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**ETHNIC MINORITIES IN BELIZE:
MOPAN, KEKCHI, AND GARIFUNA**

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Preliminary Remarks:

The present report deals with the current situation of three ethnic groups in Belize: the Mopan Maya, the Kekchi Maya, and the Garifuna. In the face of persistent and ever-increasing forces of change, these groups have managed to retain their cultural cohesiveness to a substantial degree, and all possess a strong sense of shared identity. They continue to speak their native languages, they participate in traditional rituals and institutions, and they have all recently become active in strengthening their cultural values through the formation of national councils. At the same time, however, their status as ethnic minorities places them in a difficult and often tenuous position in the struggle for economic and political survival. Following the notion that a group's survival ultimately depends upon a range of cultural, social, economic, and political factors, we have attempted to present the broad context in which the Kekchi, the Mopan, and the Garifuna presently live.

Belize is a patchwork of ethnic groups, and our decision to cover these three to the exclusion of other groups is therefore somewhat (but not entirely) arbitrary. We did not include the Yucatec Maya because they have been so thoroughly deculturated, especially during the last few decades, that they lack cohesion and self-identity as a group. Many have dropped their own language in favor of Spanish and English, and there is a widespread tendency to dismiss traditional rituals and institutions as "primitive" and "superstitious." There have been several isolated pleas for the need to recover their language and cultural heritage. But thus far little has come of this.

The report benefitted from two weeks of fieldwork in early March, 1988. During our time in the field we travelled through Toledo and Stann Creek Districts (where the Kekchi, Mopan, and Garifuna live) and talked with many people about the topics covered in this report. Those we spoke with were: Dr. Joseph Palacio, Resident Tutor at the University of the West Indies; Stewart Krohn of Great Belize Productions; Lita Hunter Krohn of St. Johns College; Primitivo Coc, Julio Canti, and Diego Bol of the Toledo Maya Cultural Council; Don Owen-Lewis, ex-Kekchi Liaison Officer in Toledo

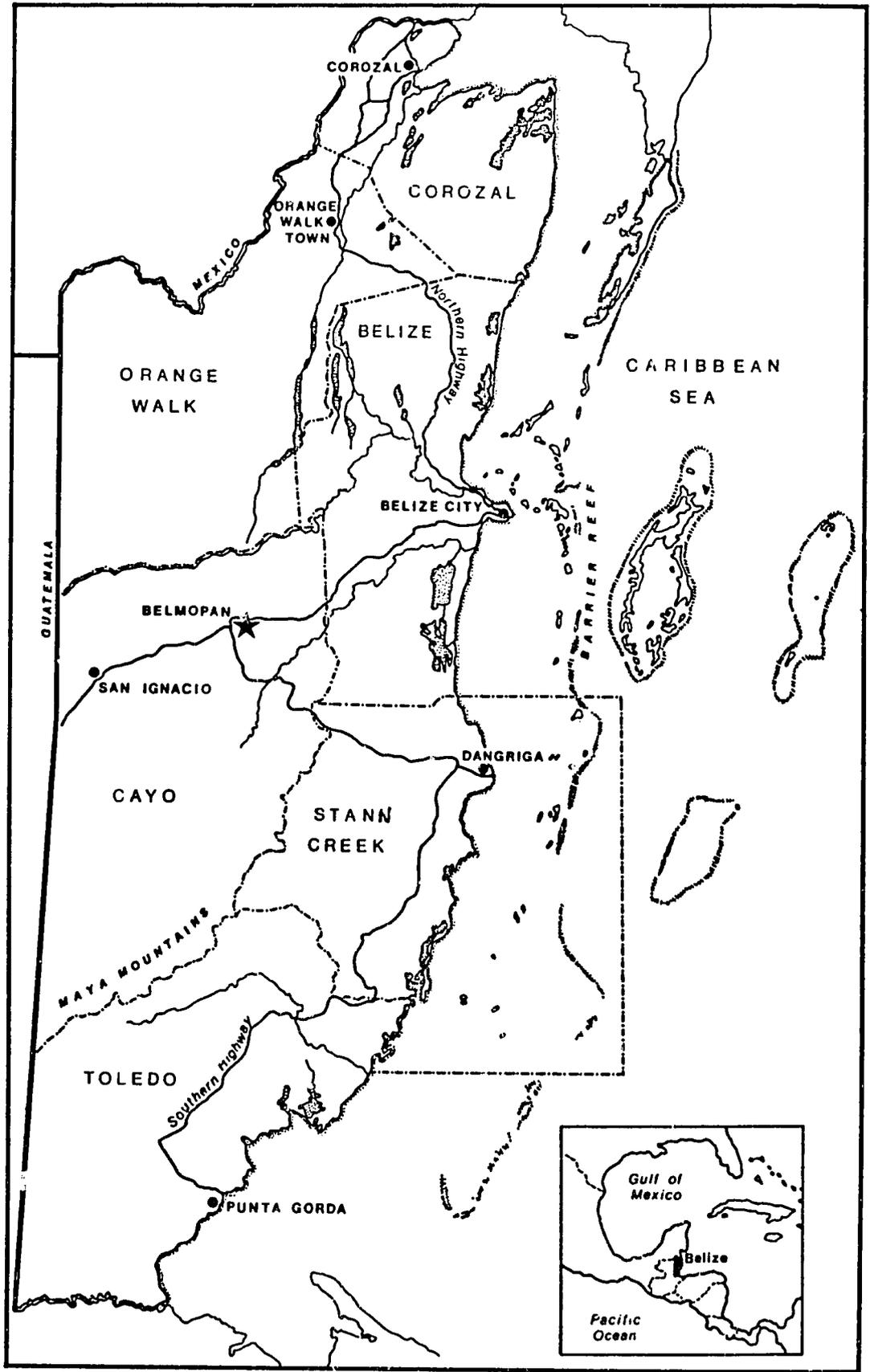
District; Roy Cayetano, District Education Officer in Toledo; Pete 'Eden" Martinez, Social Development Officer in Toledo; Basilio Ah, District Representative to government from the Toledo West constituency; Phyllis Cayetano, Director of the Warigagabaga Dance Troupe; Fabian Cayetano, Chairman of the National Garifuna Council; Cynthia Ellis, Director of the Belize Rural Women's Association; Harriot Topsey, Archaeological Commissioner; David Aguilar, Commissioner of Lands and Surveys; Rodney Neal, Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Agriculture; Liborio Gonzalez, Chief Agricultural Officer; Dianne Lindo of the Belize Institute for Community Enterprise, Training and Development; Lou Nicolait, Director of the Belize Center for Environmental Studies; Rafael Manzanero, Education Coordinator at the Belize Zoo; Kimball Kennedy, Small Business Development Advisor to the Belize Export Investment Promotion Unit; Rosita Arvigo; Jim Corven, Advisor to the PADF/Hummingbird Hershey Cocoa Development Project; Robert Tucker, Director of Project Concern primary health care program; Mellen Tenamly, USAID Project Development Officer; Prunella Brashich, USAID Education Officer; and Neboysa Brashich, USAID Chief of Mission.

We would like to express our appreciation for their generous assistance, while at the same time absolving them from responsibility for the interpretations we have reached in the following pages.

Belize: General Information:

As the national radio station says, "Belize: a new Central American nation in the heart of the Caribbean basin." The phrase points out the country's anomalous position - the only ex-British colony on the Central American mainland, the only Caribbean country where many of the inhabitants are descended from Amerindians, and the most recently independent country in either region (since 1981).

With a population of about 160,000 on 23,000 square kilometers (slightly larger than El Salvador, which has close to 5,000,000 inhabitants), Belize has the lowest population density of any country north of Panama (6 per square kilometer). Almost a third of this population is concentrated in the old capital of Belize City, which clings to a swampy river mouth where British buccaneers first settled in the 17th century. Most



of the flat infertile coastal area, including over 450 small islands and the famous barrier reef, is lightly inhabited. The largest towns are found in the rugged uplands north of the Maya Mountains in the western part of the country, and in the fertile flat northern plains, which stretch northward into the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico. The southern part of the country, where most of the Amerindians live today, is the wettest (with between 2,500 mm and 5,000 mm of rainfall annually), the most geographically varied, and the most remote and underdeveloped part of the country.

Belize is a multi-ethnic country in which almost everyone is either an immigrant or a descendant of immigrants.¹ While Belize City is mostly English-speaking Creole (Afro-Americans descended from slaves), the rest of the country is diverse, and a majority of the rural population speaks Spanish as a first language. Nationally, the largest group is made up of Creoles (39.7% of total population in 1980), followed by Spanish-speaking Mestizos mostly of Maya ancestry (33.1%), Garifuna (Afro-Indians, 7.6%), Yucatec and Mopan Maya (6.8%), Mennonite (3.3%), Kekchi Maya (2.7 %) and East Indians (2.1%). An estimated 15,000 to 20,000 refugees from El Salvador and Guatemala have entered the country in the last five years, scattering in rural areas and the cities, and forming several new villages of their own (Billard 1988:10; Bolland 1986:41). The Mennonites came to Belize in the 1950s from Mexico, and have settled five agricultural colonies which have become quite prosperous, although they are culturally isolated.

This complex ethnic pattern does not break down easily into groups by class, wealth, or economic role, and in the central and western districts mixed communities are common. About 80% of the population is multi-lingual, and over 90% is literate. Most larger towns are ethnically mixed, while rural villages tend to be more uniform. Single-ethnic communities include Mennonite settlements, coastal Garifuna settlements, the Amerindian villages of the south, and Mestizo/Maya villages in the west and north.

¹. The first national census, in 1861, noted that 57% of the population (of 25,635) had been born outside the country's borders. 85% of these immigrants were from nearby countries, primarily Mexico (Bolland 1986:26-27).

Historically, Belize has never had an economic or cultural base in agriculture. The large landowners who dominated the colony from the early 19th century made their fortunes in the export of logwood and mahogany, and the import of food to sustain what was essentially a captive workforce. Small-holder agriculture was systematically suppressed as a threat to control of that labor force, mainly by limiting access to land. And as the logging industry began an uneven decline at the end of the 19th century, small holders (mainly mestizos, immigrant Mayas and rural creoles) began to settle small villages in the countryside where they pursued subsistence agriculture. Most such settlements used public lands or squatted on private land; agricultural land remained overwhelmingly in the hands of a very few foreign landholders. In 1971, 3% of the landholders had possession of 97% of the freehold land, while at the other end, 91% of the landholders had approximately 2% of the freehold land. Beyond this, all but one of the landowners with estates of 10,000 or larger were foreigners (Bolland 1986:77). As late as 1973, over 90% of the private land in the country was held by foreigners, few of whom lived in the country (Bolland and Shoman 1977). Belizean small farmers are concentrated in areas which were once public land, and on a few private holdings that were expropriated by the government in the 1970s for distribution to farmers.

There have been many attempts, beginning in the late 19th century, to establish commercial export agriculture in Belize. Sugar was one of the first such cash crops, and has been the most enduring, covering much of the flat land in the northern region of the country. During the first decades of this century sugar estates were concentrated in increasingly larger estates. Then, in the early 1970s, these large holdings were broken down for distribution to small farmers. Other crops, such as bananas, ramie, cacao, coconuts and rubber, have come and gone with fluctuations in world markets. A major barrier to all labor-intensive export crop production over the years is the relative scarcity of farm labor, as well as the small local market. Because most of the rural population is involved in subsistence farming, they are only available for farm labor on a seasonal basis, and the high cost of living in Belize in general means that labor is expensive in comparison with neighboring countries.

Today, the Belize economy is based primarily on exporting sugar, citrus, and fishery products. Sugar has declined dramatically from the boom in the 1970s, although

it makes up 60% of Belize's agricultural exports, while citrus is now expanding, and cacao and cattle are becoming more important each year. The number of tourists coming to Belize has almost doubled in each of the last three years -- now ranking second to sugar in foreign exchange earnings -- and this has sparked a number of efforts at natural resource conservation, including the Belize Zoo and the Cockscomb jaguar preserve. A more problematic addition to the economic livelihood of Belizeans has been the major increase in marijuana production during the 1970's and 80's, and some now consider Belize the third largest supplier to the U.S. market. In conformity with regional trends, the shipping and processing of cocaine is also becoming a problem.

Unlike many of its neighbors, Belize has been a functioning two-party parliamentary democracy since the early 1960s, when it was granted self-rule. The military is small and has little influence. The press is relatively free (though most of the newspapers are affiliated with political parties) and quite vocal. Neither political party has been able to solve the basic economic and political problems that face the country: a consistent balance of trade deficit, a narrow economic base, dependence on foreign aid (mostly U.S.) for a large part of public-sector spending, and the continuing threat posed by the Guatemalan claim to Belizean territory (though recent discussions have been promising).

Indigenous Inhabitants:

The Maya who lived in Belize at the time of the Spanish Conquest of Yucatan and Guatemala were of at least two major language groups. In the north and west, Yucatec and Mopan Maya, closely related to each other, were spoken. In the south the language was Manche Chol, about as distant from Mopan/Yucatec as Italian from Portuguese. Moving up to the time of the conquest (something of a misnomer, for Belize was never conquered by the Spanish in the way of Mexico or Peru), Thompson (1977) has included all of the indigenous inhabitants of Belize north of the Stann Creek Valley in a group called the 'Chan' Maya who also lived in adjacent parts of Mexico and Guatemala. In the north, around present Corozal was the state of Chetumal, politically allied with the states of northern Yucatan. Part of Orange Walk

District and the Belize River Valley formed a province called Dzuluinicob, with its capital at Tipu, now called Negroman, on the Macal River (Jones 1984). And the area from Sittee River north towards Tipu constituted an area named Muzul, about which we know very little. It could possibly have been another autonomous province ethnically related to the modern Mopan Maya. From the town of Campin near Monkey River south to the Golfo Dulce in Guatemala, people spoke Manche Chol.

The Maya of the north and west were converted to Christianity during the 16th and 17th centuries, and the priests set up a series of missions and churches. Periodic rebellions continued until most of the Tipu people were forcibly resettled by the Spanish around Lake Peten in Guatemala by 1707 (Graham et al. 1985). Spanish rule in the area was never firmly established. As Spanish influence waned, the remaining Maya encountered British buccaneers and logwood cutters who took many as slaves.² The Manche Chol were rounded up by the Spanish and resettled in highland Guatemala by 1697, and their culture has disappeared altogether (though some related Chol speaking groups survive in the Mexican state of Chiapas). The nation of Muzul was similarly rounded up and deported in 1754 (Scholes and Thompson 1977).

The British colonists pursued an aggressive policy against the Indians whenever they actively resisted British expansion into the forest. Buccaneers raided Maya communities for provisions and slaves on a sporadic basis in the 17th century, but we know very little about Maya-Spanish relations during this time. As the native Maya communities declined, a new group of immigrant Maya began to flood into the northern part of Belize. The Caste Wars of Yucatan led many Maya and Mestizos to flee to the relative safety of Belize from the 1840s into the 1870s. For a time British merchants in Belize had friendly relations with the rebel Maya in Yucatan, and sold them weapons and ammunition.

The Mayan immigrants from Mexico founded a number of new settlements in the northern and western portion of the country. The immigrants were politically divided -

². Logwood is a tree with a bark that produces a black or blue dye. Logwood extraction was a major economic activity in the region during the 17th & 18th centuries, as the dye was valued by the woolen industry.

some became peaceful peasants and workers in British-owned enterprises in the colony, while others sought to re-establish autonomous Mayan communities. These groups resisted pressure from the colonial government and asserted their independence through armed raids on British settlements. The British response culminated in an armed expedition in 1867 which burned seven remaining Maya villages and destroyed all of their crops. The last armed resistance by the Maya was in 1872.

With the decline of timber extraction, colonial authorities initiated an abortive attempt to establish sugar cane plantations on the flat lowlands of the northern quarter of Belize. This program stuttered badly until renewed efforts were made in the 1930s with the formation of the Corozal Sugar Factory (Jones 1971:14). Although sugar has suffered a rather uneven and not altogether successful economic history since then, it has had a significant impact on the cultural configuration of the region. Especially since the 1950s, the construction of access roads has drastically diminished the insularity of the area's rural villages. The Yucatec Maya have had the most contact with outsiders of any Indian group in the country, and must be counted as the most thoroughly assimilated. Spanish has replaced the Maya language in most communities, community-wide rituals and institutions have disappeared, and the bulk of family income comes from wage labor (along with subsistence agriculture and small-holder sugar cane farming).

Writing in 1971, Jones observed:

Today the line between Maya and "Spanish" is becoming increasingly blurred, as a single, relatively undifferentiated "mestizo" culture, which is not without Creole influences, takes over the northern part of the country (1971:61).

This trend toward acculturation, with the Spanish language now supplanting Mayan as the "native" tongue, continues unabated in the late 1980s. In fact, the Yucatec Maya are frequently referred to as "Maya-Mestizos."

During the first part of the 19th century, the Garifuna (then referred to as the Black Carib) began arriving from Honduras along the Atlantic coast. Their numbers increased rapidly, as their labor was valued in cutting logwood and mahogany. When the British outlawed slavery in 1807, effectively cutting the supply of slaves coming into

Belize, the Garifuna were welcomed in to fill the labor void. With time, they founded permanent settlements along the coast, and by 1830 Stann Creek (Dangriga) was being referred to as a "Carib" town. Throughout their tenure in Belize, the Garifuna have apparently maintained peaceful relations with those in control.

Colonial policies tended to segregate each ethnic group by promoting economic specialization according to putative 'racial' characteristics. Thus the police, public servants, and logging crews were mostly Creole, teachers often Garifuna, and agricultural workers Maya/Mestizo. Following internal self-rule in the 1960s these specializations began to weaken, but their vestiges are still strong. The tension among the Caribbean- looking Creole and Garifuna cultures, and the Central American cultures of Mestizo and Maya may not have reached the level of "ethnic war" (to use Topsey's term 1987), but it is an ever-present political undertone.

Toledo District:

The largest Amerindian population in Belize that retains its language and culture is found in the southernmost administrative area, the Toledo District. With a population of 13,600 (1985 census) spread out over 1,704 sq. miles, Toledo has the lowest population density in Belize. An estimated 64% of the residents of this district are Mopan and Kekchi Mayan Indian. Toledo is naturally divided into two separate provinces - upland and lowland. The district is essentially the remnant of a flat shelf of hard, white limestone which has been folded, faulted, eroded, and then been partially covered by softer sediments. Uplift and erosion have produced a complex terrain; a rugged inland area fringed by a low, flat, coastal shelf.

The coastal plain varies between 14.5 and 52 km in width, and is crossed by four major rivers -- the Rio Grande, the Moho, the Temash, and the Sarstoon -- of which the latter three originate in Guatemala. The most striking features of the plain are the groups of steep, jagged limestone hills that stick up like ancient Maya pyramids, visible from a great distance. On the plain the rivers follow winding and meandering courses between low levees, which they overflow in the wet season. Ocean currents sweeping

south along the coast drop sand bars at the mouths of the rivers. These bars restrict river flow during the wet season, causing them to back up and flood large areas.

Swampy terrain has impeded settlement of the coastal plain, both by restricting agriculture and road construction. The only settled areas along the coast are the few higher points, where the Garifuna villages of Punta Negra, Punta Gorda, and Barranco were founded. As Punta Gorda expanded into the district administrative center, settlement moved inland along higher ground between the Rio Grande and the Moho. When the Mopan began arriving in Toledo in numbers in the late 19th century, they occupied the areas of the uplands where terrain is more gentle, while the Kekchi have mostly settled along rivers at the edges of the uplands, or in drier spots on the lowland plain.

The climate in Toledo is humid and tropical, with an average annual rainfall of over three meters, and a short dry season in March and April. Rainfall is highly variable from place to place. Frequent and often heavy rain conditions and constrains many aspects of life. Work at times is forced to a halt; flooded rivers and quagmired trails make travel and communication perilous and frequently impossible; and steady maintenance of roads is expensive and difficult. Crops cannot be dried, preservation of foodstuffs is next to impossible, and firewood must be collected and dried long before it is used. Houses rot quickly and must be built from carefully-selected materials; the bare ground around houses erodes quickly and can make village sites a network of gullies.

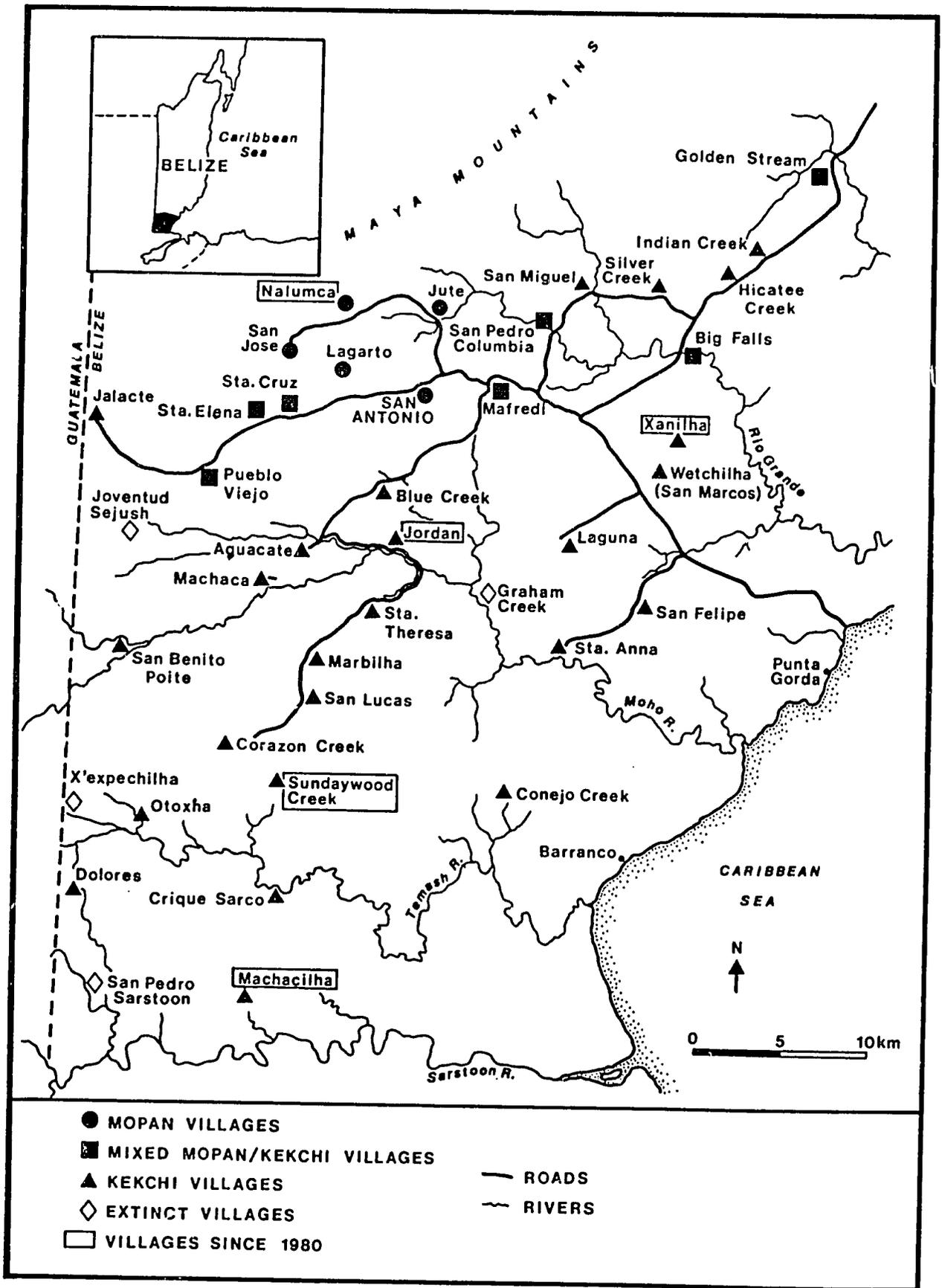
Toledo is administered from the District Town of Punta Gorda (most of the population there is Garifuna and Creole) on the coast. A Wednesday & Saturday market in town attracts many people from the surrounding Mopan, Kekchi, Garifuna and East Indian villages, but otherwise the town is a sleepy place with a few rudimentary restaurants and bars that cater largely to soldiers from a nearby British Army camp, as well as occasional tourists who have strayed from the usual circuit. The District has two representatives in the National Legislature, a Mopan from San Antonio village, and a Creole from Punta Gorda. There is also a District Council composed of representatives from each Village council and from the various government departments and ministries that maintain offices in Toledo.

Economically, Toledo produces mostly basic foodstuffs, including about 80% of the small-holder rice in Belize. Virtually all of the corn, rice and beans produced in Toledo is consumed in the country, and the district produces very modest amounts of honey, cocoa and citrus for export. Each year Toledo farmers produce about 450,000 lbs of beans, 8,000,000 lbs of rice, and 3,000,000 lbs of corn, much of which is sold to the government marketing board. In addition, several thousand hogs are sold each year. It is hard to judge the importance of marijuana to Toledo farmers. Though production seems to be much lower than in other districts, the high price of this crop attracts many farmers despite the risks.

THE MOPAN MAYA

The Mopan are an historically lowland group which originally inhabited parts of central Belize and the adjacent Peten of Guatemala. Pacified and converted by the Spanish in the late 1600s, they were mostly left alone thereafter, living in both widely scattered farming settlements and larger reduccion towns like San Luis and Poptun in the Peten. Most of the Mopan were driven out of Belize by the British in the 18th and 19th centuries, and to this day the largest concentration of Mopan -- about 7,000 -- is found in Guatemala.

Logging began in their area of Guatemala in the mid-nineteenth century, and in the 1880s the government began construction of a railway to facilitate timber extraction. Shortly afterward, in 1886, Mopan from the town of San Luis undertook a planned and organized exodus across the border into the Toledo District, to escape taxation and forced labor (Thompson 1930:41, Sapper 1897:54, Maudslay 1887 in Clegern 1968:93). Gregory (1972:14-15) recorded graphic oral accounts of the migration, which included over 100 initial settlers and many more followers. The group first settled near modern Pueblo Viejo, but the Guatemalan authorities claimed that this was still their territory, so they moved further east in 1889 and founded the village of San Antonio. This axis, running east-west from Pueblo Viejo to San Antonio, through upland hilly country on the



southern flanks of the Maya Mountains, remains the center of Mopan population in Belize.

Mopan people also settled in Cayo District in the towns of Succotz and San Antonio (not to be confused with the San Antonio in Toledo District), but through mixture with Maya of Yucatec extraction and Spanish-speaking Maya/Mestizos they have retained little identity as Mopan. Many identify themselves as "Indian" or "Maya," but not as "Mopan."

In Toledo, the Mopan are presently centered around the town of San Antonio. In the early 1970s, small groups began to move northward up the Southern Highway, founding five new villages in the Stann Creek District. Some of these villages retain their ties with San Antonio and their relatives in Toledo. However, there is no regular cultural contact or shared identity between the Mopan in the south and those in the west.

Osborn (1982) estimates the Mopan population in Toledo at about 3220 people in 1980. Counting is somewhat complicated because seven of the nine Mopan settlements in Toledo are also occupied by Kekchi. Davidson (1987:11) estimates the total Mopan population of to be 3700, suggesting that about 500 Mopan live in Cayo and Stann Creek Districts. We have no accurate measure of population growth rates among the Mopan. A conservative figure based on the 1960 and 1970 census is about 2.6 percent per year.

Settlement & Economy:

The original Mopan settlement pattern in Belize was a single large town (San Antonio) surrounded by many dispersed hamlets, called alquilos, of one or two extended families. Today, six of these alquilos have grown into small villages in their own right. With a 1981 population of 1,087 (Davidson 1987:16), San Antonio has reached a plateau of growth, and is now the source for new outmigration. People from San Antonio move into other nearby villages, north into the uninhabited foothills of the Maya mountains, and into the new villages in Stann Creek District.

The rugged, hilly country where the Mopan settled is a distinct economic and social zone from the Kekchi villages along the Moho, Temash and Sarstoon drainages. The village of San Antonio is by far the largest Indian community in southern Belize, and it dominates the Indian economic and cultural life of the district. There is more ethnic diversity here, with small East Indian, Hispanic (primarily immigrants from Honduras), Kekchi, Creole, and Carib minorities living among the Mopan. Population density is higher, cash crop production has a long and continuous history, and agriculture is more intensive than in the lowland areas to the south and east. The Mopan, unlike the Kekchi, have never been plantation laborers. Instead, they have a long history as independent small farmers, an historical characteristic that is reflected in many aspects of their culture and social organization (see Gregory 1972).

Traditionally, the Mopan are subsistence farmers who also have become involved in growing cash crops and engage in part-time wage labor. By the 1930s the Mopan had become significant exporters of corn, rice and beans to the rest of Belize, and some of their produce went as far as Jamaica. This trade was destroyed by the depression of the 1930s. More migrants came in from Guatemala during this decade, prompted by labor levies for road construction in the Peten (Howard 1977:15).

In the early 1940s, the colonial government began to once again encourage the production of corn, rice, and beans in the Toledo district in order to cut down on the amount of food imported by the colony. This was a safe policy, because Toledo lacked significant logging or plantation enterprises at the time, so small-scale farming did not draw land or labor away from other productive activities. Money was invested in building roads, churches, and schools in the larger *alquijos*. Government buying centers for crops were established.

During the 1950s the Mopan began to have a wider impact on the national economy, producing a substantial portion of the rice and beans consumed in the country. Both cause and consequence is the concentration of infrastructure and 'development' assistance in Mopan villages. In contrast to the Kekchi, Garifuna, and East Indian inhabitants of Toledo, more aid projects, Peace Corps volunteers, and health programs are aimed at the Mopan.

In San Antonio, Mopan families have opened small shops and engage in service and craft work. Four or five Mopan families have become quite wealthy by local standards through trucking, livestock wholesaling, retail trade, and cash crop agriculture. A few have invested in herds of cattle and other commercial ventures. Younger Mopan men and a few women who have managed to receive high school education have left the village for jobs in teaching, in government offices, and in businesses (see Gregory 1987 on the problems faced by Mopan women). There are now more than 20 Mopan schoolteachers, and several Mopan are receiving University education in the United States. Those with less education have been leaving the village for menial jobs in the city, or to join the police or military.

As with the Kekchi, there is a fairly clear sexual division of labor in the Mopan economy. Women work very little in agricultural fields, but they are responsible for a great deal of processing work -- threshing, hulling, and milling -- and they also care for livestock. As the cash economy becomes more important, women tend to become more economically marginal because most of the cash is earned by their husbands. Age of marriage remains very low (about 14 or 15) for women, so few have the chance to pursue education or jobs.

The major subsistence crops are corn, beans, root crops, pigs and chickens. Cash crops include honey, rice, beans, corn, pigs, marijuana, cacao and anatto (achiote). In general, Mopan farmers grow more beans and produce more honey than the Kekchi, but grow less rice and produce fewer pigs. Since 1980, Mopan farmers having their sense of identity. Gregory reported that in the 1970s a number of fiestas were no longer being supported, partially because people were leaving the Catholic Church; and communal agricultural labor groups were becoming less important. But over the last few years there has been renewed interest in the traditional fiestas, and communal exchange labor has not been replaced by wage labor. Nevertheless, there has been a consistent and increasing trend for young people educated past high school to leave their villages and take up permanent residence in urban areas. Traditional medicinal practices may be in decline - many Mopan prefer to use Kekchi curers. Pottery has largely been replaced with plastic and metal. But embroidery has become more important and abundant than ever before. And village organizations of various kinds remain active. The Mopan

language is still alive and well, though it is not taught in the schools, and children may now be brought up with poor knowledge of the language.

The Mopan in Belize do not retain significant ties with the Mopan in Guatemala. Instead they identify closely with Belize, though they often feel that they are discriminated against by other Belizeans. Gregory (1972, 1976) studied Mopan ethnicity in San Antonio Toledo in the late 1960s. He found that the Mopan were beginning to identify themselves as Indians and claim common cause and kinship with their neighbors, the Kekchi. Gregory found that the assertion of Indian identity was a product of Mopan feelings that they were being excluded from the economic and political life of the country. At about the same time Howard (1975) found that many Mopan and Kekchi felt that they were being economically exploited, underpaid for their produce and overcharged for their consumer goods. The paternalistic relationship between the government and the Mopan has led many Indians to believe that the government owes them assistance -- an attitude which constitutes a severe obstacle to autonomous honey production, pig raising and marketing, health promotion, sanitation, craft production, agriculture, cattle raising, road construction, credit, and purchasing agro-chemicals. As Gregory reports (1972,1984), when the outside impetus is taken away, the groups formed around these projects usually do not survive for long. Nevertheless, in the long run these organizations have contributed to increasing knowledge and sophistication within the community when it comes to dealing with outside agencies and funding sources.

THE KEKCHI MAYA

The Kekchi originally lived in the heavily dissected highlands of the Alta Verapaz district of Guatemala. They had a more difficult colonial past than the Mopan, and have suffered through a period of extreme oppression on German coffee plantations (1860-1930). In Belize they have settled primarily in lowland areas, forming smaller and more isolated villages than the Mopan. Today there are extreme contrasts between the most accessible roadside Kekchi villages in the northern part of Toledo district, and the more isolated communities in the south. The southernmost villages are extremely poor, and have very little access to health care, education, and other services. But even

including the wealthier northern villages, the Kekchi are by far the most self-reliant, although they are the poorest and most neglected ethnic group in Belize.

Osborn (1982) estimates a total of 4,455 Kekchi in Belize as of 1980, while Davidson (1987) gives a lower figure of 3,950. A village by village count based on Wilk's censuses as well as those of the government adds up to 4,388 in 30 communities. This does not include, however, about 150 Kekchi living in Punta Gorda and other towns and cities in Belize, nor does it include about 175 who live in Stann Creek District in mixed Mopan/Kekchi villages and in one purely Kekchi village along the Hummingbird Highway. With these, the total number of Kekchi in Belize comes to about 4,715. Since the 1980 census there has been some minor immigration of new Kekchi families from the Izabal District of Guatemala, and one new village has been started (one other has moved to a new location). Besides continuing immigration, the Kekchi population is increasing at a slightly higher natural rate than that of the Mopan, about 2.9% per year.

History:

In 1960 there were over 250,000 Kekchi in Guatemala, and this number is undoubtedly much higher today. Within Guatemala the Kekchi are expanding from the Alta Verapaz east into Izabal District and north into the Peten, in search of land and freedom from government interference in their lives. The Kekchi language is quite distantly related to Yucatec, Chol, and the other northern Maya languages. Kekchi and Mopan, for example, are not mutually intelligible, and have different words for even such basic morphemes as "sun" and "tortilla." For this reason many Indians in Toledo are trilingual in Kekchi, Mopan, and English, and some of the older people know Spanish as well.

The Kekchi were never militarily conquered by the Spanish. Instead, after several years of fierce warfare to maintain their independence, the Kekchi accepted an arrangement whereby the Dominicans under Las Casas were allowed to preach and make converts in their territory while Spanish settlers were excluded from the area. Thus Tezulutlan, the "Land of War", became the Verapaz "True Peace." In short order, the Dominicans took charge of the economic and political affairs of the area and embarked

on a campaign to force the Kekchi to resettle in large towns where they could be supervised. This reduccion policy, so reminiscent of the modern "Development Pole" resettlements, may have contributed to the terrible loss of life from disease and famine in the 16th century, when Kekchi population dropped by at least 80%.

Under the paternalistic rule of the Dominicans the Kekchi rebuilt their culture in what became an isolated backwater of Central America. While there was no education or other economic development, and some Kekchi worked as slaves or indentured workers on sugar plantations, at least the area was shielded from some of the destructive pressures that the colonial regime placed on other Guatemalan indian groups. This protection ended with independence from Spain in 1821.

During the 1860s and 1870s a land boom occurred in the Alta Verapaz, as German, English, and Ladino coffee planters flooded into the area, some of whom came from Belize (Falcon 1970:10-11). The slow erosion of Indian rights became an avalanche in 1871, when a Liberal regime took power under Granados and Barrios. This government openly served the interests of capitalist export producers, many of whom were foreign. Incentives were offered to immigrants, including land and tax exemptions, and repressive labor and land laws were enacted. In 1877, the Guatemalan government put into effect the mandamiento, a law which forced Indians to work for little or no remuneration. A new land law allowed the government to confiscate most Indian lands in Alta Verapaz.

The process that took place in the Alta Verapaz over the next 25 years deserves the name of a "second conquest" (see Farriss 1984; McCreery 1984:12 likens it to a "second serfdom"). The economy became dependent on coffee, and most coffee production was in the hands of a few German firms. By 1900 four German companies controlled almost all trade, including coffee exports and commodity imports. In 1890 German companies owned over 300,000 hectares, and a single German firm owned over 50,000 acres of coffee in the Verapaz (Cambranes 1985:143). By 1930 the Verapaz was virtually a territorial possession of Germany, paying little heed to Guatemalan laws.

Indian labor was put at the disposal of coffee producers by a number of legal and illegal means. Coercion and cheating, bribery and corruption were rampant (Cambranes 1985).

Habilitaciones -- cash advances against future work -- were given out by plantation owners, beginning a familiar cycle of endless debt. Plantation stores charged inflated prices, corporal punishment was used on workers, and the cost of catching a runaway laborer was added to his debt.

Many Kekchi fled the highlands for the lowland jungles of Guatemala and Belize. But the first large group of Kekchi, approximately 250 people, was brought to Belize in about 1890 as indentured workers on a large coffee plantation in the far southwestern corner of the colony (Wilk 1987). Other Kekchi came to Belize a few at a time, founding small villages along the Moho and Temash rivers. When the coffee plantation went out of business in 1914, after the war disrupted its trading, the workers dispersed, joining villages or establishing their own. During this period the Kekchi villages were very isolated, and the inhabitants probably wanted things that way. It is hard to overstate the trauma these people suffered at the hands of the Germans in Guatemala - their homeland had been taken away, and their lives were dominated by fear. Like other refugees from political oppression, their traditions and points of view have been molded by the experience, even in their new homes.

After 1914 the Kekchi became involved in various forms of cash crop production. They sold pigs, raised bananas for Standard Fruit for about 10 years, and sold foods to the many logging crews that stripped the rainforest of most of the valuable timber. This began to change in the 1950s when the British government appointed a Kekchi Liaison Officer to promote development in the region. With his encouragement many villages moved northward to the more accessible roadside areas near Punta Gorda, where they began to grow rice and other cash crops.

Settlement & Economy:

Most Kekchi villages range in size from 50 to 250 people, with the single exception of San Pedro Columbia, which has over 800. Most Kekchi villages are relatively dispersed, with small clusters of houses separated from each other by a hundred meters or so. There is usually a village center with churches, a football field,

cabildo (meeting house/jail), school and teachers' house. In the northern part of the district a number of recent Kekchi villages take the form of strip settlement along the Southern Highway, with no true village center.

Like the Mopan, the Kekchi are slash-and-burn subsistence farmers who also grow cash crops. In the more remote southern areas it is too time consuming to carry grain crops like rice over rugged trails, so the major source of cash is pigs, which are sold in both Belize and Guatemala. People in some villages also sell beans, cocoa, and incense gathered from wild copal trees. In the remote areas people buy many goods from travelling Kekchi traders, called cobaneros (after the city of Coban) from highland Guatemala. These cobaneros also visit Mopan villages and Punta Gorda, selling clothes, cosmetics, and other dry goods and buying cocoa, copal incense, shotguns and medicine.

Kekchi slash-and-burn farming, like that of the Mopan, is extremely productive, and provides enough to feed a family and ten pigs on two acres with about 185 days of work per year. Besides corn, over 50 other plants (and many varieties) are grown in several overlapping cycles of clearing and planting. This system works well, conserving soil and forest resources, as long as villages remain small and widely spaced. When villages grow larger the fallow cycles are shortened, poorer lands are cultivated, and erosion and grass invasion lower productivity.

Women in many of the more remote villages play important roles in food production. They fish, gather wild foods, and visit the fields often to harvest crops and carry corn back to the home. In the northern villages the division of labor is closer to that of the Mopan, where women stay at home most of the time.

One very important aspect of Kekchi farming is its cooperative nature. All adult men in a village belong to a labor group that works together, clearing and planting each farmer's fields in rotation. Jobs like harvesting, threshing rice, and even building pig pens are almost always done by groups of men who exchange their labor on a day-for-day basis. Similarly, when someone builds a house, a work group comes for two days to raise and thatch the roof. And all men in the village work together in the fagina three or four times a year to clear the village green and repair roads and trails.

In the northern part of Toledo District the Kekchi produce large quantities of rice, beans, corn, cacao, and marijuana. Kekchi farmers produce almost two fifths of the rice

consumed in Belize each year, and rice is the staple food of the urban population. Many of the northern villages are experiencing some population pressure on their land given the long-fallow agricultural regime. They have responded by adopting herbicides and pesticides in producing rice, by cutting back somewhat on their corn production and consumption, by using the land more intensively, and by switching to permanent crops such as cacao and citrus. As with most rural Belizeans, their main problem is the lack of a steady market for what they produce, and the high price of imported tools, chemicals, and goods relative to the price of their crops (except of course marijuana, which carries its own market problems).

The 1970s brought new forms of 'development' to Kekchi villages. The Belize government sold several large tracts of forest along the Southern Highway, close to existing Kekchi villages, to foreign entrepreneurs. Most foreigners cut lumber, and used Indian farmers to clear their land for cattle ranching. When cattle proved unprofitable, several tried mechanized rice production or orchard crops. What looked in 1978 like an onslaught of foreign capital, competing for land with the Indians and exploiting their labor, had become, by 1983, a series of run-down ranches with 'for sale' signs in front. In 1985 another boom began as cacao began to look like a good investment possibility. New capital is turning the ranches into cacao farms, and foreign investors are once again looking at Kekchi land and labor as resources that can be used.

Culture & Ethnicity:

Kekchi culture and language still retain strong roots in the past. Up until the 1970s, when foreign missionaries began to convert many Kekchi to Protestantism, traditional Catholicism had incorporated many Kekchi beliefs about the natural world and human relations to the supernatural. Today, many Kekchi still know folk-stories and myths that originated more than 2,000 years ago during the Classic Maya empire. The knowledge of hunting and gathering in the forest, making pottery, weaving, and building 'houses is still strong and is being maintained. Some old ritual costume dances are still performed, and most villages celebrate a number of fiestas each year. There are still a

number of traditional medical practitioners (Kekchi ilonel) who know the lore and uses of hundreds of plants.

At the same time, the Kekchi are increasingly aware of other people and cultures. They must deal with government officials, merchants, the British military (which patrols regularly through their villages along the Guatemalan border), teachers, and agents of many organizations who want the Kekchi to change their way of life (usually in the name of 'development'). Few of the people the Kekchi have contact with understand anything about Kekchi language and culture, and there is a good deal of stereotyping, misunderstanding, and mistrust on both sides of the relationship. Many Kekchi are now aware that outsiders tend to lump them together with the Mopan as "Indians", though their cultures are quite distinct. They are also finding out that most outsiders, including many Mopan, look down on them as being ignorant and primitive, and they face a number of forms of discrimination.

Belizean Kekchi often have family ties over the border in Guatemala, and they keep in touch with events in their homeland through visiting Cobanero traders. In Guatemala there are newspapers published in Kekchi and a radio station in Coban broadcasts in the language. These contribute to a growing feeling among the Kekchi that they have been ignored by the Belizean government.

Political & Social Organization:

The Kekchi, like the Mopan, govern their villages by electing a hierarchy of Alcalde, second Alcalde, Secretary and village policemen. Men who have been Alcaldes become tixil cuink - elders who are consulted in all important decisions. The Alcalde judges disputes between villagers over land and damage to crops, and can levy small fines. In practice, however, most village decisions are made by consensus with free-wheeling public discussion that is guided and channeled by elder men. Though women do not formally participate in public meetings (except as plaintiffs or witnesses), they do have some influence on public affairs through their husbands.

The village council system has only become established in some of the northern Kekchi villages. In many villages the alcalde system was disrupted in the 1970s when

many Protestant Kekchi refused to take part in the election of officials, and refused to abide by village court decisions, because the traditional hierarchy was so closely linked with the Catholic church. The government has recently passed new legislation (1980 Inferior Courts Act) which limits the authority of village alcaldes to cases where damages are less than \$25, and otherwise restricts their power within the village.

THE GARIFUNA

The Garifuna, or Black Caribs, are also relatively recent immigrants to Belizean shores, having first arrived in the early 19th century.³ At present, Garifuna communities are found all along the Caribbean coast from Belize to the Miskito region of Nicaragua. Belize has a Garifuna population of more than 11,000, or approximately 7.6% of the total population (1980 census); Guatemala has approximately 3,000; Nicaragua, a very small number that has become largely deculturated (Gullick 1979, citing Holm 1978); and Honduras, perhaps as many as 60,000. Although any precise calculation of the number of Garifuna living in the United States is virtually impossible, Gonzalez estimates it as somewhere between 75,000 and 100,000 (Gonzalez 1988:180).⁴

The Garifuna are the result of a cultural and racial fusion of Carib Indians, African Blacks, and a sprinkling of Europeans which began on the island of St. Vincent in the Lesser Antilles shortly after contact in the 16th century. This mixture apparently had the character of what Taylor (1951:138) has called "voluntary assimilation," in which

³. The term "Black Carib" was bestowed upon them by the Europeans, and as such is a description of their mixed cultural and biological heritage. Since the 1970's, they have promoted the use of "Garifuna" as the ethnic label that non-Garifuna should use. In fact, their own name for themselves is "Garinagu." "Garifuna" is they name of the language they speak. More recently some Garifuna have been seeking public usage of the label Garinagu.

⁴. Most of the Garifuna in the United States live in New York City, with large numbers also located in Los Angeles, New Orleans, Chicago, and Miami. There are also Garifuna living in Washington, D.C. and Boston, as well as some other cities (Gonzalez 1988:180).

the native inhabitants readily accepted escaped slaves and free Blacks into their communities, most certainly as allies against the Europeans. By the end of the 18th century, the Black Caribs had emerged as a distinct ethnic group which was an altogether unique amalgam (Taylor (Ibid.:143) described them as "a negro cake composed of amerindian ingredients"). The physical appearance of the Garifuna was then -- as it remains today -- decidedly Black African; many elements of their culture are closely related to the cultural complexes of the Caribs of the Caribbean and Amazon region of South America, which was their original homeland; and the morphology and syntax, as well as the vocabulary, of their language is predominantly Arawak (Indian), with numerous loan words from Carib, Spanish, French, and English.

History:

The character of the Garifuna People today is best understood through their singular history. The Spaniards arrived in the Lesser Antilles early and rapidly passed on to the mainland in their quest for gold, and it was toward the end of the 17th century that the English and the French began vying for the resources of the region. Although St. Vincent was officially designated an "Indian Territory" by the European powers, and therefore theoretically sat outside the boundaries of colonization, during the first quarter of the 18th century the French established a sizeable settlement on the leeward side of the island. At that time, the local population was made up of two groups, termed by the Europeans "Yellow (or Red) Caribs" and "Black Caribs." (Gonzalez 1988:16) Relations among the various groups were apparently peaceful, and a number of the Indians -- Yellow and Black -- spoke French.

However, European politics soon intervened to upset whatever balance may have existed. As fallout from the Seven Years War, the islands of the Lesser Antilles were divided up among the French and the English, and in 1763 St. Vincent landed in English hands. The British immediately made plans to establish sugar cane plantations and came into direct conflict with the Caribs, who at that time numbered as many as 8,000 and were occupying some of the most fertile valley lands on the island (Ibid.:22). Before long, warfare broke out and the British, with assistance from troops shipped in from

Boston, prevailed. In 1773 a treaty was signed in which the Caribs were divested of most of their lands, being relegated to a 4,000 acre tract in the northeast corner of the island.

Many French families had remained through the conflict and they soon found British domination intolerable. When France declared war on England again in 1779, the French on St. Vincent allied themselves with the Caribs and took the island. By official decree in 1783 St. Vincent was again returned to the English, but skirmishes over control of the island continued and intensified. The final battle ended with the surrender of the French/Carib forces to the British on June 10, 1796. As many as 5,000 Caribs were captured; many died shortly thereafter, apparently of an epidemic; and in March of 1797 a convoy of eight or nine ships carried an estimated 1,700 Black Caribs to the island of Roatan, just off the northern coast of Honduras. (Ibid.: 23) Some of the Caribs, apparently those with lighter skin (the so-called "Yellow Caribs"), later returned to St. Vincent, where they remain to this day.

The exiled Black Caribs were deposited by the British in Roatan in April of the same year, but their stay there was of short duration. The British left them supplies, including food and arms and even military uniforms (apparently with the notion that the Caribs would act as allies), but after rapid appraisal of the island virtually all of them set off for the coastal mainland of Honduras, where they formed an alliance with the Spanish in the fortress town of Trujillo.⁵ The Caribs at the time were valued as soldiers and as such found a ready niche as members of the Spanish militia. They rapidly took up residence in the region surrounding Trujillo, and to this day the largest concentration of Caribs along the Atlantic Coast is found in both that city and surrounding rural areas.

The Island Caribs, originally from the interior lowlands of South America, were long distance traders; and the Black Caribs of St. Vincent had been skilled at canoe-making, embarking on extensive trips through the islands of the Lesser Antilles (Ibid.: 27). It is not surprising, then, that as soon as they had established themselves on

⁵ A small number apparently remained in Roatan at a site which is today called Camp Bay (Gombe in Garifuna), although only non-Garifuna Blacks live there today (Gonzalez 1988:43).

mainland Honduras they began to fan out along the Atlantic littoral, journeying into Miskito territory to the east and as far as British Honduras to the west and north. They had arrived as agriculturalists seasoned in warfare, with considerable experience in dealing with Europeans and other local indigenous groups. In Honduras they were thrown together with an ethnic collage of French-speaking blacks, the Spanish, local Indian groups, English-speaking blacks, and an assorted collection of mestizos. However, throughout all of this contact and intermingling, they kept themselves apart, founding their own communities and preserving their distinctive culture, language, and social organization.

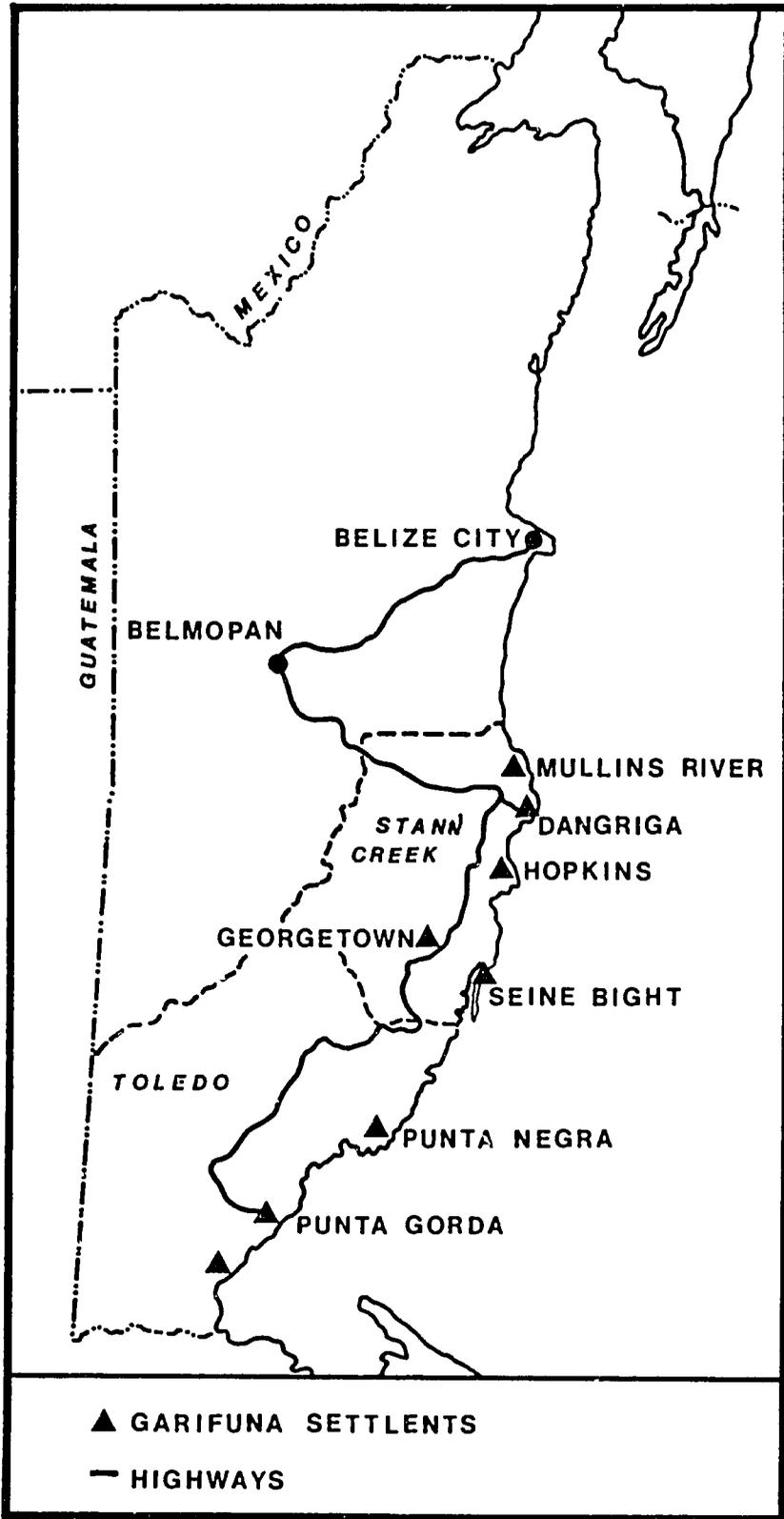
Population & Settlement Pattern:

According to tradition, the first Garifuna stepped onto the shore of what is now Belize on November 19, 1802.⁶ They were initially attracted by the opportunity for work in British forestry operations, and also by the chance to traffic contraband goods back to Honduras. The shortage of laborers brought on by the British abolition of slavery in 1807 gave new opportunities to the Caribs, who expanded their presence and began establishing permanent communities along the coastal stretches. When the Caribs found themselves on the wrong side of a Honduran civil war in 1832, large numbers were forced to flee the region to take refuge in neighboring lands, and many arrived in Belize at this time.

Through the years, Garifuna settlements have remained along the coast, more or less in the same location where they were initially established. At the present time, there are two towns -- Dangriga and Punta Gorda -- that are considered "Garifuna towns," and four Garifuna villages (Hopkins, Seine Bight, Georgetown, and Barranco); there are a few other coastal communities, such as Mullins River and Punta Negra, with Garifuna as well as Creole residents; and minorities -- between 1% and 4% of the total population -- of Garifuna live in urban and rural areas throughout the rest of the country.

The largest single concentration of Garifuna in Belize lives in Dangriga, Stann

⁶ This date has recently been declared a national holiday.



Creek District. According to 1980 census figures, 70% of Dangriga's total population of 6,661, or 4,663 people, is Garifuna; and 23.7% of Stann Creek District's rural population of 7,520, or 1,782 people, is Garifuna. In Toledo District, 48.3% of Punta Gorda's population of 2,396, or 1,157 people, is Garifuna. The total Garifuna population of Stann Creek and Toledo Districts is just short of 8,000, making up more than 70% of the Garifuna in the country. 1,392 Garifuna live among Belize City's population of 39,771, amounting to 3.5% of the total. One of the most significant concentrations of Garifuna is found in Belmopan, the nation's capital city, where they constitute 9.3% of the population of 2,935, making a total of 273 Garifuna. This is an indication of the success Garifuna have had in moving into the mainstream of Belizean life and obtaining government employment.

The population of Garifuna villages has remained at a low level, with only slight fluctuations over the last few decades. The 1980 census shows 749 people living in Hopkins; 465 in Seine Bight; 220 in Georgetown, and 229 in Barranco. With the exception of Georgetown, which was founded 10 miles inland in 1961 by a handful of residents from Seine Bight after a hurricane destroyed their village, all are located on the coast.

Economy:

On St. Vincent, the Black Caribs were apparently skilled farmers who produced surpluses they traded to neighboring islands. However, from the beginning of their tenure in Belize, agriculture has been of limited importance to the Garifuna, carried out largely as a supplement to wage labor rather than as a full-time activity (in contradistinction to the Maya of the interior, who tended to devote themselves almost entirely to farming). This was in line with the territory's colonial policy and an arrangement between the Spanish and the British which prohibited agriculture until 1817 (Bolland & Shoman 1975:117). The Garifuna began farming on a small scale as they took up residence along the southern coastal strip, planting gardens, fishing, and raising pigs and fowl, largely for subsistence but also as a cash enterprise. According to a report in 1835, the Caribs were "carrying on a constant traffic by sea with Belize (City),

in Plantains, maize, poultry, etc. The men in great part hire themselves by the year to Mahogany cutters." (quoted in Bolland & Shoman 1975:54)

This dichotomy of subsistence farming and wage labor has been present among the Garifuna in Belize since colonial times, and it persists as the dominant pattern today, although farming is losing importance. While in the village, Garifuna men have traditionally concerned themselves with fishing, transportation by sea, construction of houses, canoes, etc., basketry and woodwork, and clearing and preparing land for agriculture. Women have played a complementary role in gathering firewood, planting, weeding and harvesting crops, preparing food, washing clothes, and caring for children. (Taylor 1951:55)

Despite a few efforts in the last couple of decades to increase agricultural production in these settlements, with support from organizations such as the Inter-American Foundation and the Peace Corps, there has been no significant expansion of farming activities. In fact, as the road network grows and access to sources of employment increases, the already sparse gardens shrink even further. Most people between the ages of 20 and 50 migrate to find work, and as a result subsistence farming has all but disappeared in the villages along the coast. Gonzalez (1988:188) notes that "since about 1960 women have begun to join the migrant force in ever larger numbers..." In Belize, the Garifuna have long been known as excellent students and linguists, and they have become school teachers, priests, and government workers throughout the country. In the 1940s, Taylor (1951:55) noted that "a large majority become schoolteachers, others join the police force and some become clerks in government service or in the stores of Stann Creek (Dangriga) and Punta Gorda." This trend has continued into present-day Belize. However, Gonzalez notes that Garifuna children in Guatemala and Honduras "have higher drop-out rates than other ethnic groups among whom they live." (Gonzalez 1988:161)

Culture & Ethnicity:

Migration has been a major theme in Garifuna history. From the time of their expulsion from St. Vincent they have been on the move, with a short stop at the island

of Roatan before stopping in Honduras; and from their base in Honduras they dispersed along the Caribbean coast in both directions. After World War II many Garifuna, especially those from Honduras, continued their migratory ways by joining the Merchant Marines and journeying around the world. It was at this time that colonies of Garifuna grew in New York, and also in Los Angeles, New Orleans, Chicago, Miami, Boston, and the Washington, D.C. area.

During their history, the Garifuna have always been in flux, with changing territories, social and economic patterns, and culture. Yet until recently, they have subsisted in a Caribbean coastal environment, following a life depending upon small-scale garden farming, fishing, and wage labor. This is now changing as the modern world swallows them up, pulling them out of their coastal villages and offering them permanent jobs elsewhere. National boundaries have become more rigid, stemming the easy flow of Garifuna along the Central American coast, and the huge U.S. Garifuna population finds itself increasingly isolated, cut off from its Central American brothers. At stake is the shared, transnational Garifuna identity as individual national identities become stronger.

During the past few years, however, movements have come about to preserve and strengthen Garifuna cultural heritage. Dance groups have appeared in Belize, Honduras, and the United States, and they have toured widely; a "cultural retrieval" activity was carried out in the village of Hopkins by the National Garifuna Council and the University of the West Indies; the town of Stann Creek had its name changed to Dangriga; and there is an effort underfoot to introduce the Garifuna language into the Belize school system. Whether any of this will bear fruit, or whether it is simply the last gasp of a dying ethnic group, is a question that can only be answered with time.⁷

⁷. Gonzalez confronts this issue throughout her recent comprehensive description of the Garifuna in Central America (Gonzalez 1988). She is ambivalent as to their fate, yet tends toward pessimism. For example, the title of her Epilogue is "The Unmaking of an Ethnic Group." After disclaiming the ability to tell the future she notes that "it is necessary to point out that the Garifuna may be on the brink of cultural annihilation" (Ibid.:213).

ISSUESDevelopment Projects in Toledo

By far the greatest impact on Toledo district has come through the continuing construction of roads. Unpaved branches of the highway had reached Pueblo Viejo in the late 1960s, San Miguel in 1966 (McCaffrey 1967), and the Moho River at Aguacate by 1972. But the Moho River remained a barrier, and the southern reaches were still relatively isolated until 1984, when old roads were improved and a new road was begun with British and USAID funding that reached the Temash River in 1987 (Wilk 1984).

The growth of a rural primary health care system since 1982 in Toledo has had an important effect in many villages (including the Garifuna village of Barranco). One person in each community has been trained as a health worker, and many basic medicines and medical advice are now available for the first time in the more remote areas. A UNICEF water and sanitation project has installed handpump wells in a number of villages, though many people continue to resist the introduction of latrines.

Because Toledo is a rich agricultural region, where a hefty percentage of Belize's food is grown, it has been the target of several efforts to improve production. Unfortunately, many of these agricultural development projects -- especially those with substantial financial backing -- have been oriented more toward "national development goals" (more and cheaper food) than toward the needs and concerns of the farmers themselves. Furthermore, outside development workers rarely understand the complex network of social and economic relationships in indigenous communities, with the result that the innovations they propose frequently make little sense in the local context (see Wilk 1981 for a discussion of a misfired attempt to introduce "improved" pig breeds in Kekchi communities).

In the late 1970s, the British Development Division in the Caribbean mounted an ambitious attempt to introduce mechanized rice production among the Maya of Toledo. This project, called the Toledo Research and Development Project (TRDP), attempted "to regulate traditional patterns of shifting agriculture and convert the predominant Mayan

Indian population to settled agriculture, on independent holdings, on the largely unutilised wet lowlands of the district" (BDDC 1986:2). Slash-and-burn (milpa) agriculture was perceived as inefficient and environmentally destructive, and this project made a multi-million dollar effort to move the Maya into paddy rice production. Everything went badly from the start:

It was evident that the 'facts' of life in Toledo could not be easily accommodated into the 'theoretical' assumptions underpinning the project. The appalling wetness; poor infrastructure and communications; complex social matrices; fragile eco-systems and persistent weeds; remoteness and administrative peripherality; all combined to confound the initial strategy and objectives (Ibid.:45).

In the end, the project yielded some beneficial results when those in charge realized that their attempts to drastically overhaul traditional Mayan agriculture were doomed to failure. By 1983 they had abandoned their notions of paddy rice production and come up with what they termed an "upland strategy." This "new" strategy, which was simply a means of improving traditional agricultural systems, was seen as

a potential breakthrough in orienting the Maya towards change and adaptation. Firstly, it recognises the value of existing knowledge, social organisation and technology as important factors in farming systems, and for the maintenance of the Maya way of life. Secondly, the upland research, by building on the existing agricultural system, aims at gradual change assimilable by the local population. Improvements in the milpa system through new varieties, enhanced husbandry and alternative crops hold potential for better standards of living with minimal interference to the pattern of life. Thirdly, the emphasis on extended cropping could contribute significantly to the major problem of the milpa system -- land pressure. For these reasons, the shift in research directions resulted in TRDP's most positive achievement to that time (Ibid.:53).

More recently, citrus and cacao plantations are being heavily promoted in the Toledo District. The AID-sponsored Toledo Marketing Project promotes settled agriculture, with special emphasis on improving extension, encouraging farmer organizations, and developing post-harvest processing as a way of improving marketing throughout the region.

Both Mopan and Kekchi farmers have been quick to take advantage of agricultural innovations that make sense in their economic and ecological setting. They

grow a number of improved varieties of corn, rice, and beans, and they spray agro-chemicals to control crop pests and disease. They have also experimented with new techniques and crops on their own, often with better results than well-funded foreign researchers. When the government made low-cost mechanized services available for rice farming in 1982, both Mopan and Kekchi farmers immediately formed grain-growers cooperatives based on traditional work-groups. These have survived and flourished, competing successfully with East Indian and Creole mechanized producers. As soon as a marketing group announced they would buy achote in 1985, farmers began to plant large areas of improved plants, and production is still rising quickly. Thus far the demand for wage laborers in Toledo has been low, because there have been few large commercial farms. Many Kekchi have worked part-time on these farms, and have continued to grow enough corn for their family to live on. But as commercial farming increases in the area, and as population pressure on the land increases, many Indians will have to choose between full time wage labor and self-sufficiency. The path of development in the district depends largely on the availability and apportionment of land.

Cooperatives among the Garifuna:

Over the last few decades, a number of formal cooperatives among the Belizean Garifuna (some with mixed yet primarily Garifuna membership) have been founded. These include the Starch Producers, the Dangriga Farmers Cooperative, the Central Fishermen, the Dangriga Craftsmen, the Hopkins Farmers Cooperative, the Georgetown Farmers Cooperative, the Punta Gorda Consumers' Cooperative, the Barranco Farmers Cooperative, and the Barranco Fishermen. Unfortunately, "none of these societies achieved their stated objectives and continued to function successfully over an extended period of time" (Cayetano 1987:1). On the other hand, non-formal groups based on family and friendship, as is the case with the Sabal family's cassava business and the cement block making enterprise of "The Unknowns," have enjoyed better success.

Cayetano (Ibid.) sees the strength in the latter types of organization in five factors: (1) their objectives were clear from the start; (2) the members had a close relationship before the association was formed, and therefore communication was fluid;

(3) membership was closed; (4) capital was raised within the groups, and therefore "responsibility and risk (were) felt and shared by all members;" and (5) both groups had the skills needed for the enterprise they chose. By contrast, his analysis of a failed formal cooperative (the Dangriga Farmers Cooperative) showed that (1) it was set up by "a diverse group who came together and then tried to identify objectives, a task rendered difficult because of that same diversity;" (2) there was no prior relationships among members; (3) membership was open, and was flooded with people looking for money; (4) the cooperative was financed by a grant from a foreign donor (the Inter-American Foundation), project loans were simply not repaid, and there was no mechanism to collect repayment; and (5) few members were farmers "and many did not have time for farming. Most had never grown beans, rice and corn at subsistence levels let alone in commercial quantities."

It might be noted that the same difficulties have befallen cooperatives of Garifuna in Honduras. The recently formed Organizacion Fraternal Negra de Honduras (OFRANEH) has "undergone several unpleasant upheavals in its leadership" (Gonzalez 1988:205) since it was founded in the mid-1980s, and has as yet been unable to successfully manage development projects among member groups or communities.

Land Tenure

Belize is unique in most of Central America in that it has special rules of land tenure for Amerindian peoples - the Reservation system. But these reservations are quite unlike those in the United States, and must be understood in historical context.

Beginning in the late 19th century, British colonial authorities made it difficult for small farmers to get title to land. Most of the land was held by large mahogany companies, and the indigenous and immigrant groups were given small reservations where they could grow food for their own subsistence (Bolland 1987). Many of the large lumber firms went bankrupt at the turn of the century, and huge areas of land reverted to the Crown, and remain government property today.

Today, most land in Toledo is owned by the government, though some large parcels have been sold to foreign investors. In Belize, government land is called Crown

Land, and it is rarely sold outright. Instead, a small farmer will usually take out a lease, and will get private title only after making payments on the land for five to ten years, and after the land is surveyed (a process which can be quite expensive).

Crown land in Toledo is used by the Garifuna, Mopan, and Kekchi with a mixed system of tenure and non-tenure. They use reservation lands, lease government land, and squat on both government and private holdings. To date, the government has been lenient in its policies, rationalizing what has taken place rather than guiding it through policy or legal enforcement. Reservations have been modified or extended, and new areas have been opened up to individual or group leasing. Garifuna reservations -- such as the approximately 1,000 acre tract of land called the St. Vincent Block near Punta Gorda -- have been largely abandoned, or have reverted to other, non-agricultural uses, as farming decreases in importance. Most Kekchi and Mopan still live on the reservations.

The majority of the Mayan reservations were established in 1924, though a small reserve was set up at San Antonio in 1897. Each recognized Indian village, not including alquilos, was granted an Indian Reserve within which all members were allowed to use land for habitations and agriculture, under the administration of the alcalde who collected a yearly fee of \$5 (a significant sum at that time). Because people moved around and started new villages, the size of the reservation never had a close relationship to the size of the population using it. Most villages made agreements with their neighbors about who "owned" what land, and ignored the formal reservation boundaries (which they had never been shown in any case).

Unlike North American Indian reservations, while the Mopan and Kekchi used the land almost without restriction or supervision, they never acquired title. The reserve system, in fact, made it impossible for Indians to own land, either through squatters' rights or by outright purchase. No communal rights were recognized, and though the indians had to bear the costs of administering the land system and collecting fees, they had no part in defining boundaries. The entire tenure system on the reservations was and is at the whim of the national authorities. A stroke of the pen in the capital could eliminate their rights (and this stroke seems increasingly imminent). In cruel irony, those same authorities, from the colonial period to the present, have blamed the Kekchi's

footloose migratory ways, their inability to invest in permanent agriculture, on their "custom" of communal land tenure (when in fact prior to the Spanish conquest, the Kekchi recognized private land tenure).

In truth, the reservations are not any sort of land tenure, but rather merely community rental from the government with no security. The government owns the land, not the community or the individual, a fact that has been lost in some of the debate about the future of the Indian reserves (Romney 1959, Aguilar 1984, Howard 1974, Osborn 1982, Topsey 1987).

There is little agreement on the number of acres tied up in reservations in Toledo District, and even the people who have claim to them are unsure of their dimensions. A recent newsletter article (Spearhead 1987) quotes the following figures, which were received from the Ministry of Natural Resource's Survey Department:⁸

San Antonio	22,345 acres
Rio Blanco	1,425 acres
Pueblo Viejo	3,085 acres
Black Creek	6,327 acres
Rio Grande	5,250 acres
X'pecilha	4,075 acres
Aguacate, Maciaca & Inchasones	<u>27,670 acres</u>
Total	70,277 acres

Mopan and Kekchi have certainly adapted to the system offered them. Each village has its own rules for who can use land and for what. In fact, each community has a very detailed and ecologically sound method of land use that makes sure that each family has enough to live on. Recently, many villages have also made rules on how land is to be taken out of shifting cultivation and planted to permanent cash crops like cocoa. Many now prefer to keep things as they are, but the government has announced its intention to divide up land in Toledo in 50 acre parcels for individual (male) owners. This issue is likely to become increasingly politicized and difficult both for the government and the Indians.

⁸. The author of the article expresses some doubt as to the reliability of these figures, and we are unable to confirm them. The Toledo Maya Cultural Council apparently accepts them as accurate, quoting them in the minutes of their General Assembly meeting in 1987 (TMCC 1987).

At the present time the Toledo Maya Cultural Council has been lobbying to secure a 500,000 acre "Maya Homeland." The status of this petition is vague at best, for several reasons. First, there is as yet no strong consensus among the Kekchi and the Mopan over the desirability of a homeland, nor has any clear plan surfaced for land use rights within the proposed area. Second, the concept of a Mayan homeland has sparked rather lively debate throughout the country, receiving in the process a good measure of vociferous opposition from various quarters (for examples of the different sides of this argument see Spearhead 1987; Hall 1988; Topsey 1987; Coc 1987; Bol 1987).

Ethnicity

Belize is an ethnically heterogeneous nation composed primarily of English-speaking Creoles, Yucatec, Mopan, and Kekchi Mayan Indians, Garifuna, East Indians, Spanish-speaking Mestizos from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador, and Mennonites; and, with the exception of the Mennonites, mixtures of all of the different groups. Belize City is 76% Creole, Dangriga is 70% Garifuna, Orange Walk is 69% Mestizo/Maya (Bolland 1987:6); and Toledo district is 64% Kekchi and Mopan Maya. English -- or, more properly, English Creole -- is the first language of just over half of Belize's population; slightly less than one-third has Spanish as its mother-tongue; and then the different Mayan groups, the Garifuna, and the Mennonites all have their native languages. In this environment, where English is the official language and is taught in the schools, perhaps as many as one-third of the population is bi- or multi-lingual (Bolland 1987:6). Whether expressed explicitly or not, ethnicity is an extremely important theme in Belize.

The historical policies of colonial authorities tended to segregate the different indigenous groups from each other. Early colonial government was a form of indirect rule that gave limited responsibilities to local communities for their own administration, but prevented effective ties between communities. Indigenous groups were seen as a labor force, but were excluded from land ownership, and the general governance of the colony

For example, from their very entry into the colony, the various Maya groups were economically and politically dominated by the small land-owning class of colonists. British or mestizo culture and social institutions dominated and superseded those of the Maya in all but isolated rural areas by the first quarter of the 20th century. The culture and the economy of the colony affected the Maya immigrants as strongly as it affected the Garifuna immigrants, the East Indian indentured laborers and the Africans who were brought in as slaves, though its specific effect on these cultures varied. Colonial policies and laws tried to lump together the various Maya cultures and nations into a single ethnic category of "Indian" and to separate these Indians from the other cultural groups - a kind of "divide and conquer" strategy which had the effect of strengthening ethnic boundaries.

Indians were segregated on reserves, as were Garifuna. Laws were enforced differently for the different groups. Employers stereotyped their laborers and often segregated them by tasks, making a mestizo an overseer for a group of Maya laborers, for example. The colonial government would often use ethnic stereotypes to justify hiring a particular ethnic group for a particular branch of government. Over time, stereotypes like the Creole's dislike of agriculture or the Maya's political passivity were made more real by these policies -- the stereotypes were enforced by practice, reality was made to fit the misconception.

At the same time, however, the common experience of the colonial economy led to many similarities between all cultural groups in the country, similarities that differences in custom, language, and dress often mask. While inter-ethnic prejudices were maintained and even fostered, there was little open conflict among the different groups. This was doubtless in part due to the imposed physical separation of the groups, but also because of what Bolland terms "the feeling of being in the same rotten boat" (1987:9). All -- Garifuna and Indian and Creole -- were considered important to the colony mainly as cheap labor for whatever purposes the owners of the colony desired. In this the experience of most of the ethnic groups of Belize is in essence identical -- they were powerless, were kept in debt to their employers, were prevented from owning and controlling their own land, and were excluded from participating in politics and trade.

Some mestizos, a few Maya, and a few Creoles escaped this oppression, but the basic facts remain.

During the last several decades, and especially since Independence, rapid and profound changes in Belize's ethnic picture have brought about a good measure of ambivalence. With the breakdown in many restrictions on internal movement, the spread of communication and transportation networks, an opening of the democratic process, and population growth, all the different ethnic groups have come in closer contact, and certain tensions have resulted. Ethnicity has been a covert theme in national politics, chiefly the Creole/non-Creole balance of power; but thus far no political parties have been formed or completely dominated by particular ethnic blocks (Bolland 1987). Government recognizes the implicit dangers of ethnic separatism, and has stressed the growth of a common Belizean identity that binds together the different groups. A school textbook history of Belize, published by the Ministry of Education, expresses this view:

Belize has its own rich culture which includes the heritage of the different ethnic groups of Belize... For much of our history, the natural interaction of cultures which co-exist within one community was inhibited by the colonial policy of divide and rule, which ensured that our various cultures remained largely isolated from, and suspicious of, each other, and that the colonizer's culture remained dominant. An essential part of the decolonization process must therefore be the elimination of all colonially inherited prejudices about each other's cultures.

The historical origins of our people and the more recent influences upon our culture have produced diversity. Out of this diversity we must seek unity, while recognizing the value of our different customs and traditions (Ministry of Education 1983:73, quoted in Bolland 1987:12).

This, of course, is the ideal. In practice, the ethnic issue has become an important topic of internal debate (see the recent collection of essays in Ethnicity and Development published by SPEAR, 1987). The last few years has seen the creation of ethnic associations such as the Toledo Maya Cultural Council among the Mopan and Kekchi Maya, the National Garifuna Council, and the Isiah Mortar Harambee among the Creoles; and groups aimed at cultural and linguistic revival among the Yucatec Maya have been forming at a rapid rate. On the one hand, these groups -- which must be

seen within the context of a widespread ethnic revitalization movement throughout the Americas -- serve to promote cultural pride, social cohesion, self-reliance, community participation and action, and an interest in folklore, history, archaeology, music and the arts. At the same time, however, there are some who see these tendencies as a return to, and strengthening of, colonial policies of separatism and racial and ethnic stereotyping. Topsey (1987:1), for example, seems to think that "the resurgence of ethnic consciousness is leading Belize into an escalating ethnic war."

Official policy, caught in what might be characterized as an oscillating position between the poles of "Harmonious Pluralism" and "Ethnic War," has been marked by ambivalence and a good measure of contradiction. Actual encouragement of ethnicity has come mainly in the realm of relatively "neutral" areas such as music, dance, folklife, and crafts. For some, efforts in this direction are empty. While the great Mayan past of the country is fodder for tourist promotion, the Creole and Carib population feel little identity with this past.

The same ambivalence towards ethnicity appears in government policies towards local cooperatives, councils, cultural movements, and rural organizations. On the one hand they are promoted as essential to economic development, but on the other hand they are feared as vehicles of political action, and of regional, local, or ethnic separatism. While self-determination may be a stated goal, there is a strong tendency on the part of the government to control, either unconsciously or by design, rural and ethnic organizations. The result is that many cooperatives and associations may exist in rural ethnic minority communities, particularly in the northern and southern districts, but they are invariably of short duration. Most have been plagued by leadership problems and political factionalism. They rarely truly belong to the members, and when the outside support disappears, so do the groups. Locally formed credit unions and informal credit circles that pool savings and make loans have been more successful in some rural areas.

Ethnic Organizations:

The Toledo Maya Cultural Council (TMCC):

The TMCC was formed in 1978 by a small group of Mopan Maya from San Antonio, Toledo District. Until recently, the TMCC has operated virtually without funds and has been run on a voluntary basis. During the past decade, however, the organization has evolved considerably, expanding its influence and taking on concrete activities. The Mopan founders have reached out to incorporate the Kekchi into leadership positions, and a concerted attempt is presently underway to bring the two groups together in a harmonious relationship. The current Secretary General, Primitivo Coc, is also the Coordinator of the Coordinadora Regional de Pueblos Indigenas (CORPI), which represents indigenous people in Mexico and Central America. This connection has gained the TMCC considerable visibility throughout the region, as well as internationally.

Aside from the Maya Homeland issue (above, in the section on land tenure), the TMCC has been active in securing academic scholarships for Indian students (principally at the secondary level to the Toledo Community College in Punta Gorda), and in promoting cultural events. One recent project, carried out in collaboration with archaeologists from the State University of New York (SUNY), Albany, aims at restoration and maintenance of archaeological sites in the region. The TMCC recently (1988) received support from the Inter-American Foundation to carry out an education campaign among the people of the more remote villages -- most of which are Kekchi -- to inform them of the TMCC's objectives, activities, and accomplishments. The prime objective of this program is to bring the Kekchi more fully into decision-making and in this way to forge a more representative Toledo Mayan unity. Backing has also come from European sources.

The National Garifuna Council:

The National Garifuna Council was formed several years ago in Dangriga when a group of Garifuna crystallized around the celebration of Carib Settlement Day (November 19) when they chose Miss Garifuna Belize. However, the Garifuna are great organizers and joiners, and the present effort is built upon the shoulders of other organizations, such as the Carib Development Society, the Carib International Society, and the Carib Aid Society, which have been formed and disappeared since the 1920s.

The National Garifuna Council is a loosely structured organization with no paid full-time positions that is actively working in all of the Garifuna settlements in the country. It is composed of delegates from each local committee; they meet once a year to elect a board and a chair. Their major focus has been coordinating plans and activities pertaining to Settlement Day and Garifuna Week activities. The primary objectives of the organization are to improve ties with U.S. Garifuna groups, register the Council constitution with the government, work with income-generating projects in Dangriga, and raise funds for the construction of a cultural house/museum in Dangriga. The Council tends to come together around task-oriented activities, and its emphasis has been on "cultural" events and programs rather than on economic projects. It has collaborated with the Resident Tutor of the University of the West Indies in Belize (Dr. Joseph Palacio, himself a Garifuna) on a "Cultural Retrieval" project; it supports the Warigagabaga Dance Troupe, which performs Garifuna dances in Belize and abroad; and it promotes craft development.

The Caribbean Organization of Indigenous People (COIP):

The Caribbean Organization of Indigenous People was formed during a meeting of indigenous people from four Caribbean countries at St. Vincent in August, 1987, and a subsequent meeting in January, 1988. Representatives from Belize (The Toledo Maya Cultural Council & the National Garifuna Council), Guyana, Dominica, and St. Vincent were present. COIP's broad function is to help coordinate the activities of indigenous people of the English-speaking Caribbean. More specifically, it will serve to carry out

an inventory of information on cultural aspects of indigenous groups of the region; to mobilize groups at the local level through projects, preferably income-generating activities; and to establish a network of communication among the various groups, as well as with non-indigenous solidarity groups. The Coordinator over the period from 1988 through 1990 is Dr. Joseph Palacio, Resident Tutor at the University of the West Indies, in Belize.

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