributions and taxes [pagos] that they imposed upon us.”[66] Successive scholars have expanded upon the social and cultural dimensions, of the conflict. Victoria Bricker stresses the religious aspects of the war and the emergence of the famed talking cross.[67] Meanwhile, Terry Rugeley roots the uprising in the complexities of prewar municipal politics.[68] In a more recent monograph, Dutt examines the how the Mexican state’s attempts to undermine the traditional power of Maya leaders helped foment the seeds of rebellion.[69] The key point is that the Caste War was extremely complex and the rebellious Mayas were animated by political grievances

[64] Santiago Medes to Percy W. Doyle, March 25, 1848, CO 123/75.
[65] Ibid.
[66] Jacinto Pat, “The Whites Began It,” in *Maya Wars: Ethnographic Accounts from Nineteenth-Century Yucatán*, ed. Terry Rugeley (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 51.
[67] Victoria R. Bricker, *The Indian Christ, the Indian King: The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), Chap. 8.
[68] Terry Rugeley, "Rural Political Violence and the Origins of the Caste War." *Americas* 53, no. 4 (1997)
[69] Rajeshwari Dutt, *Maya Caciques in Early National Yucatán* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2017).

rather than racial animosity. As I elaborate on in the next chapter, British officials used race as a way of simplifying the conflict.

At this juncture, it is necessary to briefly examine the Caste War's impact on Belize. The conflict sent both Maya and Hispanic refugees over the Rio Hondo, into the colony. Consequently, the population grew to ten times prewar levels.[70] In 1848, Fancourt estimated that there were 15,000 residents in the colony, "one-third whom I believe to be foreigners."[71] A decade later, in 1858, the Society of Jesus conducted a census of Roman Catholic villages and returned a population 13,419. Seymour added an estimated 5,000 residents of Belize Town for approximate population of 18,419. However, he was quick to observe that "this census is obviously faulty, as any person acquainted with the settlement would at once mention half a dozen villages left out; nor does it include the many inhabited cays, along the coast nor the forests where thousands of Indians are believed to lurk."[72] It is impossible to know the precise population of the colony during this period. The frontier was far too fluid, and many people lived beyond the purview of colonial authorities. What *is* clear is that the Caste War radically reconfigured the colony's demographics.

Another major impact of the Caste War was the introduction of widespread agriculture to the colony. Forbidden from engaging in the cultivation of the soil and requiring all available labour for the valuable forest industry, the Baymen showed little inclination toward agriculture.[73] The Caste War refugees, by contrast, came from a fundamentally agrarian society. In 1857, the

[70] Dutt, *Empire on Edge*, 4.
[71] *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1847*, 162.
[72] The Catholic population would largely be comprised of Caste War migrants. Frederick Seymour to Charles Henry Darling, May 16, 1858, CO 123/96.
[73] Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 136.

first shipment of sugar left.[74] In the following year, sugar cultivation within the colony combined with the more general economic depression to pose problems for the government's revenue. Seymour explained, "the development which the cultivation of the sugar cane has recently taken" caused:

> The import duties on spirits and sugar [to] have greatly fallen off. The loss thus sustained has been but ill supplied by the excise imposed on these articles when manufactured in the settlement; which bearing the relation toward the import duty . . . has practically acted as a protection on the home manufacturers, which have consequently taken possession of the local market as regards the supply of brown sugar, rum, and the commoner description of cordials.[75]

Yucatec sugar cultivators revealed the viability of commercial agriculture in Belize. In 1847 Fancourt lamented that "of agriculture, in British Honduras, little that is satisfactory can be said. . . . The cultivation of the soil has been almost completely neglected."[76] Less than two decades later there was 8,143 acres of land cultivated in the Northern District alone. The crops grown included sugarcane, cotton, corn, tobacco, coffee, rice, and plantains in varying quantities.[77] With time, the large capitalists became interested in agricultural development. Initially they were content to rent out their vast landholdings to independent farmers. Since the mahogany business was in decline during the 1850s, the demand for labour was not particularly pressing. Renting plots was simply a way to profit from land that was not in use.[78] In 1863, however, Austin noted that Carmichael and the BHC were in the process of establishing sugar plantations.[79] Such investors largely confined themselves to sugar production and leveraged steam powered machinery. They quickly broke into the market. In 1868, just ten large plantations accounted for

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[74] Frederick Seymour to Charles Henry Darling, August 13, 1857, CO 123/95.
[75] *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1858*, 3.
[76] *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1846*, London: W. Clowes & Sons for H.M.S.O., 1847, 115.
[77] John Gardiner Austin to Edward Eyre, February 14, 1865, CO 123/119.
[78] Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 136-139.
[79] John Gardiner Austin to Edward Eyre, May 26, 1864, CO 123/116.

1,168 acres of the land under sugarcane.[80] For perspective, in 1865 the total area of cane land was 1,345 acres in total.[81] As a consequence of the Caste War, mahogany now had to share the economic spotlight with sugar and other cash crops.

The thousands of Mayas who quietly tended to their milpas and ranchos or fell in as "useful members of the mahogany gang,"[82] unfortunately go largely overlooked in the historical record. By contrast, the larger autonomous groups which threatened colonial interests frequently made their way into official correspondence. The Mayas who rose in revolt can be divided into two categories: the *bravos*, the long-term rebels whose existence centered around the town of Chan Santa Cruz and venerated the titular talking cross, and the inaccurately named *pacíficos del sur* (peaceful ones of the south), who established peace agreements with the Mexican state.[83] One group of pacíficos known as the Chichanhá Maya were a perpetual thorn in the British Honduran administration's side. In the autumn of 1856, S. Panting, the foreman of Young, Toledo, and Co.'s mahogany work at Blue Creek, informed his employers that Chichanhá leader Luciano Zuc "[had] made all at once an exorbitant and prompt demand of four dollars per log for all the wood I have fallen and got out – and that if the same is not paid within eight days he will embargo the mahogany and take possession of everything I have on the bank."[84] Zuc claimed to have inherited jurisdiction over the vicinity of Blue Creek from his father, Jose Mariano.[85] Dzuc's threats were the first of many tense encounters between the Chichanhá and British interests. But all was not well at Chichanhá. The next year, Superintendent Seymour reported

[80] Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 141.
[81] John Gardiner Austin to Edward Eyre, May 26, 1864, CO 123/116.
[82] *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1858*, 10.
[83] Terry Rugeley, *Maya Wars: Ethnographic Accounts from Nineteenth-Century Yucatá*n (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2001), 12-13.
[84] S. Panting to Messrs. Young, Toledo and Co., September 3, 1856, CO 123/93.
[85] Ibid.

that an estimated 3,000 Chichanhá Mayas had crossed into BH "with a view to a cultivation of the soil, contemplating permanent settlement." Their pacífico status put them at odds with the bravos and Mexico was "unwilling or unable to extend protection to the Chichanha Indians" leaving "them for some years exposed to the vindictive cruelty of stronger tribes."[86] These were likely the San Pedro Maya who, desirous to escape conflict with the rebels, broke with Zuc's Chichanhá Maya and relocated to the Yalbac Hills of western Belize. Zuc's remaining followers migrated closer to the Rio Hondo in 1863, settling at a place called Icaiche.[87] As demonstrated by the above incident, Zuc's group was a perpetual thorn in the administration's side. The San Pedro Maya, by contrast, shared a largely positive relationship with the Crown. For instance, in 1863 Seymour reported their leader, Asuncion Ek, "requested I would grant aid towards the establishment of a school at San Pedro, and supply pencils, paper, and elementary Spanish books. I have promised to furnish the articles required."[88] Of the three major groups at the colony's frontier, the San Pedro Maya were the administration's favourite. They seemed the most desirous of friendly relations with the British and, in the administration's view, most likely to integrate into colonial society. These good feelings fell apart in 1866 when the colonial administration dispatched troops to San Pedro to prevent a rumoured alliance between that group and the Icaiche Maya. Dutt suggests that the rumour was initially false but became a self-fulfilling prophecy. The approach of British soldiers spooked Ek and pushed him into Marcos Canul, the new Icaiche leader's, arms. On December 20 the combined forces of San Pedro and Icaiche fell upon the British column in the dense jungle, dealing them a humiliating defeat. The incident laid bare the inadequacy of British defense and the administrations failure navigate its

[86] Frederick Seymour to Edward Wells Bell, May 15, 1857, CO 123/95.
[87] Dutt, *Empire on Edge*, 73, 83.
[88] Frederick Seymour to Edward Eyre, July 13, 1863, CO 123/113.

frontier relations.[89] In 1863, Seymour had referred to the San Pedro Maya as "our border police force."[90] The 1866 San Pedro incident highlights just quickly circumstances at the frontier could change and how its remoteness could foster rumour and paranoia. The colonial administration's presence in the region was weak to nonexistent. Consequently, bureaucrats' knowledge of what went on there was extremely limited.

For the reasons discussed throughout this chapter, BH acquired a unique character. It was loosely controlled and tenuously legitimate. As one British administrator put it, mid nineteenth-century Belize was truly an "open and peculiar country."[91]

[89] Dutt, *Empire on Edge*, 84-85, 86-88.
[90] Frederick Seymour to Edward Eyre, February 13, 1863, CO 123/112.
[91] William Stevenson to Edward Wells Bell, August 9, 1856, CO 123/93.

Chapter 3:

Colonial Dreams: Liberal High Modernism and the Colonial Schema

Consternations among those who governed were reactions to quiet and sustained assaults on the warped logic of "European" supremacy. Challenges took unexpected forms that showed imperial principles were not, and could not be, consistent with themselves.

—Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain, Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense*

Bourgeois culture hits an insuperable limit in colonialism. None of its noble achievements—Liberalism, Democracy, Liberty, Rule of Law, and so on—can survive the inexorable urge of capital to expand and reproduce itself by means of the politics of extra-territorial, colonial dominance.

—Ranajit Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India*

The capitalist "head office" can allow itself the luxury of creating its own myths of opulence, but the poor countries know that myths cannot be eaten.

—Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America*

High Modernism and Imperialism

We may now turn to the specific culture(s) which underpinned nineteenth-century colonial projects. In *Seeing Like a State*, James Scott examines the function of modern states and the ideology which underlies their more ambitious endeavours. The latter he dubs *high modernism*, which he describes as:

> A strong, one might even say muscle-bound, version of the self-confidence about scientific and technical progress, the expansion of production, the growing satisfaction of human needs, the mastery of nature (including human nature), and, above all, the rational design of social order commensurate with the scientific understanding of natural laws. It originated, of course, in the West, as a by-product of unprecedented progress in science and industry.[1]

This definition is extremely reminiscent of Guha's "universalizing tendency of capital." Both represent a hubristic belief in the superiority of one's own worldview. Likewise, each "at its most

[1] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 4.

radical . . . imagined wiping the slate utterly clean and beginning from zero."[2] However, high modernism covers a much wider range of visions. In Scott's view, it is compatible with a wide range of ideologies from across the political spectrum. Consequently, he associates it with a slew of disparate figures, ranging from Vladimir Lenin to the Nazi Party.[3] In this way, it functions as a sort of sub-ideology which may be appended to any vision which calls for radical change based on what are perceived to be natural laws. I contend that the "universalizing tendency" described by Guha is high modernism in its liberal-capitalist form. Afterall, little could be more high modernist than the bourgeois desire to supplant all non-capitalist economic forms: to, as Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels put it, "[create] a world after its own image."[4]

Moreover, it is this version which is, in all likelihood, the oldest. Scott links the birth of high modernism to "the beliefs in scientific and technical progress that were associated with industrialization in Western Europe and in North America from roughly 1830 until World War I."[5] At the same time, Guha argues that bourgeois capitalism was the first economic mode to have a universalizing impulse.[6] If this is the case, we should look to nineteenth-century imperialism[7] as the origin point of high modernism. The "primitive accumulation" famously described by Marx relied upon a series of coincidences. As he writes when describing capitalism's triumph over feudalism, "the knights of industry . . . only succeeded in supplanting the knights of the sword by making use of events in which they had played no part whatsoever."[8]

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[2] Ibid., 94.
[3] Ibid., 88-89.
[4] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: International Publishers, 1983), 13.
[5] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 89.
[6] Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony*, 63.
[7] Here I am referring to a specific type of imperialism wherein a bourgeois minority rules over a racialized, non-capitalist majority. This includes straightforward examples such as India, but also the West Indies where the enslaved population was to be transformed into wage earners.
[8] Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, Vol. 1, *The Process of Capitalist Production*, ed. Frederic Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, rev. Ernest Untermann, (Chicago: Charles H. Kerr and Company, 1906), 875.

The champions of enclosure and the Bloody Code could not have fully known the significance of the transformative forces they had unleashed.[9] While this primitive, or first, accumulation was somewhat accidental, liberal high modernism represented a more conscious desire to replicate it. Thus, I believe that historians have much to gain by viewing nineteenth-century imperialism through the lens of high modernism.

The high modernist impulse was most zealously acted upon in the colonies, where "backwards" peoples had to be radically transformed to facilitate capitalist exploitation. Scott identifies three prerequisites which, when combined, have produced disaster. These are: high modernist ideology, a willingness and ability to realize the aims of that ideology using state force, and subjects who are unable to fight back.[10] It is the second point which separated high modernism in the metropole from the version practiced on the periphery. Bourgeois ideology constrained the level of force they could exercise at home. Once again discussing the Raj, Guha observes:

> In rural India the coercive intervention of the state was allowed to encroach on a domain which was jealously guarded by the instruments and ideology of bourgeois law in metropolitan Britain. This was the domain of the body, made inviolable by habeas corpus and the individual's right to the security of his or her own person. But the body of the colonized person was not so secure under the under the rule the same bourgeoisie in [India], as the uses of Order to mobilize manpower demonstrated again and again.[11]

Out in the colonies, administrators used racial ideology to justify illiberal behaviour. Their belief in the *self-evident* superiority of bourgeois culture coexisted with the idea that some peoples needed to be *taught to see* that superiority with a firm hand if necessary. Despite the glaring contradiction, both were present in the common sense of the colonial mind.

[9] For more on the process primitive accumulation in Britain see Marx, *Capital*, Part VIII.
[10] Scott, *Seeing Like State*, 88-89.
[11] Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony*, 26.

Race functioned as an intellectual shortcut which could be used to reconcile liberalism with capitalist exploitation. Guha notes that despite the liberal rhetoric that bourgeois Britons attached to capitalism, they could not resist its universalizing tendency. Profits and the system itself needed to keep expanding, by force if necessary.[12] This posed a conundrum: how could a class which pontificated about liberty and representative institutions reconcile its autocratic domination of various peoples across the globe. Racial ideology was their solution. As Eric Hobsbawm puts it:

> Apart from its convenience as a legitimation of the rule of white over coloured, rich over poor, [racism] is perhaps best explained as a mechanism by means of which a fundamentally inegalitarian society based upon a fundamentally egalitarian ideology rationalized its inequalities, and attempted to justify and defend those privileges which the democracy implicit in its institutions must invariably challenge. Liberalism had no logical defense against equality and democracy, so the illogical barrier of race was erected: science itself, liberalism's trump card, could prove that men were not *equal*.[13]

Nineteenth-century ethnology, anthropology and "scientific" racism fit high modernism like a glove. Here was (pseudo)scientific proof that European subjugation of non-Europeans was not only just, but ideal! George Stocking Jr. elaborates, "the sociocultural evolutionism" which was common amongst mid-Victorian intellectuals who posited that some people (women, the lower class, non-white people, etc.) were simply at a lower stage of development than bourgeois British men. This not only explained *why* there was inequalities within society, but also *justified* the maintenance of those inequalities. Consequentially, for "those whose mental development had not yet achieved the rational self-control and foresight on which individual freedom ought to be premised, . . . there was no paradox in denying them full participation in civilized society, until such a time as (if ever) their mental development justified such participation.[14] This sociocultural

[12] Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony*, 67.
[13] Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Capital, 1848-1875*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1975), 268.
[14] George W. Stocking Jr., *Victorian Anthropology*, (Toronto: The Free Press, 1987), 229-230.

evolutionary thread was part of the structure which nineteenth-century British administrators brought with them to the conjuncture of the colonies.

Sociocultural evolutionism also helped form liberal high modernism's sense of purpose. If certain peoples were "backwards," then "uplifting" them to civilization and modernity was an act of altruism. In the nineteenth century "it was both scientifically and morally respectable for civilized Europeans to take up the white man's burden."[15] Of course, it was not until the end of the Victorian era that Rudyard Kipling summarized the ideology of empire in such eloquent and enduring terms. It is not my intention to conflate early ethnological theories with later scientific racism. Throughout *Victorian Anthropology*, Stocking highlights the various strains, debates, and developments within nineteenth-century British thought as concerned civilization and race. However, they are bound together by a shared belief that humankind could be categorized and that different peoples were at different stages of teleological spectrum of development. What *really* changed was the degree to which human variance was attributed to culture vs biology.[16] Regardless, colonialism provided the raw material for metropolitan racial theories. The accounts of travellers and bureaucrats in distant lands were the data social theorists worked with. The producers of this material grew up in the shadow of the Industrial Revolution and saw the sheer technological and, in their eyes, moral superiority of their civilization over others.[17] Thus, racial theory reflected attitudes which already existed within British society. It merely took these sentiments, clad them in the language of science, and built upon them.

However, liberal high modernism, with its racialized rhetoric, had an Achilles heel. High modernism is built on hubristic self-confidence. Its legitimacy depends on the accuracy of the

[15] Ibid., 237.
[16] Ibid., 106-107.
[17] Ibid., 179.

social insights the ideology it attached to provides, in this case the supremacy and desirability of liberal-capitalist social relations. In British Honduras, for instance, in 1857 Seymour sent an agent of Hyde, Hodge, and Co. to meet with a group of "timid and uncivilized" Chichanhá Maya (likely those which settled at San Pedro) to "explain to them the liberal nature of our laws, and endeavour to persuade them to accept work and wages in the interior."[18] Seymour assumed that this group could be easily convinced to become employees of the mahogany houses. Moreover, he felt that they were "attracted to our settlement by the protection which it ensures against their enemies" and that they would eventually "[disperse] into smaller bands" and "advance to the interior where their services would be valuable as labourers and timber cutters."[19] Such thinking was fallacious. British protection did not have much weight at the colony's periphery and the group's enemies were unlikely to care for a line drawn on a map by men on a different continent. Their general reclusiveness suggested a desire to maintain their autonomy beyond the reach of any of the powers in the region. Seymour's assumption that they any interests in subordinating themselves to the colony or its firms was utter divorced from the message sent by their behavior. Nonetheless, colonial administrators needed to cling to the fantasy that they had something to offer their would-be subjects.

Subjects in Need of Governance

Before proceeding, it is necessary to explain the goals and demands of the colonial project in BH. In other words, what problems did colonial administrators have to address via the structure of the conjuncture? As usual, they faced the two perennial questions which dogged the colony from its founding. The first was the need for labour. The second was the desire to secure

[18] Frederick Seymour to Edward Wells Bell, May 15, 1857, CO 123/95.
[19] Ibid.

the northern frontier and legitimate the colony's questionable status. In a spurious hegemony like British Honduras, it was imperative to project an air of authority. The administration partially accomplished this through the very act of reduction and classification. With their simplified categories in hand, they appeared knowledgeable about the people they governed; they *knew* them and what was best for them. Moreover, high modernism in its liberal form prefers its subjects to willingly submit. Even when violence is utilized, it must be framed as being for the victim's benefit. Thus, the colonial government needed it to appear as if the population was reliant on, and supportive of, it. This was especially true of their approach to Caste War migrants, whom the government repeatedly boasted about its ability and obligation to protect. For instance, in 1859 Seymour proudly remarked that:

> Though no very great value is probably attached to this settlement, its occupation by us has been of incalculable benefit to the neighboring republics, and, indeed, to humanity. Under the shelter of our protection twelve or fifteen-thousand Yucatecans now flourish in sight of their ruined native land; and the tide of Indian rebellion and devastation in its progress to the southward was checked by the strong English force on the Hondo, and prevented from filling the channels already dug for it in Guatemala and other states.[20]

This passage perfectly summarizes how the British conceptualized, and legitimatized, their presence in Central America. In their view, British Honduras was a bastion of peace and prosperity amid a sea of turmoil which accompanied the Caste War in Yucatán and the disintegration of the Central American Republic. Going forward, I propose that British administrators staked their legitimacy on an imagined social contract. The arrangement, as officials imagined it, was that any person who came to Belize would be given British protection in exchange for obedience and loyalty. As an example, in 1848, Fancourt affirmed "that the same protection will be presented to the Indians of Yucatan in the English Possessions of Honduras, as

[20] *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1858*, 12.

that enjoyed by subjects of other nations. They will enjoy the entire protection of our laws and it will be required of them to conform with them."[21] However, this contract had problems at both ends as the following episode demonstrates.

In the spring of 1860, a group of "Wild Indians" shot at three mahogany labourers who were travelling from Hope River to Labouring Creek. The attackers killed two of the workers leaving the third, Basileo Macedo, as the sole survivor. Despite having been wounded in the head and hand, Macedo managed to reach British authorities and inform them of the incident. A posse was quickly formed to track down and apprehend the perpetrators, whom the survivor positively identified.[22] Then something strange happened. Not long after Police Inspector C. Metcalf arrived in the area, "Basileo Macedo (the wounded Indian and principal witness) deserted him in the bush from some utterly unknown reason."[23] Around the same time "a skeleton supposed to without any great evidence to be that of Macedo, was found some six miles from where Mr. Metcalf was deserted, and that there is little doubt that this is another addition to the already long list of Indian atrocities."[24] This incident flew in the face of the self-image the British had constructed for themselves. They failed to prevent the murder of Macedo's colleagues. Moreover, the authorities discovered a set of remains which they had not known about. It is quite probable that this new body was not Macedo, but some other person who died under some other circumstances. It is unclear how much time passed between Macedo's disappearance and the discovery of the remains, but the fact that they were already skeletonized suggests they had been there for a longer period of time. The affair also suggests that the administration did not have the authority or knowledge they assumed they had. Rather than remaining with the police inspector,

[21] Charles St. John Fancourt to the Chief Magistrate of Bacalar, May 9, 1848, CO 123/75.
[22] Thomas Price to Charles Henry Darling, May 3, 1860, CO 123/101.
[23] Thomas Price to Charles Henry Darling, June 16, 1860, CO 123/102.
[24] Ibid.

Macedo chose to flee. There are two possible non-mutually exclusive explanations for this decision, neither of which supports the British self perception. It might be that Macedo simply did not believe in the colonial government's ability to protect him. Thus, he took his chances and hid in the bush. It is also possible that he was not as innocent as he first appeared. British authorities were content to consider the incident as nothing more than a senseless act of violence committed by "Wild Indians," but surely there was *some* motive. It is possible that the attackers and victims were known to each other. The cases of frontier violence for which there are enough sources to study, typically had very deliberate and rational origins: usually the settlement of a debt or retribution for a past misdeed. If the same is true of this case, the British had stepped in into a complex web of relationships that they could scarcely understand.

The Empire's Men

Thus far, I have discussed Britain's colonial bureaucracy as if it were a faceless mass sent out to remake the world in the image of bourgeois capitalism. But it is important to note the personal ambitions of individual administrators. The men who governed Britain's colonies typically had a personal stake in their respective colonial projects. Success meant the potential of ascending the career ladder to increasingly prestigious postings. This was particularly pressing for bureaucrats languishing in lesser-known parts of the Empire such as BH. For instance, in 1856 when Superintendent William Stevenson learned that Charles Henry Darling was leaving the Government of Newfoundland for the Government of Jamaica, he applied for the newly opened position. He explained to Colonial Secretary Henry Labouchere that when he became superintendent he "[believed] at the time that by faithfully performing the difficult,—or rather troublesome,—work before [him he] should long since have shown [himself] capable of

undertaking a more important government with greater responsibilities."[25] He complained of the "climate which [had] never agreed with [him] since [his] arrival" and referred to his three years in Belize as "the most laborious that [he had] ever passed though."[26] Stevenson was eager to leave BH and advance his career. He felt that his service in Belize had demonstrated his merit as a colonial administrator. Thus, he implored Labouchere to consider him for the Government of Newfoundland, or for another post should it be unavailable.[27] In the end, Stevenson was named Governor of Mauritius.[28]

The advancement Stevenson's successor, Frederick Seymour, was even more closely tied to the colonial project. In 1862 the superintendent voiced his intention of "permanently settling ... all our Indian difficulties" prior to his departure from the colony."[29] This was an unrealistic goal; the incursions of hostile Mayas turned on a complex web of factors beyond the control of a single administrator. However, this intention does suggest that he saw the problems facing the colony as puzzles he could solve via shrewd leadership. His career prospects were closely tied to his ability to realize the colonial project. Despite the persistence of "Indian difficulties," Seymour's ambitions bore fruit. The following year, Colonial Secretary Newcastle suggested him for the Government of British Columbia on the basis that he was "a man of much ability and energy who has shown considerable aptitude for the management of savage tribes."[30] The career pressures of men like Stevenson and Seymour suggests a further reason for upholding the illusion of dominance even in the face of contrary evidence. To admit a lack of knowledge or authority would put one's competence as an administrator in question. Even though

[25] William Stevenson to Henry Labouchere, October 16, 1856, CO 123/93.
[26] Ibid.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Edward Wells Bell to Henry Labouchere, December 26, 1866, CO 123/93.
[29] Frederick Seymour to Edward Eyre, May 15, 1862, CO 123/110.
[30] Cited in Margaret A. Ormsby, "Frederick Seymour, the Forgotten Governor," *BC Studies* 22 (1974): 4.

administrators were constrained by their circumstances and available resources, the responsibility for failure may be laid at their feet to insulate the whole. Reporting on his dealings with the various Maya groups at the colony's frontier Seymour affirmed, "I shall, as usual, act in my own name in these transactions. I steadily keep Her Majesty's aloof from our frontier disputes and arrangements where failure is at all times possible and the best meant efforts must at first to a great extent be experimental."[31] The subtext of this statement was that his actions, regardless of his intentions, could not be allowed to reflect poorly upon the British Empire, embodied here by its sovereign, Queen Victoria. Such is the peril of high modernism. Since it is premised on a supposed mastery "natural laws," any challenge to these assumptions delegitimizes the entire endeavour.

The Colonial Schema

One important point which Scott makes about high modernists, and indeed about modern states in general, is their desire to make the people and places they govern "legible." Beginning in the Early Modern period, states became increasingly interested in making sense of the people they governed. Knowledge of a society makes it far easier to exert one's will over it. However, the picture painted by such reductions is not an accurate one. Scott describes them as "abridged maps" which:

> did not successfully represent the actual activity of the society they depicted, nor were they intended to; they represented only the slice of it that interested the official observer. . . . Rather they were maps that, when allied with state power, would enable much of the reality they depicted to be remade.[32]

Thus, state simplifications were more prescriptive than descriptive. In a colonial context such as Belize, race is a powerful means to categorize persons. However, the colonial state in BH lacked

[31] Frederick Seymour to Edward Eyre, October 8, 1862, CO 123/111.
[32] Scott, *Seeing Like a State*, 3.

the resources to meaningfully refashion frontier society. Nonetheless, administrators developed abridged maps they could do little to act on, like an explorer with a map to the location of a treasure, but no ship to take them there.

The British Honduras government's first attempt at systematically categorizing its subjects in the wake of the Caste War proved too complex to be of use. The census of 1861 listed some 42 separate categories based on race, language, and nationality. As Cunin and Hoffman point out, future censuses omitted ethnicity entirely.[33] Nonetheless, British administrators developed an informal system for classifying the many diverse peoples they now ruled. It was best outlined by Superintendent Fredrick Seymour in his report accompanying the colony's bluebook for 1858. In it, he presents four categories: "1st, the Maya and Chichanja [sic] Indians (Aztecs); 2d, Spanish refugees from the neighbouring republics, who already form the numerical majority; 3d, white and black Creoles, all who speak the English language; 4th, Caribs."[34] Each were assigned a role within the colonial economy and certain attributes to justify their subjugation. I call this the *colonial schema* and spend the remainder of this chapter breaking down each of its components in turn.[35]

It is interesting that Seymour chose to group "white and black creoles" together. As his words suggest, this was at least partially due to their shared language. With such a rapid influx of migrants from Yucatán, it is unsurprising that Seymour would make a distinction between the colony's preexisting inhabitants and new arrivals.[36] Nonetheless, he focused entirely on Black

[33] Cunin and Hoffman, "Ethno-racial Categories," 39, 41.
[34] *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1858*, 9-10.
[35] Cunin and Hoffman outline the basics of this schema, focusing on the general association of particular groups with particular places and occupations. Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I elaborate on these characterizations and place them in context with wider aims of the British Honduran colonial project. Cunin and Hoffman, "Ethno-racial Categories," 42.
[36] This view excluded the Indigenous Mayas who remained at the colony's periphery from the beginning of British settlement. For more on them, see Bolland, *Struggles for Freedom*, Ch. 4.

Creoles, never once attributing the white inhabitants explicit traits or roles. His characterization of white Belizeans was entirely implicit and conceived in opposition to the characteristics he assigned other groups. Thus, the rest of schema must be explicated before returning to the white elite.

At first glance, Seymour's description of the Creole population is out of place. He provided a brief account of the manners and economic niche of each of the other groups. For the Creoles, however, he simply described the day-to-day operation of a mahogany work.[37] In the official mind, Creoles were inseparable from forestry. Moreover, it supposedly had a beneficial moral effect upon the labourers. Seymour wrote, "the habits of bush life with the self-reliance which it creates, while compelling mutual aid in case of need, and habitual hospitality, have created in British Honduras a development of the negro character which has agreeably surprised me."[38] As Johnson argues, Belizean elites paired this connection with forestry and the "uncivilized" bush with a supposed disinclination towards agriculture which justified withholding lands from them.[39] The previous year, Stevenson provided a welter of reasons as to why the Creole population would not facilitate the emergence of widespread agriculture in the colony:

> The labourers have hitherto been habituated to [forestry] alone, and are always sure of employment at their accustomed work, whenever they choose to leave their own small plantations, even at the enormous wages they demand; wages which could never be afforded for agricultural services of any sort; even if the labourers were at all fit for that new employment, which they are not.[40]

[37] *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1858,* 11.
[38] Ibid., 9.
[39] Johnson, "Making of Race and Place," 598-599, 603-604.
[40] William Stevenson to Lieutenant-Governor of Jamaica, March 2, 1857, CO 123/95.

This description contains several threads of contradictory colonial thought. Stevenson simultaneously claimed that Creoles were inapt at agriculture yet mentioned their practice of "making plantation." From the late eighteenth century onward, the mahogany lords sought to lower the costs of their operations by encouraging labourers to grow small quantities of foodstuffs. Creoles took to this practice with gusto, securing vital provisions for themselves and their families.[41] This enthusiasm cuts against the idea that Black Belizeans were adverse to agriculture. Moreover, Stevenson's framing suggests that for many Creoles, wage labour at the mahogany works actually supplemented making plantation, not the other way around. It was something they did upon "[choosing] to leave their small plantations." He was also operating from a different conception of agriculture. Colonial elites were interested exclusively in large plantations which grew exportable cash crops.[42] Hence, Stevenson's argument that the Creoles would not accept the lower wages offered by planters. For him, the development of a smallholding peasantry was entirely unworthy of consideration. He betrayed his true concerns when he explained: "this is no place for agricultural experiments; nor is it likely to become so, while the great staples of mahogany and logwood demand the services of all the available labour of the country."[43] Stevenson was writing in a particular context: immediately before the depression of 1858 wiped out several firms and accelerated the process of monopolization. In 1857, the firms needed every single available hand to contribute to the timber industry. However, "when prices fell there was dullness everywhere; lounging woodcutters on the bridge or round the grog-shops, instead of being away in the woods, axe in hand."[44] For the first time in the colony's history there was less work than workers. The surviving firms emerged stronger than

[41] Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 58-59.
[42] Ibid., 146.
[43] William Stevenson to Lieutenant-Governor of Jamaica, March 2, 1857, CO 123/95.
[44] Gibbs, *British Honduras*, 114.

ever, no doubt benefitting from no longer having to aggressively compete for labour. In this context, the racial ideology which divorced Creoles from agriculture still served an important function. It justified withholding land from the Creoles, thereby denying them alternative methods of subsistence and keeping them pliable as labourers.

Racial ideology furthered the marginalization of Creoles by framing them as unintelligent. The previous chapter examined how educators in the colony viewed biracial schoolchildren as more academically competent than their Black peers. According to the colony's racial schema this supposed inadequacy was both innate *and* a product of the mahogany work. Seymour explained that the "chief care" of education in the colony was "to enable the children to overcome the almost mechanical difficulties which encumber the first stages of instruction."[45] Thus, the superintendent asserted that Creole children had an inherent difficulty in taking to education. Moreover, he placed them at them at the bottom of the colony's assumed intellectual hierarchy. Seymour spoke favorably of how:

> The Free Schools are so liberally and well conducted, that English, Spanish, and Indian boys and girls are induced to enter them, and thus negro vanity, that great bar to all improvement, is kept within reasonable bounds by competition with minds often honestly and faithfully desirous of improvement.[46]

This view assumed a certain arrogant duplicity on part of the Creoles. Whites, Mayas, and Hispanics could be "honestly and faithfully desirous of improvement," but Seymour implied that Creoles felt superior and merely pretended to be interested in learning. In 1847, Fancourt remarked upon their reluctance "to tell the truth which it is notorious that the Negro in this part of the world will seldom do unless under the dread of certain peculiar consequences."[47]

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[45] *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1858*, 7.
[46] Ibid., 6.
[47] Charles St. John Fancourt to Charles Edward Grey, December 11, 1847, CO 123/74.

Meanwhile, the notion of "negro vanity" conflicted with the colonial elite's sense of self-congratulatory mastery. In 1856, Superintendent Stevenson opposed the appointment of a Mr. Gordon as a missionary for the Northern District in the basis of his (presumably dark) skin colour. According to Stevenson, the colony's lower strata believed in "the fallacy that the superior qualification of an educated mind and cultivated intellect cannot be found in coloured clothing," therefore "they do not respect, obey and appreciate their own colour, as they do the European."[48] Thus in his view, the Creoles were generally unfit to direct their own affairs and desirous of British rule. With this in mind, Seymour advocated for the colony's education system to "draw from the lad who may live by the labour of his brain or the special skill of his hands, from him who should, for his own benefit, early discover or be taught that he has only his muscles and good temper to depend upon."[49] A select few, likely those with white ancestry, could aspire to intellectual pursuits. The majority were best suited to the mahogany works, where brawn was more valuable than brains. Even the educated would experience a "collapse in the highly artificial educational acquirements which too frequently takes place under the unintellectual labours of the mahogany gang."[50] According to colonial logic, most Creoles were born dull and were best suited to mind-dulling work. Therefore, a British hand was necessary to elevate those who could be educated and manage the majority who could not.

The Garifuna's relatively small numbers, made their place in the schema extremely straightforward. In the colonial mind they were inseparable from the water and fishing. Seymour emphasized that this connection to the water was established at infancy. He recounted:

> I have seen at Stann Creek a woman coming down to the river with a mahogany bowl, full of clothes to be washed, on her head, and a mere baby on her hip. Having thrown the

[48] William Stevenson to George Aubrey Spencer, July 16, 1856, CO 123/95.
[49] *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1858*, 7
[50] Ibid.

> linen on the bank, she places the child in the bowl, and then pushes it from the shore into the stream; and in this manner, the young Caribs, before they can speak distinctly, are often taught one rudiments of 'dorey' sailing, the sitting steady.[51]

Seymour continued to stress the competency of Garinagu as sailors. In his view, "these Caribs form a very useful part of our population; and on any of the various expeditions to which our smooth sea, studded with innumerable islets, invites, they are by far the best attendants."[52] Given the lack of roads and the importance of river transportation in BH, the Garifuna's maritime skills were invaluable. Interestingly, Seymour also noted their involvement in agriculture, but downplayed it. He explained, "each man on his marriage builds a house, clears and plants an acre of land for his wife. And, having thus provided for her, returns to occupations on the water."[53] Being African descended, it is likely that administrators applied the Creoles' supposed aversion to agriculture to the Garifuna, as well. Thus, from an official perspective, farming was only a sideline for the Garifuna.

Maya migrants occupied a rather ambiguous place in the colonial schema. They could supplement timber gangs but were also closely associated with agricultural labour. On the former point, Seymour famously explained: "more robust than the Spaniard, less addicted to pleasure than the negro, they are admirably adapted to the monotonous drudgery of logwood cutting, which has passed principally into their hands."[54] It is worth noting that he connected them with the less arduous task of cutting logwood rather than mahogany. In the colonial mind, mahogany extraction was primarily the domain of brawny Creoles. In an 1869 article published in New Orleans' *De Bow's Review*, BH's longtime chief justice Robert Temple described Creole mahogany workers as "a class of men who, from their height and symmetry, and muscular

[51] Stann Creek, known today as Dangriga, is the primary center of Belize's Garifuna population. Ibid., 11.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] Ibid.

development, would form splendid models for a Hercules, or an Antæus."[55] He continued to give a description of Creole and Garifuna rowers, emphasizing their strength and physique:

> With their bodies naked to the waist, and black and shining as polished ebony, their broad, brawny chests and muscular back and arms, their shrill, dissonant, ferocious cries, their wild gestures, sometimes playing the paddle with inconceivable vigor, which sends the canoe with the swiftness of an arrow through the water. . . . Altogether such an exhibition of savage nature as to cause the beholder, for an instant, to doubt whether the wild creatures he sees belong to the same species as himself.[56]

Creole physicality merged with their association with the bush to form an image of "primitive" masculine strength. By contrast, administrators portrayed Mayas as stronger than Hispanics, but weaker than Creoles. In 1863, Lieutenant-Governor Austin expressed optimism about the growth of cotton in colony, explaining that "the peculiar fitness of the Indian for such light cultivation leads to the very natural conclusion, that in time the Hondo and New River cotton fields will be very extensive."[57] Mayas slotted into the colonial schema as general-purpose labourers, suited to less strenuous occupations.

Colonial racial ideology towards the Maya and Hispanics were closely intertwined, the quadripartite schema tying both to agriculture. As Seymour put it, "[Hispanics], with a sprinkling of Indians, are our sugar growers."[58] Elites underpinned their desire to dominate Maya labour by stressing their alleged timidity and docility. Seymour, for his part, described them as "in all matters civil, but shy."[59] Hispanics, on the other hand, occupied a unique position within the racial ideology of Belize's administrators. The British elided the categories of *white* and *Mestizo* (mixed European and Indigenous ancestry), a distinction which was significant in Mexico and Latin America more broadly. To the British, they were simply *Spaniards*, simultaneously white

[55] Robert Temple, "British Honduras," *De Bow's Review* 6, no. 5 (1869): 391-392.
[56] Ibid., 392.
[57] John Gardiner Austin to Edward Eyre, May 26, 1863, CO 123/116.
[58] *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1858*, 10.
[59] Ibid.

and Other. Their whiteness meant that colonial elites could not justify their domination and dispossession in quite the same way they did with Creoles, Mayas, and Garinagu, whom administrators did not attribute any autonomy or agency. Instead, the British focused on Hispanics' incompetence at self-governance and economic management. To men like Seymour, the Caste War was the greatest evidence of the calamities which could occur when Hispanics governed themselves. In 1857 he expressed a desire to introduce popular institutions to the Northern District but lamented that "the Spanish Yucatecans have not hitherto in their own province exhibited that capacity for the management of their own affairs which the Anglo-Saxon continues to manifest in whatever part of world they may settle."[60] Seymour was skeptical of about allowing Hispanics a say in the government of the colony, fearing that the "anarchy and confusion" of the Caste War would be repeated on British soil.[61] Seymour, perhaps, best summed up the British attitude toward Hispanics when he described the case of a troublesome Catholic priest in Corozal:

> Discord, the people of Yucatan love for itself; and it is a matter of satisfaction to them, since our tolerably vigorous laws will not allow of much secular insubordination, to carry spiritual insubordination to its utmost extent. The priest who now possesses the most authority over them has been excommunicated, and warned not to trespass on a field given over to another's pastoral charge; but with drunken audacity he perseveres, and the flock follows in his eccentric movements, which have a constant tendency towards increasing depravity. Occasionally injured husbands or brothers, in the Spanish belief of the omnipotence of my office, lay before me tales of his whimsical profligacy, but his influence continues unabated. Heresy, discontent, an inability to do good oneself, or allow others to do it, are, however, simply *cosas de Yucatan*.[62]

Seymour's description was emblematic about how he and his peers felt about Hispanics in positions of authority. He highlighted the priest's drunkenness, lechery, mismanagement, and wickedness. Thus, for the time being, Hispanics could not be trusted with a large degree of

[60] Frederick Seymour to Edmund Burke, December 3, 1857, CO 123/95.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Italics in original. *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1858*, 10.

discretion over their affairs. Instead, according to the colonial schema, they needed a wise and steady British hand.

This critique extended to economic matters. While excited by the prospect of agricultural development in the colony, Seymour criticized the refugees' "extremely slovenly mode of cultivation," explaining that:

> The canes are inserted, any how, into half-cleared ground, and left to crush by their own superior vitality the few and feeble weeds. . . . When cut, the canes are ground between wooden rollers, nearly 25 per cent. of the juice being thus lost, and the sugar is boiled in copper of iron pots. Made in this inartistic manner, the leakage is considerable on long voyages.[63]

Unlike Creoles, the quadripartite schema did not deny Hispanic and Maya interest in agriculture. Rather, it framed their methods as inferior to British-style mechanized farming. Half a decade later, Austin reported that Carmichael and the BHC had employed planters from Jamaica to manage their sugar plantations. He continued, the Jamaican "system of planting is very different than that adopted on the Ranchos of the Spaniards and has given proof of its advantage."[64] He "[hoped] that in lieu of very extended fields with little or no attention paid to them, and an intermixture of corn and plantains with canes the Spaniards will profit by the good example shown to them, and confine their labours to more moderate space."[65] Such a stance favoured British entrepreneurship and landownership. Furthermore, as suggested by the case of the Corozal priest, British administrators held Hispanics to be fiscally irresponsible, squandering their money on their alleged vices. Seymour explained that in that town:

> Amusements always take precedence of work; gambling, a cock-fight, or more rarely, a bull-fight, are the occupations of the day; guitarring [sic], dancing, and waking their

[63] Ibid., 9.
[64] John Gardiner Austin to Edward Eyre, May 26, 1863, CO 123/116.
[65] Ibid.

> dead, those of the night. . . . Large sums of money, or a cane field, are lost at cards; and the expense of their entertainments is very considerable.[66]

According to the colonial schema Hispanic refugees used inferior, less profitable, agricultural methods and wasted their money on debaucherous excesses.

One quirk of the colonial schema derived from its assignment of agency. Colonial elites tied the ability to have complex, deliberate motivations to whiteness. This framing was not so dissimilar to the "spasmodic" view of lower class protests which E. P. Thompson so famously criticizes. This perspective reduces eighteenth-century bread rioters' motivation to hunger and impulse, rather than a conscience "legitimizing notion" or moral economy.[67] In the case of Belize, Dutt notes a pattern whereby British officials blamed Hispanics for violence committed by Mayas.[68] For instance, Superintendent Price entirely negated Maya agency in beginning and prosecuting the Caste War. He explained, "the Indians are . . . officered by renegade Spaniards and others who exercise over these naturally peaceful but excitable people a control which will lead them to commit any atrocity, or to rush into any danger."[69] This is a trend which I examine more thoroughly in the fourth chapter. For now, it is sufficient to understand it as a side-effect of the colonial schema. British authorities depicted Mayas as docile and dependable. From the colonial perspective, it was their submissiveness which made them ideal labourers. Moreover, presenting them this way also helped paint a picture of British strength and authority, legitimating British rule. To afford them the ability to consciously choose violence and insubordination would shatter this characterization. Thus, BH's administrators rationalized their behaviour by the shifting blame for such events onto the Hispanic population. If the Maya, "a

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[66] *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1858*, 10-11.
[67] E. P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past & Present*, no. 50 (1971): 78-79.
[68] Dutt, *Empire on Edge*, 54-55.
[69] Thomas Price to Charles Henry Darling, July 9, 1860, CO 123/102.

naturally peaceful" people, were behaving violently or sinisterly, it must be the result of Hispanic meddling. In this way, the colonial schema excused and simplified the actions of Mayas in Yucatán and BH while demonizing their Hispanic peers.

Seymour, Price, and Austin's comments also shed light on the place of whites, more specifically "Anglo-Saxon" whites, in the colonial schema. They were to use their intelligence and aptitude for governance to check the worst inclinations of the four main subject groups and shepherd them towards "civilization." British administrators staked the legitimacy of their rule on their ability to facilitate moral and economic progress of their colonial subjects, and their ability to shield them from external threats. They held their authority to be benevolent and desired. To this end, they constructed a colonial schema, assigning each group to a particular economic niche, and providing justification for their subjugation. Of course, this was an idealized view, racked with inconsistencies, and not reflective of the realities of life on the ground. At every turn, the behaviour of the colonial government's would be subjects contradicted official representations. We must now turn are attentions to these cracks in the colonial schema's façade.

Chapter 4:

Colonial Realities: Interethnic Bonds and Administrative Shortcomings

Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun.

—Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*

Your Excellency will well understand that our means both financially and physically are small, and that unless the Imperial Government will put such pressure on that of Mexico as will secure peace upon the border, the colony must either be protected by continued military outlay on part of the Mother Country or be abandoned at the only point which gives hope of a prosperous future.

—John Gardiner Austin, Lieutenant-Governor of British Honduras, 1865

On April 28, 1849, shots rang out across the Rio Hondo. C. C. Baldwin, a witness to the incident, described what happened. That night, an American merchant named Alexander Catto roused him from his bed in Santa Elena, informing him of the imminent arrival of Mexican troops.[1] These 800 soldiers were making their way up the river via steamer with the intention of retaking the bravo-held fort of Bacalar.[2] Despite being confined to bed by fever, Baldwin armed himself and proceeded to the shore. Shortly thereafter, members of the crowd fired three shots: "one by Mr. Oswald, one by Mr. Catto and another by a black man in Mr. Oswald's employ named Benjamin Dickson."[3] When the Mexican commandant questioned them, Oswald and Catto explained "that they had done so to let the Indians know that they [the Mexican army] were coming."[4] The troops departed peaceably, although Catto was so upset that he apparently struck one of the onlookers, though Baldwin could not say who.[5]

[1] C. C. Baldwin to George D. Adolphus, April 30, 1849, CO 123/77.
[2] Charles St. John Fancourt to Charles Edward Grey, May 10, 1849, CO 123/77.
[3] C. C. Baldwin to George D. Adolphus, April 30, 1849, CO 123/77.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid.

Fortunately, there were other witnesses who shed light on why, and against whom, Catto became violent. The target of Catto's wrath was an employee of Hispanic immigrant Florencio Vega. According to Vega, he was at home when he heard the gunshots and, eager to prevent violence, went outside to figure out the cause of the gunfire. Catto's response to these enquiries was crass and violent. Vega stated, "he even threatened to take my life, and said if I did not hold my tongue he would turn his gun towards me and give me a ball." When the Mexican commandant asked similar questions, Vega attempted to quell tensions by claiming that the shooters "were merely cleaning their guns." However, "Messrs. Oswald, Catto, and C. C. Baldwin replied that such was not their object, for they had fired to inform the Indians that the enemy was ascending the river." Vega accused Catto, Oswald and Baldwin of "ill using and beating two of [his] servants on [his] bank," once the troops departed.[6] James Smith, another witness, recounted "Mr. Catto's conduct was imprudent and violent. I saw him assault one of Mr. Vega's men. . . . He also abused Mr. Vega on enquiring who had fired off the guns, he said to him 'I fired the guns why do you want to know you d—d son of a b—.'"[7] Why did this situation provoke such a strong response from Catto and what can it reveal about British rule and race relations in Belize?

Episodes such as this challenged British Honduras administrators' racial schema. The colony's social milieu could not practically be divided into simple, distinct categories. The artificial racial boundaries administrators erected in their minds did not reflect the codependent nature of life in the colony. The frontier in particular engendered interethnic contacts and bonds which transgressed official taxonomies. Furthermore, the Crown's would-be subjects

[6] Florencio Vega to George D. Adolphus, May 1, 1849, CO 123/77.
[7] Profanity censored in original. James Smith to G. D. Adolphus, May 1, 1849, CO 123/77.

continuously behaved in manners which contradicted official representations and undermined colonial administrators' sense of control. Nonetheless, colonial officials both on the ground and at a distance clung to the colonial schema's simplified, legible portraits of BH's peoples despite mounting evidence of their inaccuracy. The administration needed the air of knowledge and authority this ideology provided them. Thus, they assimilated contradictory news in ways which did not challenge the colonial schema, often creating new inconsistencies in the process. The following chapter explores several events and trends which threatened to undermine the colonial project in Belize. I read along the archival grain to expose contradictions within BH's official ideology and shine light on the dynamics of the frontier.

Transcending Boundaries: Merchants, Mayas, and the Arms Trade

In order to understand the exchange which occurred between British merchants, the Mexican army, and the bravos in 1849, one must first understand the illicit trade in arms and ammunition which fostered close interethnic bonds across the Hondo. As Dutt puts it, "the frontier created its own culture, one that was, at a basic level, predicated on a simple give-and-take between merchants and tradesmen who provided arms and ammunition and Mayas who gave them access to timber and foodstuff."[8] Nonetheless, British officials repeatedly affirmed their commitment to neutrality throughout the Caste War. The instructions Superintendent Seymour gave to J. H. Faber when dispatching him to the Northern Distract in late 1857 are a representative example. The former was clear that "we are no party to the warfare. We must maintain a perfect neutrality between the contending forces and solely look at the question as it affects the honor and security of the settlement."[9] To that end, one of colonial government's

[8] Dutt, *Empire on Edge*, 27.
[9] Frederick Seymour to J. H. Faber, December 8, 1857, CO 123/95.

primary concerns was limiting the sale of arms and ammunition by British Hondurans to rebel Mayas. Seymour gave Faber the aforementioned mission upon learning that Santa Cruz Mayas were approaching the frontier to exchange war loot for gunpowder. The superintendent reiterated to Governor Darling, "I am determined to prevent the belligerent parties being supplied from this settlement with the means of continuing their barbarous warfare."[10] As early as 1848, the authorities of Yucatán implored Superintendent Fancourt to send weapons for their army and to crack down on the powder trade with the bravos. Fancourt agreed in principle but doubted the practicality of such measures. He was unable to provide arms from the colony's magazine. Additionally, he explained "to prohibit the exportation of powder from within the British limits, would be an interference with the trade of the settlement which I fear would be felt as a great hardship by the settlers, nor do I think that such a course would be successful."[11] Fancourt knew that his ability to crack down on the powder trade was extremely difficult and that any interdiction would be unpopular with BH's merchant class. Nonetheless, he vowed "to employ [his] influence, which [he] may properly exercise with the settlers, to prevent arms and ammunition from being furnished to men, who employ them for the purposes of rapine and bloodshed."[12]

Irrespective of the official position, parties on both side of the Hondo had an interest in keeping the powder trade flowing. In his seminal work on the Caste War, Nelson Reed argues that the supply of British arms and ammunition was a major reason the rebels were able to continue fighting, even when a Mexican victory seemed imminent.[13] In fact, the arms trade was critical to the outbreak and course of the war. When the future leaders of the bravos began

[10] Frederick Seymour to Charles Henry Darling, December 17, 1857, CO 123/95.
[11] Charles St. John Fancourt to [?] Manuel Leon, February 1, 1848, CO 123/74.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Reed, *Caste War*, 127.

planning their rebellion in 1847, their ranks included a Mestizo man named Bonifacio Novelo. What Novelo brought to the table was British smuggling contacts in Belize. As such, he departed towards the Hondo to procure arms for the coming conflict.[14] No doubt, his ability to keep the rebellion supplied gave him increased standing among the bravos and probably played a role in his eventual ascendence as *tatich*[15] of Santa Cruz from 1864 to 1869. As early as 1848, Mexican Minister of Interior and Foreign Affairs Mariano Otero sent British Chargé d'Affaires to Mexico Percy W. Doyle the testimony of a Pedro Garma who claimed that Novelo was "the actual leader of the Barbarians" and "that at Bacalar there were several white men heading the Indians and working the artillery."[16] Characteristic of both Mexican and British officials, Otero and Garma tried to minimize Maya agency, attributing their actions to renegade whites. Nonetheless, it is reasonable to assert that Novelo's role in the powder trade gave him increased influence over the bravos. The Maya rebels were reliant upon British weapons, and merchants of BH were happy to profit by fulfilling that demand.

It is worth contrasting how BH's administrators handled the sale of powder to the bravos versus the Confederate States of America. In 1863 an unnamed informant made Seymour aware that "a merchant living in a wooden house . . . was in the habit of transferring gunpowder from the kegs in which it was imported into soap boxes for clandestine exportation to Texas or Mobile. A practice obviously dangerous in the middle of a town." Shortly thereafter the colony's American commercial agent, Dr. Charles Leas, visited Seymour and told the same story. The lieutenant-governor cooly responded "that the duty of stopping the supply of gunpowder to the South rested with his government, and not me. [Leas] then said 'but will you put in force your

[14] Ibid., 62-63.
[15] Reed describes the office of *tatich* as "the equivalent of a pope, but a pope with almost absolute power." Ibid., 199.
[16] Francisco Antonio Cervera to Andres de Cepeda, July 17, 1848, CO 123/75.

own municipal laws, when this traffic exposes your town to destruction.' I said 'certainly.'" So, Seymour proceeded to inform the Chairman of the Board of Firewardens of the merchant's dangerous handling of powder, but not his purpose for doing so. It was merely a coincidence that Leas and Seymour's goals aligned. Had this merchant conducted his business in a safe matter, there is no indication that the lieutenant-governor would have stopped him. Moreover, Seymour was quick to assert his neutrality regarding the American Civil War, explaining "[Leas] has been led by his courtesy and good feeling erroneously into the belief that I actively interfered to further the interest of the North to the detriment of the other belligerent."[17] The desire to maintain neutrality prompted contradictory responses towards the two different illicit trades. In the case of the powder trade to Santa Cruz, the neutral course was to prevent the powder trade. For the trade with the Confederacy, Seymour felt that intervention meant choosing a side. Despite their official stance, the British simply could not afford to ignore commerce at the frontier. There was very real fear amongst colonial officials that the rebel Mayas could quickly become enemies. For instance, Fancourt argued that "it is impossible to foresee at this moment what may happen, or – how long the present chiefs may be able to maintain their authority. I am compelled therefore to request that no diminution of the military force in Honduras may take place until I see some better guarantee for tranquility."[18] Changing circumstances could quickly see the Bravos' weapons pointed back at their place of origin. There was also a racial component. Administrators assumed that Mayas would use weapons for "rapine and bloodshed," but did not make the same judgment about white Southerners fighting the Civil War. In this case, practical concerns, with the aid of racial ideology, prevailed over consistent policy.

[17] Frederick Seymour to Edward Eyre, October 14, 1863, CO 123/114.
[18] Charles St. John Fancourt to Charles Edward Grey, July 8, 1848, CO 123/74.

It is reasonable to assume that the men who gathered at the Rio Hondo in 1848 were merchants involved in the powder trade. Just a year prior, Mexican authorities had complained that "English warehouses had been established" at Bacalar for the purposes of selling arms and ammunition to the rebels there.[19] There was obviously a financial incentive to keep the arms trade open, but it could also foster deeper feeling bonds between merchants and Mayas. The night of the incident, the merchants who fired the shots were willing to risk their lives and potentially incite a war between Britian and Mexico in order to warn the rebels at Bacalar. Moreover, Catto's intensity after the incidents seems to have gone beyond what one might expect from a business relationship. He was determined to let the Mexican comandante know that he supported the other side. When the battle ultimately did occur, a witness "at pistol shot distance saw [Belizean merchants Silvestre] Lanabit and George Fantazey [sic] load and fire a piece of artillery, several times during the attack – both escaped into the woods."[20] Lanabit and Fantesie went a step further than Catto, actively fighting alongside the rebels against the Mexican army. Vega's position in the affair at Santa Elena is also interesting. At first glance, his dismay upon hearing the warning shots could be attributed to the fact that he was Hispanic, and thus a "natural" enemy of the Mayas. However, he was also likely involved in the powder trade. An "F. Vega" officially registered a 21.33 ton schooner named the Auxillio with the government of BH in 1863.[21] If these Vegas are one and the same, it would suggest that he was merchant who operated in the Rio Hondo. If this is the case, he, like the others on the bank that day, probably dabbled in the powder trade. He may have been willing to sell guns to the Maya, but not willing to go to the length of actively warning them about the impending assault. Nonetheless, the

[19] Francisco Antonio Cervera to Andres de Cepeda, July 17, 1848, CO 123/75.
[20] George D. Adolphus to Charles St. John Fancourt, May 4, 1849, CO 123/77.
[21] Lindsay W. Bristowe and Phillip B. Wright, *The Handbook of British Honduras for 1888-89*, (London: William Blackwood and Son, 1888), 49.

incident at Santa Elena is emblematic of the complex interethnic relationships which prevailed at the frontier.

Errant Immigrants: Failed Developmental Schemes

Throughout the mid-nineteenth century, the colonial government made several attempts to acquire labour and capital to bolster BH's economy. In 1862 Seymour reported that "the House of Assembly has now for three years been making every exertion to obtain labour from China, India, Yucatan, indeed from almost anywhere."[22] This insatiable thirst for labour, at first, seems strange considering that it came immediately in the wake of the 1858 depression. It implies that the big firms faced difficulty exerting control over much of the refugee population. Austin acknowledged as much when he wrote, "I have had several opportunities of observing how at such a distance masters could be successfully defied by their people, and how in many ways the labourer was completely at the mercy of his employer."[23] The lieutenant-governor's view was nuanced, recognizing that the frontier could both enable the exploitation and autonomy of its inhabitants. Regardless, the big firms still demanded more labour.

The refugees' arrival in Belize had been unplanned and haphazard, many of them seeking to maintain a high degree of autonomy. Certainly, immigrants brought to the colony under an official scheme with formal obligations would be easier to control. Seymour preferred the immigration of African Americans, explaining, "in British Honduras we have an abundance of good land, perfect liberty, light taxation and a population homogonous to that which the United States wishes to rid themselves."[24] Once again, Seymour framed BH as a refuge for the displaced

[22] Frederick Seymour to Edward Eyre, December 14, 1862, CO 123/111.
[23] John Gardiner Austin to Edward Eyre, May 26, 1864, CO 123/116.
[24] Frederick Seymour to Edward Eyre, December 14, 1862, CO 123/111.

and mistreated peoples of the world. If the US was unwilling to take custody of their Black population, the British would, from their point of view, nobly take up the cause. Nothing could have bruised the colonial administration's ego more than the US government's rejection of Britian's proposal for African American immigration to Belize. Leas eventually explained that in BH, immigrants would have "[been] subjected to a species of slavery and demoralization far worse than ever existed in our country."[25] In at least one American's opinion, BH was not suitable for the relocation of freed African Americans.

Attempts to attract white Americans were also troubled. In 1867, Austin reported that Young Toledo and Co. were "offering 100 acres of land gratuitously to every male adult from the Southern States of America or of Anglo-Saxon origin who will settle on those lands on the Western Frontier which are now heard of for the first time as being of unexampled richness and beauty."[26] This was an unusual act of charity from the colony's second largest company. As discussed in chapter two, the big firms were generally eager to maintain a monopoly over colony's land. First, it should be noted that Austin was explicit about these land grants being for "Anglo-Saxon" settlers. Given their shared history, it can be assumed that white Americans broadly fell into this category. Such people could be entrusted with land ownership, and Austin believed that "hardy and practical planters" from the South would "[be] valuable citizens."[27] However, the lieutenant-governor voiced another benefit of white American immigration: "such plans of immigration should not only benefit the Colony, but be a great relief to the Imperial Government in the way of defense."[28] It was no coincidence that the land on offer was at the frontier. Like Austin, the proprietors of Young, Toledo and Co. likely hoped that ex-

[25] Cited in Bolland, *Colonial Society*, 143.
[26] John Gardiner Austin to John Peter Grant, March 13, 1867, CO 123/127.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

Confederates, many of which would have had military experience, could defend their mahogany works from Maya incursions. Such a drastic dispensation of land suggests that the firms lacked confidence in Britain's ability to defend their interests. Just a few months prior, the Icaiche and San Pedro Maya had ambushed British troops on route to San Pedro, dealing them a humiliating defeat.[29] Regardless, the scheme to settle ex-Confederates at the frontier was a resounding failure. One Southerner who accepted a deal similar to that of Young, Toledo, and Co.'s offer was B. R. Duval, a Methodist preacher from Virginia who, during an preliminary visit to Belize Town, "made arrangements with Governor Austin [sic] and other parties to furnish land on long credit and at low rates to me and as many of my countrymen as might settle about me."[30] While Young, Toledo, and Co. seem to have taken the initiative, the mention of the lieutenant-governor reveals that he soon took an active role in facilitating the settlement of white Southerners. Nonetheless, Duval returned to the US and began recruiting. He later recounted:

> The interest in Honduras became so great that it was called the "Honduras fever," and "Honduras on the brain." About two hundred letters were written to me and duly answered, and many of the writers said most positively that they would go to Honduras as soon as they could sell their cotton and wind up their affairs, and several asked me to select their places near my own. Under these circumstances I fully expected to have plenty of neighbours for the support of a school and for religious and social privileges, and by the terms of my contract with the proprietors of the land I should have been remunerated for all the land I should have settled up for them, but not at the expense of my countrymen.[31]

Unfortunately for Duval, his time in Belize was far more isolated than he had anticipated. In the end, very few of his peers actually arrived in the colony and "after having been two years in the wilderness, fifty miles from the nearest white family, with no prospect of society, [he] began to

[29] Dutt, *Empire on Edge*, 86-87.
[30] B. R. Duval, *A Narrative of Life and Travels in Mexico and British Honduras*, 3rd ed, (Boston: W. F. Brown & Co., 1881), 42.
[31] Ibid., 42-43.

think about trying to return to Virginia."[32] By the time he decided to leave, he lacked the funds to hire a boat to Belize Town and had to barter his furniture instead.[33] The great influx of "valuable citizens" which Austin had hoped for never materialized. Most of those who did settle found themselves isolated from "civilized" society, "suffered much for want of such fare as was required,"[34] and ultimately left.

Their impermanency was not the only way Southern immigrants failed to meet British administrators' expectations. Duval may have been far from white society, but he was not alone. He made his home at an inhabited site which was "settled by an enterprising Spaniard, who traded with the Indians, and made rum, until his conduct excited the suspicions of the government; and he then fled to Guatemala where he was detected in a conspiracy to rob and murder, and, to prevent being executed, hung himself."[35] Such a scenario was emblematic of the complex relations with prevailed at the frontier. Persons of all backgrounds engaged in commerce and flight over the border was an easy way of escaping British authorities. There were also several other villages in proximity to Duval's. The closest, "where there were as many Africans as Indians, was about four miles off" and the next "three were almost entirely Indians, speaking the Maya language."[36] Immersed in this frontier space, it seems Duval and his family developed a codependent relationship with the local villagers. He explained that his son-in-law:

> Got a job of surveying and divided his wages with us, and instead of sending the money he bought us, in Belize, soap, cotton cloth, powder and shot, and such other things as the Indians needed; and I took some of the youngest children with me and went to the Indian towns and sold these thing [sic], and traded for hogs, fowls, and other things.[37]

[32] Ibid., 64-65.
[33] Ibid., 65-66.
[34] Ibid., 64.
[35] Ibid., 48.
[36] Ibid., 54.
[37] Ibid., 54.

According to colonial racial ideology, non-white persons were supposed to be reliant on "Anglo-Saxons." However, Duval's survival depended on being able to trade for food at the local villages. Moreover, he had a contact in Belize Town who could procure much desired "powder and shot" for the Mayas. Of course, this ran counter to the idea of ex-Confederates defending the colony from Maya incursions. Instead, the settlers actively armed them, a fact which is supported by the archeological record. Eleanor Harrison-Buck et al. highlight the discovery of 36 American-made shotgun shells at the Maya village of Holotunich and argue that Southerners like Duval may have provided them.[38] Nonetheless, it is clear from his account that ex-Confederates quickly became embroiled in the powder trade, counter to the wishes of the colonial administration and their place in the colonial schema.

The US was not the only potential source of immigrants. In 1864 Lieutenant-Governor Austin requested 475 indentured Chinese labourers be imported to BH.[39] In January of the following year he decided that they should be contracted from "Amoy" (Xiamen) due to "the greater tractability and robustness of the Chinchoo [sic] labourers." Chinese immigrants never received a defined role in the colonial schema. Their numbers were never very great and, as we will see, they quickly became a sore spot for the colonial government. Nonetheless, the administration's hopes for these newcomers may be further inferred from the wider discourse concerning Chinese "coolie" labour in the West Indies from this period. The British consul in Xiamen, Charles A. Winchester, wrote in 1852 that:

> The Chinese of this district are well made, and sufficiently robust and strong for ordinary agricultural labour, and when substantially fed their muscular systems are rapidly developed. They are slow over their work, but are proverbially industrious and

[38] Eleanor Harrison-Buck et al., "The Strange Bedfellows of Northern Belize: British Colonialists, Confederate Dreamers, Creole Loggers, and the Caste War Maya of the Late Nineteenth-Century," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 23, no. 1 (2019): 189-191.
[39] John Gardiner Austin to Edward Eyre, July 15, 1864, CO 123/116.

> persevering. The ordinary labourer, sprung of an enterprising race, with daily examples before him of men risen through emigration to affluence and comfort, is ambitious of elevating himself in the social scale, and hence also not indisposed to remove to foreign climes.[40]

However, he also cautioned that "they are not on the whole a faith-keeping people. They can be kept to bargain if they see their own advantage in it, but require to be sharply looked after."[41] The rhetoric of Austin and Winchester was consistent with that which British officials directed at other groups. The Chinese were "tractable" but required British supervision. However, any hopes of a submissive workforce for the colony's burgeoning agricultural sector were soon dashed.

On August 3, 1865, Edwin Adolphus, the magistrate of the Northern District, praised the conduct of Chinese immigrants at the plantation of San Andres. The magistrate's timing could not have been poorer. That very evening, a terrifically violent incident occurred amongst the labourers of San Andreas. At seven o'clock, an unnamed Chinese man walked in on Lin Su, another Chinese immigrant, physically abusing a small child. When the former attempted to intervene, Lin "dealt him a severe blow on the head with a macheat [sic]."[42] When the Chinese interpreter Si Biau likewise attempted to intervene, Lin fatally stabbed him. The perpetrator wounded four more people and escaped into the night.[43] A murder and several assaults had occurred despite British supervision. Moreover, that was not the last challenge to British mastery which derived from the crime. The authorities removed Si's body so that Dr. Frederick William Axham could perform an autopsy. But:

> Just when the doctor was commencing the examination all the [Chinese] men rushed up in a body with the intention of preventing his carrying out the same. The constables were

[40] Charles A. Winchester, "Answers to Questions Outlined Above on Emigration Prospects in China (2)," in *The Chinese in the West Indies, 1806-1995: A Documentary History*, ed. Walton Look Lai (Kingston: The Press University of the West Indies, 1998), 76.
[41] Ibid., 78.
[42] Adolphus only identifies the first victim as immigrant no. 298. Edwin Adolphus to John Gardiner Austin, August 4, 1865, CO 123/120.
[43] Ibid.

> ordered to fix their bayonets but still the men advanced up to the hospital where they were posted and it was only after some slight demonstration that they retired. Mr. Carmichael had previously removed their macheats [sic] or else there might have been a little trouble.[44]

Not only had a violent crime occurred, but the immigrant labourers also actively obstructed justice. This can, in part, be explained by the nature of the situation. The victim was the plantation's interpreter and although Adolphus called for another, he had yet to arrive.[45] This would have made clear communication between the labourers and government representatives extremely difficult. It is possible that the former group's surge against the hospital was the result of the consequent confusion. Regardless, these new labourers were not as "tractable" as the architects of the immigration scheme had hoped.

The murder of Si was a shocking beginning to the administration and entrepreneur's disappointment with their Chinese immigration experiment. John Carmichael and the BHC soon found themselves skeptical of their new employee's suitability for agricultural work. A disgruntled Carmichael complained to Austin:

> Without exception there is not one agricultural labourer in the whole lot and the greater part of them appear to have been mendicants picked up in the streets of Amoy[.] [T]he consequence of all this is they will not work days work, or task work and it is a constant appeal to the magistrate they have found out the laws are not stringent enough [sic] – and they answer muster rolls when they please – hence the chief cause of their heavy debt to the Estate, and not as you have been informed, from being paid in goods.[46]

According to Carmichael, his labourers were not the agriculturalists whom colonial authorities had promised him. His purpose in writing to the lieutenant-governor was encourage the enactment of harsher labour laws so that he could coerce them into becoming the productive labourers he desired. He essentially stated as much when he explained that "should proprietors

[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] John Carmichael to John Gardiner Austin, February 10, 1866, CO 123/122

be called on to increase such Debts by cash advances, and in the absence of more stringent laws to make or force them to work, I will be under the necessity of petitioning you to relieve me of my lot.[47] By framing Chinese labourers as lazy, he could argue that a firm hand was needed to make them productive. In doing so, he also shifted blame away from his use of the truck system, the root of the issue. It is almost certain that Carmichael, like other employers in Belize, paid his workers in goods at a rate well above market value. This forced them to seek advances to acquire all the goods they needed, pushing them into a cycle of debt. The administration was generally disdainful of this practice as it conflicted with the principles of the free market and free labour. However, Fancourt's successors typically kept their reservations to themselves. Austin's understanding of the situation was surprisingly nuanced. Having received a near identical complaint from the BHC, he argued that "because the Chinaman has offered a dogged resistance by refusing to work unless for cash paid week by week, he has been classed as a pirate, thief, beggar, or opium-eater."[48] He reinterpreted the labourers' reluctance to work as a deliberate act of protest, thereby affording them an unusual degree of agency. Therefore, the planters' pecuniary losses were "owing to a want of liberality and the absence of a desire to stimulate the energies of the labourers by weekly cash payments proportional to the labour performed."[49] In his view, the employers were failing in their duty to incorporate the immigrants into the "proper" capitalist economic structure. But why did Austin choose to criticize the planters at *this* conjuncture while there were thousands of labourers in the colony working under similar conditions? The development of agriculture via the importation of indentured Chinese was *his* contribution to the colonial project. Its failure would be his failure as an administrator. Thus, he

[47] Ibid
[48] John Gardiner Austin to Henry Knight Storks, July 23, 1866, CO 123/123.
[49] Ibid.

had to frame any "issue" with the Chinese labourers as a failure of their employers. That this conflicted with the idea that British capitalism was benevolent and desirable was secondary in the moment.

The tension between employer and employee likely led to the worst embarrassment suffered by the British during the immigration experiment. In August, Austin reported that "100 of the Chinese immigrants have absconded from the estates of the British Honduras Company in the New River, and are supposed to have crossed the Hondo, about 10 miles distant with a view to continued residence amongst the Santa Cruz Indians."[50] These runaway labourers chose Santa Cruz rule over that of the British. Their decision to break their contracts and live amongst "savages" ran entirely counter to administrators' faith in the superiority and self-evident appeal of Britain's "civilization." In response, Adolphus was quick to emphasize that "one of them who speaks Spanish well . . . told [Mr. Andrade, a merchant,] that they deeply regretted having gone to Santa Cruz, and that they would most gladly return, if they were only able to do so."[51] It is unclear precisely how the Chinese were treated at Chan Santa Cruz. That said, by highlighting their regret Adolphus was engaging in damage control by reaffirming the superior working condition of BH. This did not change the fact that in leaving the plantation, the labourers felt that life at Santa Cruz would be preferable to working for the BHC. The episode also highlighted the contrasting conceptions of race held by the administration and Santa Cruz Maya. According to Adolphus, "the Chinese, the [Santa Cruz] chiefs say, are Indians like themselves, and that the cross at Tulum has ordered that they are to be well-treated and taught to work, and to be distributed among the officers for that purpose."[52] This suggests that the Maya perception

[50] John Gardiner Austin to Henry Knight Storks, August 22, 1866, CO 123/123.
[51] Ibid.
[52] Edwin Adolphus to Thomas Graham, December 4, 1866, CO 123/126.

understanding of "Indian" and "white" was entirely different to that of white Yucatecans and the British. Both the Maya and Chinese were part of their respective society's labouring underclass. Thus, the former integrated the latter into the same category, despite being from opposite sides of the globe. This was entirely antithetical to the British's rigid racial schema. Ultimately, the colonial administration efforts to encourage and retain immigrants proved to be an abject failure which repeatedly exposed the flaws in the colonial project and its associated racial ideology.

Incendiarism, Agency, and the Problem of Defense

Michael Kirkpatrick argues that the "anarchist furor" which swept Guatemala City in 1894 reflected its upper strata's anxieties about modernity. They were committed to modernizing the country but feared the social ills liberal reforms brought. More specifically, they viewed the urban poor as potential anarchists who, through their perceived idleness and criminality, threatened the elite's liberalizing state project. However, this fear of anarchists lurking around every corner was an elite fiction; anarchists did not exist in Guatemala City in any great numbers, if at all. Filtered through the elite culture of the city, an event as innocuous as a handful of schoolboys yelling obscenities at the president's house became evidence of an anarchist plot.[53]

The government of BH had similar concerns about Caste War migrants. Simultaneously, administrators saw their labour as necessary for the colony's economic development but feared that they could be potential threats to the colonial order. In 1856, Stevenson complained that "the indiscriminate inpouring from time to time of strangers from all the neighbouring countries and islands" brought, "among the many who are most welcome to the country, others who are most

[53] Michael D. Kirkpatrick, "Phantoms of Modernity: the 1894 Anarchist Furor in the Making of Modern Guatemala City," *Urban History* 44, no. 2 (2017): 231-233, 243-244.

suspicious persons and who have been operating as a perpetual blister to the community."[54] In Guatemala City, the upper class conjured up anarchist plots where they did not exist. Similarly, prominent Belizeans in the mid nineteenth-century preoccupied themselves with fears of incendiarism and nebulous Hispanic plots. While several fires *did* occur in Belize Town and Corozal during this period, many the result of arson, administrators were prone to linking them together as a politically-motivated conspiracy. For example, in the same despatch quoted above, Stevenson explained that there were "aliens:"

> Promoting and fostering agitators, ill feelings, and disaffections, and who are believed to be most unscrupulous in their own designs, and in the mode of executing them, - and likewise to be agents or tools of others who, - from political motives, - are suspected of being engaged in working out some ulterior plots against this place, by the crushing and destructive agency of incendiarism: - and much has lately been elicited – and even more since the commencement of the [legislative] session – to prove beyond a doubt that machinations of this diabolical character are at work, and require stringent and unusual measures for their arrest.[55]

Interestingly, the superintendent clearly struggled to express a compelling reason *why* migrants would want to burn down Belizean settlements. The best British officials could do was to claim such behaviour was in Hispanics' nature. For instance, after an apparent arson plot the following year, Seymour explained that the refugees had not been in the colony long enough "to make much progress in eradicating their propensities to plotting against the authorities under whom they live, however temperate and just may their rule, and of forming projects of revenge and reckless destruction immediately on the receipt of some fancied or real injury."[56] It is worth noting that the evidence for this plot was extremely shaky. According to Seymour, two magistrates sent him an affidavit which proved that "certain persons in Corozal having become discontented with the state of things there had allowed themselves to be influenced by private

[54] William Stevenson to Edward Wells Bell, August 9, 1856, CO 123/ 93.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Frederick Seymour to Charles Henry Darling, August 13, 1857, CO 123/95.

persons plotting beyond our boundary with full cognisance of the authorities in Yucatan, the destruction of the town" and that "soldiers were to be sent to the Hondo close by on pretense of attacking the Indians but would cross in the night and join in the burning and pillage."[57] The notion that Mexican officials would sponsor such an act of terror against a predominately Hispanic town, potentially sparking a war with Britian, while still contending with the Caste War, makes little sense. Reviewing the documentation extant in the archive, the entire case seemed to be based on the testimony of a single man, Candelario Dias, and the evidence for his claims was highly circumstantial. Dias, along with Magistrates Blake and Edmund Burke, pointed to the fact an alleged conspirator named "Sandoval" had served in the Mexican army and had gone to Mérida, apparently "to obtain aid to carry out their designs."[58] In the end, six individuals were arrested, but there was insufficient evidence to take any of them to trial.[59]

Administrators' tendency to blame Hispanic migrants for the colony's problems reflected their anxieties about the efficacy of British rule. The fact there not was enough evidence against the "conspirators" of Corozal to even warrant a trial, suggests that the plot was largely an invention of British paranoia and desire to appear active. This paranoia often led British officials to misread situations and construct conspiracy theories. They envisioned tendrils reaching out from Mérida or Mexico City to undermine their authority. According to Seymour, "a not unnatural jealousy is supposed to exist in the minds of the Yucatecan authorities against our flourishing villages, and a participation on their part is imagined in the frequent attempts to set them on fire."[60] In the case of the 1857 plot, he explained that migrants sought to undermine "English laws as administered in [Corozal] by the creation of a secret society with a mutual

[57] Frederick Seymour to Edward Wells Bell, July 16, 1857, CO 123/95.
[58] Edmund Burke to Frederick Seymour, June 4, 1857, CO 123/95.
[59] Frederick Seymour to Charles Henry Darling, August 13, 1857, CO 123/95.
[60] Frederick Seymour to Edward Wells Bell, July 16, 1857, CO 123/95.

guarantee for the payment from a common fund of any fine which might be imposed in a court of justice on any member of the club."[61] It is certainly possible, perhaps likely, that a group of Corozaleños maintained a common fund for the payment of legal fees. However, it was a logical leap to tie them a wider conspiracy bent on subverting British governance. Nonetheless, administrators' belief in Hispanic jealousy was self-congratulatory; every setback attributed to Hispanic conspirators was evidence of the administration's success. More critically, their conspiracy theories allowed administrators to appear capable and active, but ultimately revealed their deep insecurity about their ability to defend the colony.

The ability to defend their subjects was central to Belizean administrators' legitimacy and sense of self. In 1866, Austin passionately articulated this view:

> We cannot yield to the exactions of the robbers of Icache [sic] – it is no longer a question of temporary expediency but one of actual existence –, as if we cannot maintain our ground against them, but on the contrary admit our weakness by submitting to pecuniary payments in respect to where there is not a shadow of a claim, what we expect but that the Locha tribe or that of Santa Cruz will assume virtual sovereignty over the colony the policy to be pursued?
>
> If the colony is to be abandoned to its fate after an occupancy of 200 years – if the policy of the northern country in avenue to the continued assertion of the rights of its sovereign in a direction which in days gone by was held essential to British interests, it is not for me (even if my judgment does not does not fully recognize the inconvenience of a British settlement in Central America) to make objection, but I would submit with all respect – even to the super intelligence which rules British interests in England, that we cannot abandon the colony to savages in a moment of peril – that we are bound to aid the colony whilst pouring forth their larder's [?] resources willingly –, and that there is an exclusive imperial responsibility in respect to foreign relations and to those aggressions from a neighbouring state which can only be checked by strong imperial presence.[62]

Time after time, however, the administration demonstrated its reluctance or inability to enforce its rule at the frontier. In 1864, there were only 28 police officers in the entire colony. Of those officers, only six were stationed in the Northern District, a jurisdiction with a recorded 14,751

[61] Frederick Seymour to Charles Henry Darling, August 13, 1857, CO 123/95
[62] John Gardiner Austin to John Peter Grant, December 20, 1866, CO 123/126.

residents.[63] Their task was made all the more difficult by the sparse nature of the district and its heavily forested, swampy terrain. The story was much the same for the British military presence in the colony. Despite believing that there was a conspiracy afoot in Corozal in 1857, Seymour opted not to send troops.[64] I address his stated reasoning momentarily. In reality, the colony simply did not have the military resources to garrison the north and could not rely on Jamaica to furnish them. In 1865, Jamaican Governor Edward Eyre revealed the contradiction at the core of British defense policy. Austin wrote to him requesting aid in order "to place a strong garrison at Corozal," but made sure to note that he was doing so "without the smallest intention of making any movements which would involve increased imperial or colonial expenditure without some pressing emergency."[65] Eyre's response was incredibly blunt:

> However desirable it may be that British soil should be a safe asylum for the non-criminal exiles of all countries[,] it would seem rather hard upon Great Britain to be called upon to establish and maintain a strong military post in distant colony remote from the seat of government solely for the protection of foreign refugees when the colony itself which would enjoy whatever advantage is to be gained by the refugees declines to bear any share of the expense.[66]

The British Empire may have been the world's leading power, but even it could not afford to fight wars in all its colonies at once. Thus, a prudent administer was to keep imperial expenditure at a minimum by avoiding conflict. Insofar as military action was necessary, the Empire at large expected BH to pay its own way. This was an issue given that British legitimacy in Belize was built on their ability to protect the colony's residents. BH's administrators constantly walked a tightrope, projecting strength and a willingness to defend its borders, while also reneging on those self-appointed responsibilities whenever possible.

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[63] John Gardiner Austin to Edward Eyre, November 12, 1864, CO 123/117.
[64] Frederick Seymour to Edward Wells Bell, July 16, 1857, CO 123/95.
[65] John Gardiner Austin to Edward Eyre, October 1865, CO 123/120.
[66] Edward Eyre to Edward Cardwell, October 24, 1865, CO 123/120.

It is extremely revealing to examine when Jamaica dispatched troops and why. During a particularly tense visit to Bacalar following the bravos' recapture of that fort in 1858, Magistrate Blake had an experience which rattled British authorities. Seymour explained, "a little before sunset Mr. Blake came with some alarm to enquire if it was true that General [Charles Ash] Windham had been beaten in India, for the chiefs said so, and that the power of England was no longer to be feared."[67] It must have been quite unnerving for Blake to realise that these "savages" were more informed about world events than he was, and that they could use the 1857 Indian Rebellion to belittle British power. This shock reverberated up the colonial chain of command. The governors of Jamaica were typically reluctant to commit military resources to Belize. But now, at a conjuncture where violence had not even been committed against British interests, Governor Darling was suddenly willing to intervene. It was the comment about the Indian Rebellion which seemed to stick in his craw.[68] Writing to the Vice Admiral Houston Stewart, he explained that "the atrocities which have marked the course of the mutiny in India appear to have been closely imitated by the natives of Central America."[69] In his response Seymour's request for aid, the governor was even more explicit about how Mayas' reference to the rebellion informed his decision:

> The allusion by the chiefs to passing events in our East Indian territories and the contempt with which they are stated to have expressed themselves with regard to our national power and influence, all lead me . . . to concur in the view which you express of the expediency of a demonstration of naval and military force but also to consider that until tranquility is restored in the immediate neighbourhood of our frontier, an augmentation of the garrison of the settlement is both desirable and prudent.[70]

[67] Frederick Seymour to Charles Henry Darling, March 13, 1858, CO 123/96.
[68] During the 1857 Indian Rebellion, also known as the Sepoy or Indian Mutiny, local soldiers employed by the East India Company revolted against the company, sparking a wave of unrest across India. Although the British crushed the uprising the following year, the event precipitated Britian asserting direct, colonial control over India, reorganizing it into the British Raj.
[69] Charles Henry Darling to Houston Stewart, March 24, 1858, CO 123/96.
[70] Charles Henry Darling to Frederick Seymour, March 27, 1858, CO 123/96.

Santa Cruz leaders had challenged British might and prestige. Unlike the scattered incursions into British territory, *that* was a slight which could not go unanswered. It did not matter how many times administrators compromised on their self-appointed mandate, as long as they maintained the illusion of strength.

British administrators' inability to meet their own standards concerning defence, often manifested in hostility towards those they claimed to protect. Despite Austin's rhetoric, when the Icaiche Maya attacked the BHC's operations along the Rio Bravo earlier that year, he suggested it was their fault for refusing to meet their demands. Austin argued, "the very great impudence of Mr. Hodge in supposing that he alone could control events to which all others had bent, and that to his mahogany works alone would be conceded that costly military protection which the government had always been unable to afford to others."[71] He continued, that Britian's inability to protect operations in the region:

> Has been so fully acknowledged by all the firms (save that represented by Mr. Hodge) that they have invariably instructed their managers to keep on the best possible terms with the Indians – to avoid all causes of altercation – to endeavour to remove as soon as possible all causes of difference –, and to yield as of necessity to Zuc all annual payments.[72]

British officials repeatedly stressed their ability, and responsibly, to protect the interests of colonists. However, when Hodge refused to pay tribute to a rival power, the destruction of his works was suddenly his fault. Similarly, the reason Seymour gave for not sending troops to Corozal in 1857 was that "[he] knew that if [he] did so all prospect of local self reliance was at an end."[73] Seymour, like the rest of his peers, was in a bind. Their legitimacy was premised on superior leadership and the protection they could provide. However, they lacked the resources

[71] John Gardiner Austin to Henry Knight Storks, August 14, 1866, CO 123/123.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Frederick Seymour to Edward Wells Bell, July 16, 1857, CO 123/95.

necessary to effectively perform that task. In a contradictory way, the population's reluctance to pick up the government's slack, frustrated administrators as it undermined their illusion of control. Any military engagement could result in embarrassment for the Empire and the official responsible. But, if the firms simply paid off Maya groups and the colonists paid for their own defenses, administrators could maintain the illusion that all was well. They had premised the colonial project on a falsehood and, as such, had to constantly perform ideological gymnastics to make it appear true.

The examples explored in this chapter represent a cursory examination of the gulf between colonial dreams and reality. The colonial schema was, at a fundamental level, an artificial construction. British officials could scarcely ignore the behaviour of their would-be subjects, who regularly challenged its simplified categories. The interethnic bonds formed at the frontier, especially by the powder trade, the official taxonomy to be far more porous than administrators believed it to be. Likewise, the colony's inhabitants repeatedly demonstrated that they were not content to be the docile, productive wage labourers bureaucrats and capitalists wished them to be. Nonetheless, administrators needed to bend over backwards to uphold the illusion the colonial schema was true, lest the entire colonial endeavour be delegitimized.

Chapter 5:

Conclusion

Constructions which respond to the demands of a complex organic period of history always impose themselves and prevail in the end, even though they may pass through several intermediary phases during which they manage to affirm themselves only in more or less bizarre and heterogenous combinations.

—Antonio Gramsci, *The Prison Notebooks*

The endpoint for this study is, in many ways, an anticlimax. As previously discussed, late 1866 saw the British suffer their greatest embarrassment at the hands of the Icaiche and San Pedro Maya. The situation was so serious that John Peter Grant personally visited the colony, the first time a governor of Jamaica had done so in at least 75 years. Speaking before BH's legislature, Grant told the upper echelons of Belizean society, "I have been always anxious to do what ever might be in my power to assist His Excellency the Lieutenant-Governor, and be of service to your colony, whenever occasions arise which such assistance and service can be in can be in anyway useful."[1] This was quite ironic considering that just a few months prior, Lietentant-Governor Austin had complained to Grant about the vulnerability of the colony. He wrote, "Major Mackay has notified to me that from the paucity of officers (only five including himself for garrison and regimental duty) . . . he cannot be responsible for the discipline at Belize [Town] if any officer is despatched to the north."[2] BH's military garrison was so understaffed that the removal of just one officer could make its effective operation difficult. Austin further highlighted the magnitude of the task his superiors expected of him and the inadequate resources they provided him to do so. He argued, "we ought to have a company of soldiers in the north – and there should be no ground of complaint in an attempt to do with that on the southern frontier of

[1] John Peter Grant to Earl of Carnarvon, February 8, 1867, CO 123/126.
[2] John Gardiner Austin to John Peter Grant, November 9, 1866, CO 123/124.

Mexico what it took half the army of the United States to perform in the north."[3] The governors of Jamaica were generally reluctant to commit resources to BH. Yet, even after such a calamity, colonial administrators maintained their front of British control and power.

Such a gross violation of British ideology ought to have irrevocably undermined it. Administrators were clearly limited in their ability to defend the colony, and the "betrayed" of the San Pedro Maya indicated that the British did not know their would-be subjects as well as they thought. However, Austin and other colonial officials quickly began to hang responsibility for the disaster on Mackay, who commanded the troops during that fateful engagement. He informed Grant that he believed "that grave errors have been committed, and that Major Mackay is not equal to the occasion even physically." He further encouraged the governor "to use [his] authority with the major general to send down an officer to command Her Majesty's forces in this colony on whom some reliance can be placed in these difficult times."[4] It was easier to see the conceptualize the incident as an individual failing of Mackay, rather than a wider failure of British rule in Belize.

Dominance is premised on a combination of persuasion and coercion. In accordance with their liberal ideology, nineteenth-century bourgeois Britons preferred a state of hegemony, in which the former outweighed the latter. They possessed a firm belief in the benefits of liberal-capitalist social relations and the desirability of British rule. However, there is a contradiction within this "universalizing tendency of capital." Despite their rhetoric, capitalism's adherents seek to subsume and replace all non-capitalist economies and cultures using force if necessary. The capitalist desire for expansion and profit often conflicts with, and wins out over, liberal

[3] John Gardiner Austin to John Peter Grant, November 9, 1866, CO 123/124.
[4] John Gardiner Austin to John Peter Grant, December 30, 1866, CO 123/126.

values. Nineteenth-century imperialists smoothed out contradiction through the use of racial ideology. Pseudoscientific theories could "prove" that certain peoples were simply at a lower stage of development than bourgeois, white, British men. Thus, their subjugation was not only justified, but altruistic. This "scientific" desire to classify people went hand in hand with the birth of high modernism. As an extension of capitalism's universalizing impulse, high modernism called for the reformation of the world based on natural laws. Living in an era of unprecedented technological and scientific advances, its missionaries believed they could harness that newfound knowledge to improve and perfect society. Thus, nineteenth-century imperialism, with its desire to discard "primitive" socioeconomic structures and "improve" the moral condition of "backwards" peoples, had a distinctly high modernist flavour.

BH was no exception. Its administrators crafted a racial schema which justified the domination of each of its major ethnic groups and assigned them a role in the colony's economy. However, the high modernist impulse to classify subjects and render them legible was more aspirational than reflective of reality. Colonial racial ideology portrayed the subaltern as productive and desirous for British rule. Concomitantly, it depicted Britain's administrators as authoritative and knowledgeable. Typically, states can use coercive force to mold society to bring their subjects more closely in line with official depictions. In the case of bourgeois rule, this included conjuring an illusion of hegemony. However, the colonial project in Belize was chronically underequipped. The colony's administrators simply lacked the resources to realize their colonial project. They could appeal to the might and prestige of the British Empire, but only rely on its power in moments of crisis. Nonetheless, British administrators needed to uphold the illusion that their racial ideology was, in fact, reality. As such, BH was suspended in a state of hegemony without dominance.

Just a few months after the San Pedro affair, Austin was back to envisioning the colony's glorious future, assimilating Britian's defeat as victory. In his official blue book report for 1866 he suggested that the cutters' abandonment of their mahogany works following the attack might actually be for the best:

> With exception of the sugar settlement at Indian Church no attempt has been made by the Colonists to resume their labours. Exposed as the mahogany cutters must be in remote, and difficult of access and combined defensive movements, depreciated too in value as mahogany has become, and expensive as its transport is proving from exhaustion of the forests close on the banks of the rivers and navigable streams, it is doubtful whether this branch of industry will again be resumed on anything approaching its former scale; and perhaps it is well for the interests of the Colony that such should be the case, as an employment which drains of resources and capital without reproduction, as in agriculture, can only end in complete exhaustion. Already, one of the great landed proprietors has given evidence of his adhesion to such views, as well in the withdrawal of his mahogany gangs as in the gratuitous offer of lands to agricultural settlers; and should his anticipations be realized, as there is every reason to conclude they will be from the constant arrival of settlers, these splendid lands, hitherto unknown along the western frontier of the Colony, may give in their agricultural development a stability which could never have been dreamt of a few years back.[5]

Austin, who had always been a zealous advocate for the development of commercial agriculture, put on optimistic spin on recent events. According to him, the colonial government had suffered a setback, but would come back stronger for it. In reality, the firms' temporary withdrawal from the frontier was a vote of no confidence in administration's ability to protect their interests. Moreover, the government's response to the crisis undermined the fundamental building blocks of its spurious hegemony: the notion that the British, through their resolute leadership, could provide a safe haven from the instability of their neighbours. Previously, I examined how the British measured their apparent suitability for governance against that of Hispanics, using the Caste War and dissolution of Central America as evidence of Hispanic incompetence. It is particularly ironic that in the immediate aftermath of the San Pedro ambush, Austin looked to

[5] *Reports to Secretary of State on Past and Present State of H.M. Colonial Possessions, 1866 (Part I. W. Indies)*, London: William Clowes & Sons for H.M.S.O., 1868, 14.

Spanish governor of Cuba for aid. The lieutenant-governor wrote to Tollet Synge, the British Consul General in Havana: "I regret to inform you that Her Majsesty's Troops having been repulsed by the Indians, the Colony is in so critical a state as to necessitate an appeal to the Captain General of Cuba." Austin hoped that the governor-general would dispatch a man-of-war to BH.[6] This was unorthodox and ran entirely counter to the image of competency and self-reliance the British sought to project. Synge apparently felt so and encouraged the captain general to disregard Austin's request. Governor John Peter Grant of Jamaica expressed his gratitude for this course of action, writing to Synge:

> You judged rightly in supposing that that sufficient aid had already been despatched from Jamaica to British Honduras, and I feel greatly obliged to you for the wise discretion which you exercised under the circumstances in begging the Captain General to consider Mr. Austin's application as non avenu.[7]

Just as Superintendent Price and Major Conran were eager to remove the hastily erected defences at Corozal, Grant and Synge were quick to downplay Austin's desperate plea for aid to a foreign government. Both made the British Empire look weak and unable to defend its possessions. In each case, bureaucrats were able to assimilate what had happened and maintain their faith in the colonial project. However, no amount of post hoc revisionism could hide the crack in the colonial façade Austin created in his initial panic. Cracks such as these revealed the uncomfortable truth behind official rhetoric: British mastery in Belize was largely performative.

[6] John Gardiner Austin to Tollett Synge, December 23, 1866, CO 123/126.
[7] John Peter Grant to Tollett Lynge, February 8, 1867, CO 123/126.

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