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Women's Activism in the Nationalist Movement and the Gendered Creation of State Hegemony in Belize, 1950-1960

by

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The very least you can do in your life is to figure out what you hope for... What I want is so simple I almost can't say it: elementary kindness.
Enough to eat, enough to go around.
The possibility that kids might one day grow up to be neither the destroyers nor the destroyed.
-Barbara Kingsolver, Animal Dreams

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Introduction

This thesis is an attempt to demystify the contested process of decolonization and state-making in Belize in the crucial decade of the 1950s, through a focus on the extent and meanings of women's activism, and on the gendered nature of the nationalist project itself. The existing historiography on Belize is silent on both these subjects, focusing more on the constitutional development of Belize in relation to Great Britain and Guatemala, and on the relative importance of class and race in analyzing Belizean history. My primary research using colonial government documents, the nationalist newspaper, and interviews with elderly activists, shows that the Creole working women of Belize City were central to the nationalist movement's strength and that the hegemonic project of the nationalist leaders involved specific constructions of women, men and the family as the basis of political and economic progress for the new nation.

Conceptually, gender is the social organization of sexual difference, and is thus not about women, but about relations between and among men and women, and between notions of masculinity and femininity.[1] The recognition of the agency and militancy of the Creole women of Belize City in the nationalist movement is an important part of my project, but my argument has larger implications concerning the importance of gender in

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[1] Joan Scott, Gender and the Politics of History (New York: Columbia, 1988).

understanding politics, particularly nationalism and hegemonic state-making. It is not enough to add women on to the existing explanations of Belizean history. This type of straightforward women's history, although it contributes useful information, does not challenge gender-blind theoretical explanations. Gender history does so by arguing that the explanations on offer, including ones that deal with class and/or race, are theoretically and historically inadequate because they ignore how the processes and institutions they study are gendered, indeed how their conceptual tools and their language are gendered.

My goal is not to quantify the strength of Creole women in the nationalist movement but to recognize that "each aspect of reality is gendered", including our own theories and methods.[2] The nationalism of the People's United Party and the Marxism of the leading Belizean historians, for all their differences, are both forms of knowledge which obscure gendered "relations of domination and the existence of contradictions."[3] To understand the process of nationalist struggle in Belize, or British Honduras as the British labelled it, and the nature of the quasi-independent state which emerged from it in 1964, we need to make gender a central category of inquiry. In what sense did

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[2] Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, "Recasting Women: and Introduction," in Ssangari and Vaid, eds. Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History (Delhi: Kali for Women, 1986), 2-3.

[3] Bruce J. Berman, Control and Crisis in Colonial Kenya: The Dialectics of Domination (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1990), 22.

the process of struggle and negotiation that was decolonization take place on a gendered terrain of popular culture and organization, of specific kinds of female militancy and specific gender ideologies? The thesis follows Irene Silverblatt's recommendation that "in order to understand the significance of gender relations, ideologies, images, and expectations in state-making and state-subverting processes we must unravel their social constructions and specific histories."[4]

In this introduction I will first sketch the main contours of Belizean history up to the late nineteenth century, where Chapter One begins, and then explain my use of hegemony and the state and how these concepts connect with those of gender and patriarchy.

Sidney Mintz has argued that in the Caribbean, particularly those parts colonized by the British as was Belize, the lack of any central cultural tradition has slowed and weakened the "emergence of an ethnically based national consciousness." There is in fact no pre-colonial nation for the post-colonial state to turn to for indigenous values or ways of living. These societies were wholly created by the violent processes of colonial and capitalist expansion, and their citizens are the most Westernized, heterogenized and colonized of "Third World"

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[4] Irene Silverblatt, "Women in States," Annual Review of Anthropology (1988), 444.

peoples.[5] This is true of Belize, with its small and incredibly diverse population, and this diversity has made the state the main unifying factor in modern Belizean society.

Unlike the Caribbean islands, Belize was a timber-extracting colony, coming to rely on sugar exports only in the late 1950s.[6] At the arrival of the British in the seventeenth century, the indigenous Mayan groups were far inland and contact did not begin until the nineteenth century.[7] A few British planters imported African slaves to cut logwood, and later mahogany, in gangs of men who lived in the bush up to 11 months of the year. The reliance on food imports was established during this period, as was control and concentration of land.[8] After emancipation, coercion was used to keep the Creole population off the land in order to maintain the forestry workforce.

From about 1800 the Garifuna - labelled Black Caribs by the British - began to arrive on the coast of southern Belize following expulsion from St. Vincent, and settled in fishing and subsistence agriculture villages. In the 1850s, after the Caste Wars in the Yucatan, thousands of Mestizo and Mayan peasants

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[5] Sidney Mintz, "The Caribbean Region," in Slavery, Colonialism and Racism Sidney Mintz, ed. (New York: Norton, 1974), 45-48.

[6] D.A.G. Waddell, British Honduras: A Historical and Contemporary Survey (London: Open University Press, 1961), 83.

[7] O. Nigel Bolland, Colonialism and Resistance in Belize (Belize: Cubola/SPEAR, 1988).

[8] Bolland and Assad Shoman, Land in Belize, 1765-1871 (Kingston: Insitute of social and Economic Research, 1977).

moved into northern Belize and were encouraged by the colonial state to begin small-scale food production. They also began to grow sugar cane, probably for internal consumption.[9] In the late nineteenth century the planter class was displaced by an merchant elite grown fat on the entrepot trade between Britain and the Central American republics, and linked to British forestry companies. These latter took over large tracts of cane lands in the north through mergers and buyouts and began estate production, bringing in indentured laborers from India. They also bought out local planters, combining their properties so that land concentration became yet more extreme.[10]

These transformations in production were associated with and facilitated by the transition to Crown Colony rule in the 1870s, a change which marked the end of the local elite's monopoly of political and economic power. But pressure came not only from Britain but also from the exploited groups in Belize in the form of Mayan attacks on sugar and timber works and strikes by the Creole workforce in the mahogany industry.[11] It was in fact this pressure from below that pushed local capitalists and merchants into accepting Crown Colony rule. I

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[9] Norman Ashcraft, Colonialism and Underdevelopment: Processes of Political change in British Honduras (New York: Teachers College Press, 1973).

[10] Trevor Petch, "Dependency, Land and Oranges in Belize," Third World Quarterly (July 1986), 1102-1017.

[11] In this transition, as with emancipation before and decolonization afterward, the resistance of Caribbean peoples, and their struggles with each other, shaped global level political and economic change.

have begun the history of popular resistance to Crown Colony rule in the 1880s, with conflict between a particularly autocratic Governor and the Creole women of Belize City, some of whom may have been born slaves.

Chapter One discusses the definitions of masculinity and femininity prevalent in Creole popular culture and traces the development of Belizean society and workers' relations with the colonial state until the 1940s. Gendered strategies were important both to the colonial state's emerging hegemonic project from the 1930s, and to organized resistance to colonial oppression, precisely because both developed through interaction with gendered popular culture - especially that of the Creole working class.

Chapter Two is a rewriting of the gender-blind Marxist analysis of the process of struggle and eventual accommodation in the 1950s. It stresses not only women's militancy but how women shaped popular demands which became established at the heart of the nationalist project alongside a contradictory commitment to capitalist growth premised on the exploitation of all workers, and particularly women - and was thus also committed to women's subordination within the family which makes them vulnerable to an oppression which is less patriarchal than capitalist. The Marxist narrative, which is that of Shoman, Bolland and Grant, stresses that the labor movement was key in the People's United Party being able to confront the colonial state. But women and women's networks were also important, to

both the union and the party, and were one focus of the colonial state's backlash against radical and uncontrolled nationalism. The chapter outlines the physical setting and gender division of labor in Belize City of the 1950s - neither of which have changed dramatically - as background to various types of women's militancy. It then proceeds chronologically, marking the events and transitions properly highlighted in the Marxist historiography as well as adding in women's experience and gendered conflicts in a way that transforms that historiography.

Chapter Three analyzes both the colonial and the contradictory nationalist discourse about women and appropriate femininity, discourses which shared a great deal and tended, like the state's and the nationalists' view of labor, to converge over the decade, as conflict evolved into negotiation and collaboration. It concludes with a brief discussion of how the meanings and practices which emerged as dominant with respect to women's political, social and domestic roles affected real women's lives after internal self-government was achieved in 1964. Finally, I will draw some theoretical conclusions which could inform subsequent comparative work on gender, decolonization, and state-making.

The independent states of the Commonwealth Caribbean are more hegemonic than the colonial states which preceded them.[12]

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[12] In this I agree with Clive Thomas' criticism of Carl Stone, who argues the reverse. Stone equates hegemony with the ability to dominate powerfully, which colonial states with their coercive apparatuses were perhaps better at. Their legitimacy was not illusory, but far more fragile than that of the post-colonial

This greater depth and stability of hegemony is due to the organized participation of the working men and women of the colonies, and the incorporation of part of their potentially counter-hegemonic agenda into a nationalism articulated by the middle class or petty bourgeoisie in its own interests. In Belize working men and women did empower themselves in ways controlled and limited by locally powerful classes and by the colonial state through the labor riots of the 1930s, union organizing in the 1940s, and the popular nationalist struggle of the 1950s. A theory of hegemony is necessary to understand the processes of control, resistance and collaboration by which the more radical possibilities engendered by working class and anti-colonial mobilization were closed off through incorporation, transformation and repression.

Women's subordination in particular continued despite their position "at the forefront of the struggle".[13] But their activism shaped the way the modern Belizean state claims its authority, and established contradictions around gender at the core of postcolonial state hegemony. It must be emphasized that just as working women's demands came out of a class experience, so are issues of class and gender linked in the construction of state hegemony. For example, popular definitions of masculinity and femininity were mobilized by the nationalists, particularly by the charismatic and astute George Price. This was a deep

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regimes.

[13] Interview with Philip Goldson, 2 July 1991.

source of legitimacy, a secure basis for a hegemonic project which did incorporate those definitions into its discourse and practices.

Hegemony is itself a contested concept in Marxist theory. In this thesis it is not used to mean ideological domination, nor complete consent. Resistance is not antithetical to hegemony.[14] Raymond Williams defines hegemony as a complex material social process through which the dominant groups' values and rules, especially those about who can be justifiably marginalized or repressed, come to constitute a sense of natural reality for most people. Hegemony has only a totalizing tendency, is never singular and always in need of renewal, re-creation, defense and modification in the face of continual resistance, challenge and manipulation of the dominant group's practices and ideas.[15] Hegemony is thus the ability of the dominant class or classes to secure a critical mass of acceptance (active, apathetic or cynical)[16] and to control dissent by marginalizing, transforming or incorporating alternative and oppositional forces. It is the ability to claim

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[14] James C. Scott, Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance (1985), argues that hegemony is ideological domination, and because the peasants of the Malaysian village he studied did not assent fully to the locally dominant class' values, there was no hegemony.

[15] Raymond Williams, Marxism and Literature (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 108-114.

[16] Joseph Femia concentrates on this aspect of hegemonic process in Gramsci's Political Thought: hegemony, consciousness and the revolutionary process (Oxford: Clarendon, 1981), 24-50.

moral and social leadership based on a constantly negotiated process of defending and recreating authority, in which profound contradictions are kept in play, never let come to a crisis point. This is accomplished through the state and institutions in civil society.

The state is the main form "in which the bourgeoisie organizes its social power," and a major arena of contestation and negotiation.[17] In Antonio Gramsci's analysis of capitalism's enduring stability, the state was in no way secondary, but as vital to capital's legitimacy as well as its growth.[18] The nation can be seen in this light also, a community imagined to obscure and contain social and economic struggle, and often imagined in gendered ways.[19] Bruce Berman stresses the necessity under capitalism for the political and the economic to appear separate, so that the state can present itself as neutral, fair and autonomous from class exploitation and

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[17] Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 2 and 8.

[18] Martin Carnoy, The State and Political Theory (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 72.

[19] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism (London: Verso, 1983), 102, makes the point that official elite nationalisms developed in the nineteenth century in order to incorporate and control already existing popular nationalisms, which presumably had some threatening class content. The development of elite or bourgeois nationalism was thus itself a successful hegemonic process. The essays by Uma Chakravarti, Lata Mani and Partha Chaterjee in Recasting Women all stress that the Indian nationalism developed in the nineteenth century against British rule had at its heart a notion of tradition that was intimately tied to the definition of woman.

struggle.[20] The relative autonomy of the state is no mystery, but an expression of its contradictory role of promoting capitalist accumulation and the legitimacy of capitalist social relations.[21] The state does not simply reflect class struggle and alliance but actively and creatively intervenes to shape, contain, and channel them, employing notions of gender, race and nation among others. The form and degree of the state's independence from capital depends on historical development, particularly the organized strength of subordinated groups.[22]

Gramsci argued that when the capitalist system is faced with challenge, a "passive revolution" involving a reorganization of state power and its relationship to the subordinated can be effective in excluding "the masses from exerting influence over political and economic institutions."[23] The very existence of the state "is itself the product of a modern age in which the masses have organized themselves and have - for the first time in history - a potential for self-government. The presence of the masses in politics is a precondition for their autonomy, but also results in an extended state that can respond to the threat of mass movement."[24] An

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[20] Berman, Crisis and Control, 26-27.

[21] Ibid, 28-29.

[22] Ibid, 30 and Nora Hamilton, The Limits of State Autonomy: Post-Revolutionary Mexico.

[23] Martin Carnoy, The State and Political Theory, 76.

[24] Ibid.

analysis of the development of state structure and practice reveals that every state is the relatively unpredictable product of social struggle and response to it. Perhaps the most significant extension of the state in the twentieth century has been the creation of welfare institutions and ideologies, a "passive revolution" on a scale as grand as the resistance to capital in the first half of the century. The 1930s in particular were a decade of crisis in both capitalist accumulation and capitalism's hegemony.

Welfarism, a profoundly gendered development, was pathetically insufficient to check anticolonial movements in the Caribbean, Africa and Asia, but has reproduced and deepened the hegemony of capitalist social relations.[25] Decolonization itself was a tremendously significant passive revolution, a reorganization of state power which brought to an end centuries of formal empire and facilitated new and rapid capitalist growth and accumulation through new alliances between international capital and independent states and ruling classes. It involved real changes in the political economies of former colonies and frequently involved enduring if contradictory relations between the independent state and the subordinated groups who helped create it.[26]

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[25] Berman, Crisis and Control, 33.

[26] Berman, 7; Clive Thomas, The Rise of the Authoritarian State Peripheral Societies (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 42-44.

In the Caribbean colonies of Great Britain, Clive Thomas argues, the educated professional class "forged an alliance with the masses and with other petty bourgeois and intermediate strata in the struggle for institutional reform." These middle groups "used mass action as the lever against the colonially entrenched ruling classes and the colonial authorities. This manipulation was in fact a vital feature of all of the independence settlements."[27] In response the colonial state became less purely coercive and repressive and developed economic development and social welfare roles. It attempted to promote the political interests of pro-capitalist local classes. "This, however, was no longer a straightforward matter, and the social struggles that ensued had a major effect on the form and content of the postcolonial state."[28] As Berman concludes, decolonization was an instrumental victory neither for capital nor nationalism, but a contested and negotiated process during which the main actors were feeling their way in the dark, testing their power and learning which strategies worked best.[29] Thomas argues that the postcolonial state is still based on the exclusion of the masses from real power, although mass politics did develop, civil society did blossom to a degree, and some popular demands have been met.[30]

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[27] Clive Thomas, 43-44.

[28] Ibid, 31-34.

[29] Berman, 415.

[30] Ibid, 54.

Assad Shoman describes the roots of postcolonial state hegemony in Belize as having roots in the nationalist struggle and the severe inequities of global capitalism:

> The post-colonial state enjoys a greater legitimacy with the people than the colonial state ever had, despite its very effective system of indoctrination, because it resulted from an anti-colonial movement that had a mass following and involvement, because in a still-emerging nation fragmented by class and ethnic divisions it is seen as the only possible hope for unity; because it is seen as the major vehicle for development, or at least the major means of ameliorating poverty.[31]

In the case of Belize the reformist leaders of the People's United Party ousted the radical working class leadership of the General Workers' Union, used the GWU to threaten the British, and transformed a potentially radical working class consciousness, in which women's demands were important, into a nationalist sentiment that stressed unity and suppressed the inequalities of class, ethnicity and gender. "The opportunity to unite a growing working class movement with anti-colonialism and the nationalist movement was lost - perhaps deliberately."[32] The nationalists of course did not just spin illusions, but involved the people and responded to their demands far more than the colonial state ever had. There were concrete advantages in decolonization for the working peoples of Belize - the relations of reciprocity between the nationalists and the people were

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[31] Assad Shoman, ""Belize: An Authoritarian Democratic State in Central America," Second Annual Studies on Belize Conference (Belize: SPEAR, 1990), 61.

[32] Assad Shoman, Party Politics in Belize 1950-1986 (Belize: Cubola, 1987), 24.

unequal, but did allow for negotiation and some bottom-up influence. The selective incorporation of the demands and perspectives of exploited social groups is the very essence of a successful hegemonic state.

Gender has been such a central arena of construction and challenge in state-making and state-subverting processes because "the operations of gender..are...present and defining forces in the organization of most societies."[33] Gender, Irene Silverblatt argues, can "carry the mystique of state power into the very marrow of human identity," and make the state's activities, particularly on behalf of capital, seem entirely natural.[34] The power of popular gender ideologies and their incorporation into nationalist projects were a firm basis for secure postcolonial hegemony, but the gendered basis of the nationalists' project was also indicative of women's capacity to resist and the need to control potentially oppositional female culture and politics. Williams' analysis of the role of resistant politics in a given hegemonic process is useful:

> At any time, forms of alternative or directly oppositional politics and culture exist as significant elements in the society. We shall need to explore their conditions and their limits, but their active presence is decisive, not only because they have to be included in any historical analysis, but as forms which have had a significant effect on the hegemonic process itself...[They are] indicative features of what the hegemonic process has in practice had to control.[35]

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[33] Joan Scott, 27.

[34] Silverblatt, 450.

[35] Williams, 113.

My research on Belize shows that female politics were decisive in shaping the hegemonic process in the 1950s, and that the nationalists controlled female militancy by firmly attaching the tradition of women's quasi-public caretaker role to the anticolonial movement, giving women some power and the illusion of much more. Existing class-based accounts cannot fully explain what happened in Belize in the 1950s; in fact, they misrepresent the process by masculinizing working class politics which were in fact heavily shaped by women's militancy and political agenda. I concur with Sonia Alvarez's argument that "Women are, and have always been, active subjects in politics and, as such, historically influenced State gender-specific policy outputs, even when their political participation was largely confined to noninstitutional political arenas."[36] Although Belizean women never organized independently outside the union or the PUP as women, they did contribute decisively to the definition of the state, just as the state contributed to the definition of Belizean womanhood.[37]

The woman most talked about in the nationalist newspaper and in PUP manifestoes is the wife-housewife-mother, a good citizen, faithful, loyal and strong, but subordinate to a familial male head. But the image of Creole womanhood which the

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[36] Sonia Alvarez, Engendering Democracy in Brazil: women's movements in Transition Politics (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 32.

[37] Irene Silverblatt, "Women in States," Annual Review of Anthropology 17 (1988), 452.

party effectively tied into, and which may have enjoyed the status of stereotype, was that of the "bembe woman". The image has roots in the gender division of labor, both economic and political. The bembes were the Creole street vendors, market women, domestics, washerwomen and shoppers, the women gossiping at the water standpipes and over the fences between yards and alleys. "They were not afraid to fight or curse or swear...They would fight, they were abusive."[38] Teacher and playwright Gladys Stuart created a character out of this image and reality - Cousin Winnifred who came on Radio Belize once a week in the 1970s to give her observations on local events and scandals. The tradition of the bembe lies behind women's prominence as canvassers, marchers, picketers, and rioters. The women who backed up George Price in the fighting that marked the splitting apart of the PUP in 1956 were bembes "because they [didn't] give a hoot for anything."[39] Elfreda Reyes, domestic and community leader, parted from Price with disgust for his ethnic and gender politics, and was in many ways the archetypal bembe woman. She led marches, stirred up crowds at rallies weekly, organized domestics for better wages and working conditions, and moreover, was "saucy... she would stand up to any man."[40]

The bembe developed out of the realities of male absence in the bush cutting timber and male irresponsibility and abuse. The

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[38] Interview with Gladys Stuart, 25 July 1991.

[39] Interview with Tharine Rudon, 28 July 1991.

[40] Ibid.

political economy and gender relations of Belize meant that Creole women, about a third of whom were single, had to learn to look after themselves and each other. By allying with these women, the PUP was tying into a realm where women had some social power, and through which the PUP could reproduce its illusions of giving working women some real power. By hitching the militancy of the bembes, as well as that of the labor movement, to the anticolonial project Price was able to entrench the notion that party politics empowered the people. The paradox of strong, tough, smart women apparently getting fooled by the PUP is explained by the fact that these women did have a better chance of influencing the PUP than the colonial state, by their strong anticolonial sentiment, and by the pride they felt in being the backbone of the movement. Many of these women, now elderly, are reluctant to trade in the power of their "all out support" for George Price for a new power rooted in the right to make and influence policy.[41]

Capitalism has always benefitted from the exploitation of women and female labor. Gramsci argued that the state, as a hegemonic apparatus, was linked to capitalist relations of production,[42] which clearly include gender relations, both within the family and in the operations of the wider political

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[41] Interview with Dolores Balderamos Garcia, 10 July 1991. Her cousin, Miss Lennie Jo Usher - another of Price's nieces - stressed to me how important the staunch PUP women consider their work for the party, how it must be respected for what it was in its time, and what it accomplished.

[42] Carnoy, 75.

economy. The specific character of peripheral capitalism makes gender relations even more central to the legitimacy of the state:

> Dependent capitalism... obstructs the development of social welfare policies and makes the peripheral State more reliant on the family and the private sphere for ensuring the reproduction of class, racial and gender power relations; the dependent State therefore will prove relatively more impervious to political claims that call for a reordering of gender power relations.[43]

Patriarchy as the rule of the father clearly does not explain the totality of women's oppression under capitalism,[44] although women's subordination within the family has certainly contributed to their vulnerability to capitalist exploitation. For the significant proportion of Caribbean and particularly Belizean women not in the immediate control of a male family head, the state has played an ambiguous role. In some ways it can be seen as a substitute male, coming through with much needed welfare and labor legislation. But the state's lack of resources and ultimate commitment to capital mean it has and will never deliver all of what women need. The capitalist state in fact maintains other gendered processes and also oppresses women directly.[45] Very much like the stereotypical Belizean man, the state promises but doesn't come through, comes to women for their strength and love but doesn't stick around too long to

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[43] Alvarez, 33.

[44] Michele Barrett, Women's Oppression Today (London: Verso, 1980), 19.

[45] Barrett, 229.

hear their problems, although it may leave a little compensatory money.

Given the way patriarchy is often used in a trans-historical sense and as a blanket term to cover all aspects of women's oppression under capitalism, it may be more useful to think of the Belizean economy and state as gendered in ways that reproduced women's subordination. The state never explicitly portrayed itself as the supreme paternal guardian in a social chain of patriarchy, but it did have a strong discourse about the moral rightness of the nuclear family as the basis of healthy national life. In practice it did not enforce the nuclear family and did have a reciprocal relationship with female heads of households in their political role. But the state that emerged from the nationalist struggle of the 1950s did fail to challenge women's oppression in civil society and incorporated gender relations oppressive to women into its hegemonic process of rule. To judge the women who devoted their energies to the creation of this state as having failed would be to ignore the character and limitations of their age, and the concrete accomplishment of making a female agenda central to the way that the state claims and practices its hegemony.[46]

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[46] Sangari and Vaid, Recasting Women, 19.

Chapter One: Historical Background

Temma Kaplan's argument that working class militancy is expressed through networks of women and their collective action, not only through trade unions and political parties, is important for a gender analysis of Belizean history prior to and including the nationalist struggle.[47] In this chapter I will amass what evidence of mainly Creole women's activism and gendered state practices exists from the late nineteenth century through the 1940s, in order to argue that a continuous if uneven process of learning was going on within both the state and civil society about how to deal with each other. The traditional periodization of Belizeans' resistance to capitalism and colonialism will be challenged by my focus on the relationship between women's political activism and the state.

Our knowledge of nineteenth century women and gender relations in the colony is limited. We do know that the slave population was very heavily male and the female slaves were overwhelmingly employed in urban domestic work.[48] Coercive land and labor policies after emancipation in 1838 kept Creole men at work in the forests, and Creole women living in poverty in

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[47] Temma Kaplan, "Female Consciousness and Collective Action: The Case of Barcelona, 1910-1918," Signs 7:3 (1982), 545-551.

[48] O. Nigel Bolland, Colonialism and Resistance in Belize (Belize: SPEAR, 1988), 52. His source is the 1834 Slave Register.

Belize Town.[49] No ex-slave peasantry developed, although Mayan women, immigrant Garifuna women, and mestizas fleeing the Caste Wars in the Yucatan all had some access to land in rural areas, and associated economic and social power. The power of the urban community of Creole women - domestics, street vendors, washerwomen - was revealed in a violent 1886 incident. This episode is important not only for its content but also because it displaces the 1894 mahogany cutters' riot that most historians cite as the dawn of politicized labor protest in British Honduras, as Belize was then known.

On Tuesday November 2, 1886, Governor Goldsworthy sailed from Belize, having been recalled to England in shame. Two years before he had contracted two cronies to dredge sewage from the town's canals during the hot rainy season and allowed them to pile the filth on the banks instead of dumping it offshore. As the colony's doctors had warned, a yellow fever epidemic broke out. It killed fully one half of the town's infants as well as many adults. On the day Goldsworthy sailed a huge crowd cheered his departure and a group of Creole women and children - "pugnacious viragoes and gamins" - hurled rocks and curses at him, wading into the sea to evade the police.[50]

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[49] The settlement became Belize City in 1943.

[50] Wayne Clegern, British Honduras: Colonial Dead End, 1859-1900 (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University State Press, 1967), 79. His source is the Colonial Guardian newspaper of November 6, 1886.

The clash confirms Kaplan's argument about the way social issues are deeply political for women who have been socialized to preserve life, of how they will rebel against the state in defense of family and community - the very things that the state and other institutions tell women they are responsible for by nature. But Kaplan's assumption that men are not socialized to preserve life creates too clean a dichotomy between male and female consciousness and practice. Creole men - the fathers, brothers and husbands of the dead - may well have protested - and women may not have been wholly accepting of the all the roles and morality associated with the "traditional" gender division of labor. The reality was that for eleven months of the year the men lived in the bush cutting mahogany in terrible conditions, most deeply indebted through the advance and commissary system. Their habitual absence meant that Creole women had developed public political skills, and that their relationship to the colonial government and local merchant elite was less mediated by familial patriarchs than for women of other ethnic groups further away from the centre of colonial power.[51]

Creole women were still, of course, specifically oppressed as women in the colonial and developing capitalist society of late nineteenth century Belize. But this oppression and their

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[51] Narda Dobson, A History of Belize (London: Longman Caribbean, 1973), 291 argues that for Creole women in Belize Rural District as well, the absence of men "had the effect of bringing [them] into village affairs, unlike their Maya or Carib sisters."

modes of resistance to it are captured at once in the hostility of a bereaved mother hurling a rock at the man who symbolizes the state's responsibility for her child's unnecessary death. The relationship between women and the state, or all of civil society and the state for that matter, was less hegemonic than overtly hostile and coercive. Late nineteenth century colonial rule in Belize was not based on incorporation of peoples' demands but on domination - as Belizeans learned to organize and articulate demands the colonial state would have to work out new strategies of control and accumulation.

Norman Ashcraft and D.A.G. Waddell agree that from the establishment of the Crown Colony status in 1862 until the labor rising of the 1930s, the colonial state utterly neglected economic development, social welfare and infrastructure.[52] Imperial policy was based on the belief that the free flow of capital would develop the colonies, that government had no role in this process.

There is evidence though, that the colonial state continued to reproduce gendered notions of identity in the Creole working class, in order to maintain a secure, motivated and productive labor force in the key forest industry. This may have been especially true after the 1894 rioting and looting by mahogany cutters who returned from the camps "to find that a currency

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[52] Norman Ashcraft, Colonialism and Underdevelopment: Processes of Political Change in British Honduras (New York: Teachers College Press, 1973), 47; D.A.G. Waddell, "Britain, British Honduras, and Belize," Belizean Studies 16:2 (1988), 23.

devaluation had severely reduced their wages."[53] Cynthia Ellis, the director of the Belize Rural Women's Association, has argued that the colonial government and local elite "feminized" agriculture and "masculinized" forestry in order to inhibit peasant settlement by the Creole population. Historian Peter Ashdown confirms this in his description of the 3000 Creole men who worked in the mahogany gangs, inadvertently contributing to the history of gender and the state in Belize:

> While the system under which they were employed kept them in a state of perpetual bondage to their masters, they clung to the belief that woodcutting was a "masculine" occupation particularly suited to the Creole physique and mentality. That belief was continually reiterated not only by the colonial government but particularly by the Creole elite of some dozen or so families.[54]

Here gendered notions of work and self, especially this male ethnic and occupational identity, stabilized both class relations and state-civil society relations, while contributing to ethnic prejudice among the colonized groups. Granny Ivy, quasi-fictional nationalist militant of the 1950s, tells her daughter-in-law and granddaughter in Zee Edgell's novel Beka Lamb that the control by the government and corporate landowners of the land is "to force us to work for starvation wages instead

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[53] Bolland (1988), 162.

[54] Peter Ashdown, Race, Class and the Unofficial Majority in British Honduras 1890-1949 unpublished PhD, 1973.

of for ourselves. They keep reminding us that we are hewers of wood, not farmers, and we believe it."[55]

The bembe women on whom Ivy is partially based, may well have read the following editorial in the nationalist Belize Billboard on March 30, 1950. Written by Mervyn Hulse, a leading agitator, the article is a gendered, sexualized exhortation to Creole men to keep fighting and pushing the colonial government. The significance of the simultaneous and contrasting efforts to calm women down will be discussed in the next chapter. I quote the article here to illustrate the cultural power of the masculine identity associated with mahogany cutting. Hulse glorified the lumbermen as a "toughened breed of men [who] performed real feats of strength and endurance," and he described these "muscular he-men" being led in a vulgar heave-ho song by a gang captain. He finally describes men's efforts to move big logs:

> There were women of voluptuous bulges, who became famous throughout the camps, because some particular awkwardly built bulging giant of a log reminded the heaving and panting men of her past favours, and that log was sure to be dubbed and even painted "Susie's Butt."[56]

Ironically, the British criticized Creole men's attachment to forestry when they began to advocate agricultural development for the colony. The Peace Handbooks, prepared during the First

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[55] Zee Edgell, Beka Lamb (Kingston: Heinemann Caribbean, 1982), 55. This novel is the jewel of Belizean fiction. It spurred me to look for historical evidence on women despite the silence of the published historical works.

[56] Mervyn Hulse, "Handwriting on the Wall," Belize Billboard 30 March 1950, 6-7.

World War and published in 1920, argue that the freedom of woodcutting meant that "The strong, robust man refuses to till the land; he leaves that work for those who are enfeebled by age or otherwise incapacitated."[57]

The hegemony of the colonial state, especially before the 1920s, was of a different quality and strength than that of the state after self-government was achieved in 1964. It seems plausible that the same or similar gendered imagery was used by both, as it resonated with, and very likely grew out of, popular Creole culture.[58] The counterpart to the he-man was very likely the bembe woman. Certainly it would have served the colonial state's interests through the decades of malign neglect to invoke the image of a strong capable woman needing no help from men or government. This is a flexible image - when the state wants to do something it mobilizes and controls these women, when it doesn't want to act, it invokes their independent strength. It is also one easily shorn of its oppositional potential and rendered safe. The use of the word virago to describe the women in 1886 moved toward such depoliticization, for it suggested that these women were like men in strength and spirit.

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[57] Great Britain (Foreign Office), The Peace Handbooks volume 21: North, Central and South America: Atlantic Islands (London: History Section of Foreign Office, 1920), 28.

[58] Robert French and Keith Kernan, "Art and Artifice in Belizean Creole," American Ethnologist 8:2 (1981), 250 , saw 1970s Belize City youth culture as exhibiting "deep-seated sexual antagonism" between men and women, and among each group. How far back this can be extrapolated is a matter for further research.

The state's neglect of Belizeans' welfare was marginally offset by a chicle boom from the turn of the century to 1914. It was cut short by World War One, which blocked exports and imports.[59] Several hundred men left for the Middle Eastern fronts in 1915 and 1916. While they experienced the overt racism of the empire at war and developed an anticolonial black pride, the women and men at home experienced a 400% jump in the cost of living, much of which was created by the merchants. They were also exposed to the Garveyite Negro World and the local Belize Independent.[60] Judging by domestics' wages in 1914 ($3-$10 a month for women, and $10-$15 a month for men) the worsening of already bad conditions must have been almost as politicizing as the soldiers' war experience.[61] The Colonial Report from 1917 stated that 40% of babies born in the colony that year were illegitimate.[62] Although this almost certainly does not take account of common law unions, it does suggest that there were significant numbers of female heads of households who would have been particularly affected by the price rises. Social problems

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[59] Peter Ashdown, "The Growth of Black Consciousness in Belize 1914-1919: the Background to the Ex-Servicemen's Riot of 1919," Belcast Journal of Belizean Affairs 2:2 (1985), 1.

[60] Peter Ashdown, "Race Riot, Class Warfare and Coup d'Etat: The Ex-Servicemen's Riots of 1919," Belcast Journal of Belizean Affairs 3:1/2 (1986), 9.

[61] Great Britain (Foreign Office), The Peace Handbooks volume 21: North, Central and South America: Atlantic Islands (London: History Section of the Foreign Office, 1920), 30.

[62] Annual Colonial Report for British Honduras, 1917. (London: HMSO, 1917), 5.

grew yet more acute with the flu epidemic of 1918, which "brought to British Honduras a new kind of social awareness, cohesiveness, and a heightened sense of national health needs."[63]

Thus, although there is no direct evidence of women participating in the January 1919 "ex-servicemen's" riots, it is reasonable on the basis of their previous and subsequent activism, their roles in the gendered division of labor, and their hostility to the gouging merchants, to speculate that they did play a part. They probably numbered among the hundreds who smashed the merchants' shop windows and looted their imported goods. That their demands have gone unrecorded is likely more a measure of officials' and historians' biases than a lack of consciousness or militancy in the community of Creole women

The immediate response of the colonial government was to call for naval support, send out the militia and police (many of whom sided with the rioters), and telegraph "groundless messages about the imminent rape of white women".[64] But in the 1920s a more constructive response developed with the filling and settling of the Mesopotamia neighborhood and the reclamation of Fort George.[65]

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[63] Eleanor Krohn Herrmann, Origins of Tomorrow: A History of Belizean Nursing Education (Belize: Ministry of Health, 1985), 37.

[64] Ibid.

[65] John C. Everitt, "The Growth and Development of Belize City," Journal of Latin American Studies 18, 99-100.

In 1920 domestics' wages were still low, with women's at $6-$8 a month and men's at $10-$15 a month.[66] In this same year the Black Cross Nurses (BCNs) were formed as part of the surge of support for Marcus Garvey and the United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).[67] Eleanor Herrmann argues that the increased awareness of health issues following the flu epidemic contributed to the growth of the organization.[68] The BCNs were older women with family responsibilities who wanted to ameliorate living conditions among the working class in Belize Town. The Belize Woman, a publication of the Belize Rural Women's Association (BRWA), calls them "gallant housewives [who] left their comfortable homes to give service in their communities." By Herrmann's account they were married women with some but not extensive means, perhaps rather different from the well educated young middle class women accepted into the professional student nurse training. The BCNs conducted on their own a house to house survey of Belize Town in 1920, that revealed severe overcrowding, neglected children, and health problems. They then asked the colonial government in 1921 to finance their training as general and maternity nurses, citing

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[66] General Information for Intending Settlers in British Honduras (London: Overseas Settlement Office, 1920), 5.

[67] Herrmann, 39 and Peter Ashdown, "Marcus Garvey, the UNIA and the Black Cause in British Honduras 1914-1949," Journal of Caribbean History 15 (1981), 45.

[68] Herrmann, 36.

their familial burdens. The government refused to come up with money, but was lavish with verbal encouragement.

Twenty women reacted to this rebuff by hiring a government medical officer and midwife and studying two nights a week at 20 cents a week for six months, after which 17 passed their nursing exams. Immediately the government's interest grew. In 1922 Governor Hutson asked the BCNs to focus on maternity and neonatal care through community health visits and the annual Babies' Health Exhibit.[69] While the male-dominated, and far more clearly middle class UNIA squabbled and degenerated into a friendly society by 1926, the BCNs expanded. Their numbers increased, they staffed the maternity ward opened in 1926 and by 1928 had established the Infant Welfare League. In that year alone the League's work cut infant mortality in town by 50%.[70]

Ashdown argues that the colonial government decided to tolerate and coopt the UNIA, and did so successfully, helped by the branch's pro-business attitudes and its fighting over money. While the UNIA was let die, the BCNs were cultivated by the colonial state. While Ashdown is wrong in saying they were founded "with Government patronage", a relationship was soon established, one which channelled whatever radical impulse may have existed at the outset into charity-oriented social work. The BCNs "continued to provide a much needed service for the

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[69] Ibid, 39-42.

[70] Ibid, 42; Ashdown (1981), 49-51.

economy's poor and unemployed" through the 1930s and 1940s.[71] They were very active after Hurricane Hattie in 1931 and in providing information to the Moyne Commission in 1938 through their sixty- page Compendium of Living Conditions and Dietary Statistics of the Labouring Classes in the Town of Belize, British Honduras.[72] But their role was to relieve suffering, at almost no cost to the state. In 1935, in the midst of working class revolt, the BCNs marched loyally at Government House to mark some Royal occasion[73]; in 1936 they donated first aid kits to every school in Belize Town[74], and in August 1951, following the Governor's dissolution of the nationalist Belize City Council, the BCNs' original leader (Vivian Seay), was appointed by the Governor to an interim City Council (CitCo).[75]

The BCNs worked well within the reformist imperial policies begun in the 1930s and elaborated in the 1940s. The image of the strong Creole woman sacrificing herself for her community was rich in potential for the state, and could be successfully recast in ways that deflected serious analysis of social and economic problems, particularly as they affected working women.

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[71] Ashdown (1981), 51.

[72] Herrmann, 44.

[73] Ashdown (1981), 66.

[74] Herrmann, 43.

[75] "Two Women in New CitCo," Belize Billboard, August 14, 1951, 3.

Angela Miles has insisted that female politics can be a politics of social transformation, a universal challenge to society, **if** the value of service to others is used to criticize rather than oil the wheels of oppressive systems. Concern for others, she argues, must become "the organizing principle of all society" and stripped of its associations with subservience and instinct. Retaining respect for women's work based on "the old values of caring, sharing, cooperation and solidarity," her perspective "allows us to express the politically conscious sisterhood of women's liberation as a transforming continuation of the age-old tradition of support and service among women."[76]

The Black Cross Nurses are perhaps the prime Belizean example of how a radical female consciousness of the kind Kaplan discusses can be woven into the state's hegemonic project and thus reproduce social relations oppressive to working women in particular. The BCNs' achievements were limited by the combined force of state patronage, Seay's middle class leadership, and the UNIA's own reformist politics. Yet the work done to contain the organization may indicate that the state in the 1920s saw as threatening a group of Creole women active on social issues which, as Kaplan argues, the gender division of labor predisposes women to deal with politically.[77] The way the PUP

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[76] Angela Miles, "Ideological Hegemony in Political Discourse: Women's Specificity and Equality," in Angela Miles and Geraldine Finn, eds. Feminism in Canada: from pressure to politics (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1982), 214-226.

[77] Kaplan, 566.

treated its own United Women's Groups in the early 1960s was similar.

The final development in the 1920s of significance in terms of gender is that mechanization in the forest industry cut the men's work season from 11 to 6 months.[78] The implications of this for household income and power relations, men's and women's identities, and the development of class consciousness have yet to be explored. It may be that a technological innovation so characteristic of capitalism led to a crisis of masculinity for Creole men and fed into the working class anger which exploded in 1934. Further mechanization in the 1930s permanently reduced the number of men needed in the forest industry, which was also rapidly declining for ecological reasons.[79]

A series of demonstrations, rallies and marches, led by barber and migrant worker Antonio Soberanis Gomez, developed from March 16, 1934 to the riots of early October. Marxist historiography has established the socioeconomic and political reasons for the disturbances, but is silent on their gendered dimensions. The largest hurricane in a century destroyed 75% of Belize Town in September 1931, killing 1000 of its 16 000 inhabitants, and creating an acute overcrowding problem.[80] Mesopotamia was reduced to rubble and its inhabitants forced to

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[78] Ashcraft, 85.

[79] Bolland (1988), 169.

[80] Bolland (1988), 169.

have mass burnings of the dead.[81] The colonial state responded with better roads and drainage and indoor sanitation for the middle classes. Not surprisingly, these measures were insufficient to prevent organized unrest. Unemployment had been rising with the decline of the forest industry and jumped as the effects of the Depression in the world capitalist economy hit. The situation since emancipation a century earlier - bad and expensive food, low wages, malnutrition, poor housing and health care - worsened:

> As the economy continued to decline after the hurricane, conditions worsened and people became increasingly desperate. Forest workers were paid pitiful wages, supplemented by inferior rations from truck shops; they lacked medical attention and lived in insanitary conditions in the camps. Bad as living and working conditions were in the camps, however, the brunt of poverty was often borne by women, children and old people who, separated from the working men by six-month logging seasons, had little security of income. They suffered in Belize City from poor diet and, particularly after the hurricane, from overcrowded housing.[82]

There were even families surviving on inferior flour and pork in lieu of wages, leading to increased malnutrition, despite the food that Garifuna families sent from their farms in Stann Creek, especially after the hurricane. In Edgell's Beka Lamb, Granny Ivy remembers "After '31 hurricane, families in Stann Creek sent food to feed lots of people up here, and we were glad to take from their hands then."[83]

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[81] Everitt, 101.

[82] Ibid, 170.

[83] Edgell, Beka Lamb, 67.

The imperial power's response was cruel. To secure a reconstruction loan the Legislative Council had to give up financial control to the British Treasury.[84] What relief money was given was misused - the Belize Estate and Produce Company, largest of the forest employers, acquired BH$200 000 of government relief funds to build the colony's first sawmill. And in 1933 and 1934 landowners succeeded in reducing the tax on chicle and abolishing it on sawn lumber.[85] As the British and the local elite battled for economic resources and political power, the needs of the mass of Belizeans remained acute and unmet. At this juncture, the working people rose up in protest against the racist neglect, greed, and cruelty of the colonial and capitalist society.

The two main historians of the labor riots, strikes, petitions and boycotts of 1934 and 1935 - which preceded the riots in St. Kitts usually cited as the first of the wave that surged through the West Indies in the 1930s - are Peter Ashdown and Nigel Bolland. Although the latter's account is more convincing for its appreciation of the whole movement's agency and the relatively contingent nature of the process of struggle, they share several analyses. They agree that Soberanis' Laborers and Unemployed Association (LUA) had a broad economic and political critique of the colonial government and local elite

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[84] Bolland (1988), 170.

[85] Trevor Petch, "Dependency, Land and Oranges in Belize," Third World Quarterly 8:3 (1986), 1006.

and enjoyed broad support up and down the colony, both unprecedented achievements. They agree also that then Governor Alan Burns' adroit conciliation and compromise were key in changing the image of the colonial government and diffusing support for the LUA by 1936. Ashdown in fact refers to the movement as "emasculated" and "still born", an analysis which Bolland correctly debunks, but without noting the gender imagery and implicit masculinization of Soberanis' movement. Finally, they share a masculine definition of worker and effective working class politics.

Neither explores the significance of the mahogany gangs' links through their families to the important female labor force of the town. They do not see the household economy as shaped by and central to capitalism, nor do they scrutinize women's experience of work - unpaid, in the informal economy, or waged.[86] Apart from the Belize domestics and shop clerks, women also worked stitching sails on the waterfront, cooking in the interior for chiclero gangs, from 1935 at the citrus processing plant in the Stann Creek Valley, and in agriculture as independent farmers or part of family economies.[87] By

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[86] Iris Young, "Beyond the Unhappy Marriage: a Critique of the Dual Systems Theory," in Lydia Sargent, ed. Women and Revolution (Boston: South End Press, 1981), argues that capitalism and patriarchy are one complex phenomenon, and that class without gender analysis is nonsensical.

[87] Louis Halle, Transcaribbean (New York: Longman's, Green and Company, 1936), 255-57; author's interview with Petrona Torres, summer 1990; Waddell (1961), 90 and Assad Shoman, "Belize: An Authoritarian Democratic State in Central America," Second Annual Studies on Belize Conference 1988 (Belize : SPEAR,

juxtaposing their accounts of the closing of the BEC sawmill on October 1st 1934 with each other and with that of Soberanis' son, Tony Jr., their differences and similarities emerge. Ashdown argues that "the strike leaders closed down the works".[88] Bolland shifts the action: "some 500 people "armed with sticks" succeeded in closing the mill."[89] But the memory of Tony Soberanis Jr., aged 9 or 10 at the time, is distinct:

> In every case the women have always taken the lead. It was the women who went there and shut down the sawmill. [The women were] more radical than the men. Men were afraid to strike...[The women] went there with sticks and kitchen utensils, potspoons and kitchen forks.[90]

While the men stood on the sides at the sawmill gates, the women declared the only way any white man would enter the premises would be by swimming across the river, and they went inside to blow the works' whistle as a signal to keep the picketing going at other city locations. Clearly, female consciousness and collective action were important factors absent from the two available top-down and bottom-up accounts.

There are several other pieces of evidence of women's activism in the mid-30s.[91] One of the places picketed was the Town Board where an original crowd of 300 "men and women"

1990), 49; British Honduras Financial and Economic Position, 1934.

[88] Ashdown, "Antonio Soberanis and the Disturbances in Belize 1934-1937," Caribbean Quarterly 24: 1/2 (1978), 65.

[89] Bolland (1988), 173.

[90] Author's interview with Tony Soberanis, Jr., 5 July 1991.

[91] The following examples from Bolland (1988), 173-174.

swelled to 1500 and eight men and one woman were arrested. The next day, October 2nd, 1500 people waited in Market Square while Soberanis was arraigned in the Courthouse. "Some, it was said "were inclined to be disorderly...it was women who were the most virulent"." In May of 1935 Soberanis - with a male lieutenant named Bangula and a female one named Ginger[92] - organized a railway strike in Stann Creek. Crowds of 400 picketed and at one point five men and one woman were arrested.

The weight of the evidence points to the weakness of the argument that the scattering of "the workers" in the bush for most of the year meant there was "little chance of any organized resistance to Government or capital.". Ashdown assumes the old eleven month season to be still in effect and argues:

> In January or February the workers returned to the lumber camps and only the old, sick, children and women were left in Belize Town. It was noted that Soberanis' followers were mainly women for even in those bad years of 1934 and 1935 a worker had to go out of the capital even if he could only get work for a few weeks. In consequence Soberanis could never count on having the same male faces in his following and his supporters were constantly in a state of flux - only the chronically unemployed and the women provided a regular captive audience.[93]

Bolland's greater emphasis on the demands of the popular movement, in contrast to Ashdown's or Soberanis' own politial critique of colonialism, allows more room to see how gendered protest fed into the elaboration of state hegemony, which developed significantly under the governorship of Alan Burns

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[92] Ashdown (1978), 66.

[93] Ashdown (1978), 70.

(November 1934-1939). For example, Ashdown argues that the LUA boycotted the merchants in September 1934 to protest their refusal to donate money to the traditional September 10th celebrations. Bolland mentions that in August the Belize Estate and Produce Company (BEC) had laid off more men and the numbers of children going hungry in town had risen correspondingly.[94] This additional reason for working class anger is one which may have motivated women particularly, although as mentioned above the preservation of life is neither peculiar to women nor expressed by them only in terms of the "traditional" gender division of labor.

Indeed, it was not Soberanis' high-level political critique which was his strength but rather his ability to link popular demands around "wages, prices, employment, food, health and housing" to a critique of "the colonial administration and merchant elite... as incompetent..., ruthless...in their relations with workers and the poor, and as the cause of much of the poverty and injustice experienced by most Belizeans."[95] The movement was never just about workplace issues or political representation, but also about social issues, which can open up debate in which "a universal challenge to society" is posed.[96] Women's activism was not inherent in the relations of production, but the product of analysis. All we have to

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[94] Bolland (1988), 172.

[95] Ibid, 176.

[96] Angela Miles, 216.

interpret are their actions, but these - confronting the state and capital at a male workplace bearing as weapons the tools they used to feed their families - speak to an attitude profoundly critical of the prevailing power relations and defensive of their rights to feed, house, and clothe their families. Rather than a liability for the LUA, the central role of women may well have been crucial to the movement's strength.

Burns' responses were motivated by a mix of revulsion at the conditions people were living in and an authoritarian drive to stay in control of the process of change he, like the Colonial Office, believed necessary. The colonial state had learned through dealing with the UNIA and the BCNs that repression was neither the only nor the best strategy of control, once neglect was no longer an option. Burns' began to provide extensive relief work at higher daily rates than previously, much of it outside the city working at a quarry or on roadbuilding. This, and the improving economy in 1935 and 1936 helped diffuse support for the LUA.

Burns was also determined to eliminate the unquenchable Soberanis from the field, having key laws tightened so that he could charge him with seditious conspiracy. This he did in October 1935, also making sure that he was tried - and convicted - outside Belize Town by a black magistrate. None of this shut Soberanis up, and even when the colonial government offered him passage for his entire family to England and free education for all the children, he did not abandon his

principles. Soberanis Jr. told me that his mother, who had suffered tremendously for her husband's militancy, wanted to take up the offer. She had spent years baking pastries daily for sale on the streets. He was concerned that the pain his family, particularly his mother, had gone through, should be part of the recorded history of the 1930s struggle.

Burns also pushed through the reintroduction of the elective principle and the first modern trade union legislation in Belizean history, as was happening throughout the West Indies in the late 1930s.[97] Both measures served to shape and channel popular protest into forms the state hoped quite confidently to control. Ashdown's attempt to distinguish between the state's motivations to control and to promote labor organization seems futile.[98] It is the coexistence of these drives in Burns' reforms that is indicative of the development of state hegemony. In terms of gender, ameliorative labor and social policies addressed the sources of women's anger, while it is likely that the relationship with the BCNs was quite important through the labor unrest, as symbolic of how women could serve the community and work with the state at the same time. Their presence at the 1935 ceremony at Government House is perhaps of greater

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[97] Richard Hart, "Trade Unionism in the English-speaking Caribbean,"

[98] Ashdown, "Control or Concern: The Motive for Government's Nurture of Organized Labor," Journal of Belizean Affairs 9 (December 1979), 36-43.

importance than a mere analysis of their reformism would suggest.

Considering Britain's imperialist policy of reform from a larger perspective allows Burns' actions to be set in context. The major reforms recommended in the report of the West India Royal Commission (the Moyne Commission) and in Major Orde-Browne's report on labor in the West Indies were preceded in Belize by two visits from educators. The first was by B.H. Easter, Director of Education in Jamaica, in January 1934. He found the curriculum to be too academic and recommended teacher training, manual training for boys and domestic science for girls. J.C. Dixon, who visited in 1936, argued the same. Facilitated by the fourfold increase in the education budget since the British Treasury took control in 1932, the colonial government set up two domestic science centers in 1936, one in an Anglican school, the other in a Methodist. They lasted until 1951, the last three years under direct state control. Upper standard girls from all the Belize Town schools attended one day a week.[99] Of course, less than half the children in the colony were students in 1931, and the hurricane and Depression can only have reduced this proportion.[100] As we shall see, in the 1940s the colonial government began to implement similar gendered

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[99] Inez Sanchez, "The Easter and Dixon Reports: An Analysis and Discussion of their Impact on our Educational Development," BISRA occasional paper #7 (Belize: Belize Institute for Social Research and Action, 1977).

[100] British Honduras Financial and Economic Position (1934), 84.

policies in the rural areas through the Department of Social Welfare, later renamed Department of Social Development.

Major Orde-Browne's report related these concerns with gendered educational reform to worries over the stability and morality of working class families. Appreciative of men's and especially women's hard work for their children, he nonetheless saw smaller families as one way of relieving pressure for wage increases, thus linking the domestic sphere with class demands and state policy.[101] Moreover, he argued with considerable insight into West Indian gender relations that only direct help to mothers and children in the form of school meals and government housing would be sure to relieve their poverty, for men could not be relied on to pass along pay increases.[102] He suggested, as a long term stabilizing factor, farming and trade apprenticeships for boys, and for girls: "housekeeping, cooking, needlework, mothercraft."[103]

The Moyne Commission report echoed these recommendations, linking girls' education in domestic science and infant welfare to happy marriages.[104] Like Orde-Browne, Moyne argued that economic recovery would do more than any social welfare to improve women's poor living and working conditions, high

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[101] Major G. St. J. Orde-Browne, Labor Conditions in the West Indies (London: HMSO, 1939), 35-37.

[102] Ibid, 39. This of course assumes that women are not earning wages.

[103] Ibid, 40-41.

[104] Report of the West India Commission, 1938-1939, 130.

unemployment and dependence on men for money.[105] But he did propose the establishment of a corps of female infant health clinic volunteers, and that protective measures be taken on behalf of women forced to work.[106] The moralistic disapproval of West Indian men's and women's "natural irresponsibility" in having large families is striking in the report, and to cure this basic problem of promiscuity Moyne recommended training boys and girls in domestic crafts, and serving fathers with strict maintenance orders. On the issue of education, the report recommended "domestic courses for girls together with instruction in cooking and child welfare."[107]

Burns' initiative to begin such training in 1936 in Belize was thus a response to both the local crisis and shifting Colonial Office policy, which itself was shaped by the resistance of working men and women throughout the West Indies. Like the reinstitution of a restricted franchise in the same year, the measure could be seen as motivated by genuine concern for colonized peoples. In reality both were part of a broad effort to suppress the radical democratic impulse of the popular movement by creating formal democratic and social welfare structures - the "passive revolution" of Gramsci's theory. Such processes of incorporation and negotiation are central to the elaboration and reproduction of state hegemony.

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[105] Ibid, 215, 216, and 220.

[106] Ibid, 170 and 215.

[107] Ibid, 125.

The strength and limits of that hegemonic project were tested during the ferment of the 1940s that linked the labor riots to the nationalist struggle of the 1950s. Because action in civil society had shifted to the level of electoral politics and colony-wide union organizing within the new labor legislation, we know less about women's activism or the state's, political parties' or union's gendered strategies of organizing and creating authority for the 1940s than for the previous decade of popular struggle. In this final section I will outline Bolland's work on the 1940s,[108] although he has no data on women in labor or party politics. Bolland's argument that "the independence movement in general, and the People's United Party (PUP) in particular, grew out of the labor movement that had been developing for sixteen years before devaluation," can only be strengthened by gender analysis which sees continuous and developing women's politics and the importance of gender to state responses from the 1930s through the 1950s and beyond.

From 1936 the working class reverted to its tradition of backing liberal elite candidates, both for the Legislative Council and the Belize Town Board (City Council after 1943).[109]

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[108] See Bolland (1988), 176-185.

[109] It seems to me that the reasons why indigenous political parties did not develop immediately in British Honduras, as they did in 1938 in Jamaica, are that the Belizean working class and peasants were not sufficiently well organized to make elite politics inviable - a factor associated with a far less strong and integrated civil society than in Jamaica - and that the interest of most upper class Belizeans lay in their links to metropolitan or US companies and markets. Indigenous manufacturing and the domestic market were far more developed in

The range of middle class politicians had broadened however, with the emergence of the Natives First group and other radical nationalist coalitions. The presence of two Progressive Party men on the Legislative Council in 1943 was crucial in the successful passage of modern trade union legislation and the repeal of all penal clauses as contained in the 1883 Masters and Servants Act. Although the Town Board was controlled from 1942-47 by the conservative UNIA coalition led by Lionel Francis, it was swept by George Price and other nationalists in the 1947 elections. This was largely a result of Francis backing the proposed West Indian Federation, to which Belizean workers of all ethnic groups were bitterly opposed. The Federation was designed to create a more viable regional economy and streamlined bureaucracy, but was perceived as a method of flooding the Belizean labor market with workers from the overcrowded islands. Soberanis founded the British Honduras Workers and Tradesmen Union early in 1939, before unions were legalized, and in July the BHWTU backed a strike in Stann Creek. From 1941, when Soberanis became President, the union had branches in Belize, Corozal in the north, Stann Creek in the south, and San Ignacio in the west. Although Soberanis left to

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Jamaica, giving the local elite more reason to want to organize institutions to control the highly organized and militant labor movement. Michael Kaufman, Jamaica Under Manley: Dilemmas of Socialism and Democracy (Westport, Conn: Lawrence Hill and Co., 1985) 47-50; Gray 15-34. And Richard Hart, "Trade Unionism in the English-Speaking Caribbean: The Formative Years and the Caribbean Labor Congress," in Susan Craig, ed. Contemporary Caribbean: A Sociological Reader vol. 2 (Maracas, Trinidad and Tobago: Susan Craig, 1982).

work in Panama from 1942 to 1948, the union grew and registered as the General Workers' Union in May 1943, days after this became legally possible. Its membership was then 350. In 1944 the GWU backed a successful stevedores' strike and elected radical Clifford Betson as President. The importance of the growth of the GWU in the 1940s begs for further research on its approach to women wage workers and to domestic labor, and on its meaning in the lives of Belizean women:

> By the late 1940s the GWU claimed a membership of over 3000. Based in Belize City, with branches in the districts and in remote chicle and mahogany camps, this organization, more than any other, helped to raise the political consciousness of the working people of Belize in the 1940s. The wretched conditions in which these people lived and worked were translated, through protracted struggles with the Belize Estate and Produce Company and the colonial government, into a protest against colonialism itself. The part played by the BHTWU-GWU, in the eleven years of their existence prior to 1950, in establishing a basis in both consciousness and organization for the nationalist movement and the PUP, can hardly be exaggerated.[110]

The annual Colonial Reports from the late 1940s do indicate that women had some role in the GWU. The 1946 report describes the union as "a general union open to all groups of workers, male and female." A year later this was amplified to "a general union comprising all classes of workers formed in 1939, including domestic servants, with a total membership (including the branches in the Districts) of 2,242." In 1948 the membership of domestic servants was reiterated and "the number of financial

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[110] Bolland (1988), 180-181.

members was reported as 1,818, of whom 125 were females."[111] The number of non-paying members and of supporters was likely already closer to the 3000 Bolland cites for the end of the decade.

Unemployment, at least for men, had been relieved during the Second World War by the departure of 900 woodsmen to Scotland to cut lumber for the war effort, and of even more men to the Panama Canal Zone. All these men began flooding back into the colony after 1946 and in this context labor unrest fuelled the GWU's growth. They staged successful strikes in 1947 at the BEC sawmill - the same one the women closed down in 1934 - at the Corozal sugar mill, and on the Belize waterfront. In this last one George Price and the other young Catholic radicals active in municipal politics and on the Belize Billboard "got their feet on the bottom of the political ladder."[112]

In the early months of 1948 two clashes occurred which sum up well how far the people of Belize had come politically, and yet foreshadow the dimensions of the struggle during the 1950s which was to limit the change they could achieve, or even perhaps conceive of. Clifford Betson's New Year's message to the readers of the Billboard called for socialism in Belize, albeit a mild British Labor Party version. Referring to high unemployment for men and women among other problems, he called

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[111] 1946 Colonial Report, 19; 1947 Colonial Report, 9; 1948 Colonial Report, 11.

[112] Bolland (1988), 181.

for an increased state role in economic development, increased rights and benefits for workers, and direct political representation for the working class.[113] The young Creole editors of the newspaper, Philip Goldson and Leigh Richardson, who were to become important nationalist leaders in the 1950s, were Catholic converts and members of the Jesuit-led study group begun in the late 1940s. Goldson had left a junior civil service post and Richardson a teaching job to begin the newspaper, which they marketed to workers. [114] They engaged in debate with Betson over the nature and necessity of socialism.

They argued that workers should stay out of government and politics, that socialism enslaves workers to the state, that workers do best under capitalist democracy, that socialism would end church-run education, and finally that communism means the destruction of the family, holy matrimony, and love.[115] They in fact defended men's rights against communism - their right to land and a house to pass on, to travel, and not to be ordered around by the state. They claimed that communism would lead to prostitution, social disease, adultery, the bad rearing of children, and incest - as if none of this existed in capitalist British Honduras! This line of argument had begun on January 18

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[113] "GWU President's New Year Message," Belize Billboard, 3 January 1948, 3.

[114] Interview with Philip Goldson, 3 July 1991. They would sell subscriptions at the sawmill gates.

[115] Belize Billboard, 3, 18 and 25 January, 22 February and 25 April 1948.

in the paper's women's column, "Powderpuff and Paint," in which promiscuity and premarital sex were cagily condemned and the idea of marriage as slavery attacked. On March 21 Belizean women were encouraged to take more interest in public affairs, defined as "social welfare work and credit unions," as well as the domestic arts training offered by the newly-formed League of Women. This editorial concludes:

> What we should like to see are women who throw their minds and bodies into explaining the local scene and into making our national lot a bit better. Women must decide to show the nation that a Christian way of life must come back, or, along with the rest of the world, we're simply hell-bent for destruction.

The nationalism of the PUP did in fact develop as both anticommunist and pro-Christian.

Clearly, the relationship between the union movement and the nationalist party, the PUP, was to be plagued by ideological differences which had gender as well as class dimensions.

The second clash, and one which illustrates yet again the power of Temma Kaplan's argument that popular working class militancy can be expressed outside of unions and political parties, especially through women's networks of survival, occurred in early April 1948, in the midst of the debate in the Billboard and at the height of the dry season. The newspaper reported in a story headlined "Women Invade City Hall" that "a group of noisy women with buckets and pails" stormed into the CitCo building just after 8 AM in search of the Town Clerk. They wanted water from the North Front Street water tank, "but though they had actually stood guard there from 3 a.m. they were unable

to obtain even a bucket each up to closing time at 8. The tank is only opened from 7-8."[116] The office staff were required to open every booth to prove to the women that the Clerk was absent. Clearly, the women had formed a plan and executed it collectively and immediately. It is perhaps no surprise that the stereotype of the bembe woman is particularly associated with the gossip and pushiness of the women at the water standpipes - but we must also appreciate their capacity for collective political action. Women, as in 1886, had again directly confronted the state, holding it responsible for ensuring their ability to fulfill their roles in the gendered division of labor prevailing in Creole society. Significantly, they had chosen to focus on the municipal government, which was, as an elected body of anti-colonialists, likely to be more open to their demands. The process of struggle in the 1950s proves that the nationalists were indeed more open (they had to be), but that the consequences for women of the incorporation of gendered demands into the hegemonic project of the PUP were at best ambiguous, at worst negative.

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[116] "Women Invade City Hall," Belize Billboard, April 4, 1948, 7-8.

Chapter Two: The 1950s

Women's Work in the Urban Geography

Both the power and evils of colonial rule were concentrated in Belize City. Originally just a loading site for logwood floated down the Belize River, it hovers barely above sea level and has always posed enormous problems for its inhabitants, who nonetheless cling to it. Drainage and sanitation have been extremely poor since the first settlement, with the canals cut in the early nineteenth century to solve the first problem providing a collective stagnant sewer (with which women were all too familiar). In the late 1940s the colonial state replaced water vats with water piped in from several miles out of town. This helped with dry season shortages but did not mean each house had its own supply. Women still met daily at the standpipes. Surrounding swamps and mangroves had limited expansion and led, with poverty, to overcrowding.[117] The 1946 census found the average Belize City family to have six or more members and to be living in an average of 2.4 rooms.[118] The following letter is indicative of living conditions in Belize City for many during the 1950s:

> I am a single woman living together with my own six young children and an adopted sickly child of two years. For two years I have tried desperately to find a home. Now I must

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[117] Everitt, 75-78, 85, 88, 103.

[118] Jamaica Central Bureau of Statistics, West India Census 1946, Part E: Census of the Population of British Honduras (Kingston: Department of Statistics, 1948), xii.

> leave the single room I have. Will not someone please help me? I can feed us and even manage a small rent. A single room under a house, a shed or a garage will do.[119]

Like many other Creole women, this one was clearly getting no support from the father or fathers of her children. The 1946 census found that 22% of females aged 10 and over in Belize District were employed, including about 1000 in domestic service as servants, cooks and laundresses.[120] This percentage was wildly unrealistic, reflecting the categorization of three quarters of women as engaged in "home duties". Philip Goldson told me that:

> The majority of women were not employed in those days. Now when you say women were not employed you have to put it in quotes, because traditionally Belizean women might be employed in the informal trade, selling Creole bread, making cut 'o brute and tableta..they bake bread for sale, they wash clothes..they might not be employed by a regular employer like now today they be employed at textile factory and so on. But they nevertheless made their living.[121]

A 1959 Colonial Office team found that only 400 of the colony's 7000 workers had "regular full employment. Those with less steady jobs include a large number of women who undertake domestic work, outside laundering, etc."[122] The fact that the

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[119] Belize Billboard, 7 September 1952, 2.

[120] Census of Population of British Honduras, xxxi-xxxv.

[121] Interview with Philip Goldson, 16 July 1991. This contrasted with his statement during our interview on July 3: "Basically when you spoke about workers in those days, you meant men, in the sense that they were the breadwinners and they had very low wages. The concept was that if you help the man, you're basically helping the woman and the family."

[122] D.H. Romney, ed., Land in British Honduras - A Report of the British Honduras Land Use Survey Team (London: Colonial Office, 1959), 33-34.

percentage of women married was lowest among black women and women in Belize City and Stann Creek Town no doubt added to the perception of women as heads of families: "In those days women were looked upon more as the breadwinner than the men."[123] Women apparently took pride in their abilities to survive, if Edgell's memories and research can be relied on: "In Belize to be able to work like a woman was an honourable thing."[124] Gladys Stuart pointed out how this attitude could reproduce the reasons why women had to work so hard: "[Creole women] are strong, but it's misguided strength. Single mothers have always been head of their households. A woman has children and she just raise them... there was no social security... she just have to be strong physically, strong mentally".[125]

In this setting, made worse by capitalist and colonial exploitation, women worked mostly in public. Their world was that of the yards and alleys, streets and markets, stores, school yards, government offices and churches. It was in these public spaces that the Creole women of Belize City would most effectively exercise their political militancy during the decade of nationalist struggle, defying all efforts to discursively and legislatively confine them to the "domestic" sphere.

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[123] Interview with Tony Soberanis, Jr., 5 July 1991.

[124] Edgell, Beka Lamb, 27.

[125] Interview with Gladys Stuart, 25 July 1991.

Female Consciousness and Collective Action

The nationalist struggle of the 1950s is one of the most thoroughly studied periods in Belizean history.[126] The People's United Party, which led the nationalist struggle through the 1950s and formed the first administration after internal self-government was achieved in 1964, portrays itself as the "champion of the workers' cause."[127] Critical scholarship, particularly that informed by Marxist perspectives, has shown that "contrary to the popular myth, the PUP did not grow out of the workers' movement - rather, the middle class leaders of the PUP took over the movement and used it for party political purposes."[128] The nationalism of the PUP, particularly that of its most charismatic and powerful leader, George Price, was as

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[126] The main secondary sources for this period are O. Nigel Bolland, Belize: A New Nation in Central America (Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1977), Cedric Grant, The Making of Modern Belize (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), Maria Elena Paz Salinas, Belize: El Despertar de Una Nacion (Mexico: Siglo Veintiuno, 1979), Assad Shoman, "The Birth of the Nationalist Movement," Readings in Belizean History, Party Politics in Belize, 1950-1986 (Belize: Cubola, 1987), and "Belize: An Authoritarian Democratic State in Central America," (1988), D.A.G. Waddell, British Honduras: A Historical and Contemporary Survey (Open University Press, 1961) and Dennis and Alma Young,"The Impact of the Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute on the Internal Politics of Belize," Latin American Perspectives 15:2 (1988).

[127] 25 Years of Struggle and Achievement 1950-1975 (Belize: People's United Party, 1975), 9.

[128] Shoman, Party Politics (1987), 87. Richard Hart among others argues that this pattern of charismatic politicians and the party system in general eroding worker-controlled trade union was common throughout the British Caribbean from the late 1930s. See his "Trade Unionism in the English Speaking Caribbean: The Formative Years and the Caribbean Labor Congress," in Susan Craig, ed. Contemporary Caribbean: A Sociological Reader vol 2 (Maracas, Trinidad and Tobago: Susan Craig, 1982).

anticommunist as it was anticolonial. It preached a social doctrine shaped by the American Jesuits who taught at the elite boys' high school, St. John's College,[129] in which capital, labor, the family and the state were to work in harmony for national progress and development.

While Marxist historiography has correctly assessed the character of the PUP and the nature of its relationship to the initially more militant labor movement, it has failed to see the importance of women in the GWU and PUP and the efforts made by the male leaderships of the union, party and colonial government to control and channel women's activism and the meaning of it. Like the literature which explains Belizean politics and nationalism in terms of ethnicity and like the PUP's own version of history, it has not considered gender either as an analytical tool or as a terrain of historical action and inquiry. In so doing it has masculinized the popular movement, narrowing it to the union alone and ignoring feminine politics on the street and within the union and party. Shoman even refers to the "workers' movement" being "effectively disarmed and rendered impotent," like a vanquished warrior, by the construction of the party system and national state.[130] In contrast, Dolores Balderamos Garcia, the young and recently appointed leader of PUP women and a niece of George Price, remembers being given the impression

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[129] Gordon K. Lewis, The Growth of the Modern West Indies, (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1968), 299.

[130] Shoman (1987), 87.

that "It was [the women's] mass support that gave the nationalist movement birth."[131] In this chapter I will show the empirical inadequacy of the masculinized Marxist historiography, and provide a fuller explanation of the process of nationalist struggle in terms of gender and hegemony/counter-hegemony.[132] First, the basic chronology of Marxist analysis must be made clear.[133]

This analysis definitely see a change taking place after the elections of 1954 and the co-optation of Goldson and Richardson within the colonial state as ministers. The decade thus falls into two halves, the first being more heavily marked by popular struggle. Middle class Catholic politicians joined with the GWU's Betson in protesting the arbitrary devaluation of the British Honduran dollar at the end of 1949, a move which

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[131] Interview, 10 July 1991.

[132] Janet Siltanen and Michelle Stanworth, Women and the Public Sphere: A Critique of Sociology (London: Hutchinson, 1984), 9, argue that both empirical critique and theoretical advance are necessary to overturn mainstream academic accounts of women's political character, or lack of one. Joan Scott would I think agree with this, for gender history cannot be written unless we have accurate knowledge of what women did, thought, and said, especially collectively.

[133] For greater detail and nuance see C.H. Grant, The Making of Modern Belize: Politics, Society and British Colonialism in Central America (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976), O. Nigel Bolland, Belize: A New Nation in Central America (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), Assad Shoman, Party Politics in Belize 1950-1986 (Belize: Cubola, 1987), and two articles by Shoman written over 15 years apart: "The Birth of the Nationalist Movement 1950-1954," in Readings in Belizean History (Belize: Belizean Studies/St. John's College, 1987) 1st ed 1973, and "Belize: An Authoritarian Democratic State in Central America," Second Annual Studies on Belize Conference (Belize: SPEAR, 1990), 42-63.

raised the cost of living sharply but made exports more competitive. The movement formed itself into the People's United Party in the fall of 1950 and continued street agitation and official demands for change. The colonial state reacted with repression culminating in the 1951 dissolution of the nationalist Belize City Council and the jailing of Goldson and Richardson for sedition. By 1951 the PUP had taken complete control of the GWU leadership, and with the two editors jailed the most prominent leaders were George Price of the party and Nicholas Pollard of the union. The working class demonstrated its enduring strength in the fall of 1952 with a general strike that lasted much longer than Pollard wished. The Marxist historiography passes lightly over 1953 as the year when nationalist pressure secured a new constitution. In the spring of 1954 the joint PUP-GWU ticket swept the first full adult suffrage elections, largely due to the strength of union organization in the districts outside Belize City.

In 1955 Goldson, Richardson and Herman Jex, the President of the GWU (Pollard had the more hands-on post of General Secretary), took up their ministerial appointments with enthusiasm, while George Price remained unco-opted and the charismatic head of a devoted popular organization. Disagreement over the proper method of gaining self-government was fuelled by Price's pro-Central America anti-West Indian Federation rhetoric and his support for the less than scrupulously honest Pollard. In the fall of 1956 the PUP split apart, with Price enduring as

sole leader. His PUP won the 1957 elections, unaided by any strong union, and his popularity rose. But this was not enough to bring the British to the bargaining table and he had to prove that he could be trusted. He negotiated in 1959 and 1960 with the British, won the 1961 elections through which he became First Minister and was in an unassailable position of power which gained him the post of Prime Minister with the final constitutional change in 1964 to internal self-government. The workers had been used and a relatively authoritarian state created to ensure capital's continued accumulation and legitimacy.

The insights of Grant, Bolland, and Shoman are of enormous importance, but any historical entity or process is "always to be discovered anew, despite the dominant markers of its past."[134] The available primary sources show that the working class women of Belize City, sometimes acting within accepted gender relations, sometimes pushing their limits, were centrally important in shaping the process and character of nationalist struggle, and in its victory over colonial control and authority.[135] Before presenting the remade chronology, I will discuss women's collective action within the popular movement

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[134] Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Peasants and Capital: Dominica in the World Economy (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1988), 27.

[135] These primary sources include annual reports of the colonial government, two PUP newspapers - The Belize Billboard and The Belize Times, the 1946 census, a series of family laws passed in 1953, interviews with nine Belizeans, and some historical fiction.

and in relation to the state, as well as the consciousness informing this action.

It is important to my overall argument that the impact of the popular movement as a whole not be diminished, that the 1950s not be cynically written off as a decade of meaningless constitutional change, or just the rearticulation of Belize with the world capitalist economy.[136] It is precisely because the nationalist politicians had to and did partially incorporate working class men's and women's demands into their project that the postcolonial state became both populist and hegemonic. There has been rapid economic growth and change in Belize in the postwar period which has reproduced essentially the same capitalist class relations in which Belizean, migrant and refugee workers are exploited while foreign investors and a small group of Belizean businessmen, politicians and lawyers reap the benefits. Constitutional decolonization did not liberate Belizeans in any profound way - there has been no revolution, not even the peaceful one the PUP claims to have created.[137] But the state's relationship to civil society has

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[136] Shoman (1987) does make a distinction between formal and real decolonization, but overestimates the power of the party system and the state, which in fact rests on a series of contradictions created by mass participation in the nationalist struggle. Alma and Dennis Young, "The Impact of the Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute on the Internal Politics of Belize," Latin American Perspectives 15:2 (1988), 25, argue for seeing decolonization as just a shift from dependence on Britain to dependence on the United States.

[137] In Philosophy of the Peaceful Constructive Belizean Revolution (n.d. but probably mid to late 1970s), the party calls capital a full partner in national development and lists all the

changed, and even if Shoman is not exaggerating in his description of the state as authoritarian and as promoting an authoritarian civil society, it is hegemonic.[138]

By institutionalizing the hegemonic processes begun by the colonial government in the late 1930s, the PUP built a stronger state with legitimate control of civil society. It was able to do this because of the crucial if limited participation in the nationalist struggle by a popular movement organized around the General Workers' Union and working class and peasant communities, a movement with a radical democratic edge[139] and the potential - given economic and political conditions - to develop strength and power. The nationalists had everything to lose by ignoring it and everything to gain by using already existing union and working class community networks (including women's) as a base to organize.

The crucial importance of popular working class organizations and militancy to the ways middle class nationalists could shape and claim state power, and continue to reproduce capitalist relations, makes it all the more important to understand the gendered character of that movement and its relations - both cooperative and conflictual - with the PUP leadership. How important to the constitution of the national

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good things the state has done for "the people".

[138] Shoman (1988), 61.

[139] Tony Soberanis Jr. claims that the people wanted to be radical but George Price just wanted peaceful followers to come out to meetings. Interview, 5 July 1991.

state was the incorporation of a **gendered** popular agenda, was the consent of politically active women?

The available evidence indicates that the issues which particularly concerned working Belizeans and to which the nationalists responded, were of greater importance to women. Oral testimony stressed again and again that women did more work, were vital to getting anything organized, any money raised, any petition circulated, to getting voters registered and out to vote.[140] In the late 1950s it was women who organized to build their own houses and pressure the state for land. My informants also stressed that women were more militant, more likely to use verbal and physical violence, were more committed. Philip Goldson remembers:

> In all these matters, where street action was involved, the women were always there, and the women were the most militant... Women always seemed to understand these issues better than men. When it came to the real street action, there were the women, up in front.

Elfreda Reyes told me that the men "were a set of cowards if you ask me," because they were afraid to lose their jobs. "The women didn't care. All we wanted - justice. It was for the children more than any other thing." And Tharine Rudon insisted that

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[140] The Belizean case is thus very similar to that in Jamaica, where "women have been the backbone of all political parties..before Independence and since. They comprise the majority of visible workers and supporters at the base." Maxine Henry-Wilson, "The Status of the Jamaican Woman, 1962 to the Present," in Rex Nettleford, ed. Jamaica Since Independence: Essays on the Early Years (Kingston: Heinemann, 1989), 240.

> There were more women, there were more women every time. You can always depend on them...Anytime if the men they are having any trouble or anything, they come to women, the women go right out...The women always work more than the men, always. For instance, we'd say alright we're going to have a fair, the men don't bother with that, the women have to do all the cooking, the women have to prepare the food, the women have to go out and beg [get donations].

In the crudest interpretation, men walked off the job and marked their X for the PUP in municipal and legislative elections, women did the rest. This is not to suggest that men did not care about the miserable living conditions of most Belizeans, but that because of the roles assigned them by the prevailing gender division of labor and due to feminine socialization, women were, as Kaplan claims, predisposed to act politically around issues of housing, water, health, and food prices. Women infused the union's struggle for increased male wages and the party's for political power with their social concerns, making every strike and every election an occasion to press their demands and work at the grassroots level for their realization.

A number of female leaders existed among the rank and file of the movement: Elfreda Reyes, domestic and an activist with the UNIA in the 1920s and with the LUA in the 1930s, her market vendor sisters Ianthe and Virginia Stanford, and her friends Hazel Gentle, Helen Taylor, Harriet Durante and others. At a level of more formal power were Tharine Rudon, office secretary of the PUP and Treasurer of the GWU, and Gwendolyn Lizzaraga, social worker, leader of the British Honduras Federation of Women, and PUP councillor. She is the only woman whom the

existing historiography recognizes as being of any importance. The women who fought to raise their own wages and those of other women have been forgotten, as have the more numerous ones who worked hard and long to earn a little extra to give to the party. Miss Caroline Flowers, who lived by doing laundry and baking bread for sale on the street - a classic member of the female dominated informal economy - was one of these. Shy by nature, she gave a portion of her profits from baking to the PUP.

Felicia Hernandez and Zee Edgell have created characters which represent these women, and fulfil many of the characteristics of the bembe. Hernandez's Miss Ellorine in her story "Those Ridiculous Years" is an "interfering Creole woman" who owns and rents out part of her house, but carried the slop buckets of well-off families to the canals to earn extra money. She is also a nationalist:

> She was a strong member of the government political party and often boasted of being loyal and patriotic...She was always trying to recruit people..."We wan get self-government soon!" was one of her favourite opening speech; and whenever there was any kind of election she spent most of her time campaigning.[141]

Miss Ivy, grandmother to Beka in Edgell's Beka Lamb, is a similar but less caricatured figure.[142] She is a devoted reader

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[141] Felicia Hernandez, "Those Ridiculous Years," in Those Ridiculous Year and Other Garifuna Stories (San Diego: Windsor Associates, 1988),2.

[142] Zee Edgell, Beka Lamb (London: Heinemann, 1982). Edgell's own paternal grandmother, Anez Lamb Webster, was active in party politics, but neither she nor Edgell's maternal great-grandmother Mrs. Adelaide Hall were models for Granny Ivy.

of the nationalist newspaper, constant attender of the political rallies on the Battlefield, and stirs up conflict with her son and daughter-in-law with her virulent anti-colonial attitudes. After a lifetime of domestic service, Ivy is knowledgeable about how colonial families treat Belizean women employees and is in no way contained within the household or any definable private sphere. The historical authenticity of the Ivy character is confirmed by the existence of Jane Hall, "61, grandmother of several small children," who was arrested during the general strike in 1952 for attacking two male scabs attempting to cross the picket line at the BEC sawmill.[143]

Several types of working class women's activism emerge from my reworked understanding of the process of struggle and negotiation during the 1950s. It is important to understand each one without ranking them, for each had both structural and contingent advantages and disadvantages. Temma Kaplan's insistence that we not think of organization in a party or union as indicative of higher forms of working class consciousness is useful in the context of Belize in the 1950s. It must, however, be added that to privilege women's community networks as the basis of collective consciousness and action against the state is just as narrow minded. Different strategies work in different situations - all express a working class feminine consciousness which has some critical depth. As Maxine Molyneux concludes,

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[143] Billboard, "Cops Grab Grandmother for Attacking Scabs," 21 November 1952.

what is necessary is feminist organizing, of whatever type, that politicizes practical gender demands around class-linked economic issues, so that the state can be fundamentally transformed.[144] In Belize in the 1950s, the PUP relied on both the union and on women's networks to transform the state's colonial, but not its capitalist character.

The tragedy of the early cooptation of the union and popular political movement by the reformist leadership was that the budding organizational self-consciousness and strength of the Creole working women of Belize City was cut off. With the restriction of union activities and the growing dependence on nationalist leaders who placed their own capture of state power above all other goals, the range and meaning of women's activism was sharply reduced, although Goldson sees the United Women's Group activity of the late 1950s as evidence that "women continued to aspire to certain roles". As the struggle in civil society became less self-generating and more controlled by partisan politicians, the place where women were strongest - street action, agitating outside - lost significance. Their gendered class consciousness was channelled to serve a populist state which had incorporated their demands certainly into its rhetoric and self-conception, but into practice in only the most limited ways. The fact that most women's strongest identity was

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[144] Maxine Molyneux, "Mobilization without Emancipation? Women's Interests, State and Revolution," in eds. R. Fagen, C.D. Deere, and J.L. Corragio, Transition and Development: Problems of Third World Socialism (New York: Monthly Review Press/CENSA, 1986), 285 and 300.

that of community fighter rather than worker with rights made this channelling easier. The militant female activists of the 1950s did not transform the patriarchal nature of the state, just as the labor movement did not transform its class character. But they did make it necessary for nationalist politicians to incorporate them and their demands partially into their hegemonic project. The introduction of commitments to women and labor into a process of negotiation which is state hegemony has created major contradictions, for the Belizean state is fundamentally committed to capitalist growth. The existence of this profound contradiction within the state is the legacy of the early years of militancy when the leaders were far more dependent on the movement than vice versa.

Philip Goldson believes that most women's identity was simply with "the cause, this cause for the betterment of the poor people as a whole."[145] A minority of women joined and were active in the union, although the leadership did create the category of Housewives early in 1950 as "an attempt to create a category of people who were not employed women, but who nevertheless had a stake in what was taking place".[146] Once the PUP was officially formed in September 1950 it likely made more sense to most women to join the party. My sense is that there was probably a large number of women who regularly attended rallies, marches and demonstrations, and who may also have

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[145] Interview, July 16, 1991.

[146] Ibid.

recruited and raised money, but who could never afford to be an official member of either organization. Goldson says whether they were formal members or not "they would take part in whatever was taking place, would be in the forefront with placards, singing...". They would have been as likely to carry Goldson on their shoulders when he was released from jail in August 1952 as they would have been to picket the BEC sawmill all night during the general strike in October of the same year. The importance of community or neighborhood networks among these women has yet to be studied. It does seem, however, that the market was an important organizational space dominated by the female vendors who were among the PUP's most committed activists.[147]

The advantage of organizing within the union was that it directed demands at employers as well as the colonial government, giving nationalism more class content. The GWU had of course been challenging BEC in the lumber camps and sawmills since its inception - indeed it was formed to do just this, as well as articulate a political critique of colonialism. None of the nationalist leaders were working class, had come out of the union, or placed the needs of labor first in their conception of nationalism. They were thus different in attitude as well as class origins from Antonio Soberanis and Clifford Betson.

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[147] Apart from Cedric Grant's mention of their role, Goldson told me that "the market vendors [were] very militant with the PUP."

It was Goldson, though, as Acting General Secretary of the GWU, who worked with Elfreda Reyes to organize the early 1953 domestics' wage drive. For a complex of reasons this effort failed, and the only other clearly specific female endeavor on their own behalf was the housing drive in 1959 and 1960 led by Lizzaraga. Indeed, the middle class British Honduras Federation of Women, founded in the late 1940s as the League of Women by Vivian Seay of the BCNs, did more concretely for working women than either the colonial state or the nationalist women, especially once Gwen Lizzaraga took charge after 1952. Their biggest project in the 1950s was the building of a low-cost day care centre for working mothers. Presumably this was conceived of as charity work. When Lizzaraga moved on to organize PUP women into groups to save money and build their own homes, she became a much more threatening force to the party leadership. Goldson maintains that Price and his lieutenants blocked her efforts and she became alienated from the PUP. The cross-class vision of the BHFW, its manipulation by larger political forces, and its internal conflicts have yet to be fully researched.

Women's political activism, of whatever tendency, was always expressed through the party and the union, never through an independent feminist organization. This basic weakness has meant that within the hegemonic postcolonial state, neither feminist organizations nor a feminist agenda have significant

power.[148] It made sense in the 1950s to be active in the PUP, for it was speaking to all the problems which the colonial regime was neglecting, and was giving the people a new self-awareness. As Elfreda Reyes explained:

> We began thinking the PUP was going to make us more independent...to get from under the claws of this British Empire. So I thought that was a good idea. He [George Price] made us to believe that.

Goldson describes women's anticolonial identity thus:

> There was a general sense of women being a participating sector of this whole great movement for the improvement of working people and poor people generally, and I suppose in that sense, women might have felt that their status was being improved [to] give them greater dignity."

From Devaluation to Adult Suffrage: 1950-1954

The first months of 1950 were characterized by militant street action in response to the devaluation of the British Honduran dollar, rising unemployment and food prices, and frustration with appalling living and working conditions.[149] There were frequent rallies, marches and political meetings, many of them at the downtown park known as the Battlefield. There was a violent level of energy with "the women..always

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[148] This is made clear in Zee Edgell's second novel, based on her experiences in the early 1980s as the first director of the Women's bureau within the Social Development Department. Bureaucrats and politicians did all within their extensive power to limit her effectiveness as a feminist organizer, particularly among working women. See In Times Like These (Kingston: Heinemann Caribbean, 1991).

[149] Belize Billboard, daily reports, January-March 1950; Assad Shoman "the Birth of...", 202; C.H. Grant, The Making of Modern Belize, 126.

there..the most militant...up in front you know."[150] Elfreda Reyes, a 50-year old domestic at the time, claims she mounted the rostrum on the Battlefield right at the beginning, shouting "give us back our dollar," and spoke almost every week after that.[151]

In mid-January the Governor's wife, Lady Garvey, appealed for donations to the Red Cross to be used for needy children affected by devaluation.[152] Whether this indicated real dissention within the Garvey marriage or the use of Lady Garvey to give the colonial regime a human face, it had little effect. In February, the People's Committee - which had formed in response to devaluation and would evolve into the PUP - sent a memorial to the King demanding action on unemployment, low wages, malnutrition and slum conditions.[153] There were reports in the Billboard of crowds of up to 2000 singing "Arise Ye Belizeans from Starvation," the battle song of the 1930s riots.[154] This was very likely initiated by members of the crowd who remembered those struggles, for the young leaders mainly encouraged the singing of "God Bless America."[155] On

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[150] Shoman (1973) and Goldson interview.

[151] Interview with Elfreda Reyes, July 10, 1991.

[152] Belize Billboard 15 January 1950, 5.

[153] Shoman, 202.

[154] Belize Billboard, 2 February 1950, 1.

[155] The People's Committee - a Short History of Early Politics in Belize, 5-6.

February 12, a crowd of 10 000 marched on Government House.[156] The following night the houses of pro-British politicians were stoned and a large and violent crowd on the Battlefield was tear-gassed.[157] The people fought back with stones, bottles and sticks, until nationalist legislator Johnny Smith arrived on the Battlefield and dispersed them, and George Price went with the police to calm those stoning houses.[158]

A state of emergency was imposed on February 14, which was to last until the end of June 1950.[159] Street action did subside somewhat, but not until the house of pro-colonial lawyer Harrison Courtenay was stoned on about February 16.[160] Gladys Stewart, a teacher in her early thirties at the time, remembers that women were involved in destroying Courtenay's car during this incident.[161] After the state of emergency, the Billboard began to report that hundreds of people, women and men, were joining the GWU. It highlighted the fact that domestics, seamstresses and housewives were pinning on the union's red and green.[162] Betson and union Vice President James Middleton were

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[156] Belize Billboard, 12 February 1950, 4.

[157] Shoman, 203-204 and Belize Billboard 16 February 1950, 1.

[158] Belize Billboard, 12 and 16 February 1950.

[159] Shoman, 204.

[160] Belize Billboard, 16 February, 1950.

[161] Interview with Gladys Stewart, July 25, 1991.

[162] Belize Billboard, 2 March 1950, 1: "Over 100 Belizean working men and women have joined or renewed their membership in the General Workers' Union since January 1. Among the new union

clearly impressed with the new Garbutt Creek branch's concern with the exploitation of women workers in Cayo District.[163] In March Middleton, who had decried the treatment of Belizean working women as animals, announced the creation of a union committee to demand good jobs for women.[164] Betson appealed to domestics to join the GWU, saying "You need not resort to violence. We have passed that stage."[165]

In April at the union's annual general meeting, Betson and the other older leaders, many of them of working class background and dark-skinned, were ousted by the young middle class nationalists.[166] Betson was quoted in the Daily Clarion of April 27 as warning "there exists of late a subtle infiltration amongst the masses in the Union... and I wonder... if the working masses realized fully the aspect of this sudden appearance joining their fold."[167] The new General Secretary, Nicholas Pollard - one of the young Catholics in the social

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members are housewives, office workers, numerous tradesmen and labourers."

[163] Belize Billboard, 16 February 1950, 5. A member of the Garbutt Creek branch called for the GWU to take action of behalf of women being paid 80 cents a day in the district.

[164] Belize Billboard, 2 March 1950, 2.

[165] 5 March 1950, 6.

[166] Bolland (1986), 114-115; Grant, 127; Shoman, 205. Pollard became President, Smith Vice President, and Price and Goldson were elected to the Executive Council of the union.

[167] Assad Shoman, "The Making and Breaking of the United General workers Union, Belize: Ethnicity and Development, papers of the first Studies on Belize conference (Belize SPEAR, 1987), 4.

justice study group and organizer of the Mercantile Clerks Union in the 1940s - quickly began to preach his Jesuit-inspired vision of social harmony: "We must not preach class hatred. Labor cannot do without capital, but capital cannot do without labor also."[168] He also initiated co-operation with the colonial government on social welfare projects.[169] Although Goldson still considers the new leadership to have been more militant, this was only in the sense of being anticolonial, for none of them were primarily committed to labor.[170]

A number of union stewards from different occupational groups were elected, with Harriet Durante representing the domestics.[171] Clearly, the union had recognized the importance of this, the largest single group of employed women in the city. According to Elfreda Reyes, Durante was the wife of a union member who supported her activism.[172] At the end of April, Mervyn Hulse's exhortation to Creole men appeared, contrasting with Betson's earlier message of calm to working women.

Leigh Richardson, like Betson, called for an end to disorder and violence. Shoman describes him as "the chief propagandist for the need to organize on sound party lines."[173]

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[168] Belize Billboard, 4 May 1950, 1.

[169] Belize Billboard, 27 August 1950, 11.

[170] Interview with Philip Goldson, 16 July 1991.

[171] Belize Billboard, 30 April 1950, 1.

[172] Interview with Elfreda Reyes, 11 July 1991.

[173] Shoman, 206.

Editor of the Billboard with Philip Goldson since 1948, he was studying in London at the time of devaluation, but mailed editorials to the paper. In July he claimed that "the day of the Battlefield is past. Proper political machinery must be set up and paid for."[174] He stressed this again after his return, particularly when addressing two huge Battlefield meetings in August. At the second of these, attended by 10 000 people, he argued specifically for constitutional change.[175] The origins of Richardson's tendency to cooperate with the British and stress the value of parliamentary procedure over popular struggle are discernible from the beginning. The PUP did form at the end of September, and the popular movement did become increasingly dependent on it, but the Battlefield was to remain important throughout the decade.[176] The PUP's first leaders were Johnny Smith as Leader, Leigh Richardson as Chairman, George Price as Secretary and Philip Goldson as Assistant Secretary.[177]

In October there was a stevedores' strike on the Belize City waterfront and the Billboard reported that women were out picketing all night in the rain.[178] The following month City Council (CitCo) elections were held, with women active in

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[174] Belize Billboard, 16 July 1950, 2.

[175] Belize Billboard, 11 and 20 August 1950.

[176] Shoman, 207; Bolland (1986), 115; Shoman "Authoritarian State", 52; Party Pols, 87.

[177] Shoman, Party Politics, 22.

[178] Belize Billboard, "Women Back Up the Pickets," 15 October 1950, 1.

campaigning for the PUP, going door to door and raising money. Goldson refers to the PUP women of the early 1950s as "mainly women who were at the grassroots level, uneducated but very loyal. They were good campaigners. It was the women who carried the message from house to house."[179] They would also have attended the large campaign rallies held at various outdoor locations.[180] Five of the PUP's six candidates won, giving the nationalists a majority of one on the nine-seat council and making CitCo a political power base from which to criticize the central colonial administration.[181]

Richardson and Goldson were first charged with sedition during this election campaign.[182] This is consistent with the punitive attitude of the colonial government during 1950. Shoman cites an advertising boycott of the Billboard by Brodie's, the largest commercial firm in the colony, and the colonial government's ban on publication of any official communiques in the newspaper. The October strike was also declared illegal.[183] Grant mentions also the government's direct pressure on the GWU to break with the PUP.[184] There were conciliatory measures too

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[179] Interview with Philip Goldson, 3 July 1991.

[180] Belize Billboard, 16 and 19 November 1950. Attendance at each rally was 1000-1400 people.

[181] Grant 147 and Shoman, Party Politics, 22.

[182] Grant, 165.

[183] Shoman, 207.

[184] Cedric Grant, The Making of Modern Belize,

- a temporary food subsidy, more spending on social services and roads. The newspaper spent considerable time attacking these measures as inadequate and damaging, invoking against the colonial state the image of the harried housewife trying to cope with a rising cost of living and import controls.[185] But the efforts to destroy the PUP and its individual leaders were serious.

Goldson remembers that he, Richardson, Price and Johnny Smith - the senior legislator among the nationalists - were advised by the United States Jesuits at St. John's College in their negotiations with the governor to have the sedition charges dropped. On the day of the trial, which never happened because the governor instructed the judge to drop the charges, Price was not in court. The following description by Goldson illustrates Price's ability to appear uncompromising with the colonial administration and to mobilize the popular movement, and particularly women, in his own interests:

> After we left the courthouse...all the women as usual were there, Miss Hazel, Miss Elsa...everybody come down with us rejoicing, happy. Now it seems that as the crowd were going across the bridge they met George Price. So he said to me, "What happen, you no goin' da court?". So I said, "Well, the Attorney General read something from the Governor and the judge throw out the case." So he says, "Oh, I had heard that these boys had swole up to the Governor but I didn't believe it." And the women: "What Mr. George you never know about this?"...Now in those days the Billboard office was right on Regent Street...and the first inkling we had that anything was wrong was somebody came and said George Price had a meeting out by Central Park. In those days it used to be called Battlefield...And the next thing we know, people

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[185] Belize Billboard, 7 September 1950, 1; 18 February 1951, 1; 5 March 1951, 1.

> were coming and stoning our office! Women. Calling us traitors. Well, some men among them too, but mainly the women were so indignant.[186]

The final event of significance in terms of gender and the nationalist movement during November 1950 was that the GWU had 150 domestics attend a meeting at which they were encouraged to join the union.[187] Henry Middleton, who had survived the April purge, reported on their low wages and bad working conditions (which the women were obviously aware of already). Richardson, as a PUP City Councillor, urged them to join or be traitors to themselves, their country, and worst of all their children. The tendency for nationalist leaders to appeal to even working women in their roles as mothers emerged here. A middle class woman - housewife and teacher - addressed the domestics also, arguing that the way to support families was not to practice birth control but for "every housewife, domestic servant and other working woman to join the GWU, to back up our men, to protect ourselves against overwork and unjust wages." This contrasts with British policy of keeping the birth rate down to keep pressure off wages, although both sides were linking household reproduction and survival with capitalist wage relations.

Conflict at many levels continued in 1951. In April the PUP took even firmer control of the GWU, in July the Governor dissolved CitCo, and in the fall Richardson and Goldson were

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[186] July 16, 1991

[187] Belize Billboard, "Domestics Begin Unity," 3 December 1950, 6.

charged, tried and convicted of sedition. Pollard continued to argue for co-operation between capital and labor, just as the political leaders were arguing against class hatred and for unity. In January there were reports of domestics being fired for belonging to the union, and the Labor Department report for that year did note an increase in domestics making individual complaints about working conditions. It also noted that these were among the most difficult cases to resolve - not surprising given that domestics' had no legal rights, that employers' authority was virtually absolute and that there was a huge pool of unemployed women in Belize City.[188] In February domestics were among the workers for whom the GWU asked the Labor Advisory Board to legislate a minimum wage, as some were receiving only $1 for as much as 84 hours of work per week.[189]

At the end of April, not only did the GWU cease to have any real independent power from the PUP, but a draft constitutional report was released.[190] It was offensive to the majority of people, limiting suffrage through an English literacy requirement.[191] Street demonstrations erupted again. At the same time, the PUP elected a new executive not much different from the last: Smith as Leader, Richardson as Chairman, Price as

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[188] Annual Report of the Department of Labor (Belize: 1951), 9.

[189] Belize Billboard, 11 February 1951, 3.

[190] Shoman, 208.

[191] Grant, 150.

Secretary and Goldson as Assistant Secretary. Mrs. Elsa Vasquez, one of the most militant of Price's supporters who was later rewarded with a Senate post in the 1960s, was elected to the party Council.

In July the colonial government attacked the nationalist movement by dissolving CitCo and the same day Elfreda Reyes led an angry crowd to Government House. Gladys Stewart remembers, "I didn't see it, but we heard that she was right up at the gate shaking her fingers at Government House you know...Had they broken the gate you would have had maybe a riot."[192] This incident occurred in the middle of the day, when mostly women involved in the informal economy or full time domestic labor would have been able to participate. At the same time, the Billboard kept up a steady stream of articles and editorials which reiterated the image of woman as housewife, admittedly a politicized role when the nationalists were attacking import controls and the rising cost of living. In early August a petition against the dissolution gathered 1200 signatures in half a day, almost certainly through the efforts and community networks of women.[193] The people clearly felt that CitCo was theirs. The colonial state's failure to discredit the PUP and GWU was shown in mid-August when 5000 people turned out to hear the four PUP leaders on the Battlefield.[194] A typical range of

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[192] Interview with Gladys Stuart, 25 July 1991.

[193] Shoman, 210; Belize Billboard, 6 August 1951, 1.

[194] Belize Billboard, 15 August 1951, 1.

topics was covered - social progress through self-government and economic independence, the record of colonial rule: low wages, poor housing, education and health, lack of democracy, employers' control of workers in the lumber camps.

In September 5000 also attended the PUP celebrations of The Tenth - the anniversary of a 1798 naval victory over the Spaniards - while only 300 attended the official parade and the Governor took the unusual step of staying at home.[195] There was renewed popular agitation around the sedition trials of the two editors and politicians in November. During these, Goldson simply listed the usual grievances of the people, but Richardson repudiated revolution, claiming that conditions in British Honduras were not bad enough to warrant one. Smith too claimed "We have no revolutionary goals."[196] By the end of the year, Price was the only free PUP leader, Smith and Hulse having resigned over the others' disrespect for the British monarchy.

Goldson and Richardson were in jail together until the following July, although Richardson kept writing for the Billboard. A complicated chain of people smuggled his articles - written in the dark on toilet paper - out of the prison. One of these was a maid at Government House, who would get the articles from one of the prisoners who came there daily in a work gang.

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[195] Belize Billboard, 10 September 1951, 1.

[196] Belize Billboard, 1 November 1951, 3 and 4 November 1951, 2-4.

This unnamed maid would then take them to the Billboard office, causing the colonial government considerable frustration.[197]

The first action of 1952 occurred in March after the new governor, Renison, called new CitCo elections. A new round of rallies, speeches and marches ensued which focused on the same issues of housing, streets, sewers,and drainage, and although the PUP did not win a majority it maintained its presence in municipal politics, with the continued backing of the GWU.[198] In April, with Goldson and Richardson still in jail, Price became President of the GWU.[199] He was of course also the Secretary and sole operative leader of the PUP and a power in CitCo.

At the annual general meeting of the GWU, social worker Gwendolyn Dunn gave a telling speech critical of women's place in the trade union. She made no specific allegations but her comments indicate that women were a secondary issue for the GWU leadership, which was likely more interested in mobilizing their energy than in solving their specific problems.

Dunn highlighted the low wages women received and how vulnerable this made them, leading to illegitimate births, juvenile delinquency and malnutrition. She criticized women's dependence on men throughout the colony. As a social worker she

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[197] Interview with Philip Goldson, 16 July 1991.

[198] Belize Billboard, daily reports through March 1952.

[199] Belize Billboard, 2 April 1952, 1; Shoman, Party Politics, 22; Bolland, 116.

would have been well aware of the connections between domestic violence and the scarcity of cash in the household. The Social Development Department report for 1956 mentioned that marital disputes brought before the department's social workers were due largely to economic insecurity. She concluded by arguing both that working women need to be organized and that the GWU should work on behalf of the whole community, not just its membership. There is no evidence of criticism of her, although she was fired for embezzlement in February of 1954,[200] but her comments certainly challenged the discourse based on the family wage which the PUP was developing. She argued for women's rights as workers and as mothers, particularly of future workers and leaders, cleverly invoking women's role as educator as a way of justifying their higher wages and greater power within the union.

May Day of 1952 was celebrated in grand style. The Billboard reported George Price addressing a large gathering and telling workers to unite for "plenty, harmony and freedom" not for "class conflict or dictatorship". He called fascism, communism and colonialism "chicks of the same brood".[201] Elfreda Reyes remembers that May Day because she organized a large number of women, most of them GWU members, domestics, and single mothers - if not all three - to march through town up to the Barracks on the north side, dance the maypole, and set up food

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[200] Belize Billboard, 26 Feb/54, 2.

[201] Belize Billboard, 2 May 1952, 2.

stalls. She recalls it as a "mammoth...beautiful march and we were singing...We took up there foods to sell...relleno, escabeche."[202] The women handed over the considerable proceeds of their stalls to Pollard, wanting it used for their struggle. Reyes indicates that this essentially social event began the process of thinking and organizing that culminated in the domestics' wage drive a year later.[203]

In June conflict erupted between the British Honduras Federation of Women (BHFW) and the GWU over the right to supply seasonal female labor to the Stann Creek Valley citrus industry. The BHFW was a middle class organization fundamentally allied with the colonial state and its work with working class women and girls was conceived of as charity. It did later raise money and build a daycare for single working mothers, but in this 1952 case it appears to have been acting to attack the nationalists through the GWU's control of female labor. The colonial state appears to have been making an alternative claim on working women through the BHFW by raising a cross-class gender identity above their union and class belonging. There was some dissent within the Federation - a letter in the Billboard from an anonymous inquirer indicated that one of the officers of the BHFW had at a recent meeting called on women to join the GWU as the best way to improve the country, and that BHFW President

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[202] Interview with Elfreda Reyes, 11 July 1991.

[203] This should be taken as very shaky evidence of a long term development of collective organization.

Mina Grant became angry "and tried to reprimand her". [204] Given Gwen Lizzaraga's subsequent close association with the PUP it is likely that she was the unnamed officer and thus that her Presidency of the BHFW signalled its takeover by the nationalists.

The pro-British Clarion published an advertisement for women workers on June 11:

> The BHFW wants to make contact with 150 women, married or unmarried, who would be willing to undertake work in the canning industry in Stann Creek as from September next. A minimum daily wage of $2.00 and quarters will be guaranteed and sick benefit will be provided. Those interested are invited to see the President of the Federation, Mrs. Mina Grant, or the Vice-President, Mrs. Gwendolyn Lizzaraga and Mrs. Vivian Seay, MBE, JP.[205]

Nicholas Pollard responded strongly on behalf of the union, criticizing the BHFW for "acting as an employment agency for the Citrus Company of Stann Creek," and calling the Federation's action "cunning, unladylike and malicious," aimed at undermining the GWU.[206] His letter speculated that the Citrus Company and probably also the National Party (organized in August 1951 by pro-British Belizeans including Vivian Seay, Lionel Francis, and Harrison Courtenay[207]) were using the BHFW, that members of the National Party were taking "refuge under the petticoats of their female associates." He stressed that the BHFW was well aware of

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[204] Belize Billboard, 26 August 1952, 3.

[205] The Clarion, "Wanted: 150 Women," 11 June 1952, 2.

[206] Belize Billboard, "150 Women for Stann Creek?" 17 June 1952, 1.

[207] Grant, 148.

the GWU collective agreement with the Citrus Company by which union members were to be given hiring priority.

> The Federation of Women (who represent little more than 50 nominal women members) can hardly be ignorant of the hard fight the GWU has gone through in order to win for the Pomona workers the very conditions of employment which the Federation now so brazenly offers the women readers of the Clarion.-namely, overtime pay at time and a half rates after eight hours of work, free "quarters, and sick benefit." Being nothing but adventuresses, the Federation's archaic leaders fail also to tell the female public that according to Article 21 of the GWU Citrus Co. Agreement, passages together with freight costs, plus one dollar and fifty cents per day for subsistence is payable for each worker recruited over ten miles from Pomona or Middlesex.

Pollard claimed that the BHFW's president, Mina Grant, didn't care if the offer was accurate, saying "laconically, that the Federation's job is to help all women in any general manner." The letter concluded by encouraging interested women to "come to the right place - The General Worker's Union, which has a unit for all women workers." On July 10, and possibly also on July 4, the GWU met with "all female members" of the union "to consider the question of employment with the Citrus Company of Stann Creek."[208] On July 4 the Billboard published the original May 24 letter from F.G. Sharpe, manager of the plant, to Mina Grant. Pollard pointed out that the 45 women whose names were listed by Sharpe for the BHFW were all GWU members who had worked in Pomona previously, and he called on these women particularly to attend the July 10 meeting. The text of Sharpe's letter raises all kinds of questions about who really created

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[208] Belize Billboard, 1 and 3 July 1952.

this crisis, questions which there is unfortunately no way of answering.

> Dear Madam,
>
> I am instructed to write you with a view to recruiting a number of girls to work in our Grapefruit Sectionising Plant, during the coming crop of 1952/53 and to advise you that the Section Plant will go into operation on or about October 1st, 1952.
>
> I am under the impression that our Miss Nicholson, who is the Supervisor of the Section Plant, has already been and discussed with you this possibility.
>
> In our effort to secure a more stable type of worker, we are proposing to build a number of houses, especially for housing these girls, and each house will contain eight girls, be grouped together, and in care of a special supervisor.
>
> We have been instructed to furnish you with the names of a couple of Belize girls who worked with us during the crop that ended April last, but we find that in no instance do we have any particular girl's address. We do however have a considerable list of names and furnish these herewith.

What Pollard failed to mention in his diatribe against a clearly anti-labor and anti-nationalist tactic with obvious gendered character is that the union agreement with the company specified a male wage of $2.25 a day for canning citrus, a female daily wage of $1.80.[209] Women workers could choose between a militant anti-colonial union that maintained gender inequality and a middle class women's organization which was likely more sympathetic and seemed to offer higher wages, but which was part (albeit a somewhat contradictory part) of the oppressive colonial apparatus.

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[209] Colonial Report 1952, 9.

In July huge crowds came out to meet Goldson and a week later Richardson as they were released from jail.[210] A spontaneous rally for Goldson must have been composed largely of women, judging by the comments of two male leaders to the crowd.[211] GWU Vice President Herman Jex (who would become the President of the union in April 1953) cut the speeches short, "realizing that it was late and that many of the women had yet to prepare their mid-day meals for their families (although some had done that from early as four o'clock this morning)." While this reinforced women's domestic responsibility, it did also recognize the importance of their daily work at some level. The message of the GWU Secretary from Stann Creek, Domingo Ventura, was far less sensitive: "He called on the women to be more moral, keeping good watch over their children, keeping check with their school work each day, even if the mothers were not fortunate to reach the sixth grade."

The contradictions of the nationalist coalition, which will be analyzed more fully in the next chapter, were evident in late July. Richardson preached the need for a "living family wage" and the paper argued that "a nation begins with a family."[212] At a 600-person PUP-GWU rally in the Cinderella Town area on Belize City's northside, Ventura expanded his traditional patriarchal view of labor's struggle: "It is up to the women to

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[210] Shoman, Party Politics, 22; Shoman, "The Birth of", 213.

[211] Belize Billboard, 8 July 1952, 1.

[212] Belize Billboard, 18 and 23 July 1952.

push their men into the GWU. If you women do not do that it is you who are going to be the greatest sufferers."[213] At the same rally, however, Pollard claimed "The GWU's for every man, women and child who depends on work for a living," and nationalist Lloyd Coffin told the crowd that the union was fighting not just for its members but for "every girl who walks her master's carriage, or kills herself out in his kitchen or at his washbowl." The need in those early years of struggle against the British, BEC and other companies made for contradictory appeals to women, whose fundamental liberation was in no way part of the nationalist project.

The annual September celebrations saw 3000 nationalists parading. Elfreda Reyes was quoted in the paper for the first time, described simply as "a widow". She "called on the mothers and women in general of this country to teach their children that patriotism is service of every worthwhile kind to their country." The PUP parade was led by a woman playing the "Goddess of Colonial Justice", a figure whose meaning remains implicit.[214]

In October a strike by women cannery workers at the citrus company foreshadowed the impending general strike. Both Goldson and Pollard stressed to me that the women in Stann Creek were very militant and indeed it was noted during a 1956 strike that "It is impossible to replace the factory sectionizers, who are

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[213] Belize Billboard, 30 July 1952, 4.

[214] Belize Billboard, 9 and 11 September 1952.

loyal GWU women."[215] Despite this militancy, Richardson insisted on speaking of the "living costs of the worker and his growing family." [216]

The general strike began on October 20 and was focused on the BEC sawmill, the Public Works yard, and the building site of the Fort George Hotel. Through the weeks of the strike the women of Belize City picketed and marched in the hundreds, attacked scabs, and were arrested. They formed about a third of those charged, but Elfreda Reyes insists that many more women were hauled before the magistrate by the police, but the magistrate - who may have been Arthur Balderamos, one of the 1940s nationalists - kept throwing out the charges. Emma Boiton recounted the story of the elderly Miss Tiny who was brought before the magistrate five times and had the charges thrown out each time.[217]

The union called several meetings of its female members in the first days of the strike, presumably to organize their support activities and possibly also to ask them not to go on strike themselves. Women did not go on strike, but did provide support for the pickets at the three main work sites. Tharine

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[215] Belize Billboard, 9 February 1956, 1.

[216] Belize Billboard, 8 October 1952, 1.

[217] Interviews with Elfreda Reyes, 10 July 1991 and Emma Boiton, 9 July 1991. The names of those charged appeared in the Billboard on 25 November. Ten of the 29 were women: Elsa Vasquez, Hazel Gentle, Merlene Middleton, Violet Hughes, Mavis Sealey, Leolin Hewitt, Clarine Gentle, Irma Middleton, Liza Gray, and Jane Hall.

Rudon, Elfreda Reyes and a small number of other women spent Saturdays packaging food and doling it out to families.[218] According to Goldson, it was the women who came to the union office to get the food and to ask for other kinds of help from the GWU.[219] Other women worked at the soup kitchen which fed 150-200 strikers daily, and Shoman notes that market women donated money to the strike fund and food to fundraising dances.[220] Food also came in from the Stann Creek district where Garifuna women grew most of the provisions while men fished and worked in the citrus orchards - as it had after the 1931 hurricane. Tharine Rudon said "the different villages would send us ground food, all like plantains and coco and all of that."[221]

All this support work helped the strikers hold out against the repression of the colonial state and resistance of particularly the Belize Estate and Produce Company. It may have influenced the rank and file's decision to extend the executive's planned two day strike indefinitely. Within two weeks negotiations had begun with the government for its Public Works employees and those working on the Commonwealth Development Corporation-funded hotel, as well as with United Fruit for stevedores and longshoremen. The BEC refused to

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[218] Interview with Tharine Rudon, July 28, 1991: "And then I had about three or four women every Saturday to come and we would [give out] these things according to your family."

[219] Interview with Philip Goldson, 16 July 1991.

[220] Shoman, "The Birth of...", 215.

[221] Interview with Tharine Rudon, 28 July 1991.

negotiate, fired the striking men, closed the sawmill, and with government permission used the radio to appeal for scab labor. It was when scabs tried to enter the sawmill that physical conflict broke out and arrests were made. It was here, for example, that Jane Hall was arrested. The strike collapsed on December 8 and only 70 of the original 260 strikers were re-employed.[222] However, the GWU's membership had risen by a thousand to 8200, and would rise to over 10 000 by 1954. Already by November the union had split the female unit in two - domestic workers and outfitters (seamstresses, milliners and garment factory workers).[223]

The domestics did not go on strike, but met frequently with other women workers such as hospital ward maids and washerwomen. This activity stepped up after the general strike ended, with a meeting of 100 domestic servants on the night of December 14. At this meeting Elfreda Reyes, "chairlady of the Domestic Service Advisory Board of the GWU, chaired the meeting" and demanded action to secure better wages. In telling the women not to fear, she displayed greater sensitivity and sharper analysis of the politics of the situation than did Herman Jex, who seemed to think the women were passive. He told them they "must begin to play a greater part. The future of our children depends on your efforts." Leigh Richardson, as Education Secretary of the GWU, informed them of what they already knew through lifetimes of

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[222] Shoman 214-215.

[223] Belize Billboard, 17 November 1952, 3.

bitter experience - "You cannot build a sound life upon 5 cents an hour." [224]

Given the action taken by the domestics' in early 1953, these meetings during and after the strike were clearly not just for organizing strike support. Most accounts of the 1950s skip 1953, or call it a "prolonged election campaign" leading up to the first full suffrage elections in April 1954.[225] In fact, the first months of 1953 were marked by a well-publicized wage drive by the domestics for $5 a week - still pitifully low given the cost of living, but well above the $2-$3 many were making. At the beginning of the strike, the Billboard's industrial correspondent cited cases of women working 50 to 60 hours a week for these wages, and of women "whose deathly fear of their employers prevents them from joining a trade union."[226] He called this "slavery in Belize".

The drive was indicative of the development of women's consciousness and organization within the union, influenced by their work together canvassing, fundraising, picketing and their experience of the developing nationalist culture with its own celebrations and gathering places. Indeed, the need for maximum mobilization against the British likely tended to give the women more space despite the traditional domestic ideology of the

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[224] Belize Billboard, 15 December 1952, 3.

[225] This is the analysis of Nigel Bolland (1986), 116. and of Shoman, 216.

[226] Belize Billboard, 23 October 1952, 2.

nationalist leadership. This space was taken up most actively by working women on their own behalf in the spring of 1953 with this domestics' wage drive.

Philip Goldson and Elfreda Reyes led the drive, announcing in early February that the 450 members of the GWU's Domestic Workers' Department had voted to make this effort.[227] Their demands were for $5 a week, a maximum of 8 hours per day and 48 hours per week, time and a half after 8 hours, a day off a week, higher rates for "cooking and other skilled domestic work", 14 days notice or 14 days pay, and signed contracts as provided by the 1943 Employers and Workers Ordinance. Although there was apparently some picketing of big houses occupied by colonial families, success ultimately depended on individual negotiations. Elfreda herself was working for a dentist and his wife, and simply told the woman that if she treated her like a slave she would knock her down. The women who failed to secure the $5, she said, were too afraid to confront their employers.[228] It is clear that GWU men did not turn out to support the domestics, as the domestics had for them several months earlier. Nor did any leader except Goldson take an interest until the return of Pollard from a trip to Brussels. Reacting to their self-organization with the same attitude of defending his turf as he displayed during the conflict with the

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[227] Belize Billboard, 8 February 1953, 1 and 3.

[228] Interview with Elfreda Reyes, 11 July 1991.

BHFW, he called on them "to flock to the GWU for protection and guidance."[229]

In April, Pollard brought his wife, Elizabeth, to one of the domestics' meetings. She gave a speech and joined the GWU Housewives and Seamstresses local.[230] Her speech, as reported in the Billboard, is impressive, and it would be fascinating to know the circumstances in which it was written and how it was received. A middle class woman, although burdened with an activist husband and a large number of children, she spoke to the domestics as members of a "worldwide sisterhood". In praising their efforts, Mrs. Pollard used Christian and nationalistic language, making no mention of their specific problems as working class women or single mothers. Referring to their noble purpose, she removed their effort from the realm of necessity and survival, made it sound ethereal rather than earthly. Although class relations and poverty were avoided, there was a critical edge:

> We know that we women are a very important part of every association. In fact, most leaders will tell you that in order to get anything done in Belize most of the time plans had to be pushed by women...I would say that I have been active only as a mother and the wife of your general secretary. I would now like to become active as one of you.

GWU trustee Tharine Rudon followed Elizabeth Pollard and spoke to the domestics of their rights, called their demands reasonable and simple, appealed for unity and new members. Her

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[229] Belize Billboard, 3 March 1953, 1.

[230] Belize Billboard, 12 April 1953, 3.

concluding remarks may have been based on her knowledge that many of the domestics were single mothers or the main support of a household:

> Who shall be able to stop us if we like a marching army keep on as we have started? An orderly, united determined body, asking, no, demanding the right to be independent and self-supporting.

This seemed to indicate that a more autonomous organization of women within the GWU was possible, but the whole wage drive faltered by the summer. Not only was it almost impossible to break the power of employers given the female labor surplus in town, but the nationalist movement as a whole was gearing up for the 1954 elections, and there was no significant support from either union or party men. Like the leaders, they very likely saw women in the role of supporters and may not have considered female wages worth their time, energy and resources. Reports of domestics' meetings did continue in the newspaper until September.

At this juncture, the colonial government moved beyond its routine social welfare and development policies directed at women, and passed a body of family law that on the whole strengthened women within the family, at least in theory. The origins of these legal changes in married women's property rights, all mothers' rights to child support, and similar measures, are in the recommendations of the Moyne and Orde-Browne reports, but also in immediate local conditions. The laws were meant to appeal to women, but also to encourage the nuclear

family form in which the wage earning husband takes responsibility for his dependents.[231]

The laws had little effect in wooing women away from the PUP, but they do indicate a definite shift by 1953, away from repressive actions like Renison's use of the government radio station during the general strike to encourage strike breaking, and toward a policy of slow controlled negotiations involving major concessions on both sides. The movement was too strong to crush with repression, but not nearly strong enough that its leaders could refuse to negotiate with the British. They benefitted from compromise because progress toward self-government, which was strongly linked in popular political culture with economic solutions, deradicalized the workers' movement which was fundamentally threatening to what the PUP leaders wanted to accomplish. The British did not control the process of change completely, nor were they clear that they wanted decolonization.[232] But they did manage to turn the PUP leaders, even eventually Price, into approximately the kind of local political elite they wanted, one which "would seek to protect their political monopoly in the face of more radical democratic demands."[233]

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[231] There was little coverage of these legal changes in the Billboard, and most of it took a jovial tone.

[232] Gordon K. Lewis, 108, argues that the idea of willing imperial withdrawal is nothing but a myth, and that in each of the West Indian colonies struggle was key in securing decolonization.

[233] Bolland (1986), 108.

The PUP's consistent pressure and endless proposals since 1950 paid off in 1953 not only with family law but with a new constitution agreed on.[234] This provided for a majority-elected Legislative Assembly, universal adult suffrage, but the retention of the Governor's executive power, to last until 1960.[235] It also released the colony from imperial Treasury control, imposed in the early 1930s.[236]

Constitutional changes in 1953 paved the way for the 1954 elections. After the colonial state insisted that the union hold a vote on whether to endorse a particular party, which passed overwhelmingly in September 1953, the PUP and GWU ran a joint slate of candidates on a platform that dealt with housing, health, education, social security, water and sewer, co-operatives, labor laws, industrial development, hydroelectricity and West Indian Federation. As Shoman points out, all this was framed by an argument for self-government. The GWU was bitterly opposed to federation, which they believed would lead to massive immigration from the crowded islands and the driving down of wages. It was a labor issue, not one of ethnic prejudice, for the strongest objections were from the Creole working class.

Also in September, the colonial state appointed seven women enumerators, after complaints by the PUP that a woman in the northern town of Corozal had been denied voter registration

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[234] Grant 153; Shoman, 22-23;

[235] Bolland, 107.

[236] Waddell, 101.

although she could sign her name. Clifford Betson's daughter was one, and Gwendolyn Lizzaraga another. They seem to have been concentrated in Belize city and district. In October Tharine Rudon was elected Treasurer of the PUP, with Elfreda Reyes, Hazel Gentle, Elsa Vasquez, Enid Panting and six men elected as party councilors.[237]

Women were key in canvassing and campaigning again during these elections. Miss Caroline Flowers remembers women being prominent in going door to door, and Tony Soberanis Jr. told me "We had a few men going around but it was mostly women... The women were always more interested than the men, even in voting."[238] Nicholas Pollard reiterated that "Women were always campaigning and canvassing; most of the canvassers were women...Elfreda was very prominent."[239] Indeed, the newspaper did report that she addressed a Pickstock rally calling on citizens to vote PUP for progress of country.[240] In early April the Billboard gave recognition to one female campaigner in the Belize Rural district. Dorothy Bradley was praised as tireless, dedicated, quiet, aggressive, vibrant, and "a handy woman on a farm, in the kitchen or around the house": "one reason why the People's United Party and the General Workers

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[237] Belize Billboard, 1 October 1953, 1.

[238] Interview with Miss Flowers, 4 July 1991; interview with Tony Soberanis, Jr., 5 July 1991.

[239] Interview with Nicholas Pollard, 11 July 1991.

[240] Belize Billboard, 26 February 1954, 1.

Union are likely to gain 8 or 9 of the elected seats in the Legislative Assembly elections."[241]

Official nomination papers were signed in early April also, and it is interesting to note that Price, Goldson and Richardson all had women as well as men sign them. Price had Elsa Vasquez and Jane Hall, Goldson had Elfreda's sisters Virginia and Ianthe Stanford as well as his mother, and Richardson had Miss Maud King. The bembe women clearly lent legitimacy to the candidates.

Despite a last minute investigation launched by Renison into the PUP's contacts with Guatemalan officials and radio attacks on the nationalists by the Governor, the PUP-GWU ticket swept 8 of the 9 elected seats, losing only in the southern district of Punta Gorda where GWU organization was weak.[242] As Shoman claims, the issue of colonial oppression was far more important in 1954 than the Guatemalan claim.[243] The union was absolutely key in the districts. Almost immediately, the PUP began to prepare for new CitCo elections and the GWU began a membership drive and to push for new labor legislation on wages and working conditions.[244]

Over the next two years Goldson and Richardson became increasingly involved in the colonial administration, especially

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[241] Belize Billboard, "Dorothy Crusades Against Colonialism," 5 April 1954, 1.

[242] Shoman, 222.

[243] Shoman, 219.

[244] Belize Billboard, 12 May 1954, 4.

once the quasi-ministerial system was established in 1955 and they became Ministers. Price, as an assistant minister, was also a member of the Executive Council, but deliberately maintained his leadership of the popular movement and his power in municipal politics. Indeed, while Grant, Shoman and Bolland see the process of struggle moving to a more elite level at this point, working men and women continued to be active in civil society.

The GWU domestics continued to meet and fundraise, the Federation of Women pursued its day nursery plan and had the Governor's wife Mrs. Renison lay the cornerstone of the building; the Federation also had talk on how women could contribute to development of country, and women continued to join the GWU.[245] In November a female worker was fired from Sharpe's and the whole sectionizing plant, where female labor was concentrated, went on strike.[246]

Far more significant at this juncture, however, was the visit to England by Jex, Goldson, and Richardson in October and November at the invitation of the Colonial Office. Although they did present demands for substantial financial aid and were met at the airport by a crowd of over a thousand when they

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[245] Belize Billboard, 13 July, 3; 23 July, 3; 14 August, 1; 30 August, 1.

[246] Belize Billboard, 21 November 1954, 1.

returned,[247] the visit signalled their incorporation into Britain's pace and style of constitutional change.

Co-optation, Resistance and Negotiation: 1955-1960

The Labor Department report for 1955 called the year one of industrial peace, "quiescence and consolidation".[248] Indeed, with the PUP leaders now preoccupied with the daily business of governing, a "pause for adjustment" was somewhat to be expected. Labor activism did sink - May Day, usually marked by parades, passed by with little activity. The Labor report said that "some union leaders were faced with a falling away of interest of members as intense participation in political activity declined". In March at a GWU meeting Price announced he would not run again but defended Pollard, who was extremely popular, against accusations by the executive that he was abusing his powers. Goldson and Richardson were focused on their ministerial work and began to argue in the Billboard that government alone could not be responsible for solving the housing crisis.[249] On May Day workers were told to rejoice that they were now so well represented in government.[250] Richardson made a strong anticommunist statement in June, arguing for a strong state role

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[247] Belize Billboard, 9 November 1954, 1.

[248] 1955 Labor Department Annual Report, 3. The report contrasted 1955 with "the previous five years [that] were full of conflict and unrest, industrial and political."

[249] Belize Billboard, 1 April 1955, 1.

[250] Belize Billboard, 1 May 1955, 1.

in mediating between capital and labor and in taking care of people.[251]

The GWU did sign a contract for the clerks at Vogue department store which included paid maternity leave, but the Mother's Day editorial made it clear that the minister-editors were moving toward the more traditional pole of their thinking. The article called on the Christian mothers of British Honduras to continue to make sacrifices on behalf of their children and their country.

The following year was far stormier, with renewed street action around strikes, CitCo elections and the September split in the PUP with Price, Pollard and most of the rank and file on one hand, Goldson, Richardson, Rudon, Reyes, other party executives and a minority of the rank and file on the other. When the new Governor Thornley arrived in January it was in the midst of strikes in the citrus industry and marches in Belize City by the unemployed.[252] He asked the people to accept him "as head of a great family comprising all in British Honduras"[253] - clearly he hadn't grasped the people's hostility and separation from the colonial state.

In February the GWU called for an across-the-board minimum wage for manual workers, except female ward maids, for whom they

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[251] Belize Billboard, 16 June, 3 and 21 June, 2-4.

[252] Belize Billboard, 14 January, 1 and 20 January, 1.

[253] Belize Billboard, 18 January, 1.

requested separate negotiations.[254] In the same month, 800 workers struck Sharpe's Citrus Company again, and it was on this occasion that the solidarity of the female cannery workers was noted. In late February and March the CitCo campaigns occurred. The first rally was reported on Feb 26. One thousand people attended and Price demonstrated his ability to connect with the crowd and create relations of mutual respect:

> 4 years of active political life had made the people of British Honduras graduates in the College of Politics, and the men and women in the streets held degrees in Political Science. Four years of politics had made BH people responsible, intelligent and sharp.

Tharine Rudon ran for the PUP and was publicly insulted by one of the candidates for the pro-colonial National Party, which had formed in 1951. This provoked the women at Rudon's rally to violent action:

> I remember it so well...I think it was on Canal Street they had a meeting... and they were talking all these kind of things, and the bloody women they move out, and they went around there, and they started to stone, [throw] bottles, and Francis and Wilson couldn't come out, because they were going to beat the hell out of them if they had come out.[255]

A woman also wrote a letter of protest to the Billboard and argued that Rudon's private life was nobody's business and that Francis was unfit for public office.[256] This incident suggests that a sense of a community of women had developed through political action, for most of these women would have known

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[254] Belize Billboard, 2 February 1956, 2.

[255] Interview with Tharine Rudon, 28 July 1991.

[256] Belize Billboard, "Woman's Dignity," 20 March 1956, 2.

Tharine from her work at the PUP office and during the general strike. A specific sense of commonality had bridged the differences of class between Tharine and the women of what she called "the coloured element" and was likely far more genuine than the relations between the BHFW women and the women they helped but did not work beside.

In May, Philip Goldson, the last leader to abandon the workers' cause, called May Day a celebration of the co-operation between labor, the state and capital, an occasion for everyone.[257] As early as March, Price had begun to mobilize the rank and file, through a petition, against Goldson's and Richardson's decision to back West Indian Federation, which they felt would bring economic development to Belizeans.[258] This issue, and the suspension of Pollard in July for misuse of union funds, led to the split in September. This was fundamentally over two different ways to deal with the colonial government, although it took on a racial character with Price seen as anti-black, pro-latino and pro-Guatemala. Grant analyzes Price's petition tactic against the others as follows:

> This reckoning of political influence in terms of active mass support was the underlying cause of Price's success. to have reckoned it in terms of the party organs was illusory because of their minimal role in the leadership struggle in the past.[259]

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[257] Belize Billboard, 28 April 1956, 1.

[258] Grant, 172-176.

[259] Grant, 177.

Although Goldson and Richardson, as well as Jex, Rudon, and Reyes, resigned, the meeting was violent. Elfreda remembers that when the first fighting broke out in the hall Price "brought a group of women outside in the street to create a sensation... There was Elsa Vasquez... Hazel Gentle, those were his support to do anything he would ask them to do. ... I myself wanted to give George Price a good whipping for what he was doing to women because he only wanted women, like Tharine, to support him, to go out there and break a window, and get behind Tharine and tell Tharine to say you did it , and she would, but not Elfreda".[260] Despite the disorder, the meeting did elect Price "undisputed leader of the party, a position he would continue to hold unchallenged for the next three decades."[261]

The association between the PUP and the GWU was over. Union membership had been declining anyway, but it plunged from 10 000 in 1954 to 700 by the end of 1956.[262] Richardson and Goldson formed the Honduras Independence Party and retained control of the GWU. Price allied with the charismatic and popular Pollard who had formed a the Christian Development Union in July following his expulsion. By the end of 1957 the GWU had 680 members, while the CDU had 1559.[263] The CDU never had any

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[260] Interview with Elfreda Reyes, 11 July 1991.

[261] Shoman, Party Politics, 23.

[262] Shoman, "Authoritarian State," 52. Labour Department report for 1956 and 1957, 9.

[263] Shoman, "The Making and Breaking", 5 with original source the 1956-57 Labour Department report.

independent strength, both it and Pollard being dependent on their association with Price and the PUP.[264] The PUP swept the 1957 elections again, for it now had its own party machine in the districts, and the GWU could do little to help the HIP, which failed to present a policy distinct from the PUP and the pro-colonial National Party.[265] Price successfully made Federation the central election issue, the split in the nationalists translating into the marginalization of the traditional anticolonial social and economic issues.

From the split until the end of 1958 Price used his control of the popular movement - maintained through a gendered religious discourse, patronage, and populist rhetoric - to push for rapid self-government on his terms.[266] Shoman argues that by late 1957

> Price had established a personalistic and paternalistic style of leadership, relying on his charismatic appeal with the rank and file and his considerable talent at manipulating the division and personality differences among other leaders in the party. Many of the PUP Assemblymen, especially from the districts, felt that they owed their position to Price and tendered him their personal loyalty.[267]

His strategies, such as his contacts with Guatemalan dictator General Ydigoras Fuentes, were not always

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[264] Ibid, 6; Grant, 185.

[265] Shoman, Party Politics, 25.

[266] Grant, 189-191.

[267] Shoman, Party Politics, 25-26.

constructive.[268] The colonial state took advantage of these contacts to try to discredit Price with the people. At a November constitutional conference in London Price met with the Guatemalan foreign minister, was sent home by the Colonial Office and expelled from the Executive Council by the Governor.[269] This made Price even a greater hero in the eyes of his followers: "The women they picked George up on their shoulder and back him down until they back him over bridgefoot." [270]

Pollard broke from Price in early 1958, apparently over Price's contacts with Guatemala, but more deeply because Price would not share power.[271] Price took control of the Christian Democratic Union and let it decline. In March 1958 he was tried for sedition but acquitted by the jury - his popularity and that of the PUP soared. But by late 1958 a stalemate had been reached, and Price was more interested in negotiation than continued confrontation through strategic use of an organized working class. The PUP "had been rudely awakened to the fact that popularity by itself did not confer legitimacy in a colonial society."[272] Bolland agrees that just after Price became mayor of Belize City in November 1958, he "came to accept

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[268] Grant 208

[269] Shoman, Party Politics, 25.

[270] Interview with Tharine Rudon, 28 July 1991.

[271] Bolland, 119 and interview with Nicholas Pollard, 11 July 1991.

[272] Grant, 195.

the British colonial process of decolonization".[273] Once he began to seriously negotiate in 1959, it was from a position of undisputed power.

By that point Richardson had left Belize for good and Goldson had become leader of the National Independence Party, an amalgamation of the NP and the HIP, which was associated in the public mind with colonialism.[274] Indeed, its formation signalled the colonial state's inability to contain Price. Goldson maintains that once Price and Pollard split for good, Price had his women supporters empty buckets of garbage on the steps of the Pollard house.[275]

In 1959 the constitutional report of Sir Hilary Blood was released. It recommended further delay before granting internal self-government because of concerns that the PUP was too powerful, that the middle class from which candidates would come was too small, that the "popular clamour" of "the large, uninformed, and for the most part inarticulate, body of persons who constitute the majority of the inhabitants of the country" was indicative of a "sick attitude of mind".[276] The PUP and NIP formed a united front to protest this and to pursue

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[273] Bolland (1986), 120.

[274] Bolland (1986), 120; Shoman, Party Politics, 26.

[275] Interview with Philip Goldson, 16 July 1991.

[276] Sir Hilary Blood. Report of the Constitutional Commissioner (British Honduras, 1959), 11 and 27.

constitutional change.[277] Talks took place in February 1960 with the result that the number of elected seats would increase, the majority of the Executive Council would be elected, and the Governor would lose his vote on ExCo.[278] Price cooperated with it all, knowing that when elections occurred his power in civil society would translate into state power. The PUP in fact won the 1961 elections and Price became first minister. Three years later, after further constitutional development, he became Prime Minister of the internally self-governing Belize, a post he has held ever since, except between 1984 and 1989. "The British insistence on the adoption of their form of two-party system was eventually internalized in the country's political culture," accepted as the proof of democracy.[279]

To analyze the late 1950s and early 1960s at this elite political level masks the ongoing conflicts within the nationalist movement, which by this time was George Price's PUP alone, with no significant union association. In early 1959 Gwendolyn Lizzaraga began to organize groups of lower income PUP women into United Women's Groups.[280] Her aims were various, but the central effort was to save money, amass building materials, and pressure central government into giving freehold plots in Belize City. The Belize Times referred to the UWGs as a social

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[277] Bolland 120; Shoman, 27; Grant, 218-219.

[278] Bolland (1986), 107.

[279] Shoman, 27.

[280] Belize Times, 7 February 1959, 1.

branch of the party, but the group's published aims went beyond routine women's auxiliary activities.[281]

Lizzaraga and her supporters wanted to bring down the cost of living, control rents, and encourage cheaper food rents - by means of demonstrations and petitions if necessary. They were concerned with the provision of milk to young girls, with slum clearance, and with the organization of the housing groups mentioned above.[282] The discourse about the group, some of it contributed by Lizzaraga, had both traditional and radical tendencies. On the one hand it was never described as other than a social auxiliary to the party and reproduced women's role as a quasi-public caretaker involved in community service, as well as women's role as housewife and mother. On the other, the same politicizing associations were made as throughout the decade. The rapid growth of the organization throughout every district in the colony and in Belize City, and the grassroots efforts to build houses must have been seen by the party hierarchy as threatening.[283] In August 1959 the party began to form United Men's Groups, which were forums for political discussion rather

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[281] The Belize Times was started by George Price as a rival to the Billboard after he failed to buy out the older paper. The Times is still the official voice of the PUP, while the Billboard ended publication in 1970.

[282] Belize Times, 7 February 1959, 1.

[283] By May 1959 there were 1400 members in Belize City. Belize Times, 12 May 1959, 1. Lizzaraga had visited nearly every part of the country, including district towns and some villages, by the end of the year.

than being geared for social action.[284] The Times continually supported the UWGs efforts to get land from government, and praised their stockpile of 28000 cement blocks.[285]

My research ends in 1960, but it is clear from PUP manifestos of the early and mid 1960s that the party leadership conceived of the state as a beneficent patriarch, who would decide what was necessary and when to provide it. This approach, in which self-generated organization in civil society was actively discouraged, is consistent with what Philip Goldson told me about the end of the housing drive. He claims that Lizzaraga's efforts to get land from the PUP administration after 1964 - in which she was Minister of Education - were blocked in overtly hostile ways by George Price and his powerful regional lieutenants. He believes that the party leadership felt it had to control women, and keep them in their assigned place as supporters - out of fear.

> The PUP leadership I think became worried about...the expanding influence of Mrs. Lizzaraga and they set out to quell it. This was particularly so after the 1961 hurricane ...Because I remember...gradually after the 1961 hurricane she began to move away [from the PUP]...She became very bitterly opposed to the PUP leadership...I think basically our politicians are afraid of women...women are regarded as people who play supportive role, they cook the food, they take part in parades, they're the cheerleaders...Now when the women tried to take out of these traditional roles, the men politicians tend to become alarmed...So here was Mrs. Lizzaraga organizing women...first of all, their economic power! I mean 25 cents a week didn't seem like much, but that was all that these poor women could afford in those days...Now, at 25 cents, or 50 cents taken out of their

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[284] Belize Times, 11 August 1959, 3.

[285] Belize Times, 29 November 1959, 2 and 16 March 1960, 1.

> little earnings, put aside towards their idea of women owning their own house one day, for women having economic power and borrowing power, now this seemed like a dream..Mrs. Lizzaraga began to give foundation to this dream and I think they probably felt that she was going too far.

Descriptions of PUP women's blind faith in and devotion to George Price clearly do not capture the complexity of women's consciousness and collective action, nor of the hegemony he was building and institutionalizing. The union may have vanished as a relatively open organizational space for working women, but the political self awareness and organizational skills learned through the 1950s, would still have to be controlled through a combination of repression, incorporation and manipulation by the PUP-dominated state.

The Creole working women of Belize City demonstrated early on their abilities to think and act collectively and politically. They did not have to be drawn into the nationalist movement, but were there with the beginnings of an agenda and an organization before the People's Committee formed. This self-organization, like that of the whole working class through the General Workers' Union, was potentially threatening to both the colonial state and middle class nationalist politicians. The British had been developing social welfare and educational policies since the late 1930s with the goal of controlling and co-opting the working classes of the Caribbean. These policies were profoundly gendered. Ultimately, the PUP resolved the contradictions within its own construction of gender and the family and adopted the traditional patriarchal attitudes of the

colonial state. The contradictions were due to both the party and the union needing mass mobilization, and to women making demands on them as workers as well as mothers and wives. Although Belizean women never organized as women for what Molyneux calls strategic demands, they did have an impact on the content of the hegemonic nationalist project. Shoman diminishes the achievements of the working men and women of Belize when he concludes sadly that they were used, defeated and victimized by middle class politicians in the 1950s: "For a brief decade... they held centre stage in the anticolonial movement, and then were relegated to the floor where their role, as audience, was to applaud their leaders and cheer, in almost neat half-and-half divisions, for their favourite political party."[286]

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[286] Shoman, (1990), 59.

Chapter Three: Constructions of Gender

In this chapter I will analyze the constructions of the Belizean woman by the colonial state, the nationalist movement, and the PUP once it had captured state power. There are only brief glimpses in the historical record of Belizean women defining themselves, although Elfreda Reyes' view of working men as "so coward" does imply a pride in working women's strength and militancy. But their strength has historically been given willingly to male-dominated organizations committed to the perpetuation of the capitalist state and capitalist relations of production which are integrally patriarchal. Maria Mies' comments on the role of women in India's nationalist movement resonate strongly with the Belizean case:

> To draw women into the political struggle is a tactical necessity of any anticolonial or national liberation struggle. But it depends on the strategic goals of such a movement whether the patriarchal family is protected as the basic social unit or not. The fact that the women themselves accepted their limited tactical function within the independence movement made them excellent instruments in the struggle. But they did not work out a strategy for their own liberation struggle for their own interests.[287]

Working women, organized within the union, the party, and within their communities, were an important part of the counter-hegemonic bloc, but did not lead or control it. Gramsci argued precisely that the working class could be conscious of itself

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[287] Maria Mies, Indian women and patriarchy: conflicts and dilemmas of students and working women (New Delhi: Concept, 1980). Quoted in Kumari Jayawardena, Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World (London: Zed, 1986), 108.

and its interests, and fight for them in the economic field of production, but still be led by dominant groups in the political field.[288] Women's strong and at times violent reaction to devaluation linked the cost of living, miserable living conditions, low wages and unemployment to the evil of colonial rule, making political independence the solution to their socioeconomic problems as well as lack of political power.

The colonial state thus had very little hope of reaching a critical mass of Belizean women in ways that could mobilize consent for British rule, or at least disorganize support for the GWU and PUP. They did use all means at their disposal to try. In fact, the whole of colonial social policy was gendered, in that it was directed at women and deployed an ideology of women's proper roles: wife, mother, moral force, good citizen. The discourse and policy of the Labor Department also revealed these conceptions:

> The principle of "equal pay for equal work" is not one which has assumed any importance in British Honduras as the work undertaken by women is usually of a light nature which is not normally given out to men.[289]

The Social Welfare Department, renamed the Social Development Department in 1950 to remove its charity-giving image and encourage initiative, focused its efforts on rural areas. This took the form of various village organizations, particularly savings unions, village councils, women's and

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[288] Martin Carnoy, The State and Political Theory (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 83.

[289] British Honduras Labor Department Report, 1950.

youth's groups, and of cottage industries, where women and girls made various craft items. The 1952 report, for example, mentioned that a basketry training program had been set up in the Toledo district in the south: "The Carib women in particular have a natural aptitude for this type of work and Indians too are being encouraged to commence these handicrafts."[290] Throughout the decade there are various reports of the numbers of women and girls working "in their spare time" at the craft depots for piece rates, and never any mention of men doing this work. Certainly at the main depot in Belize City, where finishing work was done, the workforce was female.

Village organizations had a variety of purposes. Some were producer and consumer cooperatives, others were credit and savings unions, others were women's and youth's groups which focused on social recreation and "home improvement" activities such as needlework and cake-making. The department had a sizeable staff of instructors and instructresses both for craft training and group organization, and during the decade the numbers of women's trainers and organizers increased slightly.

Only in the 1956 report did the colonial state admit that it did not conceive of these cottage industries as capitalist enterprises in the normal sense. Referring to the making of rush mats in one village, the report noted: "The results...are slow as the people are interested only in making money and have not

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[290] Annual Report of the Social Development Department for the Year 1952, 13.

yet caught on to village craft."[291] The real reasons for these programs were revealed most clearly in two comments. In the 1950 report it was declared that the general policy of the department, to be carried out by Social Development Officers through community development, was "to be concerned with the promotion of creative or constructive social services based on self-help and its activities directed to the regeneration of rural life." Regeneration meant inculcating regular work and saving habits, strengthening the nuclear family through women, and thus reinforcing women's responsibility for the household, marriage and family. In the 1953 report it was stated that "there is every indication of a developing awareness of the value of stable family life among the masses." Based on slight increases in the membership of women's and youth groups, this assessment left men, as husbands and fathers, completely out of the picture.

The department did not only concern itself with creative policy in rural areas, but also did routine social work across the colony. Part of this was marriage reconciliation - about half the cases were voluntary, half sent to the social workers by the courts. If the message of rural programs was that women were responsible for the quality of family life, it is likely that the same assumption affected the handling of domestic disputes. Indeed, the department defined a successful case as

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[291] Annual Report of the Social Development Department for the Year 1956, 10.

one in which the couple got back together, whereas many women may have wanted legal separation and the enforcement of maintenance orders. The report for 1956 did admit that the main causes of disputes were "lack of understanding and economic problems which led to insecurity."[292]

We can only speculate that the department's staff, particularly its social workers and female probation officers, played some role in pushing the family law that was passed in 1953. The head female probation officer was Gwendolyn Lizzaraga, also active in the British Honduras Federation of Women and in their effort to build a day care for working mothers. The laws do embody some of the recommendations of the Moyne and Orde-Browne reports, in that they strengthen legal mechanisms for enforcing men to support their wives and children. In an economy where underemployment was endemic and there was virtually no way working class women could support themselves and their children, such mechanisms had the potential to help large numbers of women in concrete ways. Women's rights in marriage over children and property were made equal to their husbands', and illegitimate children's claims to their fathers' property were legalized.

But there was an assumption built into the Maintenance of Children Ordinance that men would fail in their legal duties - mothers were required by law to support their children if their spouse did not. The state was not prepared to enforce men's responsibilities when women could be expected to fulfil them.

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[292] Report for 1956, 7.

Finally, women living with their spouses could not have maintenance orders served on them - the man's home was none of the state's business. All of the legislation, whether protective in intention or not, in combination with the policies of marriage reconciliation and the "regeneration of rural life" was designed to encourage and reinforce the patriarchal nuclear family. Even the protective legislation did nothing to question the social relations and processes which made women so vulnerable to men's economic neglect or abandonment. Jean Binta Breeze, Jamaican dub poet, has captured Caribbean women's daily pondering of their economic relations with men in her poem "Ordinary Mawning": "just annada wanda if ah should a/tek up back wid dis man it would a/ease de situation mawning".[293]

The Labor Department showed little awareness of or concern for the profound economic distress and hardship of Belizean women. And it continued to reproduce the stereotype of Creole masculinity, arguing in its 1950 report that young Belize City men were useless for agricultural development schemes.[294] The colonial state's census categories hid the problem of female unemployment by labelling over 75% of the females over 10 years of age as engaged in "home duties".[295] The forest economy of

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[293] Jean Binta Breeze, "Ordinary Mawning," in Creation Fire: A CAFRA Anthology of Caribbean Women's Poetry, ed. Ramabai Espinet (Toronto: Sister Vision/CAFRA, 1990).

[294] 1950 Labor Department Annual Report, 2.

[295] Jamaica Central Bureau of Statistics, West India Census 1946, Part E: Census of the Population of British Honduras (Kingston: Department of Statistics, 1948), xxxi.

British Honduras had never had as much need for female labor as did the sugar plantation economies of the Caribbean islands during slavery, and although the 1950s was a decade in which forestry began to give way to the now central industries of sugar and citrus production, employment opportunities for women were still incredibly narrow. As noted above, most waged or salaried jobs were rooted in domestic labor and ideology, and correspondingly devalued.[296] Only once, at the very end of the decade, did the Labor Department reports acknowledge that "a great need exists for suitable employment opportunities to absorb some of the un-employed women."[297] Otherwise the basic attitude that women did not need any help in the labor market was preserved, despite ample evidence that both government and private industry were paying women less for the same jobs.

The reports from 1950, 1951 and 1953 mentioned increases in the number of individual complaints being made by domestic servants to the Labor Department, and the extreme difficulty of resolving disputes between domestics and their employers. The department made no mention in its report on 1953 that several hundred Belize City domestics had organized a wage drive to earn $6 a week, when the colonial government itself estimated the cost of living for a family at over $20 a week. If the problems

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[296] The Labor Department report for 1964 listed the major women's occupations as citrus, domestic labor, shop clerks, office workers, teachers, nurses, garment factories. p. 28.

[297] Annual Report of the Labor Department for the Year 1959, 11.

of low female wages and female unemployment were acknowledged within the bureaucracy - and the Social Development reports did sometimes mention high youth unemployment - it was clearly felt that strengthening the nuclear family was the best solution, and one that would add to the control of women. The state was less willing to have its relations with large numbers of women unmediated by familial patriarchs, or muddied by men who refused to be responsible patriarchs.

None of the colonial state's concrete programs - cottage industries, village organizing, legal reform, social work and marital reconciliation - had any impact on the majority of Belizean working women. With the strength of the GWU in rural areas, and the PUP's power in Belize City, all of civil society was very early on one large and increasingly well-organized counterhegemonic alliance. The hegemonic processes begun in the 1930s by the colonial state had simply opened up political space for working class and nationalist resistance, which developed into overt counterhegemony with the devaluation crisis of December 1949.

There were, of course, contradictions and conflicts within the nationalist movement. The ouster of the radical working class GWU leadership in April 1950 was indicative of the differences in class consciousness between the nationalist leaders and the labor movement. The contradiction between women's practical and strategic gender interests on the one hand, and the PUP's commitment to both traditional Catholic

values and to capitalist development on the other, was never explicitly articulated during the 1950s. There were several brief breaks in the dominant nationalist discourse which could be called feminist, but never any self-conscious women's organizing outside the colonial state or the party and union. But there were two strands within that dominant discourse which corresponded respectively to the fundamentally patriarchal vision of a self-governing society in which the state would, like a benevolent patriarch, ensure harmony and plenty, and the very real need to both mobilize and control the mobilization of women.

In the first strand, the concept of the family wage was embraced, a concept socialist feminists have described as profoundly anti-feminist.[298] In the women's column of the Billboard, "Powderpuff and Paint", women were portrayed as morally weak, silly, and requiring the protection of men and the state.[299] The proper destiny of women was as wife and mother - on occasion the need for women to work at all was criticized. Rising food prices and the cost of living were calculated in terms of the needs of a nuclear family depending on the man's

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[298] Elisabeth Wilson, Women and the Welfare State (London: Tavistock, 1977), 115, calls the family wage ideology "entirely bourgeois". Michele Barrett, Women's Oppression Today (London: Verso, 1980), 227 - 230, stresses the role of the capitalist state in reproducing the ideology of the male breadwinner which maintains a family form central to the reproduction of both capitalist production and the welfarist state.

[299] For example, the 11 February 1951 Billboard advised girls not to be envious of other girls' possessions, as it isn't attractive to men.

wage. Women were constructed as housewives, consumers, and mothers. For example, the nationalists uncritically reproduced the Labor Department's calculation of the cost of living in terms of a nuclear family of four.[300] Even in the discourse of the GWU, both before and after the overthrow of its founding leadership, when women were appealed to as workers a language of morality and motherhood emerged, and the need for women to organize themselves vanished amid demands that they back up their men.

But even as these traditional constructions were being invoked and reproduced, they were politicized. The women of Belize City, perhaps particularly single and self-supporting women, needed no prompting to consider their domestic roles a legitimate basis for political agitation. This tendency was reinforced by the politicization of these roles by the union and party leadership in their struggle against the colonial state. Women were encouraged to join the union and party, to develop identities as workers and citizens with rights. Their daily problems of social reproduction - the collecting of water in buckets, the disposing of waste in the canals, the feeding and clothing of children - were linked to the very notion of independent state power and the iniquity of colonialism. A 1951 editorial listed the colonial government's failure to deal with streets, drains, canals, housing, water supply, housing and the

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[300] Belize Billboard, 1 October 1951, 1.

costs of food and medical care, summing up the nationalist trinity of PUP, GWU and Billboard:

> Briefly, what these three institutions are out to get is more than the three teaspoons the Belize hospital had a few months ago and to end the parade of women to dump body waste in the Belize canals at night.[301]

Motherhood itself was politicized, as the reason why women should fight for both higher wages (for themselves, but also for men) and self-government. All this validated women in their struggle for better living and working conditions. An individual example is that of Mrs. Rosita Phillips of West Street, located in Mesopotamia, one of the poorest and most neglected neighborhoods in Belize City. In 1950 she wrote to the Billboard, saying that the time had come to decide "our fate, and that of our children". She argued that the colonial government was so afraid of the nationalists because they knew the movement could succeed. "We want to be ourselves. We want self-government," she concluded.[302] The leaders may have wanted cheering crowds, but they relied for success, at least at the beginning of the nationalist struggle, on a relatively independent working people's movement in which women had some space to organize. Shoman argues that "in its first few years the PUP was much too reliant on mass mobilization and support to win the confidence of the British."[303] As Berman and Carnoy

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[301] Billboard, 20 July 1951, 1.

[302] Billboard, 17 August, 1950.

[303] Shoman "An Authoritarian State", 52.

argue, the expansion of the state under capitalism is indicative of the masses' potential for self-government and the need to incorporate them into a hegemonic process based on nationalist or imperialist sentiment. There were, in other words, both liberating and controlling moments in the nationalist discourse, as women's concerns were raised to the level of high politics, but their own militancy was defined as the natural sacrificing role of a good mother and citizen.

There are numerous examples of this contradiction at work. In March 1950 GWU President Clifford Betson wrote an editorial in the Billboard titled "3 1/2 Cents an Hour: A Living Wage?", a direct appeal to female domestics to join the union. He implied that women's passivity revealed a lack of trust in God and carelessness of their own morality:

> You in your own little way can ensure that your husband or the boy you plan to marry some day, and you and the children you hope to rear as good and decent citizens, get a fair deal in life, that you get what you are entitled to. But there is no hope for you outside the fold. All British Hondurans must unite for protection or perish disunited. So I appeal to you, domestic servants...JOIN THE UNION TODAY.[304]

In December 1950, at one of the first domestics' organizational meetings, PUP leader Leigh Richardson urged the women to join up, concluding: "If any one of you take back, I will count you not only a traitor to yourself and your country, but worst of all to your children."[305] Just over two years

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[304] Billboard, 5 March 1950, 6.

[305] Ibid, 3 December 1950.

later, Richardson attended a large gathering of domestics during their wage drive, accompanied by GWU General Secretary Nicholas Pollard. Pollard "congratulated the domestics on the start they had made and called upon them to flock to the GWU for protection and guidance." Richardson urged the women to vote for GWU and PUP candidates in the 1954 elections, implying that this would bring legislation on minimum wage, working conditions and family allowances.[306]. In each case, the needs of the union and party were primary, women's domestic roles were invoked, and protection was offered. Women were being unionized and politicized within the limits of a controlling paternalistic ideology.

In February 1952 an editorial on the housing problem in Belize argued: "The People's United Party believes that an ideal society must be self-governing and built on sound family life." This was defined in terms of adequate housing allowing marriage and privacy, which would prevent the use of birth control. The editorial argued that without self-government, the PUP could not solve the housing crisis or protect "sanctified family life."[307] Again the two tendencies are present - the patriarchal nuclear family is promoted, but women's concern with housing is made an important public issue.

The 1955 Mothers' Day editorial recognized women's contributions while inscribing their national importance in

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[306] Ibid, 3 March 1953, 1.

[307] Ibid, 24 February 1952, 1 and 6.

domestic terms. It argued that Belize's Christian mothers had maintained the country as a Christian stronghold. The country

> owes a great debt...to the stout-hearted, valiant women who have done so much and asked for so little...British Honduras had good cause to be proud of its mothers, those magnanimous women who toil and make tremendous sacrifices to send their children to school and to Church against such big odds. Like all great people, the mother's work is never done, and instead of being left alone, British Honduras will now make increased demands on her...In this development task the mother's work is essential: ceaseless training in character building, initiative, industry, independent thinking, and self-reliance.[308]

Both patronizing and potentially empowering, this editorial reveals an attitude which reduces women to mothers but also implicitly recognizes their political importance to the anti-colonial struggle and the process of nation-building. In controlling women's militancy as unionists and party activists, the GWU and PUP constantly linked women's needs to their own struggle, which was increasingly defined as being for political independence. Likewise, class demands were constructed as anticolonial and nothing more, and discussion of class inequalities was not encouraged. For working class women whose agenda for change was both gendered and classed, this development was a limiting one, for as mentioned at the outset, nationalism is a form of social knowledge which strongly tends to mask conflict and contradiction.

An example of this is one of the rare occasions in which the nationalists talk about the problem of single motherhood. The 1954 Mothers' Day editorial castigated the excessive number

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[308] Billboard, 3 May 1955, 1.

of "husbandless mothers" in British Honduras as threatening the productivity of the country and increasing public expenditure on social welfare and prisons. The blame for this "loose family life" and "social disorder" was laid at the door of not only "unwed mothers and other erratic family setups" but also employers who "in paying slave wages wreck family life." Men were not mentioned as having any responsibility. The solution to this problem which was threatening national development was "less and less illicit motherhood and more and more enlightened capitalism."[309] This last phrase existed within nationalist discourse in opposition to colonialism, so that the whole editorial is really blaming the colonial system and women for immoral and damaging illegitimacy.

This definition of women's demands as simply anticolonial rather than having a specific class or gender character was in fact the central and very successful method the nationalists' used to deradicalize women's militancy, to use it to strengthen rather than threaten their counter-hegemonic project. A letter written to the Belize Times in 1959 expresses the consciousness the nationalists had set out to construct. Headlined "Difficulties Beneath the Colonial System," the letter is from a 34 year old mother of four living in Pomona in the Stann Creek Valley, "in poverty and suffering". She said she didn't know what self government meant but believes in it because she sees good men, like PUP district representative David McKoy, saying

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[309] Billboard, 9 May 1954, 1.

that it is the only thing that will help. She wrote that she and her husband keep apart in order to avoid having more children. She concluded by saying that the prayer of "this begging and suppliant mother" was for a government that would help poor people.[310]

It seems that women had a similar trusting even adoring relationship with George Price, who may well have encouraged it, coming himself to personify the Belizean state as substitute benevolent patriarch for especially single women. Like the state, and like many Belizean men, he made promises and was charming, but rarely delivered concrete goods. As Philip Goldson told me, "in the eyes of the women, Price was the champion, the main champion of the cause. But Price sees them always in this supportive role. Price's policy was this - you promise but you don't deliver, because the moment you begin to deliver, you set in motion these rising expectations. His policy was to keep people poor, keep on blaming the colonial masters."

Bolland notes that Price used religious quotations and language to cloak his ideological position when dealing with the Belizean people.[311] In response, his female followers saw him in biblical terms: "Some of those half-ignorant old people, women they used to say he was their Messiah, he was their Moses."[312] Diane Haylock, director of popular education with

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[310] The Belize Times, 31 January 1959, 1 and 4.

[311] Bolland (1986), 114.

[312] Interview with Tharine Rudon.

SPEAR and a founder of the Belize Organization for Women and Development, remembers trying to convince a staunch PUP woman from Punta Gorda to leave the party: "E say, George Price? George Price is like Jesus Christ come back to life for me."[313] Miss Caroline Flowers did stress to me that she thought Price was a good Christian man who knew how to talk to poor people.

Nicholas Pollard and Gladys Stuart suggest that there was an element of more earthly love in the PUP women's devotion to Price: "He let them love him. They saw in him fulfillment of their dreams and yearnings...he just uses them for political support, " and: "They loved him. They sat at his feet and drank in what he had to say." It would be simplistic to believe that Price's charisma alone built his following, for he clearly devised gendered strategies that would appeal to the militant Creole women's pride in their ability to work and the pain in their lives rooted in male abuse and entrenched poverty.

Sonia Alvarez points out that a given "pact of domination" will respond selectively to women's demands, encouraging organization around those least disruptive in order to reduce the need to repress threatening demands.[314] In other words, some things can be safely transformed and incorporated by a given hegemonic bloc, others must be repressed. The PUP was fortunate that women never organized around issues of birth control, abortion, domestic violence, or childcare, for this

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[313] During interview with Gladys Stuart.

[314] Alvarez (1988), 21.

would have brought the endemic conflict within the family into public view and would have made the argument for family wages seem as weak as it really was. There is both fictional and nonfictional evidence that these more classically "feminist" issues were important in Belizean women's lives in the 1950s. Whether they were less pressing than economic problems, or women chose to deal with them outside of the nationalist movement for a variety of reasons, the essentially bourgeois attitudes of the Catholic leadership to the family were never challenged in these terms.

One remarkable fictional piece appeared in the Billboard on November 18, 1951, authored by "PEN". It is the life-story of a fallen woman and places the blame for her degradation squarely on her poverty and on men. Orphaned, she was expelled from school when the authorities learned that her grandmother was working as a prostitute in order to pay the fees. She went to work as a domestic for $1.50 a week, which was not enough to feed her grandmother, pay rent and cover other necessities. She began to work as a prostitute herself:

> I was just unlucky. I was born into that class of people that are not considered human. No one cared if I ate or drank, or if I had a place to put my weary head at night...Do you think there was any other way out? Who cares what girls like me go through? Who has ever tried to help them? All the men I've known have helped me on the trip downhill.

This was of course part of a larger nationalist discourse that blamed such social ills and personal tragedies on colonialism. The article is interesting for its almost explicit

argument that Belizean gender relations have been warped by the British and that self-government will end poverty, prostitution and even male oppression of vulnerable women. It does also reflect the experiences of a significant number of women, although in an extreme form. Apparently against women's oppression by employers and men, it actually hitches women's hopes for change to self-government. Few women can have been naive enough to believe that men would start to behave differently once the British were gone (and indeed they have not). It was far more effective for the nationalists to focus on economic issues than deal directly with gender relations. No other such story appeared in the paper.

The abuse of Belizean women by Belizean men is a central theme of Zee Edgell's Beka Lamb. In the novel Beka's friend Toycie's life is destroyed when her boyfriend gets her pregnant and then abandons her to pursue his education. The scene in which he refuses to support her emotionally or financially takes place simultaneously with a Battlefield meeting at which the nationalist leaders are preaching unity among Belizeans.[315] Beka begins to notice how many of the Creole women in her neighbourhood, of all generations, are single mothers, and fears for herself. Zoila Ellis, in her short story "Pink Christmas", describes 19-year old Julia realizing she is pregnant for the second time, and her grandmother insisting that she use her

[315] Zee Edgell, Beka Lamb, 105-111.

savings to have an abortion.[316] This, and newspaper accounts of infanticides, with the corpses usually being found in the canals, indicate that Kaplan's view of survival as the bedrock of women's consciousness needs to consider women's decisions about quality of life as well.

As well as birth control and abortion, domestic violence and child care were major issues for large numbers of women. The numbers of violent incidents and trials for assault and rape reported in the Billboard suggest that research into court and social worker records could reveal much about the harsh reality of male power in women's lives. The Billboard reported many assaults, rapes, murders, infanticides and women trying to kill themselves over men. Many disputes were between lovers or common law spouses when the woman had moved on to another man, due to physical abuse and economic neglect in the relationship, or when the man had begun a relationship with a second woman, thus reducing the amount of money he could provide. The Billboard interviewed a man eating at the Salvation Army who admitted to beating his wife: "Sure I beat her. She was out with another man. She called me all kinds of names and said I don't take anything home. But I have no job."[317] The PUP's vision of the family as the basis of a healthy national society was rotten at the core, for the working class family was strained to the

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[316] Zoila Ellis, "Pink Christmas," in On heroes, lizards and passion: seven Belizean short stories (Benque Viejo: Cubola, 1988).

[317] Billboard, 28 September 1950, 5.

breaking point by the inequalities inherent in patriarchal capitalism and by the abuses encouraged by the ideal of Creole masculinity - a strong man who can prove his manhood by having several lovers.

In this context it is interesting to juxtapose Philip Goldson's optimism about increased male wages helping the entire family with Tharine Rudon's assessment of married women's domestic authority: "These didn't have any husband. I suppose they were so outstanding because not having a husband to domineer them they could do what they want, you see! Those with their husband, I suppose they had to watch their steps."[318]

Several of the breaks in the nationalist discourse have been described above. Tharine Rudon, Gwen Dunn, and even Elizabeth Pollard all made statements criticizing women's dependence on and vulnerability to men, and calling for the union and party to support women's own efforts to become self-supporting. The domestics' 1953 wage drive, and the UWG's 1959 housing drive are both examples of women organizing within the movement in what they must have perceived as acceptable ways, and then being either deliberately neglected or actively blocked. None of these challenges to the paternalism of nationalist discourse or the oppression of women apparent in the division of labor within the movement itself lasted. It is possible to sketch out tentatively a development of women's collective self-recognition and organization over the course of

[318] Interview with Tharine Rudon, 28 July 1991.

the decade, culminating in the collective effort by women to save and build their own houses. But it had not been recognized by anyone that women could not solve their problems within or through the system of party politics that had emerged, and activism focused more and more on the women's branch of each party. The women's networks of civil society had become linked to a powerful and hegemonic state with far more legitimacy and authority than the colonial state had ever possessed. With this linkage the possibility was closed off - temporarily - that working class women might be radicalized by their political experience in ways that would seriously challenge the patriarchy of the Belizean state or the prevailing capitalist relations reproduced by that state.

Conclusion

The profoundly gendered nature of the PUP's nationalist project was revealed both in its economic development policies and its discourse about the Belizean family in the 1960s. Women continued to be subordinated within the capitalist economy and "authoritarian democratic" political culture. I will briefly review the content of these policies and discourse, then discuss women's current activism and lack of political power in theoretical perspective.

Gendered social and economic development policies were pursued after internal self-government was achieved in 1964, accompanied by a more coherent discourse of the worker, his family and the benevolent state. The Social Development Department continued the cottage industry system and its attitude that women were responsible for the improvement of families and communities.[319] Training for women in domestic skills and crafts increased, and in 1968 at a weekend training course, lectures were given on "The Role of Women in a Developing Country" and "Women: From the Home to the Wider Society".[320] Domestics were brought under the existing labor legislation in 1964, due to the work of the Domestics' Committee since 1962, much earlier than in either Jamaica or Trinidad, but

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[319] Annual Report of the Social Development Department, 1964, 13.

[320] Annual Report of the Social Development Department, 1968, 8.

in 1967 domestics still only earned $7-$20/week while unskilled male labor earned $15-$20/week.[321] Virginia Kerns' discussion of the 1970s concluded that "Women find themselves confined to a handful of traditional pursuits, the principal ones the same that they filled fifty years ago in Belize."[322]

The 1960 Manifesto of the PUP promised legislation and the state strengthening of unions to "provide decent living conditions for the worker and his family."[323] A 1961 campaign poster reproduced this discourse of "the worker and his family" being looked after by a peaceful, progressive and Christian state.[324] By the mid-60s, the PUP was actively encouraging foreign investment and capitalist growth and calling on labor to increase production as a patriotic duty and the only way of getting a greater share of the country's wealth. Through "hard work, dedication and loyal service to Belize and Belizeans," it argued, labor would help bring the country through the take-off period to the "plateau of plenty".[325] The cozy relationship between labor, capital and the state was reiterated in preparation for the 1965 elections. The whole tenor of Your

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[321] Annual Report of the Labor Department, 1967, 4.

[322] Virginia Kerns, Women and the Ancestors: Black Carib Kinship and Ritual (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 47.

[323] Manifesto of the People's United Party 1960, 5.

[324] Targets for Progress - Manifesto of the PUP Government (Belize: Department of Information and Communication, 1961).

[325] The PUP Government's Manifesto for Belizean Progress: "We Head for Take Off" (1965 - 1966?), 13-15.

Government of 1961-1965 At Work is that the PUP government is good and giving, that it won't let foreign investment or immigration hurt Belizeans, but will always do what is wise. The worker was defined as masculine and labor policy as being of the benefit of "workers and their families". The inclusion of domestics in labor legislation was mentioned in strange juxtaposition with the by now standard phrase "the worker and his family". Social security was promised to breadwinners. A photograph was included of George Price addressing a crowd on Labor Day, captioned "Honouring the Working Man on May 1st."[326]

As the traditional paternalistic view of women became entrenched in the national project, the earlier visibility of women's problems and agency as workers, wives and citizens disappeared. Women were swallowed up inside the family in nationalist discourse, and treated as domestic beings in most government policy. Yet the threat of working women's demands and self-organization had not been completely controlled, as shown by the struggle to block the UWG housing groups, nor has it yet been done away with. A space was opened up in the 1950s, by the political activism of women and the need of nationalist leaders for mass mobilization against the British. But women were dependent in the final analysis on the male-dominated union and party, so that their efforts lacked institutional commitment and bore fruit principally at the level of making gender a central contradiction in postcolonial state hegemony. For

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[326] Your Government of 1961-1965 at Work, 17-18.

example, the message of the British Honduras Development Plan 1964-1970, which was for external consumption, was that any social spending would be in order to create a healthier, happier, more productive workforce and would be secondary to spending on economic development.

Given the pervasive reproduction of women's oppression, what meaning can we ascribe to the female militancy of the 1950s? To the women involved it was an expression of a gendered anticolonial consciousness, a social skill that was theirs par excellence. In larger perspective, their militancy shaped the way the postcolonial state could claim authority and made the maintenance of an admittedly unequal reciprocity crucial to its hegemonic project. The potential to expose the class and gender contradictions of the Belizean state exists, thanks not only to the structures of class exploitation and women's oppression, but to the legacy of working women's and men's struggles of the 1950s, limited as they were.

The work of exposing these contradictions has already begun. Zee Edgell's contribution lies not only in her two novels, but in her efforts to establish some independence from party politics for the Women's Bureau established in the early 1980s. Her second novel, In Times Like These, is based on her experiences working within the entrenched PUP system of government.[327] Her main character, who has been appointed head

[327] Zee Edgell also worked with the United Democratic Party administration in 1986-1987.

of the new Bureau, is blocked at every turn by politicians and administrators. Her workshops and radio programs are threatened with censorship. A loyal PUP director at Radio Belize told her frankly: "They're not interested in the needs and aspirations of women, which they interpret as criticism." In her final confrontation with the Permanent Secretary in the Department of Social Development, she is admonished for trying to create innovative programs and told, "Expectations are being raised which the minister feels cannot be fulfilled."[328]

Myrtle Palacio's pathbreaking work on class stratification among Belize City's neighborhoods is revealing just how little the city, whose people struggled so hard on behalf of the PUP, has gained through the years of self-government and independence. She points out specifically that 38% of households, many of them the largest, were female-headed in the mid-1980s, that male headship dominated except in the lowest economic category, and that within the female-headed group

> A large amount...look after large families. They rent small 1-2 bedroom homes, without adequate plumbing facilities and are mainly from the low socio-economic strata.[329]

As in the 1950s, it is very likely these women who are most politically active, although now within the framework of routine party politics rather than a militant anticolonial struggle with

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[328] Zee Edgell, In Times Like These (Kingston: Heinemann Caribbean, 1991), 212 and 222-224.

[329] Myrtle Palacio, "A Social Profile of Belize City," Third Annual Studies on Belize Conference (Belize: SPEAR, 1990), 76-78.

an initially strong class character. Palacio's examination of the data on the 1989 CitCo elections concludes:

> Very few women are directly in the political arena, as men dominate politics at the municipal and national level. However, my research indicates that women are campaigners, they form committees, are the cooks on election day, and are the ones voting. In other words they are the backbone of our voting system, yet they are not represented by their peers.[330]

The strike by the newly-formed Women Workers' Union in the spring and summer of 1991 highlights the contradictions of women's relationship with the state. Not only did the government allow the Taiwanese Civic Textiles Company generous tax concessions, it ignored violations of the labor laws until the women workers at the plant organized themselves. The Labor Department had to be forced into backing up the women's rights to union representation and legal wages and working conditions, while the Department of Women's Affairs remained silent through the entire process.[331] It is experiences such as this, combined with the analysis being developed by Edgell, Palacio, Diane Haylock of the Society for the Promotion of Education and Research (SPEAR), and others, that may eventually bring the contradictions at the heart of postcolonial state hegemony in Belize to a crisis point. To prevent the state reworking such

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[330] Myrtle Palacio, "Elections in Belize City: Who is Participating? A Critique of Our Voting System," Fourth Annual Studies on Belize Conference (Belize: SPEAR, 1991), 58.

[331] Adele Catzim, "The Women Workers' Union," (Belize: SPEAR, 1991).

crisis to its own advantage, very strong and independent organization in civil society will be necessary.

The militants of the 1950s established some space for women within the political parties, and there may be some value in Dolores Balderamos Garcia's current efforts as Women's Co-ordinator of the PUP to increase women's power within the party. But the central lesson to be learned from the outcome of the nationalist struggle is that women must not uncritically trust politicians or the state, particularly because of their commitment to capitalist accumulation and lack of concern for the oppression of women, whether married or single heads of households. Organization in civil society that has a critical consciousness of the state and the history of its manipulation of workers and women will be critical in building a socialist feminist counter-hegemony to the oppressive nationalist hegemony of the postcolonial state.

This classic Gramscian strategy of surrounding the state is precisely what the nationalists practiced during the 1950s, creating an all-embracing nationalist culture. It was however a political culture with strong roots in the gendered popular culture of particularly the Creole working class, and thus reproduced women's oppression even while it politicized their domestic roles. Women threw off the yoke of colonial oppression only to be subordinated by a national state which they had helped create.

A broad socialist feminist attempt to surround the state is a very long way off, for its success requires that Belizean men and women question the dominant meanings of femininity and masculinity in their society and the way capital and the state benefit from them. In Belize, because of the historical development of the two-party system, this profoundly difficult task has a better chance of success if it begins with strong independent organization in civil society. Only then will the latently threatening existence of women's experience and politics become directly oppositional and a pillar of a counter-hegemonic alliance. Just as the Marxist historians of Belize need to consider gender as an analytical tool and a field of historical inquiry, so does the Belizean left, small as it is, absolutely need to make women's oppression a central critique of the postcolonial state and women's liberation a central aspect of its theory and practice. It is my hope that this analysis of women's militancy in the 1950s and the oppressive gendered strategies of the nationalists' hegemonic project will contribute to the development of the necessary alliance.

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