‘The first duties of persons living in a civilized community’: the Maya, the Church, and the colonial state in southern Belize

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Abstract

In recent years, historical geography has been at the forefront of new scholarship on the spatiality of colonial power and its complex relations with indigenous communities. This literature shows that imperial policies – emerging through state and scientific institutions, cultural practices, and capitalist ventures – required particular ways of conceptualizing, mapping, and organizing spaces and territories which transformed the geographies of indigenous communities, livelihoods, and identities. Through a close reading of archival texts from the late 19th and early 20th century, this paper examines the spatial and political relations between three groups: the Catholic Church, the British colonial state, and the Maya communities of southern British Honduras. Differences between the Catholic Church and the British colonial state – in their aims and approach to winning hegemony over the Q’eqchi’ and Mopan Maya – were accommodated and assuaged by a tacit agreement: that the Maya must be settled in permanent communities. Colonial power, in both its spiritual and statist modalities, was imminently geographical, and this geography comprised the common ground between Church and state in their approach to the Maya.

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Keywords: Colonialism; Catholic Church; Belize; Maya

Abbreviations: AB, Archives of Belize, Belmopan, Belize; MC, Miscellaneous Collection of the Archives of Belize; MP, Minute Papers housed at the Archives of Belize; PRO, Public Record Office, Kew, England.

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Introduction

In April 1913, the Reverend Tenk, head of the Catholic Church in the Toledo District of British Honduras (as Belize was then known), wrote a letter to the Governor of the colony in Belize City. Tenk wrote to advise the government about the Maya people living in the poor, rural, southern area where he was priest:

I have been told that a delegation of Indians from the neighborhood of San Antonio is now in Belize bothering your Excellency. At present the Indians, whom they are representing, are living in the bush, scattered and isolated like wild animals. We and Your Excellency also, I am sure, are desirous to have them learn at least a few of the most rudimentary sanitary laws and some of the first duties of persons living in a civilized community.1

I begin this paper with Tenk’s letter – a marginal text written from the margins of a marginal colony, one might say – because it allows us to ask a question that remains today at the heart of historical–geographical studies of colonialism: what constitute the ‘duties of living in a civilized community’? Reverend Tenk saw the Maya as primitive, and he felt a duty to ‘civilize’ them. But what did this entail? How, to put it directly, is the colonial task – introducing the first duties of civilization – to be executed in practice?

To begin to answer these questions, let us return to Tenk’s letter and read his description of ‘civilized community’:

They will have to be forced to learn these laws and duties, and this forced-education can only be obtained in the school. Now, if they are allowed to continue to live as they do at present[,] wild, scattered and hidden away in the forests, their children cannot be forced to attend school, but will grow up wild and know less, if possible, than their parents know.

Please, therefore, do all you can to compel them to live together in a village, say San Antonio, so that there we can maintain a school large enough to guarantee a good teacher’s salary. We would suggest that, in some way, it be made a financial advantage to them to live in the town and a great disadvantage not to live there, so that they, of their own free choice, will prefer to live in the village....

The delegation of Indians now in Belize will, without doubt promise Your Excellency that they will establish another village if you grant them their own Alcalde. This will, however, be a promise only. The Indians of Aguacate (Moho River) made a like promise and now are continually wandering about.

Do, therefore, what you think but we beg Your Excellency, to keep these subjects of British Honduras in some one place where we will be able to maintain a school for them. In the school alone can we place our hope for a brighter future for them. And, would could [sic] compel those ignorant, foolish and selfish parents to send their children to school. With the present go-when-you-please school system our exertions become unnecessarily great and almost entirely wasted.2

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1 Reverend Tenk to Colonial Governor, 30 April 1913. AB, MP 1685-1913: ‘The San Antonio Indians: wishes to have them compelled to live in a village.’
2 Tenk to Colonial Governor (see note 1); my italics.
Tenk therefore calls upon the colonial state to force the Maya to settle in permanent communities, go to school, and – implicitly – to attend church. At that time, much as today, the Catholic Church ran most of the schools in the Toledo District. And the colonized subjects to be ‘civilized’ were indigenous Maya peoples of southern Belize, producing a livelihood as farmers of corn and beans in lowland tropical broadleaf forests, much as they do today.

This then is a text, a minor archival fragment, that defines the practical work of colonialism and elaborates the task of civilizing the colonized. Today we recognize that Tenk’s very conception of the situation – which reflects commonly held social values and ideas shared by most British colonial officials in British Honduras – is fundamentally racist. Indeed, such racism was integral to colonialism around the world. Thus we may situate Tenk’s letter alongside Thomas Macaulay’s well known 1835 ‘Minute on Indian Education,’ insofar as each aims to specify the means to achieve colonial discipline. Read within a postcolonial frame of analysis, these texts call for an inquiry into the practices that constituted and sustain colonial power. Macaulay’s Minute is especially significant in the way it articulates a British desire to produce organic intellectuals of British imperialism: ‘We must … form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern; a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect.’ We should remember that what matters most – whether in India or Belize – is not Macaulay, nor his intentions, but rather the task that solicited this discourse, i.e., the conditions of possibility for this discourse: building and maintaining colonial power. Colonial power should be understood here not only in terms of force but also as a productive ensemble of social relations – a form of power generated through colonialism that has long outlived formal colonial rule. Hence the importance of understanding the operation of colonial power in, for

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3 In Belize City, Catholicism has long been a minority religion, second in importance to Protestant Churches. The Toledo District is more like the rest of Latin America in this respect: it has been predominantly Catholic from at least 1870s until quite recently. Since the 1970s, as missionaries of evangelical denominations (Mormons, Church of God, Seventh-Day Adventists, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others) have transformed the religious landscape of the Toledo District. Today, most Maya communities have five or six small churches. The Catholic Church remains at the center of the older villages, and is often still the largest church; yet it is undoubtedly in decline relative to the more ‘dynamic’ evangelical churches. These changes have often caused problems for village accord, often spilling into open divisions between families and villages. For a study of schismatic processes in one Maya community of southern Belize, see J. Schackt, *One God, Two Temples: Schismatic Process in a Kekchi Village*, Oslo, Norway, 1986.


5 The term ‘postcolonial’ as I use it here and throughout this paper does not refer to the historical period that follows formal political independence (which in Belize arrived only in September, 1981). Rather, the term ‘postcolonial’ is reserved for a critical, theoretical perspective on imperialism, nationalism, and culture. On postcoloniality and geography, see especially Q. Ismail, *Abiding by Sri Lanka: Peace, Place, and Postcoloniality*, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 2006. On colonial mapping of indigenous spaces, see K.H. Offen, Creating Mosquitia: mapping Amerindian spatial practices in eastern central America, 1629–1779, *Journal of Historical Geography* 33 (2007) 254–282.

instance, southern Belize in the 1910s, is not solely historical. Through an analysis of such power, we may be able to understand the colonial present.  

In recent years many historical geographers have examined the spatiality of colonial power and its complex relations with indigenous communities. This literature shows that imperial policies – emerging through state and scientific institutions, cultural practices, and capitalist ventures – required particular ways of conceptualizing, mapping, and organizing spaces and territories which, in turn, transformed the geographies of indigenous communities, livelihoods, and identities. As Tenk’s letter reminds us, colonial power does not work simply as an instrument of the state and capital. This is not to deny the capitalist nature of British imperialism, to be sure. Rather, it is to recognize that colonial power is always woven through a broad web of social relations, within which are elements that are only tangentially connected to capitalist state power. Notably throughout Central America, the church – which is to say, until recently, the Catholic Church – has been central to the reproduction of colonial power. The Church’s encounter with the indigenous peoples in the Americas (and the subsequent task of winning hegemony over them) proved to be one of the most significant events in the long duration of Church history. As is well-known, Catholic theology provided part of the justification for the colonization of the Americas. Yet as a vast literature demonstrates, the Church has often opposed state power and capitalist excesses in Latin America (most famously in the exemplary case of Las Casas), and the state has often attempted to rein in the excesses of the Church. The distinctiveness of the Church–state conflicts in southern Belize at this time may be appreciated through regional comparison. In the conclusion of his classic study, Church and State in Latin America, Mecham summarizes the response of Church authorities to post-Independence reforms throughout 19th century Latin America:

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\[^11\] The Belizean case provides a useful counterpoint within Latin America, since it resembles its neighbors although the role of the church has been relatively modest, with one notable exception: the church has been a major influence on Belizean education. For critical reflections on this influence, see: A. Shoman, Backtalking Belize: Selected Writings, in: A. Macpherson (Ed.), Belize City, 14–47.
Believing, quite correctly, that their ancient rights and privileges would be endangered with the establishment of representative republics, the ecclesiastics plunged into politics in alliance with other conservative elements, notably the landholding elite, who also sought the preservation of the status quo. The principle questions which divided Church and state were—in addition to the issue of ecclesiastical patronage—control of education, control of the marriage ceremony, the disposition of Church property, control of the registrar of vital statistics, and tolerance of dissenting sects.12

The last three of these issues—Church property, the registrar of statistics, and dissenting sects—were moot in British Honduras. As for education and marriage, in most of the Colony there were no state institutions capable of challenging the Church’s traditional role in these areas. The two institutions therefore collaborated—particularly in rural villages, where the boundaries between the two were especially thin—while remaining fundamentally distinct in their source of authority and mandate. As Cardenal explains in his discussion of Church–state relations in Central America during the late 19th century:

The Church saw its traditional institutional character as basic to its mission, while the state, concerned with its process of modernization, could not tolerate the Church’s traditional position. ... In a vain effort to recover its old position, the Church offered itself to the state as the most effective agent for controlling the rural population. The state, for its part, needed the Church to confer the legitimacy it sought. For these reasons, the separation between Church and state was more one of form than of content.13

Even as the boundaries between Church and state were contested, they thus often remained fuzzy, even porous.

It was often through conflicts specifically concerning indigenous peoples that these contests played out, and boundaries were redefined. This clarifies a tension in Tenk’s letter concerning legitimacy and authority. A representative of the Church, Tenk presumes to have a common interest with the Governor in advancing the ‘desirous’ project that the Maya learn ‘their duties before civilization.’ Yet the colonial state was the dominant institution in the relation; the Church fathers must ask the state to assist them in watching over the Maya. To prevent the Maya from ‘living in the bush, scattered and isolated like wild animals,’ Tenk requires the authority of the colonial state, which alone enjoys the right to enforce the law—even though it is the church that would, in effect, locally regulate Maya living. The Church would like to win moral leadership over the Maya, to achieve hegemony over them, and therefore intercedes into their relation with the colonial state. Consider that Tenk’s letter is written in response to a specific, and explicitly political act on the part of the Maya: a delegation was sent from San Antonio to Belize City to meet with the

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12 J.L. Mecham, *Church and State in Latin America*, Chapel Hill, 1966, 417. By ‘Church’ here Mecham means the Catholic Church; yet we should note that this Church has never been a monolithic institution. There are of course other denominations in the region: Protestantism gained a foothold in the Caribbean in 1625 when Britain occupied Barbados (E. Dussel, *The Church in Latin America*, Maryknoll, 1992). British Honduras was a colony divided along Catholic and Protestant lines (with indigenous and African influences to each). The dominant Protestant denomination, the Anglican, played important roles in social and state affairs from the late 18th century. By contrast, Protestantism made few inroads into Latin America before the late 19th century (in neighboring Mexico, Protestant churches were only established in the 1870s and remained weak until the 20th century).

Governor – a difficult and momentous journey in 1913. Tenk’s intercession is, structurally speaking, colonial: through Tenk, the Church aims to represent the Maya before the state. 

Thus the letter offers certain details about the Maya – where they live; the status of the Alcalde – to underscore Tenk’s familiarity with the local situation. These are no innocent details. His letter demonstrates his knowledge of the spatiality of Maya livelihood and their local rule. As we will see, the British colonization of southern Belize hinges on these two elements – the spatiality and governance of Maya living. We could say that Tenk’s letter captures the essential logic of colonial hegemony: Tenk would like the Mayas to accept, without coercion from the state, that they should live in settled villages and be subject to the authority of the state and the Church. Yet the letter’s existence reveals that this hegemony was imperfect.

Judged by its stated aims, Tenk’s letter failed. The Colonial Secretary replied curtly, ‘His Excellency is unable to adopt your suggestions.’ It may seem surprising that the colonial state – which certainly shared the racist notions about the Maya expressed in this letter – elected not to act, at least initially, in reply to Tenk’s letter. Why not? The Church and the state were both authoritarian institutions, sites for organizing and coordinating colonial power and stages upon which struggles between different social groups played out. Yet while both were structurally colonial, different aims and interests motivated them. In a review of the literature on the differences between Church and state (a dominant theme in 19th-century Latin American historiography), Lynch argues that the period 1830–1930 saw the decisive ‘modernization’ of the Church, meaning that it gained substantive independence from the state and reorganized itself as an autonomous institution. Yet these changes unfolded in a highly uneven pattern, with important geographical variations; this raises the challenge of explaining subsequent variations in Church–state relations across Latin America. To this, Lynch offers two main answers: first, each country carried particular historical traditions which were transformed in different ways. Second, there were contrasting experiences of state-building in this period, and therefore distinct state approaches to changing Church relations.

I know of no study that has examined the Belizean case in this literature. And Belizean historiography has deemphasized the role of the Church in the colonial process. Partly this is because

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14 On representation as a structural relation of colonial power, see Q. Ismail, Abiding, chapter 1.

15 I recognize that I am simplifying the geographies of colonialism here. As Eric Sheppard reminds us, ‘the term British colonialism neglects the fact that the colonial project was implemented in elite male spaces of southern England – the playing fields of Eton; the classrooms of Oxford and Cambridge; and the parliamentary spaces, boardrooms, and gentlemen’s clubs of London’ (2002, ‘The spaces and times of globalization: place, scale, networks, and positionality,’ Economic Geography, 78(3), 307–330, 322).

16 Anon., 1913. AB, MP 1685-13, 4.


18 Lynch’s narrative does not emphasize the class relations that undoubtedly shaped these vectors of change. The closest Lynch’s account comes to integrating class concerns is his relative wealth and strength of the Church and state: ‘Where the Church was poor and weak, it did not provoke overt hostility; but [under such conditions,] nor could it defend itself’ (John Lynch, ‘The Catholic Church in Latin America, 1830–1930’ (note 18), 563).

elites within the Belizean state have never been threatened by the power of the Church, and the Belizean state has long enjoyed a comfortably hegemony over civil society. Under such circumstances, the Church conventionally adopts a position of compromise with the state, opposing the state directly only when its interests are at risk, and generally looking for leverage through state relations (all the while calling for neutrality on the part of the state in its approach to the Church). Because of such strategies, the analysis of colonial church–state relations should not overstate superficial agreements or differences. The apparent incongruence of Church and state aims may hide more fundamental agreements. Such is the case, I will argue, with the task of settling the Maya – the task that underpinned the colonization of southern Belize in the late 19th century.

Colonizing southern Belize

After taking Jamaica in 1655, British buccaneers from Jamaica settled at points along the Central American coast, including the delta of the Belize River, where they began cutting logwood for export to England. It took two centuries for their itinerant logging camp to become the capital of the colony of British Honduras. The territorial status of southern Belize was especially unclear, as treaties between England and Spain only covered the land as far south as the Sibun River, which bisects present-day Belize. Contact between Mayas and Europeans in southern Belize may have occurred as early as the 1520s, when Cortés marched southward through the area now known as the Guatemalan Verapaz. Yet southern Belize remained uncolonized and lacked colonial state institutions. Until the late 19th century, it was a contested space claimed by two European states yet inhabited by Manché Chol and Mopan-speaking (and perhaps also

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20 Writing in his prison notebooks, Antonio Gramsci captured this distinction in approaches to the state, writing that liberals prefer a sort of ‘night watchman state’ that expects historical ‘initiative’ to derive from civil society, in effect leaving the state a limited role as the ‘guardian of ‘fair play’ and of the rules of the game.’ By contrast, when it can dominate the state outright the Catholic Church ‘would like the state to be interventionist one hundred percent in their favor; failing that, or where they are in a minority, they call for a ‘neutral’ state’ (Gramsci, Prison Notebooks, 262).

21 I focus here on evidence from the period between 1862 – the year British Honduras was declared a British Colony and the first Catholic mission was established in southern Belize (at Punta Gorda, by Father John Genon) – and 1920. As we will see, the 1910s were a decade of especially keen tensions between the colonial state and Church over Maya settlement.

22 Spain opposed the presence of these settlers but had no interest in going to war with England to drive them out. The practice was legalized after the 1763 Treaty of Paris, where Spain recognized the rights of British settlers to cut and export logwood from Belize but maintained Spanish sovereignty; the Treaty of Versailles (1783) extended British control over Belize on the land between the Sibun and Hondo rivers. The Spanish claim to Belize effectively ended after their 1798 defeat at the Battle of St. George’s Caye.

23 The first elements of a British colonial state date to 1765, when the Location laws were formulated by the settlers to formalize their rights to land at logging camps. In 1786 these rules were codified into Burnaby’s Code, the first civil law. The first Superintendent of British Honduras, Colonel Despard, was appointed in 1786. The first constitution and Legislative Assemble were established in 1854. Belize was declared a colony in 1862 and became a Crown colony in 1871. The first Magistrate for the Southern District (which comprised the area south of the Belize District) was appointed in 1865 (Anon., ‘Report for the Toledo district for the year 1953’, 2). On the establishment of British Honduras as a Crown Colony, see: O.N. Bolland, 1977, Passim.

24 The Dioceses of the Verapaz and the Yucatán were founded in the 1550s and became important regional centers of religious influence for Maya communities. The Verapaz Diocese in Coban remains significant in shaping Catholic practices and faith in southern Belize.
Q’eqchi’-speaking) Maya peoples. The ‘Toledo District’ as such only came into political existence in 1882.

After clearing the most accessible logwood and mahogany from along the major rivers in the 18th century, settlers sent their logging teams far into the interior, even beyond the present border between Guatemala and Belize (which was not yet identified on the landscape, let alone demarcated and enforced). Conflicts often erupted as logging teams came into contact with Maya communities, especially after 1847 and the start of the Guerra de las castas in the Yucatán. Then a series of raids on British logging camps threatened the stability of the industry. The reports of state officials during this period reflect the anxiety they felt in the absence of hegemony over the Maya communities.

The battles between the Mayas and the Mexican state demonstrated the former’s military capabilities, and the threat of a direct assault by the Mayas on Belize haunted the state through the mid-19th century. An 1873 report on the state of the defenses of British Honduras found that ‘the country on the whole is indefensible’ and advised ‘making two or three stations defensible as rallying posts’ that would be stout enough to ‘repulse an ordinary attack of the surrounding tribes of Indians.’

Yet the settlers and the state responded differently to the threat of attack. The settlers viewed the state as an instrument to facilitate their accumulation of forest lands by containing the Maya. For their part, colonial state officials desired to bring Mayas into closer political and economic relations – to stabilize the state’s territorial power and win hegemony. And the Colonial Office in London saw the militarization of a marginal colony as a poor investment.

Not without reason. As the value of mahogany exports declined after mid-century – an effect of overcutting, a price slump in mahogany, and the loss of the US market when Belize became a colony in 1862 – the colony’s export earnings declined precipitously. The value of all exports in 1870 was only 39% of 1857. Many smaller mahogany works went into bankruptcy, resulting in a heightened concentration of ownership of forest concessions and capital in a handful of British firms, which were anxious for the state to procure a military force. Yet the Colonial Office

25 Until recently, Belizean historiography suggested that all of the Maya people living in (what is today known as) southern Belize were killed before the British arrived – and that the land remained essentially empty until the 1880s. This narrative is consistent with colonial historiography in many other regions of the former British Empire that justified primitive accumulation on the grounds that there were no indigenous people with rights to the land. Recently, scholars have sifted through different forms of evidence (linguistic, toponymic, folkloric, and oral-historical) to demonstrate strong cultural–geographical continuity between the present Maya residents and pre-contact Maya communities; see especially G. Jones, ‘Historical Perspectives on the Maya-Speaking Peoples of the Toledo District, Belize,’ expert report presented to the Supreme Court of Belize, 1997; Wilk, Household Ecology (note 4); R. Wilk, ‘Mayan People of Toledo: Recent and Historical Land Use,’ expert report presented to the Supreme Court of Belize, 1997. On Spanish efforts to pacify the Manche Chol in the 1670s, see J.E.S. Thompson, ‘Sixteenth and seventeenth century reports on the Chol Mayas’, American Anthropologist 40 (1938) 585–64.

26 The boundaries of the Toledo District were defined, and the first Magistrate (Francis Orgill) appointed, on March 24, 1882: AB, Handbook of British Honduras for the Year 1925.


refused to guarantee the security of the timber companies, writing in one curt letter that ‘all persons engaged in timber cutting … should be given to understand that they do so at their own risk’. In 1884, the Colonial Office asked the government to develop a strategy for the defense of timber companies that did not require imperial soldiers. In 1885 four members of the Legislative Council wrote to Goldsworthy, begging him not to remove troops:

We … have heard with astonishment and dismay that … the Troops are to be withdrawn. … In 1869 the Yeaiche Indians marched into and took possession of the town of Corosal where there were no troops. … In 1871 the same tribe attacked … Orange Walk … It is true that the Santa Cruz Indians are now friendly with us, but no dependence can be placed on them. They can bring 2,000 fighting men into the field, the Yeachis 500, & the Looches and other tribes a considerable force. A Militia, a Volunteer force … and a Frontier police force have been tried at various periods, and have all proved failures. … It is incumbent on us as Councilors to point out the results which will [arise:] trade and agriculture will be immediately affected – a feeling of security will give way to a feeling of apprehension – and a blow will have been inflicted which will not merely retard the progress of the Colony but actually cause it to retrograde. The capitalist and the immigrant will alike be deterred from entering a Colony deprived of essential protection for life and property.

Although this was a time when the Maya population of southern Belize was fast increasing as a result of the flight of Maya people from the Alta Verapaz into British Honduras, the settlers failed to stop the troop withdrawal. Instead, the state established a new trio of policies and practices to achieve hegemony.

‘To cultivate the goodwill of the Indians’

The new practices were worked out through a series of engagements between the Colonial Office and the Colonial Secretary, Henry Fowler. One of Fowler’s 1885 letters to the Secretary of State for the Colonies articulates their basic aim:

Our relations with the differing tribes of Indians on our frontiers are at present of a satisfactory character, and I see no reason to anticipate any change, provided the good
understanding that has been established is encouraged, and some pains are taken to cultivate the goodwill of the Indians.  

Fowler’s emphasis on cultivating goodwill marks an important shift to a mode of colonial hegemony that emphasized consent and territorialization more than military power. During Fowler’s tenure as Colonial Secretary, the colonial state recognized that the unknown and ungoverned Maya communities of the south required state institutions that could win, in Fowler’s words, ‘the goodwill of the Indians.’

These policies were anticipated principally for the western and northern regions of the colony, yet were only fully elaborated in the south after encounters between logging crews and Maya people there between the 1840s and 1880s. The southern half of the colony remained terra incognita to the colonial state; one colonial official wrote in 1859:

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

The search for mahogany by European loggers drew the state towards the source of these wooden bowls.

Thus the colonization of Toledo came to hinge on three practices that, taken together, aimed at territorializing the land and winning hegemony over the Mayas and other subaltern groups. The first practice involved transforming the forests of southern Belize into property, i.e., bringing the land into capitalist social relations. The state played the key role in this process by demarcating forest concessions on maps and legitimating land purchases through legal relations. The conversion of logging concessions into property claims created the rudiments of a market in private land and led to the establishment of the first colonial state institutions in southern Belize. This process created a highly uneven market in real estate, as the largest European firms gained logging concessions and came to own much of the colony’s land. The Maya were excluded from owning land; the forests they occupied were claimed by the state, which charged Maya farmers land taxes. The state thus facilitated primitive accumulation by ceding lands to logging firms. It also

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34 H. Fowler to Colonial Office, PRO, CO 123–176, 1885.
36 It is beyond the scope of this paper to elaborate upon the colonization of southern Belize; but this has been explained in O.N. Bolland, Formation, chapter 8; Wilk, Household Ecology (note 4), chapter 4; and J. Wainwright, Decolonizing Development: Colonial Power and the Maya, London, 2008, chapter 1.
extracted its own surplus from the Maya peasantry through land rents. 39 Maya farmers who could not afford to pay their land taxes suffered incarceration. 40

If the Maya could not own land, where would they live? On state lands, within Indian Reservations. This was the second practice essential to the colonization of southern Belize. The initial impetus for Reservations came from the western region of the colony, where conflicts between the Ichaiche Maya and logging crews were especially acute. Colonial planners imagined constructing a trio of spaces (marked A, B, and C in Fig. 1) where the Maya were to be geographically enclosed within the margins of the colony’s territory and effectively excluded from its polity. 41 Reservations were first demarcated in the south. The original plan for the Indian Reservation at San Antonio (see Fig. 2) suggests how the Reservations were initially imagined by colonial cartographers: as rectilinear spaces, drawn independent of social life and landscape features, intended to bring spatial order to the scattered and itinerant Maya. 42

And who would govern these Indian Reservations? At the end of the 19th century, the colonial state did not have any capacity in the Toledo District – indeed, it barely existed. Therefore the colonial government moved to incorporate Maya village leaders, known as ‘alcalde’, into colonial administration. 43 Alcaldes already existed in Maya communities in southern Belize, but their roles changed decisively in the late 19th century. Alcaldes became the local state, literally ‘a system’, formally attached to the Empire. They were charged with maintaining law and order, judging certain crimes, collecting taxes, and keeping watch over the territory.

For the colonial state to make the forest lands of southern Belize amenable to logging and the extraction of value, the ‘unknown forest’ lands needed first to be claimed as territory. To this end, the Indian Reservations and the alcalde system were intended to territorialize southern Belize for the

39 Wainwright, Decolonizing Development (note 36), 54–57. Wilk writes: ‘We can document that the Kekchi used most of the district, with little interference, for almost one hundred years. During that time they were denied the rights given to other Belizean citizens: to buy or to lease the land they worked’ (Household Ecology, xx). While it is true that ‘the Kekchi used most of the district’ (alongside Mopan and Garifuna people), the imposition of British taxes and encroachment of distant markets ‘interfered’ fundamentally with their livelihoods.

40 Wainwright, Decolonizing Development (note 36), 54–59.


before 1888, there were no ‘reserves of land set apart for Indians’ in the Colony, although provisions were made for such in the Crown Lands Ordinances of 1872, 1877 and 1886. Cartography by Eric Leinberger, UBC.
British without involving the costs of maintaining a colonial military. The Maya resisted the extraction of timber, forced settlement, and land taxes, at least in fragmentary, episodic ways. But the state kept few records of Maya challenges to these colonial practices. Instead, documentation comes through an institution that was trying to build a different form of hegemony over the Mayas: the Catholic Church. Colonial policies did not prescribe any specific role for the Catholic Church. Yet the absence of any

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44 Most anticolonial resistance escapes documentation and explanation. On the impossibility of historical knowledge of resistance to colonial rule, see P. Lalu, 'The grammar of domination and the subjection of agency: colonial texts and modes of evidence', *History and Theory* 39, 45-68.
meaningful state capacity (apart from the alcaldes), coupled with the growing Catholic Maya community, created opportunities for the Church in the governance of southern Belize.

The Catholic Church and colonial settlement

The colonization of southern Belize during the late 19th century proceeded through an odd combination of actors: the colonial state was thoroughly British, but Jesuits (mainly from Italy and the USA) administered the Church. The Jesuits, a teaching order, emphasized education as a means to approach indigenous communities. The first resident Jesuit pastor to Belize, Father Eustace du Peyron, came from Jamaica in 1851; in 1862, the year that British Honduras was declared a Colony, Father John Genon of Belgium moved from Livingston, Guatemala, to Punta Gorda, to establish the first Catholic residence in southern Belize (and the third in Belize, after Corozal and the City). The Catholic Church was beginning to build its infrastructure in southern Belize during the same period that the Colonial Office shifted its strategy towards settlement, reservations, and local rule. One of the main authors of the new policies, Colonial Secretary Henry Fowler, was elected president of the British Honduras Catholic Association at its 1879 founding.

Apart from the state, the Catholic Church was the most important European institution in colonial southern Belize. Insofar as each institution was motivated by a desire to win hegemony over the Maya, the aims of the Church and state broadly complemented one another. However, while the church fathers and state officials shared the goal of building hegemony over the Mayas, their approaches differed. Between the 1890s and the 1940s, records indicate that the two institutions clashed over an array of policies concerning alcohol, education, taxes, and more. One of the key tensions between the church and state concerned how to settle the Mayas in permanent communities. As we have seen with Tenk’s letter, the Catholic Church lobbied the state to enforce its settlement policies; at other times, the Church mediated between Maya communities and the colonial state. By examining church–state relations on the question of Maya settlement, we may learn about the dynamics of colonial power – and Maya resistance to colonial rule.

The issues raised in Tenk’s April 1913 letter foreshadowed a long debate over many of the central issues of colonial rule of the Mayas. In 1913–1914 the fathers again begged the state to compel the Mayas of the area around San Antonio to settle permanently in the village, the largest in the area. Rather than submit a mere letter from the father, which had previously failed to convince the colonial government to act, Reverend Hopkins forwarded a petition to the Colonial Secretary in London, which framed the church’s arguments as a call for order on behalf of the Mayas living in San Antonio:

There are many Indians in the district surrounding our village who live hidden away in the bush like so many wild animals. These men simply refuse to obey the summons of the Alcalde, who seems to be unable to enforce his orders. They respect no authority. The undersigned, therefore, humbly beg that some steps be taken by the Government of this Colony to force all the men of this vicinity, whether they live in the Town or not, to obey the Alcalde and to do their share in keeping the roads and streams in proper condition.

45 Limited Jesuit influence in British Honduras began when Jesuits were expelled from Spanish territories in 1767, but increased substantially in the 1890s.
It would be as great a benefit to those ignorant people as to those who now live in the Villages, and ultimately, to the Colony itself, if by some scheme these isolated individuals, – there are many of them – could be induced to live in the Towns. Once in the Town, they could easily be made to respect some authority, and to bear their just share in works affecting the public good; and their children could be made to attend school [-] no small advantage. To bring this about, we suggest that some financial favour be shown to these living in Villages or Towns, and we think that many would very soon give up their present manner of living in the bush, if they were required to pay twice as much per acre for their rented land as those who live in the Town.47

Although the state and church shared a distain for the so-called ‘wild’ ways of the unsettled Mayas – whom state agents sometimes called ‘Bush-men’ – the state did not wish to be seen as getting pushed around by the church. The Colonial Secretary forwarded the letter to the Acting Governor with a note suggesting that the state’s foremost concern was the collection of land rents:

The Bishop’s views were very similar to those eschewed by the Rev[erend] H.J. Tenk S.J. in [1913]: but he mentioned inter alia … that many of their Bush-men have obtained grants of land from Government & that they make money by subletting, contrary, I think, to the Law. The Bishop further suggested that … the inhabitants of towns and villages should be relieved from duties of keeping up roads and rivers unless paid for their work done and that all they should have to do should be to keep their towns and villages in reasonable order.48

The challenge of land rent collection was exacerbated by the state’s lack of geographical knowledge about the southern third of the territory. The surveyor general was asked to prepare a report on the terms in which the ‘San Antonio, Crique Gallina and Aguacate people hold their lands’; he wrote:

In the year 1893 an Indian reservation was laid out at San Antonio Toledo District for the Indians comprising 2560 acres [see Fig. 2]. About 100 families were allowed to cultivate within the same at the rate of $1 per family per annum. A few years after some of the Indians applied for leases outside of the reserve which were approved to them and they pay the same rental for them as other persons paying any other part of the Colony.49

In a note on this report, the Colonial Secretary argued that the Bishop had not grasped the fundamental challenge, viz: ‘to turn these people into citizens with at least elementary ideas of political rights & duties.’50 The state set about this task. Its first step was to quiet the Church. The Colonial Secretary wrote to the Bishop to indicate that ‘the Government is unable to take any steps to compel the people in question to live in the village.’51 Yet although this suggests that the matter was closed, the state promptly dispatched the District Commissioner of Toledo,

49 H.J. Perkins, 1914. ‘Inducements to Indians to live in villages.’ AB, MP 1237-14. Perkins adds that ‘some people from Punta Gorda applied to lease land near the reserve[;] their applications were approved and the land cultivated. I have no reason to think the Indians are sub-letting as most of their applications were small in area.’
50 R. Walter, 1914. ‘Inducements to Indians to live in villages.’ AB, MP 1237-14. Walter adds that the lots within the Reservations ‘are held during good behavior only.’ His reference to ‘good behavior’ underscores the challenge of producing consenting subjects.
John Taylor, to investigate the matter. Taylor traveled to ‘the village on the Columbia Branch of the Rio Grande’, known as San Pedro-Columbia, where over the course of two days he ‘took a numerical census of the village, and[d] interviewed the people’. Although written in haste and full of gaps, Taylor’s report is perhaps the most detailed colonial report on any of the Maya communities in the Toledo District from this period (formal contact between the state and the Maya communities was exceptionally rare in the late 19th century and remained infrequent until the 1960s). It is therefore worth considering in some detail.

Taylor’s tone and language suggest that this was his first visit to a Maya community. He begins his report by describing San Pedro-Columbia:

It is very prettily situated on high undulating land on the bank of the river, and lends itself to quick drainage after heavy rains. I found 29 houses inhabited, and one or two others in course of erection, and the bush being cleared for others in a portion of the reserve laid out by the Survey Department, – the whole [area] was enclosed with a paling and tie-tie fence. Besides the houses, there was a Church, and the whole only needs a school to complete a very nice little settlement[,] everything was very clean and orderly[,] even the domestic animals including Dogs and Pigs seemed to have a different appearance to those one meets with in the Northern and Western [I]ndian villages.54

Note how Taylor positively tropes this ‘very nice little settlement’ by characterizing San Pedro as ‘enclosed,’ ‘clean,’ and ‘orderly.’ Further on, his report aligns these qualities with the purported newness of the community: San Pedro is described as ‘a new village’; Taylor wrote that ‘there are still a few families who live outside’ the village, i.e., in alkilos or the forest. His report was written at a time when the boundaries around Maya villages, as well as the Indian Reservations, were continually blurred and crossed. Taylor’s descriptions in this report – such as his comment about ‘families who live outside’ – imply that San Pedro was no fixed and permanent settlement, but rather a node of activity within a complex landscape where Maya households prioritized mobility and livelihood security.56

The question of where the Mayas were living impinged on the issue of greatest concern to the state: tax avoidance and sub-leasing. About sub-letting Taylor wrote: ‘I could not find the slightest

\[52\] J. Taylor to Colonial Secretary, 1914. ‘Inducements to Indians to live in villages.’ AB, MP 1237-14. Taylor sent his report 31 August 1914; it was received in Belize City 5 September 1914. Before Taylor became DC of Toledo, he was the warden of Belize’s prison. The 1884 dispatches to London regarding the establishment of the Reservation and the alcalde systems include a despatch on the need to improve prison discipline (see PRO CO 123/172, 1884).

53 John Taylor was appointed DC of Toledo on 1 October 1913. Consider that in three and a half years he had never traveled to San Antonio or San Pedro, the most accessible and populated Maya communities. This suggests just how little British officials of the colonial state visited Maya communities. In the surviving Minute Papers of 1895–1934, the reports by Toledo DCs indicate that the journeys to even the largest Maya villages were extremely rare, and that the DCs had little knowledge about the locations, let along the language or livelihoods, of the Mayas. Usually Taylor only traveled to the villages once a year for a short trip. In 1916, he walked from San Pedro to San Antonio, where he stayed one night to conduct research before returning to San Pedro and then to Punta Gorda. The lack of evidence in state records about the presence of Mayas in rural Toledo in the 19th century does not indicate that Mayas were not living there.

54 J. Taylor to Colonial Secretary, AB, MP 1237-14.

55 See note 54. For instance, Taylor counts 124 people as living ‘within the village’ and another 30 ‘within one mile.’ He does not say how many live more than a mile away – or where – and he could not have known after only one day in the village.

56 On Maya household livelihood strategies in southern Belize, see Wilk, Household Ecology (note 4).
All the adult males of the village lease lands and work them’. From San Pedro-Columbia, Taylor traveled to San Antonio, where he found ‘a much larger Pueblo, the houses and inhabitants much more numerous and scattered around the valleys of the hill upon which the Cabildo stands – of course this is a much older settlement.’ He elaborated on the problem of sub-letting:

Section 26 of Chapter 103 of the Consolidated Laws lays down the penalty for that offence in connection with a lessee’s lease. I found no trace of sub-letting leases at all; many persons were questioned by me, and in a few cases it appeared that the lessees permitted others (one here and there) to live upon and cultivate a portion of their lease, paying them a small amount, and thus assisting the lessee, the responsible party to the Government for the rent of the whole.

I found in 1905, when in this District, that it was a common thing for 2 or 3 and sometime more Indians to work a piece of land together, and only one of them in the rent roll as the lessee, who was responsible for and paid the rent of the whole. This is not Sub-letting.

Upon the subject of the Petition, very little need be said; certainly there are many families who live away from San Antonio in the bush, but upon their own lands leased from the Government, – they are not hidden, neither do they live like wild animals, and the men who have refused to obey the Alcaldes summons, are correct in doing so; – they cannot be called upon to do work under the reserve rules. I found upon inquiry – from the Alcaldes and others, it was believed that for 10 miles around the Alcaldes had jurisdiction.

Taylor concluded by questioning the legitimacy of the petition that caused his report: ‘There are many adult Males there able to read and write, but apparently only one signed this petition for the whole of the signatures on the petition. Incidentally, I could find no trace of a Type-writer at San Antonio.’ The petition (see Fig. 3) was probably written on a type-writer in the Church office in Punta Gorda.

Taken together, the Bishop Hopkins’ letter and Taylor’s report suggest three traces of Maya resistance. First, it seems likely that Maya farmers were signing up in groups to lease or use land in reservations, possibly to reduce the amount of land rent that needed to be paid. Even if sub-leasing was not common, having a single farmer sign up for land that would be used by multiple farmers reduced the risk that one person would have to pay land rent alone at a time when wage work or markets for agricultural goods were scarce. Second, these texts contribute to the considerable evidence that Mayas moved frequently, ignoring Reservation boundaries. They repeatedly established places that the British recognized as villages and then moved, partly to avoid paying land rent and partly to open new lands for maize planting. Third, Taylor’s reference to those who ‘have refused to obey the alcalde’s summons’ suggests that Maya households would at

57 A ‘cabildo’ is typically a building for colonial administration; in villages in southern Belize, the cabildo is typically the place where the alcalde holds court.

58 See note 54. Taylor’s ‘finding’ that several farmers would ‘work a piece of land together, [with] only one of them in the rent roll’, could be interpreted as an illustration of customary practices: Maya farmers typically collaborate in clearing land, exchanging their labor without monetizing labor-power.

59 The Church was then located at its present site: by the Punta Gorda shoreline, five blocks south of the center of town (where the District Commissioner kept an office). Tenk’s grave may be found in front of the Church, on the lawn to the west of the main entrance.

60 On the dynamics of movements by Maya households in southern Belize, see Wilk, Household Ecology (note 4).
There are many Indians in the district surrounding our Village who live hidden away in the bush like so many wild animals. These men simply refuse to obey the summons of the Alcalde, who seems to be unable to enforce his orders. They respect no authority.

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

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

To bring this about, we suggest that some financial favour be shown to those living in Villages or Towns, and we think that many would very soon give up their present manner of living in the bush if they were required to pay twice as much per acre for their rented land as those who live in the Town.

Aquacal, MoHo, R., March 21st, 1914.

Vincent & Co.
Andres & Co.
Domingo & Co.
Tomas & Co.
Francisco & Co.
Pedro & Co.
Matias & Co.
Pedro & Co.
Domingo & Co.
Francisco & Co.

Fig. 3. Portion of letter and signature page sent by Reverend Tenk to Belize City in 1914 (AB MP 1247-18).
times move as a means of resisting state authority. The state lacked the means to investigate, let alone prevent, these practices. Notwithstanding their often opposing views, the state therefore relied on the Church to cultivate goodwill among the Maya.

‘To hold the Indians together in towns’

The church’s approach to ‘civilizing the Maya’ centered on drawing Maya households out from ‘the bush’ to live in permanent settlements where they would be disciplined through church-led education. In 1918 the Reverend Tenk again petitioned the Governor with complaints about the Maya. ‘[M]any of the Indian parents have taken their children out of the schools,’ he wrote.\(^6^1\)

In his letter, Tenk described the movements of the Maya in and around two villages:

At San Antonio in March 1917 there were 130 names on the school register; in March 1918, only 110. The teacher of this school gave me the names of 16 children of school age who have been taken to the ‘bush’ to live. At least 28 men with their families have left San Antonio to live along in the ‘bush.’ There are others who have been living in the ‘bush’ near San Antonio for some years past.

At Aguacate in March 1917 there were 49 names on the school register; in March 1918, only 34. A number of men with their families have recently left this town also to live in the bush, and others I learnt are about to follow their bad example. The Indian prefers the freedom of the bush to the company of men.

Endeavors should be made to keep them together in the towns where they would send their children to school and they themselves would become more civilized.

Tenk concluded by outlining four reasons that the Mayas ‘are leaving the towns’:

1. They wish to be free. When they are living out of the towns they are not annoyed by the Alcalde’s orders. They do not have to work for anyone else. They will not be obliged to help to clean the town & the roads, nor to lend a hand to any public work. They come to town to enjoy the ‘fiestas’ & remain away when there is work to be done.
2. When away they are not bothered about sending their children to school, but can make them work. (Others now living in the towns see this and will soon follow them. It makes the good feel their duty of sending their children to school the more onerous and distasteful.)
3. Some go away because they meet with some annoyance from other on account of their hogs and chickens. They say that the animals must have some space in which to roam about. They are fined when their hogs do damage. And sometimes others kill their hogs, etc. This might be remedied by enlarging the enclosed portion of the towns and by appointing some one to keep the fence area closed.\(^6^2\)

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\(^{61}\) Reverend Tenk, 1918. ‘Inducements to Indians to live in villages.’ AB, MP 1237-14. See also Tenk’s letter to the Governor at AB MP 1472-18, ‘Excessive drinking of rum by Indians of Toledo District.’

\(^{62}\) The ‘etc., etc.’ suggests that Tenk finds pigs to be a disgusting and absurd reason for one not to want to live in town. And his solution – total enclosure – is essentially spatial. What is at stake is precisely to manufacture of a new spatiality, a governmentality of property and encircled hogs. Pigs play a crucial role in rural Maya livelihoods because of their mobility and marketability. Raising pigs provides a form of security for a cash-poor farmer.
4. At San Pedro, Columbia, some complain that they are forced to pay $1.00 a year to live in the town and, unlike at San Antonio, they get nothing for it, for, they say, the land allotted to them is by no means enough for all.

(We should be pleased to have them live together and not make it seem hard to them when they do so, but, rather, try to persuade to remain together in the towns).

We beg that something be done to hold the Indians together in towns that we may be able to begin to educate and civilize them.

Tenk’s letter provides further evidence that Maya people resisted settlement. Perhaps because this letter was less contrived than Tenk’s earlier efforts, it drew a more concerted response from the state, which again asked Taylor to conduct research and address its claims. Taylor’s thorough reply is especially useful for interpreting state practices and views towards the Mayas from this period. His report discusses the five ‘recognized Indian Pueblos’ at this time: San Antonio; ‘San Pedro-Columbia, Rio Grande’; ‘Aguacate Creek, Moho River’; ‘Crique Saca, Temash River’; and ‘Dolores, Sarstoon River.’ Taylor explained that Alcaldes have ‘strictly confined’ jurisdiction to the first four, but that in the case of Dolores the Alcalde has ‘Jurisdiction over San Pedro Sarstoon – 6 miles from Dolores, and Temash Village on the border line, 3 miles to the west of Dolores, and with outlying villages between San Pedro and Dolores.’ He correctly sensed that there were many more Maya people in rural Toledo, living outside of towns and recognized villages. Outside of the ‘recognized’ Maya communities, Maya households could perhaps avoid the land tax and the rule of an alcalde.

Resisting settlement implied that child would not attend school. This conflicted with the aims of the Church and the state. Taylor reported:

[I]f most children – (and their parents) – could have their own way, there would be no schools at all. ... On my occasional visits to the Indian Pueblos ... I generally get several applications for children, – either from themselves, or their parents – to leave school. I generally insist on their remaining until after the Examination by the Inspector of Schools. I have however, one or two cases, where it is the only, or Eldest Son of a Widow, who has no means of support, except the cultivate of a small piece of Reserve land, and who cannot afford to pay a man to cut down and clean the Milpa, – in cases of this kind, I have had to go outside the Law altogether and either excuse the Child[‘]s attendance for a certain time, or order half time attendance.

To address the problems of low school attendance and the refusal of Maya households to stay put in villages, Taylor called for the state to bring about ‘a complete improvement in their mode
of living, and habits generally, as well as in their methods of Agriculture." In a word, the task was to facilitate settled development. For if the Maya were to be civilized, they must live in settled communities where they could change their itinerant mode of agriculture and enjoy the fruit of development.

Facilitating these changes, Taylor stressed, was not the state's exclusive responsibility. The Church, too, must play a role:

I sympathize with Father Tenk, and realize his anxiety regarding these matters, for I recognize the good work that the Church, with its school, is doing, particularly amongst the Indians. Being to a certain extent in the embryo stage, – the uplifting – or improving this fast decaying race is difficult work, particularly as, judging by the ‘Father[’]s’ works in this, and other parts of the Colony which I have seen during my tenure in office [in British Honduras], in this and other Districts, – they are working so to speak shorthanded.

The expression ‘fast decaying race’ (which appears elsewhere in Taylor’s report) serves to bridge Taylor’s view of the work of the state and the Church: the urgency of their mission was grounded in the archaeological fact that the Mayas were once great. To reverse the decay, Taylor called for an intensification of the Church’s work:

Personally, I would like to see a Father stationed … at San Antonio, … being almost central between San Pedro-Columbia and Aguacate Creek, on the Moho. – Being resident there, a Father[’]s influence would be immense, – this however is a Church matter, – but even better than that […] I think to get some ‘Trappist’ Fathers to settle down on a grant of land from the Government, somewhere in the interior of the District, – they would no doubt in course of time prove a great boon to the Indians in cultivation matters (for I believe they are, what may be called an Agricultural Order) – as well[l] as other matters pertaining to their well-being, both spiritual and Temporal.

Remember that this exchange started when Reverend Tenk wrote to the Governor to ask the state to step in, to teach ‘the first duties of persons living in a civilized community.’ Here the state returned the compliment by soliciting the Church to cultivate, literally and figuratively, among the Maya.

Conclusion

Describing attempts by the Church to encourage ‘congregación’ – essentially, the forced settlement – of the Maya in the highlands of Guatemala during the 16th century, geographer George Lovell writes:

While much has been written about congregación, the country that is portrayed in the literature is characteristically more legal than real. Such an imbalance, given the nature of imperial bureaucracy and the state of extant documentation, is perhaps understandable, but it

65 See note 63.
66 See note 63. Taylor’s suggestion of ‘settling’ Trappist Fathers here is rich with meanings: the settlement and colonization by Trappists would be ‘a great boon to the Indians’ because it would introduce, literally, a new ‘Agricultural Order.’ These colonists would thus ‘settle’ the area, in the sense of ‘colonizing space’, ‘resolving’, and ‘calming.’
clouds our vision, it deludes and distorts.... Few Indians ever recorded how they felt about being converted to Christianity or being moved from one place to another.... There were, however, a number of clergymen who observed and debated the complex business of *congregación*, missionaries whose job it was to get Indian families down from the mountains and resettled in towns built around a Catholic church....67

Even with important differences between 16th-century Guatemala and 19th-century British Honduras, Lovell’s description aptly characterizes the latter. For as we have seen, the Church fathers (Tenk and Hopkins) could not convince the colonial state to respond exactly as they wished. While the Church enjoyed free rein in educating and preaching to the Mayas, the state did not bend to the Church on most matters and protected its relative autonomy. For the state, the Maya of the south were principally peasant farmers who played a dual role as providers of agricultural surpluses for the Belize City proletariat and occasional workers in rural, southern Belize. They were also a source of capital for the state, collected through land rents. And they were seen as political subjects to be transformed ‘into citizens with at least elementary ideas of political rights & duties,’ as Tenk put it in his 1913 letter.

Although the strategies employed by the colonial state and the Church for achieving hegemony differed by virtue of their different social organization and forms of power, their practices centered on the spatial regulation of Maya livelihoods. The Church and the state agreed upon the goal of settling the Maya by compelling them to settle in Reservations where they would attend school and pen their pigs. In the discourse on development, education and agricultural settlement are explicitly conjoined.68 In a 1918 letter, Bishop Hopkins begged the state to make education compulsory:

[W]ithout the compulsory attendance law a school in a purely Indian village is not likely to continue long. The novelty might appeal to Indian parents for a few months, but when they could see no practical good (that they could understand) coming to themselves they would withdraw their children. The compulsory law in Indian villages is therefore, I think, necessary, and where fully carried out, sufficient. Six years in school should be sufficient for an Indian child.69

Bishop Hopkins, aware that his appeal for compulsory education would be regarded as an effort to apply state resources to support the Church’s hegemony, framed his appeal with two familiar and persistent concepts. The first was *citizenship*: ‘Every encouragement should be given to the Indians to stay in the pueblos for thus they become better and more useful citizens.’70 The second was *land rent*: ‘an Indian can lease a lot of land in the ‘bush’, can then sub-let portions of it, and so get the land for nothing, whereas the town Indian has to pay a yearly rent for his holding besides suffering from other disadvantages....’71 So in framing his letter as an appeal for the suffering Mayas, Hopkins aligned the necessity of their compulsory education with the promise of regular

68 See Wainwright, *Decolonizing Development* (note 36), chapter 2.
69 Frederick Hopkins to Colonial Secretary, 1918. ‘Inducements to Indians to live in Villages.’ AB, MP 1237-14.
70 See note 69.
71 See note 69.
tax collection. Joining these three elements – education, taxing, and citizenship – was the task of
producing spatial order from the forests of Belize, which is to say, the task of settling the Maya.

We may now answer the question posed at the outset of this paper. For the Maya of Belize, the
‘first duty of living in a civilized community’ was to live in a community. Through colonialism the
Maya inherited the duty of living in a town, or at least a proper, recognized, settled village – one
where the Church and the state could do their work of ‘improving this fast decaying race’. 72 Thus
were civility and settlement joined in and for colonial hegemony.

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72 See note 63.