

**Canals and Borders: The Dynamics of British Expansion in
Central America and the Anglo-Guatemalan Territorial Dispute
over Belize, c.1821-1863**

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For Nathan and Celene, with love

(Dedicated to the Memory of Papa)

I, David M Gomez, confirm that the work presented in this thesis is my own. Where concepts, ideas, or information draw on or are derived from other sources, I confirm that these have been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

The conventional analysis that territorial expansion in Belize, formerly British Honduras, was continuously Great Britain's objective obscures the role that the settlement played in obtaining and sustaining British expansion in Central America after the latter separated from Spain in 1821. This analysis also misses why in the face of a territorial claim by Guatemala, Great Britain for decades refused to convert the logging settlement to a formal colony, despite repeated requests from the woodcutters and settlers in Belize to do so. Then in 1862 Great Britain made a historic volte-face. Research has shown that the British preferred informal empire in Latin America, and that formal empire was only opted for where this was important or necessary for safeguarding Great Britain's commercial supremacy and strategic advantages. Was this the case with the British settlement of Belize? This study challenges the established analysis of Great Britain's handling of the territorial dispute with Guatemala over Belize by arguing that British administrative control over and territorial expansion within the Belize settlement were not formal imperialism but served Great Britain's wider interests in Central America. To show this, it reconsiders Belize's salience to British imperialism and investigates the relationship between British expansionism in Central America during the nineteenth century and Great Britain's reason for converting Belize to an official colony in 1862.

This study utilizes an analytical framework of informal empire that emphasizes the concept of salience or 'value of territory' to re-examine historical sources on the territorial dispute, including hitherto unused sources in Guatemala and the United States of America. Analysis of the archival material found that Great Britain retained possession Belize not for the timber resources, but for the strategic value that such possession offered for British expansion in the region. This finding suggests that new research is needed to confirm if valuing Belize for strategic purposes was a continuity in British policy towards Belize from the earlier colonial period. The study also found that Great Britain subordinated settlement of Guatemala's territorial claims to Belize to maintaining British predominance in Central America because doing so enabled Great Britain to forestall French and United States influence in the region. Hence Great Britain only converted Belize to a colony when doing so became unavoidable for retaining British influence in Central America. In the Belize case then, Gallagher and Robinson's hypothesis of informal empire holds. This thesis offers an original perspective on the territorial dispute over Belize and contributes to our understanding of British imperial history in Central America, as well as to the study of issues-area in territorial disputes.

Impact Statement

When I started work on this dissertation in October 2016, Belize and Guatemala had, only the year before, agreed the Protocol to the Special Agreement to submit Guatemala's Territorial, Insular and Maritime Claim to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) for a definitive statement. The populace in both countries subsequently agreed by separate referenda that the ICJ offered the best way of settling the nearly 170-year long dispute, and to accept the Court's decision on the matter. Unbeknown to most Belizeans, just four years prior to this, Guatemala launched a US \$12 billion project for constructing an interoceanic corridor which would connect Guatemala City to the Atlantic, resurrecting the long history of the cart-road that Great Britain never paid for, and which remains at the centre of the whole territorial dispute. By uncovering the origins of the cart-road project (the root of the Article VII issue from the 1859 Anglo-Guatemalan treaty), and revealing the economic and political importance of a trade route through Guatemala to political elites in that country, the research findings in this thesis contributes new knowledge about the territorial dispute to historians of Belize, legal experts handling the case to be presented to the ICJ, international and local diplomats, academic researchers, and the general public.

In addition, the research findings of the thesis introduce a fundamental shift in the way academic historians, politicians, teachers of Belizean history, and the Belizean people study and understand both Belize's historical relationship with Great Britain, particularly as it relates to Belize's place and role in Great Britain's overseas empire, and Belize's historical relationship with Central America. The thesis has already served as a basis for academic conference papers and will likely serve as a basis for further research conferences, journal articles and books on Belizean history, and likewise the management of territorial disputes. This thesis will generate new research interest in the study of glass bottles from the early colonial period as possible diagnostic artifacts for the study of the colonial origins of Belize. It

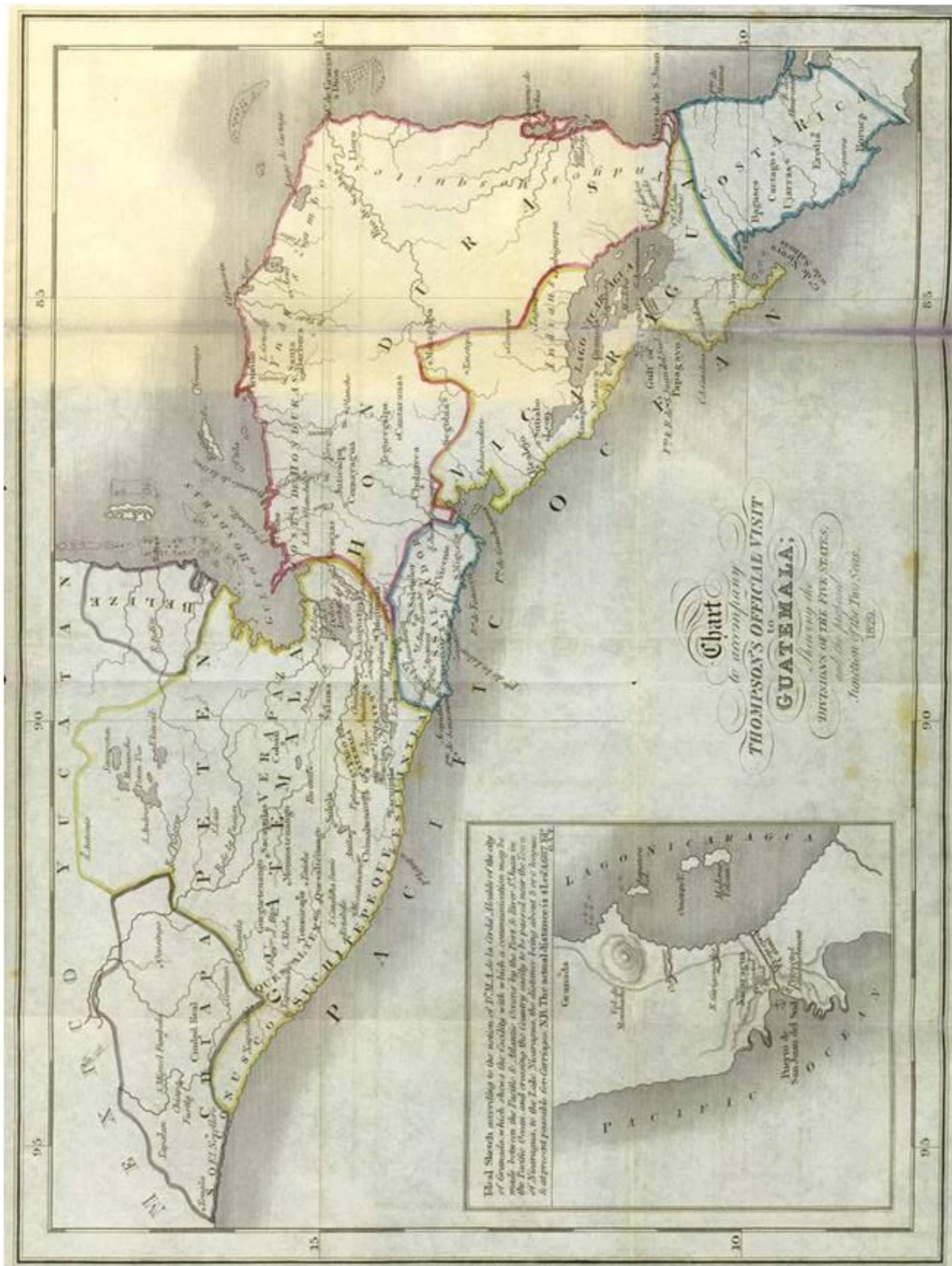
suggests that more work could be done using this technique for better pinpointing the date of the founding of the first logwood settlements, as well as for determining the nature of any early colonial trades with indigenous peoples, in Belize.

The information provided by this thesis will be important for Belize's efforts at integrating more deeply into Central America, as well as for how Belize manages its environmental and cultural assets in the frontier zone shared with Guatemala. The enduring territorial dispute has triggered development problems and security risks that have threatened Belize's territorial integrity, constrained trade and investments, and perpetuated illegal extraction of ancient Mayan artifacts and endangered forest products, and even threatened human life. The information contained in this thesis will help to promote fresh frameworks of bi-lateral and regional cooperation by raising awareness, deepening understanding, and supporting confidence building measures at the political, economic, and community levels.

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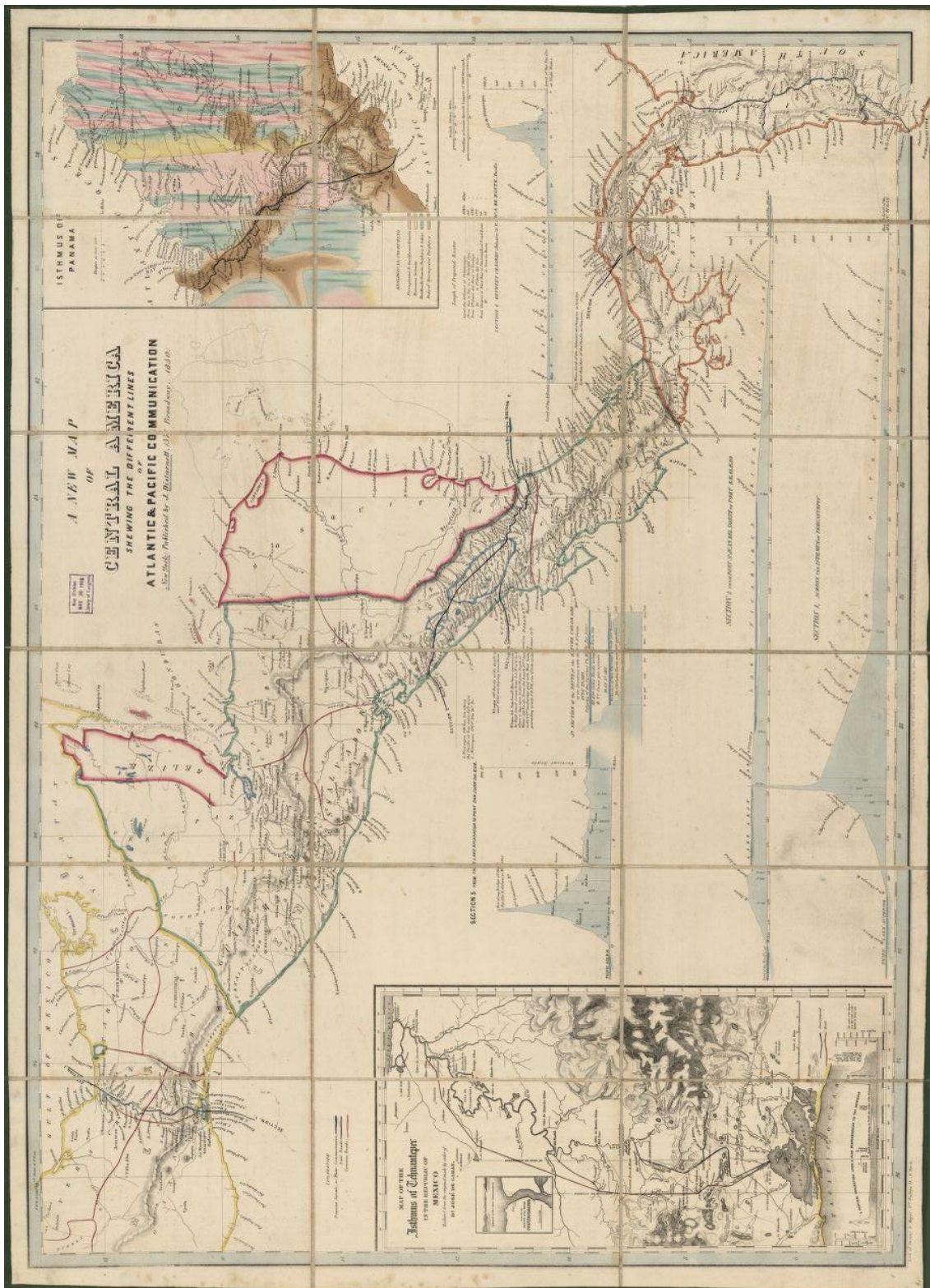
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Thompson's Map of Guatemala, c.1829



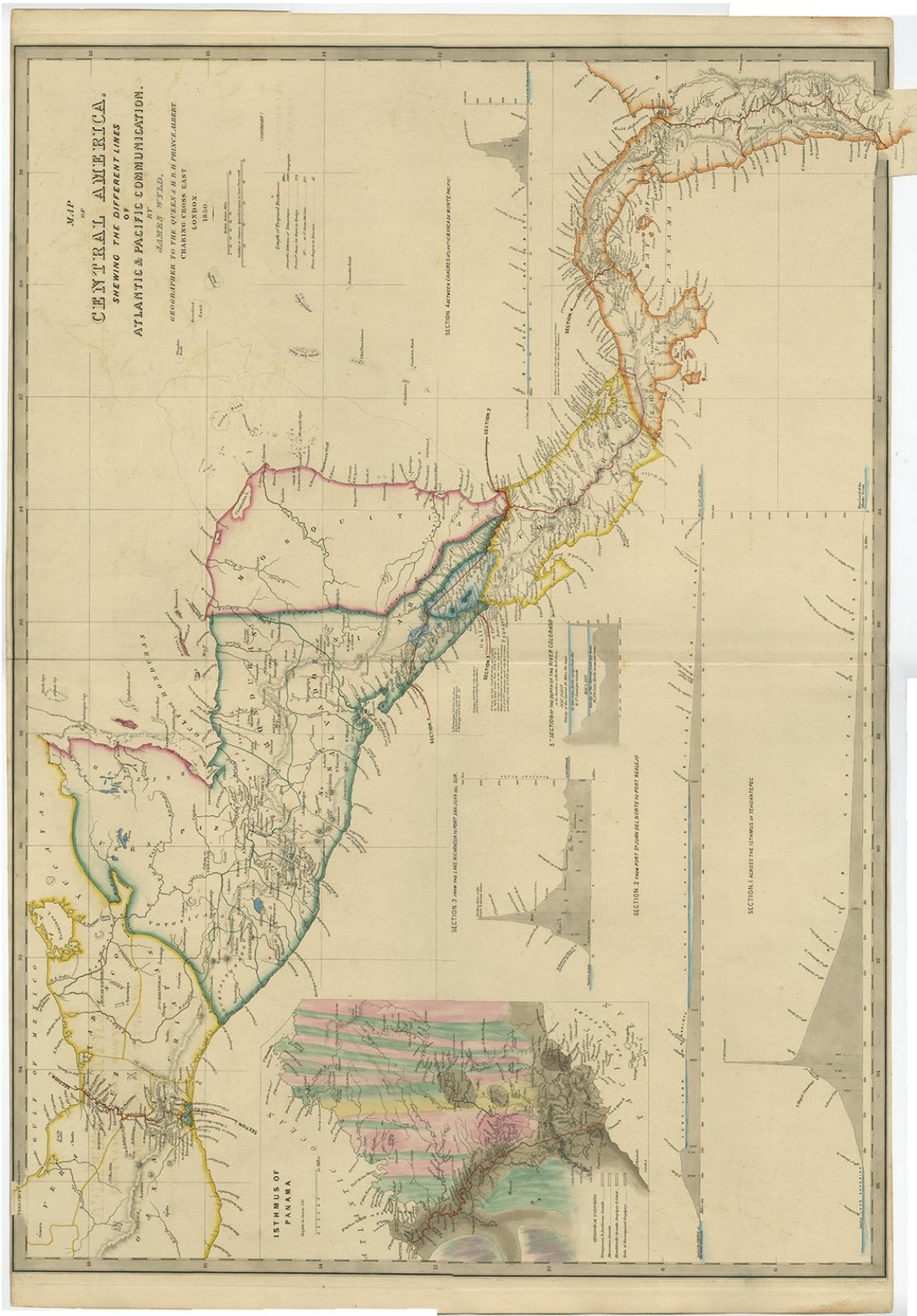
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Map of Central America, c.1830



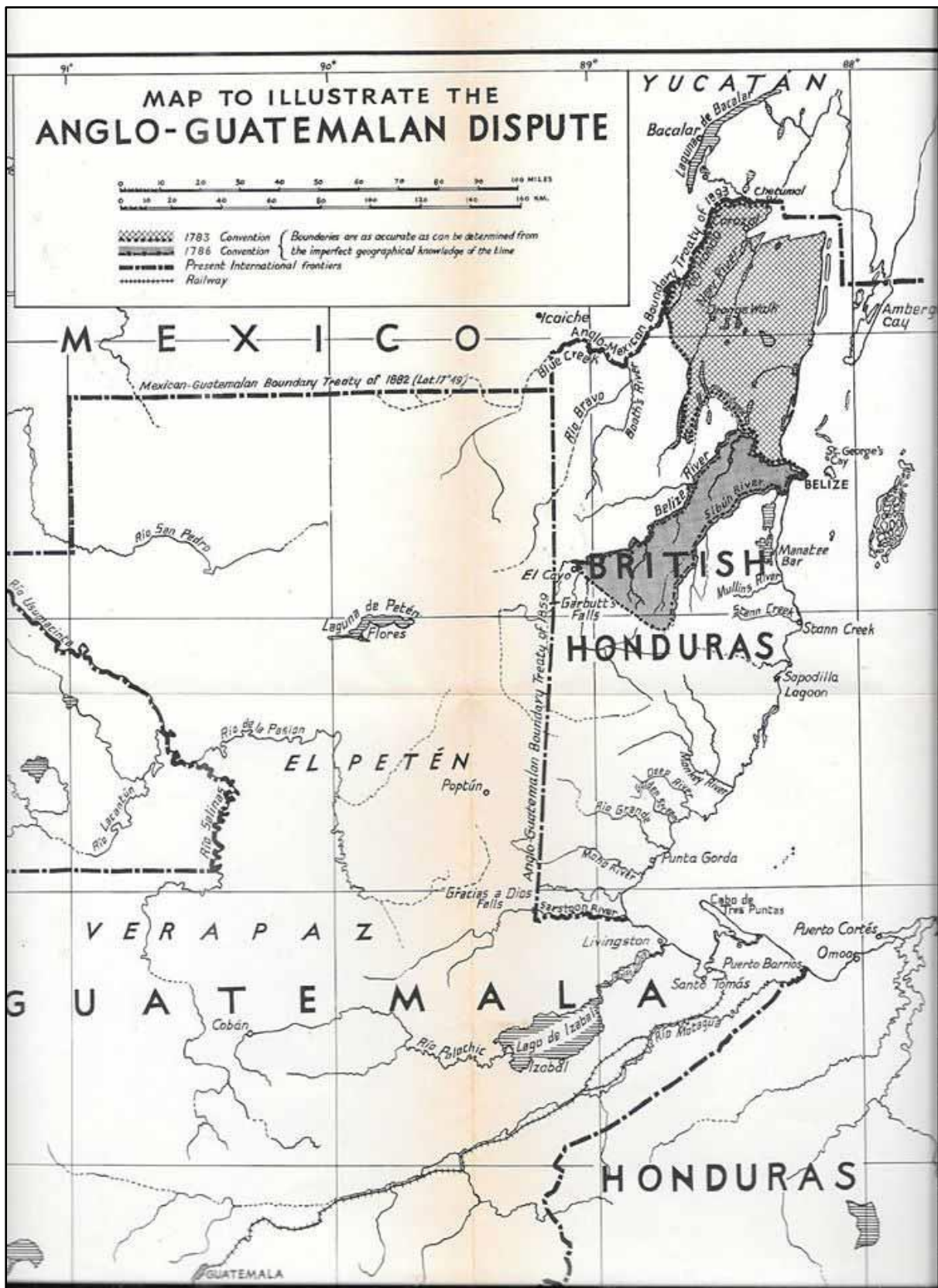
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Map of Central America showing proposed canal routes, c.1850



Source: maps-print.com

Map of Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute, c.1859



Source: R.A. Humphreys, University College London

Introduction

If the world has any ends [Belize] would certainly be one of them. It is not on the way to or from anywhere to anywhere else. It has no strategic value. It is all but uninhabited.

Aldous Huxley, 1934

In 2013, Assad Shoman, leading historian and ‘agent for Belize’ on the Belize-Guatemala territorial dispute, stated that the question of Guatemala’s territorial claim to Belize could have been settled in 1865 if Great Britain had paid “the paltry sum of £50,000!”¹ Shoman’s bold assertion raises an intriguing but perhaps fundamental question about Belize’s historical relationship with the British empire. That is, in the middle of the nineteenth century, what factors shaped Great Britain’s handling of the territorial claim to Belize and the decision to officially convert the settlement to a colony in 1862 after decades of declining requests from the Baymen (settlers in Belize) to do so? Was territorial expansion the objective of British policy in Belize (i.e., formal imperialism)? Or was this instead a product of free-trade and finance imperatives (i.e., informal empire)? To what extent, if at all, were strategic imperatives a factor in Great Britain’s possession of Belize? Was formal annexation planned, or the product of circumstances in Central America? I will show that Belize’s strategic value to British expansion in the region is what shaped Great Britain’s decisions on annexation and the territorial dispute.

¹ Assad Shoman, *How YOU can end the Guatemalan claim*, (Belize: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2013), page 1. Assad Shoman, previously Belize’s High Commissioner to London and a senior minister of government in Belize, holds a PhD in History from the University of London and has almost single-handedly kept the Belizean historiography on the territorial dispute going. Belize was, up until 1973, formerly known as British Honduras. For the purposes of consistency Belize is used throughout this study.

Historians and scholars of the territorial dispute over Belize, ordinary Belizeans as well, have traditionally considered Belize part of those colonies coloured red on the map – i.e., part of Great Britain’s formal empire.² This notion stemmed from the country’s colonial origins as the epicentre of the English logwood trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.³ Logwood (*Haematoxylum campechianum l.*), a dyewood valued in the expanding textiles industry in England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries for its deep black and purple colours, historians argued, was the *raison d’être* for the settlement.⁴ Following from this, economic interpretations assumed a dominant position in the historiography of the territorial dispute over Belize. Undoubtedly, the early scholarship on the issue (most of this published between 1935 and the late 1960s) was influenced by the sway which economic historians held “over all branches of history after the Second World War.”⁵ For instance, following Richard Pares’ article ‘The Economic Factors in the History of the Empire’ in *The Economic History Review*, that journal published John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson’s seminal paper ‘The

² This is often a euphemism for a map of the British empire.

³ Bolland and Shoman argue that “the *raison d’être* of the British Settlement in the Bay of Honduras was the extraction of logwood.” Nigel Bolland and Assad Shoman, *Land in Belize, 1765-1871: The Origins of Land Tenure, Use and Distribution in a Dependent Economy*, (Kingston: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1975), 3. See also, Jesse Cromwell, “Life on the Margins: (Ex) Buccaneers and Spanish Subjects on the Campeche Logwood Periphery, 1660-1716, *Itinerario*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2009), 43-71. Gilbert M. Joseph, “British Loggers and Spanish Governors: The Logwood Trade and its settlement in the Yucatan Peninsula: Part 1,” *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Jul. 1974), 7-37; Gilbert M. Joseph, “British Loggers and Spanish Governors: The Logwood Trade and its settlement in the Yucatan Peninsula: Part 1,” *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 15, No 4 (Jan. 1976), 43-52; Alan Craig, “Logwood as a Factor in the Settlement of British Honduras,” *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Apr. 1969); Donald C. McKay, (ed.), *Essays in the History of Modern Europe*, (Harper & Brothers Publishers: New York and London, 1936), P.K. Menon, “The Anglo-Guatemalan Territorial Dispute over the Colony of Belize (British Honduras),” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Nov. 1979).

⁴ Nigel Bolland and Assad Shoman, *Land in Belize, 1765-1871: The Origins of Land Tenure, Use and Distribution in a Dependent Economy*, (Kingston; Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1975), 9. See also, Alan Craig, “Logwood as a Factor in the Settlement of British Honduras,” *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Apr. 1969), 343, 362; P.K. Menon, “The Anglo-Guatemalan Territorial Dispute over the Colony of Belize (British Honduras),” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Nov. 1979), 345. A comparable dye was extracted from Brazilwood. See G.V. Scammell, “‘A Very Profitable and Advantageous Trade’: British Smuggling in the Iberian Americas circa 1500-1750,” *Itinerario*, Vol. 24, Issue 3-4, (Nov. 2000), 135-172.

⁵ Ronald Hyam, “The Primacy of Geopolitics: The dynamics of British imperial policy, 1763-1963,” *The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 27, No 2 (1999), 28. For instance, Gallagher and

Imperialism of Free Trade'.⁶ A decade later Vincent T. Harlow published his book *The Founding of the Second British Empire, 1763-1793*. Pares' contention that "colonisation and empire building are above all economic acts, undertaken for economic reasons," supported the historical narrative published on Belize at the time that logwood was the motive for British imperial expansion in the settlement of British Honduras.⁷

Logwood's primacy in the historiography of the territorial dispute was not coincidental. The establishment of English (later British) settlements in Belize in the second half of the seventeenth century coincided with an era when other European imperial powers were increasingly challenging Spain's title to its territorial possessions in the New World.⁸ The combination of European competition and Spanish territorial claims made England's late arrival to territorial acquisitions in Spanish America difficult, and this forced the English to find new ways of legitimizing their territorial claims.⁹ Thus, the English "took the position that [England] had a 'legal, sovereign...and imperial obligation...to proclaim its overseas holdings, particularly [because it] faced...challenges from other European colonizing [powers]'.¹⁰

⁶ Richard Pares, "The Economic Factors in the History of the Empire," *The Economic History Review*, Vol. VII, No. 2 (May 1937), 119-144; John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, "The Imperialism of Free Trade," *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 6, No. 1 (1953), 1-15. Hyam argues similarly. Hyam, "The Primacy of Geopolitics ...," 27.

⁷ Pares, "The Economic Factors ...," 119.

⁸ The exact date of the founding of the Belize settlement is unknown, but the historical evidence increasingly points towards this being around or sometime after 1670. For instance, Bulmer-Thomas and Bulmer-Thomas place this closer to this date, a period that Shoman seems to support as well. Barbara and Victor-Bulmer-Thomas, "The Origins of the Belize Settlement," *TEMPUS Revista en Historia General*, N° 4 (Septiembre - Octubre, 2016), 156. Shoman agrees that settlement occurred later. Assad Shoman, *Guatemala's Claim to Belize: The Definitive History*, (Belize: Image Factory Art Foundation, 2018), 2.

⁹ Anthony Pagden, "The Struggle for Legitimacy and the Image of Empire in the Atlantic to c.1700," chapter in Nicholas Canny (editor), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume I: The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprise to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, (Oxford University Press, 1998), 34. ⁹ Prior to 1707 England and Scotland were separate states. The United Kingdom of Great Britain was established on 1 May 1707 with the Acts of Union that year and by another Act of Union in 1800, Ireland was added to the union. After a proclamation by Queen Elizabeth II in 1953 the union officially became known as the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. See <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/apgb/Geo3/39-40/67>.

¹⁰ Christopher Tomlins, review of *Sovereignty and Possession in the English New World: The Legal Foundations of Empire, 1576-1640*, (review no. 597), <https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/597>, accessed 20 March 2020.

Consequently, the English (and later the British) attempted to by-pass Spanish territorial claims in the Americas by shifting to a new method for acquiring territory, one which sought to establish a legal principle for “legitimate possession,” and this turned on the idea of “effective occupation.”¹¹

This way of acquiring territory was formulated in 1674 when King Charles II of England instructed his Council for Foreign Plantations to find a resolution to the ‘logwood issue’ (that is, to prevail in the imperial rivalry over access to the Spanish Main).¹² Acting on this, the English philosopher John Locke, at the time Secretary of the Council, alongside other very “public men with personal interests in the Americas” that were also members of the Council, formulated an imperial argument based on the legal concept of *res nullius*, or that there were places ‘left unoccupied or undeveloped.’¹³ This new image of empire was premised not on conquest, but on the “peaceful exploitation of commerce and natural resources,” and the commodity of choice was logwood.¹⁴ By some accounts, the annual logwood trade was at one point worth around £100,000, with estimated demand in Great Britain of around 1,000 tons per year, and an equivalent quantity regularly shipped annually to the United States.¹⁵ At its zenith, logwood sold for as high as £100 per ton, and attracted annual duties of £500.¹⁶

¹¹ John T. Juricek, “English Territorial Claims in North America Under Elizabeth and the Early Stuarts,” *Terrae Incognitae*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 10. This approach was continued by the British after 1707.

¹² Eva Botella-Ordinas, “Debating Empires, Inventing Empires: British Territorial Claims Against the Spaniards in the Americas, 1670-1714,” *The Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, Vol 10, No. 1 (Spring/Summer 2010), 142-143.

¹³ Ibid, 145. Also, Joseph, “British Loggers... Part I,” 23. This way of acquiring territory gained popular use by colonial powers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. For a discussion of the legal concept of *res nullius* in English imperial history see Lauren Benton and Benjamin Straumann, “Acquiring Empire by Law: From Roman Doctrine to Early Modern European Practice,” *Law and History Review*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (February 2010), pp. 1-38; also, Randall Lesaffer, “Argument from Roman Law in Current International Law: Occupation and Acquisitive Prescription,” *The European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 16 No.1 (2005), 25 – 58.

¹⁴ Pagden, “The Struggle for Legitimacy...,” 36.

¹⁵ David Morgan McJunkin, “Logwood: An Enquiry into the Historical Biogeography of *Haematoxylum campechianum* L. and Related Dyewoods of the Neotropics,” *University of California Doctoral Diss.*, (1991), 122, 127-128. Also, Jesse Cromwell, “Life on the Margins: (Ex) Buccaneers and Spanish Subjects on the Campeche Logwood Periphery, 1660-1716,” *Itinerario*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (2009), 47.

¹⁶ Joseph, “British Loggers and Spanish Governors ... Part 1,” 17; McKay, *Essays in the History ...*, 4 – 5.

Belize was known to contain significant stands of some of the best logwood in the Bay of Honduras and this made the settlement strategically valuable to England's, and after 1707 Great Britain's, imperial project in Central America from the late seventeenth century onwards. Consequently, Great Britain sought to leverage the logwood settlements in Belize to help legitimate its territorial claims in the Spanish Main. However, a trade in logwood from Belize did not really take off until the second or third decade of the eighteenth century, around when British woodcutters, buccaneers, and ship captains (the latter usually acting as consignment agents to merchants in Jamaica and London) were prevented from operating in the Bay of Campeche.¹⁷ Prior to this, most logwood was shipped from Campeche, a port on the western side of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula founded in 1540 and which served the Spanish as a key point for conquest of Mexico. The Spanish dominated the colonial trade in dyewoods from Campeche, and as much as 5,000 tons were still being shipped annually from there in 1703.¹⁸

Barbara and Victor Bulmer-Thomas showed that by 1670, around when "logwood cutting had begun at British settlements in the Yucatan Peninsula [i.e., Belize]," the value of the commodity had fallen to about £50 per ton,¹⁹ and continued falling thereafter so much so that by 1686 dye-wood imports to London from the West Indies amounted to only £9,754, or about 2% of total imports to London from the West Indies for that year.²⁰ In other words, the value of the logwood to the Belize economy notwithstanding, even before the Belize settlement was properly established, the logwood trade was not significant to England in terms of its

¹⁷ Eva Botella-Ordinas, *Debating Empires...*, 144. Also, Cromwell, "Life on the Margins...", 48-49.

¹⁸ McJunkin, "Logwood: An Enquiry...", 135.

¹⁹ Barbara Bulmer-Thomas and Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Belize: From the 17th Century to Post-Independence*, 2nd Edition, (Belize: Cubola Books, 2017), 55.

²⁰ Nuala Zahedieh, "Overseas Expansion and Trade in the Seventeenth Century," chapter in Nicholas Canny, (ed.), *The Oxford History of the British Empire: Volume I: The Origins of Empire: British Overseas Enterprises to the Close of the Seventeenth Century*, published to Oxford Scholarship Online October 2011, 410. Still the logwood trade from Belize lasted well past 1756, when some 18,000 tons were exported. McJunkin, 144.

broader Atlantic trade. This suggests that logwood itself (i.e., economic factors) was not the reason the British first took interest in Belize.²¹ Nevertheless, the economic interpretation endured in the historiography of the territorial dispute, despite the fact that what really mattered were the strategic opportunities Belize's logwood trade provided the British for legitimating territorial claims in the Spanish Main.²² This dissertation contributes to both the scholarship on British imperial history and on the territorial dispute by showing that the primary motive in Great Britain's decision-making about Belize during the nineteenth century was strategic considerations.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, Belize's strategic significance to Great Britain increased steadily. For instance, after the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713 to end the War of Spanish Succession British merchants in Jamaica used Belize as a discreet pivot for expanding their (contraband) trade with the Captaincy General of Guatemala and for circumventing the duties and taxes levied on slaves sold by the South Sea Company.²³ The convention wrested control of the slave (and contraband) trades from the French by handing Great Britain the coveted *asiento de negros*, shifting the balance-of-power in the Atlantic in Great Britain's favor, and preventing the French from opening the Spanish American trade in a way that would

²¹ Bolland and Shoman argue that "the *raison d'être* of the British Settlement in the Bay of Honduras was the extraction of logwood." Nigel Bolland and Assad Shoman, *Land in Belize, 1765-1871: The Origins of Land Tenure, Use and Distribution in a Dependent Economy*, (Kingston: Institute of Social and Economic Research, 1975), 3.

²² Eliga Gould, "Entangled Histories, Entangled Worlds: The English-Speaking Atlantic as a Spanish Periphery," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (June 2007), 772. To counter English attempts at extending their influence in the Spanish Indies the Queen-Regent of Spain issued a royal *cedula* in 1674 prohibiting foreigners from cutting logwood in the Bay of Honduras. Apparently Spanish intelligence knew that the English were interested in Belize "as a strategic point for encouraging English trade." Botella-Ordinas, "Debating Empires ...," 143-144.

²³ Victoria Gardner Sorsby, "British Trade with Spanish America under the Asiento, 1713-1740," *University of London PhD Diss.* (1975), 10. Also, George Nelson, "Contraband Trade under the Asiento, 1730-1739," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (Oct. 1945) 59-60, 66. Contraband trade with the Spanish Main from Jamaica developed after the island's capture in 1655. See Nuala Zahedieh, "The Merchants of Port Royal, Jamaica, and the Spanish Contraband Trade, 1655-1692," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Oct. 1986), 570-593.

have favoured French commerce.²⁴ In this process, Belize's utility as a British foothold on the Spanish Main was transformed when the extensive licensed trade permitted by the *asiento* enabled the South Sea Company to establish a branch office in Guatemala. Because slaves were shipped to Guatemala through Lake Izabal, the largest lake in Guatemala, with waterway access to the Atlantic and a short sail to Belize, this provided perfect cover for British and Jamaican merchants to penetrate the Captaincy General with contraband goods via Belize.²⁵

Belize's strategic significance to Great Britain was further enhanced when, to try and increase the *asiento* channel of trade, British merchants adopted the practice of exchanging slaves for logwood in the settlement. This increased the number of slaves available for sale in Belize but enlarged total number of slaves in the settlement. This provided a ready source of labour for the woodcutters that migrated to Belize after the Spanish evicted them from the Bay of Campeche in 1720,²⁶ unintentionally increasing logwood cutting in the settlement and expanding Great Britain's territorial presence in Belize. This prompted Spain to try on several occasions to drive the British out of Belize and the Spanish raids on the settlement invariably forced the Belize woodcutters to seek refuge in nearby Roatan and the Mosquito Shore. Not unimportantly, this led to close links between Belize and Black River, an area in the Mosquito Shore on the Atlantic coast of Honduras and Nicaragua "also called Poyer or Poyas."²⁷ This

²⁴ Antonella Alimento and Koen Stapelbroek, "Trade and Treaties: Balancing the Interstate System," chapter in *The Politics of Commercial Treaties in the Eighteenth Century*, (Palgrave MacMillan, 2017), 20. Miquelon for instance argues that France lost its "favoured place in the trade of Spanish colonial positions." Dale Miquelon, "Ambiguous Concession: What Diplomatic Archives Reveal about Article 15 of the Treaty of Utrecht and France's North American Policy," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Vol. 67, No. 3 (July 2010), 461.

²⁵ Sorsby, "British Trade...", 209.

²⁶ John Burdon, *Archives of British Honduras*, Volume II, 7.

²⁷ "Honduras," *The Encyclopaedia Britannica: A Dictionary of Arts, Sciences, and General Literature*, Ninth Edition, Volume XII, (Philadelphia: Maxwell Sommerville, 1894), 133. For more on this area see, 'An Account of the Mosquito Shore', with plans and schemes for trade from Lake Nicaragua, by Joseph Smith Speer, Lieut. 49th Foot, formerly captain of a fort on the Black River, with his notes on a map of the Shore [not included] and a copy of his memorial to the first Commissioner of Trade etc., 1765 and undated, ADM 7/837/1, The National Archives at Kew.

was after one such raid in 1730 because the Belize logwood merchant William Pitt remained permanently at Black River, and thereafter directed his logwood operations in Belize from there.²⁸ This had the unintended effect of extending British influence in the Bay of Honduras and on the Mosquito Shore, and facilitated establishment of a British protectorate in the Mosquito Shore in 1747, with Belize anchoring what later became “an important triangular...power base” in Central America.²⁹ This interpretation challenges Frank Griffith Dawson’s thesis that “English cultivation of the Mosquitos was directly related to the need to protect...logwood,”³⁰ and contests Robert Naylor’s argument that “the Mosquito alliance was...needed [to] support the logwood trade.”³¹

Then in the Treaty of Paris of 1763 that ended the Seven Years War, Spain granted Great Britain the ‘right to cut, load and carry away dyewood or logwood’.³² The treaty did not describe the limits where this was permitted and reserved sovereignty of the settlement to Spain. However, it also legitimated British presence in Belize and by this means preserved British influence in the Mosquito Shore, albeit through the commercial networks and cultural links that had been forged between Belize and Black River, but this required Great Britain adopt an ambiguous policy so as not to upset Spain.³³ Notably, by 1763 Belize’s logwood trade had declined and in any event, within a few years, was superseded by the mahogany trade in

²⁸ Frank Griffith Dawson, “William Pitt’s Settlement at Black River on the Mosquito Shore: A Challenge to Spain in Central America, 1732-87,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 63, No. 4 (Nov. 1983), 683. Also, Troy S. Floyd, *The Anglo-Spanish Struggle for Mosquitia*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1967), 18-19.

²⁹ *Ibid*, 677.

³⁰ Dawson, “William Pitt’s Settlement...,” 677, 681.

³¹ Robert A. Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism: The Mosquito Shore and the Bay of Honduras, 1600-1914: A Case Study in British Informal Empire*, (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1989), 46.

³² Shoman, *Guatemala’s claim to Belize...*, 2; Mavis Campbell, “St. George’s Cay: Genesis of the British Settlement of Belize – Anglo-Spanish Rivalry,” *The Journal of Caribbean History*, Vol. 37, No. 2 (2003), 179; P.K. Menon, “The Anglo-Guatemalan Territorial Dispute over the Colony of Belize,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (No., 1979), 347.

³³ Vera Lee Brown, “Chapter II, Anglo-Spanish Relations in America, 1763-1770,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 5, no. 3 (1922): 356, 358-363.

terms of importance.³⁴ “By 1765, Belize was already exporting over 400,000 board feet” of mahogany and had an abundant supply of the resource. Thus, when the mahogany stands in Jamaica were depleted, the merchants there started regularly importing mahogany from Belize.³⁵ Hence, when Spanish forces threatened an attack in 1763, the Earl of Sandwich, then British Secretary of State, authorized a naval expedition from Jamaica to secure the Belize settlement and protect this source.³⁶

The formal treaty rights allowing the British to cut logwood in Belize confirmed the settlement’s strategic value when it gave British merchants a chance to restore the Spanish (contraband) trade which had suffered when Spanish shipping expanded after the *asiento* was cancelled in 1750.³⁷ This caused the Governor of Yucatan to undertake new efforts to displace the Belize woodcutters, and the Spanish attacks created disorder in the Belize settlement, a situation that worsened after the British Navigation Act of 1763 made logwood an enumerated good.³⁸ Thus, Sir William Burnaby sailed from Jamaica with a small naval fleet, quelled the chaos, and drew up a code of regulations for the settlement.³⁹ This gave the British a greater degree of administrative control over the settlement without requiring establishment of an official British colony.⁴⁰ Thus, Belize remained the pivot for British trade with Central

³⁴ Joseph, “British Loggers...Part 1,” 34. By 1768 logwood barely fetched £4 per ton.

³⁵ Bulmer-Thomas and Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Belize...*, 71; McJunkin, “Logwood: An Enquiry...,” 144. See also, Adam Bowett, “The English Mahogany Trade, 1700-1793,” *Brunel University PhD Thesis* (1996), 157. Bowett contends that the mahogany trade developed rapidly after “the Naval Stores Act of 1721 ...abolished duties on timber imported from the Americas.” Adam Bowett, “The Commercial Introduction of Mahogany and the Naval Stores Act of 1721,” *Furniture History*, Vol. 30 (1994), 43.

³⁶ Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism...*, 56.

³⁷ Pearce, *British Trade with Spanish America*, 49-50. Pearce estimates this was valued around £200,000 per year at the time.

³⁸ Pearce, *British Trade with Spanish America*, 43.

³⁹ Brown, “Chapter II, Anglo-Spanish Relations...,” 367.

⁴⁰ Tim Soriano, “‘The peculiar circumstances of that settlement’: Burnaby’s code and Royal Naval rule in British Honduras,” *Law & History: Journal of the Australian and New Zealand Law and History Society*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (2020), 59, available via informit.com.au

America, but the actual value of that trade through Belize was probably small,⁴¹ and the British Free Ports Act in 1766 likely reduced this further.⁴² Still, the settlement was a menace to Spain's commercial monopoly. Hence, Spanish officials used the occasion of the American Revolutionary War to attack Belize in 1779 and all the settlers and woodcutters were driven from the settlement. Many settlers sought refuge on the island of Roatan, temporarily upending Great Britain's territorial presence in Belize.⁴³

In 1783 British presence in Belize was restored when the Treaty of Versailles, agreed between Great Britain and Spain as part of the Peace of Paris to end the American Revolutionary War, reaffirmed British rights to cut logwood in Belize and defined the limits for this as being "between the Hondo and Belize Rivers."⁴⁴ This led to some of the settlers returning to Belize from Roatan that same year.⁴⁵ After the woodcutters complained that the limits set by the new treaty constrained their access to the desired stands of timber,⁴⁶ Great Britain and Spain agreed a supplementary treaty in 1786 (the Convention of London) whereby, in exchange for extending the limits for woodcutting in Belize to the Sibun River, and also for permitting the cutting of mahogany, Great Britain 'abandoned' the Mosquito Shore.⁴⁷ According to Ralph Woodward Jr., this renewed Belize's strategic importance when Great Britain's refusal to "push claims for outright ownership" of the settlement left it able to exploit

⁴¹ Pearce, *British Trade with Spanish America*, 62.

⁴² Allan Christelow, "Contraband Trade between Jamaica and the Spanish Main, and the Three Port Act of 1766," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, 22:2, (1942), 337-338.

⁴³ John Burdon, *Archives of British Honduras, I*, (Sifton Praed & Co., 1931), 18-19.

⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 20-21; Shoman, *Guatemala's claim to Belize...*, 3.

⁴⁵ Shoman, *Guatemala's claim to Belize...*, 3; Campbell, "St. George's Cay..." 182-183.

⁴⁶ Bowett, "The English Mahogany Trade..." 165. Bowett contends that the wood cutters complaints were not about logwood but about mahogany, and that the Belize woodcutters had expressly requested of the British government "that the right to cut mahogany must be explicit in any agreement with [Spain], because there will be ten times the quantity of mahogany wanted to that of logwood."

⁴⁷ Frank Griffith Dawson, "The Evacuation of the Mosquito Shore and the English who Stayed Behind, 1786-1800," *The Americas*, Vol. 55, No. 1 (1998), 63; R.A. Humphreys, "Anglo-American Rivalries in Central America," 4.

“the legitimate log cutting concessions which...the 1783 and 1786 [treaties had granted] to develop the illicit entrepôt...trade with Guatemala.”⁴⁸

After this Belize continued to serve British interests in Central America, but Spanish officials tried to eliminate the British sphere of influence.⁴⁹ The Bourbon Reforms, a series of administrative, economic, ecclesiastical, and fiscal measures implemented in Central America between 1750 and 1786, expanded Guatemala’s indigo—a dye used in the textile industry in Europe—production, and this led to an “expansion of shipping through the Atlantic ports” and helped restore some of the traditional Spanish trade routes.⁵⁰ This affected, but did not end, the trade through Belize. Besides, the creation of new intendancies in Chiapas, Salvador, Honduras (Comayagua) and Nicaragua (León) under the administrative reforms weakened the impact on Belize. This was because the new *intendentes* in Comayagua and León attempted to subvert Guatemala City’s regional dominance by shifting trade through the ports of Omoa and Trujillo in Honduras and reopening the San Juan River in Nicaragua to shipping.⁵¹ The Guatemalan *Consulado de Comercio* (merchant guild) successfully resisted this, and thereafter, advocated

⁴⁸ Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., “Economic and Social Origins of the Guatemalan Political Parties (1773-1823),” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 45, No. 4 (Nov. 1965), 553.

⁴⁹ This was the intention of Article 1 of the 1786 Treaty. Dawson, “The Evacuation of the Mosquito Shore...,” 63.

⁵⁰ John Fisher, “The Bourbon Reforms in Spanish America: a Semi-Autobiographical Re-Evaluation,” *Journal of Iberian and Latin American Research*, Vol. 18, No. 1 (2012), 1-14; Miles Wortman, “Bourbon Reforms in Central America: 1750-1786,” *The Americas*, Vol. 32, no. 2 (Oct. 1975), 222-238. A recent interpretation of the Bourbon Reforms in Central America argues that “the most pressing concern for the Spanish crown in the region was the lack of control over the Caribbean coast (also known as the Mosquito Shore)” by dislodging the British from the area. Jorge Gonzalez Alzate, “Bourbon Reforms in Central America, 1700-1808,” in *History of Central America, 1492-1824*, published online January 2018, 1 - 2, DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.517.

⁵¹ Marion Rodríguez, *The Cadiz Experiment in Central America*, (Berkeley, London: University of California Press, 1978), 15 - 16. A stock company was established to promote trade through the Omoa. See “Compañía de Navegación del Río Montagua. Erección de la Compañía de Navegación del Río Montagua, 1796,” *The Latin American Library at Tulane, Manuscripts Collection 50*, File Box4, Folder 48, 1796. For more on the interprovincial rivalry see Troy S. Floyd, “The Guatemalan Merchants, the Government, and the Provincianos, 1750-1800,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Feb. 1961), 90-110.

forcefully for the proposed interoceanic trade route to pass through Guatemala.⁵² The *Consulado* prioritized the overland route from the Atlantic port of Santo Tomás in the Golfo Dulce for this project.⁵³

An attack on the Belize settlement in 1798 by Spanish *guardacosta* forces based at San Felipe de Bacalar on Mexico's Caribbean coast also failed to dislodge the British and hence, at the turn of the nineteenth century, the Belize settlement remained under British occupation.⁵⁴ However, Belize had moved to the 'fringes' of British policy in Central America partly because British attention was focused on events elsewhere in the hemisphere and because the value of the logwood and mahogany trades had flagged (the latter due to serious foreign competition), but the contraband trade continued.⁵⁵ Then in 1807, Great Britain abolished the slave trade.⁵⁶ Following this, various leaders of Spanish American revolutionary movements came under "British cultural, [ideological,] and intellectual influence," and several of the newly independent states of Spanish America, abolished slavery.⁵⁷

⁵² Alzate, "Bourbon Reforms in Central America ...," 18; Fisher, "The Bourbon Reforms in Spanish America ...," 11. Miller contends that the Guatemalan *Consulado* "envisioned progress as the development of isthmian commerce radiating from Guatemala City through the established institutions which they controlled." Hubert J. Miller, "Conservative and Liberal Concordats in Nineteenth Century Guatemala: Who Won?" *Journal of Church and State*, Vol. 33, No. 1 (Winter 1991), 131.

⁵³ Woodward, Jr., *Class Privilege...*, 61; Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., "Merchant Guilds (*Consulado de Comercio*) in the Spanish World," *History Compass*, Vol. 5, No. 5 (Jul. 2007), 1578.

⁵⁴ Angel Cal, "The Battle of St. George's Caye: Through Spanish Eyes," Paper presented at the 1st Belize National Research Conference, 21-22 March 2018, University of Belize Auditorium, Belmopan City, Belize. Dr Cal and I were presenters on the same panel for that conference. For a more conventional account of this event see Mavis C. Campbell, "St George's Cay: Genesis of the British Settlement of Belize: Anglo-Spanish Rivalry," *The Journal of Caribbean History*, Vol. 37, Issue 2 (Jul. 2003). Also R. A. Humphreys, "Presidential Address: Anglo-American Rivalries in Central America," *Transaction of the Royal Historical Society*, 18 (1968), 178.

⁵⁵ Lynch argues that "British policy towards Spanish America [had become] diffident in its approach and vague in its intent." John Lynch, "British Policy and Spanish America, 1783-1808," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 1, Issue 1 (May 1969), 1; Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism...*, 74. On the mahogany trade see Bowett, "The English Mahogany ...," 175 - 183.

⁵⁶ Anthony Page, "Rational Dissent, Enlightenment, and Abolition of the British Slave Trade," *The Historical Journal*, Vol. 54, No. 3 (Sept. 2011), 769-770.

⁵⁷ Karen Racine, "This England and This Now": British Cultural and Intellectual Influence in the Spanish American Independence Era," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 90, No. 3 (2010), 423.

The Napoleonic Wars did not significantly alter the situation with Belize, but some Spanish American colonies started throwing off the yoke of Spanish colonial rule when Napoleon Bonaparte invaded Spain in 1808 and installed his brother Joseph Bonaparte as king there. In Central America, the situation remained largely unchanged, but Spain's attempt to reassert its authority over the Spanish colonies with the Cádiz Constitution of 1812 stirred a desire in the creole aristocracy in Guatemala, among other places, for autonomy.⁵⁸ After 1815 France stood defeated but not destroyed, but "renewed fears of [French] interventions in Spanish America" soon prompted revival of the idea of British action there.⁵⁹ As Rafe Blaufarb posited, "the erosion of Spanish authority in the Americas fuelled international competition...over the fate of Spanish America,"⁶⁰ In this new milieu, the United States emerged as the chief political rival to Great Britain in Central America but territorial acquisitions in the latter region were not a priority and economic relations were not fundamentally changed.⁶¹

On the eve of Central American independence, Belize's strategic value to British policy in the region had waned but remained unbroken, and the crowning of George Frederic II as King of the Mosquitoes in Belize in 1816 ensured that the British sphere of influence remained intact. Following Captain General Carlos Urrutia y Montoya of Guatemala's decision to open trade with Belize in 1819, Belize's strategic significance to Great Britain waxed, portending

⁵⁸ Jaime E. Rodríguez O., "The Hispanic Revolution: Spain and America, 1808-1826," *Ler História*, 57 (2009); Woodward, Jr., "Economic and Social Origins...", 557.

⁵⁹ Lynch, "British Policy and Spanish America," 14.

⁶⁰ Rafe Blaufarb, "The Western Question: The Geopolitics of Latin American Independence," *The American Historical Review* 112, no. 3 (2007), 742.

⁶¹ Frank Thistlewaite, *The Anglo-American Connection in the Early Nineteenth Century*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959), 3. Black argues that during the early nineteenth century United States imperial schemes surfaced and included expansionism. See Jeremy Black, "The United States in the Nineteenth Century: 1812-98," in *Military Strategy: A Global History*, 128-50, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), 128. Also, D. A. G. Waddell, "International Politics and Latin American Independence," in *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume III, From Independence to c.1870*, Leslie Bethell (ed.), published to Cambridge History Online 2008, 2004.

new roles Belize merchant houses would soon come to play in the trade of Central America, as cheap British cottons and textiles flooded Guatemala.⁶² Belize's mahogany trade was not the most significant factor in British policy in Belize at this juncture, but the territorial activities of the woodcutters extended the area effectively occupied by the British as they pushed further south in search of new mahogany trees. Meanwhile, the socio-economic situation in Central America was such that Great Britain still did not need to convert Belize to an official colony, and this prompted the British Parliament to indicate in 1817 that Belize was "merely a settlement for certain purposes in the possession and under the protection of his majesty."⁶³ Understanding exactly what those 'certain purposes' were is crucial for understanding British policy in Belize in the nineteenth century.

This dissertation investigates this question more closely, albeit for the period between 1821 (when the Audiencia of Guatemala declared its independence from Spain) and circa 1863 (one year after Belize became an official British colony, when the supplementary treaty between the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Guatemala to resolve the matter of Article 7 of the Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty of 1859 failed to be ratified). The aim is to provide an adequate explanation for Great Britain's handling of Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize during the nineteenth century; and, relatedly, to clarify the reasons for Great Britain converting Belize into an official colony in 1862. The hypothesis is that Central America's independence from Spain in 1821 prompted a shift in the roles played by the British settlement at Belize, and this made the latter vital strategically to attaining, then sustaining, British expansion in the isthmus. Thus, Great Britain subordinated settlement of Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize

⁶² Woodward, Jr., "Economic and Social Origins...", 559-560.

⁶³ Donald Grunewald, "The Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute over British Honduras," *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 5 No. 2 (Jul. 1965), 28; R.A. Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History of British Honduras, 1638-1901*, (Oxford University Press, 1961), 12. The statement, drawn from British Acts of Parliament of 1817 (Act 57, Geo. III, c. 53), takes on new meaning in the context of informal empire.

to maintaining British predominance in Central America, because doing so enabled Great Britain to forestall French and United States influence in the region. To demonstrate this, the following questions are examined:

1. To what extent were Great Britain's handling of Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize in the nineteenth century and conversion of the settlement to an official British colony in 1862 functions or products of British expansion in Central America?
2. How exactly did commercial and economic considerations relative to the mahogany trade influence both Great Britain's handling of Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize during the period considered by this study and the decision to formally annex Belize?
3. How exactly did Great Britain's turn to 'free-trade' and campaign for the abolition of slavery in the nineteenth century affect its handling of the territorial dispute and decision to convert Belize to an official colony?
4. In what ways did European (particularly French) and United States expansion in Central America and attentions to trans-isthmian canal projects in the latter influence Great Britain's policy in Belize during the nineteenth century?

Historiographic Review

Historical studies of Belize have been growing in recent decades, and while this trend is reassuring, relatively few monographs have been written recently about the territorial dispute over Belize.⁶⁴ Indeed, in the wake of decolonisation,⁶⁵ study of the territorial dispute has slowly and steadily moved from the centre of the historiography on Belize, out towards its periphery. Yet, the issue of the territorial dispute itself remains enticing, if not also polarizing, to Belizeans and Guatemalans alike, because 40 years after Belize's independence from Great Britain the matter remains unresolved. In the past decade interest in the territorial dispute waxed, shifting the issue back towards the centre of public and scholarly attention, and reviving the focus on

⁶⁴ Shoman's book *Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize* is the only dedicated work on this subject in the last decade.

the colonizing process and imperial claims of sovereignty.⁶⁵ Belize and Guatemala finally decided, by separate referenda (Guatemala in 2018 and Belize in 2019), to have the matter adjudicated by the International Court of Justice (ICJ). The run up to this outcome helped foment this renewal of scholarly interest, and several new works on the territorial dispute were published. For instance, the Government of Belize published its own legal analysis titled *Legal Opinion on Guatemala's Territorial Claim to Belize* (2002).⁶⁶ Gustavo Adolfo Orellana Portillo followed in 2010 with a study titled *Background and Study of the Special agreement between Guatemala and Belize to Submit Guatemala's Territorial, Insular, and Maritime Claim to the International Court of Justice*.⁶⁷ These works maintain the dominant approach for dealing with the territorial dispute over Belize, thereby further confining understanding of the issue within “the framework of nineteenth-century colonial concepts...of territorial sovereignty.”⁶⁸

This approach, which assumes that in Belize territorial expansion was the objective, employs a “spatial dimension of sovereignty” whereby territorial boundaries and sovereignty were largely based on the exercise or control over (the economic resources) of territory.⁶⁹ In this system, the boundaries of new states were deemed to be exactly as the pre-existing colonial boundaries (*uti possidetis*). Put differently, the international system that emerged after the

⁶⁵ The territorial dispute was one of the key areas of focus of the 1st Belize National Research Conference hosted in March 2018 by the consortium that included the University of Belize, Galen University and the National Institute of Culture and History. I presented a paper titled “Economic Diplomacy and the Belize-Guatemala Territorial Dispute” at this forum.

⁶⁶ Sir Elihu Lauterpacht, Judge Stephen Schwebel, Professor Shabtai Rosenne and Professor Francisco Orrego Vincuña, *Legal Opinion on Guatemala's Territorial Claim to Belize*, (Belmopan: Government of Belize, 2002).

⁶⁷ Gustavo Adolfo Orellana Portillo, *Background and Study of the Special agreement between Guatemala and Belize to Submit Guatemala's Territorial, Insular, and Maritime Claim to the International Court of Justice*, (Guatemala City, 2010), minex.gob.gt/ADMINPORTAL/Data/DOC/20100927171348408BACKGROUNDANDSTUDYOFTHESPECIALAGREEMENTBETWEENGUATEMALAANDBELIZE.pdf

⁶⁸ Robert McCorquodale and Raul Pangalangan, “Pushing Back the Limitations of Territorial Boundaries,” *European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 12, No 5 (2001), 867.

⁶⁹ *Ibid*, 868.

Second World War attempted to transfer pre-existing sovereignty over territory to the new states. In many cases however, such as with Belize, claiming pre-existing sovereignty required that states competing for territory demonstrate that the areas they claimed were “effectively occupied” and located within the colonial administrative frontiers (*res nullius*).⁷⁰ Thus, effective occupation invariably hinged on showing that the land or territory in question was being improved from an economic point of view; that is, that it was cultivated or logged (as in the Belize case) by the party claiming effective occupation.⁷¹ The existing historical scholarship on the territorial dispute over Belize largely adopts this outlook and its main contention is that formal empire was Great Britain’s objective there. Thus, a fundamental aspect of this historiography is the wood-cutting activities in Belize and following from this, that the logwood and mahogany trades (i.e., economic factors) provided the *raison d’être* for British territorial expansion in Belize.

Assad Shoman’s recent book *Guatemala’s Claim to Belize: The Definitive History* (2018) maintains this orthodox view but is very accessible. Shoman contends that the territorial activities of British woodcutters extended the British footprint in Belize beyond the limits of the Anglo-Spanish treaties of 1783.⁷² As Shoman states, “the territory of Belize controlled by the British kept on growing ... before and after those treaties.”⁷³ Shoman acknowledges that this expansion was driven by “men on the spot,” and that it was the British Superintendent in Belize who first proclaimed the Sarstoon as the southern boundary because “the cutters needed more land for finding and cutting mahogany, and they were not about to restrict themselves to

⁷⁰ McCorquodale and Pangalangan, 368, 370-375. For more on these principles of sovereignty see Ian Brownlie, *Boundary Problems and the Formation of New States*, (University of Hull Press, 1996).

⁷¹ Botella-Ordinas, “Debating Empires, Inventing Empires...,” 143, 147-148.

⁷² Assad Shoman, *Guatemala’s Claim to Belize: The Definitive History*, (Belize: Image Factory Art Foundation, 2018), 3, 28.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 394.

limits they had far exceeded for many years.”⁷⁴ Shoman also points out that it was a forum convened by Superintendent Cockburn at Belize that defined the boundaries of the settlement. Yet Shoman rationalizes these and other actions of British Superintendents in Belize in terms of formal empire. As Shoman states, “Great Britain exercised increasingly formal jurisdiction over the territory,” and “was in undisturbed possession of the land for decades.”⁷⁵

Shoman’s continuance of the formal empire analysis of the territorial dispute leads him to gloss over the consequence of Belize’s emergence as an entrepôt to British activities in Central America from the 1820s onwards, and the importance of Belize to the British sphere of influence in Central America. Thus, while Shoman recognizes that most of the trade of Guatemala “was largely controlled by Belize merchants,” he posited only that “the entrepot trade “dwarfed the value of commodity exports (logwood and mahogany)”.”⁷⁶ The upshot of this shortcoming is that Shoman fails to properly identify the impetus for Great Britain’s failure to settle the Guatemalan claim to Belize, and this ultimately caused him to opine that “the Guatemalan claim to [Belize] could have been ended...[had] Great Britain [not] refused to pay the paltry sum of £50,000.”⁷⁷ Shoman’s assumption that territorial expansion was Great Britain’s objective in Belize caused him to treat Great Britain’s formal annexation of Belize rather matter-of-factly. As Shoman observes, “in 1862 Belize was converted to a colony.”⁷⁸ My research challenges the formal empire thesis by aligning with the historical scholarship that provides an alternative explanation for Great Britain’s relationship with its dependencies and why territory is annexed or not.

⁷⁴ Shoman, *Guatemala’s Claim ...*, 6, 4.

⁷⁵ Shoman, *Guatemala’s Claim ...*, 8, 28.

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 10.

⁷⁷ Shoman, *How YOU can end the Guatemalan Claim*, 1.

⁷⁸ Shoman, *Guatemala’s Claim ...*, 39.

Shoman's failure to consult the archives in Guatemala, or a wider set of materials in the United States presents another shortcoming and reflects a persistence by many scholars of the territorial dispute. Although Shoman consulted the *White Book*, this was inadequate and, by his own admission, not totally reliable. This study remedies that tendency and consults Guatemalan archival sources, as well as other sources on Central America held at the Latin American Library at Tulane University thereby allowing for a better understanding of how events in Central America helped shape British policy in Belize.

Shoman's other (relatively recent) work, *Belize's Independence and Decolonization in Latin America: Guatemala, Great Britain, and the UN* (2010), examines Belize's experience with decolonization and its struggle for independence in the twentieth century.⁷⁹ Shoman sees this struggle as part of the process of transitioning from dependency on formal empire to independent state, and this study suggests that, like other former British colonies, Belize's march to independence was truly only permitted when the colony no longer provided a strategic benefit to British expansion in the region.⁸⁰ This analysis seems to undercut the conventional hypothesis in the historiography of the territorial dispute that the settlement at Belize was valued for its economic (timber) resources, but in centring the struggle for independence in the right to self-determination Shoman nonetheless grounds the latter in the notion that Belize's territorial boundaries reflected an area which the British 'effectively occupied' by means of their logwood and mahogany operations. This raises the question of why Great Britain never formally annexed Belize during the period when the mahogany trade was at its zenith (i.e., in

⁷⁹ Assad Shoman, *Belize's Independence and Decolonization in Latin America: Guatemala, Great Britain, and the UN*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

⁸⁰ Robin Winks, "On Decolonization and informal Empire," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 81, No. 3 (Jun. 1976), 542. Shoman makes the point that British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan famously asked for a "profit and loss account for the colonies," but Belize was valued for strategic purposes. Shoman, *Belize's Independence ...*, 5-6.

the 1840s). Whereas Shoman interprets Great Britain's relationship with Belize in terms of economic factors, my research asserts that Great Britain valued Belize for strategic reasons.

Analysis of the territorial dispute has often been undertaken in relation to research on other themes such as colonialism and resistance, decolonization, and the mapping and naming of colonial territory.⁸¹ For instance, O. Nigel Bolland's book *The Formation of a Colonial Society: Belize, from Conquest to Crown Colony* (1977), and his more recent work titled *Colonialism and Resistance: Essays in Historical Sociology* (2003), draw a direct relationship between slave resistance in Belize and the logwood and mahogany trades, which Bolland views as the settlement's *raison d'être*.⁸² Bolland also argues that slave resistance in Belize was manifest in the relationship between land and labour particularly in the exploitation of logwood and mahogany.⁸³ The use of African slaves in the woodcutting industries in Belize was vital not only to the success of the logwood and mahogany trades, but to the very persistence of the settlement itself, and by extension, central to the territorial encroachment of the British beyond the Treaties of 1783/1786.⁸⁴ For instance, in *Colonialism and Resistance* Bolland alludes to the fact that the power of the old oligarchy in Belize derived from the success of the mahogany trade and drove their appetite for territorial expansion.⁸⁵ In this way, Bolland shows that British expansion in Belize resulted from the actions of private British interests though he felt that the

⁸¹ Examples of this are Matthew Restall, "Creating "Belize": The Mapping and Naming History of a Liminal Locale," *Terrae Incognitae*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (2019); Odile Hoffman, *British Honduras: the invention of a colonial territory – Mapping and spatial knowledge in the 19th century*, (Cubola-IRD, 2014); and Mavis C. Campbell, *Becoming Belize: A History of an Outpost of Empire Searching for Identity, 1528–1823*, (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2011).

⁸² O. Nigel Bolland, *Colonialism and Resistance: Essays in Historical Sociology*, 2nd Edition, (Belize: Cubola Productions, 2003), 19.

⁸³ O. Nigel Bolland, *The Formation of Colonial Society: Belize, from Conquest to Crown Colony*, (Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977). By contrast, Mavis Campbell believes that the slaves in Belize hardly put up any resistance. Mavis Campbell, *Becoming Belize: A History of An Outpost of Empire Searching for Identity, 1528–1823*, (University of the West Indies Press, 2011), 287.

⁸⁴ Bolland, *Colonialism and Resistance ...*, 22, 24, 37. Portillo points this out in his report. Portillo, *Background and Study ...*, 13.

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 40, 42.

settlement was merely “a trading post attached to a massive timber industry.”⁸⁶ Still, Bolland saw British expansion in Belize as formal empire, and in doing so he doesn’t fully contemplate how events in Central America shaped British policy in Belize.⁸⁷ My research remedies this latter deficiency by situating British policy in Belize within historical events in Central America in the nineteenth century.

Grant D. Jones also deals with the matter of British expansion southward in Belize but in the context of Mayan resistance to this encroachment. In his book *Maya Resistance to Spanish Rule: Time and History of the Colonial Frontier* (1989), Jones contends that the Maya of Belize likewise resisted colonization by European powers (i.e., the Spanish), a claim that is supported by Angel Cal.⁸⁸ Jones’ analysis shows that the areas encroached by the British woodcutters were not empty but in fact sparsely populated. Jones roots Mayan resistance to British expansion in southern Belize in the early colonial political economy of the settlement and in doing so upholds the hypothesis that economic factors were the impetus for such expansion. At the same time, by showing that Mayan resistance was localized, Jones helps to dispel the notion that in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries this area was still under the control of Guatemala City.⁸⁹ Jones does not give any attention to the role the Mosquito Indians may have played in the helping the British to subdue Mayan resistance. This is not a theme that my research treats in any depth either, but the role of the Mosquito Indians in facilitating extension of a British sphere of influence southward from Belize is explored.

⁸⁶ Bolland, *The Formation of Colonial Society ...*, 6.

⁸⁷ Bolland, *Colonialism and Resistance ...*, 17; Bolland, *The Formation of a Colonial Society ...*, 385, 392.

⁸⁸ Grant D. Jones, *Maya Resistance to Spanish Rule: Time and History on a Colonial Frontier*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1989). For Cal’s position see Angel Cal, “Mavis Campbell, Becoming Belize: A History of An Outpost of Empire Searching for Identity, 1528-1823,” Book Reviews in *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 59, No. 3-4 (2013), 177.

⁸⁹ Wainwright contends that “the British saw only the “traces” of “once teeming Maya”.” Joel Wainwright, “The Colonial Origins of the State in Southern Belize,” *Historical Geography*, Vol. 43 (2017), 126.

The recent book by Rajeshwari Dutt, *Empire on Edge: The British Struggle for Empire during the Yucatan's Caste War, 1847-1901* (2018), picks up the theme of Anglo-Mayan relations in terms of the impact this had on “contain[ing] and control[ling] the northern frontier of Belize” from about the middle of the nineteenth century.⁹⁰ Dutt’s book contributes to our understanding of the dynamics of British imperial activity in Belize during this period, and in showing how exactly “British colonial officials attempted...to impose coherence at the frontiers” of Britain’s empire, illuminates the tensions between the forward actions of men on the ground in Belize and officials in London.⁹¹ Thus, Dutt argues that while “threats to the [Belize] settlement derived from...ill-defined boundaries [... and ...] the influx of Hispanics into [northern Belize] presented new challenges, British policymakers were more concerned with the imperial threats to [British] power than with the Mayan threat.”⁹² Dutt also shows that private interests drove British expansion in the north of Belize in the same way that they did in the south of the settlement, and that British policy in Belize responded to events in the periphery. For instance, Dutt contends that “merchant firms [in Belize] responded to increased demand for mahogany by pushing further into the borderlands between Belize and Mexico.”⁹³ Dutt’s analysis that, during the early 1860s, the “policies of the new Mexican government to end the Caste War created tensions with the British government” and that the situation “deteriorated in 1861 when the Santa Cruz Maya entered Belize in pursuit of [their foes]”⁹⁴ is significant, as it demonstrates that events in Mexico profoundly affected British policy in Belize. This thesis extends this analysis to consider the impact of French imperial activity in

⁹⁰ Rajeshwari Dutt, *Empire on Edge: The British Struggle for Empire during the Yucatan's Caste War, 1847-1901*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 4.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

⁹² Dutt, *Empire on Edge ...*, 17, 28, 54.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 29.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 7, 66.

Mexico during this period but disagrees with Dutt's conclusion that "Britain's desire for settling the boundary was related to its economic interest in Mexico."⁹⁵

Cartographic studies of Belize provide further analysis of the territorial dispute with Guatemala. Several such studies have provided new 'evidence' that the southern areas of Belize were in fact not uninhabited, but Joel Wainwright points out that "maps drawn prior to 1900 typically describe Toledo [the southernmost district in Belize] as 'unexplored.'"⁹⁶ Matthew Restall argues that one reason for this may be that the area "no longer existed in practical terms to Spaniards because their colonial effort had failed," and therefore was "elided on early maps."⁹⁷ Odile Hoffmann takes up the matter of British expansion in Belize in her book *British Honduras: The invention of a colonial territory Mapping and spatial knowledge in the 19th century* (2014). Hoffmann contends that British territorial actions in Belize "occurred in an already populated area" and amounted to the "invention of a colonial territory,"⁹⁸ leaving Hoffmann to conclude that Belize was "imperial before it was colonial."⁹⁹ This suggests that British policy in Belize in the nineteenth century was arguably intended to support Great Britain's wider interests in the region and was not aimed at territorial expansion per se. Hoffmann is sparse in her treatment of the matter of British encroachments beyond the limits set out by Anglo-Spanish treaties of 1783/1786, but Hoffmann nonetheless shows that the colonial territory which is today Belize was achieved through territorial expansion driven by the British woodcutters as they switched from logwood cutting to mahogany felling. As Hoffmann contends, by claiming new territory the woodcutters laid the groundwork for British

⁹⁵ Dutt, 161.

⁹⁶ Wainwright, "The Colonial Origins ...," 126.

⁹⁷ Matthew Restall, "Creating "Belize": The Mapping and Naming History of a Liminal Locale," *Terrae Incognitae*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (2019), 7.

⁹⁸ Odile Hoffmann, *British Honduras: The invention of a colonial territory Mapping and spatial knowledge in the 19th century*, (Benque Viejo del Carmen: Cubola Books, 2014), 11, 16.

⁹⁹ *Ibid*, 70.

legitimacy and in this way the settlement was in fact not “peripheral to the British empire.”¹⁰⁰ This study builds on Hoffmann’s analysis by showing that British territorial claims in Belize were vital to a British sphere of influence in Central America.

More recently, economic history has been used as an analytical frame for examining the territorial dispute. This is a new approach for examining the matter, despite the historical significance of logwood and mahogany to Belize’s evolution from settlement, to official colony, to independent state.¹⁰¹ Angel Cal first examined the matter briefly in his doctoral thesis on “Rural society and socio-economic development: British mercantile capital in nineteenth century Belize.” Cal showed that while logging was important to the economy, the nature of British capital in Belize accounted for the importation of African slaves and reinforced patterns of internal migration of mainly non-blacks towards rural areas.¹⁰² Barbara and Victor Bulmer-Thomas’ take a different approach in their book *The Economic History of Belize: From the 17th Century to Post-Independence* (2012).¹⁰³ The authors manage to squeeze “350 years of economic history” into 200 pages, but the book nonetheless remains accessible and, by their own admission, fills a much-needed gap in Belizean history generally. They debunk the national myth that a Scottish buccaneer named Wallace founded the first settlement in Belize in 1638 and conclude that “[w]hat is certain ... is that shipwrecked sailors cannot have founded Belize in 1638,” and that there was no permanent settlement in Belize prior to 1642 but that by 1647 permanent British presence in Belize was evident.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 13-14, 22.

¹⁰¹ Cal’s 1991 doctoral thesis examines how British capital shaped socio-economic development in rural Belize. Angel Eduardo Cal, “Rural society and socio-economic development: British mercantile capital in nineteenth century Belize,” *University of Arizona PhD Diss* (1991), UMI Order # 9210316.

¹⁰² Ibid, 380-381.

¹⁰³ Barbara Bulmer-Thomas and Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Belize: From the 17th Century to Post-Independence*, 2nd Edition, (Benque Viejo de Carmen: Cubola Productions, 2017).

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 14, 26.

Bulmer-Thomas and Bulmer-Thomas confirm the significance of the logwood and mahogany industries to Belize and given the complete reliance on the trade of this commodity referred to the settlement as “a logwood economy.”¹⁰⁵ The authors argue that the concentration of logwood stands in the north removed any need for southward expansion by the British.¹⁰⁶ This shows that mahogany was the impetus for British territorial expansion yet, as the basis of the economy shifted, British officials continued to use the ‘logwood connections’ between Belize and Black River in the Mosquito Shore to maintain the British sphere of influence in the area. Bulmer-Thomas and Bulmer-Thomas downplay the import of this shift observing only that “mahogany had replaced logwood as the most important domestic export long before it was legal for the Baymen to extract it.” This might be because the Treaty of Versailles of 1783 “restricted economic activity [in the settlement] to cutting of logwood.”¹⁰⁷ The authors also downplay the significance of the nuanced shift in Belize’s strategic value to British expansion resulting from the settlement’s emergence as a trade entrepôt. Thus, the fact that it was Belize’s effectiveness as the fount of British influence in Central America that enabled Great Britain to eschew diplomatic recognition of the United Provinces of Central America (UPCA) is glossed over.¹⁰⁸ I will show that this shift in strategic value was fundamental to Great Britain’s policy in Belize from the late 1820s up to the mid-1860s.

By contrast, in the article titled “The British Role in Central America Prior to the Clayton to Bulwer Treaty of 1850,” Robert Naylor identifies Belize’s entrepôt role as instrumental to Great Britain obtaining and sustaining pre-eminence in the isthmus.¹⁰⁹ In this

¹⁰⁵ Bulmer-Thomas and Bulmer-Thomas, 41.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid*, 57-58.

¹⁰⁷ Bulmer-Thomas and Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History ...*, 66. Also, Shoman, *Guatemala’s claim to Belize ...*, 3.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid*, 78.

¹⁰⁹ Robert Naylor, “The British Role in Central America Prior to the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Aug. 1960), 366-367.

article which draws heavily from Naylor's unpublished doctoral thesis "British Commercial Relations with Central America, 1821-1851," Naylor highlighted the importance of the commercial activities of British merchants in Belize in this process.¹¹⁰ However, Naylor does not fully consider how Belize's emergence as a trade entrepôt affected British policy in Belize, and overlooks over how strategic factors also shaped British policy in Belize and Central America.¹¹¹ In the book *Penny Ante Imperialism: The Mosquito Shore and the Bay of Honduras, 1600-1914. A Case Study in British Informal Empire* (1989) Naylor shows that British policy in Central America was "informal" but that the activities of the Baymen, and the crowning of Mosquito Kings in Belize, kept the British sphere of influence in the region alive.¹¹² Naylor also points out that Central American merchants travelling to Belize to conduct trade after Carlos Urrutia the Captain General of Guatemala legalized this helped regularize the trade through Belize. Naylor concludes that "Belize was key to British commercial supremacy in Central America," but held that Great Britain valued Belize for economic reasons, and that the British state only 'reluctantly' sanctioned the territorial activities of wood cutters. This prevented Naylor from explaining why the British "abandoned the Bay Islands and Mosquito Shore [but] kept Belize ... at a time when Belize no longer dominated the foreign trade of Central America." Naylor's conclusion was that it was a "mild case of imperialism."¹¹³ This study differs from Naylor's in that it argues that Belize's value to British expansion in Central America was not based on the entrepôt trade but on the strategic advantages possession

¹¹⁰ Robert Naylor, "British Commercial Relations with Central America, 1821-1851," *PhD diss. Tulane University*, (1959).

¹¹¹ Van Aken similarly argues that Naylor did not consider how political factors influenced British policy in Central America. See Mark Van Aken, "British Policy Considerations in Central America before 1850, *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 42, No. 1 (Feb. 1962), 54.

¹¹² Robert Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism: The Mosquito Shore and the Bay of Honduras, 1600-1914*, London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1989), 74, 78.

¹¹³ Naylor, "Penny Ante Imperialism ...," 217-218.

of the settlement offered Great Britain for forestalling French and United States influence in the isthmus. This study also examines a shorter period (i.e., 1821-63).

Mavis C. Campbell also challenges the widely accepted narrative about Belize's origins. Campbell's book *Becoming Belize: A History of an Outpost of Empire Searching for Identity, 1528-1823* (2011) undercuts the *res nullius* argument by showing that the lands in Belize were in fact not empty prior to the mid-seventeenth century but that the Spanish had failed in colonizing the area. Campbell argues that Belize was valued to the Spaniards for strategic purposes but maintains that for the British Belize's value was, conversely, economic. This causes Campbell to miss the pivotal role Belize played in enabling the British to establish a sphere of influence in the region and thus, she contends that it was the Mosquito Shore that was of strategic value to Great Britain and that this "saved Belize."¹¹⁴ This dissertation adopts a similar analysis to Campbell's for the Spanish but emphasizes a later period (i.e., 1821-c.1863) and I show that Great Britain also valued Belize for strategic and not economic considerations. Campbell's findings suggest that there is need to revisit the earlier period of Belize's colonial history especially as it relates to the Spanish experience. Campbell's book is accessible but only covers the period up to 1823.

Krista Wiegand seems to agree with Campbell's contention that the Spanish did not value Belize for economic purposes. Wiegand argues in the paper "Nationalist Discourse and Domestic Incentives to Prevent Settlement of the Territorial Dispute Between Guatemala and Belize," that Spain was 'unwilling' to take Belize by force "because Belize was never of any economic significance" and that in any event had failed to settle the area.¹¹⁵ I will show that

¹¹⁴ Campbell, *Becoming Belize...*, x.

¹¹⁵ Krista E. Wiegand, "Nationalist Discourse and Domestic Incentives to Prevent Settlement of the Territorial Dispute Between Guatemala and Belize," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (2005), 352. Wiegand is a historian on

Wiegand is correct in this analysis and that Guatemala likewise valued Belize for strategic, not economic purposes. Wiegand seems to suggest however, that the British valued Belize for economic reasons citing that Great Britain only “[received] the right to cut and export timber from the territory.”¹¹⁶ This latter misreading of the matter led Wiegand to conclude, perhaps erroneously, that Belize may be “more willing to offer large territorial concessions in [unpopulated] areas” should Guatemala drop its claim.¹¹⁷ Belizeans have been steadfast that not one inch of territory is to be yielded to Guatemala.

The works discussed above nearly all have the following things in common: an analytical framework of formal empire emphasizing economic considerations for British imperial actions; an emphasis on British archival sources including Sir John Burdon’s *Archives of British Honduras*¹¹⁸ as a main source (i.e., they largely ignore Guatemalan and Central American archival sources); and they don’t adequately situate the Anglo-Guatemalan relations within the context of broader Central American history. Burdon started his research on Belize between 1925 and 1933 when he was governor of the settlement, and initially based his views on a mix of historical sources, including court records and minutes of magistrates’ meetings.¹¹⁹ The scant nature of the sources, however, forced Burdon to consult secondary sources to adjust for the gaps. This included an unpublished M.A. thesis by James McLeish titled “British Activities in the Yucatan and Mosquito Shore in the Eighteenth Century,”¹²⁰ and two earlier

territorial disputes.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 351.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 379.

¹¹⁸ Sir John A. Burdon, *Archives of Belize*, Edited, 3 vols., (London: Sifton Praed & Co., Ltd., 1931 – 1935).

¹¹⁹ Burdon, *ABH*, I, vii.

¹²⁰ James McLeish, “British Activities in the Yucatan and Mosquito Shore in the Eighteenth Century,” unpublished M.A. Diss., University of London. For his research McLeish drew on information contained in periodicals published in the settlement of Belize in the 1820s and 1830s such as *The Honduras Almanacks* and the *Honduras Gazette and Commercial Advertiser* in addition to colonial office papers, parliamentary records, and state papers (Foreign, Spain). Only four of the *Honduras Almanacks* have survived, but both sources were

historical works on Belize, one by Archibald Gibbs titled *British Honduras: An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Colony from its Settlement, 1670*,¹²¹ and the other by E.W. Williams entitled *The Baymen of Belize, and how they Wrested British Honduras from the Spaniards*.¹²² The main argument of all these works is that territorial expansion in Belize was the objective.

Guatemalan publications on the territorial dispute by comparison cite material from Guatemalan and Central American archival sources but do so selectively. Still, several Guatemalan publications on the territorial dispute hold that British expansionism was the objective of the territorial encroachments. This started after General Jorge Ubico Castañeda of Guatemala seized power in that state in 1931. Thereafter, Ubico demanded that Belize be restored to Guatemala and inserted Guatemalan claims to sovereignty over Belize into the Guatemalan constitution. After this, the Guatemalan Foreign Office published several works promulgating this claim. This included *The White Book* in 1938 that detailed Guatemala's account of the events related to the 1859 Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty of Commerce.¹²³ The object of *The White Book* was to delegitimize Great Britain's imperial claims to Belize; the argument being that "Great Britain never had dominion over the territory of Belize."¹²⁴ This was followed by publication of José Luis Mendoza's book *Great Britain and her Treaties on Belize (British Honduras): Guatemala has the Right to Reinstate the Entire Territory of Belize*

instrumental in promulgating the imperial narrative, and the *Almanack* of 1839 propagate the national myth about a corsair Wallace founding the settlement.

¹²¹ Archibald Gibbs, *British Honduras: An Historical and Descriptive Account of the Colony from its Settlement, 1670*, (London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle & Rivington, 1883), title page.

¹²² E. W. Williams, *The Baymen of Belize and How they Wrested British Honduras from the Spaniards*, (London: The Sheldon Press, 1914). Williams claims that the account of events set out in the book was told by Steven Forbes, one of the Baymen.

¹²³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Guatemala, *The White Book: Controversy between Guatemala and Great Britain Relative to the Convention of 1859 on Territorial Matters*, (Guatemala: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1938). This 1859 convention, as Victor Bulmer-Thomas rightly pointed out, established the basis of Guatemala's claim to Belize. Victor Bulmer-Thomas, "Foreword," in Shoman, *Belize's Independence and Decolonization*.

¹²⁴ *The White Book*, 6.

which similarly refuted the legal basis of British territorial claims to Belize. As Mendoza stated thereon, Great Britain “*did not possess any title whatsoever* to her occupancy of British Honduras.”¹²⁵ My research relies on the Guatemalan archives but accesses a wider set of materials in its analysis of the territorial dispute.

Early British scholarship on the territorial dispute over Belize tended to respond to the Guatemalan narrative.¹²⁶ Thus, the British scholarship contested Guatemala’s claim that the latter had inherited the territory from Spain at independence in 1821 by grounding Great Britain’s counterclaims on the same legal principle of *uti possidetis juris*. Accordingly, the rash of publications on the territorial dispute by Anglophone historians in the 1940s to 1960s sought to reaffirm British claims in Belize¹²⁷ by uncritically accepting the conventional argument that logwood was the *raison d’être* for the settlement and that the woodcutters’ activities extended into areas that were ‘abandoned’. This is evident in Stephen L. Caiger’s *British Honduras: Past and Present*;¹²⁸ L. M. Bloomfield’s *The British Honduras – Guatemala Dispute*;¹²⁹ and William J. Bianchi’s *Belize: The Controversy Between Guatemala and Great Britain over the territory of British Honduras in Central America*.¹³⁰ R.A. Humphreys’ *The Diplomatic History of British Honduras, 1638-1901* did little to dispel this outlook, and he concluded that “there is no evidence to suggest that the territory was ever occupied by Spaniards.”¹³¹ Humphrey’s

¹²⁵ José Luis Mendoza, *Great Britain and Her Treaties on Belize (British Honduras): Guatemala has the Right to Reinstatate the Entire Territory of Belize*, (Guatemala: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1946), 23, 125.

¹²⁶ Ironically, President Ubico revived the Guatemalan claim in response to attempts by Great Britain’s envoy to that country, Charles Lee, to secure technical support for demarcating the boundary of Belize. See, *The White Book*, 356-57; Also, Wayne M Cleghern, “New Lights on the Belize Dispute,” *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 52, No. 2 (Apr. 1958), 280.

¹²⁷ Kenneth J. Grieb, “Jorge Ubico and the Belice Boundary Dispute,” *The Americas*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Apr. 1974), 452.

¹²⁸ Stephen L. Caiger, *British Honduras: Past and Present*, (G. Allen & Unwin, 1951).

¹²⁹ L. M. Bloomsfield, *The British Honduras-Guatemala Dispute*, (Toronto: Carswell Co., 1953).

¹³⁰ William J. Bianchi, *Belize: the controversy between Guatemala and Great Britain over the territory of British Honduras in Central America*, (Las Palmeras Publishing Co., 1959).

¹³¹ R. A. Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History of British Honduras, 1638-1901*, (New York and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1961), 4.

stated that “the Captaincy General of Guatemala appears to have had nothing to do [with the settlement between the Rivers Hondo and Sibun]” and that Belize’s “chief value lay in its mahogany trade.”¹³² I challenge this analysis by Humphreys’ and the contention that the entrepôt trade was of secondary importance to Great Britain.¹³³

D. A. G. Waddell’s book *British Honduras: A Historical and Contemporary Survey*,¹³⁴ and three articles he published, namely, “British Honduras and Anglo-American Relations,” “Developments in the Belize Question 1946-1960,” and “More on the Belize Question,”¹³⁵ maintain the formal empire argument. In the first of these works, Waddell concluded that Guatemala’s claims to the territory were weak,¹³⁶ and that “British Honduras was a British possession...because it was a source of logwood and mahogany.” Waddell also claimed that “British Honduras was irrelevant to the transit question.”¹³⁷ Wayne M. Cleghern’s *British Honduras: Colonial Dead End*,¹³⁸ and his paper entitled “New Light on the Belize Dispute,”¹³⁹ likewise perpetuate the uncritical view that Great Britain possessed the settlement because of the economic value of logwood.

This dissertation deviates from the orthodoxy of the existing scholarship on the territorial dispute over Belize. It adopts a different analytical framework for examining the matter, consults archival holdings in Guatemala and the United States as well as new material

¹³² R.A. Humphreys, “The Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute,” *International Affairs*, Vol. 24, no. 3 (Jul. 1948), 389.

¹³³ Humphreys, “Presidential Address: Anglo-American Rivalries...,” 186,

¹³⁴ D.A.G. Waddell, *British Honduras: A Historical and Contemporary Survey*, (London, New York, Toronto: Oxford University Press for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1961)

¹³⁵ Respectively D.A.G. Waddell, “British Honduras and Anglo-American Relations,” *Caribbean Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Jun. 1957), 50; David A. G. Waddell, “Developments in the Belize Question,” *The American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 55, No. 2 (Apr. 1961), pp. 459-469; and David A. G. Waddell, “More on the Belize Question,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 40, No. 2 (May 1960), 230-233.

¹³⁶ Waddell, *British Honduras...*, 49.

¹³⁷ Waddell, “British Honduras...,” 50, 56

¹³⁸ Wayne M. Cleghern, *British Honduras: Colonial Dead End*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1967).

¹³⁹ Cleghern, “New Light on the Belize Dispute,” 280-297.

at the National Archives at Kew not previously consulted, and examines the issue within the wider international and Central American regional context in the nineteenth century.

Contributions of this Thesis

This thesis makes several scholarly contributions. Firstly, it challenges the conventional analysis that territorial expansion in Belize was Great Britain's objective and instead shows that such expansion was the work of private interests and British officials on the ground in Belize. It also shows that the British government only sanctioned this expansion when doing so was necessary to preserve British interests in Central America. Secondly, it advances understanding of the matter by providing an alternative explanation for the inclusion of Article 7 in the Anglo-Guatemalan treaty of 1859. It shows that the idea for including this provision was previously contemplated by the Foreign Office and that while the British negotiator acted somewhat on his own cognizance in admitting the article into the treaty, he did so out of an interest in extending British influence in Guatemala by collaborating with the Foreign Minister in that country. It also shows that the impetus for the 1859 treaty was not settlement of the boundaries of Belize per se, but resolution of one of the main points of disagreement with the United States over Central America. Finally, it shows that the reason Great Britain converted the settlement into an official colony in 1862 had to do with British concerns over the spread of French influence in the region and that the emancipation of slaves was a factor in why the United States did not protest when Belize was formally annexed.

This thesis also adds to the current historiography on Central America. This is an area of study which largely excludes Belize, except for peripheral references to the Guatemalan territorial claim. Although Belize had a different colonial past than the rest of Central America, it is located geographically in the region, and this study shows that Belize was integral to events in Central America in the nineteenth century, particularly the processes of Central American

decolonization. It also shows that Belize was a factor in Guatemala's struggle for maintaining Guatemala City as the regional seat of commerce and political power in the 1800s, and that Belize was central to the imperial rivalry for control of possible trans-isthmian communications that shaped the region's development after independence in 1821.

This thesis also contributes to nineteenth century British Atlantic history by considering the hitherto neglected connections between the territorial dispute over Belize and the British campaign for the abolition of slavery. Atlantic history is currently benefitting from a recent renaissance as scholars explore, for instance, how events such as 'the end of the Atlantic slave trade', revolutionary movements for independence, and the Napoleonic wars shaped Great Britain's relations in the Atlantic world in the nineteenth century.¹⁴⁰ Shortly after the Central American states declared their independence from Spain in 1821, they abolished slavery. Thereafter, Guatemala used this achievement repeatedly as a political tool to try to undermine the British settlement at Belize by encouraging slaves working in the logwood and mahogany camps there to run away, and then to protect those that did so. This study adds to the understanding of slavery in the Atlantic world by situating the British response to Central American abolitionism within Great Britain's own campaign for the abolition of slavery.

Finally, this thesis adds to the growing scholarship on issues-areas in territorial disputes by upholding the hypothesis that states manage territorial disputes according to the salience of the disputed territory.¹⁴¹ The orthodox view in the historiography of Belize is that Great Britain

¹⁴⁰ See for example, Aaron Fogleman, "The transformation of the Atlantic World, 1776–1867," *Atlantic Studies*, 6:1 (2009), 5. For a recent consideration of the impact of Napoleon's military enterprises on free trade see Tyson Reeder, *Smugglers, Pirates, and Patriots: Free Trade in the Age of Revolution*, (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).

¹⁴¹ Wiegand, "Enduring Territorial Disputes ...," 22. Also, Paul Hensel, "Contentious Issues and World Politics: The Management of Territorial Claims in the Americas, 1816-1992," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 45, No 1 (2001), 85.

possessed Belize for its logwood and timber resources.¹⁴² That position however conflates the motivations of British merchants and private interests with those of the British state. As this thesis shows, Great Britain valued Belize for tangible reasons, but this had to do with the geo-strategic advantage that possession of the settlement offered for extending British influence in Central America in the nineteenth century and did not concern logwood and mahogany per se. Put differently, logwood was not the *raison d'être* for Great Britain's possession of Belize, but rather provided the means to legitimizing its imperial project in the Spanish Main (later Central America). Moreover, as this study makes clear, the way in which Great Britain valued Belize over the centuries (i.e., between the mid-seventeenth and mid-nineteenth centuries) was not static, but the dynamism was related only to role of the territory and not to the resources contained therein. At the same time, the study shows that the true impetus for Guatemala's claim to Belize was because Guatemala valued the settlement for a similar reason—as strategically important to re-establishing Guatemala's predominance in Central America—and not because it inherited sovereignty over the territory from Spain. That is, despite claims to the contrary, Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize is not based on any intangible value (i.e., historical possession)¹⁴³ of the territory.

Analytical Framework

This study investigates Great Britain's handling of Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize by challenging the conventional supposition that Belize's mahogany trade (i.e., economic factors) was the *raison d'être* for Great Britain's territorial expansion in the settlement and that formal annexation in 1862 was planned or otherwise intended. It does so by arguing that Great Britain did not value Belize for its economic (timber) resources but for

¹⁴² Bolland and Shoman, *Land in Belize, 1765-1871*, 3, 9.

¹⁴³ Wiegand, "Enduring Territorial Disputes ...," 25.

the strategic advantage the territory offered for (first obtaining and then) sustaining British pre-eminence in Central America after 1821. To examine this hypothesis, the concept of informal empire is used as an analytical framework, emphasizing the strategic salience or “value of territory” (as opposed to economic salience), to demonstrate why Belize was retained as a settlement for decades and then abruptly converted to a colony.

In their paper titled “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson argued that “the type of political lien between the expanding economy and its formal or informal dependencies...in practice...tended to vary with the economic value of the [overseas] territory...and...how far rival [powers] allowed British policy a free hand.”¹⁴⁴ Put differently, the economic value of the territory did not by itself determine whether such territory was formally annexed, although several territories across the world were converted into official colonies,¹⁴⁵ but rather when the threat of foreign expansion made this a necessity. In other words, Gallagher and Robinson “emphasize strategic considerations as the primary motive behind Great Britain’s imperial decisions in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.”¹⁴⁶ Thus, to paraphrase Nuala Zahedieh, the success of Great Britain’s colonial project rested on effectively parrying foreign expansion where this threatened “the security of British enterprise.”¹⁴⁷

Gallagher and Robinson specified ‘economic value’ of territory as determining the “type of political lien between the expanding economy and its dependency.”¹⁴⁸ The ‘economic

¹⁴⁴ John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” *The Economic History Review*, Vol 6. No. 1 (1953), 7. Gallagher and Robinson contend that “the political lien ranged from...informal paramountcy to outright political possession.”

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 5.

¹⁴⁶ James Onley, “Great Britain’s Informal Empire in the Gulf, 1820-1971,” *Journal of Social Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 87 (Fall 2005), 32.

¹⁴⁷ Zahedieh, “The Capital and the Colonies...,” 42.

¹⁴⁸ Gallagher and Robinson, 7.

value' category is too limiting and discounts how strategic factors influenced the form a lien took – formal or informal. Thus, I propose 'tangible value' as a more fitting category, and indeed substituting 'tangible' for 'economic' makes it possible to consider both economic and strategic factors when explaining the form of the political lien—formal or informal empire—Great Britain adopted with its various dependencies assumed. To help establish this 'value of territory' therefore, this study draws on the growing scholarship on issues-areas in territorial disputes which hold that the salience or value of disputed territory fundamentally affects how states handle settlement of such disputes.¹⁴⁹

According to the issues-area school of thought, territory is understood to have tangible (economic or strategic) value, or intangible (sentimental or historic attachment) value. The economic value of territory refers to the natural resources contained therein, such as, for example, logwood and mahogany, whereas the strategic value of territory derives from its geographical proximity to trade routes or shipping corridors.¹⁵⁰ Conversely, the intangible value of territory, often referred to as indivisible value, has to do with the "ethnic, [historic], nationalist, or symbolic value" that is attached to territory.¹⁵¹ Hence, extrapolating from these concepts, it can be established that Belize held either economic (logwood and mahogany) or strategic (proximity to Central America) value to Great Britain, or both, but not intangible value. Thus, it may be further reasoned that in the nineteenth century, Great Britain's policy in

¹⁴⁹ For a discussion of this see Krista E Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes: Strategies of Bargaining, Coercive Diplomacy, and Settlement*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011). Also, Hensel, "Contentious Issues ...," 81-109; and Daniel J. Dzurek, "What makes territory important: tangible and intangible dimensions," *GeoJournal*, Vol. 64, No. 4 (2005), 263-274. This scholarship has yielded important new theories and insights in the last couple of decades and these conceptual shifts have, in turn, enabled deeper, analysis of territorial disputes while illuminating issues related thereto that were previously glossed over or completely shunned.

¹⁵⁰ Wiegand, 22-26.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 23-24. Wiegand argues that Belize now holds nationalist (i.e., intangible) value for Guatemala and that the territorial dispute has taken on a "national discourse" character, particularly in Guatemala. Krista E. Wiegand, "Nationalist Discourse and Domestic Incentives to Prevent Settlement of the Territorial Dispute between Guatemala and Belize," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 11, Issue 3 (2005), 349-383.

Belize was predicated on one, or both, of these two forms of tangible value of territory. Understanding which it was, is crucial to understanding Great Britain's colonial and imperial impulses relative to Belize and the territorial dispute during this period. Territory abstracted this way also helps clarify Belize's true position in Great Britain's empire (that is, as a formal versus an informal dependency).¹⁵² This dissertation represents the first attempt to utilize the analytical framework advanced herein to examine both Great Britain's handling of the Guatemalan territorial claim to Belize during the nineteenth century, and the decision for converting Belize to an official British colony in 1862.

Sources:

In completing this study, I consulted several archival sources not previously consulted for studies of the territorial dispute. This included printed correspondence (diplomatic and private); manuscripts; maps; memorials; newspaper articles; treaties; at the Archivo General de Centro América (AGCA) in Guatemala City, the Central American holdings at the Latin American Library of Tulane University in New Orleans, and the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. Some materials not previously accessed at the National Archives at Kew were also consulted.

The AGCA yielded materials on nineteenth century Guatemala that permitted analysis of Guatemalan politics, as well as, crucially, the *Consulado de Comercio* that were directly relevant to the territorial dispute. The information relative to port and road infrastructure projects in Guatemala during this period, particularly on the colonization projects of Gálvez in the 1830s and 1840s, provided important insights into likely motivations for demanding the

¹⁵² Mansbach and Vasquez argue that foreign policy behaviour varies according to issue type. Richard Mansbach and John Vasquez, "The Effect of Actor and Issue Classifications on the Analysis of Global Conflict-Cooperation," *Journal of Politics*, Vol. 43, No. 3, (Aug. 1981), 861-874.

inclusion of a provision for building a cart-road from the Atlantic coast to Guatemala City. However, my access to the archives in Guatemala City was curtailed after the staff there realized that I was of Belizean nationality. Perhaps the timing of my research trip influenced that outcome (this unintendedly coincided with a time of heightened tensions between Belize and Guatemala and Guatemala's referendum on the territorial dispute with Belize). Fortunately, I was able to access duplicate and some additional materials on these topics at the Latin American Library at Tulane University.

The archival holdings at the Latin American Library included copies as well as originals of various manuscripts, maps, monographs, and pictures on Guatemala and Central America. This included, among others, the *Ephraim George Squier Papers*, especially those related to the Honduran Railway project, alongside several doctoral theses on Guatemala, published and unpublished and The *Patricia Schmit Collection* of photocopied manuscripts from the Archivo General de Centro America in Guatemala (AGCA). The latter provided useful insights to the period between 1820 – 1833 and helped substitute for material I was unable to consult at the AGCA. *The Morazán Papers* (1830-1842), and William Griffith's complementary publication on the Personal archives of Francisco Morazán, 1792-1842 were invaluable to understanding how the civil conflicts in Central America shaped British policy towards Belize in the 1830s and early 1840s. Both these sources better illuminated how the territorial activities of Belizean woodcutters and mahogany merchants in Honduras in the second quarter of the nineteenth century extended British presence in the isthmus during this period. *The Fayssoux Collection* contained invaluable information (correspondence, maps, and other materials) on William Walker's military ventures in Central America and enabled a better understanding of how these campaigns related to United States expansionary impulses during the 1850s. Some material was available in digital format but the microfilms that were damaged during Hurricane Katrina in 2005 were missing. Nevertheless, the available microfilms were adequate to facilitate the

research effort. In addition, the maps collection on Central America permitted better visualization of the geographical setting, especially in the area around Lake Izabal.

The sources at Library of Congress were especially useful for gaining an understanding of the territorial dispute from the perspective of the United States and included manuscripts, maps, compilations of congressional and department of state papers, and rare publications. The *Senate Executive Documents on the Clayton Bulwer Treaty and Monroe Doctrine*, and the *Compilation of Executive Documents Diplomatic Correspondence relating to A Trans-Isthmian Canal* (2 volumes) yielded vital information on Anglo-American relations relative to an interoceanic transit canal in Central America, and in several instances provided useful counter-narratives to the British account of events. The library had some manuscripts on Guatemala (for the period 1689 to 1849) that were useful for understanding United States relations with the region during the period indicated. The online collection of maps maintained by the library, crucially, eliminated the need for copious photographs or cumbersome copies, and made later analysis of these practicable.

The National Archives at Kew contained several files on British correspondence with the Mosquito Shore and Bay Islands that were closed. I requested three files covering the 1850s be opened under the Freedom of Information Act, but this was rejected for two of them (*FO 420/311: Central America: correspondence and memoranda respecting Mosquito Coast and Bay Islands*; and *Clayton-Bulwer Treaty and Roatan (Roatan) Island, 1850-1856*) on the ground that “the release of the information ... would harm UK relations with the countries concerned, and UK interests there. [That] this would be detrimental to the operation of government and not be in the UK’s interest.”¹⁵³ A redacted version of the other file, *FO 420/312*

¹⁵³ Letter from the National Archives, Internal Review Reference F0059241, 18 December 2019.

- *Central America: affairs of Central America, 1856-1860* was made available, and this proved useful for clarifying Belize's role in Great Britain's expansion in the region.¹⁵⁴

Meanwhile, one of two complete sets of Burdon's three-volume *Archives of Belize* held at the British Library as well as various maps of nineteenth century Central America not previously depicted in existing studies of the territorial dispute were consulted.

Structure of the Dissertation

The rest of this dissertation is organized into five empirical chapters (1 to 5), and a conclusions chapter. Chapter 1 (c.1821 to 1829) considers how the advent of Central America's independence from Spain engendered changes in the roles played by Belize that, in turn, enabled Belize to support British expansion in Central America in the nineteenth century. It shows how Belize's emergence as a centre for British entrepôt trade with the UPCA, particularly Guatemala, alongside the Belize merchant houses becoming providers of merchant credit services to Guatemalan merchants, and a British loan to the UPCA together transformed British influence in the region. It also shows how Belize's new significance permitted Great Britain to attain its pre-eminence in the isthmus without formally recognizing the UPCA's independence even as France and the United States formally extended early recognition to the newly independent states in Spanish America.

Chapter 2 (c.1830 to 1839) examines the reasons for crystallization of the Guatemalan claim to Belize and shows that Great Britain responded to the heightened rhetoric by sanctioning the Sarstoon River as the southern boundary of Belize. It also shows that the land grants and colonization schemes implemented by President Mariano Gálvez of Guatemala

¹⁵⁴ Phillipa Turnbull, foienquiry@nationalarchives.gsi.gov.uk, 6 July 2018, "Freedom of Information Request: Call Reference FOO51849," email to david.gomez.16@ucl.ac.uk.

threatened to enable European and United States expansion in the region and that the road and port infrastructure projects attached to these schemes were part of decades-old plans by Guatemalan elites for establishing an interoceanic corridor or route through Guatemala. It shows too how the territorial activities of the Belize mahogany merchants and woodcutters alongside the forward actions of different Superintendents in Belize drove British expansion not only in the settlement but also in Central America. This chapter also contemplates how the demise of the UPCA affected British expansion in the region.

Chapter 3 (c.1840 to 1849) assesses how the United States' heightened attentions to Central America following the former's manifest destiny expansion westward threatened British pre-eminence in the region and shows that this caused British officials on the ground to consolidate British influence in the isthmus. It shows further that Belize's strategic relevance to Great Britain's expansion in Central America deepened during this period and that Belize's effectiveness in anchoring a British sphere of influence in the region enabled the British seizure of Roatan and reassertion of a British protectorate over Mosquitia, thereby handing the British control over the potential terminus of proposed trans-isthmian routes in both Honduras and Nicaragua.¹⁵⁵ It also demonstrates that Great Britain's decision to negotiate a treaty of commerce with Guatemala thereby recognizing that state's independence was done to forestall United States expansion in Central America after the United States signed treaties with New Granada (in 1846) and Nicaragua (in 1849) which respectively provided for opening a ship canal between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans.

Chapter 4 (c.1850 to 1859) explores how Great Britain's manipulation of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty further heightened Belize's strategic value for preserving British influence in

¹⁵⁵ This is consistent with Humphreys claim that Great Britain was "anxious to safeguard British interests in the region." Humphreys, "The Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute," 393.

Central America. It shows that Great Britain countered intensification of United States pretensions over trans-isthmian projects in Central America by yoking the Bay Islands and Mosquito Shore to Belize thereby safeguarding British interests in the isthmus. It also shows that Great Britain negotiated the Anglo-Guatemalan treaty of 1859 treaty to satisfy a point of disagreement with the United States and not for the purpose of establishing the boundaries of the settlement per se,¹⁵⁶ but that this allowed Great Britain to retain possession of Belize, and by this means, British influence in the region.

Chapter 5 studies the period from 1859 to 1863 and shows that the terms of Article 7 of the 1859 treaty (for construction of a cart-road in Guatemala) was not exactly contrived by Charles Lennox Wyke, the British negotiator for treaty, and that the Foreign Office had discussed similar plans prior to Wyke appointment. It shows that the British negotiator agreed to include the provision in the treaty to extend British influence in the region, and that Great Britain ‘failed’ to pay the costs of construction of the cart-road to prevent new French schemes for seizing the port of Santo Tomás from succeeding. It shows further that Great Britain formally annexed Belize in 1862 to thwart the expansion of French influence into Central America through Guatemala, and that this was not the logical outcome of ‘formal empire’ building.

The study concludes by reflecting critically on the relationship between Belize and British expansion in Central America and stresses the continuity of Belize’s strategic value to British expansion in the isthmus after the region switched from being under Spanish colonial rule to being independent republics. It shows that private individuals and British officials on

¹⁵⁶ The conventional view of Shoman and other historians that this treaty was negotiated for the purpose of settling the boundaries of Belize discounts the Anglo-American factor. See Shoman, “*Guatemala’s Claim to Belize...*,” 13-22; also, Victor Bulmer-Thomas, “Assad Shoman, *Guatemala’s Claim to Belize: The Definitive History*,” review of ‘*Guatemala’s Claim to Belize: The Definitive History*,’ by Assad Shoman,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol 51, Issue 1, (February 2019), 214-216.

the ground drove territorial expansion in the Belize settlement, and that formal annexation of territory was used to meet the strategic threat posed by rivals. It also demonstrates that Great Britain subordinated settling first the UPCAs and later Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize, to maintaining British predominance in the region, and that in this scheme of things, the matter of an interoceanic canal across the Central American isthmus was, ultimately, directly tied to establishing Belize's boundaries.

1 Recognition, Trade and the Footings of British Expansion in Central America, c.1821-29

The Audiencia of Guatemala's declaration of independence from Spain on the 15 September 1821 marked a watershed in Great Britain's relations with that region, one with significant consequences for Belize.¹ The achievement, accomplished in the face of mounting pressures from related events in neighboring Mexico and undertaken in the wake of the restoration of constitutional government in Spain the year before,² created a "commercial vacuum" in the region and simultaneously ushered in a period of geopolitical rivalry among European powers (particularly Great Britain and France), as well as the United States for influence in the Central American isthmus.³ This rivalry initially played out in diplomatic struggles over recognition of the independence of the former Spanish colonies. At stake was control of the trade with the new states.⁴ Great Britain was resolute that the Spanish monopoly of commerce which typified the colonial period would not be restored and firmly resisted European powers intervening in Spanish America.⁵

¹ "Acta de Independencia," Guatemala, 15 September 1821, *Printed Ephemera Collection, Box 1 (1745–1830), Latin American Library Manuscripts, Collections 20 and 74*, Tulane University, accessed March 2019.

² Natalia Sobrevilla Perrea, "The Cádiz Constitution in the Atlantic World," in *History of Latin America and the Oceanic World, Revolutions and Rebellions, Colonialism, and Imperialism*, Online publication, June 2016, 1, DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.35. Also, Jaime E. Rodríguez O., "The Hispanic Revolution: Spain and America, 1808 – 1826," *Ler História*, 57 (2009), 86; Rodríguez, "The Cadiz Experiment in Central America," 160. Within a few months of declaring their independence from Spain the Central American provinces, except for El Salvador, annexed themselves to Mexico. Jordana Dym, *From Sovereign Villages to National States: City, State, and Federation in Central America, 1759-1839*, (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006), 160.

³ Robert G. Albion, "Capital Movement and Transportation: British Shipping and Latin America, 1806-1914," *Journal of Economic History*, XI, No. 4 (Autumn 1951), published online by Cambridge University Press: 02 February 2011, 361. Also, Blaufarb, "The Western Question..." 742. Prussia, as well as the Dutch Netherlands, did not pose as great a concern to Great Britain's activities in Central America. For a discussion of Prussian imperial schemes in Central America see Thomas Schoonover, *Germany in Central America: Competitive Imperialism, 1821-1929*, (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1998).

⁴ Burdon, *ABH*, I, xv.

⁵ Leslie Bethell, "Great Britain and Latin America in historical perspective," chapter in *Great Britain and Latin America: A Changing Relationship*, (ed.) by Victor Bulmer-Thomas, (Cambridge University Press, 1989), 4. Also, Bethell, "George Canning ..." 8.

In the nineteenth century, Belize was vital to Great Britain attaining these foreign policy objectives in Central America. Belize's emergence as a trade entrepôt during the first decade of Central American independence, and the attendant rise of merchant credit services by newly established merchant houses in the settlement, though unplanned, greatly facilitated British expansion in the isthmus. Along with Belize's British institutions, sensibilities, and political systems, this enabled Great Britain to achieve commercial predominance in the Central American isthmus without formally recognizing the independence of the UPCA. The changes also signalled a shift in Belize's position from an 'outpost of empire' through which contraband trade flowed to a bridgehead from which to consolidate and project British influence in the Central American isthmus.⁶ This shift enhanced key advantages Great Britain already held over other foreign powers in the region.⁷ For instance, Great Britain exploited Belize's links with the Mosquito Shore by crowning another Mosquito King in the settlement in 1824, thereby renewing the British sphere of influence. Great Britain also leveraged British possession of Belize in negotiations of the Anglo-Mexican Treaty of 1826 to draw Mexico even closer into a British compass in the Americas.⁸ In addition, British merchant houses in Belize that had shifted to open trade with the Audiencia of Guatemala on the eve of the latter's independence, now enabled Belize to attain a full "phalanx of closely knit [British controlled] economic activities"⁹

⁶ John Darwin argues that 'bridgeheads' were crucial to the creation of the "British world system." See Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3, 49-57. Italics are mine.

⁷ Robert Albion contends that while the United States competed on shipping, it "lacked the capital and manufactures" to go head-to-head with Great Britain. See Robert G. Albion, "Capital Movement and Transportation: British Shipping and Latin America, 1806-1914," *Journal of Economic History*, 11, No. 4 (1951).

⁸ A first step towards this was arguably achieved in 1824 with the 'sale of £3.2 million worth of Mexican Treasury bonds in London' followed by a second bond offering of the same value in 1825. See Michael P. Costeloe, *Bond and Bondholders: British Investors and Mexico's Foreign Debt, 1824-1888*, (Westport, Connecticut, London: Praeger Publishing, 2003), xiii.

⁹ Albion, "Capital Movement and Transportation...", 361-362.

This chapter explores how Belize enabled Great Britain's emergence as the predominant foreign power in Central America in the latter's first decade of independence and, how this outcome in turn shaped the former's handling of the UPCA's nascent territorial claim lodged in the 1820s. First, the chapter argues that Belize's unplanned rise as an entrepôt for British trade with the UPCA and a centre of merchant credit services with merchants from (mainly) Guatemala City bestowed Great Britain with significant advantages over rival European powers and the United States in the isthmus, thereby increasing the settlement's strategic value to Great Britain's imperial project in the Central American region. It shows (a) that the collapse of the Cádiz Atlantic trade networks in Spanish America created a vacuum which, in the case of Central America, allowed British controlled overseas trade networks concentrated through the British settlement in Belize to replace this, and (b) that the Audiencia of Guatemala opening its commerce to the Belize merchant houses in 1819 made this happen more readily. It also shows that the inadequacy of the UPCA's Atlantic coast ports for handling the country's trade led to shipping being routed through the port at Belize. Together with a British loan to the new republic alongside new types of merchant credit services by the Belize merchant houses this helped to consolidate British influence over the UPCA.

Next, it argues that the above dynamics rendered President Monroe's caution against European colonization in the Americas, "what would become known as the Monroe Doctrine,"¹⁰ unproductive in preventing British expansion in Central America while allowing Great Britain to eschew formal recognition of the UPCA. Finally, it concludes by demonstrating that Belize's effectiveness in projecting British influence by informal means led the British government to subordinate Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize to British

¹⁰ Victor Bulmer-Thomas, *Empire in Retreat: The Past, Present, and Future of the United States*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2018), 42. Bulmer-Thomas points out that Monroe's statement was mainly in response to Russian claims to sovereignty on the Western coast of the United States.

expansion in the isthmus, but that the Belize woodcutters and the Superintendent nonetheless pressed forward with their private commercial and territorial activities thereby giving Great Britain an extended foothold in the Belize settlement.

From Outpost to Bridgehead: Sources of British influence in Central America

In this section of the chapter, I will show how exactly Belize's unplanned rise as an entrepôt for British trade with Central America and centre of merchant credit services with Guatemalan merchants, enabled Great Britain to achieve paramountcy in Central America. I will also show that these 'new' roles played by Belize were critical to the settlement serving as the base from which British interests in Central America could be advanced, and that the private commercial and territorial activities of the woodcutters and the forward interests of the British Superintendent in the settlement expanded Great Britain's presence not only in Belize, but also in Roatan in the Bay Islands off Honduras and the Mosquito Shore. However, when the old oligarchy in Belize threatened Great Britain's interests in the region, the Foreign Office took steps to counter or prevent this.

Rise of Belize's (British) Merchant Networks

For Great Britain, perhaps the single most important outcome of Central America's independence was removal of the centuries-long Spanish colonial monopoly of trade with the region. Great Britain's contraband trade through Belize had proven highly effective in penetrating Central America with British products during the Spanish colonial period,¹¹ but following the region's independence legitimate trade was permitted.¹² This development

¹¹ Pearce, "British Trade with the Spanish Colonies," 233-260; Mack, "Contraband Trade Through Trujillo...," 45-56; Woodward Jr., "The Merchants and Economic Development ...," 134.

¹² Matthew McCarthy, *Privateering, Piracy and British Policy in Spanish America, 1810-1830*, (Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2013), 14. Also, Naylor, "British Role in Central America ...," 365.

provided Great Britain with an opening for consolidating its influence in the UPCA but Belize's full transition to an entrepôt was gradual, and this constrained the settlement's consolidation as a "strategic base for sustaining British influence [in the isthmus]"¹³ before the latter part of the decade. Nevertheless, commercial penetration of the UPCA from Belize remained the linchpin of obtaining British paramountcy in the region,¹⁴ but this required the establishment of British merchant houses in Belize, with strong commercial connections to Great Britain. The merchant banking services provided by these establishments, alongside government bonds issued by British banks helped accelerate and amplify the spread of Great Britain's influence in the isthmus.

Throughout the Spanish colonial period, the Audiencia of Guatemala's foreign trade remained officially closed. Consequently, formal trade continued to be conducted largely via the trans-Atlantic channels established between the Cádiz Consulado and merchants from the Audiencia of Guatemala, though a system of licensed trade was permitted from 1797. Nevertheless, contraband trade persisted, and British merchants and traders managed to penetrate the neutral trade with the Spanish colonies during the war years.¹⁵ Under the colonial system, monopolies were strongly encouraged. After the Guatemalan *Consulado*'s creation in 1794,¹⁶ it wrested any remaining control of the audiencia's external trade from the *Consulado* of Mexico (New Spain), and thereafter controlled the trade with Central America.¹⁷ This

¹³ Lynn, "British Policy, Trade, and Informal Empire ...," 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 112.

¹⁵ Pearce, *British Trade with Spanish America ...*, 121, 161-229.

¹⁶ AGCA, A.1.3.25, legato 1,962, expediente 13,260; also cited in Woodward, "Class Privilege...," 8. Guatemala received its charter for a *Consulado* by a *cedula de Erección* issued in 1793. Fidel Tavarez argues that this happening comprised part of a wider effort by Spanish officials to secure the survival of Spain's empire. See Fidel J. Tavárez, "Colonial Economic Improvement: How Spain Created New *Consulados* to Preserve and Develop Its American Empire, 1778–1795" *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 98, No. 4 (2018), 605–634. For an earlier discussion of the *Consulado*'s background and formation see Robert Sydney Smith, "Origins of the *Consulado* of Guatemala," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, XXVI (May 1946), 150-161.

¹⁷ Woodward, "Class Privilege...," 20.

occurrence reinforced the authority of a small class of merchants in the Audiencia of Guatemala that had risen to prominence in the eighteenth century. Though the Bourbon Reforms weakened their grip on the audiencia's economy and society, it failed to completely break the group's power. Several of the leading merchants in Guatemala therefore used the institution to advance their personal interests and protect their privileged position, usually at the expense of merchants in other parts of Central America.¹⁸ For instance, persons who were not members of the Guatemalan *Consulado* were prohibited from conducting any trade in the territory;¹⁹ and only Guatemalan nationals were permitted to join the *Consulado*.²⁰ Thus, in the two decades or so prior to independence, the Guatemalan merchants remained in control of the foreign trade of Guatemala, and also dominated the domestic trade.²¹

Juan Fermín de Aycinena, grandfather of Pedro de Aycinena, Guatemala's signatory to the 1859 Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty and patriarch of the *Casa de Aycinena*, was part of the small group of merchants that exercised control over the trade of Guatemala, and he served as syndic (colonial administrator) of the *Consulado*.²² Juan Fermín started to consolidate his power in the second half of the eighteenth century, and by the 1770s he had become the largest and most powerful merchant in Central America. In 1777 Juan Fermín secured a royal title from Spain and thereafter became known as the Marques de Aycinena.²³ The expanse of the

¹⁸ Gabriel B. Paquette, "State-Civil Society Cooperation and Conflict in the Spanish Empire: The Intellectual and Political Activities of the Ultramarine Consulado and Economic Societies, c. 1780–1810," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 39 (2007), 263; also, Woodward Jr., "The Merchants and Economic ...," 137-138

¹⁹ Woodward Jr., "The Merchants and Economic ...," 139.

²⁰ Woodward Jr., "Class Privilege ...," 20, footnote 56.

²¹ Floyd, "The Guatemalan Merchants ...," 99.

²² Richmond Brown, "Family, Business and Politics in Bourbon, Central America: The Rise of Juan Fermín de Aycinena, 1750-1796," *Tulane University PhD Diss.* (1993), 23. Also, Richmond F. Brown, "Profits, Prestige, and Persistence: Juan Fermín de Aycinena and the Spirit of Enterprise in the Kingdom of Guatemala," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 75, No. 3 (Aug. 1995), 405-440; David L. Chandler, "La Casa Aycinena," *Anuario de Estudios Centroamericanos*, No. 4 (1978), 163-169

²³ Brown, "Profits, Prestige ...," 405; Chandler, "La Casa Aycinena," 164.

Marques de Aycinena's business holdings and interests and the nature of his external trade networks enabled him to hold significant sway over the commerce of Guatemala, and true to practice, he used both his position in the *Consulado*, as well as his connections with the Roman Catholic Church – which itself held considerable economic power, to effectively help cement his status in Guatemala.²⁴ Juan Fermín also married into leading merchant families that helped him to dominate political offices in the colony.²⁵ As *regidor* (councillor) in the Audiencia of Guatemala the Marques also influenced provincial officials and several *alcaldes mayor* (district administrators) were under his influence, or, alternatively, became 'silent' business partners of his.²⁶

During the eighteenth century, the Marques de Aycinena became the largest indigo merchant in Guatemala City. His business network extended to Mexico, Peru, Seville, and Cádiz, where he had pre-existing contacts, or, where his family members had risen to become owners of merchant firms or members of *Consulados*.²⁷ For instance, two nephews of the Marques de Aycinena were successful business partners in Spain before relocating to Guatemala and becoming important members of the merchant network there themselves. The involvement of his family members as agents in disparate locations across his commercial network enabled Aycinena to use his significant financial resources to provide credit (*habilitaciones*) to indigo producers in Guatemala, a role that was also played by other leading

²⁴ Weaver, "Reform and Counter-Revolution in Guatemala," 132.

²⁵ Brown, "Family, Business and Politics ...," 43. Juan Fermín married Anna María Carillo y Gálvez, daughter of Pedro Carillo y Varon, head of the then most powerful family network in Central America, in 1755. He remarried twice, also to daughters of other powerful Guatemalan merchants. See Brown, "Profit, Prestige ...," 408-410.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 20-21, 95; Lindo-Fuentes, "The Economy of Central America ...," 19-21. The *alcaldes mayores* in the provinces for example administered *habilitaciones* to indigo producers on behalf of Aycinena.

²⁷ Brown, "Family, Business ...," 41-42; Brown, "Profit, Prestige ...," 408-409; Chandler, "La Casa Aycinena," 164-165. Juan Fermin was born in Iberian Spain and then left for Mexico where he became a successful businessman before relocating to Guatemala, taking his business contacts with him.

merchants in the country.²⁸ Aycinena's power was unique among Guatemalan merchants, but his use of family and familial ties in overseas networks for advancing trade, and his involvement in the indigo trade as exporter and investor, typified the nature of the Audiencia of Guatemala's foreign trade in the colonial period.²⁹

The opening up of direct trade with Central America, and the attendant establishment of a new set of British merchant houses in Belize during the first decade of independence, introduced a completely new system of overseas trade to the UPCA.³⁰ In short, and consistent with Brown and Paquette's argument that independence "did not abruptly sever links between the Old World and the New, but instead dramatically shifted their terms,"³¹ the Guatemalan merchants' roles as intermediaries in the foreign trade of the country was upended, and British merchants in Belize effectively replaced them as the intermediaries of that trade.³² This paved the way for the new merchant houses to assume the role of credit providers in the trade with the UPCA, but as intermediaries for London merchant bankers.³³ Thus, the new merchant houses in Belize served as two-way clearing houses:³⁴ they received goods on consignment and

²⁸ Ibid, 69, 79; Brown, "Profit, Prestige ...," 405. For a recent analysis of the influence of the *Casa de Aycinena* on Guatemalan society see, Magda Aragón Ibarra, "Análisis de fuentes históricas: La familia Aycinena y su influencia en la sociedad Guatemalteca de fines del siglo XVIII y principios del XIX," *Estudios Digital*, 16 - AÑO 6, Número 16 (Diciembre 2018).

²⁹ Guatemalan Report, Thompson to Secretary Canning, London, 3 December 1825, TNA F.O. 15/1, 174; Brown, "Profit, Prestige...," 406-407.

³⁰ Dashwood to Bidwell, Belize, January 28, 1830, TNA, Board of Trade, 1/268, nf. Prior to this trade between Belize and Great Britain was mainly for the settlement's own use. Products exchanged as part of the contraband trade was usually on-shipped from Jamaica.

³¹ Matthew Brown and Gabriel Paquette, *Connections after Colonialism; Europe and Latin America in the 1820s*, (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2013), 1.

³² O'Reilly to Canning, Guatemala, February 22, 1826, TNA, F.O. 15/5, 21; Lindo Fuentes, "The Economy of Central America...," 29.

³³ Emily Buchnea, "Bridges and Bonds: The Role of British Merchant Bank Intermediaries in Latin American Trade and Finance Networks, 1825-1850," *Enterprise & Society*, (2020), 1-41. Manuel Llorca-Jaña recently revealed that the Belize merchants were part of the complex international network of trade financing that emerged in the nineteenth century. See Manuel Llorca-Jaña, "Huth & Co.'s credit strategies: a global merchant-banker's risk management, c.1810-1850," *Estudios de Economía*, Vol. 42, N° 2 (Diciembre 2015), 23.

³⁴ Naylor, "British Commercial Relations ...," 13-14. According to Naylor a few merchant houses in Great Britain had established agents or branches in Belize by 1824.

commission from the London merchants and exporters, and then sold those on to their agents/consignors and merchants in Guatemala also on consignment-credit basis.³⁵ At the same time, they also acted as re-export agents for Guatemala and El Salvador's indigo trade, receiving exports from the UPCA for on-shipment to Europe (usually through London). By this means, the nature of the UPCA's foreign trade, and Belize's role in that trade as well, fundamentally changed.³⁶

This way of doing business evolved on account of the surplus manufactures, a result of Great Britain's industrial revolution, being increasingly directed towards foreign markets.³⁷ In this setting, Great Britain's overseas trade was controlled by a relatively small number of commercial houses located mostly in London,³⁸ which served increasingly not only as commission or mercantile agents, but also as merchant bank intermediaries.³⁹ In this manner, "merchant bankers ... played a crucial role [in expanding international trade after the Napoleonic Wars] by advancing [credit] to consignors of products" in Latin America in the nineteenth century.⁴⁰ This latter dynamic, when folded with the pace of Great Britain's

³⁵ "Report from the Select Committee on the Law Relating to Merchants, Agents and Factors," *Parliamentary Papers (Great Britain)*, 4th Session, 1823, 17; Morgan, "Business networks ...," 50; Miller, "Bills of Lading...," 259. By the nineteenth century, the use of consignment agents in overseas trade had gained wide acceptance in Great Britain.

³⁶ R.A. Humphreys, *British Consular Reports*, xi. Humphreys contends that "the resources of Great Britain's and bankers... were of vital importance" to its presence in Latin America in the aftermath of independence.

³⁷ J.R. Ward, "The Industrial Revolution and British Imperialism, 1750-1850," *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 47, No. 1 (Feb. 1994), 44. Jacob Price argues that "the growth of British industrial exports during the Industrial Revolution...was spurred by declining relative costs and prices." See Jacob M. Price, "What Did Merchants Do? Reflections on British Overseas Trade, 1660-1790," *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (Jun. 1989), 269. Cain and Hopkins alternatively, argue that the financial revolution was a key impetus for British imperialism after 1688. See P.J. Cain and A.G. Hopkins, "Gentlemanly Capitalism and British Expansion Overseas I: The Old Colonial System, 1688-1850," *The Economic History Review*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (Nov. 1986), 511.

³⁸ Kenneth Morgan, "Business networks in the British export trade to North America, 1750-1800," in John J. McCusker and Kenneth Morgan, *The Early Modern Atlantic Economy*, (edited), (Cambridge University Press, 2001), 38-39.

³⁹ Norman I. Miller, "Bills of Lading and Factors in Nineteenth Century English Overseas Trade," *The University of Chicago Law Review*, Vol. 24, Issue 2 (1957), 258. This practice was consistent with similar trends in other parts of Latin America.

⁴⁰ Llorca-Jaña, "Huth & Co.'s ...," 17.

industrialization,⁴¹ gave British merchants a competitive advantage in overseas trade. The risks involved in overseas trade were high, but the parallel integration of merchant bank underwritten consignments and closer working relationships between merchants on both sides of the transatlantic trade network mitigated against this.⁴² When therefore 'Belize' assumed control of the foreign trade of the UPCA in the 1820s,⁴³ the practice of conducting overseas trade between merchant exporters or merchant houses in London and their agents overseas (usually other merchant houses), using new types of consignment-commission-credit programmes in the trade with the UPCA was readily adopted by the new merchant houses in the settlement.⁴⁴

New merchant houses started to become established in Belize around the time of, or just after, Central America's secession from Mexico, and by the end of the decade some 26 commercial houses were established in Belize. This included the better-known houses of Campbell, Young & Co.; John Waldron Wright; James and George Hyde & Co.; and Marshall Bennett (as his own merchant house), in addition to the partnership of Bennett, Martiny & Co.; as well as others such as Woodburn, Noro & Co.; Welsh & Brother; Angus, Andrew and Miller; Thomas Blockley & Co..⁴⁵ In some cases, the new merchant houses involved partners who had previously lived or worked in a capacity related to Belize as colonial officials or ship captains. John Young from Young & Co. for example was a former magistrate in the settlement,⁴⁶ while

⁴¹ Ward, "The Industrial Revolution ...," 61.

⁴² Morgan, "Business networks ...," 39-40; Llorca-Jaña, "Huth & Co.'s ...," 17-18.

⁴³ Naylor, "British Commercial Relations ...," 140, 165-166. Naylor points out that some trade was also conducted through Jamaica and Peru but, interestingly, this did not include Mexico.

⁴⁴ Appendices to the Guatemala Report, F.O. 15/2, 112. The use of credit-consignment was not new in Belize, but underwriting bills of exchange through merchant bank underwritten discount programs shifted the risk from the Belize merchants and by this means gave them better negotiating leverage with the Guatemalan merchants. At the same time merchants focused on the domestic economy were also able to offer longer terms of payment. See *Honduras Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, Vol 1, various numbers, 1826.

⁴⁵ *The Honduras Almanack for 1829*, 145-146. It also helped that Belize (then British Honduras) was a British settlement that subscribed to British laws and institutions, and with English speaking inhabitants.

⁴⁶ Naylor, "British Commercial Relations ...," 159-160.

James Hyde was a mahogany merchant and ship-owner, and had worked as a local agent for shipping lines calling at Belize.⁴⁷ Hyde may also have been a slave owner.⁴⁸

Over the next two decades, additional merchant houses attending to the trade of the UPCA were established in Belize including by other European nationals,⁴⁹ but British houses remained in the majority.⁵⁰ And, in a limited number of cases, British co-owned merchant houses were established in Guatemala, but these by necessity involved partnerships with Guatemalan merchants.⁵¹ This was because the Guatemalan *Consulado de comercio* maintained double prohibitions preventing foreigners from joining the *Consulado* and from conducting retail trade in the state of Guatemala.⁵² To get around this hurdle, Marshall Bennett and William Hall, both members of the old oligarchy and Belize merchants prior to 1821, partnered with one Carlos Antonio Meany of Guatemala to establish a company in Guatemala City in 1826.⁵³ Meany's political connections and his close ties to the Guatemalan *Consulado* meant that the firm of Hall, Meany and Bennett enjoyed the dual benefits of being a British commission-house established in Guatemala City.⁵⁴ Notably, Bennett and Meany were also

⁴⁷ *The Honduras Gazette and Commercial and Commercial Advertiser*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Belize, Saturday, July 15, 1826. The firm of Hyde & Adam were local agents for the ship Huntley, among others.

⁴⁸ "James Hyde," *Legacies of British Slave-Ownership Database*, <http://www.depts-live.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/11517>, accessed 17 April 2019.

⁴⁹ Belize Merchants' Memorial to Viscount Goderich, Belize, June 22, 1832, TNA, C.O. 123/43, nf.; Fancourt to Stanley, Belize, April 15, 1844, TNA, C.O. 123/68; also, Fancourt to Sir Charles Grey, Belize, March 11, 1848, TNA C.O. 123/74 nf.

⁵⁰ Naylor, "British Commercial Relations ...," 167.

⁵¹ Charles Dashwood to John Backhouse, Esq., No. 1, 28 January 1830, TNA, F.O. 15/10, 6; Wright and Pickstock to Codd, Belize, 14 October 1823, TNA C.O. 123/34; John O'Reilly to George Canning, No. 3, British Consulate Guatemala, 18 February 1826, F.O. 15/5.

⁵² Consul O'Reilly to Secretary Bidwell, 2 April 1827, TNA F.O. 15/7, 120.

⁵³ Naylor, 161-164; Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., "Central America from Independence to c.1870," chapter in Leslie Bethell, *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume III*, edited, (Cambridge University Press, 1985) published online by Cambridge University Press 2008, 496; William J Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness: Foreign Colonization and Development in Guatemala, 1834-1844*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965), 28-29.

⁵⁴ Carlos Meany was a member of Guatemala's political elite in the 1820s and served as President of the El Salvador Congress between 1824 and 1850, as well as "*alcalde* of Guatemala City and *corregidor* (mayor) of the Department of Guatemala." Ralph Lee Woodward Jr., *Rafael Carrera and the Emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 1821-1871*, (University of Georgia Press, 2012), 172. Meany was likely the son of Francis Meany

partners in the concession secured in 1834 from Dr Mariano Gálvez, Chief of State of Guatemala, for a colonization project in Chiquimula, a district in Guatemala.⁵⁵ And, in the 1830s, Bennett forged a partnership with Francisco Morazán, then President of the Federation of Central America, for operating mahogany works in Honduras.⁵⁶

In the first couple of years of Central American independence, the trade between Belize and the UPCA “was limited and the export of British manufactures ... estimated at about £180,000.”⁵⁷ This was a period when Spain’s restrictions on direct trade with its colonies in Spanish America were not yet completely dismantled, but Great Britain had already secured “preferential trading privileges with Brazil,” and Foreign Secretary George Canning was pushing for negotiating treaties of commerce with Buenos Aires, Gran Colombia, and Mexico to try and open those markets to British trade.⁵⁸ However, after 1823 British trade with Central America expanded considerably and by 1825 the trade with Guatemala was estimated at around £2 million (worth about £188 million today), with about £1.5 million going through Belize and another £450,000 through Jamaica.⁵⁹ British exports to the isthmus remained at or above this level for the remainder of the decade, with more than 90% of that trade taking place through

who had a business partnership in the 1780s with William Pitt, founder of the British settlement at Black River in the Mosquito Shore. One of Carlos Meany’s descendants by the same name, was recently Minister of Energy and Mines in Guatemala. See “Extension to Oil Contract Signed in Guatemala,” 23 July 2010, online article, *CentralAmericaData.com*, available at

https://en.centralamericadata.com/en/search?q1=content_en_le:%22Carlos+Meany%22

⁵⁵ “Jurisdiction of Guatemala over her Atlantic Coast,” section in *Guatemala-Honduras Boundary Arbitration: The Case of Guatemala*, report submitted by Guatemala to the Arbitral Tribunal composed of the Hon. Charles Evans Hughes, Chief Justice of the United States of America; Hon. Luis Castro Ureña, from Costa Rica; Hon. Emilio Bello Codesido, from Chile, Under Treaty of July 16, 1930, Volume 1, (Washington, 1932), 345.

⁵⁶ William J. Griffith, *The Personal Archive of Francisco Morazán*, Philological and Documentary Studies, Vol. II, No. 6, (New Orleans: Middle American Research Institute, Tulane University, 1977), 202, 204.

⁵⁷ Charles Dashwood to John Backhouse, Esq., No. 1, 28 January 1830, TNA F.O. 15/10, 4.

⁵⁸ Rory Miller, *Great Britain and Latin America in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, (London and New York: Longman, 1993), 1-2.

⁵⁹ Memorandum (British Honduras), 27 January 1830, F.O. 15/10, 8; Bulmer-Thomas and Bulmer-Thomas, “*The Economic History of Belize ...*,” 77-78. The authors argue that this was owing to a lack of “direct trade routes” between Great Britain and Guatemala. Jamaica therefore served as a regular re-export hub for British exports to Belize. Henry Cooke to Howick, London, October 12, 1831, TNA F.O. 15/11, 163.

Belize.⁶⁰ Of this, the products that remained in the settlement for its own consumption expanded to around £250,000.⁶¹ At the same time, UPCA exports to Great Britain comprising of cochineal, indigo, and various types of woods also expanded with around 90% of this transacted via Belize.⁶²

George Thompson, the British agent dispatched to Guatemala in 1826, estimated that one of the new commercial houses in Belize handled around £15,000 per month on average; and “one half of the imports ... consisted of broad cloths, cotton goods, hard-wares and other dry goods.”⁶³ This expansion of commercial activity between Belize and Guatemala was a boon for the coasting shipping sector. “Goods were conveyed from Belize in small schooners ... between 4 and 7 tons, and [cost] \$150-\$200 per trip each way” between the port of Belize and the port at Izabal.⁶⁴ At the same time, in July 1826, the British government adopted new import duties for mahogany which reduced the rate of preference for Belize mahogany by more than £3 per ton (from £8.16 to £5).⁶⁵ This is important, as it shows that mahogany, at least Belize’s mahogany trade, was not the factor that swayed British policy in Central America during this time.

⁶⁰ Ralph Lee Woodward Jr., “Central America from Independence to c.1870,” chapter in *The Cambridge History of Latin America*, edited by Leslie Bethell, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) published online March 2008, 498.

⁶¹ Guatemala Report, F.O. 15/1, 10, 13.

⁶² Ibid, Tables 2 and 3.

⁶³ Appendices to the Guatemala Report, F.O. 15/2, 112. The figure of £1.5 million is almost double the estimates of the highpoint of this trade (£753,545) between 1821-1829 provided by Robert Naylor. Naylor’s study confirms the increase in trade between Belize and Guatemala for this period but suggest that although this remained above £342,939 after 1823, it levelled off after 1825. See Naylor, “Total Export of British Merchandise from Great Britain to British Honduras” table in Appendix to “British Commercial Policy with Central America,” 321; also, table 3.4 on “Share of Central American imports from UK through Belize (%), 1825-1851.” Notwithstanding, the key takeaway is that British trade between Belize and Guatemala in the first decade of independence increased, and significantly.

⁶⁴ Importance of the Adoption of Steamboats in the Gulfo Dulce, Appendix 36, F.O. 15/2, 188.

⁶⁵ Robert Naylor, “The Mahogany Trade as a Factor in the British Return to the Mosquito Shore in the Second Quarter of the 19th Century,” *Jamaican Historical Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Jan. 1967), 42, 49. Although Belize was not yet an official British colony, Belize mahogany received the colonial tariff.

Limiting the Old Oligarchy

The establishment of several new merchant houses in Belize in the 1820s upset the dynamic of the old oligarchy that had hitherto prevailed in the settlement. The older merchants were generally mahogany traders, though a couple of them also served as consignment agents for merchants in Bristol, Liverpool or London; or, operated import and retail businesses to satisfy the consumption and demands of the settlement at Belize, or both.⁶⁶ After 1821, the older Belize merchant houses increased their imports on the expectation that the newly legitimate trade with Guatemala would naturally accrue to them, and to some extent this happened.⁶⁷ In the new environment, UPCA merchants, particularly from Guatemala, exchanged their produce (mainly indigo and cochineal) in Belize and used those products to pay for any manufactures or other goods procured there for re-export to Guatemala.⁶⁸ The export market in the state of Guatemala was not large. In 1820, the population of the whole of Central America was only 1.2 million, nearly 600,000 of which were in the state of Guatemala.⁶⁹ Most of the population were poor and illiterate, and lived on the Pacific slopes near the main centres of production of indigo.⁷⁰ The rural population by contrast, mostly Indians and *ladinos*, tended to concentrate in the Guatemalan highlands and practiced subsistence farming, but developed a highly distinctive pattern of regional trade centres where artisanal goods and agricultural crops were bartered.⁷¹

⁶⁶ Dashwood to Bidwell, Belize, January 28, 1830, TNA Board of Trade 1/268, nf.

⁶⁷ Dashwood to Backhouse, Belize, January 28, 1830, TNA, F.O. 15/10, 3-6; Naylor, "British Commercial Relations ...," 167.

⁶⁸ Guatemala Report, F.O. 15/1, 175; Correspondence from Government House to Right Honourable Earl Bathurst, 8 March 1823, TNA F.O 88/5490; Mariano de Aycinena to O'Reilly, 10 January 1826, quoted in *British Consular Reports*, 299.

⁶⁹ Lowell Gudmundson, "Society and Politics in Central America, 1821-1871," chapter in Lowell Gudmundson and Héctor Lindo-Fuentes, *Central America, 1821-1871: Liberalism before Liberal Reform*, (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 113.

⁷⁰ Ralph Lee Woodward Jr., *Rafael Carrera and the Emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 1821-1871*, (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 12.

⁷¹ Gudmundson, "Society and Politics...", 116; Miller, *Great Britain and Latin America...*, 6.

Shortfalls between goods imported for payment and goods procured for re-exporting to Guatemala were often covered by the Belize merchants extending terms of credit.⁷² The new merchant houses extended the latter practice and had the ability to offer longer credit terms, a trend consistent with British trade in other parts of Latin America during this period. Hence, given their better connections with manufacturers and exporters in London, they shortly displaced the older establishments in the Guatemala trade. The new merchant houses also continued the habit of the Belize merchants of rarely ever doing business in Guatemala City. This drew sharp criticism from Frederick Chatfield, the British attaché to Central America newly appointed in 1834, because it undermined his efforts in Guatemala (the Belize merchants were aloof to events in the latter). As Chatfield fumed, the tendency “threatened British interest in the isthmus.”⁷³

However, the real threat to British interests in Central America during the decade concerned measures adopted by the established oligarchy in the settlement related to duties and shipping, among other things. The group, comprising mainly the leading merchants in the settlement plus a few other prominent settlers, ran the affairs of the settlement. For instance, magistrates in Belize were nominated from among their number and elected annually at Public Meetings.⁷⁴ The Public Meeting, the administrative and quasi-legislative body that had been established in the eighteenth century to regulate the affairs of the settlement, regularly decided regulations on matters having to do with Belize’s trade, especially the mahogany trade. In the 1820s the old oligarchy was confronted by a “marked depletion of marketable [mahogany] within the Belize limits...and ... greater competition from foreign mahogany.”⁷⁵

⁷² Naylor, “British Commercial Relations ...,” 168.

⁷³ Chatfield to Evans, El Salvador, May 6, 1836, TNA F.O. 252/9, nf.

⁷⁴ *The Honduras Almanacks for 1829 and for 1839*.

⁷⁵ Naylor, “The Mahogany Trade...,” 47.

Anxious to exploit new sources of mahogany and wanting to secure benefits of the trade with Guatemala to themselves, the Public Meeting on 28 February, took matters into their own hands and required all *foreign* vessels calling on Belize “to carry away two-thirds of their cargo in mahogany or dyewood.”⁷⁶ This benefitted the woodcutters on account of the increasing shipping to the settlement because of the growing entrepôt trade. Thus, in July of that year, the Public Meeting changed this to require “foreign vessels to carry out full cargoes of mahogany.”⁷⁷ But, to try and increase profits even further, the old oligarchy attempted to obtain the Colonial Office’s ‘sanction’ of their mahogany logging activities beyond the Sibun River (the limits delineated in the 1786 Anglo-Spanish Treaty).⁷⁸ Thus, the members of the old oligarchy prompted Superintendent Major Edward Codd to submit a report to the Foreign Office, and enclosed a map sketch, suggesting that this should officially be made the southern boundary of Belize.⁷⁹ However, the old oligarchy did not stop there, and the Public Meeting also decreed that a “5% tax be levied on all goods not of British manufactures landed in Belize for re-export,” and there was also a “3% tax on foreign transients.”⁸⁰

British officials recognized that British influence in the Central American isthmus stemmed from the commercial activities of merchants and woodcutters in Belize, hence, they needed to ensure that the actions of the Public Meeting did not compromise this. Thus, as the entrepôt trade through Belize became more important to Great Britain’s standing in Central America, the Foreign Office took steps to nullify the measures adopted by the Public Meeting. For instance, Superintendent Codd was instructed to reduce the charges at the port of Belize

⁷⁶ *The Honduras Almanack*, (Belize Town, 1826), 62-64. My italics. The Belize Public Meeting had resolved in July of 1826 that an Almanac be published for the settlement. Burdon, *ABH*, II, 291.

⁷⁷ Burdon, *ABH*, II, 291.

⁷⁸ Colonial Office Memorandum, 20 January 1835, TNA, C.O. 123/47; *ABH*, II, 367. The supply of mahogany trees in Belize was becoming exhausted even before 1821. Arthur to Bathurst, 4 July 2016, TNA C.O. 123/25

⁷⁹ Codd to Horton, 8 July 1825, TNA F.O. 15/4; *ABH*, II, 285

⁸⁰ *Archives of British Honduras*, II, 284.

and to immediately suspend the additional duties on goods shipped through Belize. Superintendent Codd was also advised by the Foreign Secretary that for the future, “no Act affecting trade is permitted to be passed in the settlement ... unless [it has the approval of the Crown].”⁸¹ The regulations requiring foreign vessels calling at Belize to carry out full cargoes of mahogany or other products from the settlement were repealed, and likewise the taxes on transients.⁸²

The timing of the measures adopted by the Public Meeting between 1825 and 1826 was unpropitious. These occurred around when the Foreign Office was otherwise occupied with myriad issues: Great Britain was negotiating a treaty of commerce with Mexico which involved delineating the northern boundaries of Belize; the Federal Republic of Central America was promoting project for the construction of an interoceanic canal in the isthmus; Simón Bolívar was trying to rally the new states of Spanish America Pan-American plan that was planned for launch at the first Congress of Panama;⁸³ and the United States had recognized Central America.⁸⁴ The measures that had been adopted by the Public Meeting were designed to be discriminatory in such a way as to severely prejudice the new British commission-consignment houses operating in Belize, if not also force their closure.⁸⁵ As such, these had real potential for undermining British pre-eminence in Central America at the very time that Great Britain was attempting to consolidate its standing in the isthmus. Thus, the Foreign Office took steps to prevent this from happening.

⁸¹ Burdon, *ABH*, II, 306.

⁸² Secretary of State to Superintendent, 23 April 1830, R7, *ABH*, II, 233.

⁸³ Canning to Lamb, 15 February 1826, TNA F.O. Spain, 72/312. For more on Bolívar's plans see Harry T. Collings, "The Congress of Bolívar," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 6, No. 4 (1926): 194-98.

⁸⁴ "Supplement to the Honduras Gazette," in *The Honduras Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, Vol. 1, No. 7, Saturday 12 August 1826.

⁸⁵ Memorial of Glasgow merchants to the Colonial Office, January 27, 1829, TNA, C.O. 123/40, nf.

This interpretation expands the analysis by Robert Naylor that the British government only objected when the measures adopted by the Public Meeting negatively affected British companies.⁸⁶ Given the reluctance of the Foreign Office to intervene in strictly private commercial matters, measures which simply affected British enterprises would, in and of itself, not have moved the British government to any response.⁸⁷ The Foreign Office acted because it recognized that the measures had broader implications for British interests in Central America. It also recognized that Superintendent Codd was under the sway of the old oligarchy and therefore replaced him. Thereafter, starting with Codd's replacement, the members of the Public Meeting were appointed by the Superintendent, and hence, with their power effectively broken, several former members of the old oligarchy either migrated, or returned, to England where a few became the main commission agents to manufacturers there in the trade with the UPCA and afterwards with the autonomous states.⁸⁸

British Finance and Investments in Central America

Another fount of British predominance in Central America in the 1820s stemmed from British capital and investments in the region in the form of loans to the new government of the UPCA. As Carlos Marichal observed, during the struggle for autonomy, and following Mexico and other new republics in Spanish America, the UPCA "sought loans...to consolidate independence and to promote trade."⁸⁹ The strictures of the closed Spanish system of commerce alongside ineffectual colonial administration had starved the Spanish American

⁸⁶ Naylor, "British Commercial Relations ...," 94.

⁸⁷ As Martin Lynn points out, the British government only intervened in matters concerning private commercial interests where it this supported British political interests. Lynn, "British policy ...,"; also D.C.M. Platt, *Finance, Trade and Politics in British Foreign Policy, 1815 – 1914*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), 316.

⁸⁸ Naylor, 14.

⁸⁹ Carlos Marichal, *A Century of Debt Crises in Latin America: From Independence to the Great Depression, 1820-1930*, (Princeton University Press, 1989), 3.

colonies of access to foreign trade and left many “short of money.”⁹⁰ In Central America, “the new nation was born in debt.”⁹¹ The dire economic and financial situation in the early years of its independence⁹²—a hangover from the decline in the indigo trade in the preceding decades which had negative downstream effects on public revenues from trade taxes—demanded not only that the country “[create] a new fiscal and monetary system and a domestic financial market,”⁹³ but that it also secure capital and investments in international markets.⁹⁴ The government of the UPCA met these financing needs partly by forced loans (including from British merchant houses established in Guatemala City),⁹⁵ and partly through foreign borrowing.

The capital needs of the new republics in Spanish America coincided with “a cyclical phase of prosperity in Great Britain” and the metamorphosis in London’s banking and financial sector in the first quarter of the nineteenth century that saw an explosion in the export of British capital to Latin America.⁹⁶ Indeed, the promise of British investments in Central America became part of the speculation frenzy in London that erupted into a veritable investment boom over “El Dorado” (i.e., Latin America) during the decade.⁹⁷ The UPCA’s loan paled in comparison to the loans of other new republics such as Mexico (£7 million) and Gran Colombia

⁹⁰ Ibid, 4; Miller, *Great Britain and Latin America...*, 6.

⁹¹ Robert S. Smith, Financing the Central American Federation, 1821-1838, *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Nov. 1963), 486.

⁹² Charles Dashwood to John Backhouse, Esq., No. 1, 28 January 1820, F.O. 15/10, 5. For an assessment of this see Hector Lindo-Fuentes, “Consecuencias económicas de la independencia en Centroamérica,” chapter in Leandro Prados de la Escosura and Samuel Amaral (eds.), *La Independencia Americana: consecuencia económicas*, (Madrid: Alianza Universidad, 1993), 54-79.

⁹³ Escosura, “Lost Decades? ...,” 6.

⁹⁴ Decreto del Supremo Poder Ejecutivo, 27 noviembre 1823, Provincias Unidas del Centro America, *Central American Printed Ephemera Collection*, 20 & 74, Box 1; Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Latin America*, 28-31.

⁹⁵ General Perks to Mr. Planta, 8th March 1828, Guatemala, F.O. 15/8, 49

⁹⁶ Marichal, *A Century of Debt...*, 13.

⁹⁷ Giorgio Fodor, “The Boom that Never Was? Latin American Loans in London, 1822-1825,” *Discussion Paper No. 5* (2002), Paper presented at the Conference “Crisis: from the real economy to the financial system,” Venice, 17-18 November 2000. For an earlier discussion of this theme see J. Fred Rippy, “Latin America and the British Investment “Boom” of the 1820’s,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Jun. 1947), 122-129.

(£6,750,000).⁹⁸ Still it encumbered the UPCA and afterwards the separate republics, for decades. British investment portfolio and foreign direct investments in Spanish America however, enabled Great Britain to forestall French influence there, and it helped to increase Great Britain's Spanish American trade.⁹⁹

The weakened state of the French economy (the aftereffects of the Napoleonic War and new costs from France's military invasion of Spain in 1823),¹⁰⁰ as well as the United States' own dependence on British capital and investments for its own industrial development,¹⁰¹ left Great Britain as the only real option for financing Central America.¹⁰² Thus, in 1825, Manuel Arce, President of the UPCA, negotiated a loan for £163,000 (5 million pesos) with the London house of Barclay, Herring, Richardson & Co.¹⁰³ The timing of this loan 'coincided' with a report by George A. Thompson, the British agent sent to Guatemala to "assess the political situation and plans for transisthmian projects."¹⁰⁴ Notably, Thompson's report emphasized the expected increase of trade in British manufactures and the role Belize was expected to play in that trade; and, also Guatemala's plans for a possible route (i.e. a cart-road) through that state.¹⁰⁵ The report also indicated that Thompson believed it unlikely that the state of Guatemala would raise problems over fixing the boundary with Belize, and mentioned that the

⁹⁸ Fred J Rippy, "Latin America and the British Investment Boom of the 1820s," *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Jun. 1947), 124.

⁹⁹ Marichal, *A Century of Debt...*, 14.

¹⁰⁰ By the middle of the 1820s however, the trade of the French Caribbean colonies was contributing around 30% to total French imports and their combined sugar exports rivalled that of Haiti, and the French trans-Atlantic trade in African slaves had rebounded to the eighteenth-century levels. See Todd, "A French Imperial Meridian...," 167-168.

¹⁰¹ Albion, "Capital Movement and Transportation," 362.

¹⁰² Frank Griffith Dawson, *The First Latin American Debt Crisis: The City of London and the 1822-25 Loan Bubble*, (Yale University Press, 1990), 3.

¹⁰³ "Taylor v. Barclay," *The Law Journal for the Years 1828: Comprising Reports of Cases in the Courts of Chancery*, Volume VI, (1828), 93.

¹⁰⁴ Foreign Office, 2 September 1825, F.O. 15/4, 19

¹⁰⁵ George Thompson, Preliminary Report on Guatemala, 19 October 1825, F.O. 15/, 123 and 210; 136 and 253. Guatemala had contracted a British engineer to survey a road to the capital.

planned “road works from the capital to the Atlantic was expected to be undertaken by a British house of great capital and respectability,”¹⁰⁶ (i.e., by British investors).

That Thompson raised this latter project showed two things: that British investments were important to Guatemala’s economic development plans; and that Guatemala was attentive to the implications of a canal in Nicaragua for its own regional hegemony.¹⁰⁷ Thompson’s report on Guatemala helped catalyse the Barclay, Herring, Richardson & Co. loan, and probably stimulated a few more British merchant houses to establish in Belize. His visit to Guatemala also helped that state’s officials to begin clarifying their new conception of the territory and the possible boundaries of the new republic. As Dym pointed out, “vague and imprecise notions of the region’s geography” persisted for decades.¹⁰⁸

The UPCA’s understanding of its boundaries post-independence, were initially shaped by Spain’s elision of the southern areas of Belize in its early colonial maps, and later by the cartographic accounts of Thompson. Both these sources projected that an interoceanic canal would dictate the “future commercial interests in the region.”¹⁰⁹ This is crucial, as it not only exposes the extent to which the UPCA’s (and afterwards Guatemala’s) territorial claim to Belize rested on Thompson’s construction of the geographic spaces of Central America in the post-colonial period, but it also confirms that the matter of a possible cart-road through that

¹⁰⁶ Preliminary Report on Guatemala, 19 October 1825, F.O. 15/1, 253. This shows that the matter of a cart-road was already in the plans of Guatemalan officials.

¹⁰⁷ Proposed Communication between the two Seas by the Lake of Nicaragua, Appendix 35 to the Guatemala Report, F.O. 15/2, 166-167, 172-173.

¹⁰⁸ Jordana Dym, “De Reino de Guatemala a República de Centro América: A Pleniplo Cartográfico,” *Boletín de AFEHC*, Issue 48 (May 2011), <http://www.afehc-historia-centromaericana.org/>; also Jordana Dym, “La reconciliación de la historia y a modernidad: George Thompson, Henry Dunn y Frederick Crowe, tres viajeros británicos en Centroamérica, 1825-1845,” *Meosamerica*, Vol. 21, Issue 40 (2000), http://works.bepress.com/jordanan_dym/10/; Jordana Dym, “The Republic of Guatemala: Stitching Together a New Country,” chapter in John Tutino (Ed.), *New Countries: Capitalism, Revolutions, and Nations in the Americas, 1750-1870*, (Duke University Press, 2016).

¹⁰⁹ Jordana Dym, “Virtual Slide set: Defining Independent Central America through Traveller’s Cartographies (1821-1950), available at https://works.bepress.com/jordana_dym/3/. Restall, “Creating Belize ...,” 7.

territory was central to the UPCA's political elites' efforts at nation building in the 1820s. In this context, UPCA, particularly Guatemalan, officials hoped that British investments would help speed recognition of the country's independence.¹¹⁰ Conversely, British investments were a new 'tool' for subordinating Latin America.¹¹¹ Besides, the 'outlook' of colonial officials and the Foreign Office relative to Central America during the decade was tacitly intended to persuade the increase of British commercial activities through Belize, thereby providing Great Britain with a firm basis for its interests in the isthmus.¹¹²

Meanwhile, in 1823, a Scottish adventurer named Gregor McGregor, who previously fought beside General Francisco de Miranda and Simón Bolívar in the revolutionary wars of independence in Venezuela, secured financing from London investors for a bond for £200,000 for a colonization project in an area near Black River in the Mosquito Shore.¹¹³ It is likely that McGregor was viewed as a possible 'agent' by some of the newcomer merchant investors in London hopeful for "business opportunities in the new markets [of Spanish America]."¹¹⁴ In 1820 McGregor was granted 12,000 square miles of land in in the Mosquito Shore by the Mosquito King, George Frederick. McGregor subsequently registered the land at the court of chancery in London and named this area "Poyais". Styling himself Gregor I, Cacique of Poyais,

¹¹⁰ Dym, "De Reino a Guatemala ...," 7, 11-13. In 1829 Thompson published a book on his travels to Guatemala, but his report to the Foreign Office along with 47 appendices was available from 1825.

¹¹¹ Alan Knight, "U.S. Imperialism/Hegemony and Latin American Resistance," chapter in Fred Rosen (ed.) *Empire and Dissent: The United States and Latin America*, (Duke University Press, 2008).

¹¹² This is consistent with L.H. Roper's assessment that the seventeenth century commercial activities of British merchants provided the basis for Great Britain's expansion in the Americas. Roper, "Advancing Empire ...," 39. It also supports Brown and Paquette's argument that "the influx of European capital ... secured political and economic conditions that were beneficial to outsiders." Brown and Paquette, *Connections after Colonialism...*, 4.

¹¹³ David Sinclair, *The Land that Never Was: Sir Gregor McGregor and the Most Audacious Fraud in History*, (Da Capo Press Inc., 2003), 4; Frank Griffith Dawson, "MacGregor, Gregor, (1786–1845)" in Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, published online 23 September 2004, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/17519>. See also Alfred Hasbrouck, "Gregor McGregor and the Colonization of Poyais, between 1820 and 1824," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Nov. 1927), 438-459. Brief accounts of McGregor's Poyais enterprise may be found in *The Honduras Almanack for 1839*, 14, and *The Honduras Gazette ...*, Vol. 1, No. 9, Belize, Saturday August 26, 1826.

¹¹⁴ Costeloe, *Bonds and Bondholders ...*, xviii.

McGregor established a “Poyaisian” legation in London from where he distributed printed pamphlets extolling the virtues of Poyais and sold pre-packaged parcels of land in the made-up country.¹¹⁵ Given Londoners’ romanticism with investing in Latin America at the time, McGregor, amidst the panoply of new bond offerings that sprung up almost daily in London, received scores of subscriptions for his colonization project, including from a French colonization company anxious to become established in Central America. Over two hundred persons sailed from London and Leith, a port north of Edinburgh, Scotland only to find that Poyais never existed.¹¹⁶

McGregor’s enterprises are best understood within the intersection of both the imperial scramble for influence in Spanish America and the Spanish American revolutionary movements. In this setting, as Damien Clavel alluded, territory captured by private enterprises and individuals often subsequently served as political bargaining chips.¹¹⁷ In this context, McGregor arguably represented the vanguard of British expansion in nineteenth century Spanish America and his Poyais scheme was pertinent to establishing Belize as a bridgehead of British influence in Central America in the 1820s. Firstly, it ‘legitimated’ the authority of the Mosquito King crowned in Belize (up to this point only Great Britain had ‘recognized’ a Mosquito Kingdom but not the UPCA); and secondly, it helped re-store the Belize-Mosquito Shore connection as a British sphere of influence (this had diminished after the Shore was evacuated in accordance with the 1786 Anglo-Spanish treaty).¹¹⁸ However, Matthew Brown

¹¹⁵ Brown found that McGregor used various titles, ostensibly to fit his changing identities, including “Sir, General, King, Cacique, Prince and Inca.” Matthew Brown, “Inca, Sailor, King: Gregor McGregor and the Early Nineteenth-Century Caribbean,” *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (Jan. 2005), 48.

¹¹⁶ Rebecca Cole Heinowitz, “The Spanish American Bubble and Great Britain’s Crisis of Informal Empire, 1822-6,” chapter in *Spanish America and British Romanticism, 1777-1826: Rewriting Conquest*, (Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 191-192. Also, Sinclair, “*The Land that Never Was ...*,” 3-4.

¹¹⁷ Damien Clavel, “Beyond the Fraudulent Man: Opening the Black-Box of Poyais 1820-1823,” *Paper presented at Penn Economic History Forum*, (April 2019), 6.

¹¹⁸ For a discussion of the Mosquito King’s relationship with Belize see Michael D. Oliën, “The Miskito Kings and the Line of Succession,” *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol 39, No, 2 (Summer 1983), 198-241.

contends that in Central America McGregor “emphasized...[enforcing] the restoration of a legitimate authority,” and points out that the grant of land to him by King George Frederick “did not cede [McGregor] any sovereignty.”¹¹⁹ If this was the case, then it appears that McGregor’s Poyais project facilitated Great Britain forestalling European rivals and the United States in San Juan de Nicaragua, at the time considered the most practicable route for a transisthmian canal in Central America. Moreover, by abolishing slavery and embracing a constitutional monarchy in the Constitution of Poyais that was drafted. McGregor’s ‘political project’ in “Poyais” also buttressed Great Britain’s campaign against the slave trade and propped up Foreign Secretary Canning’s resistance to republicanism in the new states of Spanish America.¹²⁰

As this section of the chapter shows the consolidation of British expansion was due to Belize’s emergence as a bridgehead of British influence in Central America in the early post-independence period in the latter. This was unplanned and not the product of ‘the official mind,’ but the development which restructured Central America’s external relationships nonetheless handed Great Britain significant advantages over European rivals and the United States in the isthmus, and this in turn increased Belize’s strategic value to Great Britain’s imperial project in Central America in the nineteenth century. Meanwhile, the forward territorial activities of the woodcutters south of the Sibun river also expanded the British footprint in Belize.

Recognition

Belize’s effectiveness in promoting British expansion in Central America enabled Great Britain to eschew formal recognition of the UPCA and parry the United States’ warning against

¹¹⁹ Matthew Brown argues that McGregor’s Poyais enterprise may be viewed as a continuity of legitimating the power of the local political authorities. Brown, “Inca, Sailor...,” 54.

¹²⁰ Ibid, 56, 63.

non-colonization in the Americas. This outcome in turn allowed Great Britain to continue its expansion in Central America by using Belize as its base for doing so, and President James Monroe's forewarning, by further dissuading the French from direct intervention in Spanish America, helped enable this. Great Britain's refusal to officially recognize the UPCA angered the political elites from Guatemala as this constrained their ability to restore Guatemala City as the seat of power in the isthmus. The outbreak of civil unrest in the UPCA in 1826 exacerbated the situation, and the combination of the lack of recognition by Great Britain and the effects of Belize's entrepôt trade role on Guatemala's merchants led the UPCA authorities, with the prodding of the state government of Guatemala, to lodge a 'tentative' territorial claim to Belize. This caused the Foreign Office to caution the UPCA against maintaining this claim.

Parrying the United States and Precluding France

British expansion in Central America during the first decade of the latter's independence presented significant concerns for other foreign powers, including the United States. For instance, merchants in the United States were particularly apprehensive over the impact of cheap British exports on United States manufactures, as well as on its then monopoly of cotton production.¹²¹ United States apprehensions involved more than the constraints to their own commercial advance in Central America however, and Great Britain's anti-slavery agenda also created serious trepidations for slave-owning interests in the Southern states. In addition, British amenability to the "establishment of monarchies in Latin America" was also an issue for the United States government.¹²² In short, as Jay Sexton notes, United States leaders were apprehensive over the potential for "foreign threats to exacerbate pre-existing internal divisions

¹²¹ Brauer, 22-25.

¹²² William Spence Robertson, "The Monroe Doctrine Abroad in 1823-24," published online by Cambridge University Press, 2 September 2013, 550, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.2307/1944651>

[within the United States].”¹²³ By comparison, France’s priority was for safeguarding its commerce, or at least, to enjoy the same advantages of trade in Central America as did Great Britain.¹²⁴ However, as Thomas Schoonover observed, “France’s weakened political economy limited the capacity of its industry and commerce to compete in Central America;” and, French influence in the region was on the wane.¹²⁵ Hence, it remained largely for the United States to counter British influence in the isthmus.

Recognition of the independence of the new Republics in Spanish America offered foreign powers an opportunity to expand their influence and secure new markets for their exports.¹²⁶ Thus, Joseph, count de Villèle, then French Prime Minister, planned to address the matter of recognition of Latin American independence at a conference of European powers,¹²⁷ but François-Auguste-René, vicomte de Chateaubriand, at the time French minister to London, objected to Great Britain’s suggestion that the United States be invited to any such meeting.¹²⁸ Installing Bourbon Princes at the head of separate “Spanish dependencies” in America, and not direct recognition, formed the keystone of French policy towards Latin American independence.¹²⁹ As Viscount Chateaubriand stated in 1822, if we are “obliged to recognize the de facto governments in America, [the] policy must [be] to bring monarchies to life in the

¹²³ Jay Sexton, “The Monroe Doctrine in the Nineteenth Century,” chapter in Andre Preston and Doug Rossinow (eds.), *Outside In: The Transnational Circuitry of US History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 21.

¹²⁴ Robertson, *France and Latin American Independence*, 269-270.

¹²⁵ Thomas Schoonover, “France in Central America 1820s-1929: an overview,” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer*, tome 79, n° 295 (2e trimestre, 1992), 162, https://www.persee.fr/doc/outre_0300_9513_1992_mim_79_295_2988

¹²⁶ Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth Century America*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), 50.

¹²⁷ Sir Charles Stuart to George Canning (No. 23), Paris, January 9, 1824, F.O. 27/305.

¹²⁸ Sir Charles Stuart to George Canning (No. 30), Paris, January 13, 1824, F.O. 27/305.

¹²⁹ Viscount Castlereagh to Sir Charles Stuart (No. 38 Most Confidential), July 15, 1820, TNA F.O. 27/222; also, Edward Thornton to Viscount Castlereagh (no. 18), Rio de Janeiro, April 18, 1820, TNA F.O. 63/228.

New World.”¹³⁰ This was why President Monroe had stated in his annual address in 1823 that “the political system of the [European] powers is essentially different...from that of America.”¹³¹

Installing Bourbon Princes in the new Republics would have furthered the Bourbon restoration project and facilitated French expansion in Latin America by opening the markets there.¹³² French officials understood that the commercial activities of French merchants in Central America were instrumental to preserving any remaining vestiges of French influence there. France’s trade with the UPCA at the time was mainly with Guatemala and estimated at roughly 600,000 Francs a year, second to only that of the British. French officials, therefore, were quick to signal France’s “readiness to conclude [a] commercial treaty” with the government of the Federation.¹³³ Thus, to help facilitate French mercantile activities in the new republics, Viscount Chateaubriand dispatched commissioners to Mexico and Colombia towards the end 1823.¹³⁴

However, the ‘aggressive’ posture and legitimist tendencies adopted by France towards the Spanish American question undermined French objectives in Central America – it fuelled Canning’s suspicions of French enterprises and also stoked United States apprehensions over a puppet monarchy in neighboring Mexico provoking domestic tensions.¹³⁵ Indeed,

¹³⁰ François-Rene de Chateaubriand, *The Memoirs of François Rene Vicomte de Chateaubriand* sometime Ambassador to England, Vol. 4, trans. by Alexander Teiveira de Mattos (London: Freemantle and Company), *Project Gutenberg*, 2017.

¹³¹ James Monroe, “December 2, 1823: Seventh Annual Message (Monroe Doctrine), Transcript,” *Presidential Speeches*, James Monroe, Miller Center, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-2-1823-seventh-annual-message-monroe-doctrine>

¹³² “Episode 19: France and the Monroe Doctrine,” *The Siècle History Podcast*, available at thesiecle.com/episode19/ accessed 12 March 2020; Blaufarb, “The Western Question ...,” 748; Robertson, *France and Latin-American Independence*, 192; Also, Henry Blumenthal, *France and the United States: Their Diplomatic Relations, 1789 – 1914*, (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1972), 35.

¹³³ Schoonover, *The French in Central America ...*, 6.

¹³⁴ Robertson, *France and Latin American Independence*, 277.

¹³⁵ Sexton, “The Monroe Doctrine in...,” 21; Robertson, *France and Latin American ...*, 125-126.

Chateaubriand's insistence on military intervention in Spanish America as an option for "protecting her commerce" fed Canning's suspicions and deepened his resolve to prevent European powers from 'helping' Spain to restore its Spanish American empire.¹³⁶ Yet, while the Monroe administration viewed monarchical government as a threat to republicanism, Canning was open to the possibility of monarchies being established in Spanish America.¹³⁷ In any event, French merchants were incapable of maintaining an appreciable level of commerce and shipping with Central America;¹³⁸ and, by the end of the decade, France was "without any proper representation in Guatemala."¹³⁹ Thus, French influence in Central America inevitably waned, and, as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4, ambitions for realizing a "French imperial meridian" in the Atlantic world shifted from commerce to constructing a Central American trans-isthmian canal.¹⁴⁰ In the meantime, British expansion in Central America continued pretty much unchallenged by other powers.

For the United States, early recognition of Latin American independence was a cornerstone of its policy towards the region,¹⁴¹ but the United States intended to do so as part of establishing an "American System" and the objective was forestalling perceived threats to the union.¹⁴² Support for Latin American independence was first advocated by Henry Clay,

¹³⁶ H. W. Temperley, *Foreign Policy of Canning*, revised edition, (Routledge, 2013), 118.

¹³⁷ Sexton, "The Monroe Doctrine in...", 21.

¹³⁸ Schoonover, "France in Central America...", 162.

¹³⁹ Thomas Schoonover, *The French in Central America: Culture and Commerce, 1820 – 1930*, (Rowan & Littlefield, 2000), 6, 11.

¹⁴⁰ Schoonover, "France in Central America...", 161. Dym argues that the retreat of French influence in the first quarter of the nineteenth century in the Atlantic world nonetheless shaped post-imperial identities in the Americas. Jordana Dym, *The Impact of Napoleonic Empire in the Atlantic World*, (Brill, 2010).

¹⁴¹ Sam L. Mitchell, "Report to Congress - Spain," Dec. 10, 1811, 12th Congress, 1st Session, No. 243, *American State Papers: documents, legislative and executive of the Congress of the United States...*, (Washington: Gales and Seaton, 183261), 538-539. The United States doctrine of recognition originated under Thomas Jefferson but did not find international expression till well into the second decade of the nineteenth century. See Julius Goebel, *The Recognition Policy of the United States*, (New York: Columbia University, 1915).

¹⁴² Jay Sexton, "An American System: The North American Union and Latin America in the 1820s," chapter in Brown and Paquette, *Connections after Colonialism ...*, 143-144. Also, Henry Clay, "In Defense of the American System," in Wendy Wolff (ed.), *The Senate 1789-1989: Classic Speeches 1830-1993, Volume Three, Bicentennial Edition*, available at URL: <https://www.senate.gov/artandhistory/resources/pdf/AmericanSystem.pdf>; Kinsley

representative for Kentucky in the United States Congress, in a speech delivered on 10 May 1820.¹⁴³ Thereafter, the United States government initially extended *de facto* recognition by allowing Latin American flagged vessels into United States ports, but this practice soured relations with Spain. Then on 19 June 1822 the United States recognized Colombian independence followed by recognition of Mexico on 12 December 1822. On the latter occasion, President Monroe received the Mexican Minister to the United States, José Manuel Zozaya, thereby becoming the first foreign ‘power’ to do so.¹⁴⁴ Technically, Central American independence was first recognized at this time as the region then comprised part of Agustín de Iturbide’s Mexican empire. Hence, United States recognition of the independence of the UPCA on 4 August 1824 arguably represented another instance of this happening.¹⁴⁵

United States recognition of Central American independence occurred within the framework of its broader attitudes towards the independence of Spanish America.¹⁴⁶ To some extent, this was informed by the period of emergent nationalist sentiments in the United States. On the other hand, for the United States, recognition of the new republics was impelled by the desire of its leaders to avoid “the never ceasing broils of Europe;” to escape from under the thumb of British commercial and imperial domination; and (crucially) to attempt to sway the

J. Brauer, *The United States and British Imperial Expansion, 1815-1860*, *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Winter 1988), 23; Randolph B. Campbell, “The Spanish American Aspect of Henry Clay’s American System,” *The Americas*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (July 1967), 4.

¹⁴³ Campbell, “The Spanish American ...,” 4. Sexton points out that Clay’s aim was “to advance the economic interests of the union.” Sexton, “An American System ...,” 143.

¹⁴⁴ “A Guide to the United States’ History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: Mexico,” available at <https://history.state.gov/countries/mexico>. At the time the United States was not yet a global power.

¹⁴⁵ “Recognition of the Republic of Guatemala by the United States of America,” article in *The Honduras Gazette...*, Vol. 1, No. 7, Saturday, August 12, 1826. For more on this see “A Guide to the United States’ History of Recognition, Diplomatic, and Consular Relations, by Country, since 1776: Central American Federation,” available at <https://history.state.gov/countries/centralamerica>.

¹⁴⁶ Jay Sexton, “An American System: The North American Union and Latin America in the 1820s,” chapter in Brown and Paquette, *Connections after Colonialism ...*, 139.

new states of Latin America towards republican forms of government.¹⁴⁷ Thus, early recognition was part of the United States' strategy for addressing both domestic and external considerations, and it involved different aspects. For instance, regarding Central America, formal diplomatic relations were first intimated when, in 1824, President Monroe officially received the Central American Minister to the United States, Antonio José Cañas. The two countries subsequently concluded a Treaty of Peace, Amity, Commerce and Navigation in 1825, and the following year, a United States legation was established in Guatemala City.¹⁴⁸ By using a treaty of commerce to open Central America's markets to United States manufactures, the latter sought to carve out commercial concessions for United States merchants which, it hoped, would help break "[Great Britain's] commercial and political fetters" in the isthmus.¹⁴⁹ A similar approach was adopted with Mexico, but failed to produce the desired results, as Mexican officials insisted on offering other new states in Latin America preferential treatment.¹⁵⁰

President Monroe's message on 2 December 1823 provided an alternative opportunity to counter British power in Central America. Monroe's caution that "the American continent...[was] henceforth not to be considered subjects for future colonization by any European power" was intended to secure the union against external threats, and it succeeded in realizing the United States' doctrine of two spheres.¹⁵¹ As Sexton concluded, "European [expansion] in the New World constituted a threat to the United States."¹⁵² However, this was

¹⁴⁷ Campbell, "The Spanish American System ...," 4; Clay, "In Defense of the American System."

¹⁴⁸ This was the second such treaty agreed by the United States, the first being with Colombia (New Granada).

¹⁴⁹ Campbell, "The Spanish American System ...," 7-8.

¹⁵⁰ Campbell, "The Spanish American...," 13.

¹⁵¹ Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire*, 49, 56; Sexton, "The Monroe Doctrine in the Nineteenth Century," 21. Prior to this Great Britain had considered allying with the United States to prevent French intervention in the Americas. See 'Selkirk's Letter to Greenville and Canning', October 15, 1806, in John Terry Pritchett, "Selkirk's Views on British Policy Towards Spanish-American Colonies, 1806," *The Canadian Historical Review*, Vol. 24, No. 4, (Dec. 1943), 394.

¹⁵² Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire ...*, 57.

averted when Foreign Secretary Canning secured assurances from French Foreign Minister Polignac that France would not intervene in Spanish America, and other European powers too “decided against intervention in Spanish America.”¹⁵³ Great Britain though continued its expansion in Central America, and other parts of Spanish America as well, and in the former case, Belize’s emergence as a trade entrepôt facilitated this. British merchant houses established in Belize controlled the trade of Guatemala; British merchant credit services offered by those very merchant houses propped up Guatemalan merchants; and all shipping on the Atlantic coast bound for Guatemala passed through the port at Belize. In addition, the crowning of another Mosquito King in Belize reaffirmed the British sphere of influence in the isthmus. Together, these things let Great Britain project influence into Central America from Belize without the need for annexing the settlement.

The upshot of this was twofold: Great Britain was able to avoid official recognition of Central American independence without compromising British expansion in the isthmus; and the United States fell short of replacing Great Britain as the pre-eminent foreign power in Central America in the early decades of the nineteenth century.¹⁵⁴ Therefore, Great Britain, and not the United States, continued to serve as the main pivot for consolidating Latin American independence. Other factors of course contributed to the latter outcome—Simón Bolívar preferred an alliance with Great Britain over one with the United States on account of the former’s ‘more meaningful standing’¹⁵⁵—but Belize’s effectiveness in assuming new

¹⁵³ Ibid, 62. George Canning to Sir Charles Stuart, No. 84, 9 November 1823, F.O. 25/285; Sir Charles Stuart to George Canning, No. 587, Paris, 15 November 1823, F.O. 27/296. Also, William S. Robertson, *France, and Latin American Independence*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1939), 269-271

¹⁵⁴ Nonetheless British consuls were appointed to the UPCA from the second half of the 1820s with Frederick Chatfield serving the position for almost two decades starting in 1834.

¹⁵⁵ Matthew Brown, “The 1820s in Perspective: The Bolivar Decade,” chapter in Brown and Paquette, *Connections after Colonialism ...*, 257; Sexton, “Monroe Doctrine in...,” 29; Campbell, “The Spanish American...,” 14.

commercial and finance roles during the first decade of Central American independence was what underpinned the growth and consolidation of British influence that occurred in that period.

Still, the United States had other opportunities for forestalling British influence in the isthmus. For instance, in 1825 an invitation by the UPCA authorities to build a trans-isthmian canal in Nicaragua, and Bolívar's Congress of Panama the following year, had separately presented Clay, then Secretary of State in the John Quincy Adams administration, with opportunities for extending United States influence in Central America.¹⁵⁶ The invitation to consider a canal project in Central America was first communicated to Secretary Clay by Minister Cañas on 8th February 1825. Secretary Clay was also aware that the matter would be raised at the Panama Congress the following year.¹⁵⁷ Clay was roused by the prospects a canal project presented for realizing United States' ambitions in Central America (i.e., a "path to empire"¹⁵⁸), and therefore he pursued various means of securing United States participation in the canal initiative.

Clay submitted a plan to that end to the United States Congress for their consideration.¹⁵⁹ Clay also instructed the two United States representatives attending the Panama Congress to "[ensure] that the benefits of [any canal] ought not to be exclusively appropriated by any one nation...and to transmit any proposals...or plans that may be suggested for its execution" and directed John Williams, the United States Chargé d' affaires to Central

¹⁵⁶ Henry Clay, "Instructions, General, Department of State," Washington, May 8, 1826, in *Reports of Committees and Discussions Theron: The congress of 1826, at Panama, and subsequent movements toward a conference of American nations, Volume 4* (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1890,) digitized 15 Oct 2009, 114.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid, 143-144; To Antonio José Cañas, Department of State, Washington, 18 April 1825, in James Hopkins, ed., *The Papers of Henry Clay: Secretary of State 1825*, (University Press of Kentucky), 263-264.

¹⁵⁸ Aims McGuinness, *Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush*, (Cornell University Press, 2007).

¹⁵⁹ "Nicaragua Canal," Speech of B.T. Clayton of New York in the House of Representatives, Wednesday, 2 May 1900, *Congressional Record: Proceedings and Debates of the United States Congress, Vol. 33, Part 8, Appendix to the Congressional Record*, (United States Government Printer, 1900) digitized August 2019, 258-260.

America, to “gather all data and information available” and “to investigate...the facilities which the route through the Province of Nicaragua offers.”¹⁶⁰

Despite these efforts, the United States did not make up any ground on Great Britain in Central America. To be sure, the canal project never got off the ground as British financing was not forthcoming; one of the United States representatives dispatched to the Congress of Panama died en route and the other arrived after the Congress was concluded; and Great Britain re-established its presence in the Mosquito Shore near the proposed canal route through Nicaragua.

Tempering Guatemala’s Early Territorial Claim

British expansion in Central America also presented growing concerns for the UPCA, particularly the state of Guatemala, for reasserting its influence in the isthmus, more so given Great Britain’s delay in recognizing the independence of the new republic.¹⁶¹ The loss of control of the country’s external trade to merchant houses in Belize resulting from the ‘reorganization of imperial commerce networks,’¹⁶² and the attendant rise of credit services from those same establishments, had significantly undermined the regional power of the Guatemalan merchants, and this eroded further with the decline of the Guatemalan *Consulado* after 1823.¹⁶³ Provincial trade specialization and the tendency of the provincial juntas to bypass Guatemala City and work instead through their regional governors simply added to the tensions and emboldened the agitations of the provincial merchants and political leaders for greater

¹⁶⁰ Clay, “Instructions, General, Department of State,” 143-144.

¹⁶¹ Rodriguez, *The Cadiz Experiment ...*, 179.

¹⁶² Brown, “The 1820s in Perspective ...,” 250.

¹⁶³ Ralph Lee Woodward Jr, *Class Privilege and Economic Development: The Consulado de Comercio of Guatemala, 1793 - 1871*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1966.)

autonomy, particularly in Honduras and Nicaragua.¹⁶⁴ When therefore internecine conflicts broke out in Central America in 1826, this deepened the predicament for the authorities of the state of Guatemala. The struggle between liberals and conservatives exposed decades-old fissures that now manifested in rivalries between provincial centres and Guatemala City over political leadership, control of the economy, and the nature of economic development and reforms of the Federation.¹⁶⁵ To address the deteriorating situation therefore, Guatemalan state leaders deployed several measures against Belize.

Firstly, the state's officials, urged by leading Guatemalan merchants, looked increasingly towards replacing the trade through Belize by shifting this to Izabal and Santo Tomás in the Golfo Dulce (see map on page 16).¹⁶⁶ At the time, the "ports on the Atlantic ["best suited for trade"] were Omoa and Truxillo," but those were located in the state of Honduras.¹⁶⁷ Some of the trade from Belize for Central America trans-shipped through both of these ports but the majority of goods intended for Guatemala entered through the Golfo Dulce.¹⁶⁸ As the trade passing through Belize expanded, the Guatemalan merchants' desire for wresting back the country's trade likewise intensified.¹⁶⁹ Thus, to try and bypass Belize, the Guatemalan authorities closed the ports on the Atlantic and raised the duties on key British manufactures (e.g., 10% for cottons, and 6% for linens and woollens.)¹⁷⁰ while also reducing the taxes and charges on goods shipped through its Pacific ports.¹⁷¹ Meanwhile, the *Consulado* focused on

¹⁶⁴ Dym, *From Sovereign Villages ...*, 168-173, 191; Rodriguez, *The Cadiz Experiment ...*, 156-157, 180-181; Woodward, *Class Privilege ...*, xv.

¹⁶⁵ Gudmundson, *Central America ...*, 29-36; Central America from Independence ..., 479-480.

¹⁶⁶ "Belice," 6 December 1828, *Archivo Nacional de Guatemala*, B10.3, expediente 3625, legato 170, folio 18; Chatfield to Palmerston, enclosure 1, No. 22, 13 November 1834, F.O. 15/14. (Hereinafter *ANG*).

¹⁶⁷ Secretary Canning to Consul O'Reilly, 12 September 1825, F.O. 15/4, 33.

¹⁶⁸ Memoir on Central America, F.O. 15/4, 33-34; Appendix 36 of Guatemalan Report, 188.

¹⁶⁹ Charles Dashwood to John Backhouse, Esq., No. 1, 28 January 1830, F.O. 15/10, 4.

¹⁷⁰ William Hall to Bidwell, Guatemala, 10 October 1832, F.O. 15/12, 84-87.

¹⁷¹ Consul O'Reilly to Secretary Dudley, 14 October 1827, F.O. 15/6, 207; John O'Reilly to George Canning, No. 3, British Consulate, Guatemala, 22 February 1826, F.O. 15/5.

establishing a satisfactory port at either Izabal or Santo Tomás, and to build a cart road from there to the capital at Guatemala City.¹⁷² This was short-lived however, as though the new charges were injurious to British trade,¹⁷³ the closure of the Atlantic ports also removed the collection of taxes at the customs house at Izabal.

Securing early recognition for Central America's independence provided another means for Guatemala to restore its power in the region. Thus after Manuel José Arce was elected President of the UPCA at the General Congress in February 1825, one of his first acts in office was to write to Foreign Secretary Canning over securing Great Britain's recognition.¹⁷⁴ Arce also dispatched Marcial Zebadúa to London as Guatemala's Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary with the objective of "establishing relations ... between the Government of Your Majesty and that of this Republic."¹⁷⁵ Canning however refused to meet with Zebadúa, indicating that he could only do so *after* Central America's independence was recognized.¹⁷⁶ The snub was not the first as the Foreign Office had, in October 1821, also rebuffed then Captain General of Guatemala, Gabino Gaínza's proposal to the Superintendent at Belize to "conclude a definitive commercial treaty."¹⁷⁷ These refusals reflected, on one hand, the Foreign Office's desire to not upset Spain, which still had not recognized any of the breakaway colonies. Then again, Great Britain was not ready to extend

¹⁷² Guatemala Report, F.O. 15/2, 219; Appendix 35 to the Guatemala Report, 172-173; Appendix 36, 188, F.O. 15/2. George Thompson had reported that Guatemala had proposed three possible projects for this, all involving the building of cart-roads to the capital. John O'Reilly to George Canning, No. 3, British Consulate, Guatemala, 22 February 1826, F.O. 15/5; also quoted in R.A. Humphreys, "Guatemala," in *British Consular Reports on the Trade and Politics of Latin America, 1824-1826*, (Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1940), 296.

¹⁷³ Humphreys, *British Consular Reports ...*, 294.

¹⁷⁴ Manuel Arce to George Canning (Translation), Guatemala, 23 June 1825, F.O. 15/4

¹⁷⁵ The President of the Federal Republic of Central America to His Majesty the King of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, (Translation), Guatemala, 31 January 1826, F.O. 15/6.

¹⁷⁶ Joseph Planta to Marcial Zebadúa, 26 May 1826, F.O. 15/6; Marcial Zebadúa to Joseph Planta (Translation), 29 May 1826, F.O. 15/6.

¹⁷⁷ Gabino Gainza to Superintendent Arthur, 24 October 1821, C.O. 123/30.

recognition to Central America, and besides, Belize had not yet been fully consolidated as an *entrepôt*. By 1826 however, Canning, having received Thompson's consular report on Guatemala pointing out "important advantages to British interests," and following Lord Bathurst's urging that any treaty concluded with Guatemala delineate Belize boundaries "as they existed *de facto*,"¹⁷⁸ determined that it was time to secure "a specific understanding of ... the new states ... contiguous with H.M. possessions, for the purpose of defining and fixing the respective boundaries."¹⁷⁹

When Great Britain's support for recognition was not forthcoming, the UPCA authorities, again urged by Guatemalan elites, sought to assert UPCA sovereignty over Belize. The first of these instances occurred not long after Central America declared its separation from Mexico. On 22 July 1823, José de Velosa, Secretary of the UPCA, sent a letter to Superintendent Codd of Belize on behalf of the Supreme Executive of the Centre of America "asserting that the settlement was situated in Guatemalan territory" on the prompting of Guatemalan officials.¹⁸⁰ Then in 1826, the government of the UPCA, again on Guatemala's instigation, alluded to Guatemalan sovereignty over Belize in the treaty of commerce it was negotiating with Gran Colombia.¹⁸¹ The Foreign Office was alert to these pretensions, and when the latter event occurred, it immediately notified the Guatemalan authorities of their 'misconstruction'.¹⁸² At the same time, the British Vice-Consul to Guatemala, E.W. Schenley, following the declaration by Superintendent Codd in Belize in July 1825,¹⁸³ reiterated to the

¹⁷⁸ Horton to Planta, 23 September 1825, F.O. 15/4, also quoted in Humphreys, *"Diplomatic History ..."* 31.

¹⁷⁹ Planta to Horton, 26 April 1826, F.O. 72/323.

¹⁸⁰ Edward Codd to the Earl of Bathurst, 6 February 1825, F.O. 15/4, 158; Horton to Planta, 28 May 1825, F.O. 15/4.

¹⁸¹ Chatfield to Palmerston, F.O 15/17, 51.

¹⁸² Secretary Canning to Consul O'Reilly, 12 September 1825, F.O. 15/4, 21.

¹⁸³ Marshall Bennett to R. W. Horton, 17 June 1825, in Horton to Planta, 9 July 1825, F.O. 15/4.

Guatemalan Ministry of Foreign Affairs that “the territory ... extended from the Hondo to the Sarstoon.”¹⁸⁴

Guatemala also adopted measures to try and destabilize the settlement at Belize. For instance, as the UPCA had abolished slavery in 1824, the government of the state of Guatemala started to entice the slaves working in the mahogany camps in Belize to run away by offering them their ‘complete freedom’ in Guatemala.¹⁸⁵ This practice troubled the Belize woodcutters but did not deter their logging activities and did not reverse their territorial encroachments southward. Instead, the woodcutters “urged Consul O’Reilly to threaten the Guatemalan authorities with his [departure] if the slaves were not returned.”¹⁸⁶ Cajoling the slaves in Belize to run-away was part of a scheme hatched by Dr Mariano Gálvez, then Minister of Finance of Guatemala, to initiate colonies in the areas contiguous with the settlement.¹⁸⁷ In 1824 Gálvez had persuaded the Federation to adopt broad colonization laws which permitted states to separately grant land concessions to foreigners. Gálvez’s plan was aimed at wresting Guatemala’s trade from the British merchants in Belize by remedying the “difficult roads [between the capital] and the Atlantic.”¹⁸⁸ This tactic did not deter Great Britain’s continued possession of Belize, but it caused Superintendent Codd to express his concerns and ultimately “undermined [slavery] in Belize.”¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁴ Schenley to Planta, 31 May 1826, F.O. 15/5.

¹⁸⁵ O’Reilly to Secretary Canning, 30 June 1825, F.O. 15/4, 49-55; Extract of Letter from Honduras, Henry Cooke Esq., 21 February 1826, F.O. 15/9, 31.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, F.O. 15/4.

¹⁸⁷ Extract of Letter from Honduras, F.O. 15/9, 31.

¹⁸⁸ William J. Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness: Foreign Colonization and Development in Guatemala, 1834-1844*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965) 8.

¹⁸⁹ O. Nigel Boland, “Colonization and Slavery in Central America,” *Slavery and Abolition*, Vol. 15, No. 2 (1994), 11.

Conclusions

By the end of the first decade of Central America's independence, Great Britain's standing in the region had changed profoundly: British imperial networks had replaced Iberian ones; trade with the isthmus was no longer contraband; British manufactures dominated the imports of Guatemala; and British finance propped up both the government of the UPCA and Guatemalan merchants engaged in the foreign trade of that country. In short, the advantages over other foreign powers Great Britain enjoyed in Central America had deepened and by the end of the decade British influence in the isthmus consolidated. This achievement resulted from Belize's unplanned emergence as a trade entrepôt and centre of merchant credit, and this significantly enhanced Belize's strategic importance to British designs in Central America. This development seemed to remove any need for Great Britain to convert Belize to an official colony.¹⁹⁰ Thus, the Foreign Office not only ignored repeated requests from the mercantile oligarchy, and even the Superintendent of the settlement to do so, but Great Britain never officially recognized the UPCA. Still, to further strengthen British influence in the isthmus, Robert Charles Frederic was crowned Mosquito King in Belize Town in 1824.¹⁹¹ In the meantime, the Belize settlers continued agitating for establishing the Sarstoon River as the southernmost boundary of Belize.

Meanwhile, French and United States attempts at pre-empting Great Britain in Central America by separately extending early recognition to the new Central American Union failed to translate into greater commercial privileges there for either of them. A New York firm winning the contract in 1826 for building a canal through Nicaragua also did not make any

¹⁹⁰ This seems to support Darwin's hypothesis that the decision to transform British influence ... into formal or informal empire, largely depended ... on the performance of the bridgehead." John Darwin, "Imperialism and the Victorians: The Dynamics of Territorial Expansion," 629.

¹⁹¹ The first Mosquito King crowning in Belize occurred in 1816 when George Frederic was crowned. Olien, "The Miskito Kings and the Line of Succession," 215, 221.

difference for the United States, but in any event, the latter was not yet positioned to really take advantage of any commercial opportunities in the region. President Monroe's caution against European colonization of the Americas was also unsuccessful in forestalling British expansion in Central America but led Foreign Secretary Canning to use the occasion to broadcast the Polignac Memorandum. As Sexton points out, the latter occurrence dissuaded France from intervening in Spain's former Spanish colonies.¹⁹² Monroe's 'caution' however, laid the basis for later United States foreign policy in Central America, indeed all Latin America, and the closely related 'American System's' use of treaties of amity and commerce for extending recognition ensured that commerce would feature prominently in any relations with the new states.

During the decade, the UPCA's efforts at resisting British expansion in the region met with limited success. When attempts at securing official British recognition for Central American independence failed, the government of the UPCA, on constant prodding from Guatemalan elites, asserted a territorial claim to Belize. Initially these claims were tentative, mainly because the government of the UPCA, and the Guatemalan state authorities too, was unsure of the external boundaries of the state of Guatemala, even though the constitution adopted by the National Constituent Assembly of the UPCA in 1824 laid out a description of this.¹⁹³ This was because, as Matthew Restall contends, Spanish officials had elided large parts of Belize in colonial maps after Spanish efforts to colonize the area failed.¹⁹⁴ Moreover, as Sophie Brockmann recently argued, "nation-states [in Central America] emerged along the lines of provincial divisions that...meant very little to colonial understandings of

¹⁹² Sexton, "An American System ...," 148.

¹⁹³ Dym, "De Reino de Guatemala ...,".

¹⁹⁴ Matthew Restall, "Creating "Belize": The Mapping and Naming History of a Liminal Locale," *Terrae Incognitae*, Vol. 51, No. 1 (2019), 7.

sovereignty.”¹⁹⁵ Still, the UPCA authorities needed to “identify the land and people over which it claimed sovereignty,”¹⁹⁶ but it shows that Guatemala’s territorial claim was *not* and *could not* have been based on any understanding of a geographically defined space inherited from Spain. This interpretation challenges the supposition hitherto by Guatemalan scholars and officials that the state inherited Belize’s territory at the time of Guatemalan independence from Spain.

Conversely, the Central American Federation’s schemes for attracting European investments for trans-isthmian communication projects (i.e., ship canals) generated significant interests from European powers and the United States alike. The potential for external states to use these projects as openings for asserting their influence in Central America posed real threats to British interests in the isthmus. At the same time, the Federation’s emphasis on canal projects in Nicaragua, and Honduras’ plans for a Honduras corridor, posed genuine obstacles to Guatemala’s leaders for restoring Guatemala’s influence in the region. Hence, Guatemala’s political elites and the Guatemalan *Consulado* countered this by promoting their own project for a cart-road running from the port at Izabal to Guatemala City. The Guatemalan authorities also enticed slaves from Belize to abscond to Guatemala, with the hope that they could be settled in the Izabal area along with Carib families. During the ensuing decade, Dr Mariano Gálvez, President of the state of Guatemala, promoted several colonization programs with requirements for port and road infrastructure works folded into them, in attempts to undermine British presence in Belize. That subject is the focus of the next chapter.

¹⁹⁵ Sophie Brockmann, *The Science of Useful Nature in Central America: Landscapes, Networks and Practical enlightenment, 1784-1838*, (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 13. Also, Jordana Dym, “Democratizing the Map: The Geo-Body and National Cartography in Guatemala, 1821–2010,” chapter in James R. Akerman, *Decolonizing the Map: Cartography from Colony to Nation*, (ed.), (University of Chicago Press, 2017), 13.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid*, 13. R.A. Humphreys also pointed out that Guatemala needed to obtain the necessary information about its external border. Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History...*, 19.

2 Colonization, Land Grants, and Escalation of the Territorial Claim, c.1830 - 1839

During the second decade of Central American independence, Great Britain's influence in the region expanded as the Foreign Office not only consolidated its territorial base in Belize but different Superintendents posted there also asserted British authority over the Bay Islands and Mosquito Shore. These incidents occurred largely in response to developments provoked by the UPCA that threatened British paramountcy in Central America. Francisco Morazán and the *liberales'* victory over Manuel José Arce and the conservatives in the 1829 elections produced a shift of power in Central America that profoundly influenced the federal-provincial rivalry and affected Great Britain's relationship with the region and Belize as well. The following year, Morazán was elected President of the Central America Federation and Juan Barrundia was restored as Guatemala's head of state.¹ This presaged the suppression of the Guatemalan *Consulado* and transferred responsibility for economic development to the government of the state of Guatemala. The new federal government hoped that this change would help reinvigorate commerce and restore economic growth in the young Republic, but the unrelenting bitter internecine conflicts only deepened interstate rivalry, and this unintentionally increased Guatemala's dependence on Belize's entrepôt trade. Then, in 1832, opposition forces loyal to Arce seized the maritime ports of Omoa and Truxillo on the country's Atlantic coast, thereby closing off the Atlantic coast to the trade with the state of Guatemala.

To try and remedy the latter situation, the UPCA authorities appealed to the Belize merchants for funding to arm of a vessel to attempt retaking the port at Omoa. When this was

¹ Ralph Woodward, Jr., *Rafael Carrera and the emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 1821-1871*, (Athens and London: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 41.

rejected, the UPCA authorities escalated their territorial claim to Belize and launched a calculated challenge to British influence in the isthmus. This campaign focused on overturning Belize's control of the commerce of Central America; restricting Great Britain's possession of Belize to the limits set out in the 1783 and 1786 Anglo-Spanish treaties; and securing the disputed territory in Belize to Guatemala. To achieve this, Dr Mariano Gálvez, Chief-of-state of Guatemala, issued a series of land grants to foreign nationals and companies, ostensibly as part of a wider program of economic development.² Two of these grants covered territory already occupied or possessed by the Belize settlers, while the others adjoined the Belize territory. Moreover, all the grants assigned exclusive rights to the concessionaires to exploit the mahogany stands and mineral deposits within the areas they covered. Several of the contracts for the grants contained prerequisites for colonization—particularly in the Lake Izabal and Santo Tomás areas—as well as obligations for undertaking port infrastructure and road works connecting these ports on the Atlantic coast to Guatemala City.³ Gálvez hoped that these programs would remedy Guatemala's financial situation, generate much needed resources for its government, and restore its regional authority,⁴ but the reforms backfired, stoking unrest among the *ladino* population in the Mita Mountains, and catapulted Rafael Carrera to power. By 1839 the Central American Federation had collapsed, and thereafter the conservatives resumed power in Guatemala.

This chapter examines the impact of these dynamics on Great Britain's handling of the UPCA's territorial claim to Belize. First, it considers, in more detail, the impetus for the UPCA

² For more on this see William J. Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness: Foreign Colonization and Development in Guatemala, 1834-1844*, (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1965). Also, Miriam Williford, *The Reform Program of Dr Mariano Gálvez, Chief-of-State of Guatemala, 1831-1838*, *Tulane University unpublished PhD Dissertation* (1963).

³ Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness ...*, 191.

⁴ Robert Smith, "Financing the Central American Federation, 1821-1838," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (Nov. 1963), 484.

authorities escalating the territorial claim to Belize and how exactly this swayed British policy in Belize. I show that the reaction of Guatemalan elites over the Belize merchants' attitude towards the Omoa incident caused Great Britain to pre-emptively claim the territory between the Sibun and Sarstoon Rivers to stabilize Belize's position and thereby protect British influence in the isthmus. Second, the chapter examines how Gálvez's land grants programs, and the infrastructure works requirements that were folded into these, threatened Great Britain's presence in Belize. The concessions were more a source of annoyance to Great Britain, and, ironically, conceivably extended British commercial and territorial presence in Central America because a couple of the grants were to British companies or nationals. I show further that the 'rights' to exploit the mahogany resources assigned by the concessions were rendered ineffective because the mahogany trade was largely controlled by the Belize merchants, and that the abolition of slavery in 1833 did not enable Guatemala to successfully colonize the ports at Izabal or Santo Tomás. This undermined any chance of establishing these two ports as viable rivals to the port at Belize. The chapter concludes by demonstrating that the combination of Guatemala's heightened rhetoric and cheeky land grants played to Great Britain's favor and ultimately led the latter to consolidate its possession of Belize. I show that the collapse of the UPCA in 1838 facilitated British expansion in the region but stress that the extension of the area the British occupied in Belize resulted from British merchants and different Belize Superintendents "conducting their own forward policies."⁵

Omoa and the Escalation of Guatemala's Territorial Claim to Belize

In this section, I show that the Guatemalan state's territorial claim to Belize, lodged through the UPCA, intensified after the seizure of the maritime port at Omoa exposed the

⁵ Knight, "Great Britain and Latin America," 132.

debilities in restoring Guatemalan control over the commerce and trade of Central America. In doing so, I explore how the conservative-liberal rivalry in Central America during the second decade of independence, and the provincial struggle for autonomy that this produced directly influenced Guatemala's, and hence by extension the UPCA's, outlook towards Belize.⁶ I show that the seizure of Omoa exposed the Guatemalan state's economic and political fragilities in Central America and threatened to further undermine the vestiges of power of Guatemala's political elites within the region.⁷ Finally, I show that although the aim was not to seize territory, the response of the Guatemalan authorities to the Omoa incident caused Great Britain to authorize establishing the Sarstoon as the southern boundary of Belize.

The Threat of Honduran Autonomy

Prior to the second decade of Central American independence, "Belize was not naturally a flash point for either the government or people [of the state of Guatemala]."⁸ What then, produced the change in Guatemala's outlook towards Belize, resulting in the escalation of the former's territorial claim to the latter? Contrary to the existing historiography, the explanation for this does not lie with the British woodcutters' territorial encroachments beyond the limits delineated by the 1783 and 1786 Anglo-Spanish treaties per se, but with the hazard posed by Comayagua's (Honduras') potential emergence as the center of power in Central America to Guatemala's political leaders' project of state building. The seizure of Omoa by rebel forces imperilled the Guatemalan elites' ambitions for restoring Guatemala City's dominance over Central America. To be sure, the rift between the sub-regional hubs of

⁶ This distinction is important as the attitudes of the UPCA towards Belize stemmed from that of the Guatemalan political elites.

⁷ Frederick Chatfield to Secretary Lord Palmerston, enclosure 1, No. 22, 13 November 1834, F.O. 15/14.

⁸ Dym, "Democratizing the Map...", 183.

influence in Central America—for example, Comayagua (Honduras) and Leon (Nicaragua)—and Guatemala City were evident at independence when the Captaincy General of Guatemala fractured into five constituent states, and with the leaders in each keen on separately controlling their own economic and political destinies.⁹ This was why Guatemala City's *Diputación Provincial's* attempts to extend its authority into other provinces of Central America in 1822 was not only firmly rebuffed by Comayagua, but also led to a general “rejection of Guatemala as the political capital” of Central America.¹⁰

The fissures between the provinces of the Captaincy General of Guatemala that existed during the colonial period did not dissipate with their break from Mexico in 1823. Instead, these fractures deepened after the formation of the Federation of Central America. This was manifest in the bitter rivalry between the government of the Federation and the government of the state of Guatemala over, among other things, differences over the distribution of power; and, over the political and economic agendas and institutions for shaping the development of the new country. The federal-state government rivalry became, arguably, the proxy through which the interstate enmity in Central America played out, most notably, in the form of internecine conflicts that first broke out in 1826. These conflicts continued into the next decade and eventually led to the Federation's collapse in 1839.¹¹ The federal–state government dichotomy has, traditionally, posed significant conceptual challenges to historical discussions

⁹ Dym, *From Sovereign Villages ...*, 191.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 169.

¹¹ David Chandler, “Peace through Disunion: Father Juan José de Aycinena and the fall of the Central American Federation,” *The Americas* 46, no. 2 (1989): 137. For more details on the causes and outcomes of the conflicts see Ralph Lee Woodward, *Rafael Carrera and the Emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 1821-1871* (University of Georgia Press, 1993). Also, Gilmar E. Visoni-Alonzo, *The Carrera Revolt and “Hybrid Warfare” in Nineteenth-Century Central America*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

of Guatemala;¹² and, crucially, this has obscured the reasons why Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize crystallized in the 1830s.

One cause for this opacity, as discussed in the previous chapter, was that Guatemala's early claims to Belize were conveyed through, and often with, the acquiescence of the federal government. In other words, by advancing the territorial claim to Belize through the Federation, the Guatemalan authorities made it seem, at least for some time, that the matter was of equal concern to all the states of Central America. This was not the case, and Guatemala's external boundaries issues with Belize did not hold the same primacy for the other Central American states. For instance, for Honduras, the matter of the internal boundary disputed with Guatemala was of more importance, and this remained unsettled until 1933.¹³ Another cause for the obscurity is that Central America's civil wars have hitherto not been treated with any depth or granularity in the history of the territorial dispute. Consequently, the source of the conflicts that erupted between the Central American states after their independence, such as, for example, the struggle of provincial centers such as those in Comayagua and Leon for their autonomy, have been completely ignored in studies of the Anglo-Guatemalan boundary dispute over Belize and are generally seen as lacking any explanatory value in the matter.

Yet, the Guatemalan authorities' difficulties with "stitching together" the constituent parts of that state, alongside the impediments to the ambitions of the Guatemalan elites for obtaining a unified republic under the political control of Guatemala City, both resulting partly from the unsettled internal boundaries of the UPCA, profoundly affected Guatemala's outlook

¹² Dym posits that there has been a tradition of conflating the history of Guatemala City with that of the Kingdom. Dym, "The Republic of Guatemala ...," 278.

¹³ See F.C. Fisher, "The Arbitration of the Guatemalan-Honduran Boundary Dispute," *American Journal of International Law*, Vol. 27, No. 3 (1933), 403-427. Incidentally, Guatemala's claim to Belize was revived around this time (1930s).

towards Belize.¹⁴ For Guatemala, the crux of the matter was twofold. The prospect of Honduran autonomy which control of the maritime ports of Omoa and Trujillo by rebel forces portended, compounded the impact of the dissolution of the Guatemalan *Consulado* and threatened to leave Guatemala without possession of a port and, hence, without access to the Atlantic and therefore without the means of revitalizing its foreign trade. In short, Guatemala faced the potential loss of a key source of public revenue, and this threatened to undermine the Guatemalan authorities plans for economic development of the state. Hence, the authorities decided that the only alternative was to break Guatemala's dependence on Belize. However, as William J. Griffith contends, this required that the disputed territory in Belize be wrested from British occupation and the commerce of Central America freed from Belize's control.¹⁵ Vice-Consul Schenley captured the sense of this when he reported that, "many Central American leaders were becoming adamant Belize was the natural sea-port on the Atlantic and that the British had no right to be there."¹⁶

Conversely, Honduras' potential for emerging as the new seat of power in Central America was immediately more imaginable to Guatemala's elites, as 'rebel' control of the ports at Omoa and Trujillo threatened to place Honduras in a position to not only take over the trade of Central America, but to also make good on establishing a Honduras trans-isthmian corridor via the Puerto Caballos area (see map on page 15). The idea of a 'Honduras trans-isthmian corridor' was first proposed in 1529 by Andrés Cerezeda, *Contador* (comptroller) and acting governor of the province of Higueras, an area in Honduras which stretched right up to the Golfo Dulce region in Guatemala. Within a decade, infrastructure, and economic development plans

¹⁴ Dym, "The Republic of Guatemala..." 279.

¹⁵ Griffith, *The Personal Archives of Francisco Morazán*, 202.

¹⁶ Vice-Consul Schenley to Joseph Planta, 6 January 1831, F.O. 15/5, 350-351.

around a corridor between Puerto Caballos (and Trujillo) on the Atlantic side of Honduras and the Gulf of Fonseca on the Pacific side had been drafted.¹⁷

During the sixteenth century, Cerezeda, and several provincial administrators, thereafter, consistently advocated for “shifting transisthmian transport to the Honduras corridor for easier passage and to stimulate the region’s development.”¹⁸ As Scott Brady states, the plans for the ‘Honduras corridor’ kindled the ambitions of colonial leaders in Guatemala, particularly Pedro de Alvarado, *Adelantado* (military commander), for establishing an Atlantic port at Higueras for Guatemala. Alvarado’s plan was for securing any trans-isthmian trade in Central America to the merchants of Guatemala, and he believed this could be accomplished through establishing a trade route in the region of Puerto Caballos by connecting a maritime port from there to the then capital city of Santiago de Guatemala via a cart-road or mule-track.¹⁹ The Puerto Caballos area was believed to be the only route in Honduras that would lend easily to the construction of a cart-road in the region.²⁰ This route was also promoted by another Spanish colonial administrator, Francisco Montejo, who, prior to being assigned to Higueras was *Adelantado* for Yucatán in Mexico. Over the next three centuries, colonial administrators in Comayagua Honduras continued to nurture visions of establishing the Honduras corridor as the regional hub for Central America’s trade, and featuring a cart-road connecting the Atlantic to Guatemala City.²¹

¹⁷ Scott Brady, “Honduras’ Transisthmian Corridor: A Case of Undeveloped Potential in Colonial Central America,” *Revista Geográfica*, No. 133 (Enero-Junio 2003), 128, 131. Also, Brady, Scott Arlen, “Honduras’ Transisthmian Corridor: An Historical Geography of Roadbuilding in Colonial Central America.” (1996). *LSU Historical Dissertations and Theses*. 6176. https://digitalcommons.lsu.edu/gradschool_disstheses/6176

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 128.

¹⁹ Brady, “Honduras’ Trans-isthmian Corridor ...,” 135.

²⁰ Brady, 139.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 143.

Guatemalan officials were initially open to the idea of the Honduran corridor, but only if the proposed route passed through or near to Guatemala's capital. However, once the Spanish crown designated Comayagua as one of three provincial capitals in Central America, a proposal repeated by Augustín de Iturbide during the region's annexation to Mexico, the Guatemalan merchants, fearing that such an occurrence would promote Honduras' development over that of Guatemala as Central America's center of commerce, agitated forcefully against any project for the development of a Honduras Corridor.²² Thus, after independence, as Ralph Woodward Jr pointed out, the Guatemalan *Consulado* placed heavy emphasis on developing a route through the Golfo Dulce-Lake Izabal region while repeatedly disregarding the deficiencies which stymied Omoa and Truxillo, as this directly benefitted the Guatemalan merchants.²³

When therefore Vicente Domínguez and Ramón Guzmán captured the ports at Omoa and Truxillo in late 1831 after a period of exile in Belize,²⁴ Guatemala's new liberal leaders, and also its merchants, became seriously concerned over their state's development prospects.²⁵ This was because Omoa not only shared historical maritime trade links with Belize, but also served as an important intermediary node in the coastal shipping trade carried on with the lake port of Izabal.²⁶ Omoa had also continued to be important to the trade of Central America, particularly the British trade through Belize.²⁷ The situation prompted Pedro Molina, then Secretary of the Guatemalan state government, to write to Superintendent Cockburn at Belize

²² John O'Reilly to George Canning, British Consulate, Guatemala, No. 3, 22 February 1826, F.O. 15/5.

²³ Ralph Lee Woodward, Jr., *Class Privilege and Economic Development: The Consulado de Comercio of Guatemala, 1793-1871*, (University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 60-61.

²⁴ Hall to Bidwell, No. 8, 18 December 1831, F.O. 15/11, 83; Extract of a Dispatch, with copies of its enclosures from Colonel Cockburn, Superintendent at [British] Honduras to Lord Goderich, dated Honduras, 14 February 1832, F.O. 15/12, 124. Dominguez and Guzmán were both former army generals under the conservative government of Juan Manuel Arce when he was President of the Federation.

²⁵ William Hall to John Bidwell, Esq., No. 8 18 December 1831, F.O. 15/11, 83.

²⁶ Colonel Dashwood to John Backhouse, British Consulate, Guatemala, 1 September 1830, F.O. 15/10, 181.

²⁷ William Hall to John Bidwell, No. 8, 18 December 1831, F.O. 15/11, 83.

complaining that Domínguez's capture of Omoa "has paralyzed the trade of your country as well as that of every other country carrying on a commerce with this Republic by the north coast."²⁸

The Belize Merchants Reject the Federation's Appeals for Support

Omoa's capture by opposition forces interrupted trade with Belize and led Superintendent Cockburn to report that "[Belize] at present [has] no communication that can be depended upon with the capital of Central America, the Coast and the Golfo Dulce being in possession of Colonel Dominguez."²⁹ Some trade however continued through the Izabal. Significantly, the capture of Omoa also disrupted the revenue streams of the UPCA.³⁰ This was because the state governments collected all taxes and charges at their respective ports, largely on account of the federal government lacking alternative mechanisms for doing so.³¹ Thus, the taxes and other charges collected at Omoa and Truxillo, the only two ports in Central America located on the Atlantic Coast, started accruing to the state government of Honduras.³² The UPCA's dire financial situation at the time made this situation untenable, hence, the federal government was forced to attempt to recapture Omoa.³³ Consequently, the federal government, with the strong urging of the Guatemalan state authorities, dispatched one Colonel Juan Galindo to Belize to approach the authorities there about requesting the financial support of the Belize merchants in the form of a loan for arming a vessel for the purpose of attempting to

²⁸ Pedro Molina to H.E. the Superintendent of the Settlement of Belize, F.O. 15/12, 164.

²⁹ Extract of a Dispatch ..., F.O. 15/12, 128.

³⁰ Juan Barrundia to Colonel Cockburn, British Consulate, Guatemala, 31 January 1832, F.O. 15/12, 166.

³¹ William Hall to John Bidwell, Superintendent of H.M. Consular Services, 30 April 1833, No. 5, F.O. 15/13, 13.

³² Colonel Cockburn, Superintendent at Honduras to Lord Goderich, extract of a despatch with copies of its enclosures, 14 February 1832, F.O. 15/12, 126.

³³ William Hall to John Bidwell, No. 5, 30 April 1833, F.O. 15/13, 17.

retake the port at Omoa.³⁴ The governments of both the UPCA and the state of Guatemala felt that, given the extent and way in which the British settlement was benefitting from the resources and trade of the Republic, the Belize merchants should have extended the assistance requested of them.³⁵

Born in Ireland 1802, Galindo emigrated in 1818 after joining Lord Cochrane's liberationist movement,³⁶ and "[fought] in the South American wars of independence and later in the civil wars in Central America [as well]."³⁷ Galindo served under the command of Gregor McGregor in military action in New Granada in 1819. This connection likely placed Galindo in contact with members of "Bolívar's political family" if not with Bolívar himself, and the nature of Galindo's involvement in Central America suggests that, like others, this was shaped by his 'involvement' with or alongside Bolívar in the 1820s.³⁸ For instance, Galindo's experiences in Central America seems to parallel several aspects of José Antonio Páez's experiences in Venezuela: they both fought in South American wars of independence 'alongside' Bolívar; both "grappled with ... constructing post-colonial nations" in Spanish America; both were involved with infrastructure or road building projects as well as immigration schemes; and both "resisted growing British territorial incursions."³⁹ As such, Galindo's encounters in Central America could similarly be understood in terms of an anti-imperialist outlook and, as Brown argues in relation to Páez, "within a Bolivarian paradigm."⁴⁰

³⁴ William Hall to Francis Cockburn, 31 January 1832, F.O. 253/2; O'Reilly to John Bidwell, 25 September 1827, F.O. 15/6, 193.

³⁵ William Hall to John Bidwell, enclosure No. 10, 11 June 1832, F.O. 15/12, 51.

³⁶ Ian Graham, "Juan Galindo, Enthusiast," *Inicio*, 3, (1963): 11, 16. Graham does not make it clear whether Galindo was involved in any military action in South America alongside Lord Cochrane.

³⁷ "John (Juan) Galindo," available at URL: <http://www.englishgalindos.co.uk/Juan%20Galindo.html>

³⁸ Brown argues that Simón Bolívar's influence on events in Spanish America is borne out in the actions of those who "accompanied [him] through the 1820s then struck out on their own ... after his death." Brown, "The 1820s in Perspective...", 257, 258.

³⁹ *Ibid*, 260, 261.

⁴⁰ Brown, "The 1820s in Perspective...", 256, 259.

Galindo arrived in Guatemala in 1827 and took up residence with John O'Reilly, the British Consul there at the time.⁴¹ How Galindo ended up staying with O'Reilly is not clear, but in doing so, and in courting British officials and the oligarchy in Belize, Galindo exhibited similarities to Simón Bolívar in the latter's relationships with British authorities in South America. Indeed, through his connection to O'Reilly, Galindo habitually consorted with the oligarchy and political figures in the British settlement at Belize, including with the then Superintendent Francis Cockburn.⁴² During his stay as O'Reilly's house guest, Galindo was privy to many discussions about the commercial activities and the politics of the Belize settlement. Whether this was from discussions with O'Reilly directly or from what Galindo overheard is not clear, but it is evident that Galindo had important insights into the activities of the British woodcutters, including knowledge about what areas of Belize and other parts of Central America the woodcutters were interested in logging. At the very least, Galindo knew that the woodcutters were already long operating beyond the limits of the Anglo-Spanish treaties, and, having an interest in the mahogany trade himself,⁴³ later used this knowledge to try and advance his own personal commercial and economic interests.⁴⁴ Galindo's travels across Central America as a "zealous corresponding member" of the Royal Geographical Society of London, undoubtedly lent to his knowledge of the activity and geography of the region.⁴⁵

⁴¹ William J. Griffith, "Juan Galindo, Central American Chauvinist," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 40, no. 1 (1960), 25.

⁴² Graham, "Juan Galindo, Enthusiast," 16.

⁴³ Juan Galindo to Lieutenant Colonel Francis Cockburn, Superintendent of Belize, October 17, 1834, C.O. 123/45. Galindo was fully cognizant of the value of the mahogany stands and this very likely factored into his application for the land grant from the government of Guatemala.

⁴⁴ Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism...*, 109.

⁴⁵ For an example of one of Galindo's contributions see Don Juan Galindo, "On Central America," *The Journal of the Royal Geographical Society of London* 6 (1836): 119–35. The observation about Galindo being zealous was made by the editor to the article cited above.

After settling in Central America, Galindo served in the army there and developed a reputation for the comportment of his military engagements in the Republic. In 1829, Galindo participated in the attack on conservative forces in Guatemala City while serving under General Francisco Morazán.⁴⁶ Galindo's contributions to the success of the mission earned him a medal of recognition from the Federation on high commendations from then Minister of State for Guatemala, Marcial Zebadúa.⁴⁷ Thereafter, Galindo became a naturalized citizen of Guatemala and continued to serve in various public roles, including with the garrison in Omoa, and as commandant of the port of Truxillo. Galindo rose swiftly through the army ranks attaining, in 1830, the position of *Comandante General* (Commandant) of the federal armies of Central America, after which he was known by his rank of Colonel Galindo.⁴⁸

Galindo's role within the military and public service in Central America undoubtedly placed him in a position of significant influence among Guatemala's political and business elites and may have given him crucial insights into the political and economic workings of the Republic. Moreover, during his tenure as commandant of the Department of Petén in Guatemala, Galindo habitually visited the British settlement at Belize and through these visits strengthened his relationships with Superintendent Cockburn and his wife, both of whom he had met while he was a guest of John O'Reilly.⁴⁹ The Guatemalan authorities were aware of Galindo's long-standing association with Belize, and as his old consort Francis Cockburn was still the Superintendent of the British settlement, Galindo was believed to be the best person to request funding from the Belize residents for retaking Omoa. To enhance Galindo's chances of success with securing the necessary support, he was empowered to offer, as a carrot, "certain

⁴⁶ Griffith, "Juan Galindo, Central American Chauvinist," 26.

⁴⁷ Graham, "Juan Galindo, Enthusiast," 19.

⁴⁸ Griffith, "Juan Galindo ...," 26.

⁴⁹ Galindo to Superintendent Francis Cockburn, 17 January 1833, C.O. 123/44.

alterations in the tariff laws of [the Republic] in favor of the Belize trade, as might induce the merchants there to advance the money."⁵⁰ Specifically, Galindo was authorized to "abolish the 5 per cent tax on imports from Belize" which the Guatemalan authorities had implemented a couple years earlier.

The Belize merchants, however, were reluctant about becoming entangled in Central America's internal conflicts, and consequently refused to lend any assistance to Galindo and the Guatemalans. The merchants were also still smarting from having their power in the settlement usurped by Superintendent Cockburn. Unfortunately for Galindo, he visited the settlement to lobby the merchants for their support around the time when Superintendent Cockburn declared that the Public Meeting, the forum by which all the decisions concerning the settlement were taken, would no longer decide appointments of the magistrates.⁵¹ Given this turn of events, the merchants were in no mood to agree to Cockburn's appeal on behalf of his consort Galindo, and therefore after he was advised as such by the leading local merchants, Superintendent Cockburn had no other option but to refuse Galindo's request for support.⁵²

The Territorial Claim Escalates

The Belize merchants' refusal "to [lend] assistance to retake Omoa" ignited Guatemala's festering contempt for the territorial encroachments of Belize's woodcutters.⁵³ The public censure was immediate. Leading government officials from Guatemala as well as the Federation ratcheted up their pronouncements against Belize in the strongest terms, including fresh, tougher calls for acquiring the disputed territories occupied by the British in Belize (see

⁵⁰ William Hall to John Bidwell, British Consulate, Guatemala City, No. 10, 11 June 1832, F.O. 15/12, 51.

⁵¹ Proclamation of 18 December 1832, C.O. 123/44.

⁵² William Hall to Superintendent Francis Cockburn, 11 January 1832, F.O. 15/12.

⁵³ William Hall to John Bidwell, No. 10, British Consulate, Guatemala City, 11 June 1832, FO 15/12, 51.

map on page xii). On 11 June 1832, William Hall, the Belize merchant cum British Vice-Consul in Guatemala, reported that the Guatemalan Minister of War published a statement addressed to the national Congress "calling upon that body to deliberate upon the dangers the Republic [was] exposed to by the proximity of the settlement of Belize," and averring that Belize was

a manifest usurpation of the territory of this Republic and occupies a frontier of much importance ... that its contiguity to the principal ports on the north [i.e., the Atlantic] has a very prejudicial influence on them ... that the population [of the settlement] having increased excessively, every day makes fresh advances on the territory of that coast ... that the merchants of Belize have [usurped] the property belonging to individuals of this country.⁵⁴

This attack signaled Guatemala's shifting position on the Belize issue, and its manifest opposition to British existence in the region. The Guatemalan War Minister's address also revealed that Guatemala's lack of an adequate maritime port on the Atlantic was a growing concern for the political elites and merchants in that country. Thus, faced with the danger of not recovering the port at Omoa, on 26 March 1832, "the Vice-President of Guatemala ... issued a decree prohibiting all trade through the ports of Omoa and Truxillo whilst these [were] in the possession of enemies of the present government."⁵⁵ This move was intended not only to halt the trade of the Republic from passing through those ports, but given that a significant share of the goods shipped from Belize to Guatemala passed through either Omoa and Truxillo, it was hoped this would help free the commerce of Central America from the control of the Belize merchants.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ William Hall to John Bidwell, Enclosure No. 11, 10 February 1852, F.O. 15/12, 53.

⁵⁵ William Hall to John Bidwell, British Consulate, Guatemala City, No. 4, 26 March 1832, F.O. 15/12, 25.

⁵⁶ William Hall to John Bidwell, No. 4, 26 March 1832, F.O. 15/12, 25; No. 7, 15 June 1833, F.O. 15/13, 17-18; Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness...*, 8.

Further to the public remonstrations against British possession of Belize, the Guatemalan authorities also implemented punitive trade measures aimed at injuring the importation of British manufactures through Belize. Firstly, the authorities, that same month, renewed the additional duties of 5% on all goods from or trans-shipped through Belize, and, at the same time, adopted new favorable duties for goods shipped through the Pacific ports (in particular the maritime port of Yztapa).⁵⁷ Then, on 23 June 1832 William Hall, then Consul to Guatemala, reported that he was informed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Guatemala of their “intention to reform the Tariff Laws and appoint a commission for the purpose of making certain alterations ... on many [imports],” and that in his assessment “this excessive evaluation falls heavily on British manufactures.”⁵⁸ The proposed alterations were for the additional duties to be “increased to 20% on all objects of commerce which on their importation may have touched Belize, until the settlement retires within the limits laid down by the treaties of 1783 and 1786.”⁵⁹ Needless to say, the new tariffs “tended to operate against British trade.”⁶⁰ Secondly, “the Guatemalan Congress passed a new law obliging all foreigners, without excepting those who [had] been naturalized ... to consign their merchandise to individuals of this country, or in case of not doing so, to pay a percentage thereon to the government.”⁶¹ This measure was clearly aimed at forcing the trade into the hands of Guatemalan merchants but

⁵⁷ William Hall to John Bidwell, No. 10, 11 June 1832, F.O. 15/12, 51; Hall to Bidwell, No. 9, 1 July 1833, F.O. 15/13, 21. Rodriguez argues that these duties were retaliatory to those imposed previously by the Belize merchants. Mario Rodriguez, *A Palmerstonian Diplomat in Central America: Frederick Chatfield, Esquire*, (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 1964), 63.

⁵⁸ No. 13, 23 June 1832, F.O. 15/12, 57.

⁵⁹ Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 14, San Salvador, 6 May 1836, F.O. 15/18, 81-83; also, Chatfield to Don Miguel Alvarez, Minister of State for Foreign Affairs in Central America, San Salvador, 22 April 1826, F.O. 15/18, 85. The communication to Palmerston concerned a motion to be tabled by the Guatemalan National Congress to restrict the intercourse between Belize and Central America.

⁶⁰ Charles Dashwood to John Bidwell, Esq., British Consulate, Guatemala, No. 2, August 3, 1831, F.O. 15/11, 58.

⁶¹ No. 18, 18 September 1832, F.O. 15/12, 72.

ultimately it mainly affected British merchant houses established in Guatemala that did not have local partners.

In addition, the government of the UPCA initiated negotiations with France for recognizing Central American independence. During the 1830s, a faction existed in the state government of Guatemala that favored commercial connections with the French over the British, and they had succeeded in getting the Guatemalan Congress to sanction negotiating a commercial treaty between Guatemala and France.⁶² Hence, Prosper Herrera, the Guatemalan Envoy to Paris, was instructed to open negotiations with the French authorities and to offer, as a carrot, the opportunity for “executing a project for uniting the two oceans by the Lake of Nicaragua and the River San Juan.”⁶³ On 10th December 1832, Herrera “announced that ... he [had] signed a treaty of amity and commerce between Central America and France.”⁶⁴ French trade with Central America was not significant during this period, though “a few articles of French manufactures occasionally arrived at Omoa from Havana.”⁶⁵ The French however, were interested in improving their trade with Central America, and had expressed a strong interest in establishing Roatan as a base from which to do so.⁶⁶

In September 1832, President Morazán’s forces recaptured the port at Omoa. Despite this feat, the Guatemalan assembly, fearing that the state’s weaknesses could be exposed again, on 29 May the following year, requested that the government of the Federation resuscitate the port at Santo Tomás and that this be established as the country’s major port on the Atlantic.⁶⁷ The Assembly also resolved that the government of the state of Guatemala investigate the

⁶² Rodriguez, *A Palmerstonian Diplomat...*, 64.

⁶³ Backhouse to Chatfield, 5 July 1833, F.O. 15/13, 63.

⁶⁴ No. 27, 10 December 1832, F.O. 15/12, 103.

⁶⁵ Memorandum, British Honduras, 27 January 1830, F.O. 15/10, 8.

⁶⁶ Francis Cockburn to Viscount Goderich, 17 February 1831, F.O. 15/11, 131-132.

⁶⁷ Orden legislative, N° 45, 29 de Mayo, 1833, *Archivo Nacional de Guatemala*, Congreso, Número 38

possibility of a practicable route between Santo Tomás and Gualan, and from the latter to the capital at Guatemala City via upgrading of the existing very dilapidated cart-road.⁶⁸ To facilitate upgrading of the Santo Tomás–Guatemala City trade route, slaves working in the mahogany camps in Belize were enticed to escape to Guatemala while Caribs from Roatan and surrounding areas were encouraged to return to their village of Livingston near the port of Izabal, ostensibly as a source of labour,⁶⁹ and to permit the Guatemalan authorities to claim that they effectively occupied the area.

Great Britain's Riposte to the Deepening of the Guatemalan Claim

Great Britain's response to Guatemala's intensification of its territorial claim to Belize was not the product of any prearranged design between the Belize merchants and the Colonial and Foreign Offices. Nonetheless, it reflected an intention by both groups for preserving Belize's position as the base of British influence in Central America and marked Great Britain's resolve to continue possessing Belize. The way in which the Belize merchants and the colonial officials responded to the situation differed. On one hand, the British merchants at Belize, concerned about losing their trade with Central America to French interests, advocated the advantages of securing possession of Roatan to Great Britain. As one Belize merchant stated, "Roatan [sic] is the most convenient and prominent point worth possessing as a port unconnected with the mainland...it commands all the commerce of those seas which is very considerable with [British] Honduras."⁷⁰ Henry Cooke, the agent for British Honduras seemed to agree, and pointed out to Earl Grey, then Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, that

⁶⁸ ANG, leg. 183, exp. 3989, folios 15 -35

⁶⁹ Mariano Gálvez to the Minister of War, June 30, 1832, ANG, leg. 182, exp. 3979, fol. 5. Caribs in Belize are known as Garifuna.

⁷⁰ Enclosure of Letter from G. Westby, 6 May 1831, F.O. 15/11, 136.

the proximity of that island to the British settlement at Honduras ... together with its excellent harbor ... [rendered] it most peculiarly important to its trade ... in peace the facility would give decided advantage in introducing manufactured goods to the main, and in receiving its productions of mahogany, dyewoods, tobacco, cochineal and other valuable articles to the exclusion of the trade of Central America with the British settlement of Honduras...and in the case of hostilities, with any power possessing that island, the annihilation of British interests must ensue by the facilities with which the capture of vessels going to Belize could be affected.⁷¹

British colonial officials similarly concerned about maintaining the advantages of British commerce from Belize, fretted more about the situation in Guatemala and about the overtures of the government of Guatemala towards France. Forestalling the expansion of other European powers in the region was an objective of the Foreign Office. Hence, Charles Dashwood, O'Reilly's replacement as Consul to Central America, was tasked with ensuring that the 'interests' of the British merchants in Belize and Guatemala were protected. On taking up his post in Guatemala City, Dashwood reported to the Foreign Office that "the situation at [Belize remains] very advantageous for carrying on a trade with Guatemala ... although circumstances may occur and cause great changes to this trade,"⁷² and therefore he recommended that Great Britain act to avert Roatan from falling "into the hands of a considerable maritime power [as this would] become a consequence to our settlement at Belize, being a direct line of our trade to that point."⁷³

Superintendent Cockburn also had "special instructions ... to resist any encroachments upon lands claimed by the British subjects at Belize,"⁷⁴ although this authorization clearly did

⁷¹ Henry Cooke, agent for Honduras, to Lord Howick, 13 August 1831, F.O. 15/11, 156-157. Earl Grey was known as Viscount Howick between 1806 and 1807.

⁷² Charles Dashwood to John Backhouse, Esq., No. 1, British Consulate, Guatemala, 28 January 1830, F.O. 15/10, 4.

⁷³ Charles Dashwood to John Backhouse, Esq., No. 15, British Consulate, Guatemala, 3 November 1830, F.O. 15/10, 209.

⁷⁴ To Palmerston, No. 1, 25 June 1834, F.O. 15/14; From Cockburn, 13 September 1834, F.O. 252/8.

not extend to Roatan. In general, Cockburn refrained from reacting to the entreaties of the Belize merchants over securing the island to Great Britain. When however, the Commander of a small Honduran force stationed at Roatan claimed that the island was the territory of that state, Superintendent Cockburn, aware that France had obtained permission to settle the island in return for having recently recognized Guatemala,⁷⁵ took matters into his own hands, sailed to Roatan and forcibly removed the Commandant of the military force stationed there.⁷⁶ Although Cockburn did not have prior authorization for this, the Foreign Office mindful that France's objective was "to possess the island [as this] would be injurious to every British interest,"⁷⁷ afterwards quietly sanctioned his actions.⁷⁸

Meanwhile, the Belize merchant William Hall, left by Dashwood to hold over the consular functions when ill health forced Dashwood to return to England in the middle of 1831, used this opportunity to further his and a few other Belize merchants' mercantile interests, and took up the matter of the increased duties with the Guatemalan authorities. Hall was aware that the Belize merchants had written to the agent for Belize in London at the time, Henry Cooke, expressing their grave concerns and anxieties that the new tariffs adopted by Guatemala "will not only operate to the prejudice of the settlement but will [also] affect the manufactures of [Great Britain]."⁷⁹ Hall was not moved to action by this request per se, but he was particularly concerned over the actions of the Guatemalan Congress' agitations against foreign merchants. Thus, Hall was, on his own cognizance, compelled to protest that the tariff hikes and additional duties levied against goods "from any foreign settlements whatsoever on the Northern Coast

⁷⁵ Concerning Roatan [sic], F.O. 15/17, 37.

⁷⁶ (Translation) Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Supreme Federal Government, 3 July 1830, F.O. 15/10, 213; Charles Dashwood to John Backhouse, Esq., No. 15, British Consulate, Guatemala, 3 November 1830, F.O. 15/10, 209.

⁷⁷ Enclosure of letter from G. Westby, 6 May 1831, F.O. 15/11, 136-137.

⁷⁸ (Translation), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Supreme Federal Government, 3 July 1830, F.O. 15/10, 213; Waddell, "Great Britain and the Bay Islands..." 61.

⁷⁹ Memorial from Merchants to Henry Cooke, Esq. 6 October 1831, F.O. 15/11, 165.

(i.e., Belize)” were “highly prejudicial to the British trade in this Republic, a measure that my government cannot view with indifference.”⁸⁰

Chatfield also weighed in on the matter of increased duties and “wrote to the Minister of State [for Guatemala] at the conclusion of the Congress to insist that unless the prohibitory duties against Belize was rescinded... countervailing duties would be imposed upon the produce of the state of Guatemala introduced into Belize.”⁸¹ Chatfield then urged Superintendent Cockburn to implement the countervailing duties, and further warned the Central American authorities that “in the event certain prohibitory duties [are] passed on exclusively to British merchandise...it is impossible to state the nature of the measures the British government may ultimately adopt...but that a blockade of Central American ports was likely.”⁸² Foreign Secretary Palmerston subsequently advised Chatfield that he should “do no more than take a strong remonstrance against any attempt by Central America at impeding the trade of the British settlement at Honduras.”⁸³ Palmerston and Chatfield both realized however, that the absence of a treaty of commerce between Great Britain and Central America was an impediment to continued British influence in the isthmus. This deficiency took on new importance in 1836 with the prospect of Spanish recognition of Latin American independence.⁸⁴

The prospect of French recognition of the UPCA forced Great Britain to revive its own negotiations for a treaty of commerce with the government of the Federation.⁸⁵ This development presented Great Britain with the opportunity to try and settle the issue of the

⁸⁰ William Hall to C. Pedro Valenzuela, British Consul, Guatemala, 12 October 1831, F.O. 15/11, 77.

⁸¹ Chatfield to the Duke of Wellington, 1 June 1835, F.O. 15/16, 100-101.

⁸² Senior Naval Office at Belize to Chatfield, 19 February 1835, F.O. 15/16, 66-67.

⁸³ Palmerston to Consul Chatfield, No. 11, 31 August 1836, F.O. 15/18, 28.

⁸⁴ Chatfield to John Backhouse, Esq., Private, San Salvador, 17 March 1837, F.O. 15/19, 57.

⁸⁵ Foreign Office, re: Copy of letter from Board of Trade regarding boundary, 19 February 1834, F.O. 15/15, 38.

boundary line at Belize raised earlier by Guatemala,⁸⁶ and which the Guatemalan authorities now argued was a condition sine qua non.⁸⁷ Chatfield however suggested to Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston that the matter of the boundaries of Belize be one for discussion only with Spain.⁸⁸ Initially, Palmerston was “prepared to instruct [Chatfield] to propose ... a declaratory article [establishing the Sarstoon as the boundary] ... if the Guatemalan government was so willing”, but the Board of Trade cautioned against “[discussing] with the government of Guatemala as to the rights of Great Britain within Belize.”⁸⁹ Eventually Palmerston agreed that “given the circumstances it would not be expedient to enter into any negotiations with Guatemala” and thus, he instructed the British Minister to Spain, George Villiers, to request that Spain’s Foreign Office grant Great Britain sovereignty over Belize,⁹⁰ according to the boundaries agreed by Superintendent Cockburn and the Belize magistrates the year before (i.e. between the Hondo and the Sarstoon Rivers).⁹¹ The Spanish Foreign Minister Martinez de la Rosa however, never responded officially and hence the concession sought by Great Britain was never granted by Spain.⁹²

Consequently, and with Spanish recognition of Central American independence likely, Villiers was forced to secure an undertaking from Juan Mendizabal, de la Rosa’s successor, to omit the Belize-Mexico boundary from any Spanish-Central American treaty.⁹³ This was crucial, as Marcel Zebadúa, now the Central American Foreign Minister, had insisted in his

⁸⁶ Charles Dashwood to John Backhouse, Esq., 1 May 1830, F.O. 15/10, 76.

⁸⁷ Chatfield to Backhouse, 16 March 1835, F.O. 15/16, 54.

⁸⁸ Foreign Office to the Colonial Office, 19 February 1834, F.O. 15/15; To Palmerston, 3 February 1834, F.O. 15/14; Rodriguez, *A Palmerstonian Diplomat ...*, 34.

⁸⁹ Foreign Office, 19 February 1834, F.O. 15/15, 38-40.

⁹⁰ Colonial Office, 20 January 1835, F.O. 15/17, 9; Wellington to Villiers, Draft, No. 19, 12 March 1835, F.O. 72/439, 19.

⁹¹ George Villiers to Martinez de la Rosa, 5 April 1835, F.O. 72/441.

⁹² R. A. Humphreys claims that de la Rosa was receptive to the idea. See Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History ...*, 37.

⁹³ Villiers to Palmerston, 27 February 1836, F.O. 72/457.

negotiations with Chatfield that the commercial treaty contain a clause similar to that of Article 14 of the Anglo-Mexico treaty of 1826; that the boundaries be delineated according to the Anglo-Spanish treaties of 1783 and 1786;⁹⁴ and that Great Britain relinquish its claims to the Bay Islands and the Mosquito Shore.⁹⁵ Zebadúa's ploy was calculated to force Great Britain's acquiescence to, and recognition of, the above mentioned treaties as the basis of British 'rights' in Belize. Chatfield rejected these proposals and responded that the only boundaries Great Britain was prepared to agree for Belize were those as occupied by British woodcutters in 1821.⁹⁶ He counter-proposed therefore that the treaty "fix the Sarstoon as the southernmost boundary;" and that Guatemala "relinquish all claims to such rights of sovereignty (if any) over [Belize] as might be supposed to have accrued to it derivatively from Old Spain."⁹⁷ Hence, facing an impasse, the government of the Federation of Central America in 1834 suspended its negotiations with Chatfield and dispatched Juan Galindo to England to pick up the negotiations there over the matter.⁹⁸ However, Galindo's mission to London was unsuccessful because, as discussed in more detail hereafter, he had started promoting projects that sought to undermine British standing in the region and attempted to force Great Britain to recognize title to land in Belize granted to him by the Guatemalan government. This directly threatened Great Britain's possessory rights in Belize and hence by extension, also British interests in Central America.⁹⁹

⁹⁴ Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History ...*, 36.

⁹⁵ Chatfield to Palmerston, Guatemala, 5 July 1834, F.O. 15/14, 99; Rodriguez, *A Palmerstonian Diplomat ...*, 69; Naylor, "British Commercial Relations ...," 42.

⁹⁶ Chatfield to Palmerston, 16 August 1834, F.O. 15/14.

⁹⁷ F.O. 15/17, 48.

⁹⁸ Chatfield to Palmerston, 13 November 1834, F.O. 15/14.

⁹⁹ William J. Griffith, "Juan Galindo, Central American Chauvinist," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 40, No. 1 (1960), 27-28.

Colonization Schemes, Land Grants, and Infrastructure Works

In 1834, Dr. Mariano Gálvez, Chief-of-state of Guatemala, introduced a colonization and land grants program in Guatemala as part of his liberal economic reforms aimed at consolidating the economic independence for that state.¹⁰⁰ In this section, I show that a ‘secondary’ objective was countering British expansion in Belize and Central America, and that realizing this was pivotal to consolidating Guatemala’s independence. I also reveal that Chief-of-State Gálvez attempted to use the territorial activities of British merchants and companies (i.e., exploiting the mahogany stands in Guatemala) to reverse the encroachments of Great Britain beyond the limits of the 1783 and 1786 treaties. However, this undermined Gálvez’s attempt to wrest both the disputed territory in Belize and the commerce of Central America from British control and ultimately compromised promoting ‘Guatemala’s’ dominance in Central America and its integration in the world.¹⁰¹ I will show that the reason this failed was twofold: one, the land grants encroached on Great Britain’s possessory rights in Belize and thwarted fixing the boundaries of the settlement; and two, the requirements for infrastructure works Gálvez folded into the colonization and concession schemes (i.e., establishing a port at Santo Tomás to rival Belize and building a cart-road between a port on the Atlantic and the capital) provided openings for other European powers to challenge Great Britain’s position in the isthmus. This led Great Britain to subvert the scheme from without, and the local peasant population to do so from within.

¹⁰⁰ Williford, “The Reform Program of Dr. Mariano Gálvez...,” 14.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid*, 93. Williford contends that “almost from the beginning of independence, the government [of Guatemala] had been convinced that the limited [state of] economic development was caused by the commercial monopoly of [Belize].”

Gálvez's Economic Reforms: Their Character and Conservative Influences

Three years after his election to the office of Chief-of-state of Guatemala in August 1831, Dr. José Felipe Mariano Gálvez, a Guatemalan liberal and former Minister of Finance of the federal government,¹⁰² finally set about implementing the economic reforms he hoped would “draw [Guatemala] closer to the Atlantic.”¹⁰³ Since Central America’s break from Mexico, “the liberal dominated National Constituent Assembly [were of the view that the Republic’s] economic growth required removal of the artificial shackles” which constrained it.¹⁰⁴ This referred partly to the vestiges of the Spanish colonial restrictions that had forced the trade of Central America to operate under the control of and through the merchant guilds in Peninsular Spain. More importantly, and the more pressing, they implied the more recent control of the commerce of Guatemala exercised by the merchants in Belize. The problem for the UPCA was twofold: British merchants in Belize (and not Guatemalans) now controlled the commerce of the Republic as well as the shipping and the only viable port on the Atlantic coast. In other words, the economy was still under external control. Owing to neglect during the Spanish colonial period, the UPCA lacked adequate port and road infrastructure in the independence period that could enable it to wrest this control away from the British merchants and Belize.

For Gálvez, redressing the latter was the key to remedying the former, and hence his reforms essentially focused on projects aimed at providing a direct outlet for Guatemala to the Atlantic for the state’s commerce and exports.¹⁰⁵ In an address to the national Congress of Guatemala in 1830, Gálvez declared that

¹⁰² Williford, "The Reform Program ...," 1.

¹⁰³ Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness ...*, 9.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid*, 4.

¹⁰⁵ Orden legislative, N° 45, 29 May 1833, ANG

We are separated from commercial contact with the European markets; [and] ... Belize is today the warehouse for Central America from which all our merchants and the contraband traders supply themselves. This circumstance forces our commerce to accept prices set by four suppliers who consistently undervalue our products. This situation requires preferential consideration, as does the state of our coasts, ports, and frontiers, our roads, and our internal navigations... the advances made ... by the woodcutters [of Belize] resound in the Petén and at the mouth of the River of Izabal ... and should be opposed.¹⁰⁶

Gálvez's proclamation was consistent with the demands of the Guatemalan Assembly "to restrict [British occupation in Belize] to the limits laid down by the treaty of 1786" after the Belize merchants had refused to assist with retaking Omoa.¹⁰⁷ This remained part of Gálvez's overarching objectives when he became Chief-of-state of Guatemala. For Gálvez then, reducing British power in the state of Guatemala and breaking the Guatemalan merchants' dependence on the trade from Belize were the priorities.¹⁰⁸ As Gálvez argued, Guatemala needed to "free up the commerce of Central America from its tributary status to the British merchants' resident in the port at Belize."¹⁰⁹ Gálvez believed that the entire situation was reversible, if not also avoidable, as Guatemala was "not without navigable rivers...a lake that communicates to the Atlantic, covered with precious woods, [and] where mines are not lacking..."¹¹⁰

Chief-of-state Gálvez elected to pursue a political solution to, as he saw it, the problem posed by Belize for Guatemala's economic underdevelopment in the independence period. Thus, he appointed a special committee "tasked with [presenting] to the government all the

¹⁰⁶ *Exposición que al comenzar la actual Legislatura ordinaria, hizo al Congreso federal de esta República el Secretario de Estado y del Despacho de Hacienda ... en los días 20 y 23 Abril y 4 de mayo ... de 1830*, (Guatemala, 1830), 7.

¹⁰⁷ Francis Cockburn to Viscount Goderich, No. 52, 26 January 1833, Government House, British Honduras, F.O. 15/13, 116.

¹⁰⁸ David Felix, "Review of Empires in the Wilderness: Foreign Colonization and Development in Guatemala, 1834-1844, by William J. Griffith," *The Economic History Review* 19, no. 2 (1966), 458.

¹⁰⁹ Williford, *passim*, 8.

¹¹⁰ *Anales de la Sociedad de Geográfica e Historia de Guatemala*, año II, (September 1925), 13-14

reports...and projects...directed to remove the...obstacles that may hinder the progress...of the [Guatemalan] state.”¹¹¹ Gálvez also concentrated on colonizing the underdeveloped parts of Guatemala, and, on improving its communications infrastructure. He maintained some, though insufficient, attention towards diversifying and expanding the Guatemalan economy; improving living standards; and establishing the economic independence of the state of Guatemala.¹¹²

Prior to Gálvez’s election as Chief-of-state, Francisco Morazán, then President of the UPCA, had started to fear Gálvez’ growing influence. Hence, Morazán “attempted to remove him from office by offering [Gálvez] a diplomatic posting to [Holland or France],” ostensibly to help Central America promote the idea of an inter-oceanic canal through the isthmus. Gálvez however, (rightly) believed that this would prevent him from having a presence and a say in the affairs of the new Republic and therefore, he ‘declined’ the offer.¹¹³ To Morazán and other leading liberals, Gálvez’s close association with conservative influences in Guatemala City, particularly with the *Casa de Aycinena*, was disconcerting. Gálvez was especially close to José de Aycinena, son of the Marqués de Aycinena, first *prior* of the Guatemalan *Consulado*, and a leading conservative and *Consulado* member. José de Aycinena had also been a close friend of Gálvez’s adoptive parents and became Gálvez’s legal guardian, as well as the executor to his mother’s estate, after she died. José de Aycinena was also instrumental in Gálvez attending the conservatively oriented University of San Carlos, from where he graduated with a law degree in 1819.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Ibid, 98; Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness...*, 4.

¹¹² Williford, "The Reform Program ...," 1. Enlightening the citizenry and expanding education were other components of Gálvez’ reforms in Guatemala.

¹¹³ Ibid, 17-18.

¹¹⁴ Williford, "The Reform Program ...," 9. Williford states that Gálvez was orphaned at birth and left at the doorstep of the family that raised him. She also claims that José de Aycinena had to use his influence and

Morazán was also unsettled by the complexion of Gálvez's economic reforms during the 1830s. This was a period when the Guatemalan *Consulado* was officially suppressed, yet many facets of Gálvez's economic reforms exhibited uncanny parallels with the economic development priorities of the conservative elites of Guatemala and championed projects almost identical to those of the merchant guild prior to its disbanding in 1829. For instance, Gálvez's priority for developing the port of Izabal involving colonization schemes was patently similar to the *Consulado*'s project in 1804.¹¹⁵ Both aimed at "establishing a deep-water port [...] on the Caribbean coast to carry on trade with Europe," and at improving the roads or communication between the Bay of Honduras and the capital city of Guatemala.¹¹⁶ To his credit, Gálvez recognized that the failures of earlier colonization schemes at Izabal were due not only to critical deficiencies—such as the low population and the lack of infrastructure at the port there—but also to the legal strictures which constrained foreign investments in such projects. At the same time, he also realized that the only way for Guatemala to effectively challenge Belize's control over the commerce of Central America, indeed for Guatemala "to continue to exert significant influence over the development of the [Central American] economy," was to enhance the operational ability of a port on the Atlantic – preferably at Izabal, but alternatively at Santo Tomás.¹¹⁷ Hence, through his colonization schemes and land grants, Gálvez sought to populate the area around the port at Lake Izabal and to secure the foreign capital and expertise needed to effectively undertake the required infrastructure works.

connections to circumvent the admission requirements which prohibited orphans from entering university to get Gálvez into college.

¹¹⁵ Frederick Chatfield to Lord Palmerston, enclosure 1, No. 22, 13 November 1834, F.O. 15/14; Acuerdo Ejecutivo, 21 November 1832, AGCA, leg. 177, exp. 3788, folio 3.

¹¹⁶ Woodward, *Class Privilege ...*, 60–61.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid*, 35, 40, 69.

Colonization Schemes (as a Counterpoise to British Expansion)

The colonization schemes that Gálvez implemented in 1834 as part of his economic reforms for the state of Guatemala were based on plans which he drew up the previous decade, and which the government of the UPCA had approved for the constituent states for attracting European migrants to settle in Central America. The original program was more simplistic and aimed only at stimulating the capacity for agricultural productivity in under-populated regions of the country. The colonization program Gálvez now put forward for the state of Guatemala was considerably more complex and had very different objectives.¹¹⁸ Thus, to strengthen this, and his hand, Gálvez implemented several strategic legislative changes. First, Gálvez actuated the 1826 decree of the Federation permitting colonization projects by the respective states, and then he made ‘colonization’ the cornerstone of his government’s policy. In an address to the Guatemalan Legislative Assembly in October 1831, after he took office as Guatemala’s Chief-of-state, Gálvez stated that “colonization [is] the first interest of the State.”¹¹⁹ Next, Gálvez persuaded the Assembly to adopt a decree permitting him “to undertake public projects using private investments,”¹²⁰ and then he used this to expand legal provisions adopted by the Legislative Assembly earlier that same year to allow for any infrastructure works involving improvements of mule tracks or cart-roads to be financed and undertaken by foreign nationals.¹²¹ These changes not only armed Gálvez with the legal authority to raise the capital needed to undertake the port and road improvements he prioritized, but crucially, also gave him the latitude to try and secure the financing he needed from British sources. In short, the changes ensured that the projects ‘desired by the government of the state of Guatemala’ were

¹¹⁸ Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness...*, 8.

¹¹⁹ A los Diputados Secretarios de la Asamblea Legislativa, 24 October 1831, AGCA, leg. 1395, exp. 32331; Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness...*, 8.

¹²⁰ Decreto Número 15, 21 de Abril 1834, AGCA, leg. 361, exp. 6374, nf.; Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness...*, 17

¹²¹ *Ibid*, 1.

those selected by Gálvez to “free up the commerce of Central America from its tributary status.”

At first Gálvez attempted to have the desired colonization schemes undertaken locally (i.e. by leading *Consulado* members).¹²² Gálvez had interests in a firm that was trying to establish a direct trade between Guatemala and Europe but it is not certain what role this played.¹²³ In any event, Gálvez persuaded the State Assembly to approve the formation of a joint stock company called the “Company for Colonization, Industry, Commerce and Agriculture of Verapaz, Livingston and Santo Tomás.”¹²⁴ When the funding necessary to undertake the anticipated colonization programs was not forthcoming from local sources however, Gálvez turned to foreign (i.e., British) sources for this. Thus, to try and make the concessions more attractive to British financing Gálvez issued all the concessions to British companies or persons with good connections or a track record in Central America. For instance, one was to a British merchant previously established in Belize but now established in Guatemala (i.e., Marshall Bennett); another was to a business partnership involving a leading local merchant and a *Consulado* member (Meany and Bennett); and yet another was to a British company with linkages to prior operations in the region (the East Coast of Central America Agricultural and Commercial Company, an offshoot of McGregor’s “Poyais Company” of the 1820s.)¹²⁵ The other concession was to a British national with no known prior business investments but with excellent connections in Guatemala City as well as with the old oligarchy

¹²² *Boletín Oficial* (Guatemala), Número 34, Segundo parte (26 May 1833), 375.

¹²³ Chatfield to the Duke of Wellington, No. 7, 1 June 1835, F.O. 15/16, 99-100.

¹²⁴ William Hall to Bidwell, No. 5, 31 May 1834, F.O. 15/15, 15; AGCA, leg. 1395, exp. 32334; Griffith, *passim*, 15.

¹²⁵ *The Honduras Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, Vol. 1, No. 5, Belize, Saturday, 29 July 1826. Hereinafter East Coast Company.

and the Superintendent in Belize (i.e., Juan Galindo). To facilitate these new concessions, all previous (held mostly by local businessmen) were cancelled.¹²⁶

The colonization contracts were distributed between five different concessions. Three to the partnership of Marshall Bennett and Carlos Antonio Meany in the Chiquimula and Totonicapán departments of Guatemala and covering an area that included the mouth of the Rio Dulce, the Polochic River (which drains into Lake Izabal), as well as the Montagua River (which empties into the Bay of Honduras nearby the ports of Izabal, Livingston and Santo Tomás de Castillo).¹²⁷ Another contract was issued to the Eastern Coast Company,¹²⁸ the largest of the contracts, in the Petén and Verapaz areas and encompassing the southern part of Belize between the Sibun and Sarstoon Rivers and much of the northern coast of Lake Izabal and part of the coast of Golfo Dulce. And yet another to Juan Galindo in the Petén department of Guatemala overlapping all the territory occupied by the British in Belize between the Hondo and Belize Rivers (i.e., beyond the northern limits established by the 1783 and 1786 treaties).¹²⁹ Notably, the contract awarded to Galindo had a proviso attached to it whereby failure to deliver the colonization obligations would result in his concession being transferred to the East Coast Company.¹³⁰

The contracts for colonization issued by Chief-of-State Gálvez in 1834, together, covered almost all the unoccupied public lands of the state of Guatemala, especially in the

¹²⁶ Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness...*, 40.

¹²⁷ Chatfield to Viscount Palmerston, 12 September 1835, F.O. 15/16, 145; Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness...*, 40-41.

¹²⁸ "Charter of the Territory of Verapaz," in *Brief Statement, Supported by Original Documents, of the Important Grants Conceded to the Eastern Coast of Central America Commercial and Agricultural Company by the State of Guatemala*, (London: Manning and Mason, M.DCCC.XL), 23.

¹²⁹ Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 15, Enclosure 5, 17 September 1834, F.O. 15/14, 226-227.

¹³⁰ To Palmerston, No. 15, 17 September 1834, F.O. 15/14; Draft Executive Decree, 19th August 1834, AGCA, leg. 7555; Rodríguez, *A Palmerstonian Diplomat ...*, 77.

Verapaz and Chiquimula departments (i.e., those departments of Guatemala adjoining the boundaries of Belize) plus all the territory of Belize itself that the British woodcutters had encroached. The focus on unoccupied areas was deliberate, and it allowed Gálvez to open the timber resources in these areas to the concessionaires for their exploitation. Gálvez knew that the Belize woodcutters were already operating in the unoccupied areas of Petén and Verapaz,¹³¹ and therefore re-assigning ‘ownership’ of the mahogany stands in these areas provided him with one means of subverting their activities there.

The colonization requirements demanded by the Gálvez concessions represented, in a sense, a first cog in a complex strategy for countering British expansion in Belize and Central America. At its core, the strategy attempted to reverse the territorial encroachments of the British woodcutters in Belize beyond the limitations delineated in the 1783 and 1786 Anglo-Spanish treaties, and to confine the activities of the Belize woodcutters, by assigning the ‘rights’ to the disputed territory in Belize and adjacent areas to British nationals or companies.¹³² In this way, Gálvez hoped to consolidate Guatemala’s territory and by establishing agricultural and logging works in the territories of the concessions he also hoped to establish Guatemala’s ‘effective occupation’ over such territories. In other words, Gálvez audaciously attempted to use the very approach the British used to extend the territory they occupied in Belize to transfer control of that very same territory to Guatemala.

Specific requirements were set out in the respective colonization contracts, but in general, they required the concessionaires to deliver a specific number of settlers (usually 1000)

¹³¹ Colonial Office Memorandum, 20 January 1835, F.O. 15/17, 58-60. See also Robert A. Naylor, *The Mahogany Trade as a Factor in the British Return to the Mosquito Shore in the Second Quarter of the 19th Century* (Jamaica Historical Society, 1970), 42–43, 47.

¹³² Francis Cockburn to Viscount Goderich, No. 53, January 30, 1833, F.O. 15/13, 116; Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness ...*, 8.

within a graduated period (i.e., ten years but with specific targets at given points). For instance, the East Coast Company “agreed to [settle] one hundred families in Verapaz in two years, one hundred more within four years, and [the full] one thousand before the expiration of ten years.”¹³³ Only the East Coast Company and Bennett and Meany (for their two concessions south of Lake Izabal) were required to deliver colonists. Galindo’s contract did not have any requirement to settle colonists, and neither did the Bennett & Meany contract for the northern coast of Lake Izabal (i.e., that area between Lake Izabal and the southwestern boundaries of Belize).¹³⁴ The areas that his land grants covered were already occupied by the British woodcutters.

To help meet the colonization objectives, the Gálvez administration sought to resettle Carib families to designated areas around Lake Izabal and Santo Tomás.¹³⁵ It also attempted to lure the newly liberated slaves from the British settlement at Belize to join them.¹³⁶ At the time, Caribs as well as African slaves and their descendants were believed more resilient towards malaria, yellow fever, and other tropical diseases that debilitated Europeans. More than 150 of the passengers that sailed from Leith Scotland to take up residency in McGregor’s Kingdom of Poyais succumbed to the pestilence encountered after their arrival. Indeed, malaria and other diseases had long posed a threat to colonizing Central America. In 1697-98 the Scottish enterprise to the Strait of Darien in Panama to establish a trading colony on the route between the Atlantic and Pacific oceans was practically wiped out by tropical ‘fevers.’¹³⁷ In 1780 as

¹³³ Griffith, 43.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ AGCA, B10.8, leg., 3,483, exp. 79,641, folios 341-347; Woodward, 67.

¹³⁶ Major General Edward Codd to Earl Bathurst, Belize, June 2, 1825, F.O. 15/6; Extract of Letter from Honduras to Henry Cooke, Esq., 21 February 1826, F.O. 15/9, 31. Although not officially a British colony, the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833 freed slaves from Belize effective the following year.

¹³⁷ “The Darien Scheme,” May 2005 from the Spencer Collection, Glasgow University Library, Special Collections Department, <https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/library/files/special/exhibns/month/may2005.html>

well, the British expedition up the San Juan River in Nicaragua led by a young Captain Horatio Nelson suffered a similar fate, with Nelson himself nearly succumbing to ‘fever.’¹³⁸

Gregorio Salazar, Vice President of the Republic of the Federation, also “represented to the Federal Government the probability of British subjects in Belize ‘assisting’ in the colonization of Verapaz and then incorporating with Central America in throwing off their allegiance to England in order to avert from themselves that distress which an interdiction of the trade between this country and Belize will occasion.”¹³⁹ Despite such efforts however, the concessionaires never delivered on the colonization requirements, and Izabal remained sparsely populated,¹⁴⁰ unable to sustain the operations of a customs house there.¹⁴¹

Infrastructure Projects (to Challenge the Port at Belize)

The issue of inadequate communications was a major concern for Gálvez as well as the Guatemalan state authorities, as not only was this one of the reasons why the bulk of the state’s commerce passed through the port at Belize,¹⁴² but it also prevented them assuming proper control of their own economic development. The Guatemalan merchants and political elites were convinced that the state’s economic development shortcomings were the product of Belize’s commercial monopoly. However, for the “ports [to] be effective, [roads connecting] to them had to be improved.” This comprised a second cog in the strategy. Thus Gálvez

¹³⁸ John McNeill, “Aedes Rides Again: Mosquitoes and Flaviviruses in the Americas,” *American Journal of Public Health*, April, 106 (4), (April 2016): 596–597. For more on the impact of tropical diseases on colonial Central America and the Caribbean see J. R. McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620-1914*, (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press; 2010). Nelson’s ordeal was described in a letter from Peter Parker, Medical Officer to Jamaica, to Philip Stephens. Peter Parker to Philip Stephens, Port Royal, Jamaica, 5 September 1780, National Archives, Kew, ADM 1/242, folio 531.

¹³⁹ Chatfield to Backhouse, Esq. Feb 1, 1835, F.O. 15/16, 34

¹⁴⁰ Jones estimates that in 1825, Izabal only had 100 inhabitants. See Jones, *Guatemala, Past and Present*, 32.

¹⁴¹ Opinion of the Priors and Consuls of the Consulado, 6 August 1821, AGCA, A3.18, leg. 3,888, exp. 42,356

¹⁴² Delmer G Ross, “Construction of the Interoceanic Railroad of Guatemala,” *The Americas*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Jan. 1977), 430-31.

“agitated for building ... roads [because he felt] that was the best way of making effective ... all the benefits that will flow from the commerce of the country.”¹⁴³ This solution was not new to Guatemala’s leaders. During the late colonial period and the first decade of Central American independence, the responsibility for economic development (i.e., for improving the roads and ports) rested with the *Consulado*,¹⁴⁴ but the merchant guild always lacked the funding necessary to undertake this objective with any seriousness. To try and get around this shortcoming, the *Consulado* often had to borrow huge sums of money.¹⁴⁵

Gálvez employed a different approach – investments by private enterprises. Hence, the requirements for infrastructure works (were folded into the contracts for colonization and made obligatory. Consequently, the colonization contracts required concessionaires “to build various road and canals that the government deemed necessary,”¹⁴⁶ and the emphasis, consistent with the preferences of the *Consulado*, was on establishing a deep-water port on the Atlantic near to Izabal, and to connect such a port to the capital by a good cart-road.¹⁴⁷ Since independence, the port at Izabal had continued to serve as the main transfer point for the commerce of the UPCA. A basic customs house was located there, but the mule track that led from there to Guatemala City was impassable during the rainy season and demanded attention and upgrading.

Not surprisingly then, the infrastructure projects by the government of Guatemala prioritized upgrading this roadway. Hence, the East Coast Company was obligated to construct a cart-road from the projected port of Refugio near Lake Izabal and connecting with existing

¹⁴³ Williford, “The Reform Program of Dr. Mariano Gálvez...,” 21, 95.

¹⁴⁴ Article XXIII of “*Real Cédula de erección del Consulado de Guatemala.*”

¹⁴⁵ A.N.G., A1.5.5, leg. 267, exp. 5,854. Given the persistent lack of finances in Guatemala, the *Consulado* often resorted to borrowing the huge sums needed to undertake improvements of the roads and ports in the country.

¹⁴⁶ Williford, “The Reform Program of Dr. Mariano Gálvez...,” 21.

¹⁴⁷ Chatfield to Palmerston, Enclosure 1, No. 22, 13 November 1834, F.O. 15/14; Woodward, *Class Privilege ...*, 60-61.

routes in Chiquimula and Verapaz.¹⁴⁸ The Company also had a specific obligation to “establish a Town and a Port in the Bay of Santo Tomás ... [and] to construct the roads and bridges necessary for easy and expeditious communication with the interior.”¹⁴⁹ By comparison, the projects required of Bennett and Meany’s also involved constructing roads “linking Santo Tomás with the road to Izabal, and opening a canal to connect the Bay of Santo Tomás with the Montagua River.”¹⁵⁰

By prioritizing the port at Izabal and a cart-road from there to the capital for infrastructure development, Gálvez hoped to kill the two proverbial birds with the one stone. That is, he could challenge the port at Belize for the commerce of the Republic, and at the same time reduce or eliminate the threat posed to Guatemala’s regional dominance by the port at Omoa fostering Honduras’ economic development. Notwithstanding, these projects presented the best opportunities for challenging the port of Belize for control of the trade with Guatemala. In 1839, following the conservatives’ return to power, the Legislative Assembly passed a decree which confirmed the priority for developing Izabal. This followed the responsibility for economic development reverting to the newly re-established *Consulado*.

To help offset the costs of colonization and the other infrastructure works the companies were required to deliver, the contracts also provided “special privileges ... including collecting tolls [and retaining a percentage of the same] ... for a period of twenty years,” as well as (in one case) permission to operate steam shipping navigation services in the surrounding bodies

¹⁴⁸ Griffith, “Empires in the Wilderness,” 43.

¹⁴⁹ “Translation of the Charter of Santo Tomás,” *Brief Statement, Supported by Original Documents, of the Important Grants Conceded to the Eastern Coast of Central America Commercial and Agricultural Company by the State of Guatemala*,” 37.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 43.

of waterways between the coast and the interior areas in Guatemala.¹⁵¹ Gálvez hoped that the latter provision would help to usurp the coastal shipping services controlled by the Belize merchants.

Exclusive Rights to Mahogany (a challenge to British Possessory Rights)

In return for undertaking the colonization requirements and the infrastructure works identified by the government of Guatemala, the concession holders were awarded monopoly control of the economic resources contained in their respective territories (i.e., the right to exploit the mahogany and mineral deposits in the areas of their respective grants).¹⁵² These exclusive rights to cut mahogany represented the final cog in Gálvez's strategy, and were intended to halt or directly challenge the activities of the Belize woodcutters in Guatemalan territory.¹⁵³ The provisions created significant anxiety among the Belize woodcutters, especially since the contracts gave the former Belize merchant and magistrate Marshall Bennett a decided advantage in the mahogany trade,¹⁵⁴ but also because by the 1830s the mahogany stands in Belize were largely exhausted.¹⁵⁵

This realization had led to the Public Meeting at Belize agreeing on the 5 November 1832 to extend logging operations into Central American territory. A combination of other factors quickly cemented this practice. Firstly, changes in the duties for mahogany imported to England adopted in 1826 had resulted in a smaller preference for Belize mahogany (which

¹⁵¹ Bases para una compañía de colonización, industria, comercio, y agricultura de Verapaz, Livingston y Santo Tomás de Castilla, AGCA, Congreso, No. 156, 1834, nf.; Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness...*, 10, 17-19.

¹⁵² "Contrato que fija las condiciones para colonizar el departamento de Verapaz," 6 August 1834, AGCA, B 93.1, exp. 32338, leg. 1395.

¹⁵³ Cockburn to Chatfield, No. 5, 1834, F.O. 252/8.

¹⁵⁴ Chatfield to Viscount Palmerston, 12 September 1835, F.O. 15/16, 145-146.

¹⁵⁵ Jennifer L. Anderson, "Nature's Currency: The Atlantic Mahogany Trade and the Commodification of Nature in the Eighteenth Century," *Early American Studies* 2, no. 1 (2004): 47-48.

attracted duties of £2.10 per ton) versus foreign mahogany (charged at £7.10 per ton),¹⁵⁶ and this encouraged the increased uptake of foreign mahogany. Then, after some of the Belize merchants complained, the British government attempted to remedy the situation in 1832 by lowering the rate for mahogany “shipped from Belize” to £1.10 per ton.¹⁵⁷ As could be expected, this accelerated the practice of logging in Central America. And finally, the Board of Trade, in response to a request from Superintendent Cockburn at Belize for clarification on the duties for mahogany shipped from Belize, had argued that “the mahogany trade ought not to be confined to the exhausted areas [in Belize]” and that Great Britain should seek to extend its “license” to cut in wood in the neighboring Republic.¹⁵⁸ The growing encroachment of British woodcutters into Guatemala that resulted from this was exactly what Gálvez sought to redress.

Accordingly, Galindo and the East Coast Company both used their concessions to challenge British occupation in and around Belize. They also tried to prevent the Belize woodcutters from exploiting the mahogany stands contained within their respective concessions without them benefitting economically. The land grants to Galindo and the East Coast Company were designed precisely to restrict the British woodcutters to operating within the limits of the 1783 and 1786 treaties.¹⁵⁹ Thus, almost immediately after receiving his grant, Galindo, interested in gaining a part of the lucrative mahogany trade, wrote to Superintendent Cockburn announcing his title to the lands in Petén and the portion of territory in Belize between the Belize River and the Hondo River to the north. Galindo also demanded that

¹⁵⁶ Naylor, “*The Mahogany Trade as a Factor*,” 49, 52.

¹⁵⁷ Correspondence Relative to the Proposed Mahogany Bill, *The Honduras Gazette and Commercial Advertiser*, Vol. 1, No. 2, Belize, Saturday 8 July 1826. This was crucial as most of the mahogany cut in the Bay of Honduras shipped through Belize. See Naylor, “*The Mahogany Trade ...*,” 49-50.

¹⁵⁸ Board of Trade Memorandum on Belize Mahogany, 19 September 1833, C.O. 123/43

¹⁵⁹ Griffith, “*Empires in the Wilderness*,” 53.

Superintendent Cockburn restrain the Belize wood cutters from any further activity on his territory until the matter of the boundaries could be resolved, and warned that the Belize woodcutters that mahogany cutting within the limits of his grant was prohibited without his prior approval.¹⁶⁰ In this, Galindo reportedly had the backing of the Guatemalan firm of Klée Skinner and Company which likewise had a deep interest in the mahogany trade, and which had offered to cancel a portion of the debt owed to them by the Guatemalan government in exchange for this concession.¹⁶¹ When this failed, Klée Skinner and Company reportedly “maneuvered the Galindo contract to trigger the territorial row [with Belize],” presumably as a way of furthering their own enterprise.¹⁶²

After receiving its land grant, the East Coast Company borrowed from Galindo’s playbook. In October 1836, the company wrote to Lord Glenelg, Secretary for War and the Colonies, “enquiring into the limits of the Belize territory” and complaining of the Belize merchants cutting timber (i.e. mahogany) on territory covered under the land grant from Guatemala.¹⁶³ In that same letter, the Company, in an attempt to assert its ownership of the lands concerned, indicated that “His Majesty’s Government is claiming or negotiating to obtain greater extent of the territory on the Bay of Honduras than is defined by the treaties of 1783 and 1786.”¹⁶⁴ Also interested in profits that could be generated from the mahogany trade, the East Coast Company moved to secure their title to the lands and to protect against incursions

¹⁶⁰ Galindo to Cockburn, 2 August 1834, F.O. 15/17, 95.

¹⁶¹ Foreign Office to the Colonial Office, enclosing despatches from Vice-Consul Hall, 3 October 1832. According to one of the despatches Skinner-Klée was a creditor to the Guatemalan government for two separate sums: one for £11,768.11 and another for \$26,676.00.

¹⁶² Griffith, “Empires in the Wilderness,” 37.

¹⁶³ Jeremiah Barnett, Esq. to Lord Palmerston, London, 28 October 1835, Appendix C, in *Brief Statement Supported by Original Documents of the Important Grants conceded to the Eastern Coast of Central America Commercial and Agricultural Company by the State of Guatemala*, (London: Whittaker & Co, 1839),

¹⁶⁴ Eastern Coast of Central America Agricultural and Commercial Company to Lord Glenelg, 12 October 1836, F.O. 15/18, 283.

from the Belize woodcutters. Thus in 1835, Jeremiah Barrett, one of the Directors of the East Coast Company, wrote to Foreign Secretary Palmerston complaining that “certain persons under the protection of the British force at Belize are extending their depredations on the coast beyond the River Jabon (i.e., Sibun) the southern boundary of Belize...” and that as a result of this “the Company must have sustained a loss of £100,000.”¹⁶⁵

In his communication to Lord Glenelg, Barrett made it clear that

A prominent object of [the Company] is the clearance of their lands previous to colonization, which operation includes the supply of such timber to the British ... as they have been accustomed to procuring at Belize. It appears that Belize has been stripped of its valuable timber and at this there are no less than twenty-three gangs of unlicensed mahogany cutters (British subjects or Belizeans) employed to the southward of the boundary of Javon [sic] and consequently in the department of Verapaz.¹⁶⁶

The East Coast Company kept pressing the matter and in another communication to Foreign Secretary Lord Palmerston, stated that “it is obvious that the timber ... now forcibly carried away by some Belizeans, grows on land belonging to some power or the other. The treaties of 1783 and 1786 declare it to belong to Spain [and] the constitution of Central America declares it to belong to the Republic ... [which] granted it ... to this company.”¹⁶⁷ Pushing the matter even further, Leonard Coxe, one of the Company Directors indicated to the Colonial Office that the Company was advising that “the Superintendent in Verapaz has been apprised of the limits and requested to use every precaution possible to prevent the settlers [from Belize] from coming ... within the limits [of the concession].”¹⁶⁸

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, 64. Three years later the East Coast Company published a pamphlet claiming that total losses suffered by mahogany being surreptitiously taken by merchants of Belize amounted to over £1.5 million.

¹⁶⁶ Brief Statement ..., 64.

¹⁶⁷ Leonard Coxe to the Rt. Honorable Lord Palmerston, London, 2 November 1836, in *Brief Statement ...*, 83.

¹⁶⁸ Leonard Coxe to Lord Glenelg, London, 8th December 1836, in *Brief Statement...*, 88.

Marshall Bennett also had a stake in the mahogany business though his concessions in Guatemala did not seem to have troubled the Belize authorities to any significant extent. However, Bennett's partnership with Francisco Morazán, President of the Federation of Central America, was a concern to the British authorities because of the implications for the Mosquito Coast, and this led Superintendent McDonald to castigate Bennett for acting contrary to the interests of the Belize mahogany merchants.¹⁶⁹ For Bennett though the mahogany resources were what really mattered, and his objective was for personally securing all lands on the Central American coast that yielded stands of mahogany and logwood.¹⁷⁰ Hence, Bennett moved to consolidate his dominance of the trade by entering into a business relationship in 1834 with Morazán and initially managed several of Morazán's commercial enterprises and affairs.¹⁷¹ This soon segued into Bennett managing all of the mahogany resources for Morazán who had "secured the rights to nearly all of the commercially valuable mahogany in Honduras" through two different concessions from the government of the state of Honduras.¹⁷² The first concession to Morazán was awarded in late 1834, despite tidy offers from other interested parties, and protests from several merchants. This was cancelled after the Commandant at Omoa seized a shipment of mahogany destined for Belize unaware of that it was owned by Morazán and Bennett, leading to protests from Honduran merchants. Morazán was subsequently granted another concession by the Chief of State for the government of Honduras, again despite and amidst protests from other interested parties, and even refusal by the Committee reviewing the application to sign off on the transfer.

¹⁶⁹ Superintendent MacDonalld to Lord Glenelg, 12 February 1837, F.O. 15/19, 232.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, F.O. 15/16, 146.

¹⁷¹ Craig Stephen Revels, "*Timber, Trade, and Transformation: A Historical Geography of Mahogany in Honduras*," *Louisiana State University PhD Diss.* (2002), 107.

¹⁷² William J. Griffith, *The Personal Archive of Francisco Morazán*, *Philological and Documentary Studies* Vol. II, No. 6, (Middle American Research Institute, Tulane University of Louisiana, 1977), 204.

To counter the actions of Galindo and the East Coast Company, British officials in London, Belize, and Central America, undertook separate measures that were similarly aimed at preventing the concession holders from occupying the lands in Belize set out under their respective contracts. For instance, after receiving Galindo's request concerning his concession, Superintendent Cockburn, viewing the demand as a direct challenge to British expansion in Central America,¹⁷³ convened an ad hoc council comprised of local merchants and requested their counsel on the matter. Upon receiving the response of the council, Cockburn advised Galindo that the grants he held were for territory already "occupied [by British settlers] between the Rio Hondo and the Sarstoon, and extending west to a line between the two rivers and passing through Garbutt's Falls."¹⁷⁴ At the same time, to prevent any confrontation between Galindo and the woodcutters, Superintendent Cockburn also advised the Belize woodcutters that only wood cut 'between the Hondo and the Sarstoon Rivers' could be classified as coming from Belize.¹⁷⁵ Additionally, on the direction of the Board of Trade, Cockburn rejected the recommendations of the Belize merchants to discriminate against mahogany merchants not resident in Belize on the basis that this affected not just foreign nationals, but also British nationals.

Chatfield's response to the Galindo and East Coast Company contracts was equally calculated to preserve British occupation of Belize, as well as the settlement's position as a bridgehead for British influence in Central America. First Chatfield advised Foreign Secretary Palmerston that the "Colonial Office [had] transmitted orders to discontinue [the added] duties on [mahogany] brought from beyond Belize's limits."¹⁷⁶ Chatfield also used the opportunity to

¹⁷³ Cockburn to Chatfield, 13 September 1834, C.O. 123/45, nf.; also, Naylor, *Penny Ante-Imperialism...*, 89.

¹⁷⁴ Griffith, "Empires in the Wilderness," 57.

¹⁷⁵ Cockburn to Spring Rice, No. 48, 6 November 1834, C.O. 123/45; Cockburn to Goderich, Belize, 24 November 1832, C.O. 123/43.

¹⁷⁶ Chatfield to Viscount Palmerston, San Salvador, No. 15, 27 May 1836, F.O. 15/18, 87.

advise Palmerston that “the erroneous way of calculating duties on mahogany admits foreign mahogany into England at lower duties than mahogany shipped from Belize.”¹⁷⁷ Finally, Chatfield indicated that “mahogany shipped from the Bay of Honduras and warehoused in any British possession then shipped in British ships shall be subject to the same [treatment] as if it had been cleared from Belize.”

Opposite to the Belize merchants’ concerns about Marshall Bennett’s concessions in Guatemala and Honduras however, Chatfield believed that these were strategically valuable to Great Britain’s activities in Central America as they gave Bennett “absolute command of the passage to the River Dulce and thus could be leveraged to prevent Santo Tomás becoming a rival port to Belize.”¹⁷⁸ In Chatfield’s opinion, because the concessions had been awarded to British nationals this provided an opportunity for possibly incorporating the relevant territories these concessions covered under future control from Belize. Consequently, Chatfield recommended that the Cabinet “should fully consider the opportunities opened to British subjects by the contracts before taking a stand on the boundary issue” and that he hoped that the issue of sovereignty over Belize could be held in abeyance.¹⁷⁹

Lord Glenelg likewise sought to frustrate the pretensions of the East Coast Company. In a response to Barrett, the Foreign Office replying on behalf of Lord Glenelg “[advised] that the matter should be addressed with the Secretary of State for the colonies ... but observed that if British subjects choose to take from a foreign government land which is included within a British settlement, such persons must take the consequences of the connivance with the encroaching pretensions of such a foreign government.”¹⁸⁰ Meanwhile, the Colonial Office

¹⁷⁷ No. 16, 1 June 1836, F.O. 15/18, 91.

¹⁷⁸ Chatfield to Viscount Palmerston, 12 September 1835, F.O. 15/16, 146A

¹⁷⁹ Chatfield to Lord Palmerston, No. 12, 25 August 1834, F.O. 15/14, 161.

¹⁸⁰ W. Fox Strangways to J. Barrett, Esq., Foreign Office, 4 November 1835, in *Brief Statement ...*, 68.

enquired “whether a treaty existed between Great Britain and Central America or Spain regarding the boundaries of Belize,” and was advised by the Foreign Office that Lord Palmerston “does not feel it consistent with his public duty to give a private company information as to the state of negotiations pending between the British government and foreign powers on the subject of the territorial limits of His Majesty’s possessions and settlements abroad.”¹⁸¹

Corollaries of the Colonization Schemes

The worthy explicit objectives of Gálvez’ economic reforms (i.e., improving productivity and raising the standard of living in Guatemala) because of the benefits they conferred to foreigners (especially the British in Belize) at the expense of the locals, made them unpopular amongst Guatemalan political elites and *campesinos* alike.¹⁸² As Ann Jefferson argued, in Gálvez’s attempt “to modernize land tenure and economic structures [meant that his programs] collided with the *campesinos* who took up arms to defend their way of life,” because the contracts “promoted the extraction of natural resources for the benefit of foreign rather than local interests.”¹⁸³ That Gálvez implemented his reforms during a period of sustained social upheaval and conflict in Central America did not help his cause. Forcing through the Livingston Codes despite the opposition to this from leading members of his own liberal party (e.g., José Francisco Barrundia), the Guatemalan clergy, and the local peasant population also counted against him. But dissent also came from other sections of Guatemalan society and for other reasons. On one hand the merchants, especially the conservatives, were strongly opposed to

¹⁸¹ John Backhouse, Esq. to Leonard Coxe, Esq., Foreign Office, 29 October 1836, 78-79.

¹⁸² The grants to British companies and nationals were a main trigger for the uprisings in eastern Guatemala. Jefferson, Ann F., "The rebellion of Mita, eastern Guatemala, in 1837," (2000), *Doctoral Dissertations 1896 - February 2014*, 861, 19, 229, https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_1/861. Also, Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera...*, 51.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*,

foreign interests maintaining a grasp over the economy. Although Gálvez' reforms had promised to break the shackles that constrained the states' economic development, his reforms simply substituted one foreign group for another. To be sure, Bennett and the East Coast Company (both British) had unfettered access and exclusive rights to the timber resources in Guatemala. In a period when the state suffered a severe shortage of capital, lacked public revenues, and depended largely on one or two exports (cochineal and indigo), assigning exclusive rights to the mahogany resources deprived the treasury of much needed funds. On the other hand, the economic reforms contributed to the feeling of disenfranchisement among the ladino peasant population in rural Guatemala.¹⁸⁴ Unfortunately for Gálvez, the conservatives used this to foment unrest by convincing the Indian population that the colonization schemes were plans to get rid of them.¹⁸⁵ The outbreak of cholera in Belize in 1837 added fuel to that fire, and the conflict that ensued prompted the collapse of the Federation of Central America.¹⁸⁶

British officials were also opposed Gálvez's economic reforms because of how specific measures potentially impacted Great Britain's presence in Belize and its position in the region. The colonization schemes for instance had the potential for disrupting British occupation in the areas between the Sibun and Sarstoon rivers in Belize because the slave labourers were being enticed to leave the mahogany works and thus the Superintendent at Belize lodged stiff protests about this with the Guatemalan authorities. Also, the unilateral tariff increases by Guatemala upset trade from Belize, and thus the Belize Superintendent and the Consul in Guatemala dealt with this through gun-boat type diplomacy and by 1837, the additional duties that had been levied against goods touching Belize and destined for Guatemala were repealed. The attempts

¹⁸⁴ Jefferson, "The rebellion of Mita, easter Guatemala, in 1837."

¹⁸⁵ Woodward, Jr., *Rafael Carrera ...*, 41.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 54; Jefferson, "The rebellion of Mita..." 233-241; Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness...*, 148.

by Galindo and the East Coast Company to force recognition of their land titles also prompted the British officials to disavow any rights claimed by these parties under the land grants and to declare British possessory rights in Belize.

Conclusions

In the first half of the 1830s, the subdued mood between Great Britain and Guatemala over the boundaries of Belize shifted abruptly and diametrically. Whereas at the turn of the decade Belize was considered a likely means of helping Guatemala recover Omoa (i.e., restore Guatemala's internal integrity), by 1834 Guatemala viewed Belize as 'a significant threat to its external sovereignty.' After the Belize merchants refused to assist the Guatemalan authorities with recovering the port at Omoa from rebel opposition forces, the Guatemalan authorities escalated their territorial claim to Belize. The Omoa incident exposed Guatemala's economic and political frailties within Central America. It highlighted the extent to which the lack of adequate maritime ports and connecting road infrastructure on the Atlantic coast prevented the "protection and development of [Guatemala's] commerce;"¹⁸⁷ and it imperilled the Guatemalan elites project of "stitching together" Guatemala's territory and restoring Guatemala City's authority in Central America.¹⁸⁸

Dr Mariano Gálvez repackaged the Guatemalan *Consulado's* infrastructure development projects as part of his colonization schemes to redress some of these deficiencies. However, the anticipated cart-road was never built, primarily because the funding needed to undertake this was never raised and because the British concessionaires had other interests.

¹⁸⁷ This was a principal responsibility of the *Consulado* as laid out by Article XXII of the *real cedula de erección*.

¹⁸⁸ Jordana Dym, "The Republic of Guatemala: Stitching Together a New Country," chapter in John Tutino (ed.), *New Countries: Capitalism, Revolutions, and Nations in the America, 1750-1870*, (London: Duke University Press, 2016), 278-315.

Nonetheless, the nature of Gálvez's schemes show that the idea of constructing a cart-road from Guatemala City to a port on the Atlantic was central to Guatemala's leaders plans for development of the state.¹⁸⁹ Guatemala's ability to successfully subvert Belize's entrepôt role hung entirely on this happening. The insistence on the cart-road project also showed that the Guatemalan elites believed that even though the state of Guatemala was not formally identified as one of the possible locations for a transisthmian route, "by its lakes and rivers ... it might [nonetheless] be rendered effective for [trans-isthmian] communications...by the junction of two oceans."¹⁹⁰

At the same time, the disquiet that Gálvez' colonization schemes fermented among the Guatemalan *campesinos* (rural peasants) laid bare the realization that British expansion in Central America was unpopular and had merely shifted external control of Guatemala's economy in the independence period to another foreign power; and, that provincial opposition to any furtherance of Guatemalan authority in the region had deepened significantly. While the colonization schemes focused attention on Great Britain's continued possession of Belize (i.e., the Belize issue) and led to Guatemala's political elites coalescing around the state's territorial integrity agenda, the local uprisings they stirred also uncovered the economic and social inequities in Guatemala that existed between the landed elites and the rural peasantry. The role of non-elite actors in Guatemala in shaping British expansion there is an area that is significantly understudied in the history of the territorial dispute. Suffice it to say, the peasant

¹⁸⁹ This is consistent with Sophie Brockmann's argument that Guatemalan reformers envisioned communications infrastructure projects that could improve trade and commerce. Sophie Brockmann, *The Science of Useful Nature in Central America: Landscape, Networks and Practical Enlightenment, 1784-1838*, (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 27, 142 – 154.

¹⁹⁰ Eastern Coast of Central America Commercial and Agricultural Company, "Brief Statement, supported by Original Documents, of the Important Grants Conceded to the Eastern Coast of Central America Commercial and Agricultural Company by the State of Guatemala." 1840, 8.

revolts provided both an opportunity and a platform for Rafael Carrera and the conservatives to resume power in Guatemala in the closing years of the 1830s.

Great Britain's response to Guatemala's escalation of its territorial claim to Belize confirmed that continued possession of Belize was pivotal to British expansion in Central America, and to pre-empting foreign rivals in the region. The nature of Great Britain's response to the events that unfolded in the isthmus during the decade also showed that the expansion of its territorial possession at Belize was not the result of British formal empire building. Such expansion did not lead to the settlement's conversion to an official British colony, despite repeated demands of the settlers at Belize for this to happen. Nevertheless, by 1834, extending possession to the Sarstoon River as the southernmost boundary of the settlement was necessary to preserve Belize's position as the bridgehead of British influence in the region. Preserving or extending the level of British influence in Central America attained the previous decade also became necessary. To that end, different British Superintendents at Belize "conducted their own forward policies"¹⁹¹ over developments in the Bay Islands in Roatan, but their use of force on the two occasions this happened were afterwards sanctioned by the Foreign Office. The British merchants in Guatemala also played a role in advancing Great Britain's interests in the isthmus, though, somewhat paradoxically, through their roles as agents of the government of the state of Guatemala. Their "collaboration" with the Guatemalan authorities provided Great Britain with a certain extended 'presence' in Central America and kept the mahogany trade firmly within British control. This was not part of a "grand design," and British policy was reactive to events that unfolded on the ground in Central America during this period, but British influence was maintained, and Belize's importance grew. This would prove crucial during the

¹⁹¹ Knight, "Great Britain and Latin America," 132.

next decade when United States interest in a trans-isthmian canal enhanced and catalyzed that country's turn towards Central America.

3 *Mosquitia, Manifest Destiny, and the Conservative Pivot, c.1840 -1849*¹

Rafael Carrera's military victory over Francisco Morazán's forces in 1839 heralded his rise to head of the conservative party and the latter's return to power in both Guatemala and the wider Central American region. It also portended the collapse of the Federation of Central America.² These developments reshaped Great Britain's relationship with Central America, and had unintentional, but nonetheless profound, implications for Great Britain's possessory rights in Belize. For certain, the Federation's demise launched a scramble for autonomy that deepened rivalry among the five states, each with the potential for locating interoceanic communication within its territory; and each vying, to the potential exclusion of the others, for the attentions of competing foreign interests (both capitalists and governments) for undertaking such an enterprise.³ Thus, Guatemala abandoned its earlier ambitions of maintaining a Central American union with Guatemala City serving as the regional seat of power, and sought its independence as well as a treaty of commerce (i.e. recognition) with Great Britain. Guatemala's conservative leaders also re-established the *Consulado de comercio* and reinstated the guild's responsibility for economic development, but confined this to the state of Guatemala, though now with more far-reaching powers.⁴

¹ A Foreign Office Memorandum in 1843 referred to the Mosquito Shore as *Mosquitia*. Mary W. Williams, *Anglo-American Isthmian Diplomacy, 1815-1915* (American Historical Association, 1916), 44.

² Woodward Jr., "Central America from Independence to c.1870," 490. For a useful background to the Carrera uprisings see Gilmar E. Visoni-Alonzo, *The Carrera Revolt and "Hybrid Warfare" in Nineteenth-Century Central America*, Chapter 3, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

³ In the nineteenth century, and particularly after the breakup of the Federation of Central America, Honduras and Nicaragua continued their attempts to respectively locate interoceanic routes through their territories. Meanwhile, New Granada pursued similar projects in Panama. Guatemala too continued with its own efforts for building a cart road from the Golfo Dulce to the capital.

⁴ Ralph Lee Woodward, *Class Privilege and Economic Development: The Consulado de Comercio of Guatemala, 1793-1871*, Class Privilege and Economic Development (University of North Carolina Press, 1966), 81. Woodward contends that although the Guatemalan *Consulado* had responsibility for all Central America, its efforts focused primarily on the state of Guatemala.

Meanwhile, separate events during the 1840s collectively introduced additional dynamics into Great Britain's outlook towards Belize and Central America. In the first half of the decade, Great Britain, under the second administration of Prime Minister Robert Peel, shifted decisively towards free trade and repealed the Corn Laws in 1846, followed by the Navigation Laws in 1849.⁵ During this period, the mahogany trade, controlled by British merchants in Belize, expanded significantly. During the second half, Anglo-American tensions over Central America reached new heights as the United States made a concerted push towards asserting its influence in the isthmus,⁶ and the Caste War of Yucatan broke out in 1847 and "created a zone of imperial rivalry" on Belize northern borderlands.⁷ As it relates to the former, United States President James Polk, opposed to Great Britain's expansion in the Americas and keen to appease southern interests in his own country to expand slavery, pronounced his corollary to the Monroe Doctrine and embarked on territorial expansion.⁸ This manifest destiny creed led to the United States annexing Texas, and afterwards, a vast territory from Mexico, including California. The discovery of gold in California immediately thereafter fuelled United States' interest in Central America canal projects, and the United States signed different treaties for constructing transit routes across the isthmus: with New Granada in 1846 for a (railroad)

⁵ Martin Lynn, "British Policy, Trade, and Informal empire in the Mid-Nineteenth Century," chapter in Andrew Porter, *The Oxford History of the British Empire, Volume III, The Nineteenth Century*, (Oxford University Press, 1999), 103-104. Also, Alan Knight, "Rethinking British Informal Empire in Latin America (especially Argentina)," *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 27, No. 11, 23-48. For a discussion of the repeal of the Corn Laws see Douglas A. Irwin, "Political Economy and Peel's Repeal of the Corn Laws," *Economics and Politics*, Vol. 1 (Spring 1989), 41-59. For the navigation acts see Larry Sawyers, "The Navigation Acts Revisited," *The Economic History Review*, New Series, Vol. 45, No. 2 (May., 1992), 262-284; and J. J. Clapham, "The Last Years of the Navigation Acts," *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 25, No. 99 (Jul. 1910), 480-501.

⁶ Kinley J. Brauer, "The United States and British Imperial Expansion, 1815-60," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Winter 1988), 29-34; Richard van Alstyne, "The Central American Policy of Lord Palmerston, 1846-48," *Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Aug. 1936), 339-359

⁷ Dutt, *Empire on Edge ...*, 27.

⁸ Dexter Perkins, "Polk and the Monroe Doctrine," review of *The Monroe Doctrine and American Expansionism, 1843-1849* by Frederick Merk; and *James K. Polk, Continentalist, 1843-1846* by Charles Sellers, *The Virginia Quarterly Review*, Vol. 43, No. 1 (WINTER 1967), 146-149. Perkins argues that Polk used this as a justification for his territorial expansion 'project'.

route through Panama and with Nicaragua in 1849 for a canal through that state.⁹ In the meantime, French interest in Central America re-awakened. In 1841 French officials began to consider ways of “increasing French political, naval ...and commercial influence in [the isthmus].”¹⁰ After French King Louis Phillipe rejected entreaties from Nicaragua to build a canal in that state, Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte (who later became Napoléon III) agreed in 1846 to do so, thereby giving France the opening it coveted.

This chapter explores how these dynamics, separately and collectively, shaped Great Britain’s handling of Guatemala’s territorial claim to Belize during the third decade of Central American independence. It argues that the Federation’s collapse, followed by General Francisco Morazán’s execution a few years later, paved the way for Guatemala’s new conservative leaders to pursue independence, and that this course was urged by Frederick Chatfield, the British Consul to Central America, in the hope that autonomous Central American states would enhance Great Britain’s standing in the region. It shows that Chatfield’s promise to secure a treaty of commerce with Great Britain led the Guatemalan authorities to disregard the Belize boundary issue, and to also refrain from protesting aggressive British territorial activities in the Mosquito Shore, even as Belize was implicated in such happenings. The chapter also shows that territorial claims lodged by the Central American states and increased pretensions from external powers in the Mosquito Shore led Great Britain to first install a British consul then afterwards to re-establish a British protectorate there. It argues that these developments emphasized the significance of Belize’s role to British actions in *Mosquitia* and reaffirmed Belize’s strategic salience to British expansion in the isthmus.

⁹ These were the Bidlack-Mallarino and Hise-Selva Treaties respectively.

¹⁰ Thomas Schoonover, *The French in Central America: Culture and Commerce, 1820-1930*, (Rowan and Littlefield, 2000), 10 – 11.

Conservative Rule and Guatemalan Independence

In this first section I show that the return of conservative control to the Guatemalan state government presaged the collapse of the Central American Federation, and following Francisco Morazán's demise, set in train a course of events in Central America which made Guatemalan independence a priority for that state's conservative leaders, as well as for the British Consul in Guatemala Frederick Chatfield. I also show that Raphael Carrera's failure to "fundamentally shift power in Guatemalan society"¹¹ out of the hands of the small oligarchy in Guatemala City was a factor in this happening. I argue that, to preserve British influence in the region, Chatfield connived with Guatemalan political elites to have Great Britain agree a treaty of commerce with Guatemala despite the latter not actually attaining the 'right political conditions,'¹² and this compelled the Guatemalan authorities to not mention the Belize boundary issue at the time Great Britain recognized its independence in 1849. And I argue that Great Britain's decision to revive its control over the Mosquito Shore required that it leverage Belize's connection to the Shore, but that this was not determined by the mahogany trade per se, nor by appeals from the Belize settlers to convert the settlement to an official colony.

Carrera and the Conservative Pivot

The uprising which started among the Indian peasants in the Mita Mountains of eastern Guatemala soon mushroomed, behind the leadership of Rafael Carrera, into a larger revolt against the liberal government in Guatemala City, resulting in a change in the government of

¹¹ John Lynch, "Rafael Carrera: Guatemala 1837-1865," chapter in *Caudillos in Spanish America 1800-1850*, edited by John Lynch, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), published to Oxford Online October 2011, 387, DOI: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780198211358.001.0001.

¹² Foreign Office, Memorandum, 23 June 1841, F.O. 15/27.

that state.¹³ Thus, at the turn of the third decade of Central American independence, conservatives controlled the government in the state of Guatemala, and had also gained power in other state governments in the region. These developments did not fundamentally change Belize's role in the commerce and trade of Central America, but they nonetheless had important ramifications for Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize, and hence by extension, also for Great Britain's handling of that claim. To clarify, the pivot in Guatemala towards the conservatives in the closing years of the 1830s, although obstacle laden as Lowell Gudmundson observed, enabled Rafael Carrera and Guatemala City's conservative elites led by the *Casa de Aycinena* to thereafter pursue their agenda for state autonomy successfully. By this means, the liberals' hopes for federation virtually ended.¹⁴ The push for independence however, imposed an imperative on the Guatemalan authorities to secure a "defensible geographical area" for the state,¹⁵ including as a means of countering the challenges posed by Honduras and Nicaragua as potential centres of power in Central America. Thus, once Guatemala attained full independence, and a treaty of commerce with Great Britain had been agreed, reasserting the Guatemalan territorial claim to Belize would have seemed imminent, but the Guatemalan authorities somehow disregarded this. What was the reason for this?

After resuming control of the government of Guatemala, the conservatives, viewing the entire "liberal-republican system as an [obstacle to Guatemala's] autonomy,"¹⁶ moved decisively to reverse many of the economic and social reforms implemented by Mariano

¹³ A detailed analysis of these uprisings and their causes is provided by Ann Jefferson. See Ann F. Jefferson, "The Rebellion of Mita, Eastern Guatemala, in 1837," (2000), *Doctoral Dissertations 1896 - February 2014*, https://scholarworks.umass.edu/dissertations_1/861.

¹⁴ Lowell Gudmundson, "Society and Politics in Central America, 1821-1871," chapter in Lowell Gudmundson and Hector Lindo-Fuentes, *Central America, 1821-1871: Liberalism before Liberal Reform*, (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1995), 79-132.

¹⁵ Wayne M. Cleghern, "Change and Development in Central America, 1840-1900," *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Jan. 1966), 28.

¹⁶ Dym, "Stitching Together a Country," 302.

Gálvez in the preceding years.¹⁷ Thus the Livingston Codes were abolished; ecclesiastical authority, including for handling divorces and marriages, was restored; the head tax was repealed; and political exiles were granted amnesty. These changes addressed some of the issues that had stoked popular disenchantment,¹⁸ and were consistent with Carrera's list of demands put forward in his manifesto to the liberal Guatemalan constituent assembly after his successful invasion of Guatemala City. Carrera, echoing his clerical advisors, had also called on the assembly to "dismantle the liberal legislation and to replace this with [a system] that conform[ed] more closely to [Guatemala's] customs."¹⁹

The merchants in Guatemala City shared much disquiet with the liberals' policies. Yet, notably, the debt accrued by the Gálvez administration was not repudiated. This is because, besides the British merchants established in Guatemala City, much of this debt was owed to conservative merchants and elites.²⁰ This was a crucial mis-step, as keeping the debts open later allowed Chatfield to repeatedly use the lack of repayment of liabilities owing to British merchants to threaten and, in several instances, to try and force the Central American states to bend to his demands.²¹ The new conservative authorities though, reversed two key components of Gálvez's economic reforms program: specifically, they nullified the colonization contracts issued to the English companies and nationals; and, they re-established the Guatemalan *Consulado de Comercio*. The first change allowed the Guatemalan authorities to shift the contracts to a friendlier (and Catholic) European power – Belgium; and the latter restored the Consulado's control over Guatemala's economic development. These changes returned two of

¹⁷ Ralph Lee Woodward, *Rafael Carrera ...*, 90; Woodward, "Central America from Independence ...," 491.

¹⁸ Woodward, "Central America from Independence ...," 490.

¹⁹ Lynch, "Rafael Carrera: Guatemala ...," 373; Woodward Jr., "Central America from Independence ...," 487; Woodward Jr., *Rafael Carrera and the Emergence...*, 105.

²⁰ Woodward Jr., *Rafael Carrera ...*, 105.

²¹ Decree, Leon, 8 March 1844, in Adam to the Admiralty, 14 August 1844, F.O. 15/38.

the key sources of strength of the conservative party in Guatemala and helped advance the conservative elite's aim of Guatemalan state autonomy, but neither was necessarily calculated to wrest control of the Republic's trade from Belize and, their reversals inhibited this from happening.

Gálvez's colonization, by virtue of the involvement of primarily British concessionaires, fuelled concerns in Guatemala about increased levels of British commercial activity in that state, and Central America. To an extent, this concern was justified as during the Gálvez and Morazán parallel periods of government, British activity in the mahogany trade had indeed expanded,²² but the local population's opposition to foreigners gaining control of the natural resources was also a factor.²³ Cancelling the colonization contracts of the British concessionaires therefore, enabled the conservative authorities to restore Guatemalan 'ownership' of the lands concerned, and by this means quell the anxieties of the peasant population. This was crucial for gaining popular support, as the areas involved were communal lands, used by the indigenous Indians and peasants for their subsistence farming and other activities.²⁴ However, I show that the conservative faction were not opposed to colonization projects per se, only to British colonization projects. Besides, the cancellations served as reprisals for the shipment of arms being imported aboard a steamer owned by the East Coast Company and destined for the Gálvez administration when it was captured by Carrera.²⁵

²² Several Belize merchants were active in cutting mahogany in Central American territory. Marshall Bennett was the largest among them and his partnerships with Francisco Morazán in Honduras, as well as the concessions he received from Mariano Gálvez gave him access to significant portions of territory in the Chiquimula and Verapaz areas in Guatemala known to contain some of the choicest mahogany stands. See Robert Naylor, "The Mahogany trade as a factor in the British return to the Mosquito Sore in the Second Quarter of the 19th Century," *Jamaican Historical Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Jan. 1967), .

²³ Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera ...*, 178, 183-184.

²⁴ Keith L. Miceli, "Rafael Carrera: Defender and Promoter of Peasant Interests in Guatemala, 1837-1848," *The Americas*, Vol. 31, No. 1 (Jul. 1974), 77.

²⁵ Young Anderson to Frederick Chatfield, 28 October 1838, F.O. 15/22, 252-256; Griffith, *Empires in the Wilderness...*, 163; Woodward, *Rafael Carrera ...*, 73.

Alternatively, re-establishment of the *Consulado* effectively shifted responsibility for economic development back to the Guatemalan merchants. This had the effect of placing leading *Consulado* members, particularly from the *Casa de Aycinena*, in positions within Guatemalan government and society from where they could influence policy and key decision making. For instance, the *Consulado*'s priority for infrastructure projects which benefitted the merchants of Guatemala City was restored.²⁶ This change later proved pivotal to Guatemala's efforts at displacing Belize, as the restored *Consulado* preferred developing the port at Santo Tomás over that at Izabal. There were a couple of reasons for this preference: one, the *Consulado* genuinely believed that Santo Tomás was "well adapted for the purposes of commerce" and hence, useful for subverting the port at Belize; and two, emphasizing Santo Tomás facilitated shifting the concession held by the East Coast Company to the then newly formed Belgian Colonization Company.²⁷ As Young Anderson, the agent for the East Coast Company, indicated to Consul Chatfield, "communication with Ysabal [sic] tends greatly to facilitate the commercial intercourse between [Belize] and ... Central America."²⁸ Chatfield however, made it clear to Anderson that a colony and an improved port at Santo Tomás "would be prejudicial to the prosperity of the English settlement at Belize."²⁹

The liberals rallied behind Francisco Morazán and resisted this conservative thrust. Thus, for a brief period around the turn of the decade, and intermittently over the next twenty years, the liberals were successful in restoring their influence in Central America. But, Morazán's heavy-handed treatment of the conservatives, as well as his forcing a new loan on to the merchants of Guatemala City, undermined his attempts alongside Juan Barrundia and

²⁶ Woodward Jr., "The Merchants and Economic Development...", 147.

²⁷ Robert Ansiaux, *Belgian Colonization Projects*, 115.

²⁸ Young Anderson to Frederick Chatfield, 28 October 1838, F.O. 15/22, 103-106.

²⁹ Copy from Young Anderson to Chatfield, Guatemala, 1 December 1838, F.O. 15/22, 115.

General Carlos Salazar at restoring liberal power more fully, and precipitated Carrera's return to Guatemala City. Then, in March 1840 Carrera's forces defeated Morazán's, and after narrowly escaping the fighting in Guatemala City, Morazán went to Panama along with several of his cohorts before taking exile in Peru. His return from exile in 1842 on the 'invitation' from the authorities in Nicaragua was perceived as an attempt to re-establish the Federation and ended with his execution in Costa Rica. By this time, as Wayne Cleghern contended, faced with "union or separation ... the mass of the population [clearly] did not identify with ... the pan-isthmian patria."³⁰ In any event, Carrera and the conservatives ruled over Guatemala for the next 30 years.

Morazán's demise significantly diminished hopes of reviving the federation. The occurrence catalysed the secessionist mood that had been fermenting in Nicaragua,³¹ in part due to the tepid interest the United States started showing in isthmian canal projects through the Rio San Juan and Lake Nicaragua area.³² In Guatemala City, the conservatives led by Juan José de Aycinena, and urged on by Chatfield, grasped this opportunity to press their agenda for Guatemalan independence.³³ In Guatemala, this campaign gained some traction when Mariano Rivera Paz, then chief-of-state for Guatemala, began the process of unravelling the liberal program of Mariano Gálvez. State autonomy was a key objective of the Guatemalan conservative elites. Hence, Carrera's pivot towards the conservatives once he came to view their goals as being congruent with his own, committed him to pursuit of Guatemalan autonomy as well, especially after he became President of Guatemala in 1844. A series of incidents

³⁰ Wayne M. Cleghern, "Change and Development in Central America, 1840-1900," *Caribbean Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 4 (Jan. 1966), 28-29.

³¹ From Foster, (Private), 3 Nov. 1837, F.O. 252/19.

³² (Mr. Chatfield), No. 20, 1 March 1838, F.O. 15/20, 110; To Palmerston, No. 41, 27 June 1838, F.O. 15/20.

³³ Stephen to Backhouse, 8 June 1841, F.O. 15/27. Juan José was recently returned from exile in the United States and as Ralph Woodward Jr. points out, was "[laying] the groundwork for conservative support for Guatemalan secession from the Republic." Woodward Jr., *Rafael Carrera...*, 88.

following the “secessionist crisis” of 1838-39,³⁴ and the conservative leanings of the restored ecclesiastics and *Consulado*, helped move Carrera and Guatemala progressively towards this eventuality during the decade.³⁵

Firstly, the UPCA decided in May 1838 that the five constituent states were permitted to pursue their respective autonomies.³⁶ Then, after Riviera Paz was reinstated by Carrera as chief-of-state in 1839, he declared that Guatemala would be absolutely free and independent of the federal state, and then changed his title from chief-of-state to President of Guatemala.³⁷ Pedro Aycinena, third Marques de Aycinena and at the time Minister of Foreign Affairs for Guatemala, followed this by informing all the foreign embassies in Guatemala City that “as the Federation no longer existed, Guatemala now stood independently.”³⁸ This outlook was reaffirmed on 5 July, 1842 when the Guatemalan authorities refused to send delegates to the meeting at Chinandega in Nicaragua. Aycinena argued that the event was merely “a convention of states,” and Guatemala later officially rejected the Chinandega Pact proposing formation of a new union of the Central American states.³⁹

The Guatemalan authorities knew that Nicaragua’s authorities had sent information to Morazán while he was exiled in Peru, about joint Nicaragua-Honduras plans for re-establishing the Central American Union. Thus, the Guatemalan authorities believed, rightly so, that Morazán’s return to isthmus had been to take up the cause of Federation.⁴⁰ This was the reason

³⁴ Rodriguez, *A Palmerstonian Diplomat ...*, 154-155.

³⁵ These measures allowed the conservatives to resume control of the economy, enforce economic legislation and to appeal to the ‘protection’ of the peasant population.

³⁶ Decree, 20 May 1838, F.O. 254/1; Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera ...*, 88.

³⁷ Woodward Jr, *Rafael Carrera ...*, 97.

³⁸ Chatfield later report to Palmerston that Guatemala had showed “a determination to separate from the rest of Central America.” Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 3, 28 January 1847, F.O. 15/45, 42.

³⁹ Chatfield to the Earl of Aberdeen, April 25, 1846, F.O. 15/42, 160

⁴⁰ William Hall to Aberdeen, 5 March 1842, F.O. 15/29; Rodriguez, *A Palmerstonian Diplomat...*, 249-250.

the Guatemalans rejected the Chinandega Pact, but they were also nudged into doing so by Chatfield who had proposed an alternative course of action, referred to by Mario Rodríguez as, “the Guatemalan Confederation.”⁴¹ In a nutshell, Chatfield’s proposal sought to establish Guatemala as the seat of power in Central America, and to get the other states to accede to this. Chatfield believed this would advance British interests in the region. Thus, to secure Guatemala’s compliance, Chatfield extended a carrot: he promised the Guatemalan officials that if they pushed for independence, he would secure Great Britain’s recognition of this by helping Guatemala negotiate a treaty of commerce with Great Britain.⁴² This latter development, as Rodríguez observed, pretty much ‘locked in’ Guatemala’s trudge towards state autonomy.⁴³

While the Guatemalan authorities steered towards independence, Superintendent McDonald’s continued forward actions in the Mosquito Shore inflamed anti-British sentiments in Central America. The matter this time concerned McDonald, accompanied by King Robert Charles Frederic, sailing aboard H.M. vessel the *Tweed* to the port at the mouth of the San Juan and forcing a Nicaraguan commandant to sign a document agreeing that the north bank of the San Juan River was actually located within *Mosquitia*, and declaring that this was the property of the Mosquito King.⁴⁴ This led to protests, and consequently, both Nicaragua and Honduras increased their efforts for establishing a new union, one aim of which was to counter further British expansion in the region.⁴⁵ However, Chatfield had already achieved his objective.

⁴¹ Rodríguez, *A Palmerstonian Diplomat ...*, 254.

⁴² To Aberdeen, No. 7, 30 August 1842, F.O. 15/29.

⁴³ Rodríguez, *A Palmerstonian Diplomat...*, 254.

⁴⁴ To Aberdeen, No. 14, 17 November 1842, F.O. 15/29. There are conflicting accounts of which James McDonald was. R.A. Humphreys states that this was the Superintendent of Belize, but Mario Rodríguez argues that it was a nephew of the Superintendent by the same name, who at the time was the captain of a British naval vessel.

⁴⁵ P. Caravajal to William Hall, 31 May 1842, F.O. 252/16.

Hence, he replied to these protests by indicating that “it [was] not necessary to discuss the rights of British sovereignty with Central America.”⁴⁶ Chatfield also responded to the calls for the Central American states to band together, by threatening a British blockade of Nicaragua’s maritime ports, and by laying fresh calls for the Nicaraguan government to repay debts it owed to British merchants as well as the portion of the debt it inherited from the UPCA after that body’s collapse.⁴⁷ Then, following McDonald’s earlier lead, Chatfield too declared that “the boundaries of *Mosquitia* extend from the north bank of the San Juan River all the way to Cape Gracias a Dios.”⁴⁸ In this way, Chatfield preserved British influence in the isthmus.

The authorities from El Salvador joined with those from Honduras and Nicaragua, and retorted to these threats by agitating against Chatfield’s proposed “Guatemalan Confederation” plan.⁴⁹ This led Chatfield to step up his efforts at undermining the calls for reviving a Central American federation.⁵⁰ Chatfield also used this incident to strengthen his relationship with the Guatemalan conservatives by reiterating his promise to help Guatemala secure a treaty of commerce with Great Britain.⁵¹ Chatfield’s heavy handed tactics produced the results he desired, but it committed him (and Great Britain) to supporting Guatemala’s independence. Thus, with Great Britain’s support seemingly locked in, the Guatemalan Commissioners attending a meeting of the Central American states in Sonsonate, Salvador in 1846 to consider re-establishing a union, reported that “to attempt to change the situation of the separation of the states would materially alter the status quo... [that] it would be a useless effort... [as] all

⁴⁶ Foreign Office Memorandum on the Mosquito Shore, 1844, F.O. 39/9.

⁴⁷ To Aberdeen, No. 16, 30 November 1842, F.O. 15/29.

⁴⁸ To Aberdeen, No. 15, 21 November 1842, F.O. 15/29; To Aberdeen, No. 9, 27 May 1843, F.O. 15/35.

⁴⁹ To the Government of Salvador, No. 19, 7 December 1843, F.O. 252/20; Rodriguez, *A Palmerstonian Diplomat ...*, 258.

⁵⁰ Mendoza, *Great Britain and Her Treaties...*, 92.

⁵¹ From Juan José Aycinena, 13 November 1843, F.O. 252/12.

the old rivalries among states would reappear.”⁵² Consequently the congress, from which Costa Rica was absent, failed to secure agreement among the states for forming a new union. Honduras, Nicaragua, and Salvador though, left an opening to do so in the event Guatemala change its position. Such a change was not forthcoming however, as on the 2 March 1847 Carrera issued a decree asserting Guatemala’s absolute independence.⁵³ The following year, on 10 September 1848, the Guatemalan constituent assembly declared Guatemala’s independence.⁵⁴ Then on 20 February 1849, almost two years after the Foreign Office had rejected a similar convention, Great Britain signed a treaty of commerce and navigation with the Republic of Guatemala, thereby recognizing Guatemala’s independence.⁵⁵

Chatfield must have enjoyed a sense of triumph with the way events unfolded. He had successfully prevented the re-establishment of a Central American union to counter British activities in the isthmus;⁵⁶ secured recognition of Guatemalan independence; parried enquiries from the Guatemalan Foreign Minister and gotten the Guatemalan authorities (for the time being) to disregard the Belize boundary issue;⁵⁷ and, expanded British influence in Guatemala. One reason Chatfield had urged Guatemala to pursue its independence was the increased activities of foreign powers in the region.⁵⁸ Chatfield understood that Great Britain could not continue to “exercise a preponderant influence ... in Central America” for long without

⁵² (Translation), Report of Guatemalan Commissioners, Guatemala City, 23 March 1846, F.O. 15/42, 176.

⁵³ Chatfield had advised the Guatemalan authorities that the state’s “material prosperity... establishments of learning and seat of bishopric made it suitable for independence.” Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 3, 28 January 1847, F.O. 15/45, 42.

⁵⁴ The assembly included members of both the conservative and liberal parties.

⁵⁵ Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History...*, 47; Mendoza, *Great Britain and Her Treaties ...*, 91-96.

⁵⁶ Mr. Chatfield, No. 29, Guatemala, 4 September 1846, F.O. 15/42, 340-341 Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 12, 22 March 1847, F.O. 15/45, 118.

⁵⁷ Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 34, Guatemala, 20 July 1847, enclosing translation of a note received from the Guatemalan Minister José Mariano Rodríguez, F.O 15/46, 194, 197.

⁵⁸ To Aberdeen, No. 7, 30 August 1842, F.O. 15/19.

recognizing the independence of the states.⁵⁹ He also realized that negotiating a treaty of commerce with all five states would have proven too difficult. Thus, hoping that Guatemala City would remain as the hub of commercial and political power in Central America Chatfield pursued this end with Guatemala.⁶⁰ As he stated to Lord Palmerston “a timely move on the part of England towards closer connection with Guatemala might enable us to secure a stronghold on the country to the advantage and maintenance of British influence under all changes and circumstances.”⁶¹

The Belgian Colonization Project at Santo Tomás:

The colonization contract issued by the Guatemalan government to the Belgian Colonization Company posed concerns for Belize’s continued role as the bridgehead for British influence in Central America. After cancelling the contract with the East Coast Company, the Guatemalan government issued a new contract to the Belgian Colonization Company on 4 May, 1842.⁶² This was for 8,000 *caballerías* of land (about 1,539,200 acres or 2,405 square miles⁶³) and as a part of that deal, the Belgian Colonization Company agreed to take over the road and port infrastructure development project at Santo Tomás.⁶⁴ This transfer was urged by

⁵⁹ Naylor rightly points out that Great Britain maintained its pre-eminence in the region despite not recognizing Central American independence, though he fails to recognize that Belize’s strategic value was the reason for this. Robert Naylor, “The British Roles in Central America prior to the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Aug. 1960), 361.

⁶⁰ To Aberdeen, No. 36, 18 November 1844, F.O. 15/37.

⁶¹ Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 3, 28 January 1847, F.O. 15/45, 48.

⁶² Chatfield to Aberdeen, Guatemala 12 July 1842, F.O. 15/29, 100-122. A copy of the contract is available in Manuel Pineda de Mont, *Recopilación de las leyes de Guatemala*, Volume 2, (Imprenta de la Paz, 1869), Section 36, Ley 7, N. 514, 824-831, digitized 21 July 2014, available at https://books.google.co.uk/books/about/Recopilaci%C3%B3n_de_las_leyes_de_Guatemala.html?id=XI5CAQAAMAAJ&redir_esc=y

⁶³ This is equivalent to a little more than 25% of the total area of Belize today.

⁶⁴ Memorandum on Belgian Colonization Company Settlement at Santo Tomás, F.O. 15/42, 333. For a discussion of Belgian colonization efforts in Latin America in the second quarter of the 19th century see Robert Raymond Ansiaux, *Early Belgian Colonial Efforts: The Long and Fateful Shadow of Leopold I*, unpublished doctoral thesis, (University of Texas at Arlington, 2006).

Mariano Riviera Paz and other leading conservatives in the government such as Manuel Francisco Pavón Aycinena, along with several *Consulado* members including Juan José Aycinena. The conservative group exerted their influence to win Carrera's favour for the initiative and achieved this by enticing him with offers of title to land in the surrounding area. Thus, in return for acceding to the requests of the conservative cohort and granting this concession, Carrera personally received a land grant of one hundred *caballerías* adjacent to Santo Tomás from the government of Guatemala. Thereafter, Carrera, previously opposed to foreign colonization schemes, shifted his position, and openly agitated for projects which would directly benefit the Guatemalan merchants.⁶⁵

The Aycinenas had a vested interest in reviving Santo Tomás. They, like other members of the Guatemalan consulado, firmly believed that the port could not only rival that of Belize,⁶⁶ but that its revival could also be a “victory [for Guatemala] over Honduras in a decades-long [inter-provincial] struggle for control of the trade [of the isthmus].”⁶⁷ In short, the revival of Santo Tomás was key to the Guatemalan elites and merchants restoring their power in Central America and making good on their plans for establishing an inter-oceanic route through the state of Guatemala. As Sophie Brockmann observes, the constraints to Guatemala's development caused by the lack of infrastructure had been a concern for the Guatemalan statesman Jose Cecilio del Valle.⁶⁸ The *Consulado* argued that Santo Tomás held several comparative advantages over the ports of Omoa and Trujillo in Honduras in the trade of Central America, including a shorter distance to the capital of Guatemala and easier access to the

⁶⁵ Woodward, *Rafael Carrera ...*, 124, 132.

⁶⁶ Woodward, *Class Privilege and Economic Development: The Consulado de Comercio of Guatemala, 1793-1871*, 69.

⁶⁷ Troy S. Floyd, “The Guatemalan Merchants, the Government, and the Provincianos, 1750-1800,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 41, no. 1 (1961): 93.

⁶⁸ Sophie Brockmann, *The Science of Useful Nature in Central America: Landscapes, Networks and Practical Enlightenment, 1784-1838*, (Cambridge University Press, 2020), 205.

Atlantic.⁶⁹ The work required of the Belgian Colonization Company therefore was “to make a good road or a canal from Santo Tomás to the Montagua, [and] to canalize that river to the Gualan or further if possible.”⁷⁰ This route was consistent with the partialities of the Guatemalan Consulado hitherto.

The persistence in Guatemalan political and mercantile circles that a ‘communications route’ through Guatemalan territory with a terminus in the Golfo Dulce was viable, stemmed from older reports from studies of such crossings during the Spanish colonial period, as well as more recent surveys by British engineers since independence.⁷¹ For example, the Guatemalans considered a study from “1792 [by an] engineer Antonio Porta [which] indicated to the Spanish government a project of communication between the port of Santo Tomás, and the Montagua river, by way of a road, or better, by way of a canal.”⁷² They also considered a survey of possible trans-isthmian routes in 1836 by a British engineer, John Bailey, who helped negotiate a loan in Guatemala from a British bank and ended up staying in Guatemala.⁷³ Bailey who was regularly “engaged in cartographic projects for the...Guatemalan and Nicaraguan governments in the 1830s and 1840s,” was commissioned for the work of surveying a route across Guatemala by Francisco Morazán, then President of the UPCA, after Morazán received

⁶⁹ Floyd, 93.

⁷⁰ Mr Chatfield, No. 28, Foreign Office, August 10, 1846, F.O. 15/42, 317; Memorandum of Treaty signed between Belgium and the State of Guatemala, July 1846, F.O. 15/42, 329.

⁷¹ Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 24, Guatemala, June 28, 1847, F.O. 15/46, 143. According to Brockmann, British geographers were regularly involved in surveys of the region for the government of Guatemala. Brockmann, Brockmann, *The Science of Useful Nature ...*, 201.

⁷² Brockmann, *The Science of Useful Nature ...*, 206, citing “‘En 1792 el Ing P presentó un proyecto de comunicación entre el puerto de Santo Tomás y el río Motagua.’ (Consulado papers, 1841), AGCA, B92.2., Leg. 3612, Exp. 84389.”

⁷³ From John Baily, 30 June 1838, F.O. 252/6. Also, Brockmann, 214; and Report of the Isthmian Canal Commission, 1899-1901, *57th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Document No. 54*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1901) digitized 2010, 41, <http://ufdc.ufl.edu/AA00000269/00001>.

a project for a Central American canal from Juan José Aycinena.⁷⁴ Bailey suggested that given the importance of the Golfo Dulce to Guatemala's trade,

were a short canal made from the port [of Santo Tomás] to the River Montagua, ... a water communication thirty leagues into the interior could be opened [...and] the advantages which would arise are obvious. Or if a road were made from Santo Tomás to meet the Montagua...many of the existing inconveniences to commerce would be removed [but] the construction of a good road would be expensive.⁷⁵

In 1849, another British engineer, A. F. Campbell, invited by the Guatemalan government to conduct another set of surveys, had, alternatively, proposed construction of a railroad across Guatemala.⁷⁶ This was “to be built with British capital... [and] be entirely under British control [but] could not be used ... in any way detrimental to the British empire.” This later became known as the British alternative transit route (to the railroad crossing considered through Panama), and was projected to run, rather intriguingly, “from a port on the Bay of Honduras...from some point on the Gulf of Dulce...called Lake Izabal and Rio Dulce.”⁷⁷ This route differed from the Santo Tomás route, and would later be used for building the railway in Guatemala, but it corresponds rather strongly with the route for the “cart-road” later considered by Article 7 of the 1859 Wyke-Aycinena Treaty (also known as the Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty). This demonstrates that the cart-road contemplated by Article 7 was not hatched as a last-minute compensation to Guatemala for agreeing the boundaries of Belize.

⁷⁴ Brockman, 213, citing “AGCA, B95.1, Exp. 32600, Leg. 1398, fol. 8; AGCA, B95.1, Leg. 1398, Exp. 32689.”

⁷⁵ John Baily, *Central America: Describing Each of the States of Guatemala, Honduras, Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica; Their Natural Features, Products, Population, and Remarkable Capacity for Colonization...* (London: T. Saunders, 1850), 37, <http://archive.org/details/centralamericade00bail>.

⁷⁶ Ross, “The Construction of the Interoceanic Railroad of Guatemala,” *The Americas*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Jan. 1977), 432. A railroad was not built across Guatemala until the closing period of the nineteenth century. See Wayne Foster Anderson, “The Development of Export Transportation in Liberal Guatemala, 1871-1920,” *PhD Diss. Tulane University*, 1985.

⁷⁷ *Ibid*, 433.

Mariano Riviera Paz also had personal interest in having the colonization concession transferred to the Belgian Colonization Company. To strengthen Guatemala's hand in the negotiations with the visiting Belgian investors,⁷⁸ Paz proposed to Superintendent McDonald of Belize that a commercial treaty be concluded between Great Britain and Guatemala.⁷⁹ Paz was aware of growing European and United States attentions to building an interoceanic canal in the isthmus and wanted to have Guatemala benefit from any European investments in canal schemes. Paz also knew that the Mosquito King had recently issued several land grants in the Shore, and that MacDonald had urged the Colonial Secretary to consider possessing the mouth of the San Juan River in Nicaragua to "protect British commercial prosperity...and political power" as well.⁸⁰ The prospect of further British territorial annexations in Central America troubled the Guatemalans, indeed all the Central Americans.

The merchants at Belize were, understandably, concerned about the impact the Belgian project at Santo Tomás would have on the settlement's trade with Guatemala. Hence, they voiced their concerns to the colonial authorities.⁸¹ Chatfield, fully appraised of the details of the Belgian contract by his secretary, Manuel Francisco Pavón,⁸² was likewise put off by the whole affair and made this known to Lord Palmerston.⁸³ Chatfield's fears over Belgian intentions in Guatemala were confirmed when Lord Palmerston advised him that the Belgian Colonization Company was negotiating with the Guatemalan government for the proposed

⁷⁸ The enterprise was commissioned by King Leopold I of Belgium after he met with Alexander von Humboldt in Ostend to discuss possible economic opportunities in Guatemala that could advance Belgian imperial interests. See Jean Théodoridès, "Humboldt and England," *The British Journal for the History of Science* 3, no. 1 (1966), 48.

⁷⁹ Stephen to Backhouse, 8 June 1841, F.O. 15/27; also, Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History ...*, 47.

⁸⁰ Williams, *Anglo-American Isthmian Diplomacy, 1815-1915*, 41.

⁸¹ Superintendent to Secretary of State, August 11, 1843, *Archives of British Honduras III*, 66.

⁸² Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 22, Guatemala, May 31, 1847, F. O. 15/46, 36

⁸³ To Palmerston, No. 2, enclosures, 6 January 1852, F. O. 15/76.

colony at Santo Tomás to be transferred to the Belgian government.⁸⁴ Hence, despite British investments in the Santo Tomás colonization scheme, Chatfield quietly sought to subvert the Belgians implementing the contract.⁸⁵ Chatfield knew that the Belgians lacked the financial resources to fully undertake this project on their own, and that, consequently British investments or other sources of financing and technical expertise was necessary.⁸⁶ Hence, he convinced Pavón that the entire initiative was just another fraudulent scheme.⁸⁷ At the same time, he also knew that the Guatemalan authorities, aware of this shortcoming, were exploring financing with other European countries.⁸⁸ Thus, he asked for instructions from the Foreign Office on the matter of the Belgian project and was advised to simply “support any request for assistance but not to commit the British government.”⁸⁹ The Foreign Office, anticipating increased United States attentions to Central America, were already manoeuvring to secure better relations with Guatemala to the “advantage and maintenance of British influence.”⁹⁰

Restoring *Mosquitia*

In this section I show that heightened British activities in the Mosquito Shore, especially in the first half of the decade, resulted from competing territorial claims by New Granada and Costa Rica colliding with Belizean (mahogany) woodcutting activities in the area. I also show that this led Superintendent McDonald of Belize to undertake measures to protect British interests in the territory that involved “keeping up the connection with the Mosquito

⁸⁴ Mr. Chatfield, No. 28, 10 August 1846, F. O. 15/42, 306.

⁸⁵ Superintendent to Secretary of State, August 11, 1843, in *ABH III*, 66; To Clarendon, 24 September 1853, F.O. 15/81.

⁸⁶ Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 22, Guatemala, May 31, 1847, F. O. 15/46, 36.

⁸⁷ Lord Howard De Walden to Clarendon, 11 September 1853, F. O. 15/174.

⁸⁸ Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 32, Guatemala, July 17, 1847, F. O. 15/46, 184.

⁸⁹ Draft, Consul Chatfield, Foreign Office, No. 4, 1 December 1846, F. O. 15/42.

⁹⁰ Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 3, January 28, 1847, F. O. 15/45, 42.

Shore,”⁹¹ and argue that this reaffirmed Belize’s value to British interests in Central America, but that it also had the unintended effect of drawing attention to the question of British rights in Belize.⁹² I argue further that British officials prevented the developments in the Mosquito Shore from seriously undermining Great Britain’s position in the region by leveraging Belize’s historical linkages to the Mosquito Indians, and in this way enabled the Belizean mahogany trade to expand.

Mahogany and Territorial Claims in Mosquitia

In 1843, New Granada, anxious about the prospect of a trans-isthmian canal route through the San Juan River and Lake Nicaragua, laid claim to the entire Mosquito Shore territory.⁹³ New Granada’s claim was triggered by growing concerns in that state over the threat posed by the United States attentions to a possible Nicaragua canal, for its own inter-oceanic communications project in Panama.⁹⁴ Indeed, within a space of three years in the second half of the 1830s, the United States government had authorized two different missions to investigate the practicality of a trans-isthmian crossing in Central America.⁹⁵ United States interest in a

⁹¹ Memorandum, Mosquito Shore, 15 December 1843, F. O. 15/36, 355.

⁹² Guatemala contended that British rights in the settlement was one of usufruct and limited to the area delineated by the Anglo-Spanish treaty of 1786. For a discussion of this see Jose Luis Mendoza, *Great Britain and Her Treaties on Belize (British Honduras): Guatemala Has the Right to Reinstatate the Entire Territory of Belize*, (Guatemala: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1946), 47-66.

⁹³ Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 16, 15 April 1847, F. O. 15/45; Memorandum, Mosquito Shore, 15 December 1843, F.O. 15/36, 358. This claim indirectly affected Belize, unlike the agreement between New Granada and Guatemala in 1825 which directly clashed with British possessory rights in Belize.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, F. O. 15/45.

⁹⁵ In 1836 the United States government dispatched Charles Biddle to investigate the best route across Central America for locating a canal crossing after New Granada “issued a contract to an Englishman Charles Thierry, to build a route across Panama. In 1839 again, the United States Congress resolved to dispatch another representative to the isthmus again to assess the prospects for an interoceanic canal. For the Biddle mission see John M. Belohlavek, “A Philadelphian and the Canal: The Charles Biddle Mission to Panama, 1835-1836,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 104, No. 4 (Oct. 1980), 451-461. Also, James D. Richardson, *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, Vol 3, 1789-1897, (Forgotten Books, February 2019), 272-273.

canal in the isthmus lay predominantly in a Panama canal and Secretary of State, Henry Clay, had authorized the two United States representatives to the Congress of Panama in 1826 to discuss this.⁹⁶ Costa Rica, spurred by its interest in ensuring that it “maintained a free outlet to the Atlantic for its trade via the San Juan River,” also lodged a claim to a part of the Mosquito Shore.⁹⁷ These claims overlapped with heightened activities by Belize mahogany woodcutters in the Mosquito Shore resulting from the depletion of mahogany stands in Belize and the subsequent decision of the Board of Trade in 1838 to “allow mahogany cut in the Bay of Honduras without clearing through Belize.”⁹⁸ This had the potential for seriously undermining Great Britain’s standing in the region.

The Board of Trade’s decision to allow mahogany cut outside of Belize to be shipped directly to London, stemmed from a combination of factors and favoured Belize’s continued role as a bridgehead for British influence in Central America. The fact that the mahogany stands in Belize were mostly logged by the mid to late 1830s left the Belize woodcutters, potentially, without the basis of their economic activity in the settlement. In addition, changes in the duties for mahogany imported into England, while they reduced the margin of preference for Belizean mahogany, placed Belize mahogany at a ‘disadvantage’ (although mahogany cut in Belize only paid £2.10 per ton after 1826, all other mahogany now paid only £7.10 per ton on importation into Great Britain).⁹⁹ Additional changes adopted in 1832 which permitted foreign mahogany to be cleared through Belize, but which required that these pay additional duties of £1.10 per

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 451.

⁹⁷ McDonald to Russell, Belize, 10 February 1841, F.O. 15/26, 158-159; Mr. Chatfield, No. 7, Guatemala, 20 February 1846, F.O. 15/42, 72.

⁹⁸ George Hyde to Palmerston, London, 24 October 1837, F.O. 15/19, 296; James Hume to James Stephens, Whitehall, 16 August 1838, C.O. 123/54, nf.

⁹⁹ Henry Cooke to R.W. Horton, London, 10 March 1826, C.O. 123/37, nf. Also, Bulmer-Thomas and Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Belize...*, 74.

ton redressed the matter somewhat.¹⁰⁰ At the same time the ability for foreign mahogany to now clear from other British colonies at a cost of £4.10 per ton additional charges, meant that while Belize could be by-passed, the preferential rate provided an incentive for foreign mahogany to still be shipped through the port of Belize.

The above mix of factors and “the erroneous way of calculating duties on mahogany,” as Chatfield complained,¹⁰¹ had the potential for significantly weakening the commercial activities of the Belize woodcutters. They also had the potential for shifting economic activity and shipping from the port of Belize to a port or ports in Central America. This latter prospect however, was nullified by the lack of an adequate port on the Atlantic coast of Central America that connected to the capital at Guatemala City by a good cart-road.¹⁰² Nonetheless, with regard to the former, the Board of Trade argued that “Belize had been established originally for the express purpose of cutting mahogany on foreign territory and that ... if Great Britain could have her cutting licence extended beyond the original limits without quarrelling with the neighbouring states, then the mahogany trade ought not to be confined to the exhausted areas.”¹⁰³ This position of the Board of Trade confirms that for British officials in London, the ability of the Belize mahogany merchants to remain engaged in the trade was more important to British interests in Central America than the value of the trade itself.¹⁰⁴ The problem for the Belize woodcutters now was sourcing that foreign mahogany.

¹⁰⁰ Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 16, Salvador, 1 June 1836, F.O. 15/18, 91. For details of the changes in the duty schedule see Board of Trade memo on the Belize mahogany trade, 19 September 1833, C.O. 123/43, nf.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, No. 16, F.O. 15/18, 91; Chatfield to Viscount Palmerston, No. 15, San Salvador, 27 May 1836, F.O. 15/18, 87-90.

¹⁰² Naylor, “British Commercial Relations with Central America ...,” 122.

¹⁰³

¹⁰⁴ Barbara and Victor Bulmer-Thomas jointly show that the mahogany trade expanded significantly after 1836 reaching its peak around 1846 -1847 in terms of both total board feet exported, and the share of total British imports of mahogany before declining sharply thereafter. See Bulmer-Thomas and Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Belize...*, 74-76.

The attempts of the Belize merchants to extend their mahogany operations into the Mosquito Shore ran into immediate problems. This was because the areas “where the best mahogany stands were located”—that is, east of the maritime port of “Trujillo on the Roman and Limon Rivers”—were already under the control of Marshall Bennett.¹⁰⁵ Bennett, as mentioned in the previous chapter, was business partner with Francisco Morazán, and managed the concessions that Morazán had secured from the state of Honduras prior to the UPCA’s collapse.¹⁰⁶ The areas these concessions covered overlapped with the Mosquito territory, or at least the boundaries between them were unclear. Thus, when Bennett indicated to the Belize woodcutters that they were trespassing and “threatened to occupy by force the spot in dispute,”¹⁰⁷ the latter, to get around this, leveraged the settlement’s historical relationship with the Mosquito Shore by urging Robert Charles Frederick, then Mosquito King, to seek the protection of the Superintendent at Belize. The Belize woodcutters also took advantage of the opening to secure several concessions from the Mosquito King which gave them cutting rights in the disputed areas.¹⁰⁸

Great Britain’s relationship with the Mosquito Shore stretched back to around the mid-seventeenth century when the settlers established trade relations with the Mosquito tribes.¹⁰⁹ Over the course of the eighteenth century, British officials forged economic-military alliances with the Mosquitos, and the latter embraced many British customs and politics.¹¹⁰ This was

¹⁰⁵ Naylor, *Penny Ante-Imperialism...*, 113.

¹⁰⁶ Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 24, San Salvador, 19 August 1837, F. O. 15/19, 127.

¹⁰⁷ Chatfield to Colonel McDonald, Superintendent at British Honduras, 31 March 1837, F. O. 15/19, 73; Extract of letter from Colonel McDonald, Superintendent at Belize, 20 February 1837, F. O. 15/19, 69.

¹⁰⁸ George Hyde to Palmerston, London, 24 October 1837, F. O. 15/19, 296-297.

¹⁰⁹ Karl Offen, “Creating Mosquitia: mapping Amerindian spatial practices in eastern Central America, 1629-1779,” *Journal of Historiographical Geography* (April 2007), 260. Also, Daniel Mendiola, “The rise of the Mosquito Kingdom in Central America’s borderlands: Sources, questions, and enduring myths,” *History Compass*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (Jan 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1111/hic3.12437>.

¹¹⁰ Matthew P. Dziennik, “The Miskitu, Military Labor, and the San Juan Expedition of 1780,” *The Historical Journal*, Vol 61, No. 1 (2018), 155-179.

unique within Central America and allowed the British to forge a distinctive relationship with the Mosquito people that was advantageous to British activities in Central America. In 1780 for instance, Great Britain launched a military expedition up the San Juan River under the command of Captain John Polson and a young Captain Horatio Nelson that, with the help of the Mosquito Indians, was successful in capturing the strategic “fortress of San Carlos at the mouth of Lake Nicaragua.”¹¹¹ Then in 1816 British officials began crowning Mosquito Kings in Belize.¹¹² McGregor’s “Poyais” kingdom in the 1820s also extended the British-Mosquito relationship. Thus, when disputes over Belizean mahogany merchants’ woodcutting rights in the Mosquito Shore arose, Lord Glenelg, at the time the Colonial Secretary, suggested that “the practice of giving gifts to the Mosquito King should be renewed, but insisted that the value of this should be left to [the merchants of] Belize.”¹¹³

Lord Palmerston was in agreement with this, and he also supported Lord Glenelg’s position that “Her Majesty’s government should remonstrate against any interference by Central America within territories in the actual occupation of the Mosquito Indians, or with territories to which they can show themselves entitled.”¹¹⁴ Hence, Palmerston informed Chatfield that Great Britain “would not treat with indifference on the part of Central America to encroach upon the Mosquito territory,” and further “alluded ... to the advantage which would result to British interests from keeping up the connection ... and the all-important matter of the extension of British commerce in that part of the world.”¹¹⁵ When therefore King Robert

¹¹¹ Dalling to Germain, 2 July 1780, C. O. 137/78, 179-181. For a discussion of the expedition see Dziennik, “The Miskito, Military Labor, and the San Juan Expedition of 1780.”

¹¹² George Frederic was the first Mosquito King to be crowned in Belize. For more on this see Michael D. Olien, “The Miskito Kings and the Line of Succession,” *Journal of Anthropological Research*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Summer, 1983), 198-241. Also, Wolfgang Gabbert, “God Save the King of the Mosquito Nation!” *Indigenous Leaders on the Fringe of the Spanish Empire*, *Ethnohistory* 1 January 2016; 63 (1): 71-93.

¹¹³ James Stephens to John Backhouse, 15 June 1837, F. O. 15/19, 244-246.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 244-246.

¹¹⁵ Memorandum. Mosquito Shore, F. O. 15/36, 355/356, 358.

Charles Frederic sought out the protection and support of Superintendent McDonald,¹¹⁶ the latter acted decisively, and in a manner that was aimed at preserving ‘British rights’ in the Mosquito Shore, but which simultaneously affirmed Belize’s strategic value to Great Britain’s interests in Central America.

Superintendent McDonald, in keeping with the request of the Mosquito King, on 18 February 1840, established a commission to help “govern” the Shore. This committee was comprised of five of the leading commercial and political figures, all residents, of Belize, including one of the leading mahogany merchants of the settlement, William Cox.¹¹⁷ The commission had only been in existence for a little over a year when McDonald received instructions from Lord Russell, the Colonial Secretary, to renounce the body.¹¹⁸ McDonald complied with these instructions, but he also determinedly advised Robert Charles Frederic that while the establishment of a commission did not have the sanction of the British government directly, there was nothing preventing him as the Mosquito King from appointing his own commission. King Robert Charles Frederic heeded this counsel, and basically re-appointed the same commission members save for William Cox.¹¹⁹

In 1844, Robert Charles Frederic died, leaving the ‘Belizean commission’ fully in charge of governing the affairs of the Mosquito Shore. At the time of his death, none of Robert Charles’ two sons were old enough to succeed him as king of Mosquitia. The transfer of authority however was then complicated by the commission deciding, on McDonald’s prior agreement with Robert Charles Frederic, that the younger son William Henry Clarence, who

¹¹⁶ Robert Charles Frederic to McDonald, Belize, 12 February 1840, F. O. 15/24, 39.

¹¹⁷ Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism ...*, 132.

¹¹⁸ Lord John Russell to McDonald, 8 February 1841, F.O. 15/28.

¹¹⁹ Decree, King Robert Charles Frederick, 9 August 1841, enclosure in Colonial Office to the Foreign Office, 24 December 1841, F.O. 15/28.

had spent the last few years in Belize getting an education, should succeed Robert Charles as king instead of the rightful heir, his brother George Augustus.¹²⁰ Given Clarence's young age, McDonald empowered the commission to serve, alongside three representatives from different Mosquito communities in the Shore, as regent until such time that Clarence was old enough to take over. Robert Charles Frederic's passing however had created a power vacuum in the Shore, and the anarchy that ensued as the three local regents competed for power, led to the Colonial Office in 1844, officially appointing Patrick Walker, McDonald's secretary in Belize, as regent to the Mosquito Shore.¹²¹ Meanwhile, Clarence was sent to England to complete his studies there and never became king. In any event, the unstable situation in the Shore led to Walker having George Augustus crowned in Belize on 7 May 1845 as the new Mosquito King.¹²²

Meanwhile, Superintendent McDonald responded to the territorial pretensions of Costa Rica and New Granada by urging that Great Britain appoint a resident to the Shore, and by warning authorities of both countries against encroaching or occupying the Mosquito Shore.¹²³ The latter was not very effective however, and the encroachments continued. Consequently, McDonald, sailed to the San Juan River, and imposed his authority on the Nicaraguan force that occupied the south bank of the river.¹²⁴ On the 14th of August, after Manuel Quijano, the Nicaraguan Commandant at the base at San Juan, refused to acquiesce to demands for desisting from any further encroachments in the Mosquito Shore, Superintendent McDonald forced Quijano to pull down the Nicaraguan flag that was flying over the area, and then removed him

¹²⁰ Proclamation by Robert Charles Frederick, Colonial Office to the Foreign Office, 24 December 1841, F.O. 15/28, 109-113. Also, "Mosquito Kings (Mosquitia), AD 900 – 1894," *The History Files*, available at <https://www.historyfiles.co.uk/KingListsAmericas/CentralMiskito.htm>.

¹²¹ Chatfield to Aberdeen, No. 24, 1 July 1844, F.O. 15/37.

¹²² Olien, "The Miskito Kings and the Line of Succession," 228.

¹²³ McDonald to Lord Russell, Belize, 10 February 1841, F.O. 15/26, 158-159; Burdon, *ABH*, III, 49.

¹²⁴ William Hall to Aberdeen, 16 October 1841, F.O. 15/25.

aboard H.M. vessel the *Tweed* to Boca del Toro.¹²⁵ Subsequently, Quijano signed a declaration which agreed to the demands, and which, importantly, discharged McDonald of any responsibility in pulling down the flag. Despite this ‘confession’, the Central American authorities charged that Great Britain was attempting to annex the territory, and McDonald’s actions fuelled anti-British sentiments in the Central American states.¹²⁶

The Quijano episode eventually led, as McDonald had earlier suggested, to Great Britain taking a greater direct role in the Mosquito Shore.¹²⁷ While Lord Russell the Colonial Secretary had been reluctant for this to happen, Lord Palmerston at the Foreign Office was, by comparison, open to the idea of increasing Great Britain’s role in the region.¹²⁸ Changes in both the Colonial and Foreign Offices in 1841, led to Russell’s demitting the office of Colonial Secretary and to Lord Palmerston also leaving his role as Foreign Secretary. These changes, alongside the anarchy in the Shore that followed the death of Robert Charles Frederic, as Robert Naylor contends, allowed McDonald to press forward with his plans for securing the Mosquito Shore to British control.¹²⁹ Thus, McDonald urged Lord Russell to take possession of the mouth of the San Juan River so as “to promote British commercial prosperity and [expansion].”¹³⁰ Chatfield and Sir Charles Metcalfe, the Governor of Jamaica, to whom McDonald was answerable, both agreed that it would be prudent for Great Britain to establish the north bank

¹²⁵ McDonald to the Chief-of-State of Nicaragua, 15 August 1841, F.O. 15/25, 130-133; Secretary of State for Nicaragua to Aberdeen, 12 January 1842, F.O. 15/29; From the Secretary General of the government of Nicaragua to Frederick Chatfield, Government House, Leon, 10 November 1842, *Congressional Serial Set*, (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1849), 30 - 39. Also, “International Court of Justice: Territorial and Maritime Dispute (Nicaragua v. Colombia), Memorial of the Government of Nicaragua, Volume 1,” 28 April 2003, 63.

¹²⁶ William Hall to Palmerston, No. 12, 18 October 1841, F.O. 15/25; From the Secretary General of the government of Nicaragua to Frederick Chatfield, Government House, Leon, 10 November 1842, *Congressional Serial Set*, (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1849), 30 - 39. The Secretary General complained that “Quijano’s ...removal by force [was] a violation of the Nicaraguan territory.”

¹²⁷ Chatfield to Aberdeen, No. 24, 1 July 1844, F.O. 15/37; From Aberdeen, 30 April 1844, F.O. 15/37.

¹²⁸ John Backhouse to the Colonial Office, Foreign Office, 15 December 1840, F.O. 15/24, 180-188.

¹²⁹ Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism...*, 144.

¹³⁰ McDonald to Lord Russell, 1841, C.O. 123/57, 45.

of the San Juan River as the boundary of *Mosquitia*.¹³¹ With growing international attention to isthmian canal schemes in the second half of the decade, especially by France and the United States, this matter of the Mosquito Shore's boundaries later proved significant. Meanwhile, extension of *Mosquitia's* boundaries raised questions about British presence there, and in Belize as well.

So how exactly did this affect Great Britain's outlook towards Belize? The answer to this lies with the fact that McDonald's schemes "consolidate[d] British control over the shore."¹³² Notably, as the two commissions were comprised largely of residents from Belize control of the Shore was exercised "informally" from the settlement in Belize. Robert Charles Frederic's deferral to Superintendent McDonald for guaranteeing the security of the Shore, and the decision of Patrick Walker, installed as British regent in *Mosquitia*, to crown George Augustus as Mosquito King in Belize, separately reinforced the importance of the Belize-Mosquito relationship to British activities in Central America. In other words, McDonald's tactics in letting the Mosquito King appoint the commission, the latter's 'shuffle' of the commission by re-appointing the very persons initially appointed by McDonald, and the coronation of George Augustus in Belize Town together practically relegated *Mosquitia* to a political dependency of the British settlement at Belize.

Manifest Destiny and ... Greytown!

In this final section of the chapter, I highlight how exactly the competition among the Central American states for autonomy further shaped Great Britain's handling of Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize during the decade under consideration here. I show that the

¹³¹ From Chatfield, London, 12 April 1842, F.O. 15/29, 61-64; Metcalfe to Lord Russell, Jamaica, 24 June 1841, F.O. 15/27, 162-167.

¹³² Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism...*, 135.

promotions of the Central American states for locating trans-isthmian canal routes across the isthmus, particularly in Nicaragua,¹³³ created openings for other foreign powers to establish their influence within the region, and that Lord Palmerston's response to this—i.e., extending the boundaries of the Mosquito territory to the mouth of the San Juan River and re-naming the place Greytown—furthered Belize's salience to British activities in Central America. I argue that while Germany and France both pursued separate colonization and canal projects in Nicaragua, it was the clash between British expansion in the Mosquito Shore and United States' manifest destiny aspirations in the isthmus that affected Belize, as this led the United States to pivot on British presence in Central America and its possession of Belize. I also argue that Great Britain's free trade turn the 1840s was a factor in how Great Britain responded to the United States over the whole matter.

Prussian (German)¹³⁴ and French Canal and Colonization Projects

The promotions of Guatemala and Nicaragua for colonization and isthmian canal projects in their respective territories following the collapse of the Federation, by playing to the ambitions of other foreign powers for establishing their own influences in the isthmus, all had the potential for undermining British predominance in Central America. While the Guatemalan authorities courted the Belgians for their colonization project at Santo Tomás, the French, Prussians, and the United States were all attentive to Nicaragua and projects that the state held up for a canal route through the San Juan River and Lake Nicaragua. Of the latter three, United States pretensions towards Nicaragua posed the greatest threat to British presence

¹³³ William Whatley Pierson, "The Political Influences of an Interoceanic Canal, 1826-1926," *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 6, no. 4 (1926): 205–31, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2505801>; also, John T. Morgan, "The Choice of Isthmian Canal Routes," *The North American Review* 174, no. 546 (1902): 672–86.

¹³⁴ Prior to the unification of the Germany in 1871, Prussia was one of the more powerful states of the German Federation

in the Mosquito Shore, and as such, also affected the question of Great Britain's possessory rights in Belize the most.

Prussian colonization and expansion in Central America in the middle of the nineteenth century did not exactly imperil British presence in the region, nor did it affect Great Britain's possessory right in Belize. However, a German colonization scheme in the Bluefields area of the Mosquito Shore, key to British control over the San Juan River area had to be deterred. Prussian interests in colonization and canal schemes in Nicaragua during the 1840s were an outgrowth of the former's involvement with the Belgian colonization project at Santo Tomás in Guatemala,¹³⁵ and resulted from the combination of economic and social pressures brought about by the industrial revolution,¹³⁶ along with a series of "local crop failures [in Germany] in 1844."¹³⁷ A commission which visited the Mosquito Shore recommended that immigration and colonization ventures be pursued there as a possible vent to the economic and social tensions being experienced in Germany, but the German government thwarted this. Thus, recalling the Prussian geographer Alexander von Humboldt's reports on possible canal routes in Central America (among other places),¹³⁸ Prince Karl of Prussia led a private venture and purchased land in the Bluefields area of the Mosquito Shore from Mathew Willock, a Jamaican resident and representative of a speculative colonization enterprise, with the intention of

¹³⁵ For more on the German involvement in the Mosquito Shore see Thomas Schoonover, *Germany in Central America: Competitive Imperialism, 1821-1929* (University of Alabama Press, 2012). Schoonover provides a useful discussion of the competition between European states over the economic opportunities in the newly independent Central America. For German involvement in Guatemala during the nineteenth century see Regina Wagner, "Los Alemanes En Guatemala, 1828-1944," *PhD Dissertation*, (Tulane University, 1991), <https://search.proquest.com/docview/303974149/abstract/1DC1061978AC45A1PQ/1>.

¹³⁶ Schoonover, *Germany in Central America*, 9; Henderson, "German Colonial Projects on the Mosquito Coast, 1844-1848," 260.

¹³⁷ Gavin B. Henderson, "German Colonial Projects on the Mosquito Coast, 1844-1848," *The English Historical Review* 59, no. 234 (1944): 260.

¹³⁸ Christine Keiner, *Science, Power, and the Unbuilt Inter-oceanic Canal*, (University of Georgia Press, 2020), 20.

establishing a German colony or settlement there.¹³⁹ The land in question, located on the Atlantic coast just north east of the mouth of the San Juan River, was part of a concession granted by Robert Charles Frederic to Peter Lelacheur (the company's head) in 1825, and was connected to the infamous "Poyais" land.¹⁴⁰

Hence, shortly after his arrival in Bluefields to take up his post "as resident and adviser to the Mosquito King," Patrick Walker announced that the land grants were "improperly made," and cautioned strongly against any colonization schemes in the Mosquito Shore.¹⁴¹ When Foreign Secretary Palmerston learned of the plans for the German enterprise in Mosquitia, he cancelled the land grants to both Willock and the German company,¹⁴² and advised Walker that

the Mosquito Government should take care in making sales or grants of land to Prince Charles of Prussia, or to any other Foreign Prince or Government, [and that] they reserve very clearly and distinctly the full sovereignty over the Lands so sold.¹⁴³

Palmerston's decision was triggered by the Prussian Minister to London, Baron von Bulow's conditions relative to the proposed colonization enterprise in Bluefields that Mosquito rights notwithstanding,

[the Germans] ought to have the right of forming a separate corporation and a community of their own with their own civil municipal and criminal administration...[and that] the Prussian or German settlement ought likewise to be placed under the protection of the Prussian Government as it is contemplated to erect the proposed factory and also partly carry out the Colonization [sic] system ... and of course appoint a Superintendent of the Factor in order to look after and secure her interests and rights in all matters ... and such a

¹³⁹ Walker to Aberdeen, No. 5, July 10, 1844, F.O. 53/1; Foreign Office, Memorandum, 6 March 1845, F.O. 53/44; Henderson, "German Colonial Projects on the Mosquito Coast, 1844-1848," 260.

¹⁴⁰ Walker to Aberdeen, No. 20, 21 July 1845, F.O. 53/44.

¹⁴¹ Burdon, *ABH*, III, 85.

¹⁴² Foreign Office Memorandum, March 6, 1845, F.O. 53/44.

¹⁴³ Note by Palmerston to Memo on Walker's Dispatch No. 4 of 20 July 1846, dated January 3, 1847, F.O. 53/10.

Superintendent ought to be vested with the free control of all internal affairs under the protection of the *Mosquitia* government if there should be any occasion for the same.¹⁴⁴

Palmerston knew that if the German colonization project proceeded this would have “transferred sovereignty of a part of the Mosquito territory” to the Germans.¹⁴⁵ Consequently this initiative was disallowed by Palmerston¹⁴⁶ and as a result, a German or Prussian colony in *Mosquitia* was never established.¹⁴⁷

French involvement in canal schemes in Nicaragua during the 1840s likewise did not significantly impact Great Britain’s presence in Belize. This is because, as Iwan Morgan contends, “during the reign of Louis Philippe [France] was concerned mainly with Mexico”¹⁴⁸ and French policy was otherwise aimed at countering United States expansion and influence.¹⁴⁹ French interests in the region resumed in 1838 when, following the demands of French citizens resident in Mexico for reparations from the Mexican government for unpaid debts and lost investments, French forces attacked and captured the seaport of San Juan de Ulúa in Veracruz.¹⁵⁰ The incident set off the Pastry War, but was actually a pretext for expanding French commercial and economic interests in Latin America.¹⁵¹ That this was France’s outlook

¹⁴⁴ Baron Bulow to Christie, Berlin, June 12, 1848, F.O. 53/11. Bulow is reported to have been an investor in the German colonization enterprise alongside Prince Charles of Prussia.

¹⁴⁵ Draft: Palmerston to Christie, No. 7, July 20, 1848, F.O. 53/11.

¹⁴⁶ Palmerston to Chatfield, 18 November 1848, F.O. 53/11, nf.; Christie to Palmerston, No. 7, January 30, 1849, F.O. 53/17.

¹⁴⁷ Memo on Walker’s Dispatch, No. 4 of July 20, 1846, F.O. 53/10.

¹⁴⁸ Iwan Morgan, “French Policy in Spanish America: 1830-48,” *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 10, No. 2 (Nov. 1978) 315.

¹⁴⁹ Stève Sainlaude, “France’s Grand Design and the Confederacy,” chapter in *American Civil Wars: The United States, Latin America, Europe, and the Crisis of the 1860s*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 108.

¹⁵⁰ For more on this see William Spence Robertson, “French Intervention in Mexico in 1838,” *The Hispanic American Historical Review* 24, no. 2 (1944): 222–52.

¹⁵¹ Schoonover for instance contends that the French government believed that Latin American independence would have yielded more commercial opportunities for France. Thomas Schoonover, *The French in Central America: Culture and Commerce, 1820-1930*, (Rowan and Littlefield, 2000), 4. For more on French policy in Central America see Thomas Schoonover, France in Central America 1820s-1929: an overview,” *Revue française d’histoire d’outre-mer*, tome 79, n°295, 2e trimestre (1992), 161-197; and for wider Latin America see

was confirmed when, in response to the government of Guatemala revealing an interest in negotiating treaties of commerce, the French consul to Mexico openly suggested that it “might be advantageous for France to be the first [to do so],” as this would provide an opportunity to negotiate a canal contract in Central America.¹⁵²

Renewed French ambitions in Central America were also evident in 1841 when the French government dispatched an engineer, Leon Lecomte, to Central America with instructions to “review the economic and political situation there, and to determine a course of action for France.” Lecomte had recommended that “establishment of [a] transatlantic shipping line and an interoceanic communications enterprise would “increase French political, naval and commercial influence” in Central America, but nothing came of this.¹⁵³ Then in 1843, Admiral Ludovic Moges, Commandant of the French navy in the Pacific proposed that Martinique and Guadeloupe be combined with Santo Tomás and the Rio Dulce in Guatemala, politically and economically as a way of countering British influence in the region.¹⁵⁴ And in 1848, the French Minister Charles de Challeye, convinced that greater French presence in the isthmus would prompt Nicaragua to seek French protection for the proposed San Juan del Norte transit canal project as a counter to British pretensions in the Mosquito Shore, similarly urged that Santo Tomás be seized as a base for a French colony in Central America.¹⁵⁵ The Santo Tomás initiative never materialized, quashing any potential threat to Belize, but Nicaragua’s entreaties to the French authorities in 1846 over an isthmian canal proved significant.

Morgan, “French Policy in Spanish America...,” 309-328. Morgan points out in the article that the French navy was active in “the Argentine siege of Montevideo, in imposing peace ... in the Rio de la Plata, ... [and schemed] with Great Britain to block American expansion in 1845.”

¹⁵² Schoonover, *The French in Central America ...*, 10–11.

¹⁵³ *Ibid*, 10.

¹⁵⁴ Schoonover, “France in Central America...,” 166.

¹⁵⁵ Castellon to Aberdeen, 28 August 18, F.O. 15/39; *Ibid*, 168.

In 1846, the Nicaraguan government appointed Francisco Castellón as its envoy to Europe to secure capital and support for the proposed Nicaragua canal project.¹⁵⁶ This development produced an unintended but decided shift in France's outlook towards Central America that favoured continued British influence in the isthmus. Part of Castellón's assignment was actually to protest against Great Britain's blockade of Central American ports and to try and redress the matter of the Mosquito King's jurisdiction over the Shore, now extending to the San Juan River.¹⁵⁷ Castellón's appeals to Whitehall for support did not meet with any success, and he also did not secure any British investments for the canal project.¹⁵⁸ King Louis Philippe I also rejected Castellón's appeals for support for the Nicaragua canal, as his preference was for the Panama route.¹⁵⁹ Hence, Castellón secured approval to meet with Charles-Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte while the latter was imprisoned at Ham, and offered to have him lead a commercial enterprise for constructing an interoceanic canal in Nicaragua.¹⁶⁰ The "principal inhabitants" of Nicaragua (i.e. the political elites) heavily supported this idea,¹⁶¹ thus, to entice Louis-Napoléon, Castellón also offered various commercial advantages, including transit rights across the canal route in return for French protection of Nicaragua.¹⁶²

¹⁵⁶ To Palmerston, No. 89, 16 September 1848, F.O. 15/53

¹⁵⁷ From John Foster, 6 November 1843, F.O. 252/19. In 1844 Lord Palmerston re-established a British protectorate of the Shore thereby giving the Mosquito King jurisdiction over the extended territory comprising *Mosquitia*, an area which the state of Nicaragua had laid claims of sovereignty to in 1824. See "International Court of Justice: Territorial and Maritime Dispute (Nicaragua v. Colombia), Memorial of the Government of Nicaragua, Volume 1," 28 April 2003, 2.

¹⁵⁸ Palmerston to Castellon, 16 July 1849, F.O. 97/88.

¹⁵⁹ In 1846 Louis Phillipe dispatched an engineer, Antonio Garella, to the isthmus to survey possible canal routes.

¹⁶⁰ Edward W. Richards, "Louis Napoleon and Central America," *The Journal of Modern History* 34, no. 2 (1962): 178–84. Also, "International Court of Justice: Territorial and Maritime Dispute (Nicaragua v. Colombia), Memorial of the Government of Nicaragua, Volume 1," 62.

¹⁶¹ Mr Chatfield (No. 29), Guatemala, September 4, 1846, F.O. 15/42, 339.

¹⁶² Louis Napoleon Bonaparte (L.N.B.), *Canal of Nicaragua: Or, a Project to Connect the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans by Means of a Canal* (Mills & Son, 1846), ii.

After Louis-Napoléon escaped from Ham, he became President of the Second French Republic, and one of his key aims relative to Central America was “to create a major French voice in control of isthmian routes.”¹⁶³ However, he was not in a position to follow through with this ambition prior to his becoming emperor of France in 1852.¹⁶⁴ Napoléon III, as he was called thereafter, had shared his plans for Central America with his long-time friend Lord Malmesbury,¹⁶⁵ but the British government declined investing in his proposed canal scheme in Nicaragua.¹⁶⁶ Notwithstanding, during the 1840s, Napoléon III shared Great Britain’s apprehensions over United States expansion, and during his Presidency French objectives in Central America shifted towards blocking the southward thrust of the United States.¹⁶⁷ Although Chatfield welcomed this,¹⁶⁸ he remained wary of French attentions to Central America and complained to Palmerston about their exertions to persuade Guatemala and Costa Rica to seek French protection.¹⁶⁹ For the remainder of the decade French expansionary efforts in the region would not pose any concerns to British presence in Belize, but the second French intervention in Mexico starting in 1861 shaped Great Britain’s decision to convert Belize to an official colony in 1862.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 278.

¹⁶⁴ Domingo Juarres to Thomas Manning, Managua, August 6th, 1846, F.O. 15/42, 348

¹⁶⁵ To Aberdeen, No. 29, 4 September 1846, F.O. 15/42; also, Geoffrey Hicks, “An Overlooked Entente: Lord Malmesbury, Anglo-French Relations and the Conservatives’ Recognition of the Second Empire, 1852,” *History*, Vol. 92, No. 2 (April 2007), 192-193.

¹⁶⁶ Richards, “Louis Napoleon...,” 181.

¹⁶⁷ Thomas Schoonover, “Costa Rican Trade and Navigation Ties with the United States, Germany and Europe, 1840 – 1885,” 278, www.degruyter.com/downloadpdf/j/jbla.1977.14.issue-1/jbla-1977-0111/jbla-1977-0111.pdf. Sainlaude contends that French fears of United States territorial expansion preceded Napoléon III and French Minister Francois Guizot worked consistently at stemming this. Stève Sainlaude, “France’s Grand Design and the Confederacy,” 108.

¹⁶⁸ To Aberdeen, No. 29, 4 September 1846, F.O. 15/42.

¹⁶⁹ Chatfield to Palmerston, Dispatch No. 4, Guatemala, January 17, 1848, F.O. 15/51

Rise of Anglo-American Rivalry over Central America

During the 1840s, the tangible threat among external powers to Great Britain's possessory rights in Belize was presented by the United States. For most of the previous two decades, the United States had turned a 'blind-eye' to British activities and expansion in Central America. That changed following James Polk's inaugural address as President of the United States on 4 March 1845. On that occasion, Polk articulated a clear agenda for territorial expansion, stating that "to enlarge [the United States'] limits is to extend the dominions of peace over additional territories and increasing millions...[it is] my duty to assert ... the right of the United States to that portion of our territory which lies beyond the Rocky Mountain...our title to the country of the Oregon is clear and unquestionable."¹⁷⁰ Polk based his expansionist policy on Monroe's declaration of 1823, but, as Jay Sexton observed, Polk's focus was continental as opposed to hemispheric.¹⁷¹ That is to say, Polk's "manifest destiny"¹⁷² did not (at first) seem concerned with Central America, indeed Latin America at all, though the annexation of Texas implicated Mexico. On the other hand, by "quoting Monroe's non-colonization clause ... [Polk maintained this] as continuing American Policy."¹⁷³

On the face of it, Polk's expansionist policy was consistent with prior United States' territorial expansionist impulses that stretched back to Thomas Jefferson's purchase of

¹⁷⁰ The full text of this address is available at "Inaugural Address of James Polk," *The Avalon Project: Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, available at https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/polk.asp

¹⁷¹ Sexton, "The Monroe Doctrine: Empire ...," 105.

¹⁷² Julius W. Pratt posits that the term "manifest destiny" originated with Robert C. Winthrop, Representative of Massachusetts, over British possession of the Oregon but took on its eventual meaning relation to the annexation of Texas. See Julius W. Pratt, "The Origin of 'Manifest Destiny'," *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 32, No. 4 (Jul. 1927) 795, 797, <http://www.jstor.com/stable/1837859>. For a more recent discussion of this see Jay Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine: Empire and Nation in Nineteenth Century America*, (Hill and Wang, 2011); also, Shane Mountjoy, *Manifest Destiny: Westward Expansion*, (Infobase Publishing, 2009).

¹⁷³ Walter R. Borneman, *Polk: The Man who Transformed the Presidency and America*, (Random House, 2009), 168.

Louisiana from Napoleon Bonaparte's France in 1803.¹⁷⁴ That acquisition practically doubled the size of the United States at the time, and for sure, started the process of United States' westward expansion.¹⁷⁵ The addition of this new territory to the Union though introduced a conflict between different political factions within the United States over the issue of slavery that, in 1820, as a compromise for admitting Missouri to the Union, resulted in Maine also being added to the Union as well but as a free state and to slavery being prohibited from the remaining territories from the Louisiana purchase. The issue of slavery was also a consideration when Florida was purchased from Spain the year before, and slave-holding considerations continued to shape Polk's expansionist policies. The slavery issue notwithstanding, by these territorial acquisitions, the quest for an American (read, United States) empire stirred,¹⁷⁶ but the program of territorial expansion articulated by Polk in 1845 had a more aggressive mood to it.

By 1845, the United States had entered a period of recession-free economic growth, primarily a result of "a boom in transportation-goods investments."¹⁷⁷ Then, following the discovery of gold in the newly annexed California territory after the end of the Mexican American War, the United States turned its attention towards Central America and the idea of constructing an Atlantic-Pacific canal across the isthmus, preferably in Panama.¹⁷⁸ Indeed, in

¹⁷⁴ Lawrence Hatter argues for instance that the Jay Charter helped pave the way for westward expansion and subverting British presence south of the Great Lakes. See Lawrence B.A. Hatter, "The Jay Charter: Rethinking the American National State in the West, 1796-1819," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 37, No. 4 (2013), 693-726. By comparison, Maass makes the point that territory conquered by the War of 1812 were not the result of United States expansionism but that such territory was still not relinquished. Richard W. Maass, "'Difficult to Relinquish Territory Which Had Been Conquered': Expansionism and the War of 1812," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 39, No. 1 (2015), 70-97.

¹⁷⁵ For more on this see "Westward Expansion: The Louisiana Purchase," online article in *U.S. History: Pre-Colombian to the New Millennium*, available at <https://www.ushistory.org/us/20c.asp>

¹⁷⁶ For more on this thesis see William Earl Weeks, *John Quincy Adams and American Global Empire*, (University Press of Kentucky, 1992).

¹⁷⁷ Joseph David and Marc D. Weidenmier, "America's First Great Moderation," *The Journal of Economic History*, Vol. 77, No. 4 (Dec. 2017), 1117. This growth followed the Great Depression of 1839.

¹⁷⁸ Aims McGuinness, *Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush*, (Cornell University Press, 2008).

the closing years of the 1840s, a trans-isthmian route across Panama presented the possibility of “a faster way of reaching San Francisco (i.e., California).”¹⁷⁹ Thus, United States opposition to British presence in the Mosquito Shore materialized, then hardened, and shortly agitated questions over Great Britain’s possession of Belize arose. This shift stemmed from the belief in the United States that British free traders were conspiring to prevent United States commercial expansion,¹⁸⁰ and at a time when the latter was looking to “expand [its] commercial interests.”¹⁸¹ This factor had underpinned United States’ concerns over British presence in the Oregon, and, alongside Great Britain’s anti-slave trade policies, also contributed to the United States viewing British relations with Mexico and Texas more and more as obstacles to realizing United States commercial interests.¹⁸² In short, United States officials “were convinced that Great Britain, in addition to adding territory...was using its powerful industrial, financial and commercial resources to build an informal empire based on economic domination.”¹⁸³ As James Buchanan ventured in 1848 when he was Secretary of State, Great Britain’s policy “is to seize upon every valuable commercial point throughout the world whenever circumstances have placed this in her power.”¹⁸⁴

In Central America, British presence in the Mosquito Shore during the decade under consideration was perceived exactly thus – that is, as an impediment to United States ambitions

¹⁷⁹ Ibid., 16.

¹⁸⁰ For a useful recent debate of this, see Marc-William Palen, *The “Conspiracy” of Free Trade: The Anglo-American Struggle over Empire and Economic Globalisation, 1846-1896*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

¹⁸¹ Lester D. Langley, “Manifest Destiny,” chapter in *America and the Americas: The United States in the Western Hemisphere*, (University of Georgia Press, 2010), 40. Also, Brauer, “The United States and British Imperial Expansion...,” 23.

¹⁸² Sam W. Haynes, “Manifest Destiny,” in *The U.S.-Mexican War: Prelude to War*, published online March 14, 2006, 2 of 3, available at http://www.pbs.org/kera/usmexicanwar/prelude/md_manifest_destiny.html

¹⁸³ Kinley J. Brauer, “The United States and British Imperial Expansion, 1815-60,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (Winter, 1988), 23.

¹⁸⁴ James Buchanan to Romulus M. Saunders, United States Minister to Spain, Washington, D.C., (No. 21), 17 June 1848, *United States Department of State, Diplomatic Instructions, 1785-1906, Spain*, Vol. 14.

for establishing an inter-oceanic crossing in Central America. In the early period of Central America's independence from Spain, the United States was unable to do much about British influence in the isthmus largely because it was unable to compete with British manufactures, merchants, and capital. Thus, as Lester D. Langley pointed out, the United States was somewhat dis-interested "when the [new states] requested ... support in their protests against the British presence in Belize." Hence, the United States maintained a 'holding interest' in the region by early recognizing Central American independence (something Great Britain never did), and by "dispatch[ing] commercial agents and canal promoters" to the isthmus and other parts of Latin America¹⁸⁵ (which prompted Great Britain to follow suit by sending out its own commercial agents). Great Britain's anti-slavery agenda, a factor in the annexation of Texas, was not exactly a concern in Central America as slavery was abolished there in 1823. Nonetheless, the United States now openly sought to subvert Great Britain in the region.¹⁸⁶

Great Britain's response to the United States' new attentions towards Central America in the 1840s are best understood within the above-mentioned contexts. The Oregon boundary dispute and annexation of Texas provide useful comparisons for illuminating this. In the first case, Great Britain arguably settled the Oregon boundary dispute not because Polk claimed that United States "title to the whole portion of the Oregon is clear and unquestionable,"¹⁸⁷ but because, as Henry Commager judged, by the 1840s this area had already lost its economic significance to Great Britain, or was on well on its way to doing so.¹⁸⁸ In the second case,

¹⁸⁵ Langley, "Manifest Destiny," 40.

¹⁸⁶ Brauer, "The United States and British Imperial Expansion...," 19.

¹⁸⁷ "The Proposal of President Polk," in *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, citing Niles Weekly Register, LXVI, 227, June 8, 1844, 29.

¹⁸⁸ Henry Commager, "England and the Oregon Treaty of 1846," *Oregon Historical Quarterly*, Vol. 28, No. 1 (Mar. 1927), 26. Secretary of State Buchanan had written to the British Minister to Washington, Sir Richard Packenham, that "the territory in dispute [isn't] of equal...value to [Great Britain and the United States]. While it is invaluable to the [latter] it is of comparatively small importance to Great Britain." *Ibid*, 22.

although Texas was a significant supplier of cotton to British manufacturing and therefore economically important, Great Britain acquiesced to the United States' annexation of that territory because as Lelia M. Roeckell concluded, this brought stability to Mexico and protected British capital and investments there.¹⁸⁹ In both the Oregon and Texas cases, the salience of the respective territories to British objectives differed to those of the United States.¹⁹⁰

By comparison, by the time that Central America's commercial and economic significance to the United States became enhanced¹⁹¹—that is, after gold was discovered in California—the Mosquito Shore was already vital to sustaining British expansion in the Central America. In other words, the Mosquito Shore was strategically, if not economically, significant to British interests in the isthmus. It was precisely because of “the encouragement of British trade” that Lord Palmerston intimated that “the connection should be kept up with the Mosquitos.”¹⁹² Hence, United States' ambitions for controlling an interoceanic canal in Nicaragua ran up against British presence in Greytown and a protectorate in the Mosquito Shore, both established “to stem the spread of United States influence in the region.”¹⁹³ The measures implemented by the United States government to try to counter this, and British influence in the wider region, directly affected Great Britain's possessory rights in Belize. These included signing treaties of commerce and navigation with the Central American states; recognizing Nicaraguan independence; helping United States companies win contracts in the isthmus, including for building canals and railways and for delivering passenger transport and

¹⁸⁹ Lelia M. Roeckell, “Bonds over Bondage: British Opposition to the Annexation of Texas,” *Journal of the Early Republic*, Vol. 19, No. 2 (Summer 1999), 260.

¹⁹⁰ This was also true for California. See Ephraim D Adams, “English Interest in the Annexation of California,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (Jul. 1909), 744-763.

¹⁹¹ William Earl Weeks, “Bullying Great Britain, Conquering Mexico, Claiming the Canal,” chapter in, *The New Cambridge History of American Foreign Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 204.

¹⁹² Memorandum on the Mosquito Shore, 15 December 1843, F.O. 15/36 355-356.

¹⁹³ Chatfield to Viscount Palmerston, No. 29, Guatemala, March 7, 1848, F.O. 420/8.

mail services; seizing territory; and directly challenging British presence in the Mosquito Shore.¹⁹⁴

United States interests in a route across Central America tended to concentrate on Panama, but all possible routes were considered to prevent the United States missing out to rival nations.¹⁹⁵ The United States also did not limit itself strictly to inter-oceanic canal projects and in 1849 William Aspinall and his fellow investors won a concession from the government of New Granada for construction of a railroad across Panama and set up the Panama Railroad company.¹⁹⁶ The British and the French were also interested in constructing the railroad, and in 1828 a British engineer, on the invitation of the government of New Granada, had even surveyed the route for this.¹⁹⁷ These projects are best understood in terms of both the inter-imperial rivalry in Central America in the nineteenth century, particularly between Great Britain and the United States, and U.S. manifest destiny. Through this lens it becomes clear that, for the United States, inter-oceanic canal and railroad projects in Central America during the nineteenth century were seen as possible “paths to [a United States] empire” there.¹⁹⁸ The problem for the United States was twofold: British commerce, investments, and loans gave Great Britain a predominant position in many of the new republics in Spanish America after independence; and British financing, as Lord Napier indicated to U.S. Secretary of State Lewis

¹⁹⁴ In 1848 the Pacific Mail Steamship Company was contracted to deliver mail between Panama and the U.S. and the following year, William Aspinall was given a concession to build the Panama Railway

¹⁹⁵ (Mr. Marcy to Messrs. Morse and Bowlin), [No. 28], Dept. of State, Washington, December 3, 1856, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 112, in *Compilation of Executive Documents ...*, 1012–1018.

¹⁹⁶ McGuinness, *Path of Empire ...*, 55. Also, Alexander Saunders, “Short History of the Panama Railroad,” *The Railway and Locomotive Historical Society Bulletin*, No. 78 (Oct. 1949), 10.

¹⁹⁷ Saunders, “Short History ...,” 9.

¹⁹⁸ McGuinness, *Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush*.

Cass,¹⁹⁹ was needed to fully deliver such infrastructure projects and this had the potential for undermining U.S. efforts at displacing British imperialism in the region.²⁰⁰

Faced with these realities, on 12 December 1846, the United States signed the Bidlack-Mallarino Treaty with New Granada for the construction of a canal route across the isthmus of Panama.²⁰¹ This treaty, by giving the U.S. right of transit across the Isthmus of Panama along with certain commercial concessions (i.e. no payment of any duties, tolls or charges whatsoever) in return for guarantees of protection of the territorial integrity of New Granada, handed the U.S. an advantage vis-à-vis Great Britain in the isthmus.²⁰² A secret report sent by Benjamin Bidlack, Secretary of State for New Granada, revealed that one motive for the treaty was the belief that "...Great Britain...would no longer be possible...to encroach upon the Isthmus."²⁰³ This treaty did not result in anything, even though interoceanic canal projects

¹⁹⁹ (Lord Napier to Mr. Cass.), Washington, May 31st, 1857, 46th Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Exec Doc. No 112, in *Compilation of Executive Documents and Diplomatic Correspondence ...*, 1035.

²⁰⁰ Mathew Brown, agreeing with Alan Knight, suggests that British finance and commerce in Spanish America ascribed a certain "loose informal imperialism." Brown, *Struggle for Power ...*, 6. For Knight's discussion of this see Knight, "U.S. Imperialism/Hegemony and Latin American Resistance." In the 1900s British investments underwrote railroads in Colombia and Guatemala. For the former see Andrew Primmer, "Capital, Monopoly and Economic Nationalism: A History of British Railways in Colombia 1902-1930," *University of Bristol PhD Dissertation* (2018), available at URL: https://research-information.bris.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/190241267/Final_Copy_2019_01_23_Primmer_A_PhD_Redacted.pdf. For the latter see Wayne Foster Anderson, *The Development of Export Transportation in Liberal Guatemala, 1871-1920*, *Tulane University PhD Diss.* (1985). B

²⁰¹ The full text of this treaty is available at <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/b-co-ust000006-0868.pdf>. The treaty was proposed by Manuel Mallarino, the Minister of Foreign Affairs of New Granada, as retribution to British encroachments in the isthmus and their claims that the Mosquito Kingdom extended to Panama. See Michael L. Conniff, "Independence and Early Relations," in *Panama and the United States*, 3rd ed., The End of the Alliance (University of Georgia Press, 2012), 18, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt46ngvs.5>; also Joseph B. Lockey, "A Neglected Aspect of Isthmian Diplomacy," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 41, Issue 2 (Jan., 1936), 295-305.

²⁰² Special Message of the President of the United States), 15 May 1856, 34th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Exec. Doc. No. 68, in *Compilation of Executive Documents ...*, 988-995; Department of State, 11 Despatches, Colombia, No. 28, 27 November 1846; and No. 32, 14 December 1846. See also James Brown Scott, "The Treaty between Colombia and the United States," *The American Journal of International Law* 15, no. 3 (1921): 433; and Pierson, "The Political Influences of an Interoceanic Canal, 1826-1926," 215.

²⁰³ Secret and Confidential, Report upon the Reasons that Make the Stipulations of the Treaty Proposed Useful and Acceptable to the United States of America, Department of State, 11 Despatches [sic], Colombia, No. 31 Document 125, in David Hunter Miller, *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, Volume 5, (Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1937), 152.

formed part of Polk's expansionist strategy in Central America,²⁰⁴ because Polk believed that Nicaragua was a more practicable route for a trans-isthmian canal. The same Aaron Palmer from the New York Company that was awarded the canal contract in 1826 by the Federation had sold Polk on the Nicaragua route!²⁰⁵

Thus, on 21 June 1849, Elijah Hise, the Kentucky Senator sent by Polk as the United States Minister to Central America,²⁰⁶ concluded a treaty of commerce and navigation with the state government of Nicaragua.²⁰⁷ Known as the Hise-Selva Treaty, the agreement granted the United States the "exclusive right of way across her territories including therein the River San Juan for the purpose of joining the two oceans across the isthmus [and containing] a number of provisions for the construction of forts and military works upon the bank of the San Juan."²⁰⁸ In return, the "United States guarantee[d] to Nicaragua for ever the whole of her territory," including the Mosquito Shore. Elijah Hise's statement that "there can and will be no effectual means of preventing the spread of British dominion over all of Central American unless the United States interferes...firmly," laid bare the United States objectives in the isthmus.²⁰⁹ Thus, a conflict with Great Britain over the Hise-Selva Treaty was averted only by the fact that Congress did not ratify the convention and by United States Secretary of State, John Clayton, disavowing the Hise-Selva convention and disclaiming any desire "for obtaining ... exclusive

²⁰⁴ Williams, *Anglo-American Isthmian Diplomacy...*, 53.

²⁰⁵ "Memoir: Geographical, Political and Commercial by Aaron Palmer to James K. Polk, President of the United States," 8 March 1848, *Senate, 30th Congress, 1st Session, Miscellaneous*, 80, 62.

²⁰⁶ Department of State, 15 Instructions, American States, 64, Document 141 in *Treaties and Other International Acts...*, 714.

²⁰⁷ To Palmerston, No. 65, 27 July 1849, F.O. 15/29.

²⁰⁸ Confidential, Mr Crampton to Viscount Palmerston, (No. 80), 17 September 1849, F.O. 420/10, 1, in *Correspondence Respecting the Mosquito Territory, 1849-1854, Part III*. Also, *Correspondence with the United States Respecting Central America*, 2. Hise was also authorized to negotiate other treaties with Guatemala and Honduras. To Thomas Manning, 26 January 1849, F.O. 252/43.

²⁰⁹ Mr. Hise to Mr Buchanan, (Extracts), Honduras, Port of Omoa, 26 October 1848, *31st Congress, 1st Session, House Executive Documents No. 75*, in No. 10, 283.

advantage” to the United States.²¹⁰ At same time, Clayton proposed that the United States and Great Britain jointly undertake another treaty “by which no exclusive advantage should be conferred on any party.”²¹¹

Hise’s replacement Ephraim B. Squier proved more hostile to British interests in the isthmus. For instance, within a few months of Squier’s arrival, he concluded, with the express authorization of the United States government,²¹² a “Treaty with Nicaragua regarding the construction of an Interoceanic Canal across the territory.”²¹³ Squier also used the opportunity of his welcome audiences to allude “to Mr. Monroe’s doctrine respecting colonization of any part of the American continent by a European power.”²¹⁴ In addition, Squier prodded the Nicaraguan authorities to grant concession to private enterprises to undertake canal works, and on the 27 August 1849, the Atlantic Pacific Ship Canal Company owned by Cornelius Vanderbilt from the United States, to build a canal across Nicaragua. (Vanderbilt’s other enterprise, the Accessory Transit Company had secured a contract to transport passengers across Nicaragua.)²¹⁵ The exclusive nature of this agreement required that the Atlantic Pacific Ship Canal Company have unfettered access to the San Juan de Norte, but this required that the British retract their protectorate over Mosquitia and that Mosquito ‘rights’ to the territory be renounced as well. Squier also concluded a treaty with Honduras ceding Tigre Island on the

²¹⁰ No. 2, Mr. Crampton to Viscount Palmerston, (No. 84 Confidential), Washington, 1 October 1849, 3.

²¹¹ *Correspondence with the United States Respecting Central America*, No. 2, (Extract), Washington, 1 October 1849, 3.

²¹² No. 3, Mr. Crampton to Viscount Palmerston, (Extract), Washington, 15 October 1849, *Correspondence with the United States...*, 5. See also Mary Wilhelmine Williams, E. George Squire, and John M. Clayton, “Letters of E. George Squire to John M. Clayton, 1849-1850,” *The Hispanic Historical Review* 1, no. 4 (1918): 426.

²¹³ No. 2a, Mr. Crampton to Viscount Palmerston, (No. 89), Washington, 15 October 1849, F.O. 420/10.

²¹⁴ To Palmerston, No. 64, 16 July 1849, F.O. 15/59.

²¹⁵ Clayton, Lawrence A. "The Nicaragua Canal in the Nineteenth Century: Prelude to American Empire in the Caribbean." *Journal of Latin American Studies* 19, no. 2 (1987): 326. Also, James T. Wall, "American Intervention in Nicaragua, 1848-1861," *PhD diss., University of Tennessee*, 1974, https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddiss/4223

Pacific coast to the United States,²¹⁶ and on the 24 December 1849, concluded a treaty with the Nicaraguan government recognizing Nicaraguan independence.

Squier's pretensions in Tigre Island, the likely terminus on the Pacific for a ship canal, provoked an immediate response from Chatfield. The British Consul first demanded repayment of outstanding debts owed by Honduras to British merchants and bond-holders, and then, after securing the support of Secretary Palmerston and the promise of naval support, used force to redress the situation.²¹⁷ In the afternoon of 16 October 1849, Chatfield, accompanied by a contingent of British marines from the H.M.S. *Gorgon* landed at Tigre Island in the Gulf of Fonseca on the Pacific Coast of Central America and forcibly lowered the Honduran flag.²¹⁸ Chatfield then promptly appointed a British Superintendent of Tigre Island and assigned him a small military force.²¹⁹ When Abbott Lawrence the United States Minister to London queried Lord Palmerston about the incident, Palmerston claimed that the measures were necessary to enforce "long standing claims against the Central American States."²²⁰ Palmerston used the meeting with Lawrence to advise him that "we do not acknowledge the right of the United States to interfere with us in the course we have taken in Central America." In fact, Palmerston had instructed Chatfield to subvert the United States "in as far as its object was hostile to the interests of Great Britain."²²¹ In the San Juan, Chatfield used this advice to demand that the Central American states "recognize the boundary line claimed by H.M. Government for the

²¹⁶ To Palmerston, No. 86, 7 September 1849, F.O. 15/59.

²¹⁷ To Palmerston, No. 106, 6 November 1849, F.O. 15/60.

²¹⁸ To Palmerston, No. 95, private enclosures, 17 October 1849, F.O. 15/60; [No. 13], Department of State, Washington, 29 December 1849, 31st Congress, 1st Session, House Doc. No. 175, in *Tigre Island and Central America, Message from the President of the United States*, (United States Government Printing Office, 1850), 314.

²¹⁹ To Palmerston, No. 111, 14 November 1849, F.O. 15/60.

²²⁰ [Private], Memorandum of an interview between Mr. Lawrence and Lord Palmerston, on 27th January 1850, House Doc. No. 175, in *Tigre Island...*, 316; (Confidential), 17 March 1856, F.O. 88/571, 2.

²²¹ From Palmerston, No. 24, 1 November 1848, F.O. 15/50.

Kingdom of the Mosquitos in exchange for payment of certain debts to British subjects which the states have neglected to settle.”²²²

Central American territorial claims to *Mosquitia*, and United States pretensions in Nicaragua and around the San Juan River also provoked a strong response from the Foreign Office. Firstly, Patrick Walker acted authoritatively to uphold Mosquito authority in the Shore. After advising the Nicaraguan Foreign Minister of his intention to seize San Juan de Norte,²²³ Walker sailed to San Juan aboard the H.M.S. *Vixen* and on 1 January 1848, hauled down the Nicaraguan flag, installed a Commandant for the town, renamed the place Greytown, and forced the Nicaraguan authorities to recognize Mosquito sovereignty.²²⁴ Thereafter, Walker used naval support from Jamaica to crush any resistance that the Nicaragua authorities put up, and the latter was warned against any further attacks on Greytown.²²⁵ Walker drowned on the last mission and therefore a military detachment from Jamaica was assigned to Greytown to maintain British control.²²⁶

Palmerston acted decisively to bring the Mosquito Shore squarely within British control. In 1848, he outlined Great Britain’s claim to *Mosquitia* to Charles Crampton, the British Minister in Washington,²²⁷ and made it clear that “the weak position of the Mosquito State required that for its safety [*Mosquitia*] be placed under... [British] protection.”²²⁸ Palmerston then ‘seized’ the San Juan de Nicaragua and demanded recognition of the Mosquito

²²² Draft, Mr. Chatfield, Foreign Office, 24 March 1841, F.O. 15/50, 32.

²²³ Bluefields, 8 December 1847, F.O. 53/8, nf.

²²⁴ To Palmerston, No. 6, 22 January 1848, F.O. 15/51; No. 33, 17 March 1848, F.O. 15/51; Walker to Palmerston, Bluefields, 15 January 1848, F.O. 53/11.

²²⁵ Loch to government of Nicaragua, 20 February 1851, F.O. 15/51, 272-273.

²²⁶ Grey to Palmerston, Jamaica, 8 May 1848, F.O. 53/13, nf.

²²⁷ Palmerston to Crampton, 27 April 1848, F.O.

²²⁸ Memorandum, Mosquito Shore, F.O. 15/36, 353.

kingdom's independence.²²⁹ He also instructed Chatfield to "advise Honduras and Nicaragua that [the protectorate] extended from Cape Honduras to the mouth of the San Juan River, and that His Majesty's Government would not be indifferent to any encroachments."²³⁰ This was opposed by the Colonial Secretary, Earl Grey,²³¹ but Palmerston nevertheless redrew the boundaries of *Mosquitia* to enable for Great Britain to control the Atlantic terminus of a canal route through the San Juan River.²³²

Conclusions

In the third decade of Central American independence, Belize's salience to British expansion in Central America became even more enhanced. The forward activities of British colonial officials, both the Superintendents in Belize and Chatfield in Central America, implicated Belize in the extension of British influence in the region. In their pursuit of 'British interests,' these officials employed coercive measures, demanded repayment for debt owed to British merchants and bondholders, and blockaded ports. Chatfield even collaborated with local elites and meddled in the local politics of the Central American states.²³³ In this process, two things happened during the decade that helped shape Great Britain's policy in Belize: the conservative elites of Guatemala pursued that state's independence; and the Mosquito Shore emerged as a crucial pivot for extending British influence in the isthmus. As it relates to the former, Chatfield's manoeuvring resulted in the Guatemalan authorities disregarding the Belize boundary issue in exchange for Great Britain recognizing their independence. With regards to

²²⁹ "Correspondence with the United States respecting the Mosquito Territory," 1847-48, F.O. 420/10 *Parliamentary Papers*, 65, 1.

²³⁰ Memorandum, Mosquito Shore, F.O. 15/36, 358

²³¹ van Alstyne, "The Central American Policy of Lord Palmerston, 1846-1848," 340.

²³² *Parliamentary Papers*, 1847-48,

²³³ Alan Knight argues that this type of engagement (i.e., both coercive and political) was commonplace in British overseas expansion. See Knight, "Great Britain and Latin America," 124.

the latter, the heightened interest in the Mosquito Shore by the United States and European rivals led Great Britain to leverage Belize's relationship with the Mosquito Indians to attain its objective in the isthmus. This reaffirmed Belize's continued value to British interests in Central America, and this allowed Great Britain to maintain possession of the settlement without formally converting the territory to an official colony just yet.

Meanwhile, the actions of British merchants in Belize in the northern areas of the settlement both to greater British presence "in the borderlands between Mexico and Belize," and entangled Great Britain in the Caste War and in this way threatened Britain's position in Belize.²³⁴ Thus, to preserve this British officials acted to protect their interests in the settlement, particularly its business interests.²³⁵ As Rajeshwari Dutt observes however, there were other factors at play and the perceived threats of United States expansion (this early years of the Caste war coincided with the period immediately following U.S. victory over Mexico which handed the former California, Texas, and New Mexico as well as rights to the proposed trans-isthmian crossing at Tehuantepec) also partly attributed to the response of the British officials.²³⁶ In any event, the Caste War issue showed, at least in the early years of the conflict, that as late as the middle of the nineteenth century, British policy in Belize lacked any grand design.²³⁷

During the 1840s, European and United States interests in Central America increased sharply. This deepened the external rivalry over pre-eminence in Central America, fuelled internal tussles over federation versus independence, and shifted the matter of trans-isthmian

²³⁴ Dutt, *Empire on Edge ...*, 28-29. Also, Paul Sullivan, "John Carmichael: Life and Design on the Frontier in Central America." *Revista Mexicana del Caribe*, Vol. 4, no. 10 (2000), 6 – 88, available at <https://www.redalyc.org/pdf/128/12801001.pdf>.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 30, 34.

²³⁶ Dutt, 35.

²³⁷ Sullivan, "John Carmichael ...," 7.

canals projects to the centre of British policy towards the region. The canal issue has been the focus of several studies on Anglo-American rivalry over Central America, and many of these have discussed the logwood and mahogany trades in Belize in the context of British interests in the region. Alternatively, the internal politics and economics of Central America have been examined at length in histories of the region. Yet, despite this, the existing body of works on the territorial dispute over Belize has itself treated both the Anglo-American rivalry and the canal issues somewhat peripherally and has not assigned any relevance to Central American history and events. As this chapter showed however, it is impossible to fully understand British policy in Belize without adequately investigating these matters. In any event, at the close of the decade (i.e., 1840s), tensions between Great Britain and the United States over a ship canal through Nicaragua remained taut; French interests in isthmian canal projects had awakened; the mahogany trade was at its highest but fluctuating; and the Caste War had broken out in the Yucatan. These dynamics provided the backdrop for Great Britain's handling of Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize during the next decade.

4 Three Treaties: From Clayton-Bulwer (1850) to the Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty of 1859

The tensions between Great Britain and the United States that resulted from the latter's enhanced interest in a ship canal through Nicaragua's San Juan River in the closing years of the 1840s, led to them signing the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty on 19 April 1850.¹ This outcome diffused the hostilities, especially between Consuls Chatfield and Squier, and required Great Britain and the United States both to refrain from "further territorial acquisitions, colonization or occupation" in the isthmus while simultaneously committing them to jointly promoting development of a ship canal in the region. However, it did not dampen the competition between the two states for supremacy in Central America and not long after ratification,² the United States recognized that British expansion in Central America was neither contained, nor deterred. Then in 1852 Great Britain converted the Bay Islands into a British colony. This latter development, together with the British protectorate of the Mosquito Shore and possession of Greytown, strengthened Great Britain's presence in Central America, and potentially gave it exclusive control over two possible trans-isthmian canal routes. This situation presented significant concerns to the United States' designs for expanding its own power and influence in the region, and hence it sought to remove the obstacles.³ James Buchanan's election to the Presidency of the United States in 1856, stiffened resolve in that country for having Great Britain relinquish its possessions in the isthmus. At the same time, increased tensions between

¹ Sir Henry Bulwer to Viscount Palmerston, No. 35, Washington, April 28, 1850, (Inclosure [sic] in No. 35) for "Convention between Her Majesty and the United States of America relative to the Establishment of a Communication by Ship-Canal between the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans," *Correspondence respecting Central America*, 50 – 52.

² Woodward Jr, Rafael Carrera and the emergence of the Republic of Guatemala, 231.

³ No. 13, Mr. Abbott Lawrence to Viscount Palmerston, United States Legation, 14 December 1849, *Correspondence respecting Central America...*, 26. Also, G. F. Hickson, "Palmerston and the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty," *Cambridge Historical Journal*, Vol. 3, no. 3 (1931), 303.

northern and southern states in the Union over the issue of slavery, unsettled the domestic situation and set the United States on a course towards civil war.

During the 1850s, several, often related, events unfolded which threatened to inflame the tensions between Great Britain and the United States over the former's standing in Central America. For instance, in 1853, George E. Squier, formerly United States Consul to Central America, embarked on a campaign promoting his Honduras Interoceanic Railroad Project, and used the opportunity to try and subvert British presence in the isthmus.⁴ Then in 1855, the filibuster William Walker seized control of the government of Nicaragua and became President of that state. Occupied with schemes for extending the 'American' empire to Central America, Walker subsequently announced plans for annexing Nicaragua to the United States, and in 1856, reinstated slavery in the former. Two years prior, President Franklin Pierce of the United States, opposed to the abolitionist movement, signed the Kansas-Nebraska Act further inflaming tensions in the United States over slavery. Pierce also recognized Walker's Nicaragua.⁵ Meanwhile, the Panama railroad was completed in 1855 and started operations, and this had a deleterious effect on the entrepôt trade through Belize. Around this time, France became more assertive in Central America. The French entrepreneur Felix Belly began promoting a canal project through Nicaragua and Napoléon III attempted to revive the colonization program at Santo Tomás, while French trade with Central America expanded noticeably between 1855 and 1859.⁶ Then in 1858, 'fearing' United States expansion in Mexico, Napoléon III mobilized the French navy to protect French interests there.⁷

⁴ Ephraim George Squier, *Honduras Interoceanic railway: Preliminary Report*, (New York, 1854).

⁵ Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine ...*, 125; Brian Loveman, "U.S. Foreign Policy toward Latin American in the 19th Century," in *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Latin America*, online publication July 2016, 13-14, DOI: 10.1093/acrefore/9780199366439.013.41

⁶ Schoonover, "France in Central America...," 169-170.

⁷ Sainlaude, "France's Grand Design and the Confederacy," 109.

This chapter examines how Great Britain's response to the above set of events affected its possessory rights in Belize, and how in turn, British possession of Belize shaped that response. It argues that in the face of the imminent United States expansion in Central America, Great Britain manipulated the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty to extend the status quo there, and this enabled Great Britain to affirm British rights in Belize. It shows that this was attained by "[excepting] of Belize and its dependencies" from the treaty, and two years later, by formally annexing the Bay Islands in Honduras. It also shows that these two events unquestionably moved Belize to the centre of the Anglo-American struggle for paramountcy in Central America, as ending British presence in Belize became a point of emphasis in the United States' thrust for eliminating British influence from the isthmus. It demonstrates however, that, paradoxically, this permitted Great Britain to retain its sway there because President Buchanan offered to discount British rights in Belize if the two other obstacles to United States expansion were removed (i.e., annexation of the Bay Islands and the Mosquito Protectorate). Buchanan's 'proposition' permitted Great Britain to negotiate separate treaties with the affected Central American states corresponding with the three impediments cited by the United States government.⁸ Finally, it shows that, contrary to the conventional interpretation of the historiography of the territorial dispute, Great Britain negotiated the 1859 Anglo-Guatemalan treaty to resolve this point of disagreement with the United States over Central America, and not for the reason of settling the boundaries of the settlement per se.

⁸ These were the treaties with Guatemala (to settle the boundaries of Belize); Honduras (to settle Great Britain's annexation of the Bay Islands); and Nicaragua (to end Great Britain's protectorate of the Mosquito Shore). These treaties were themselves products of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850 and the unratified Webster-Crampton and Dallas-Clarendon treaties of 1852 and 1856 respectively.

The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty of 1850

In this first section of the chapter, I show that, opposed to the orthodox assumption in previous works on the territorial dispute over Belize, Great Britain excepted “Belize and its dependencies” from the provisions of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty in order maintain the status quo in Central America in the face of growing United States pretensions there, and not because Belize was part of Great Britain’s formal empire.⁹ I show that this ploy by Lord Palmerston (temporarily) extended Great Britain’s standing in Central America and upheld Belize’s strategic value to British expansion in the isthmus, but moved Belize from relative unimportance to significance in terms of United States policy towards Great Britain in Central America. I demonstrate that while the measure was crucial to Great Britain circumventing the treaty’s prohibition against exercising “dominion ... over any part of Central America,” Great Britain’s yoking of the Bay Islands to Belize as the latter’s “dependencies” prompted the United States to categorize Belize as being outside of Central America, thereby setting the stage for the boundaries of Belize to later be settled separate from the Mosquito Shore and Bay Islands issues. I then show that Great Britain’s subsequent annexation of the Bay Islands in 1852 caused Belize to be labelled as one of the impediments to United States expansion in the isthmus and led the latter to demand that British rights in Belize be restricted to the limits of the Spanish treaty of 1786.

⁹ Van Alstyne early argued that Great Britain regarded Belize as “unarguably British and [hence] outside the scope of the treaty.” See Richard Van Alstyne, “British Diplomacy and the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty, 1850-60,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Jun. 1939), 160. This argument is upheld by recent historical works on Belize including by Assad Shoman, *Guatemala’s claim to Belize...*; O. Nigel Bolland, *Belize a New Nation in Central America*, (Routledge, 2020); P.A.B. Thompson, *Belize: A Concise History*, (MacMillan, 2004); and Renate Johanna Mayr, *Belize: Tracking the Path of Its History: From the Heart of the Mayan Empire to a Retreat for Buccaneers, a Safe-Haven for Ex-Pirates and Pioneers, a Crown Colony and a Modern Nation*, (LIT Verlag Münster, 2014).

Excepting “British Honduras and its ‘Dependencies’”

After months of wrangling and “strategic jockeying” between the governments of Great Britain and the United States over asserting their respective influence in relation to schemes for canal projects in Nicaragua, the two countries, on 19 April 1850, agreed the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.¹⁰ This outcome did not end the rivalry between Great Britain and the United States over supremacy in the isthmus,¹¹ for the main reason that while the convention committed the two parties not to “occupy, or fortify, or colonize, or assume...dominion over... any part of Central America,”¹² it did not resolve the main sources of the discord between them. That is to say, the treaty did not contain, or reverse, British expansion in Central America, and also did not categorically settle the matter of British presence in the Mosquito Shore.¹³ Conversely, the treaty did not quell United States’ manifest destiny ambitions for territorial expansion southward or its penchant for signing further (unauthorized) treaties with Central American states and did not address the issue of slavery, the extension of which provoked deep domestic divisions within the United States,¹⁴ but, crucially, provided a means for the United States to counter Great Britain’s free trade thrust with its own incipient economic nationalism.¹⁵

The American Whig Review aptly described the situation in Central America in the first half of 1850 when it stated, “[it] is clear that Great Britain does not intend to relinquish her hold on San Juan, and that in open defiance of her stipulations she still both ‘assumes dominion’

¹⁰ Sexton, *The Monroe Doctrine...*, 116; For the treaty see Miller, *Treaties and Other International...*, 671-675.

¹¹ David M Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Trade and Investment: American Economic Expansion in the Hemisphere, 1865-1900*, (Columbia and London, University of Missouri Press, 1998), 118.

¹² §1, The Clayton Bulwer Treaty, Document 141, *Treaties and Other International Acts...*, 671-672.

¹³ Thomas Leonard, *United States-Latin American Relations, 1850-1903*, (University of Alabama Press, 1999), 82.

¹⁴ In 1854, several northern senators launched an anti-slavery manifesto to counter the push by slaveholding interests to repeal the Missouri Compromise. See John Ashworth, “The antislavery challenge: The Republicans, 1854-1861,” chapter in *Slavery, Capitalism and Politics in the Antebellum Republic*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 173 – 336.

¹⁵ Marc-William Palen, *The “Conspiracy” of Free Trade: The Anglo-American Struggle over Empire and Economic Globalization, 1846-1896*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).

and ‘exercises’ it in the most arbitrary manner in Central America.”¹⁶ For certain, the problem for the United States after signing the Clayton Bulwer treaty was that despite the ‘best’ intentions of the convention for placing the United States “upon an exact equality” with Great Britain in Central America,¹⁷ the British protectorate over the Mosquito Shore remained. Hence, the United States still did not have unimpeded transit across the proposed isthmian canal route through Nicaragua.¹⁸

Prior to the acquisition of California from Mexico and the discovery of gold there, the United States did not react significantly to Great Britain’s activities and growing predominance in Central America, and was even less concerned about British presence in Belize.¹⁹ In other words, up to that point, Great Britain freely “followed a unilateral policy in Central America.”²⁰ One reason for this, as Kathleen Burke contends, was that the United States was mostly focused on expanding continentally though to achieve that objective it had to overcome British presence in the Oregon.²¹ The upshot of the United States’ early attitude that Central America was somewhat peripheral to its interests, was that Great Britain consolidated its influence in the isthmus within three decades of Central American independence. To be sure, beginning in the 1830s Great Britain bit by bit re-established its influence in the Bay Islands and the Mosquito Shore, so that by the 1840s it had established *de facto* control over the former and re-asserted

¹⁶ ““London Assurance;” or Sir Henry Bulwer versus Yankee Newspapers,” *The American Whig Review*, January 1851, 60.

¹⁷ President James Buchanan, “State of the Union Address,” 8 December 1857, available at URL: let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/james-buchanana/state-of-the-union-1857.php

¹⁸ William L. Marcy, Secretary of State of the United States to James Buchanan, United States Minister to Great Britain, [Extracts], No. 2, Washington, 2 July 1853, in William R. Manning, *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States: Inter-American Affairs, 1831-1860*, VII, 86.

¹⁹ Humphreys, “The Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute,” 393; Van Alstyne, “British Diplomacy...,” 151.

²⁰ Naylor, “The British Role in Central American...,” 361.

²¹ Kathleen Burke, *The Lion and the Eagle: The Interaction of the British and American Empires, 1783-1972*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2018). See also Kathleen Burke, *Old World, New World, Great Britain, and America from the Beginning*, (Atlantic Monthly Press, 2008).

a protectorate over the latter. Belize's links with both Roatan and Black River made these two outcomes possible and the forward activities of the Superintendents at Belize and the territorial activities of Belize mahogany merchants and woodcutters provided necessary pretexts for this expansion.²² Thus, by the time the United States turned its interests towards the project of an interoceanic canal across the Central American isthmus, it was forced to reckon with an established "British presence...in Belize, the Bay Islands and the Mosquito Shore."²³

The prevailing situation in the isthmus eventually led President Zachary Taylor to utter in April 1850, just three days after the Clayton-Bulwer treaty was agreed but prior to its ratification, that "at the time negotiations were opened with Nicaragua for the construction of a canal through her territory [he] found Great Britain in possession of nearly half of Central America."²⁴ Still, virtually up to the point of ratification of the treaty, the problem for the United States in Central America was not Belize itself.²⁵ This outlook was made repeatedly clear by different United States administrations, before and after the Clayton-Bulwer treaty was ratified. The Polk administration for instance, was concerned with British presence in Nicaragua, and, on account of "the frontiers of the various republics not being delimited," possibly also with Honduras, but not with Belize.²⁶ In 1847, the Polk administration appointed

²² Naylor, "The Mahogany Trade as a factor in the British return to the Mosquito Shore...", 40-67. This interpretation contrast with Naylor's argument that Great Britain's return to the Shore was not "the result of the circumstances surrounding the expansion of the Belize mahogany trade after 1836."

²³ Naylor, "The Mahogany Trade as a factor ...," 40. Also, Pletcher, *The Diplomacy of Trade and Investment...*, 118.

²⁴ "April 22, 1850: Message Regarding Treaty with Great Britain," *Presidential Speeches, Zachary Taylor Presidency, Transcript*, University of Virginia, Miller Center, available at URL: millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/April-22-1850-messages-regarding-treaty-with-Great-Great-Britain. James Buchanan subsequently reiterated this to Lord Clarendon but changed it to "the whole extensive coast of Central America." No. 175, Statement for the Earl of Clarendon, *Correspondence with the United States...*, 259.

²⁵ 31st Congress, 1st Session, House Executive Document 75, 7; Report of the Secretary of State, 18 July 1850, in *Compilation of Executive Documents...*, 661; Van Alstyne, "British Diplomacy...", 151.

²⁶ David Hunter Miller, *Treaties and Other International Acts of the United States of America*, Vol. 5, ed., (United States Government Printing Office, 1937), 704.

a consul to Belize, thereby recognizing British jurisdiction over the settlement.²⁷ Then in December of 1849, Abbott Lawrence, United States Minister to London, admitted to Lord Palmerston that “the only apparent obstacle [to United States designs in the isthmus] are the boundary disputes between the different states of Central America, the claims made in favour of the Mosquito Indians ..., and the British occupation of Greytown.”²⁸ In addition, in 1854, James Buchanan, United States Minister to London under the Pierce administration, stated in a letter to Lord Clarendon that “the Government of the United States seriously contested the claim of Great Britain to any [of its] possessions [in Central America] *with the single exception of...the Belize settlement.*”²⁹ Sir Henry Bulwer too indicated to Lord Palmerston while the negotiations of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty were ongoing, “that the interests of the United States were only...involved in the question between Nicaragua and the Mosquitos.”³⁰ This being the case, what caused the shift in the United States attitude towards Great Britain’s possessory rights in Belize?

The answer to this question lies with Lord Palmerston’s manipulation of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty to preserve Great Britain’s standing in Central America in the face of mounting United States pretensions there. Specifically, on the 8 June 1850 Palmerston unilaterally instructed Sir Henry Bulwer, the special negotiator to Washington for the British government,

²⁷ “British Colony in Central America,” 10 January 1853, *Congressional Globe*, 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, 247, from Library of Congress, *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: Debates and Proceedings: 1833-1873*, <https://memory.loc.gov/ammem/amlaw/lwclink.html> (accessed 14 August 2020).

²⁸ No. 13, Mr. Abbott Lawrence to Viscount Palmerston, United States’ Legation, 138 Piccadilly, 1 December 1849, in *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States...*, 26. Abbott later restated this position when he was United States Minister to London. (Mr. Lawrence to Mr. Clayton.), [No. 10], United States Legation, London, 9 November 1849, 32nd, Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Ex. Doc. No. 27 in Vol. 3, in *Compilation of Executive Documents...*, 513-515.

²⁹ Statement of James Buchanan, United States Minister to Great Britain, to Lord Clarendon, British Secretary of States for Foreign Affairs, London, 6 January 1854, in *Compilation of Executive Documents...*, Vol. I, 519. My italics.

³⁰ No. 19, Sir Henry Bulwer to Viscount Palmerston, (Extract), Washington, 3 February 1850, in *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States...*, 36.

to advise Secretary of State Clayton, “at the time of the exchange of the ratifications of the Convention,” that “her Majesty does not understand the engagements of that Convention to apply to Her Majesty’s settlement at Honduras or to its *dependencies*.”³¹ Hence, in accordance with these instructions, Bulwer, on the 29 June, wrote to Clayton and pronounced this exemption.³² Not surprisingly, this stoked United States’ fears of Great Britain’s intentions for extending its dominion in Central America.

The problem for the United States government was that Bulwer’s exemption of “Belize and its dependencies” from the Clayton-Bulwer treaty extended, rather than limited or reversed, British possessions in Central America. In short, Bulwer’s declaration, not only went against what the United States believed was the spirit and objective of the convention,³³ but crucially, increased the impediments to the United States for controlling a “a canal or railway across the isthmus.”³⁴ Thus, in addition to the matters of the British protectorate over the Mosquito Shore and their possession of Greytown, the United States now had to also worry about British possession of the Bay Islands, claimed as ‘dependencies’ of Belize. Bulwer’s declaration then, as Frederick Frelinghuysen, the United States Secretary of State, admitted much later, completely defeated the United States’ objective of “dispossess[ing] Great Britain of [its] settlements in Central America.”³⁵ To get around this, the Polk administration shifted its

³¹ No. 42, Viscount Palmerston to Sir Henry Bulwer, Foreign Office, 8 June 1850, No. 44, Viscount Palmerston to Sir Henry Bulwer, Foreign Office, 14 June 1850, in *Correspondence with the United States...*, Vol 2, 59, 60.

³² “Declaration made by Sir Henry Bulwer at the Department of State, June 29, 1850, prior to the exchange of the ratifications of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty,” Messages and Documents 1855-1856, Part 1, in *Compilation of Executive Documents and Diplomatic Correspondence...*, Vol. 1, 643; Inclosure [sic] in No. 42, Draft of Declaration See also Senate Ex. Doc. 194, 47th Congress, 1st Session, *The Clayton-Bulwer Treaty and The Monroe Doctrine, A Letter from the Secretary of State to the Minister of the United States at London*, May 8, 1882, 87; John Bassett Moore, *A Digest of International Law as embodied in Diplomatic Discussions, Treaties and Other International Agreements...*, Vol. II, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1906), 136. Italics are mine.

³³ *Congressional Globe*, XXVI, 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, Tuesday 7 December 1852, 237, 248.

³⁴ Zachary Taylor, President of the United States of America, *Treaties and Other Acts...*, 678.

³⁵ Mr. Frederick Frelinghuysen to Mr. Lovell, [No. 368], Department of State, Washington, D.C., 8 May 1882, *Senate Executive Document 194, 47th Congress, 1st Session*, 14.

foreign policy towards Great Britain over Central America from the ‘softer’ approach in the 1820s and 1830s (when Central America was not exactly a foreign policy priority for United States) to a more aggressive one, starting from around the middle of the 1840s.³⁶

The treaty of commerce the United States agreed with New Granada in 1846 for a right-of-way across the Isthmus of Panama in return for United States assurance of neutrality there is best understood within this context.³⁷ Within this new framework, the Hise and Squier treaties with Nicaragua (and Honduras) heralded Central America’s new significance to the United States. As Sir Henry Bulwer stated to Lord Clarendon, “Central America is no longer what it was and is daily becoming the most important spot of earth in the whole world.”³⁸ Slave holding interests in the United States south and economic nationalists’ opposed to free trade drove this more aggressive posture of the United States towards Great Britain over Central America, and demanded territorial expansion into the Central American isthmus, as well as the removal of British presence there.³⁹ The change in attitude of the United States was triggered, as Marc-William Palen argues, by the United States’ expansionist drive during this period being matched by growing “economic nationalist fears” in that country, especially after Great

³⁶ Lester D. Langley, “Manifest Destiny,” chapter in *America and the Americas: The United States in the Western Hemisphere*, (University of Georgia Press, 2010), 38 - 69. Also, Charles L. Stansifer, “United States-Central American Relations, 1824-1850,” chapter in T. Ray Shurbutt, *United States-Latin American Relations, 1800-1850*, (ed.), (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1991).

³⁷ Hannis Taylor, “The Rule of Treaty Construction Known as Rebus Sic Stantibus,” *Proceedings of the American Society of International Law (1907-1917)*, (Apr. 1913), 224. A copy of the *General Treaty of Peace, Amity and Navigation between the United States of America and the Republic of New Granada* is available at <https://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/b-co-ust000006-0868.pdf>

³⁸ Excerpt of letter from Bulwer to Clarendon dated March 1854, in Richard Van Alstyne, “Anglo-American Relations, 1853-1857: British Statesmen on the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty and American Expansion,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 42, No. 3 (Apr. 1837), 495.

³⁹ Palen, *The Conspiracy of Free Trade...*, xx, 10, 27. Also, Sam Haynes, “Manifest Destiny,” in *The U.S.-Mexican War: Prelude to War*, online publication, available at http://www.pbs.org/kera/usmexicanwar/prelude/md_manifest_destiny.html. As Haynes points out, Southern slaveholders wanted more territory to expand their slave empires.

Britain's free trade turn around 1846.⁴⁰ Some factions of the United States government, and many in the slave owning south, genuinely believed that free trade advanced the economic interests of only Great Britain.⁴¹ In such circumstances and against this thinking, the fact that Great Britain was in possession of Greytown and the Mosquito Shore and refused to relinquish these areas to Nicaragua, or to agree to Nicaraguan sovereignty over them, led the United States government to "imagine...that Great Britain [intended] to shut out the United States from that which appeared to be the best line of communication across the Isthmus from sea to sea."⁴² Hence, and desiring unobstructed access to any isthmian crossing in Central America, the United States became adamant about Great Britain not occupying or colonizing any part of the isthmus.⁴³

Before examining exactly how Bulwer's declaration exempting "Belize and its dependencies" from the Clayton-Bulwer treaty shaped Great Britain's rights in Belize, it is useful to first turn briefly to why Lord Palmerston instructed Bulwer to make such a declaration. The current historiography of the territorial dispute over Belize generally assumes, incorrectly, that Palmerston's motivation for this decision was Belize being part of Great Britain's formal empire. For instance, Nigel O. Bolland, a leading historian on Belize, has uncritically promulgated the view that "the Belize settlement was exempt because it was a prior settlement."⁴⁴ This outlook is also implicit in Shoman's recent work, *Guatemala's Claim to*

⁴⁰ Palen, *The Conspiracy of Free Trade...*, xx. For a recent discussion of nineteenth century Anglophobia in the United States see Lawrence A. Peskin, "Conspiratorial Anglophobia and the War of 1812," *Journal of American History*, 98 (Dec. 2011), 647-669. Also, Brauer, "The United States and British Imperial Expansion, 1815-60."

⁴¹ Nicole M. Phelps, "Re-Thinking Open Door Imperialism," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 41, No. 1 (Jan. 2017), 213.

⁴² No. 64, Viscount Palmerston to Sir Henry Bulwer, Foreign Office, 28 October 1850, *Correspondence with the United States...*, 93.

⁴³ No. 4, Mr. Abbott Lawrence to Viscount Palmerston, United States Legation, 8 November 1849, *Correspondence respecting Central America...*, 6. The United States did not consider Belize to be a part of Central America.

⁴⁴ Bolland, *Belize: A New Nation in Central America*, 130.

Belize: The Definitive History.⁴⁵ Historians of Anglo-American relations relative to Central America too are of this view,⁴⁶ and contend that either Great Britain was trying to secure title to Belize, or, that the declaration was made because Palmerston suspected that the United States intended the treaty to apply to the Bay Islands and Belize.⁴⁷ These analyses don't adequately explain the reason for Palmerston's decision, and moreover, obscure how political developments in Central America and the United States around the mid-point of the nineteenth century,⁴⁸ shaped this outcome.

The presumption that Palmerston "became suspicious" about the United States' intentions stems from the wording of Secretary Clayton's response to Bulwer's note, wherein Clayton concurred that "[the treaty] was not understood by [the United States government] to include the British settlement in Honduras, commonly called British Honduras, as distinct from the state of Honduras, nor the small islands in the neighbourhood of that Settlement, which may be known as its dependencies."⁴⁹ This reasoning is premised on the observation that, while Clayton drew a sharp distinction over Belize and Central America, Bulwer had not himself specified what "dependencies" exactly were referred to in his declaration.⁵⁰ Clayton's response

⁴⁵ Shoman, *Guatemala's claim to Belize: The Definitive History*, 12.

⁴⁶ See for example, R.A. Humphreys *The Diplomatic History of British Honduras, 1638-1901*, 53-54; also, his paper in *International Affairs* titled "The Anglo-Guatemalan Dispute." Menon echoes Humphreys. See P.K. Menon, "The Anglo-Guatemalan Territorial Dispute over the Colony of Belize (British Honduras)," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2 (Nov. 1979), 353-354.

⁴⁷ Williams, *Anglo-American Isthmian Diplomacy...*, 102 - 104. Later works have either eschewed explanation of this issue, avoided the issue itself completely, or, tended to adopt this view uncritically. The matter is not treated at all by Flashnick in his recent thesis on nineteenth century Anglo-American Rapprochement. See Jon M. Flashnick, "'Blood is Thicker than Water': Anglo-American Rapprochement in the Mid-Nineteenth Century, 1823-1872," *Arizona State University PhD Diss.*, (2014), available at URL: repository.asu.edu/attachments/137387/content/Flashnick_asu_0010E_14124.pdf.

⁴⁸ The United States push for expanded influence in Central America for instance may be understood as the beginning of its broader thrust of economic nationalism. See Palen, *The "Conspiracy" of Free Trade...*

⁴⁹ Inclosure (sic) 1 in No. 49, Mr. Clayton to Sir Henry Bulwer, Department of State, Washington, 4 July 1850, in *Diplomatic Correspondence of the United States...*, 63 - 64; Williams, *Anglo-American Isthmian Diplomacy...*, 102.

⁵⁰ No. 157, Bulwer to Palmerston, 6 August 1850, F.O. 5/514

however, was based on a series of exchanges with both Bulwer and Lord Palmerston, following President Taylor's address in March 1850, but that preceded Bulwer's declaration. To expound, on April 15 of that same year, Bulwer submitted a note to Clayton indicating that "the Bay Islands, Roatan and Bonaca were...British possessions and to be ruled from Belize."⁵¹ Clayton later argued, while defending his response to Bulwer in a Senate meeting, that

We knew that the British Government had...laid claim to Roatan, an island on the Atlantic side of the States of Honduras and Guatemala; but whether that island was or was not part of the British West Indies, or a dependency of a Central American State, was a question about which we might have differed, and in relation to which this Government determined to leave the question of right to be decided hereafter. Roatan and others of these Bay Islands, are on the Atlas of the Society for the Diffusion of Useful Knowledge...delineated as a part of the "British West Indies." We had no claim to any of the "Bay Islands."⁵²

It is evident from this that Secretary Clayton was aware of the British claim to the Bay Islands. Clayton had come to believe from his communications with Lord Palmerston, despite Bulwer's assurances to the contrary, that "the British Government would seize and occupy, and claim dominion over any parts of Central American that it thought proper."⁵³ More to the point, Clayton feared that Great Britain's territorial activities in Honduras and other parts of Central America would hinder the United States' own ambitions for territorial expansion,⁵⁴ as well as its plans for a canal across the isthmus there. Palmerston's failure to disavow Chatfield's seizure of Tigre Island and blockade of the port at Trujillo (located only 30 miles from Roatan), even after the United States' government had asked for this to be done (in fact Palmerston

⁵¹ Speech of Hon. J.M. Clayton of Delaware, In the Senate, 16 January 1854, *Congressional Globe*, XXXIII, 97.

⁵² *Ibid*, 97.

⁵³ No. 32, Sir Henry Bulwer to Viscount Palmerston, (Extract), Washington, 31 March 1850, *Correspondence respecting Central America...*, 48-49.

⁵⁴ Jay Sexton, "Toward a synthesis of foreign relations in the Civil War era, 1848-77," *American Nineteenth Century History*, Vol. 5, No. 3, 52. Sexton contends that Central America posed the most attractive option to the United States for further territorial expansion once its "contiguous continental empire" had been attained.

argued these measures were necessary to collect debts owing to Great Britain),⁵⁵ fuelled this thinking. These incidents left the United States feeling that Great Britain “had for its object to extend British jurisdiction over [the Bay Islands].”⁵⁶ As Bulwer indicated to Palmerston, ‘some of Clayton’s colleagues were convinced’ that although Great Britain had declared “never to fortify or colonize the vicinity of the projected canal...as long as the territory bordering thereupon was in the hands of the Mosquito...we [would do] under another name that which we engage we will not do under our own.”⁵⁷

Lord Palmerston was aware of these conspiracies of the United States government and was also alert to the latter’s manoeuvres to roll back British influence in Central America. For instance, on 1 March 1850 Secretary Clayton recalled Christopher Hempstead from his post as United States Consul to Belize. In his letter of recall, Clayton informed Hempstead that “the appointment of a Consul...[had] been made without full consideration of the territorial rights of Great Britain in that quarter.”⁵⁸ Then on 19 March 1850, President Taylor reported that the Squier-Zepeda Treaty had been submitted to the United States Senate for ratification. President Taylor also announced in that speech that several treaties had been signed with four of the new Republics, and, that these states “should maintain the American system of policy.” And Taylor pointed out that beyond the treaties already concluded by Elijah Hise, in his view, “the only [other] Central American states whose consent or cooperation would ...be necessary for the

⁵⁵ Palmerston to Chatfield, No. 7, 1 May 1849, F.O. 15/56; Chatfield to Palmerston, Nos. 67-68, 27 July 1849, F.O. 15/59.

⁵⁶ No. 17, Mr. Abbott Lawrence to Viscount Palmerston, United States Legation, 30 January 1850, *Correspondence respecting Central America*, 33-34.

⁵⁷ No. 21, Sir Henry Bulwer to Viscount Palmerston, (Extract), Washington, 18 February 1850, *Correspondence respecting Central America*, 41.

⁵⁸ Mr. Clayton to Mr. Hempstead, Department of State, Washington, 1 March 1850, *Correspondence respecting Central America*, 206.

construction of the ship canal contemplated ...by way of Lake Nicaragua” were *Honduras* and Costa Rica.⁵⁹

President Taylor’s pronunciations and anti-British rhetoric coincided with political shifts in Honduras in 1850. That year, the conservative President of Honduras, Juan Lindo, suffered an attempted coup by his Foreign Minister, General José Santos Guardiola. The timely intervention of Trinidad Cabanas, at the time leader of El Salvador, prevented Lindo’s overthrow, but this led Lindo to switch to the liberal camp and thereafter he sided with Doroteo Vasconcelos, President of Salvador, in new conflicts against Rafael Carrera.⁶⁰ The former development reinvigorated the unionist movement in Central America that had gained momentum after Superintendent McDonald of Belize forcibly removed Manuel Quijano the Commandant of San Juan de Nicaragua.⁶¹ Thus, Honduras, Nicaragua, and El Salvador together redoubled efforts for creating a new Central American federation in order to check British expansionism.⁶² At the same time, the government of Honduras floated the prospect of annexation to the United States.

The prospect of this happening, and of United States intervention in Honduras, was the reason Lord Palmerston instructed Bulwer to declare the exemption of Belize and its dependencies from the Clayton Bulwer treaty, but not before rejecting a request from the settlers at Roatan in January of that very year (urged by Chatfield), to petition for the island to

⁵⁹ Zachary Taylor, Special Message to Congress (Proposed Central American Treaties, Uphold Monroe Doctrine), 19 March 1850, available at loveman.sdsu.edu/docs/1850Zachary_Taylor.pdf. My italics.

⁶⁰ Ralph Lee Woodward Jr., “Central America from Independence to c.1870,” chapter in Leslie Bethell (ed.), *The Cambridge History of Latin America, Volume III: From Independence to c. 1870*, (Cambridge University Press, 2008), 493.

⁶¹ Government of Nicaragua to Lord Aberdeen, 16 October 1841, F.O. 15/25. In 1847 the three states had signed the *Pacto de Nacaome* but were unsuccessful in getting Guatemala to accede to this convention.

⁶² Rodriguez, *A Palmerstonian Diplomat ...*, 272. Also, Thomas M. Leonard, *The History of Honduras*, (ABC-CLIO, 2011), 56.

be established as a British colony.⁶³ When the Foreign Office vacillated, Lord Grey, then Colonial Secretary, aware that the magistrate in Roatan at the time was a United States citizen, William Fitzgibbon, cautioned that failure to regularize matters there would lead the settlers straight into the hands of the United States.⁶⁴ In short, Great Britain's declaration exempting Belize and its dependencies was not aimed at seizing new colonies nor necessarily at opening new markets, but at securing the British sphere of influence that was strategically anchored from Belize.

From Relative 'Unimportance' to Policy Significance

Bulwer's declaration exempting Belize from the Clayton-Bulwer treaty produced a shift in the United States outlook towards Great Britain's possessory rights in Belize. After musing over Bulwer's pronouncement for a few days, Clayton responded "acknowledging that [he] understood British Honduras was not embraced in the treaty of the 19th day of April but at the same time carefully declining to affirm or deny the British title in their settlement or its alleged dependencies." Clayton informed Bulwer that

The Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the Senate, the Honourable William R. King [confirmed] that "the Senate perfectly understood that the treaty did not include British Honduras." It was understood to apply to and does include all the Central American States of Guatemala, Honduras, San Salvador, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, with their just limits and proper dependencies.⁶⁵

Clayton's response to Bulwer is significant for distinguishing British Honduras (i.e., Belize) from Central America, as well as for "avoiding all admission of British title to Belize,

⁶³ Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 39, 20 May 1850, F.O. 15/64.

⁶⁴ Minutes of Lord Grey, Secretary for the Colonies, 17 May 1850, C.O. 123/79.

⁶⁵ Memorandum, Department of State, Washington 5 July 1850, *Correspondence respecting Central America*, 682. Also, *Congressional Globe*, 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, 10 January 1853, 248. Interestingly, William King was the representative for the slave-holding state Alabama and an important producer of cotton sold to Great Britain.

or its dependencies.”⁶⁶ With regards to the first point, prior to Bulwer’s declaration, the United States had not previously considered Belize as relevant to its expansion in Central America. Clayton maintained this outlook because, geographically, Belize was located too far away (some 500 miles or more) from the proposed canal route through Nicaragua to restrict freedom of transit.⁶⁷ The Bay Islands were however, proximal to the San Juan route, and, as discussed in Chapter 2, Roatan was also considered the possible Atlantic terminus of a corridor across Honduras. Secretary Clayton was, therefore, understandably apprehensive that the dependencies referred to by Bulwer in his declaration were the Bay Islands. The matter raised the issue of the geographical boundaries of the states of Central America, and with this, the United States government asserted that the Bay Islands were in fact part of Central America, and not “dependencies” of Belize.⁶⁸ The significance of this argument was not lost on Frederick Chatfield, and he urged the settlers at Roatan to petition London for colony status.⁶⁹

With regards to the second point, following Bulwer’s declaration to Clayton, the latter’s attention now turned towards the nature of the British ‘title’ in Belize. In his reply to Bulwer, Clayton indicated that “the treaty leaves it [i.e., title to Belize and its dependencies], without denying, affirming, or in any way meddling with the same, just as it stood previously.” This position followed William R. King’s suggestion to Clayton to “be careful not to use any expression which would seem to recognize the right of England to any portion of Honduras,”⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Clayton’s Speech to the Senate, 16 January 1854, *Congressional Globe*, 33rd Congress, 1st Session, Appendix, 96.

⁶⁷ *Congressional Globe*, 34th Congress, 1st Session, 116-117; 31st Congress, 1st Session, House Executive Document 75, 7. See also Kinley J. Brauer, “The United States and British Imperial Expansion, 1815-60,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 12 (Jan. 1988), 19-37.

⁶⁸ *The Congressional Globe*, 32 Congress, 2nd Session, 10 January 1853, 249. In the Senate meeting Seward asked the question: “Now, did the convention use the name of Central America in its geographical sense, or did they use it in its political sense?”

⁶⁹ To Palmerston, No. 49, 26 July 1850, F.O. 15/64.

⁷⁰ Mr. King to Mr. Clayton, 4 July 1850, *Correspondence respecting Central America...*, 208. King was the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Relations at the time he was consulted by Clayton on the matter.

gained for the United States a negotiating advantage in the whole matter. In this way, the issue of Great Britain's possessory rights to Belize was now of interest to the United States. The untimely death of President Taylor on the 9 July 1850 however prevented further action on this, and Millard Fillmore's inauguration as President of the United States, ushered in a brief period of 'détente' in that country over the Belize question.

The Prometheus Incident

While negotiations for the Clayton-Bulwer treaty were still being finalized, Frederick Chatfield set about reinforcing Great Britain's position in Greytown, and, not surprisingly, the measures he implemented led the United States to charge that Great Britain had contravened the Clayton-Bulwer treaty. Notably, Chatfield prompted the British resident in the Mosquito Shore, James Green, to establish a Municipal Government for Greytown, and drew up a new port tariff schedule which that body had responsibility for implementing.⁷¹ Chatfield also organized a policing force for Greytown, the cost of which the Foreign Office agreed to meet,⁷² as this bolstered British authority there. In the fall of 1851, the Municipal Authority tried repeatedly to collect the port charges from the *Prometheus*, a vessel operated by the Accessory Transit Company, "a subsidiary of Cornelius Vanderbilt's Atlantic and Pacific Ship Canal Company," the outfit that had the concession for operating passenger transport services through the San Juan River.⁷³ When the Captain of the *Prometheus* refused to pay the charges, however Green called on Commander William F. Fead, captain of Her Majesty's vessel the *Express*, to

⁷¹ Chatfield to Palmerston, No. 30, April 8, F.O. 15/64.

⁷² Palmerston to Chatfield, No. 20, 31 May 1850, F.O. 15/65

⁷³ Richmond F. Brown, "Charles Lennox Wyke and the Clayton-Bulwer Formula in Central America, 1852-1860," *The Americas*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Apr. 1991), 416.

help enforce the levy.⁷⁴ A bit overzealous, Commander Fead fired on the *Prometheus* thereby forcing its return to port and the captain to pay the charges, but under protest. Cornelius Vanderbilt was onboard at the time of the incident and advised against paying the charges on account of the port having been earlier declared a free port,⁷⁵ but also because Lord Palmerston had given assurances that Great Britain would not interfere with the operations of the canal company.⁷⁶

Vanderbilt's protestations against the autonomy of the Greytown Authority and their authority to levy such charges, alongside his claim that the land the company was located on (i.e., the Southbank of the San Juan River) belonged to Costa Rica, highlighted the nature of the rivalry between Great Britain and the United States over British influence around the proposed canal route through the San Juan River. Vanderbilt asserted that the actions of the Greytown Authorities, and the collection of port charges, violated the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.⁷⁷ The *Prometheus* incident led Daniel Webster, Secretary of State under the Fillmore administration, to instruct Abbott Lawrence to seek an apology from the Foreign Office.⁷⁸ At the same time, the United States government also indicated that it "acknowledged no rights...of Great Britain to exercise any...supervision over American merchants vessels in Nicaragua or elsewhere, out of British dominions."⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Mr Abbott Lawrence to Viscount Palmerston, No. 84, Legation of the United States, Piccadilly, 19 December 1851, *Correspondence respecting Central America*, 102; Green to Commander Fead, 22 November 1851, in Admiralty to the Foreign Office, 9 January 1852, F.O. 53/30.

⁷⁵ From Palmerston, No. 45, 15 November 1850, F.O. 15/63; Inclosure [sic] in No. 84, Captain Churchill to the Editors of the "New York Express.", San Juan, 21 November 1851, *Correspondence respecting Central America*, 103.

⁷⁶ Inclosure 1 in No. 85, Mr. White to Mr. Webster, New York, 2 December 1851, *Correspondence respecting Central America*, 104.

⁷⁷ Rodriguez, *A Palmerstonian Diplomat...*, 329.

⁷⁸ Mr. Abbott Lawrence to Palmerston, No. 84, Legation of the United States, Piccadilly, 19 December 1851, F.O. 254/18, 102.

⁷⁹ John Crampton to Palmerston, No. 77, 19 December 1851, F.O. 5/531.

The Earl of Granville, who succeeded Palmerston as Foreign Secretary following the latter's resignation,⁸⁰ responded to Lawrence disavowing the incident and indicated that Commander Fead's actions had not been sanctioned by Her Majesty's Government.⁸¹ At the same time, British Admiral George Seymour warned James Green to desist from having the Greytown Municipal Authority implement any other measures which prejudiced British interests in the area.⁸² These measures were intended to calm the situation while preserving British control in Greytown, but the situation there had become concerning for British officials. The town was occupied largely by United States citizens, many of them transiting to California, and the changes to the political atmosphere in the town that this engendered, later proved fitting for enabling filibuster activities in Nicaragua.⁸³ As Naylor put it, "Greytown was rapidly becoming an American settlement."⁸⁴ In Panama City, a similar situation existed and "the unexpected rush of migrants to California" had transformed the place. As McGuinness noted, "this offered the opportunity for [Panama] to recapture [some of the glory of serving] ... as a gateway to the Pacific coast of the Americas."⁸⁵ It also showed that Panama was as viable a location for a trans-isthmian crossing as Nicaragua.

As they did in Panama City, travellers from the United States and elsewhere customarily stopped over in Greytown on their journeys to California. Some stayed on for longer periods and others became involved in the Greytown Municipal Authority.⁸⁶ On

⁸⁰ Lord Palmerston was forced to resign on account of his 'secret' approval of Napoléon III's successful coup d'état in France.

⁸¹ Granville to Abbott Lawrence, No. 96, Foreign Office, 10 January 1852, F.O. 254/18, 114. The letter forwarded by Granville was based on one drafted by Palmerston before he demitted office. Draft, Palmerston, 22 December 1851, F.O. 5/541.

⁸² Earl Granville to Consul Green, No. 99, Foreign Office, 13 January 1852, F.O. 254/18, 116.

⁸³ Consul-General Wyke to the Earl of Malmesbury, No. 126, Greytown, 28 May 1852, *Correspondence respecting Central America*, 167-168.

⁸⁴ Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism...*, 180.

⁸⁵ Also, McGuinness, *Path of Empire ...*, 55.

⁸⁶ Arthur Cochrane to Peter McTeahal, 1 March 1852, F.O. 53/30.

February 28 of 1852 “a body of persons styling themselves citizens of San Juan de Nicaragua” adopted resolutions which would have usurped the Municipal Authority itself and handed power over Greytown to Nicaragua. Realizing the threat this posed to Great Britain’s position in the Mosquito Shore, Crampton took steps to prevent this from happening.⁸⁷ This caused the ‘citizens of Greytown’ to complain of British interference and abuse of power.⁸⁸ Consequently, to get around this, Green, who was acting as ‘head’ of the Authority, resigned and installed a system of self-government thereby preserving ‘Mosquito authority.’⁸⁹

The Webster-Crampton Agreement

The *Prometheus* incident caused Prime Minister Russell to recall Chatfield in 1852,⁹⁰ but Chatfield’s replacement in Central America, Charles Lennox Wyke, would prove no less passionate about maintaining British influence there.⁹¹ Russell also instructed John Crampton, the British Minister in Washington, to negotiate a settlement of the causes of the disputes with the United States over Greytown forthwith.⁹² The upshot of the latter was the Webster-Crampton Agreement concluded on 30 April 1852 between Crampton and Daniel Webster,⁹³ John Clayton’s successor as Secretary of State after President Taylor’s passing. This agreement, based on several points previously agreed between Bulwer and Webster,⁹⁴ was

⁸⁷ Mr. Crampton to the Earl of Malmesbury, No. 112, Washington 22 March 1852, *Correspondence respecting Central America*, 137.

⁸⁸ Consul Green to the Earl of Malmesbury, No. 127, 3 June 1852, 168-169.

⁸⁹ No. 126, footnote 88.

⁹⁰ Granville to Chatfield, No. 1, 15 January 1852, F.O. 15/77, 177-178.

⁹¹ Brown, “Charles Lennox Wyke...,” 412.

⁹² Russell to Granville, 1 January 1852, C.O. 30/22, 10.

⁹³ Inclosure [sic] 1 in No. 121, Proposed Basis of an Agreement for settling Central American Affairs, Washington, 30 April 1852, F.O. 254/18, 155-158. Daniel Webster, who twice bid, unsuccessfully, for presidency of the United States, was opposed to slavery and to annexing Mexican territory. He also backed John Clay’s proposal for banning the importation of slaves, and for admitting California as a free state into the Union.

⁹⁴ Bulwer’s negotiations with Webster were also aimed at countering any advantages the United States would derive from its negotiations for a treaty of commerce with Nicaragua. Sir Henry Bulwer to Viscount

never ratified, but nonetheless, it provided the “bases” for eventual settlement of the Mosquito question.⁹⁵ Specifically, the Webster-Crampton agreement advanced recommendations for fixing the limits of *Mosquitia* and provided for Nicaraguan control over that territory in the future; for obtaining joint recognition of Greytown;⁹⁶ and for defining the boundary between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. However, the agreement did not address the matter of British presence in the Bay Islands, and thus, neither that of British rights in Belize.

The Webster-Crampton proposals were accepted by Felipe Molina, the Costa Rican Minister in Washington but rejected by José Marcoleta, his Nicaragua counterpart there.⁹⁷ This led British officials to put forward alternate proposals, but the negotiators recognized the need for involving the affected states and thus a joint commission comprised of Charles Lennox Wyke and Robert Walsh, envoy for the United States, met with the governments of Costa Rica and Nicaragua. After some convincing, Nicaragua decided to accept the “bases” of the Webster-Crampton agreement but wanted to amend the terms to provide for *Mosquitia* and Greytown to be under Nicaraguan sovereignty.⁹⁸ In the meantime, as a counterpoise to the unionists’ continued push for re-establishing a Federation,⁹⁹ Chatfield unsuccessfully suggested a joint superintendency of Central America be established.¹⁰⁰ The agreement’s

Palmerston, No. 72, Washington, 5 May 1851, and No. 74 of 19 May 1851, both in *Correspondence respective Central America*, 96, 97.

⁹⁵ Mario Rodriguez, “The “Prometheus” and the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty,” *The Journal of Modern History*, Vol. 36, No. 3 (Sep. 1964), 272-274.

⁹⁶ Granville to Crampton, No. 25, 20 February 1852, F.O. 5/542.

⁹⁷ Mr. Crampton to the Earl of Malmesbury, No. 136, Washington, 23 August 1852, *Correspondence respecting Central America*, 198-199; Miller, *Treaties and Other Act...*, 781, 785.

⁹⁸ Sir Henry Bulwer to Viscount Palmerston, No. 74, 19 May 1851, *Correspondence respecting Central America*, 97.

⁹⁹ To Palmerston, No. 78, 25 July 1851, F.O. 15/71.

¹⁰⁰ To Palmerston, No. 10, 5 February 1851, F.O. 15/70.

collapse however nullified need for any superintendency and at the same time kept Great Britain's 'honour' in the Shore intact by tacitly acknowledging Mosquito sovereignty.¹⁰¹

Annexation of the Bay Islands – the upshot for Belize

During the time that Costa Rica and Nicaragua were being consulted on the Webster-Crampton agreement, the Colonial Office annexed the Bay Islands.¹⁰² This occurrence, on 17 July 1852, virtually on the heels of the *Prometheus* incident, was undertaken ostensibly to prevent Roatan falling into the hands of another foreign power, but it complicated Great Britain's position in Central America, and, reinforced the belief in the United States that Great Britain had territorial ambitions in the isthmus.¹⁰³ That Superintendent Wodehouse of Belize sailed to Roatan to pronounce the new Colony of the Bay Islands,¹⁰⁴ implicated Belize further in the whole Anglo-American rivalry over Central America. The British settlers in Roatan were elated by this development, though the decision had more to do with preserving Roatan's strategic value to Great Britain in relation to a possible corridor across Honduras, than with the settler's petitions for colony status.¹⁰⁵ In this instance British power preserved British influence in the isthmus. However, the governments of Honduras and the United States protested sharply, the latter on the ground that this was a clear violation of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰¹ The Earl of Malmesbury to Mr. Crampton, No. 125, Foreign Office, 18 June 1852, *Correspondence respecting Central America*, 165.

¹⁰² Proclamation, Office of the Colonial Secretary, Belize, 17 July 1852, 47th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Executive Doc. No 194, in Vol. 6, *Compilation of Executive Documents*, 774.

¹⁰³ The letters of patent creating the Colony were issued on the 20 March 1852 but were not proclaimed until July/August. Miller, *Treaties and Other Acts...*, 786. See also "Proclamation, Office of the Colonial Secretary," Belize, 17 July 1852, Moore, *A Digest of International Law...*, 140.

¹⁰⁴ *Archives of British Honduras, III*, 15; Waddell, "Great Britain and the Bay Islands..." 68.

¹⁰⁵ This analysis deviates from the notion that Roatan was valued for being "[the commercial] key to the Bay of Honduras." For that outlook see *Archives of British Honduras, III*, 268.

¹⁰⁶ Mr. Crampton to the Earl of Malmesbury, Washington, 16 January 1853, F.O. 254/18, 209.

The problem for the United States, as James Buchanan later stated, was that “Great Britain has not even retired from the island of Roatan [sic]... and not only continued [its occupation] but ... actually established a colonial government over it [and] this is a palpable violation of both the letter and spirit of the Clayton and Bulwer convention.”¹⁰⁷ Thus, following the introduction of a resolution by Representative Lewis Cass of Michigan, the United States Congress resolved that President Fillmore

be requested to communicate to the Senate...any information...respecting the establishment of a new British colony in Central America; together with the copy of the proclamation...issued by the British authorities at Belize... and what measures, if any have been taken by the Executive to prevent the violation of [Article 1 of the Clayton Bulwer treaty].¹⁰⁸

The information President Fillmore communicated to the Senate included Bulwer’s declaration exempting Belize and its dependencies, along with the subsequent exchanges between Bulwer and Clayton over the matter.¹⁰⁹ It was at this point apparently that Congress first became aware of the declaration,¹¹⁰ and this caused several Senators to rebuke Clayton for acting “without the knowledge or consent of the Senate.”¹¹¹

Superintendent Wodehouse’s role in the annexation of the Bay Islands ultimately caused the United States government to scrutinize British possessory rights in the settlement more closely. To begin with, Cass sponsored a resolution in the Senate...to the effect that the Committee on Foreign Relations should be instructed to inquire “whether any measure should

¹⁰⁷ James Buchanan, No. 175, “Statement for the Earl of Clarendon,” Correspondence ... Respecting Central America, 259-266.

¹⁰⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 32 Congress, 2nd Session, Tuesday 7 December 1852, 237; Inclosure [sic] in No. 140, Extract from the Washington National Intelligencer of December 29, 1852, *Correspondence...respecting Central America*, 201-202.

¹⁰⁹ To the United States Senate, Washington, 27 January 1853, 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, Senate Ex. Doc., No. 28, in Vol. 3, *Compilation of Executive Documents...*, 835.

¹¹⁰ Miller, *Treaties and other International Acts...*, 690.

¹¹¹ *Congressional Globe*, 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, 10 January 1853, 248.

be taken by the Senate, and if any, what, in relation to the Declaration annexed to the [Clayton-Bulwer treaty].”¹¹² Cass also stated that “if he had been of the opinion that [the treaty would not apply to Belize, he] should never have voted for its ratification,” and that in supporting the ratification of the treaty his “object was to sweep away all British claim in Central America.”¹¹³ This was also the position of several Democratic Senators, including the anti-abolitionist Franklin Pierce of New Hampshire. Pierce won the Presidential election in 1852 and assumed office the following March. His Vice-President was the cotton plantation and slave owner William King – who had been Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs in 1850 when Clayton consulted him about Bulwer’s declaration exempting Belize and its dependencies from the Clayton-Bulwer treaty.¹¹⁴

The change of administration in the United States in 1853 ended the conciliatory attitude of the Fillmore administration towards British expansion in Central America and ushered in a more combative and hard-line stance in the government of the former. Advocating United States territorial expansion southward and spouting heavy anti-British rhetoric,¹¹⁵ President Pierce stated in his inaugural address that

the policy of my Administration will not be controlled by any timid forebodings of evil from expansion. Indeed...our attitude as a nation and our position on the globe render the acquisition of certain possessions not within our jurisdiction eminently important for our protection, if not in the future essential for the preservation of the rights of commerce and the peace of the world.¹¹⁶

¹¹² Mr. Crampton to Lord John Russell, No. 151, Washington, 13 February 1853, *Correspondence...respecting Central America*, 217.

¹¹³ *Ibid*, 237.

¹¹⁴ As King was recuperating from an illness at the time of his swearing in as Vice-President, Congress had to adopt a special decree to allow for this. “An Act providing for administering the Oath of Office to William R. King, Vice-President Elect of the United States of America,” 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, 2 March 1853, 189.

¹¹⁵ Franklin Pierce, “Message Regarding Transit Across Central America,” 15 May 1854, *Presidential Speeches, Transcript*, <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/may-15-1854-message-regarding-transit-across-central-america>

¹¹⁶ “Inaugural Address of Franklin Pierce,” Friday 4 March 1853, *The Avalon Project, Documents in Law, History and Diplomacy*, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/pierce.asp

This sabre rattling by President Pierce appealed to filibusters from the United States and incited their ventures into Central America throughout the remainder of the decade. It also emboldened Solon Borland, Democratic Senator from Arkansas and United States Consul to Nicaragua and Minister to Central America from 1853 to 1854, to order the war vessel *Cyane* to “flatten Greytown,” potentially prompting a confrontation between Great Britain and the United States.¹¹⁷ Borland embodied the attitude of the Pierce administration towards British presence in Central America, and voted against the Clayton-Bulwer treaty because, as he stated, “I would never, by my voice, bend the United States to abstain from the acquisition of territory in [Central America], or any other.”¹¹⁸ During his time in Central America, Borland plotted with the government of Trinidad Cabañas to oust Great Britain from the Bay Islands, and, he advocated for the removal of Great Britain from all areas of Central America, including Belize. Borland also negotiated a treaty of commerce with Nicaragua and schemed with the government in that country to restore Nicaraguan authority over Greytown and the Mosquito Shore.¹¹⁹ Borland’s machinations and the *Cyane* incident seriously jeopardized the ongoing efforts to settle the Central American issue,¹²⁰ and Borland’s objective of removing all British influence from the isthmus also posed a potential menace to Belize.

Faced with this new stance of the United States, and with Great Britain “drifting into war” in Crimea,¹²¹ Foreign Secretary Lord Clarendon clarified Great Britain’s position on the

¹¹⁷ Will Soper, “Revisiting nineteenth century U.S. interventionism in Central America capitalism, intrigue, and the obliteration of Greytown,” *American Nineteenth Century History*, Vol. 18, Issue 1 (May 2017), 19-44, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14664658.2017.1319633>. Also, James M. Woods, “Expansionism as Diplomacy: The Career of Solon Borland in Central America 1853-1854,” *The Americas*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Jan. 1984), 399-415.

¹¹⁸ *Congressional Globe*, 32nd Congress, 2nd Session, 10 January 1853, 253.

¹¹⁹ Charles Wyke to Lord Clarendon, 27 November 1853, F.O. 15/79.

¹²⁰ [Inclosure No. 2], (Lord Clarendon to Mr. Crampton), Foreign Office, 29 April 1853, *Compilation of Executive Documents...*, 846; Naylor, *Penny Ante Imperialism...*, 189.

¹²¹ The Earl of Clarendon, “War with Russia – Her Majesty’s Message,” *House of Lords Debate*, 31 March 1854, Vol. 132, <https://api.parliament.uk/historic-hansard/lords/1854/mar/31/war-with-russia-her-majestys-message>

Clayton-Bulwer treaty “with respect to her present and future relations with Mosquito and other nations in Central America.” Lord Clarendon pointed out that while Great Britain will “religiously keep [its engagements], nowhere in the Treaty of April 1850 [has it] renounced, nor ever had any intention to renounce, the full and absolute right which she possesses over her own lawful territories in Central America.”¹²² Meanwhile, the Committee on Foreign Relations reported that “nothing contained in the [Clayton-Bulwer] treaty was to be considered affecting the title or existing rights of Great Britain to the English Settlements in Honduras Bay [and] consequently...no measures are necessary on the part of the Senate” to redress Bulwer’s declaration. The Committee also pointed out, with regards to the repeat practice of “the authorities of her Britannic Majesty at Belize...[to] assert claims to the Island of Roatan...that the English settlements on the Belize have no political character whatsoever.”¹²³ In other words, in the Senate’s view, Spain’s sovereignty over Belize was preserved, and Great Britain purportedly held only “useful domain.”

Armed with this information and recognizing that the latter’s standing underpinned British influence in the region, William Marcy, President Pierce’s Secretary of State, sought to subvert Great Britain’s rights in Belize. As Marcy stated in his instructions to James Buchanan when the latter was appointed Minister to London,

[in] Belize, the right [Great Britain] ... holds ... is derived from a grant by Spain; and this right is limited to a single purpose...a possession so restricted as to its use could never be considered a British colony. While she confines herself to the boundaries specified in the treaties with Spain, in 1783 and 1786 ... we have no right to complain that she is infringing *our* policy, but when she extends her occupancy by encroachments far beyond the prescribed bounds...a very different character is given to this settlement...since the acquisition of California, Great

¹²² The Earl of Clarendon to Mr. Crampton, No. 163, Foreign Office, 27 ay 1853, *Correspondence...respecting Central America*, 248.

¹²³ Inclosure [sic] in No. 154, Report of the Committee on Foreign Relations respecting Establishment of a New British Colony in Central America, *Correspondence...respecting Central America*, 223-234.

Britain has manifested a more matured design to change this Spanish license to cut dyewood and mahogany at Belize into a British dominion.¹²⁴

Secretary Marcy also pointed out that in 1817 and again in 1819, the British government “admitted that Belize [was] not within the British dominions,” and that “while the United States conceded that Great Britain has rights in Belize, [it] positively den[ied] that Belize is a British province, or any part of the British dominions.” Marcy’s contention was not with British rights in Belize per se, but rather concerned the way in which Great Britain exploited the territorial encroachments in Belize to attain its informal empire objectives in Central America. This nuance is not unimportant, and the United States purposely left an opening for Great Britain to retain its rights in Belize, including over the areas encroached beyond the limits of the 1786 treaty, as long as it did not use this foothold “to inhibit free and common use of the contemplated ship canal” across Central America.¹²⁵ This plan is implicit in Marcy’s instructions to James Buchanan that “the main object to be accomplished is to induce the British government to withdraw from all interference in the political affairs of Central American States and the adjacent islands.”

Squier’s Honduras Rail-road Project

In 1853, Ephraim G. Squier, who previously served as United States Consul to Central America, started promoting a project for the construction of a railway across Honduras. The idea for this project was first planted in Squier’s mind when, on visiting the Bay Islands, he realized the business potential from the growing throngs of passengers travelling en route to California, but this did not start to take shape until after Great Britain’s annexation of the Bay

¹²⁴ Mr. Marcy to Mr. Buchanan, Extract, No. 2, Department of State Washington, 2 July 1853, *Compilation of Executive Documents...*, 855-856.

¹²⁵ *Ibid*, 855-857.

Islands. To undercut British influence in the area, Squier forged closer relations with the government of Trinidad Cabañas of Honduras and used this alliance to secure a contract from that state granting his Honduras Interoceanic Railway Company exclusive rights to construct and operate the proposed railway.

Squier's manoeuvrings in Honduras helped stir anti-British sentiments, and inflamed tensions between President Trinidad Cabañas, who had succeeded Francisco Morazán as head of the liberal party after Morazán's execution, and Rafael Carrera. Cabañas needed to finance his military efforts against Carrera and therefore sought closer relations with the United States to try and secure funding from them for this. When he was forced to meet Chatfield's demands for payment of debt owing to Great Britain, this embittered him towards British presence in the Bay Islands.¹²⁶ Thus, when Squier came selling him on the idea of the Honduras interoceanic railway, Cabañas saw an opportunity for retaliating. Meanwhile, Squier received support for his canal project from a most unlikely source, Lord Malmesbury, at the time, the British Foreign Secretary. This factor, for several years, completely undermined the efforts of Charles Wyke, who replaced Chatfield as Consul in Central America, for extending British influence in the isthmus.

The problem for Wyke was two-fold. Firstly, the Board of Trade had reported favourably on the Squier project and hence Lord Clarendon came to consider this as a viable option for Great Britain;¹²⁷ and secondly, both Lord Malmesbury and Lord Derby, Great Britain's Prime Minister, had personal financial interests in the Honduran project and felt that

¹²⁶ Woodward Jr., *Rafael Carrera...*, 242.

¹²⁷ Board of Trade to Foreign Office, 21 May 1856, F.O. 15/93, 150; Waddell, "Great Britain and the Bay Islands...", 71.

support for this would help to counter United States expansion in Nicaragua.¹²⁸ Lord Clarendon's deliberate omission of the latter information infuriated Wyke. Wyke found the former's refusal to support the alternative project of his Guatemalan counterpart and Minister of Foreign Affairs, Pedro de Aycinena, for a cart-road in Guatemala on the grounds that the British government could not support private projects of that nature somewhat hypocritical.¹²⁹

The Dallas-Clarendon Treaty of 1856 – The Separate Articles

This section of the chapter explores how Belize becoming “one of three questions of difference” between Great Britain and the United States over Central America led to settlement of the issue of British rights in Belize in Great Britain's favour.¹³⁰ It argues that treating the Belize and the Bay Islands issues as separate articles to an agreement to settle the boundaries of Nicaragua in relation to Costa Rica, as well as to incorporate the Mosquito territory within such boundaries, effectively decoupled the issues from each other. This paved the way for Great Britain to settle all three separately, but “in accordance with the general tenor of the American interpretation of the [Clayton-Bulwer] treaty.” It argues further that a growing desire in Great Britain for preventing war with the United States (to ensure that the former continued to benefit from the trade with the latter) produced a more conciliatory attitude towards United States expansion in Central America and in this way, Great Britain was able to leverage the separate treaties to preserve Belize as the fount of British influence in Central America.

¹²⁸ Richmond F. Brown, “Charles Lennox Wyke and the Clayton-Bulwer Formula in Central America, 1852-1860,” *The Americas*, Vol. 47, No. 4 (Apr. 1991), 440.

¹²⁹ Wyke to Malmesbury, 30 August 1858, F.O. 15/100, 60; Clarendon to Wyke, 3 September 1856, F.O. 15/90, 22; Brown, “Charles Lennox Wyke...,” 434.

¹³⁰ Miller, *Treaties and Other International Acts...*, 787.

From Arbitration to Abrogation

James Buchanan's meetings with Lord Clarendon over the Central American issue after the former had assumed his post in London, yielded an unexpected opportunity for Great Britain to secure its possessory rights in Belize. In a written statement to Lord Clarendon on 6th January 1854, Buchanan "seriously contested" British claims in Central America, except for "that part of the Belize settlement lying between the Rio Hondo and the Seibun [sic]." At the same time, Buchanan argued that the Clayton-Bulwer treaty was retrospective but that "the British government...have not deemed it proper to take the first step towards the performance of their obligations under this convention."¹³¹ While this was true (Great Britain still had possession of the Bay Islands and the protectorate of the Mosquito Shore), Great Britain did not have any grand designs in Central America and neither had it "manifested a more deliberate design to change Belize to a British dominion." In fact, as late as 1856 the British government ignored petitions from the Belize settlers to convert the settlement to an official colony. By this period the shift to free trade in Great Britain had produced in that country an aversion for obtaining any further colonial possessions even as it "promoted extra-European expansion."¹³² Still, the prevailing situation meant that getting Great Britain to "cease her interposition in the affairs of Central America, and to confine herself to...the limited rights in Belize" remained the key foreign policy objectives in Central America for the United States.¹³³

In his response to Buchanan's statement, Lord Clarendon insisted that the Clayton-Bulwer treaty was prospective, and therefore did not affect its possessions in the isthmus. However, Lord Clarendon also suggested that "the Bay Islands were of little value but

¹³¹ James Buchanan, No. 175, "Statement for the Early of Clarendon," *Correspondence ... Respecting Central America*, 259-266.

¹³² Darwin, "Imperialism and the Victorians: The dynamics of Territorial Expansion," 627

¹³³ No. 178, Remarks in reply to Lord Clarendon's Statement of 2 May 1854, *Correspondence...respecting Central America*, 277.

repudiated the idea of [yielding on Belize].”¹³⁴ Buchanan seemed to concede on the latter point and pointed out to Secretary Marcy that “the British have been in ... possession of Belize...for more than seventy years.” This arguably marked a first ‘loosening’ of Buchanan’s attitude towards British expansion in Central America, and was followed, in Marcy’s response to Buchanan, by the former’s acknowledgement that “the United States could not claim as a matter of right that Great Britain should altogether withdraw from Belize.” As a result of this, Buchanan revealed to Lord Clarendon that “the government of the United States will not, for the present, insist upon a withdrawal of Great Britain from this settlement, provided all the other questions between the two Governments concerning Central America can be amicably adjusted.”¹³⁵ Then, at a session of Parliament on 31 January 1856, Lord Clarendon indicated that he had offered the United States to arbitrate the matter, but this was not accepted.¹³⁶

James Buchanan was unable to complete the negotiations in London over the Central American question before his recall to the United States, and therefore this was taken up by his replacement George M. Dallas.¹³⁷ Dallas, an expansionist and former Vice-President under the Polk administration, had strongly supported the acquisition of the Oregon territory as well as the annexation of Texas and other territory from Mexico.¹³⁸ Marcy’s instructions to Dallas showed the United States’ readiness to take advantage of the opening presented by the proposal for arbitration to reconcile the differences with Great Britain. Marcy revealed to Dallas that

¹³⁴ Mr. Buchanan to Mr. Marcy, No. 20, Legation of the United States, London, 10 January 1854, *Compilation of Executive Documents...*, 905-906.

¹³⁵ Remarks of Mr. Buchanan, Minister to England, 22 July 1854

¹³⁶ No. 186, The Earl of Clarendon to Mr. Crampton, Foreign Office, 8 February 1856, *Correspondence respecting Central America*, 297. Buchanan had written to March about this but joked that “it would now be difficult to find an impartial umpire, as they had gone to war with our arbitrator, the Emperor of Russia.” Mr. Buchanan to Mr. Marcy, No. 49, Legation of the United States, London, 21 November 1854, *Correspondence...respecting Central America*, 300.

¹³⁷ No. 1, Mr. Marcy to Mr. Dallas, (Communicated to the Earl of Clarendon by Mr. Dallas, June 11), No. 13, Dept. of State, 24 May 1856, *Further Correspondence with the United States respecting Central America*, 1.

¹³⁸ Harry E. Wade, "Dallas: The Man Behind the Name," *East Texas Historical Journal*, Vol. 21, Issue 1 (1983).

while the [United States] could not consent to any questions about the true construction of the [Clayton-Bulwer convention] ... some of the questions of fact ... may not be conveniently determined by arbitration... [This included] the question of the [boundaries] of Belize, and the question whether the Bay Islands ...belong to [Honduras].¹³⁹

This proposal presented an opportunity for Great Britain to try and preserve elements of its standing in Central America by distinguishing settlement of the above-mentioned issues from that of the Mosquito Shore.

Lord Clarendon was receptive to this proposal and replied that Great Britain was “prepared to enter into negotiation on these matters.” He clarified to Dallas however that “with respect to the district of Belize, Her Majesty’s Government consider that the only question to be determined...is that of the boundary between [Central America] and the British possessions.”¹⁴⁰ Lord Clarendon also signalled a readiness to resolve the Bay Islands issue via direct negotiations. This turn of events was, as already mentioned, the result of a shift in outlook within Great Britain related to a preference for maintaining the benefits of trade over war with the United States,¹⁴¹ and not, as Dallas surmised, because of a ‘tough stand’ by the United States.¹⁴² Richard Cobden and like-minded parliamentarians, aware that Napoléon III, under advisement from Michel Chevalier, had started to liberalize trade in France, lowering tariffs in that country starting in 1856,¹⁴³ weighed in on the Central American issue.¹⁴⁴ Coinciding with

¹³⁹ No. 1, *Further Correspondence with the United States respecting Central America*, 6.

¹⁴⁰ No. 2, The Earl of Clarendon to Mr. Dallas, Foreign Office, 26 June 1856, *Further Correspondence with the United States respecting Central America*, 8.

¹⁴¹ Free trade advocates such as Richard Cobden “saw free trade as the linchpin of an international system in which...commercial intercourse would in time render war [unnecessary].” Patrick O’Brien and Geoffrey Pigman, “Free trade, British hegemony and the international economic order in the nineteenth century,” *Review of International Studies*, Vol 18 (1992), 98. For a discussion of Cobden on war see Peter Cain, Capitalism, war and internationalism in the thought of Richard Cobden, *British Journal of International Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 3 (Oct. 1979) 229-247.

¹⁴² Williams, *Anglo-American Isthmian Diplomacy*, 218.

¹⁴³ O’Brien and Pigman, “Free trade, British hegemony...,” 98-99.

¹⁴⁴ Hansard, House of Commons, Dispute with the United States, 8 February 1856, Volume 140, Columns 462-467.

increased French attentions to canal projects in Central America as it did, these developments together posed concerns for Great Britain over possible French expansion in the isthmus.

Meanwhile, in the United States, the general recession that started to set in there during 1856 forced President James Buchanan early into his term, to implement tariff reductions of up to 20 per cent the following year. This occurrence, and the *Dred Scott* decision by the United States Supreme Court in March of 1857 (which found that slavery could not be outlawed in the southern territories), greatly favoured southern interests in the United States but grated against Great Britain's campaign for abolition. The Panic of 1857 which followed these disparate events, and virtually on the heels of the tariff reductions, galvanized economic nationalists in the United States and precipitated clashes between northern and southern states over economy and slavery.¹⁴⁵ They also deepened Anglophobia and, arguably, accelerated the shift towards economic nationalism, because as Palen points out, political elites in the United States "[believed] that only protectionism could keep the United States safe from British free trade imperial designs."¹⁴⁶

In any event, on 17 October 1856, the two parties agreed the Dallas-Clarendon Treaty.¹⁴⁷ The agreement dealt primarily with settling the boundaries between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Under the agreement, the Mosquito territory was to be clearly delineated, and subject to future Nicaraguan sovereignty, and Greytown was to be converted into a free port. Following the newly adopted approach of distinguishing the Bay Islands and Belize issues from

¹⁴⁵ James Huston argues that the end of the Crimean War contributed to the Panic of 1857 by depressing prices for United States wheat as a result of steep declines in demand for the commodity. See James L. Huston, *The Panic of 1857 and the Coming of the Civil War*, (Louisiana State University Press, 1999).

¹⁴⁶ Marc-William Palen, "The Conspiracy of Free Trade," *Imperial & Global Forum*, 1 March 2016, <https://imperialglobalexeter.com/2016/03/01/the-conspiracy-of-free-trade/#more-3390>

¹⁴⁷ James Buchanan, State of the Union 1857, 8 December 1857, *American History – Presidents*, available at URL: <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/presidents/james-buchanan/state-of-the-union-1857.php>

that of the Mosquito Shore, the agreement also contained separate articles dealing with these two issues. , As it relates to the question of Belize, Article II defined the boundaries as “bounded on the North by the Mexican province of Yucatan, and on the South by the River Sarstoon.”¹⁴⁸ The United States Congress objected to the clause on the Bay Islands (Separate Articles, §II.2) and therefore, adjusted this before ratifying the convention.¹⁴⁹ However, the changes caused the British Parliament to reject the agreement and to propose its own changes, which the United States Congress then decided were not acceptable.

The problem for the British government was that the United States inserted terms into the agreement which would have effectively undercut Belize’s position by transferring sovereignty of the Bay Islands to the government of the Republic of Honduras.¹⁵⁰ Moreover, if this was accepted by Great Britain (at that juncture), it had the potential for compromising the Clarendon-Herrán agreement recently concluded between Great Britain and Honduras over the Bay Islands but which were not yet “ratified and in force.”¹⁵¹ As it so happened, the Honduran Legislative Assembly rejected the latter agreement and sent it back to their agent in London, Pedro A. Herrán, “to be presented to [Lord Clarendon] with modifications.”¹⁵² Meanwhile, a

¹⁴⁸ Article II.1, *Tratado entre La Majestad Británica y los Estados Unidos de Norte America referente a Centro América, firmando en Londres el 17 de octubre de 1856*, <http://www.oas.org/sap/peacefund/belizeandguatemala/timelinedocuments/April%2019%201856%20Dallas-Clarendon.pdf>

¹⁴⁹ No. 13, Lord Napier to the Earl of Clarendon, (No. 8 Confidential), Washington, 12 March 1857, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 42-43.

¹⁵⁰ Inclosure 1 in No. 17, James Buchanan, President of the United States of America; No. 19, The Earl of Malmesbury to Lord Napier, (No. 61), Foreign Office, 17 April 1857, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 47, 49.

¹⁵¹ No. 19, 49. Also, Mr. Dallas to Mr. Marcy, Legation of the United States, London, 15 August 1856, *Correspondence and Other Papers relating to the Proposed Interoceanic Ship Canal being a reprint of an Executive Document of the Special Session of 4 March 1857, and of Document No. 194 of the 47th Congress, 1st Session*, (Washington, 1900), 58.

¹⁵² No. 24, Mr. Wyke to the Earl of Clarendon, (No. 25), Guatemala 27 March 1857, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 57.

new Lieutenant-Governor of the Bay Islands was sworn in at Roatan.¹⁵³ This happening did not disarm the rumours about the agreement that Great Britain had, by this convention, “guaranteed the independence and neutrality of the territory of Honduras.” The possible use of the Bay Islands as a shelter and base for pirates caused much anxiety in Guatemala and posed concerns for Guatemala for its isthmian communication projects and hence, the Guatemalan government protested this.¹⁵⁴

The Dallas-Clarendon convention falling to the ground led the United States to consider abrogation.¹⁵⁵ On learning of this development, Lord Napier recommended that the British government dispatch an envoy to Central America specifically to negotiate settlement of the Central American issue.¹⁵⁶ Doing so, Lord Napier argued, was “safer,” and would permit the British government to “stand on that which already exists, and secure its permanence by...conforming our position to the construction adopted by the American Cabinet.”¹⁵⁷ This suggestion was initially disregarded, but then Lord Napier informed Lord Clarendon that if the matter was not settled promptly, President Buchanan would attempt to set aside the convention at the next session of Congress.¹⁵⁸ Consequently, the Foreign Office dispatched Sir William Ouseley as special envoy to Central America, with the objective of delimiting the Mosquito territory; ceding the Bay Islands to Honduras; and defining the boundaries of Belize “by

¹⁵³ No. 26, The Earl of Clarendon to Lord Napier, (No. 83), Foreign Office, 8 May 1857, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 61.

¹⁵⁴ Inclosure 1 in No. 8, Señor Aycinena to Mr. Wyke, Guatemala, Noviembre 28 de 1856, and (Translation), Guatemala, 28 November 1856, both in *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 15-16, 16-17.

¹⁵⁵ No. 33, Lord Napier to the Earl of Clarendon, (No. 107), Washington, 22 June 1857, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 77. Freeman Snow argues that at that juncture, abrogation was one of “two possible modes of proceeding.” Freeman Snow, “Legal Rights under the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty,” *Harvard Law Review*, Vol 3, No. 2 (May 1889), 58, DOI: 10.2307/1321215

¹⁵⁶ No. 33, Lord Napier to the Earl of Clarendon, (No. 107), Washington, 22 June 1857, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 78.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid*, 78.

¹⁵⁸ No. 33, 76.

separate negotiations with the States of Central America themselves.”¹⁵⁹ Ouseley was also instructed to reiterate the offer to refer the matter to arbitration.¹⁶⁰ This decision gave the British government an hitherto unexpected opportunity to re-shape its influence in the region.

In the meantime, Lord Napier advised General Cass of Ouseley’s mission and requested that this be given time to work. Lord Napier also assured General Cass that Great Britain intended to settle the matters in accordance with the United States construction of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty. Because of this, the United States agreed “not to move towards abrogation of the Clayton-Bulwer treaty until it could be seen what interpretation of its provisions would result from Sir William Ouseley’s mission.” President Buchanan’s continued insistence that Great Britain unequivocally relinquish the Mosquito protectorate; return the Bay Islands to Honduras, and in Belize, retreat to the limits of the 1783 and 1786 treaties however made for tensions over Great Britain doing so.¹⁶¹ Thus, Lord Napier explained to President Buchanan that

it was the intention of Her Majesty’s Government to sanction the execution of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty “according to the general tenor of the interpretation put upon it by the United States, but to do so by separate negotiations with the Central American republics in lieu of a direct negotiation with the Federal Government.”¹⁶²

To this, General Cass informed Lord Napier that “to the President of the United States, it was indifferent whether the concession contemplated by Her Majesty’s Government were consigned to a direct engagement between England and the United

¹⁵⁹ No. 38, The Earl of Clarendon to Sir W. G. Ouseley, (No. 2), Foreign Office, 30 October 1857, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 81-85.

¹⁶⁰ Lord Napier to General Cass, Washington, 15 February 1858,

¹⁶¹ No. 43, Lord Napier to the Earl of Clarendon, (No. 222), Washington, 24 October 1857, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 94.

¹⁶² No. 45, Lord Napier to the Earl of Clarendon, (No. 227. Confidential), Washington, 27 October 1857, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 95.

States or to treaties between the former and the Central American Republics.”¹⁶³ At the same time, General Cass recognized that this meant that settlement of the obstacles to United States expansion in the Central American isthmus “were to be based, not upon the treaty of 1850, but upon the Dallas-Clarendon treaty of 1856.”¹⁶⁴ Still the United States felt that Great Britain was not doing sufficient to deliver the Clayton-Bulwer treaty. Hence General Cass floated the notion of the President dissolving the treaty. The Foreign Office simply replied that

should the treaty be annulled, Great Britain will ... return to the position she held [prior] to ratification of the Treaty and would retain all the territorial and other advantages she then possessed. The question of the possession of the Bay Island, or that of the protectorate of *Mosquitia*, or the boundaries of Honduras would no longer be subject to discussion.¹⁶⁵

With this gauntlet thrown down, the United States was forced to accept the more palatable option put forward by Lord Napier to, alongside ceding the Bay Islands to Honduras and arranging the Mosquito territory, “support Her Majesty’s Minister in negotiating a Treaty with Guatemala, by which the sovereignty should be recognized between the Rivers Sibun and Sarstoon.”¹⁶⁶

Meanwhile, a new development in Central America threatened to undermine the status quo there, and before British and United States officials had the opportunity for settling their disagreements. On 16 June 1855, William Walker, a United States physician and lawyer turned

¹⁶³ Mr. Cass to Lord Napier, Senate Executive Documents, 56th Congress, 1st Session, Document No. 237, 149.

¹⁶⁴ Inclosure [sic] 1 in No. 100, General Cass to Lord Napier, Department of State, Washington 6 April 1858, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 161.

¹⁶⁵ No. 94, Sir. W.G. Ouseley to the Earl of Malmesbury, (No. 30), Washington, 16 March 1858, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 148.

¹⁶⁶ No. 100, Lord Napier to the Earl of Malmesbury, (No. 85), Washington, 12 April 1858 and No. 180, The Earl of Malmesbury to Lord Napier, (No. 195), Foreign Office, 8 December 1858, both in *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 158, 266.

filibuster invaded Nicaragua and subsequently established his “empire by invitation.”¹⁶⁷ Walker, a part of the Young America movement in the United States which strongly advocated annexation of Cuba and Central America,¹⁶⁸ had actually been invited by Nicaraguan political elites, including Francisco Castellón, previously Nicaraguan envoy to London and afterwards a senior member of the liberal party in Nicaragua, during the civil war that broke out in Nicaragua during that decade, to lend assistance to the liberals’ cause against the conservatives and to help them achieve their other (economic) objectives.¹⁶⁹ Walker’s success in Nicaragua posed significant concerns for Great Britain’s standing in Central America for a couple of reasons.

Firstly, as Michel Gobat describes, Walker’s filibuster enterprise achieved a “filibuster state,” one which could potentially serve the United States manifest destiny ambitions in the region. In short, Nicaragua under Walker essentially became, for a short period, and in a loose sense, a United States “satellite.” At the very least, it held the potential for this, and hence the reason for its recognition by the Pierce administration. However, Gobat contends that this impulse was “utopian” and did not originate with the United States but externally, that is, among Nicaraguan collaborating elites.¹⁷⁰ The prospects of this happening increased significantly when Walker’s military successes against the local Nicaraguan forces soon put

¹⁶⁷ See Michel Gobat, *Empire by Invitation: William Walker and Manifest Destiny in Central America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018). The standard interpretation of Walker’s Central American exploits may be found in William Scroggs, *Filibuster and Financiers: The Story of William Walker and his Associates*, (New York: The McMillan Company, 1916). Recent works tend to maintain this view. See for example, Solomon, Jeffrey H., "Tortured History: Filibustering, Rhetoric, and Walker's "War in Nicaragua," *Alif: Journal of Comparative Poetics*, No. 31 (2011): 105-32. Accessed April 22, 2020 <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23216049>.

¹⁶⁸ Brady Harrison, “The Young Americans: Emerson, Walker, and the Early Literature of American Empire,” *American Studies*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (Fall 1999), 75.

¹⁶⁹ *The Callender I. Fayssoux Collection of William Walker Papers, 1856-1860* at the Latin American Library at Tulane University provides useful details about Walker’s exploits in Central America, particularly in Nicaragua.

¹⁷⁰ Gobat, *Empire by Invitation ...*,” 8.

him in control of an important railroad within that country. Known as the transit road, this was the main artery of communications in Nicaragua for transporting gold and passengers. Walker had deliberately established this as his objective as he believed that controlling the transit route would position him tactically for raising funds for their continued military exploits, and more ‘American’ mercenaries could be recruited for the purpose.¹⁷¹ The transit road was key to the route used by the Accessory Transit Company for ferrying people across Nicaragua travelling from the east coast of the United States to California on its west coast during the gold rush. As such, Walker had the power to ‘disrupt’ use of the Nicaragua canal route.

And secondly, Walker’s filibuster state appealed to the southern slave holding interests for expanding slavery by annexing territory in Central America. As the UPCA abolished slavery shortly after seceding from Mexico, Walker had to get around this. Thus, one of Walker’s early acts when he assumed the Presidency of Nicaragua was to pass a decree legalizing slavery in the Republic. Gobat argues that this decision was counterintuitive but was not the result of southern interests in the United States and suggests that Walker, although “ideologically” opposed to slavery, wanted to appeal to southern slave holding interests, particularly to try and raise financing for his filibuster enterprises.¹⁷² In any event, this undertaking affected Great Britain’s rights in Belize through the anti-slavery nationalism impulse it fired in the United States,¹⁷³ as well as through the Anglo-phobia it fed in the

¹⁷¹ Also, William Oscar Scroggs, “William Walker and the Steamship Corporation of Nicaragua,” *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (Jul. 1905), 792-811.

¹⁷² Sexton seems to be of a similar understanding. See Jay Sexton, “Introduction,” in George Fuji, *H-Diplo Roundtable XX-38 on Empire by Invitation: William Walker and Manifest Destiny in Central America*, H-Diplo, 05-13-2019, <https://networks.h-net.org/node/28443/discussions/4084046/h-diplo-roundtable-xx-38-empire-invitation-william-walker-and>.

¹⁷³ Graham A. Peck, “Manifest Destiny, Slavery, and the Rupture of the Democratic Party, 1843-1847,” chapter in *Making an Antislavery Nation: Lincoln, Douglas, and the Battle over Freedom*, (University of Illinois Press, 2017), 70. For a recent debate of Walker’s enterprises in Central America see Claire M. Wolnisty, *A Different Manifest Destiny: U.S. Southern Identity and Citizenship in Nineteenth-Century South America*, (University of Nebraska Press, 2020).

Confederate States over renewed British actions in 1858 against the slave trade to Cuba.¹⁷⁴ The former coincided with the anti-slavery challenge posed by the Republican party in that country of which Abraham Lincoln was a part, and which eventually ended in a bloody Civil War.¹⁷⁵

On a different occasion, the United States, on 16 November 1857 signed the Cass-Irissari Treaty with Nicaragua.¹⁷⁶ This new convention was intended to replace the Squier Treaty and sought to extend United States influence in Central America, with renewed canal rights in Nicaragua.¹⁷⁷ The agreement reflected the ambition for United States expansion in the region, and this met with growing distrust and resistance to United States imperialism.¹⁷⁸ Guatemala for instance, had openly sought European intervention and even proposed that Great Britain establish a protectorate over the country.¹⁷⁹ Pedro de Aycinena, Guatemala's Foreign Minister, also offered, as a carrot, concessions for isthmian communication projects, in the hope that this would entice Great Britain and France to jointly undertake "establishing a canal route through Guatemala."¹⁸⁰ Great Britain never took up this invitation, and fortunately, the Cass-Irissari agreement was not ratified by either the Nicaraguan or the United States Congress. Thus, Squier's treaty of 1849 (which focused on establishment of a canal) continued to frame United States engagement in Central America, and in this way Great Britain's possessions in Belize and the Bay Islands, as well as its Mosquito Protectorate were unaffected.

¹⁷⁴ For a debate of this tensions see Leonardo Marques, *The United States and the Transatlantic Slave Trade to the Americas, 1776-1867*, (Yale University Press, 2016), 219-255.

¹⁷⁵ See John Ashworth, "The antislavery challenge: The Republicans, 1854-1861," chapter in *Slavery, Capitalism and Politics in the Antebellum Republic, 173-336*, (Cambridge University Press, 2007), 173-336.

¹⁷⁶ Cass-Yrissari Treaty, 16 November 1857, 47th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Ex. Doc. No. 194, *Compilation of Executive Documents...*, 1048-1058.

¹⁷⁷ For a discussion of United States expansion in Nicaragua see James T. Wall, "American International in Nicaragua, 1848-1861," *University of Tennessee PhD diss.*, (University of Tennessee, 1974), https://trace.tennessee.edu/utk_graddis/4223

¹⁷⁸ Warren Albert Beck, "American Policy in Guatemala, 1839-1900," *Ohio State University PhD Diss.* (1954), 17.

¹⁷⁹ Wyke to Clarendon, 28 November 1855, F.O. 15/85, 56.

¹⁸⁰ Wyke to Clarendon, 31 March 1856, F.O. 15/90, 18; Brown, Charles Wyke in Central America, 432; Savage to Webster, 21 April 1851, Records of the Department of State, Diplomatic Despatches.

Thirdly, Walker's filibuster enterprise in Nicaragua opened the way for France's re-entry into the region. The success of Walker's adventures in Central America alongside United States expansionist ambitions in Central America (in 1858 there was growing talk about annexing Nicaragua to the United States)¹⁸¹ provoked Napoléon III to step up French attentions to the isthmus. For the United States, renewing the treaty of commerce with Nicaragua was strategic, as the Walker episode had proved a headache for the Buchanan administration and had the potential for completely derailing United States relations with Central America. That relationship had suffered after President Pierce recognized Walker's Nicaragua in 1856. The United States was also put on the backfoot when Walker's government, alongside the government of Costa Rica, issued Felix Belly a concession for an exclusive canal through the isthmus, partly in exchange for settling the disputes between the two countries concerned, as well as for helping to provide a counterpoise to growing United States imperialism there.¹⁸² This latter development threatened not only the United States designs in the isthmus but also undercut its influence there, and crucially, gave Napoléon III's France a footing in Central America from which to challenge the status quo.

In 1855 the Panama railroad was completed and, as Barbara and Victor Bulmer-Thomas pointed out, this impacted the entrepôt trade through Belize.¹⁸³ This advent coincided with free trade principles taking root more firmly in British policy and faced with the combination of these two factors Belize's entrepôt trade performance with Central America waned significantly. During the 1850s, the mahogany trade through Belize also entered a period of decline. Bulmer-Thomas and Bulmer-Thomas show that this decline started in the closing years

¹⁸¹ Paul Frymer, "The Limits of Manifest Destiny," chapter in *Building an American Empire: The Era of Territorial and Political Expansion*, (Princeton University Press, 2017), 208.

¹⁸² Cyril Allen, "Felix Belly: Nicaragua Canal Promoter," *The Hispanic American Historical Review*, Vol. 37, No. 1 (Feb. 1957), 46-59.

¹⁸³ Bulmer-Thomas and Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Belize...*, 82.

of the 1840s due in part to the combination of trade liberalization in Great Britain the splintering of the region into multiple smaller economies following the collapse of the UPCA.¹⁸⁴ The upshot of this was that, by the second half of the 1850s, Belize position as the fount of British expansion in Central America was already weakening.

Three Treaties - with Guatemala & Honduras (1859) and Nicaragua (1860)

This final section of the chapter briefly examines Great Britain's negotiation of the Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty. It argues that the convention was negotiated primarily to settle one of three impediments identified by the United States in Central America, and not to settle the boundaries of Belize per se. It demonstrates that President Buchanan's recognition of the Sarstoon River as the southernmost boundary of Belize confirmed British rights there as covering the encroached territories but shows that Great Britain was nonetheless compelled to negotiate the treaty with Guatemala to finalize carrying the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty into effect.

From Ouseley to Wyke

Sir William Ouseley's failure to make adequate progress with settling the Central American issues eventually forced the Foreign Office to recall him. Consequently, in February 1859, Charles Lennox Wyke, was appointed to take up the negotiations, on the Belize question only, from Ouseley.¹⁸⁵ By this time, Wyke was already long engaged in negotiations with Nicaraguan officials over settling the issue of Great Britain's Mosquito Protectorate,¹⁸⁶ and now in Guatemala, his relationship with the powerful Pedro de Aycinena in Guatemala made him highly suited for the job. Negotiation on the single Belize issue also suited, as Wyke

¹⁸⁴ Ibid, 82.

¹⁸⁵ Malmesbury to Wyke, 16 February 1859, F.O. 15/106, No. 6.

¹⁸⁶ Wyke to Clarendon, 27 August 1856, F.O. 15/90, 55.

preferred “direct negotiations with the states involved” because that approach permitted him to shape the extension of British influence in the region.¹⁸⁷ Wyke believed this would allow him to undercut United States influence in the isthmus.¹⁸⁸ As Richmond Brown contends, Wyke “envisioned a strong and friendly Guatemala as a bulwark in protecting British interests in Central America.”¹⁸⁹

The Basis for the Negotiations

The task for Wyke then was to negotiate Belize’s boundaries with Guatemala.¹⁹⁰ The negotiations were conducted between Wyke and his good friend Pedro de Aycinena, Guatemala’s Foreign Minister, and were based on the (failed) Dallas-Clarendon agreement. The relevant provision of that agreement, §2.1 of the Separate Articles of the convention,¹⁹¹ read as follows:

That Her Britannic Majesty’s Settlement called the Belize or British Honduras, on the Shores of the Bay of Honduras, bounded on the Shores of the Bay of Honduras, bounded on the North by the Mexican Province of Yucatan, and on the South by the River Sarstoon, was not and is not embraced in the Treaty entered into between the Contracting Parties on the 19th day of April 1850:—and that the limits of the said Belize, on the West, as they existed on the said 19th of April 1850, shall, if possible, be settled and fixed by Treaty between Her Britannic Majesty and the Republic of Guatemala, within Two Years from the exchange of ratifications of this Instrument; which said boundaries and limits shall not at any time hereafter be extended.¹⁹²

This provision makes it clear that the *only* matter for negotiation between Great Britain and Guatemala was the “Western boundary – as they existed in 1850,” and the Foreign Office

¹⁸⁷ Brown, “Charles Lennox Wyke...,” 437, 445.

¹⁸⁸ Wyke to Edmund Hammond, (Private), 30 September 1857, F.O. 15/95.

¹⁸⁹ Brown, “Charles Lennox Wyke...,” 441.

¹⁹⁰ No. 229, The Earl of Malmesbury to Mr. Wyke, (No. 5). Foreign Office, 15 February 1859, 328.

¹⁹¹ My italics.

¹⁹² Separate Articles, Article II.1, Dallas-Clarendon Treaty of 1856, Miller, *Treaties and other international acts...*, 797.

made it clear that “Her Majesty’s Government seek for nothing whatever beyond [this].”¹⁹³ As such, the negotiations could not conceivably have been considered one of cession, and for two simple reasons: the other boundaries were already previously agreed by all parties concerned (including Guatemala), and it was also agreed that this was to be the object of the negotiation. Lord Malmesbury made this expressly clear to Wyke in his instructions to the latter. In other words, only the western boundary needed to be delimited but without “involving any cession or new acquisition from the Republic of Guatemala.”¹⁹⁴ Moreover, by the boundaries spelt out in Article II.1 of the Separate Articles of the Dallas-Clarendon treaty, Great Britain was recognized as having rights beyond the limits of the 1783 and 1786 Anglo-Spanish treaties up to the Sarstoon. President Buchanan had already recognized the Sarstoon as the southernmost boundary of the Belize settlement.¹⁹⁵

The chapeau of the main part of the Dallas-Clarendon Treaty is important for clarifying this matter. The first paragraph of the chapeau expressly states that

The United States of America, and Her Majesty the Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, *being desirous to settle in a friendly manner the questions which have come into discussion between them relative to Central America, have resolved to conclude a Treaty for that purpose.*¹⁹⁶

As this sentence makes clear, the object of the treaty was to settle the disagreements between Great Britain and the United States over the impediments to United States expansion relative to a ship canal through Nicaragua posed by Great Britain’s possessions in Central America.

¹⁹³ No. 229, The Earl of Malmesbury to Mr. Wyke, (No. 5). Foreign Office, 15 February 1859, 329.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 229.

¹⁹⁵ No. 360 Lord Lyons to Lord J. Russell, (No. 125), Washington, 2 August 1859, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 493.

¹⁹⁶ My italics.

The chapeau of Article II of the Separate Articles further clarifies that this object is to be attained by “by some definite arrangement on two other questions which have come into discussion,” those being the boundaries of Belize: and the sovereignty of the Bay Islands. Delimiting the boundaries of Belize was instrumental to delivering the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty according to the construction of the United States. This was the true objective of Wyke’s negotiations with Pedro Aycinena. Wyke conceded to Aycinena’s request to use the agreement to counter Squier’s project for constructing a trans-oceanic railway across Honduras but used the occasion to pursue his own object of extending British influence in the region. Thus, Wyke and Aycinena agreed between them to insert an article in the agreement to establish the boundaries of Belize. This, they believed, would help achieve the objective Wyke had mentioned to the Foreign Office the year before – that is, “a route across this part of the isthmus...one within the territory of Guatemala ... which would suit [Great Britain’s] purposes politically much better.”¹⁹⁷

Agreements on the Bay Islands and Mosquito Protectorate

Wyke used his connections as British Consul to Central America in Guatemala to get Aycinena to put pressure on Honduras and Nicaragua for settling their respective issues with Great Britain. To fully deliver the Clayton-Bulwer treaty however, Wyke, in November 1859, concluded a treaty with Honduras which ceded the Bay Islands to that Republic. After some delay caused by further filibuster activities in Nicaragua, Wyke, in April 1860, also concluded a treaty with that country recognizing Nicaraguan sovereignty over the Mosquito Shore area, thereby settling the Mosquito Shore and Greytown issues.¹⁹⁸ Hence, by concluding the three

¹⁹⁷ Wyke to Hammond, (Confidential), 30 April 1858, F.O. 15/100.

¹⁹⁸ “Arrangement of 1858-60,” § 356, in John Bassett Moore, *A Digest of Law: As Embodied in Diplomatic Discussions, Treaties and Other International Agreements, International Awards, the Decisions of Municipal*

treaties, Wyke succeeded in delivering the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty in accordance with the United States construction of the convention.

Conclusions

Great Britain's declaration exempting "Belize and its dependencies" from the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty in 1850 successfully extended the status quo in Central America during the decade. The tactic reaffirmed Belize's strategic value to British expansion in the isthmus, but also caused the United States to pay closer attention to British possessory rights in the settlement. Belize wasn't itself a concern for the United States in Central America though, and hence British possessory rights in Belize were "left unaltered." United States officials repeatedly made this expressly clear, and their response to the development—initially arguing that Belize (i.e., British Honduras) was not a part of Central America—hinted at a willingness to treat Belize separately, if not also differently. Great Britain's annexation of the Bay Islands in 1852 however, changed the calculus for the United States as this occurrence ascribed new significance to the former's yoking of the Bay Islands to Belize. The upshot of this was that the United States now tried to destabilize Belize's standing by challenging British rights there, and with the hope that this would remove, or at the very least weaken, British predominance in the region. Interestingly that weakening came from another source, as the settlement's entrepôt trade with Central America started declining just before the mid-point of the century, and in importance as well.¹⁹⁹

Courts, and the Writings of Jurists, (U.S. Government Printing Office, 1906), 181. The President of Nicaragua announced the treaty to the country on 23 November 1860. See (The president of the republic to its inhabitants), Managua, 23 November 1860, United States Department of State, *Commercial Relations of the United States with Foreign Countries*, (United States Printing Office, 1862), 392.

¹⁹⁹ Bulmer-Thomas and Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Belize ...*, 77-83.

In the first couple of years of the decade, Frederick Chatfield fought against this in his usual manner – by agitating for annexation of Roatan in the belief that this would maintain Great Britain’s influence in Central America; and by enforcing debt collection from Honduras and Nicaragua. When annexation of the Bay Islands by Great Britain did occur, it had the unintended effect of Belize being labelled as an impediment to United States expansion in Central America in the middle of the nineteenth century. In somewhat of an ironic twist, this latter judgment ultimately enabled Great Britain to negotiate settlement of the Belize boundary issue separate from the real obstacles to United States expansion in the isthmus. That is, as distinct from the issues of the Bay Islands colony and Mosquito Shore protectorate. Interestingly, this carrot was extended by James Buchanan almost two years before the failed Dallas-Clarendon treaty was agreed, even as he demanded that Great Britain retreat from Central America all together. This opening though, was not grasped by the Foreign Office until the Dallas-Clarendon treaty collapsed. Thereafter however, the Foreign Office maintained that the issues would be settled “by negotiation with the [separate] states of Central America,” and the U.S. government assented to this.²⁰⁰

This chapter showed, firstly, that, during the 1850s, the British agents in Belize and Central America collaborated with political elites in Guatemala and used treaties of commerce to extend British influence in Central America. Such collaboration resulted in Wyke agreeing to insertion of a provision in the treaty to oblige his good friend, Pedro de Aycinena, Guatemala’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, and a senior member of the Guatemalan Consulado. This provision was aimed at restoring Guatemala’s power in the region, but Wyke believed

²⁰⁰ (Mr. Cass to Mr Dimitry.), [No. 3], Department of States, Washington, September 22, 1859, 46th congress, 2nd Session, Senate Ex. Doc. No. 112, and [Lord Napier to Lord Clarendon.] [Extract], [No. 26.], Washington, October 22, 1857, 47th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Ex. Doc. No. 194, both in *Compilation of Executive Documents ...*, 1044, 1120. Inclosure in No. 69, Lord Napier to General Cass, Washington, November 30, 1859, in *Correspondence respecting Central America ...*, 126.

that the need for British capital for the project would help to maintain British sway there as well. Thus, the treaty agreed with Guatemala in 1859 contained an article for building a cart-road from the port of Izabal to the capital – the very same project that the Guatemalan *Consulado* had repeatedly put forward unsuccessfully as part of various colonization schemes, since Central American independence. However, members of the British government with commercial interests in the isthmian communications project in Honduras undercut British support for the cart-road before it could get started. This had deep repercussions for Belize thereafter.

Secondly, the chapter showed that, contrary to the prevailing body of work on the territorial dispute over Belize, Great Britain negotiated the Anglo-Guatemalan treaty of 1859 to settle a point of disagreement with the United States over Central America relative to proposed isthmian canal projects there, and not to settle the boundaries of Belize per se. President James Buchanan's recognition of the Sarstoon River as the Southernmost boundary of the Belize in 1856, confirmed British rights in the settlement beyond the limits prescribed by the 1783 and 1786 treaties at the time of this acknowledgement. For Great Britain to deliver the Clayton-Bulwer treaty according to the United States construction of the convention however, the former still needed to negotiate a (boundary) treaty with Guatemala. By this time though, Belize had reverted to being of 'little' concern to the United States in Central America.

5 *Fait Accompli?* The Cart Road and the ‘Lincoln Colony’, c.1859 - 1863

The Wyke-Aycinena Treaty¹ agreed between Great Britain and Guatemala in 1859 resolved one of the points of disagreement between Great Britain and the United States over Central America, but it did not settle the matter of the boundaries of Belize. Quite the opposite, Article 7 of the treaty triggered a dispute between Great Britain and Guatemala over the cart-road proposed therein that, for a couple of years, threatened to upend Belize’s position as the fount of British influence in Central America. Guatemala claimed that the agreement was a treaty of cession, and that this therefore carried a corresponding compensation.² For that reason, ostensibly, Guatemala insisted that Great Britain’s delivery on the obligation under Article 7 for constructing ‘a cart-road from a port on the coast near to Belize to the capital city’ was a *sine qua non* for any settlement of the dispute. Great Britain countered that the treaty was purely for defining the boundaries between Belize and Guatemala.³ To try and resolve the impasse, Great Britain and Guatemala agreed a supplementary treaty in 1863 but this soon collapsed,⁴ and ultimately, Great Britain failed to pay even the £50,000 eventually agreed by Guatemala for construction of the said cart-road.⁵ Then in 1862, Great Britain converted Belize into an official British colony.

Meanwhile, following the civil war in Mexico, Napoléon III moved to establish a second French empire in that country, presumably as a counterweight to United States

¹Convention Boundary of British Honduras, 30 April 1859, F.O 93/39/3. The entire treaty is also included in No. 337, Lord John Russell to Acting Consul General Hall, (No. 1), Foreign Office, 30 June 1859, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 472.

² Shoman, *Guatemala’s claim to Belize...*, 16.

³ Memorandum on Draft of Treaty with Guatemala relative to the Boundary with British Honduras, 14 January 1859, F.O. 15/114, 11.

⁴ General Cass to Lord Napier, Inclosure [sic] 1 in No. 20, Department of State, Washington, 29 May 1857, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 68.

⁵ Shoman, *Guatemala’s claim to Belize...*, 22; Shoman, *How YOU can end the Guatemalan claim*, 1; Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History...*, 139, 159.

influence and expansionism.⁶ Napoléon III also orchestrated the revival of Mexico's territorial claim to Belize with the hope that securing this would facilitate French colonization plans in Santo Tomás, Guatemala. Napoléon III's schemes to get Great Britain and Spain to join with France in invading Mexico on the pretext of recouping debts owed by Mexico to all three European countries gave France a much-coveted footing in the region from which to expand its influence. At the same time, the United States explored colonizing British Honduras (i.e. Belize) and other parts of Central America with freed black slaves.⁷ Abraham Lincoln's election in 1860 though spurred deep sectionalism in the United States and set that country on a path towards the outbreak of civil war in 1861, while the Morrill Tariff provoked British sympathies to the Confederate cause.⁸ But then in 1862 Lincoln upped his antislavery challenge and threatened emancipation if the Confederate states did not re-join the union by the end of the year. When this did not happen, Lincoln, on 1 January 1863, issued his proclamation of emancipation declaring that "all slaves in rebellious states [were] henceforward ... free."⁹

This chapter explores these themes in more detail in relation to the Anglo-Guatemalan territorial dispute over Belize, and reasons that Great Britain's handling of the Article 7 provision in the early 1860s emphasized a desire for checking French and United States expansion in Central America. It challenges the conventional historical narrative of the

⁶ Stève Sainlaude, "France's Grand Design and the Confederacy," in *American Civil Wars: The United States, Latin America, Europe, and the Crisis of the 1860s*, ed. Don H. Doyle, (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 110.

⁷ Phillip Magness, "The British Honduras Colony: Black Emigrationist Support for Colonization in the Lincoln Presidency," *Slavery & Abolition*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2013), 39-60; Janet L. Coryell, "'The Lincoln Colony': Aaron Columbus Burr's Proposed Colonization of British Honduras," *Civil War History*, Vol. 43, Issue 1 (Mar. 1997), 5-16. Coryell points out that in 1858 the United States government called for "establishing a black republic in Central America," and that Abraham Lincoln supported the idea from as early as 1852. Coryell, "The Lincoln Colony...," 7.

⁸ Marc-William Palen, "The Civil War's Forgotten Transatlantic Tariff Debate and the Confederacy's Free Trade Diplomacy," *Journal of the Civil War Era*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Mar. 2013), 35, 42.

⁹ Transcript of the Proclamation, 1 January 1863, available at <https://www.archives.gov/exhibits/featured-documents/emancipation-proclamation/transcript.html>

territorial dispute which claims that Great Britain's refusal to settle the territorial claim to Belize concerned disagreements over the costs of construction of the proposed cart-road and avers that this had to do with thwarting Guatemalan schemes for shifting the proposed communications route from Izabal to Santo Tomás to prevent further compromising Belize's position in Central America. It contends that the shifting regional context underlined by, inter alia, William Walker's execution in Honduras in 1860; the advent of the second French empire in Mexico; and the prospect of black colonization in Central America involving plans for resettling freed slaves from the United States (the latter two both gaining traction in 1860),¹⁰ shifted Great Britain's outlook about Belize benefitting from the proposed cart-road project and its appetite for seeing this project through.

It also challenges the historiographical assumption that Belize's conversion to an official colony in 1862 represented a *fait accompli*, that is, that this was the logical outcome of British formal empire building. Instead, to borrow from Richard Huzzey, it asserts that this event "can only be understood in the context of British calculations regarding the threat of French and Spanish imperialism" in the region.¹¹ It argues further that the impetus for the decision rested (largely) on foiling French imperial expansion into Guatemala and Central America from Mexico, and was the product of a mixture of both reactive foreign policy and opportunism.¹² Finally, it posits that although this event contravened the Clayton-Bulwer

¹⁰ Sebastian Page, "A Knife Sharp Enough to Divided Us': William H. Seward, Abraham Lincoln, and Black Colonization," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 41, No. 2 (Apr. 2017), 362-391.

¹¹ Richard Huzzey, "Manifest Dominion: The British Empire and the Crises of the Americas in the 1860s," chapter in Don H. Doyle, *American Civil Wars: The United States, Latin America, Europe, and the Crisis of the 1860s*, (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 82.

¹² Reactive foreign policy explains state's foreign economic policy. In the way used here, it denotes a related concept, that is, an unsystematic response by one state (i.e., Great Britain) to changes in behaviour by another state (France) to minimize the threat to the status quo posed by the latter's imperial designs in Mexico and Central America. For a discussion of the 'reactive state' see Calder, Kent E. "Japanese Foreign Economic Policy Formation: Explaining the Reactive State." *World Politics*, Vol. 40, No. 4 (1988): 517-41. John Darwin contends that, to an extent, British policy was in fact both experimental and opportunistic. British imperial policy often

Treaty, the exigencies of President Abraham Lincoln's 'antislavery challenge' in the United States, and his plans for black colonization in Belize and Central America permitted Great Britain to undertake this move without provoking any real opposition from the United States.

The Wyke-Aycinena Treaty and Article VII

This first section of the chapter examines Great Britain's handling of Article 7 of the Wyke-Aycinena Treaty of 1859. It shows that Great Britain's hesitation, and ultimately refusal, in making good on the obligations set out by the provision stemmed largely from growing concerns by the British government that the cart-road project would not actually benefit the Belize settlement, or Great Britain's standing in Central America for that matter, and not because of cost considerations, as the historiography argues hitherto. It shows further that Guatemala's conniving for shifting the projected route from the port of Izabal to the port of Santo Tomás largely provoked this change by Great Britain, and that changes in the regional context marked by renewed French imperial ambitions in Latin America occasioned both Great Britain's (and Guatemala's) 'changes of heart'.

Article VII - Compensation for Territorial Cession ?

The treaty concluded between Great Britain and Guatemala following the collapse of the Dallas-Clarendon treaty satisfied the obligation undertaken by Great Britain at the time to settle the limits (i.e. boundaries) of Belize with Guatemala within a period of two years.¹³ Direct

vacillated, and the Colonial Office had grown accustomed to formally annexing territories after years and even decades of steadfastly opposing the lobbying of British merchants and settlers in those very territories to do so. This was arguably the case with the Bay Islands in Honduras, but also with New Zealand and the Transvaal state in South Africa. Darwin, "Imperialism and the Victorians..." 622.

¹³ No. 338, Lord J. Russell to Acting Consul-General Hall, (No. 2), Foreign Office, 30 June 1859, and No. 358, Lord Lyons to Lord John Russell, (No. 112. Confidential), Washington, 19 July 1859, both in *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 473, 490. The negotiations of the treaty started in 1857 in London but were not agreed and ratified until 1859.

negotiations with Guatemala were adopted because, as already mentioned, the Buchanan administration agreed to Lord Napier's intimation that the British government would pursue "separate negotiations with the Central American republics" to settle the different areas of controversy with the United States over the Central American question.¹⁴ In the case of Belize then, the issue that had to be settled with Guatemala was the "western" boundaries of the settlement, but President Buchanan's insistence that any such boundaries be restricted to the limits established by the Convention of London of 1786 introduced a problem into the matter. *The New York Herald* captured the nature of this hitch when it reported that

we published yesterday news of the cession in sovereignty to Great Britain, by the so-called Republic of Guatemala...of Belize...we may regard the acquisition as a *fait accompli*...it only remains for Great Britain to consolidate her pretensions on the Mosquito Shore to ensure her control of two-thirds of the Atlantic Shore of Central America.¹⁵

The 1859 Anglo-Guatemalan treaty did not contemplate the transfer of territory from either party to the other. However, the Foreign Office realized that Buchanan's position provided Guatemala with an opening to claim that the territory between the Sibun and Sarstoon rivers in Belize were being ceded to Great Britain by the treaty. Therefore, Charles Wyke, Great Britain's negotiator for the convention, was expressly instructed that in his negotiation of the matter he was "not to accept any part of the proposed boundary as a cession from the Republic of Guatemala, or to accept, as it were, a title to any part of the British occupation from the republic."¹⁶ To ensure that Wyke was clear on Great Britain's position, Lord

¹⁴ Lord Napier to Lord Clarendon, Extract, No. 26, Washington, 22 October 1857, 47th Cong., 1st Sess., Senate Executive Doc. No. 194, *Compilation of Executive Documents...*, 1043; Williams, *Anglo-American Isthmian Diplomacy*, 235.

¹⁵ Extract from the "New York Herald" of 29 July 1860, Inclosure [sic] 1 in No. 360, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 494.

¹⁶ Draft to Mr. Wyke, (No. 5), 16 February 1859, F.O. 15/114, 14; No. 229, The Earl of Malmesbury to Mr. Wyke, (No. 5), Foreign Office, 16 February 1859, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 328.

Malmesbury advised Wyke that “the adjustment of the boundary now contemplated, Her Majesty’s Government *seek for nothing beyond what was in their occupation* at the time of the signature of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty.”¹⁷ In other words, Great Britain was not attempting to add any new territory beyond that already effectively occupied by the woodcutters up to the Sarstoon River.

The construction of the Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty of 1859, containing eight provisions, reinforces this interpretation. The first six articles of the treaty sketched out the boundary limitations (Article 1), called for the appointment of Commissioners to undertake the marking of the boundary as described (Article 2), and set out the terms for their reporting (Article 4) and engagement (Article 5). Article 7 however, diverged from the boundary objective enjoined by the treaty, and read as follows:

With the object of practically carrying out the views set forth in the preamble of the present Convention, for improving and perpetuating the friendly relations which at present so happily exists between the two High Contracting Parties, they mutually agree to use conjointly their best efforts, by taking adequate means for establishing the easiest communication (either by means of a cart-road, or employing the rivers, or both united, according to the opinion of the surveying engineers) between the fittest place on the Atlantic Coast, near the settlement of Belize, and the Capital of Guatemala; whereby the commerce of England on the one hand, and the material prosperity of the Republic on the other, cannot fail to be sensibly increased, at the same time that the limits of the two countries being now clearly defined, all further encroachments by either party on the territory of the other will be effectually checked and prevented for the future.¹⁸

The principle introduced by Article 7 did not relate to the boundaries of Belize, but to the intention of the negotiators to, on one hand, extend British influence in Central America, and, on the other hand, help Guatemala realize its long-standing goal of establishing a communication (i.e., a railway or road) route across its territory. The Guatemalan government

¹⁷ *Ibid*, 329. My italics.

¹⁸ Article 7, Wyke-Aycinena Treaty of 1859, F.O. 93/39/3.

has, since the year following agreement of the treaty, insisted, erroneously, that Article 7 represented a “compensation” to Guatemala for “abandoning its rights to the territories...occupied...in Belize.”¹⁹ The advantage which Guatemala’s Foreign Minister Pedro de Aycinena sought at that time however, was not payment for territory occupied by British settlers in Belize but British finance and investment for the Guatemalan Consulado project for building a “satisfactory maritime port on the Atlantic coast [near Izabal on the southern shore of the Golfo Dulce] and a road connecting from there to the capital of Guatemala City.”²⁰

As Woodward Jr. showed, the Guatemalan Consulado had for decades attempted to realize such a project “on the Golfo Dulce (Lake Izabal)” but the turmoil in Central America prevented this from happening.²¹ In the mid to late 1850s and early 1860s however, the hopes of Guatemala’s political elites for this to happen were reinvigorated by rumours of fresh United States interest in establishing a colony or colonies in Central America for freed slaves from that country. The prospects of realizing the long unachieved objective of populating the Golfo Dulce area, thereby making a transisthmian route through Guatemala very much a viable possibility, had never seemed closer to realization. At the same time, Guatemalan anxieties over United States intervention in the country also became intensified.

Wyke recognized even before agreement of the 1859 treaty that the Guatemalan project for a trans-isthmian communications route through that country presented an opening for extending British influence in the isthmus while subverting possible French and United States expansion by undercutting both the Honduran Railway project and Felix Belly’s canal project

¹⁹ Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History...*, 81 citing *The White Book*, 102.

²⁰ Woodward Jr., *Class Privilege and Economic Development...*, 61-62, 91.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 61, 66.

in Nicaragua.²² Thus, in an attempt to take advantage of this and urged on by Pedro de Aycinena, Wyke argued that the two projects (i.e. the Honduran railroad and the Nicaragua canal) were “only...brilliant dreams incapable of being realized.”²³ Wyke also informed Lord Malmesbury that “intelligent men from...Guatemala...openly express[ed] their astonishment that English capitalists should have allowed themselves to be drawn into such speculation.”²⁴ Lord Malmesbury parried Wyke’s entreaties for the Guatemala communications route and simultaneously requested he “not openly discourage the...railway [project] across...Honduras.”²⁵ Thus, Wyke ‘went to bat’, so to speak, on behalf of his Guatemalan counterpart Aycinena and indicated to Lord Malmesbury that Guatemala would “claim compensation *if* required to cede territory [between the Sibun and Sarstoon rivers] ...encroached upon.”²⁶

The nature of Wyke’s ‘caution’ to Lord Malmesbury reveals that the position that territory was ceded to Belize was truly a fall-back position for Guatemala should Great Britain not assent to the former’s plans for building the cart road. As Shoman rightly points out, cession of territory was not an issue when the “exiled Bolivarian governor” Juan de Francisco Martín commenced negotiations of the treaty on behalf of Guatemala.²⁷ In Wyke’s zeal for extending British influence in the region however, he in-advisedly yielded to Aycinena’s entreaties to

²² Charles Wyke to the Earl of Malmesbury, No. 46, British Legation, Guatemala, 28 June 1858 F.O. 15/100, 246.

²³ To Don Pedro de Aycinena, Her British Majesty’s Legation, Guatemala, 20 July 1858 F.O. 15/100, 275.

²⁴ To the Earl of Malmesbury, No. 60, 30 August 1858, F.O. 15/100, 300.

²⁵ To the Earl of Malmesbury, No. 17, British Legation, Guatemala, 25 March 1859, F.O. 15/106, 88.

²⁶ Charles Wyke to Lord Malmesbury, 31 March 1859, F.O. 15/106. My italics.

²⁷ Shoman, *Guatemala’s claim to Belize...*, 14. Conversely, Jose Luis Mendoza claims that Francisco Martín was instructed “to start the negotiations in London for a boundary treaty, wherein the Republic should relinquish her rights to the territory of British Honduras, and, in compensation, the Government of His Majesty should guarantee the nation’s integrity.” Mendoza, *Great Britain and her Treaties on Belize*, 126. Francisco Martín’s involvement in the matter of the cart road on behalf of Guatemala confirms Brown’s hypothesis that a network of exiles linked to Simon Bolivar in Colombia in the 1820s were active on the fringes of British expansion in Central America. Brown, *The Struggle for Power in Post-Independence Colombia and Venezuela*.

include the Article 7 provision in the convention. This was done partly out of wanting to assist his friend Aycinena with securing British financing for the cart-road project, and partly because Wyke genuinely believed that this project would help restore Belize's entrepôt trade role and thereby advance Great Britain's standing in the isthmus.²⁸ As Wyke argued, "to say that such a change would not be immensely advantageous to [Belize and Great Britain] would be an absurdity."²⁹ Wyke also did not lose the opportunity to remind the Foreign Office that Great Britain should not lose sight of the fact that by the treaty of 1859, "[it] disarmed the United States government of their principal argument against us in the Central American imbroglio."³⁰

Shoman notes that Wyke agreed the Article 7 inclusion with Aycinena on his own cognizance,³¹ but what Shoman does not expose is that the idea of using the cart-road as an 'inducement' to Guatemala in the negotiations was in fact not Wyke's but that of the Foreign Office. As it turns out, because of apprehensions over Guatemala issuing a concession to the French for "establishing a route from ocean to ocean through Guatemala,"³² the Foreign Office had earlier discussed the possibility of offering the cart-road as a carrot to Guatemala for concluding the treaty. This was well before Wyke was appointed to take over the treaty

²⁸ To the Rt. Honorable Earl of Malmesbury, No. 27, British Legation, Guatemala, 30 April 1859, F.O. 15/114, 45; Memorandum, 28 March 1861, F.O. 15/115; Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History...*, 84.

²⁹ Memorandum, (undated), F.O. 15/113, 34.

³⁰ Memorandum, 28 March 1861, F.O. 15/115, 189.

³¹ Shoman refers to Wyke (and Pedro de Aycinena) as "rogue negotiators" and posits that Wyke "made up the article and put it in the treaty when he was in Guatemala." Shoman, *Guatemala's claim to Belize...*, 17.

³² Draft, Mr. Wyke, No. 22, Foreign Office, 3 September 1856, F.O. 15/90, 7. The Foreign Office had earlier advised Wyke of the Guatemalan government's plans for forming an Anglo-French company, but the Foreign Office indicated that "Her Majesty's government can take no part in the formation of such a company." Pedro de Aycinena expressed his disappointment "with the indifference of England to this request" but much to Guatemala's dismay, later learned that key figures in the British government were involved in plans for "an English company...being formed for carrying into execution Mr. Squier's projected railroad in Honduras." To the Earl of Clarendon, No. 63, 29 October 1856 and No. 69 28 November 1856, British Legation, Guatemala, F.O. 15/90, 165, 189.

negotiations from Sir William Ouseley.³³ To be sure, in a memorandum drawn up in January of 1859, the Foreign Office contemplated that

if a negotiation be entered into with Guatemala for this object [of obtaining a recognition of the boundaries of the settlement at Belize] we might propose...the conclusion of a new treaty of commerce...containing articles...relative to the transit, applicable to any line of communication from ocean to ocean which may hereafter be opened through the territory of Guatemala...Our present Treaty of Commerce was concluded before the last alterations of the Navigation Laws. A new treaty like that ... which would be in harmony with our recent legislation and the guarantee of neutrality of any interoceanic route through the territory of Guatemala might probably make the Republic more willing to agree to what we propose about the boundary of British Honduras.³⁴

In light of this, while it is conceivable that Wyke did not actually offer the Article 7 provision as an “‘inducement’ to the Guatemalans in order for them to agree the Convention” as the historiography of the territorial dispute has hitherto promulgated,³⁵ he misguidedly used the knowledge that the Foreign Office had contemplated exactly such an undertaking as a ‘green light’ for conniving with Aycinena to seize the occasion of the treaty to secure possible British funding for the envisioned port and cart road project through Guatemala. This then was the reason for inserting Article 7 into the treaty, and not to compensate Guatemala. Pedro de Aycinena was only too happy to have scored this win, and he admitted that the idea of inserting Article 7 was his own and not Wyke’s. As Aycinena stated in a letter to Acting Consul General William Hall, “it has been very satisfactory...that the article relative to the opening of the road, proposed on our part, and acceded to by Mr. Wyke, has been fully approved by His Majesty’s

³³ Draft to Mr Wyke, Foreign Office, April 16, 1859, F.O. 15/106, 23. Wyke was requested by the Foreign Office to take over the negotiations on the boundaries of Belize from William Ouseley on the 16 February 1859.

³⁴ Memorandum on Draft of Treaty with Guatemala relative to the Boundary with British Honduras, 14 January 1859, F.O. 15/144, 11-12.

³⁵ Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History...*, 82.

Government...[this] doubtless will tend to the aggrandizement of the country [(i.e., Guatemala)].”³⁶

As it was in fact Aycinena who proposed inserting Article 7 into the treaty,³⁷ the notion that the provision was “an inducement under which the Guatemalan government signed the treaty” is somewhat misleading. Article 7, it is evident, was, more appropriately, the consideration Aycinena sought of Great Britain to help Guatemala secure its territorial integrity, not from Belize but from possible filibustering attacks or annexation by the United States for its proposed program of negro colonization in Central America.³⁸ This was implicit in Wyke’s indication in 1861 that the “wording of the Article having reference to the road was purposely left very vague, in order to prevent the United States Government from asserting that by this clause we had bribed that of Guatemala to cede their right...of territory.” Thus, not only did Article 7 not equate to an agreement to compensate Guatemala, but it also did not square with the whole background and context for negotiation of the treaty. To be sure, as the previous chapter showed, the treaty was negotiated between Great Britain and Guatemala to settle a point of disagreement between the former and the United States over the Central American question. This was agreed to by the United States government, and, importantly, President Buchanan had already acknowledged the Sarstoon river as the southernmost boundary of the British settlement.³⁹

³⁶ Pedro de Aycinena to the Acting Consul General in charge of the Legation of His Britannic Majesty, 17 September 1859, Translation, F.O. 15/114, 86.

³⁷ No. 338, Lord John Russel to Acting Consul-General Hall, (No.2), Foreign Office, 30 June 1859, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 473.

³⁸ Mary Patricia Chapman, “The Mission of Elisha O. Crosby to Guatemala, 1861-1864,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Aug. 1955), 276-277, citing Crosby to Seward, #3, 21 July 1861, Records of the Department of State, Diplomatic Despatches 4, (Guatemala).

³⁹ No. 360, Lord Lyons to Lord J. Russell, (No. 125), Washington, 2 August 1859, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 493.

The notion of Article 7 signifying a ‘compensation’ took root more firmly several months *after* agreement of the Wyke-Aycinena treaty, largely in response to protests against the entire treaty lodged by Beverly D. Clarke, United States Minister to Guatemala.⁴⁰ Clarke, like Ephraim George Squier had done ten years earlier, tried to secure United States commercial interests in Central America while also trying to subvert British influence in the isthmus. Clarke therefore was furious that Aycinena and the Guatemalan government dared “conceal...all knowledge of this...negotiations vitally affecting the interests and policy of [the United States of America] thereby depriving him [Clarke] of the right and privilege of defending those rights.”⁴¹ Clarke’s protestations over the treaty caused the opposition in Guatemala led by Don Pedro Valenzuela, a member of the Guatemalan Council of State, to contest the treaty and accuse Aycinena of acting contrary to the interests of Guatemala.⁴² Consequently, fearing severe domestic punishment,⁴³ Aycinena, having previously extolled the advantages of the treaty for Guatemala, switched position and now claimed that Article 7 was “compensation for cession of territory.”⁴⁴ This ‘change of heart’ by Aycinena, not surprisingly, produced a long-standing controversy between Great Britain and Guatemala not only over the

⁴⁰ No. 409, Lord Lyons to Lord John Russell, (No, 277. Confidential), Washington, 6 December 1859, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 548-549.

⁴¹ Inclosure [sic] 1 in No. 412, Mr. Clarke to Senor Aycinena, Guatemala, 1 October 1859, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-1860*, 555.

⁴² Pedro de Aycinena to Acting Consul General Hall, (Translation), 17 September 1859, F.O. 15/114, 86.

⁴³ Krista E. Wiegand contends that nationalist discourse and domestic punishment best explains the actions of Guatemala in the territorial dispute over Belize. The nationalist discourse in Guatemala circa 1859-1860 emphasized loss of sovereignty and economic underdevelopment as a result of British occupation of Belize.

Krista E. Wiegand, “Nationalist Discourse and Domestic Incentives to Prevent Settlement of the Territorial Dispute between Guatemala and Belize,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 3 (Aug. 2006), 349-383

⁴⁴ Portillo, “*Background and Study ...*”; for earlier accounts of Guatemala’s position on this see *The White Book: Controversy between Guatemala and Great Britain relative to the Convention of 1859 on Territorial Matters – The Belize Question*, (Guatemala, 1938). For Guatemalan analysis of this convention see Alberto Herrarte, *La Cuestión de Belice: Estudio Histórico-Jurídico de la Controversia*, (Guatemala, 2000). The standard Guatemalan reference on this has been Jose Louis Mendoza, *Great Britain and Her Treaties on Belize (British Honduras)*, (Guatemala, 1946).

nature of the obligation of Article 7 for the two contracting parties, but also over the object of the 1859 treaty.

Great Britain's refusal to pay the costs of constructing the cart-road

The competing interpretations of Article 7 of the Wyke-Aycinena Treaty of 1859 led to a standoff between Great Britain and Guatemala over the nature of the obligation relative to construction of the proposed cart-road. As I showed above, Guatemala's claim that Article 7 was compensation for territory ceded to Great Britain was linked more to the efforts for establishing a communications route through Guatemala. And as Shoman rightly contends, "Great Britain was not willing to give compensation of any kind."⁴⁵ The Foreign Office though, was agreeable to Great Britain covering some of the costs related to the cart-road project. So, what then was the reason for Great Britain's failure to meet the obligation relative to the cart-road? To understand the reasons for this folding, it is necessary to comprehend two things: Aycinena's motivations for requesting the Article 7 provision for building a cart-road in Guatemala; and, after the Wyke-Aycinena Treaty was agreed, Guatemala's reasons for proposing changes to the cart-road project.

Guatemala's merchants and political elites, as discussed in Chapter 2, were, since the latter decades of the colonial period, interested in establishing an interoceanic transit route through that country.⁴⁶ After independence, as the Central American Federation, and thereafter separate Central American states, pursued their economic development, this plan took on increasing significance, and for external powers (both European and the United States)

⁴⁵ Shoman, "Guatemala's Claim to Belize ...," 15.

⁴⁶ See Chapter 2 of this thesis.

attempting to expand their influence in the isthmus as well.⁴⁷ This reality was summed up by García Laguardia in his article *La Cuestión de Belice*, wherein he stated

Our turbulent past was affected by the project of inter-ocean communication that became almost a natural fact within Middle America. After Spanish domination, world powers turned their eyes towards us and officials carrying special instructions, adventurous merchants, entrepreneurs, and unscrupulous speculators began to appear everywhere searching for fast profit ... Great Britain was a country that accentuated its presence and influence during the first republican years of the Federation, as well as in the constituted State as an independent nation.⁴⁸

During the post-independence period in Central America, the government of Guatemala and the *Consulado de Comercio*, to try and restore Guatemala's dominance over the foreign commerce of Central America, placed primary emphasis on establishing a deep water maritime port on the country's Atlantic coast, "the most notable [of which] were at Izabal ... and Santo Tomás, [but neither] satisfied all the needed requirements."⁴⁹ Guatemala's aim was to connect the port at Izabal to its capital – Guatemala City, and from there connect to another port the Pacific Ocean. The objective was for this project to redress the colonial era-long problem of the lack of good communications in Guatemala, indeed in all Central America, but the project never came to fruition as Guatemala lacked the resources itself required to undertake the necessary works, and moreover, consistently failed to attract the external investments for this.

The problem of attracting funding for the Guatemalan communications project persisted long after Central American independence on account of Guatemala not being identified as a practicable location for this. To be sure, Alexander von Humboldt identified Nicaragua and Darien in the isthmus of Panama as the two practicable locations in Central

⁴⁷ No. 279, Mr. Cass to Mr Dallas, Department of State, Washington, April 12, 1859, *Correspondence respecting Central America, 1856-60*, F.O. 420/14B, 403.

⁴⁸ Jorge García Laguardia, "Reflexiones En Torno a La Cuestión De Belice, Libro De Alberto Herrarte," *Relaciones Internacionales*, Vol. 62, No. 2 (2016), 75-79.

⁴⁹ Woodward, *Class Privilege and Economic Development*, 60.

America for locating possible trans-isthmian transit routes.⁵⁰ Honduras was not included in that list, but it nonetheless benefited from the centuries old plan of a “corridor” or dry canal across that country. In 1822 Jeremy Bentham had weighed in on the matter as well in his “Junctiana Proposal” but he too prioritized the Nicaragua canal route.⁵¹ The upshot of all this was that after Central America’s independence, Nicaragua, Panama, and even Honduras, but not Guatemala, were the focus of European, and later, also United States, attentions for such transisthmian communication projects, with the emphasis on Nicaragua (for a canal) and Panama (for the railroad) after 1848.⁵² Nevertheless, Guatemala held tenaciously to its own plans for constructing an interoceanic transit route through its territory and seized on every opportunity for promoting these. On one occasion for instance, Don Pedro de Aycinena, Guatemala’s Minister of Foreign Affairs, even offered to “guarantee to the European powers every facility of communication across the [country and to] aid any plans...for the construction of a canal or railroad to connect the [Atlantic and Pacific] oceans.”⁵³ Still, and despite the Guatemalan government granting a number of concessions for a variety of British and European colonization enterprises over the decades, Guatemala struggled to attract the investments needed for its own interoceanic communications projects.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ Humboldt also recommended Darien in the Isthmus of Panama (which was at the time a part of New Granada – today’s Colombia), and Tehuantepec in Mexico.

⁵¹ Miriam Williford, “Utilitarian Design for the New World Bentham’s Plan for a Nicaraguan Canal,” *The Americas*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Jul. 1970), 75-85. A transcribed version of Bentham’s letter setting out his ‘Junctiana Proposal’ dated 25 June 1822 is available at the UCL Library, JB/106/273/001, Box 106, Folio 273 and JB/106/285/001, Box 106, Folio 285. A full copy of the “Junctiana Proposal” is available *The Works of Jeremy Bentham* published under the Superintendence of his Executor, John Bowring (Edinburgh: William Tait, 1838-1843), 11 vols., Vol. 2. A digitized copy of that publication is available online via the Online Library of Liberty at URL: https://oll.libertyfund.org/title/bowring-the-works-of-jeremy-bentham-vol-2#f0872-02_head_457

⁵² For a discussion of this see Scott Brady, “An Historical Geography of the Earliest Colonial Routes across the American Isthmus,” *Revista Geográfica*, no. 126 (1999): 121-43. For Humboldt’s recommendations of isthmian routes see Alexander von Humboldt, *Political Essay on the Kingdom of New Spain*, Cambridge Library Collection - Latin American Studies, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

⁵³ Wyke to Clarendon, No. 18, March 31, 1856, F.O. 15/90

⁵⁴ Clarendon to Wyke, No. 22, September 3, 1856, F.O. 15/90. Lord Clarendon, in response to Guatemalan overtures for establishing an Anglo-French company for constructing a transit route through Guatemala,

The fact that Pedro de Aycinena was Guatemala's negotiator for the 1859 Treaty is not unimportant for grasping the import of Article 7. Aycinena was attempting to undo decades of failure to secure the financing needed to deliver the cart-road and the port on the Atlantic coast that the Guatemalan *Consulado* had long desired.⁵⁵ The *Consulado*, of which Aycinena was a leading member, had long preferred Izabal in the Golfo Dulce as the location on the Atlantic for developing a maritime port on that coast, and believed that opening a good road from there to the capital of Guatemala would enable the merchants of Guatemala to restore their monopoly of trade and political influence in Central America.⁵⁶ This was why Aycinena had impressed on Charles Wyke a few years earlier to advocate for consideration of Guatemala, instead of Honduras or Nicaragua, for locating any Central American isthmian transit route. The desire of Guatemala's government and political elites for this to happen sooner rather than later was manifest in "the Chamber of Deputies approval of the convention [as] conditional on the stipulations contained in [Article 7] being carried into effect with as little delay as possible."⁵⁷

Wyke's endorsement of Aycinena's cart-road project as the preferred location for an interoceanic communication in Central America, and his opposition to Squier's project for building an interoceanic railway across Honduras, reflected his belief that such a route "within the territory of Guatemala, [was better] suited [for Great Britain's] purposes 'politically' [and commercially]."⁵⁸ But that was only the case if the route ran from the port at Izabal to Guatemala City. As Wyke put it,

indicated that public support for such private enterprises was not in accordance with government's practices. As already mentioned, all the land concessions and colonization contracts granted by Guatemala failed to secure the funding necessary to deliver the ports and roads works required of the concessionaires.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 60. The *Consulado* of Guatemala held responsibility for road and port development in Central America from the latter part of the colonial period, and after independence, its authority for this role increased.

⁵⁶ Woodward, "*Social and Economic Origins ...*," 561.

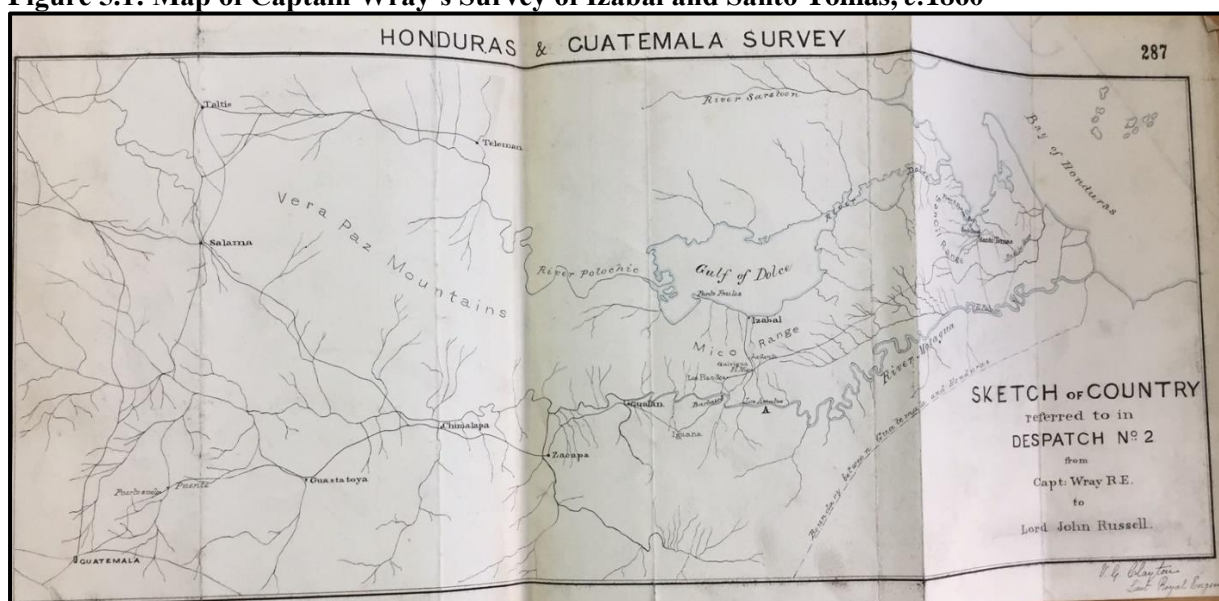
⁵⁷ Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History...*, 88.

⁵⁸ Wyke to Hammond, Confidential, April 30, 1858, F.O. 15/100.

now as the commerce of [Guatemala] with Belize and the Atlantic Coast generally, has been falling off rapidly of late years...it struck me that...if we aided them in the construction of a practicable cart road to the port of Izabal...the old commercial relations with Belize would be renewed.⁵⁹

According to Wyke though, at the time of concluding the agreement, “all that was contemplated by [Article 7 of] the treaty was a rough but practical cart-road;” and, he added, “the day that such a road is completed [Great Britain’s] share is concluded.”⁶⁰

Figure 5.1: Map of Captain Wray’s Survey of Izabal and Santo Tomás, c.1860



Source: F.O. 15/100, 287.

For a brief period, it looked like the cart-road project in Guatemala would finally come together. On one hand, the French canal developer Felix Belly had failed to establish a company to construct an interoceanic transit canal in Nicaragua in the second half of the 1850s. And, Squier’s railroad project in Honduras had collapsed causing the interest of British financiers in

⁵⁹ To Right Honourable Earl of Malmesbury, No. 27, F.O. 15/114, 45.

⁶⁰ Memorandum, March 28, 1861, F.O. 15/115, 188.

the latter venture to wane.⁶¹ Consequently, a couple members of the British Parliament with vested interests in the Honduran project alongside others in the Foreign Office now considered “[buttressing] the British presence in Central America [... by directing] British investments to the Guatemalan transit project.”⁶² It is not surprising therefore that the Foreign Office “entirely approved of the article admitted into the convention by Mr. Wyke at the desire of the Guatemalan government.”⁶³ The Izabal project however, was not to be.⁶⁴

The rekindling of attentions in the United States in 1860 to black colonization schemes in Central America changed the calculus for Guatemala relative to establishing a trans-isthmian communication through that country. The occurrence had the unintended effect of reviving interests among the leading merchants and Guatemalan Consulado for developing the port at Santo Tomás.⁶⁵ This is because the prospects of black colonization of the region held out a possible remedy to the decades old challenge of colonizing the north coast (i.e. Atlantic coast) of Guatemala.⁶⁶ Inability to successfully colonize Santo Tomás had been one of the reasons both the East Coast Company (a British enterprise) and the Belgian Colonization Company had failed in delivering the infrastructure objects of their respective concessions. To make matters worse, completion of the Panama railroad in 1855 had the effect of shifting the trade of

⁶¹ Mr Hall to the Earl of Malmesbury, No. 32, 31 May 1859, F.O. 15/106, 118; To Don Pedro de Aycinena, Her British Majesty’s Legation, Guatemala, July 20, 1858, F.O. 15/100, 275.

⁶² Brown, “Charles Lennox Wyke ...,” 440.

⁶³ Draft to Acting Consult General Hall, No. 2, June 30, 1859, F.O. 15/114, 74.

⁶⁴ This seems to uphold Primmer’s argument that British investments in transport infrastructure (or not) were key elements of British economic imperialism in the post-independence republics of Spanish America. Andrew Primmer, “Capital, Monopoly, and Economic Nationalism: A History of British Railways in Colombia, 1902-1930,” 343-344.

⁶⁵ In 1850, Guatemalan Presidential decree number 43 established Santo Tomás as Guatemala’s main port of entry on the Atlantic. To Palmerston, No. 50, 26 July 1850, F.O. 15/64; also, Woodward Jr, *Class Privilege...*, 72. footnote 56, citing *Gaceta de Guatemala*, Vol. 4, No. 84, 28 February 1850, 334.

⁶⁶ In 1824 the Guatemalan Consulado drew up plans for the colonization of Rio Dulce area of Guatemala (i.e., around the ports at Izabal and Santo Tomás) using Caribs (known in Belize today as the Garifuna) from Truxillo and the coastal areas of Honduras. Henry Dunn, *Guatemala [sic], or the United Provinces of Central America in 1827-28, being Sketches and Memorandums Made During a Twelve Month’s Residence in that Republic*, (United State, 2011), 235-236.

Guatemala through Panama, and thus to Guatemala's Pacific ports,⁶⁷ and also shifted the imperial advantage in Central America towards the United States.⁶⁸ In short, Guatemala still did not control the trade, and now had the added challenge of not being able to attract the investments needed for completing the communications route (i.e., the cart-road) through that country. Thus, to try and take advantage of any black colonization to redress these ills, the Guatemalan government began agitating for the proposed cart-road to the capital to originate from Santo Tomás, or run in a general line from that point, instead of from Izabal.⁶⁹

This shift unsettled the British officials in both Belize and Central America, and likewise in the Foreign Office. This is because, since the 1830s Santo Tomás was foretold as the port which, if ever developed, and if the overland mule-track route from there to Guatemala City was likewise improved, could undercut the port of Belize.⁷⁰ Yet, because of his collaboration with Aycinena, Charles Wyke argued, perhaps knowing otherwise, that "the effect of the road will be to increase the traffic with Guatemala ... and that this traffic would pass through Belize."⁷¹ The British Superintendent at Belize, Frederick Seymour, initially supported the view that restoring to the settlement some of the trade with Guatemala that was lost in recent years would make the cart-road 'advantageous' to Belize and even pledged an annual contribution of £200 - £300 from the settlement for the upkeep of the cart road once this was completed.⁷² Seymour believed that "Guatemalan merchants [would resume] their habit of going to [the latter] to buy their goods."⁷³ By 1860 however, the mahogany trade from Belize as well as the entrepôt trade with Guatemala from there were already seriously in decline.

⁶⁷ Woodward Jr., *Class Privilege...*, 79.

⁶⁸ McGuinness, *Path of Empire: Panama and the California Gold Rush*.

⁶⁹ Draft, Mr. Hall, No. 18, Foreign Office, May 11, 1860, F.O. 15/114, 308.

⁷⁰ Woodward Jr., *Class Privilege...*, 84.

⁷¹ To Lord Wodehouse, London, July 16, 1864, F.O. 15/143, 102.

⁷² Mr. Seymour to Mr. Fontescue, Copy, London, 25 April 1861, F.O. 15/143, 28.

⁷³ To Lord Wodehouse, London, July 23rd, 1861, F.O. 15/143, 118.

British investments in construction of the proposed cart-road therefore would not likely have netted the benefits to Belize envisioned by Wyke.

In sanctioning the Article 7 provision, the Foreign Office was hoping to show, for the benefit of the United States government, “the intention of Her Majesty’s Government to carry out the stipulations of the 7th Article of the Convention...to the fullest extent in which they can fairly be considered to apply to the British government.”⁷⁴ However, the latter limited its contribution to “[furnishing] ...scientific assistance to guide...in determining the best direction for the projected line of communication.”⁷⁵ Even so, some members of the British government were uncertain of the effects construction of the cart-road would have on the settlement, while the Colonial Office was opposed to the whole scheme.⁷⁶ The Colonial Office for instance contended that the cart-road would “divert from Belize even the small amount of trans-shipment trade [the settlement] at present possesses.”⁷⁷

British resistance to contributing to the costs of the cart-road grew with knowledge of French plans for extending the second French empire in Mexico into Guatemala and for taking over the Santo Tomás project. However, this did not become an issue until the Foreign Office despatched one Captain Wray to Belize and Guatemala to conduct the surveying and designing for, firstly, the cart-road and thereafter, the boundaries between Belize and Guatemala.⁷⁸ Captain Wray was not the person initially considered for this undertaking. Lord John Russell, then Foreign Secretary in the Palmerston administration, had suggested a Colonel Stanton of the Royal Engineers as a few years earlier Stanton had “surveyed the line for an interoceanic

⁷⁴ To Lord John Russell, No. 5, Managua, February 7, 1960, F.O. 15/114, 219.

⁷⁵ Draft to Acting Consul General Hall, No. 7, December 15, 1859, F.O. 15/114, 140.

⁷⁶ Draft, Colonial Office, Foreign Office, 21 September 1861, F.O. 15/115,119.

⁷⁷ To George Hammond, Esquire, May 11, 1861, F.O. 15/143, 5.

⁷⁸ To Lord John Russell, Foreign Secretary, No. 10, Government House, Belize, January 6, 1861, F.O. 15/115, 1.

railway through the territories of [the] Republic [of Honduras].”⁷⁹ Colonel Stanton however was not fluent in Spanish, and as the Guatemalans required this competency of any engineer assigned for the job, the Foreign Office selected Captain Wray instead.

Before Captain Wray was able to get started with the surveying and other design work, the Guatemalan authorities attempted to “induce him to shift the proposed route from Izabal to Santo Tomás.”⁸⁰ On his arrival in Guatemala, Foreign Minister Pedro de Aycinena advised Captain Wray that “in the opinion of the Guatemalan government it [was] desirable two engineers should [... survey and design] the line of communication.”⁸¹ Thus, the Guatemalan government assigned Augustín Van de Gehuchte, the Consulado engineer and a Belgian who was involved with the Belgian Colonization Company enterprise at Santo Tomás, to accompany Captain Wray during the exercise. Captain Wray reported this development to the Foreign Office, stating that “Your Lordship has probably been already informed by... Superintendent [Seymour] of Belize, that a strong desire [now exists] in [Guatemala] that the Atlantic terminus of the proposed line of communication should be at the Belgian settlement of Santo Tomás, rather than at its present terminus, Izabal.”⁸² It was on receipt of this news that the Foreign Office began to consider more seriously the implications of the proposed cart-road for Belize’s role and standing.

Captain Wray’s report on the different routes he surveyed for the proposed cart-road provided the Foreign Office with the justification needed for ‘reassessment’ of the project. Captain Wray had conducted the work in the presence of, and with ‘practical’ suggestions from, Van de Gehuchte who advised him that the surveys were unnecessary as the Belgian

⁷⁹ Draft (to Colonial Office), Herman Merivale, Esquire, December 7, 1859, F.O. 15/114, 121.

⁸⁰ Draft, Mr. Hall, No. 18, Foreign Office, May 11, 1860, F.O. 15/114, 308.

⁸¹ To Lord John Russell, No. 60, British Consulate, Guatemala, 20 September 1859, F.O. 15/114, 82.

⁸² To Lord John Russell, No. 2, 1 May 1860, F.O. 15/114, 268.

Colonization Company had already completed technical studies of a canal transit route from Santo Tomás, and that this was done after the Company assumed the concession in the Verapaz District of Guatemala from the Eastern Coast of Central America Commercial and Agricultural Company.⁸³ Foreign Minister Aycinena also tried to sway Captain Wray by arguing that "...expenses would be saved by making Santo Tomás the Atlantic terminus, and that this was corroborated by the last Belgian [Colonization company] of 1859."⁸⁴ Captain Wray refused to be diverted however, and after surveying all possible routes identified different options for a terminus on the Atlantic coast including Izabal, Santo Tomás, and the mouth of the River Montagua.⁸⁵

As to Guatemala's suggestion for the cart-road to take the 'general line from Santo Tomás', Captain Wray advised the Foreign Office that in his view a road from that port as "... construed by Mr Van de Gehuchte... would be 35 to 45 miles longer than any other road to Guatemala, [and hence he Wray,] abandoned the idea of adopting it."⁸⁶ In keeping with the preference of the Foreign Office therefore, Captain Wray selected the route from Izabal and estimated that this would cost £145,465.⁸⁷ Captain Wray also undercut Guatemala's schemes for changing the proposed route by confirming that "... the result to Belize [of a cart-road, although] a good line of communication would... increase traffic materially... [but it would also] destroy what little trade with Guatemala Belize now has."⁸⁸

⁸³ See Chapter 3 of this thesis for a discussion of this.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, F.O. 15/114, 300.

⁸⁵ To Lord John Russell, No. 10, 6 January 1861, F.O. 15/115, 1.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 25 February 1861, F.O. 15/115, 2.

⁸⁷ Wray to John Russell, 6 January 1861, F.O. 15/115.

⁸⁸ To Lord Wodehouse, London, July 16, 1864, F.O. 15/143, 110.

With this turn of events, Superintendent Seymour, now aroused to the machinations of Foreign Minister Aycinena and the Guatemalan government for changing the line for the cart-road, admitted that he initially wrote in support of the project

on the supposition that the port of Yzabal (sic) would be selected as the Atlantic terminus, but shortly after Mr. Wyke's departure for Europe, rumours reached ... that the Guatemalan project was not in reality to improve the capital to the port of ...Yzabal (sic) which cultural features and political circumstances make it a commercial dependency of Belize, but to reopen the almost abandoned project of Belgian colonization, and start Santo Tomás, with English money, in rivalry to our principal ports in Central America.⁸⁹

Thus, Seymour re-assessed the matter of the cart-road and now indicated that, in his view,

[It] is difficult to conceive the importance of the consequences to Belize involved in the apparently simple question of the selection of the Atlantic terminus of the Guatemalan road. Santo Tomás would be a mischievous and dangerous rival; Yzabal (sic) a most useful assistant and dependent ... thus a severe blow would be dealt to the prosperity of our settlement, *and at English influence in Central America* now largely sustained by the commercial dependency of Honduras and Guatemala on Belize. Therefore, if the object ... is to place Santo Tomás in convenient communication with the capital of the Republic, it would be decidedly for the advantage of our settlement in the Bay of Honduras that the whole project should fall to the ground [as ...] Belize would see ... with alarm Santo Tomás raised to an important position.⁹⁰

Seymour concluded therefore, “[that] it is one thing to spend such a sum of money upon foreign ground in order to fulfil a treaty engagement [but] it is quite another thing when it is shown that the costly operation will be injurious to British [interests].”⁹¹

Realizing that the dynamics in Guatemala had changed, Foreign Secretary Lord Russell now sought to distance himself, and the Foreign Office, from the matter. Lord Russell recognized that the proposed cart-road if shifted to the Santo Tomás route, even using British financing and technical expertise, potentially prejudiced Great Britain's standing in Central

⁸⁹ To Colonial Office, May 3, 1860, F.O. 15/114, 299-300.

⁹⁰ To Colonial Office, May 3, 1860, F.O. 15/114, 302-303. Italics are my own.

⁹¹ (Draft) Colonial Office, Foreign Office, February 21, 1861, F.O. 15/115, 116-117.

America. In other words, the upshot of building the cart-road from Santo Tomás instead of from Izabal would not only have been to eliminate Belize's role in the commerce of Guatemala, but more crucially, would have produced a manifest decline in British influence in Central America. Recognition of this possibility caused Lord Russell to opine that "the very serious difficulty which has arisen in this case appears to have originated in a proposal made by Mr Wyke on his own impossibility...to insert an article in the treaty providing for making a road."⁹² As opposition to the cart-road grew in Great Britain, Wyke found himself increasingly alienated. Thus, to try and defend his character, Wyke wrote a memorandum to the Foreign Office contending that it "is better to place on record...what passed between Don Pedro de Aycinena and myself with respect to this matter. [Wyke contested] that it was agreed [between him and Aycinena] that both governments should cooperate in carrying out this work."⁹³

In any case, the real issue for the Foreign Office had to do with the realization that,

the interests of British Honduras...required that the terminus...be the port of Yzabal (sic)... [and that] the Port of Santo Tomás...be abandoned, as the British government could never be party to the construction of a line of road which would prove injurious to the settlement of Belize [i.e., to British interests].⁹⁴

The Foreign Office was also forced to admit that the proposed cart-road would at best, be only nominally beneficial to the British settlement at Belize because it did "not appear that the projected road [would] in any way connect Guatemala with the town of Belize or with any part of British Honduras, or that it will touch British territory at all."⁹⁵ Realizing that this provided a possible escape from the obligation, and given the Colonial Office's denial any good could

⁹² Guatemala Road, F.O. 15/115, 206

⁹³ Memorandum, March 29, 1861, F.O. 15/115, 194.

⁹⁴ Draft, Mr. Hall, No. 18, Foreign Office, May 11, 1860, F.O. 15/114, 308.

⁹⁵ To Lord Wodehouse, Downing Street, 22 December 1859, F.O. 15/114, 149.

come to Belize from a road which does not ever pass through any portion of the settlement,”⁹⁶ the Foreign Office submitted that as “an engagement contracted under these circumstances cannot be finding, [it would be...] justified [...for Great Britain] to get out of it.”⁹⁷

The growing opposition within the British government towards construction of the proposed cart-road in Guatemala eventually compelled the Foreign Office to consider either fulfilling the convention, but to “fall back to upon a stricter construction [of Article 7] in favour of British interests;”⁹⁸ or, to “repudiate the convention altogether.” The other alternative was to “open new negotiations with Guatemala for a modification of the arrangements”⁹⁹ relative to construction of the proposed cart-road. Great Britain opted for the latter, and so too did Guatemala as it did not want to lose the opportunity for securing British financing for its cart-road project.

The Supplementary Agreement of 1863

The supplementary agreement signed 5 August 1863 between Great Britain and Guatemala (the Wyke-Martín agreement), exercised the third option considered by the Foreign Office for redressing the demands placed on Great Britain relative to Article 7 of the 1859 Treaty. In truth, as mentioned above, the Colonial Office was of the view that Great Britain needed to extricate itself completely from the situation. However, Lord Palmerston commented that Great Britain “...could hardly keep the boundary and not contribute to the road.”¹⁰⁰ This obliged the British government to weigh up its responsibility about the matter. As Shoman

⁹⁶ Guatemala Road, F.O. 15/115, 206.

⁹⁷ Draft Colonial Office, Foreign Office, 21 September 1861, F.O. 15/115, 117.

⁹⁸ Ibid, F.O. 15/115, 119.

⁹⁹ Mr Seymour to Sir Frederic Rogers, London, 4 July 1861, F.O. 15/143, 163.

¹⁰⁰ Minute by Palmerston, 26 March 1861, F.O. 15/115.

rightly points out, Great Britain had a legal obligation under Article 7 of the 1859 treaty,¹⁰¹ and therefore the Foreign Office instructed the new British Minister to Central America, George B. Mathews, to advise Aycinena that Great Britain needed additional time to fully consider the report submitted by Captain Wray.¹⁰²

Mathews and Aycinena soon clashed over Great Britain's failure to make good on Article 7 requirements, but to his surprise, the Guatemalan government still acquiesced to this request. Mathews, found out this was because it gave the Guatemalans time to further their negotiations with the United States over building the cart-road and transit route, but via the Montagua (i.e., via Santo Tomás).¹⁰³ Mathews reported to Lord Russell that he had

been in constant communication during the last month with Don Pedro de Aycinena respecting the proposed road to the Atlantic...but [that he had] reason to believe that delays may have been purposefully thrown in the way, in order that the Guatemalan government may hear the result of an examination of the Montagua river which some Americans recently arrived from New York propose to channel.¹⁰⁴

Mathews also shortly understood why the Guatemalans were pushing for construction of the cart-road via this line. This was because "the Guatemalan merchants [no longer] depended on Belize but [had] formed connections with European houses and [therefore were] free to import and export their goods by the ... route ... [thereby allowing] the future port at ... Santo Tomás ... to be established by Guatemalan merchants themselves."¹⁰⁵

The negotiations for the 1863 supplementary convention took place, on the insistence of Pedro de Aycinena, in London instead of in Guatemala. These negotiations confirmed the

¹⁰¹ Shoman, "Guatemala's claim to Belize," 29. This is also Humphrey's outlook. See Humphreys, "The Diplomatic History ...," 127.

¹⁰² Humphreys, 109.

¹⁰³ To Right Honourable Earl Russell, 23 June 1863, F.O. 15/144A.

¹⁰⁴ To Right Honourable Earl Russell, No. 24, Guatemala, 2 July 1862, F.O. 15/143, 243.

¹⁰⁵ To Lord Wodehouse, London, 23 July 1861, F.O. 15/143, 119.

disagreement between two parties over the matter of Article 7. Although the Foreign Office insisted that its obligation was limited to providing technical assistance for the surveying works, the Guatemalan Foreign Minister maintained that Great Britain also pay the costs of the cart-road.¹⁰⁶ Wyke's insistence that this latter expectation reflected the terms agreed between him and Aycinena, did not help the Foreign Office's case. Nevertheless, after much back and forth over this point, the two parties eventually agreed on a compromise: that is, for Great Britain to pay up to £50,000.00 plus the costs of surveying the road.¹⁰⁷ The Guatemalan government accepted these terms with one important condition: that Guatemala be free to construct the road of its choosing.¹⁰⁸ In other words, in return for accepting that Great Britain's payment for the cart-road be limited to £50,000, Guatemala now wanted the latitude to build the cart-road via the line from Santo Tomás. As Francisco Martín, the Guatemalan Minister in London pointed out,

The government of Guatemala in considering the convention has found that if the canalization of the River Montagua...be carried out, the road by land from Guatemala to the point of the Montagua where it may be made navigable, may be constructed for the sum of fifty thousand pounds sterling... but if ... the canalization of the River Montagua should not be effected, and it should be necessary to construct the road by land from the capital to the coast of the Atlantic ... in that case the work would cost at least the one hundred and forty two thousand pounds estimated by Major Wray.¹⁰⁹

The Foreign Office agreed to the terms of payment of the £50,000 proposed by Martín—£10,000 on ratification of the supplementary agreement, followed by four other instalments, the second when the work began, and the final when the cart-road was

¹⁰⁶ Wyke to Hammond, 17 April 1861, F.O. 15/113.

¹⁰⁷ Translation, Memorandum, Legation of Guatemala, London, 18 May 1863, F.O. 15/144A, 77. Mathews first proposed these terms.

¹⁰⁸ Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History ...*, 118.

¹⁰⁹ Translation, Legation of Guatemala, London, 25 April 1864, F.O. 15/144A, 170.

completed.¹¹⁰ Wyke was instructed however, to advise Martín that the general line of the road would first need approval by Mathews.¹¹¹ Wyke also notified Martín that the payment would first need approval by Parliament. On these conditions then, the supplementary treaty was agreed, but Great Britain retained the right of refusal for any line for the cart road proposed by Guatemala.¹¹²

Guatemala's failure to sanction the treaty within the six-month period stipulated by the agreement played directly into British hands,¹¹³ and the latter used this as an excuse to claim that the agreement fell to the ground.¹¹⁴ In response to this, Martín contended that "the supplementary convention could not be examined by President Carrera due to his being away on military operations."¹¹⁵ The reasons for Guatemala's delay however, actually had to do with the proviso in the supplementary convention that denied Guatemala the freedom to build the cart-road via the Montagua. In actuality, the Guatemalan government had been secretly negotiating with Elisha O. Crosby, the United States Minister to Guatemala, to broker loan-financing for the war-impooverished country and therefore did not give much attention to the supplementary agreement.¹¹⁶ When this fell through, Guatemala was forced to take additional time to try and secure the funding required to proceed with construction of the road along the Montagua route instead of from Izabal—the general line preferred by Great Britain—from British sources. Thus, to try and sway the Foreign Office, Martín claimed that if "Her British Majesty's

¹¹⁰ Wyke to Russel, 26 July 1863, F.O. 15/144A.

¹¹¹ Russel to Wyke, 23 July 1863, F.O. 15/144A.

¹¹² Article 1 of the 1863 Supplementary Agreement. Essentially this required that any route selected 'had to communicate with the British Possessions in Belize.'

¹¹³ Guatemala did not ratify the 1863 convention until 1865, fully two years later.

¹¹⁴ Draft, To Mr Francisco Martín, Foreign Office, 3 May 1864, F.O. 15/144A, 174.

¹¹⁵ Translation, Legation of Guatemala, London, 25 April 1864, F.O. 15/144A, 170.

¹¹⁶ Mary Patricia Chapman, "The Mission of Elisha O. Crosby to Guatemala, 1861-1864," *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (Aug. 1855), 284, citing Secretary of State Seward to Crosby, 19 May 1864, Records of the Department of State, Diplomatic Instructions 16, Guatemala, 439.

government should not...grant the concession asked for, the supplementary convention of...1863 remains without effect and that of...1859 alone in force.”¹¹⁷ The Foreign Office however, nonetheless declined Guatemala’s request.¹¹⁸

The Foreign Office ultimately allowed the 1863 Supplementary Treaty to collapse because doing so better supported Great Britain’s foreign policy objectives in Central America. This line of reasoning contrasts with the explanation adopted by Shoman and other historians of the territorial dispute that the decision to let the agreement flop concerned the monetary size of the compensation (i.e. that £50,000 imposed a ‘heavy pecuniary charge’ on Great Britain).¹¹⁹ It also deviates from the explanation provided by Humphreys in his earlier work on the territorial dispute that the convention failed simply because of a failure by the government of Guatemala to ratify it.¹²⁰ In effect, the key issue for Guatemala in the entire matter was the inability to build the proposed cart-road along the general line it desired in order to try and reassert its position in Central America – that is, from Santo Tomás through Montagua. For Great Britain, conversely, the line of the proposed cart-road was likewise the key issue, as the British government could not concede to any projects for a cart-road (i.e., communications route) in Guatemala that would potentially prove injurious to its new colony at Belize, and by extension to British expansion in Central America.

From Settlement to Colony: The French Factor

In this second, and final, section of the chapter, I investigate Great Britain’s reasons for converting Belize to an official colony in 1862. I show that contrary to the assumption in the

¹¹⁷ Ibid, F.O. 15/144A, 172.

¹¹⁸ Draft, To Mr Francisco Martín, Foreign Office, 3 May 1864, F.O. 15/144A, 174.

¹¹⁹ Shoman, *Guatemala’s claim to Belize*, 29.

¹²⁰ Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History...*, 131.

traditional historiography of the territorial dispute, this decision was not a logical ‘next step’ of British formal empire building and demonstrate that forestalling French expansion into Central America from Mexico was the impetus for Great Britain’s decision, but that this was nevertheless somewhat of a ‘knee-jerk’ reaction. I show further that the United States government did not protest this because the Lincoln administration needed for Belize’s status to be secured to facilitate President Lincoln’s and Secretary of State William Seward’s nascent plans for black colonization in the settlement of British Honduras.

The Threat of French Expansion into Central America

On 12 May 1862, Superintendent Seymour executed the royal proclamation that converted the settlement of British Honduras (Belize) into a colony.¹²¹ The generally accepted view of this occurrence promulgated by the historiography of the territorial dispute over Belize hitherto is that Great Britain used the occasion of the Civil War in the United States to surreptitiously carry out this event. But was the diversion created by the Civil War the impetus for this decision? The archival evidence supports a more nuanced explanation for this outcome. Thus, to better explain Great Britain’s decision for finally converting Belize to an official colony, this study considered two issues that tugged at British policy vis-à-vis Belize and Central America in the first half of the 1860s. One was the second French intervention in Mexico and the associated intrigues of Napoléon III thereto for “expanding French influence first into Guatemala and then all of Central America.”¹²² Related to this was Napoléon III’s aim of leveraging the Cobden-Chevalier Treaty agreed between Great Britain and France in 1860 to advance French commercial interests and the attendant plan for taking over the port

¹²¹ Burdon, *ABH III*, 25 and 247.

¹²² Thomas Schoonover, “Misconstrued Mission: Expansionism and Black Colonization in Mexico and Central America during the Civil War,” *Pacific Historical Review*, Vol 49, No. 4 (Nov. 1980), 611.

and road project at Santo Tomás in Guatemala as a way of achieving this objective while simultaneously countering United States expansion in the isthmus.¹²³ Another was President Lincoln's plans for black colonization of British Honduras and Central America. This initiative was 'loosely' tied to the United States' government desire for controlling "a great highway from the Atlantic or Caribbean Sea to the Pacific Ocean."¹²⁴

Regarding the first matter, in October 1861, the forces of Napoléon III invaded Mexico but they did not act alone in this venture and were joined by troops from both Great Britain and Spain. The three European powers had agreed to jointly intervene in Mexico to try and recoup debts owed by the latter state, after the government of Benito Juárez, then Mexican President, voted on 17 July 1861 to suspend the payment of all foreign debts for a period of two years.¹²⁵ This was concerning to the Mexican bondholders and hence they sought "the active support of His Majesty's Government [on the matter]."¹²⁶ Still, Britain was more concerned about the implications of 'collecting debt' for French re-engagement in Mexico and therefore did intervene alongside France and Spain.¹²⁷ However, while Great Britain enlisted in the enterprise to keep a watchful eye on the French (this was not the first time the French had used the pretext of debts to invade Mexico), Spain was hoping that this opening would lead to the reassertion of Spanish influence in Mexico and the wider region.¹²⁸ The United States

¹²³ Erika Pani, "Juárez vs. Maximiliano: Mexico's Experiment with Monarchy," in *American Civil Wars: The United States, Latin America, Europe, and the Crisis of the 1860s*, ed. Don H Doyle, (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 172. Also, Schoonover, "France in Central America 1820s-1929...", 169 - 170.

¹²⁴ Address of President Abraham Lincoln to Deputation of Free Negroes, White House, Washington, D.C., 14 August 1862,

¹²⁵ Frederic Bancroft, "The French in Mexico and the Monroe Doctrine," *Political Science Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (1896): 30.

¹²⁶ Costeloe, *Bonds and Bondholders ...*, 304, 319.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, xix, 312. As Costeloe explains, the British government had, throughout the nineteenth century, eschewed intervening in "private matters."

¹²⁸ Costeloe, 307. As Costeloe noted, "in 1838 the French had invaded and occupied Veracruz to collect the debts allegedly owed to their citizens."

government though, declined joining the trio because this forcible remedy did not accord with its own aims and policies,¹²⁹ but also because the ongoing Civil War in the United States demanded all its financial resources. As President Buchanan had noted, “it would be vain for [the Government of the United States] to attempt to enforce payment in money of the claims...now amounting to more than \$10,000,000.00 against Mexico, because she is destitute of all pecuniary means to satisfy these demands.”¹³⁰ The United States therefore, acted cautiously in order “to keep relations with France harmonious and prevent French willingness to assist the Confederacy.”¹³¹

Mexico’s dire financial situation however did not deter Napoléon III. While the need for recovering the debts owed to France by Mexico served as the pretext for the former’s intervention in the latter, there were in fact other, more sinister, forces at play in the eventuality.¹³² That this was the case is evident from several things. Firstly, Napoléon III made it clear that stemming United States expansion was a key policy objective.¹³³ In October 1861 Napoléon III wrote to the Comte de Flahaut, at the time French Minister to London and father to his half-brother, the Duke of Morny, himself a close friend of the Comte of Saligny, French Minister to Mexico, stating

¹²⁹ Seward to the Ministers of Spain, France and England, *Senate Executive Documents, No. 100, 37th Congress, 2nd Session*, 136-137. At the time, Mexico owed over \$82 million to the three countries, the majority of this to Great Britain. By comparison, Mexico owed France less than \$2 million.

¹³⁰ “State of the Union Address: James Buchanan (December 6, 1858),” *InfoPlease*, accessed December 5, 2019, <https://www.infoplease.com/primary-sources/government/presidential-speeches/state-union-address-james-buchanan-december-6-1858>. In his last annual address however, President Buchanan had suggested that the United States intervene in Mexico, but for shoring up the security of the country and not necessarily for recovering debts owing to it by the latter.

¹³¹ French Intervention in Mexico and the American Civil War, 1862-1867, *Office of the Historian*, online article, available at URL: <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1861-1865/french-intervention>

¹³² For a recent thesis on French imperialism in Mexico in the nineteenth century see Edward Shawcross, *France, Mexico and Informal Empire in Latin America, 1820-1867: Equilibrium in the New World*, (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

¹³³ Robert Ryal Miller, “Arms across the Border: United States Aid to Juarez during the French Intervention in Mexico,” *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 63, No. 6 (1973), 5.

Mexico...by her regeneration...would form an impassable barrier to the encroachments of North America, she would be an important outlet for...French commerce...from what I have learned, as soon as the ships appear off Veracruz, a considerable party in Mexico is ready to seize power...and to proclaim a monarchy. I have been asked who my candidate is...you see, my dear Monsieur de Flahaut, in this whole question I have only one aim: namely, that of seeing French interests protected and preserved for the future.¹³⁴

Secondly, while Mexico was indeed indebted to all three countries (that is, Great Britain, France, and Spain) as well as the United States, the debt owing by Mexico to the French was not only by far the smallest but, arguably, also insignificant in comparison to that owed to British bondholders and investors.¹³⁵ As Stève Sainlaude observed, given this reality, France stood to lose significantly less than either Great Britain or Spain, yet, France, not Great Britain or Spain, was directing the intervention in Mexico.¹³⁶ Napoléon III exploited the fact that several leading members of the French aristocracy and government were holding Mexican bonds as a convenient excuse or justification for invading Mexico. Somewhat calculatedly, Napoléon III had earlier arranged for his half-brother the Duke of Morny and other high-ranking members of the French government to purchase stakes in a speculative loan for the

¹³⁴ "The Mexican Campaign: Napoleon III's Letter to the Comte de Flahaut, French Ambassador in London," available at URL: <https://www.napoleon.org/en/history-of-the-two-empires/articles/the-mexican-campaign-napoleon-iiiis-letter-to-the-comte-de-flahaut-french-ambassador-in-london/>. Also, Shawcross, *France, Mexico, and Informal Empire...*, 9, 195-232; and Frederic Bancroft, "The French in Mexico and the Monroe Doctrine," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 11, No. 1, (March 1896).

¹³⁵ For an account of British investments in Mexico see Costeloe, *Bonds and Bondholders: British Investors and Mexico's Foreign Debt*. Also, D. C. M. Platt, "British Finance in Mexico, 1821 – 1867," *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Jan. 1984), 45 – 62. Tenenbaum argues that the policies of the Foreign Office aided British finance and investments in Mexico. See Barbara A. Tenenbaum, "Merchants, Money, and Mischief, The British in Mexico, 1821 – 1862," *The Americas*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Jan. 1979), 317 – 339.

¹³⁶ Stève Sainlaude, "France's Grand Design..." 112. Also, Costeloe, *Bonds and Bondholders*. The British government by comparison, sought only to recover any monies owed by Mexico.

Mexican government of Benito Juárez, arranged through a Swiss private banker named Jean-Baptiste Jecker.¹³⁷

And thirdly, the Confederacy in the United States had actually encouraged foreign, and particularly French, intervention in Mexico.¹³⁸ This was because, during the Civil War, the Confederacy needed to prevent or guard against an attack by the Union from the southern flank through Mexico and Texas, and hence were counting on the knowledge that Napoléon III himself harboured pro-Confederate sympathies.¹³⁹ In addition, as Napoléon III himself revealed, he had the collaboration of conservative elites in Mexico for this enterprise.¹⁴⁰

The combination of French diplomatic folly¹⁴¹ and the support of other leading members of the French government for the Unionists, ultimately provided a counterbalance to Napoléon III leanings on this matter.¹⁴² Nevertheless, Napoléon III obtained the opening he coveted for asserting French power in the region. The Confederacy government had also hoped for British recognition of its independence and believed that this was a possibility because of the extensive trade in cotton the southern states carried on with Great Britain.¹⁴³ That trade, in fact, continued during the Civil War, despite British proclamations of neutrality, much to the chagrin of the United States government. Great Britain, however, never extended recognition

¹³⁷ Ibid, 112; also, Kathryn Abbey Hanna, "The Roles of the South in the French Intervention in Mexico," *The Journal of Southern History*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Feb. 1954), 3-21.

¹³⁸ Patrick J. Kelly, "The Cat's Paw: Confederate Ambitions in Latin America," in *American Civil Wars: The United States, Latin America, Europe, and the Crisis of the 1860s*, ed. Don H. Doyle, 58.

¹³⁹ Stève Sainlaude, *France and the American Civil War: A Diplomatic History*, Trans., Jessica Edwards, (The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), 2.

¹⁴⁰ "The Mexican Campaign: Napoleon III's Letter to the Comte de Flahaut."

¹⁴¹ Ibid, 185. Sainlaude contends that the French Foreign Ministry believed that recognizing the Confederacy would hurt French interests.

¹⁴² Lynn M. Case and Warren Spencer, *The United States and France: Civil War Diplomacy*, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970), 2-3. This provides a good interpretation for Napoléon III's failure to recognize the Confederacy.

¹⁴³ Mr Seward to Mr Adams, (No. 2), Department of State, Washington, April 10, 1861, 39, 41, in *North America No. 2, Extracts of Despatch from Her Majesty's Minister at Washington*, December 6, 1861.

of independence to the Confederacy,¹⁴⁴ and neither did France, but for a while the prospects of this happening deeply concerned President Lincoln and the Union.¹⁴⁵

French fears about United States expansion and ‘manifest destiny’ agenda that extended back to the reign of Louis-Philippe were suddenly reawakened at the turn of the decade.¹⁴⁶ The earlier anxieties which had engendered French support for Texan independence as a means of curbing any territorial expansion by the United States,¹⁴⁷ deepened in 1860 when President James Buchanan reaffirmed his policy vis-à-vis Mexico and Central America. Buchanan’s position was that “the United States can never permit any [transit routes across the American isthmus] to be permanently interrupted, nor can it safely allow them to pass under the control of rival nations...it can never consent to be made tributary to their use to any European power.”¹⁴⁸ Still, Napoléon III exploited the onset of the United States Civil War to pursue his aim of thwarting United States expansion by creating a new French empire in Mexico, though he took care not to upset the very profitable Franco-American trade. Napoléon III hoped that his Mexican empire would help to restore France “as a major European power [to] counterbalance ... Great Britain.”¹⁴⁹ Thus, acting on a scheme set out in a manifesto drafted in

¹⁴⁴ Richard Huzzey, “Manifest Dominion: The British Empire and the Crises of the Americas in the 1860s,” in *American Civil Wars: The United States, Latin America, Europe, and the Crisis of the 1860s*, ed. Don H Doyle, (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 87.

¹⁴⁵ Sainlaude, “France and the American Civil War.”

¹⁴⁶ Napoléon III had written to his General in Mexico, Elie Forey, on this, and, along with his minister of foreign affairs, also contemplated other ways of manipulating territory in Mexico.

¹⁴⁷ Sainlaude, “France’s Grand Design ...,” 108.

¹⁴⁸ 53rd Congress, 2nd Session, House Miscellaneous Documents, Vol. 37, Messages of Presidents, Vol. V., 585, 5th April 1860, in “*Compilation of Executive Documents*,” 1145. In his state of the Union Address in 1858, President Buchanan requested the United States Congress to approve (a) his establishing a ‘temporary protectorate over Mexico and (b) the use of military forces to guarantee its access to any interoceanic transit in Mexico or the Central American isthmus. Congress denied these requests, but the matter nonetheless incited Napoléon III into pursuing his schemes relative to Mexico and an interoceanic canal transit in Central America.

¹⁴⁹ Sainlaude, “France’s Grand Design and the Confederacy,” 108.

1856 by the Marquis of Rademont, a French government agent living in Mexico at the time, Napoléon III installed Archduke Maximilian of Austria as Emperor in Mexico.¹⁵⁰

Secretary of State William Seward, attentive to Napoléon III's political manoeuvres in Mexico, instructed the United States Minister to Paris to advise the French Foreign Ministry that its imperial agenda in Mexico "could not be looked at with indifference."¹⁵¹ However, encumbered by the Civil War, and anxious not to cause the French to recognize the Confederacy, the United States government did not take further preventive action against this happening. The United States though later provided aid and military support (arms) to deposed Mexican President, Benito Juárez to facilitate Mexico's resistance to French occupation.¹⁵² When, however, Sir Charles Wyke, now Great Britain's representative in Mexico, learned of French plans to pursue their own agenda independent of the other members of the alliance and French forces started moving towards Mexico City, the British government realized that it needed to act decisively to counter French expansion southward while preserving its own position in the region.¹⁵³ The need for this was accelerated by the fact that "the new government in Mexico [had] issued decrees claiming Belizean territory."¹⁵⁴ According to Rajeshwari Dutt, the combination of the chaos caused by the Caste War and the machinations of the French controlled government in Mexico forced Great Britain to protect Belize's borders.¹⁵⁵

In the early 1860s, Great Britain was firmly contemplating negotiations with the de facto government in Mexico for a treaty to settle the northern limits of Belize, but Lord Russell,

¹⁵⁰ Hanna, "Roles of the South in French Intervention," 5.

¹⁵¹ Senate Executive Documents No. 100, 37th Congress, 2nd Session, 218.

¹⁵² Robert Ryal Miller, "Arms across the Border: United States Aid to Juarez during the French Intervention in Mexico," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, Vol. 63, No. 6 (1973), 5, DOI: 10.2307/1006291.

¹⁵³ Russell to Wyke, No. 52, 30 April 1862, F.O. 50/363.

¹⁵⁴ Rajeshwari Dutt, *Empire on Edge: The British Struggle for Order in Belize during Yucatan's Caste War, 1847-1901*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020), 71.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid*, 71-72.

then Foreign Minister, came to the opinion that “negotiations with Mexico for adjustment of the boundaries could have... no other than a prejudicial effect on all of the English settlement [of Belize].”¹⁵⁶ It appears that around this time the Foreign Office also became aware of plans being entertained in Guatemala “to negotiate for [Guatemala’s] admission into the proposed [Mexican empire], and to urge its extension to all Central America.”¹⁵⁷ Thus, realizing that the prospects of this happening alongside the events unfolding in Mexico “threatened the settlement at British Honduras with an immediate loss of territory,”¹⁵⁸ Superintendent Seymour on the 12th May 1862, executed Her Majesty’s Letter Patent and declared the settlement at British Honduras (i.e. Belize) a colony, and immediately took the oath as Lieutenant Governor of the same.¹⁵⁹

Lincoln’s Colony

Great Britain declaring Belize an official British colony did not provoke any objection from the United States. The existing historiography of the territorial dispute treats this response somewhat matter-of-factly. Yet, the impetus for this was anything but, and was related to the slavery issue in the United States. President Abraham Lincoln, facing a possible Confederacy victory in the Civil War, undertook measures which were arguably aimed at winning British sympathies for the Union’s cause. The Lyon-Seward Treaty concluded between the Lincoln administration and Great Britain on the 25th April 1862 for instance, was clearly aimed at “winning British sympathies for the North,” and it achieved this.¹⁶⁰ The convention agreed

¹⁵⁶ Copy of Proposal by Lord John Russell relative to negotiation of a convention with Mexico to settle the norther border of British Honduras, n.d., F.O. 15/114, 320.

¹⁵⁷ To Earl Russell, No. 27, Confidential, Guatemala, August 2, 1862, F.O. 15/117, 137.

¹⁵⁸ Mr Seymour to Mr Fontescue, Copy, London, 25th April 1861, F.O. 15/143, 16.

¹⁵⁹ Lieutenant Governor Seymour to His Excellency, G. B. Matthew, June 26, 1862, *ABH III*, 247.

¹⁶⁰ December 1, 1862: Second Annual Message, Transcript, Presidential Speeches: Abraham Lincoln, URL <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-1-1862-second-annual-message>

earlier that month in the wake of the *Trent Affair*, concerned the right of search of vessels involved in the trade in African slaves.¹⁶¹ This gave President Lincoln the assurance to issue, almost immediately after the Battle of Antietam in September of that year, an executive order announcing his intention to proclaim emancipation if the Confederate states did not return to the Union within three months.¹⁶² These events notwithstanding, it was Lincoln's other initiative regarding the proposed colonization of freed blacks in Central America that explains the United States' apparent apathy towards Britain's conversion of Belize to an official British colony.

Early into his term as President of the United States, and with the country headed towards civil war, Abraham Lincoln sought to relocate freed blacks and African slaves to other countries and territories.¹⁶³ Lincoln had been a proponent of black colonization for some years, and from the mid-1850s publicly supported the notion as a member of the American Colonization Society.¹⁶⁴ The idea of strategically using black colonization as one means of preventing European control of areas in Central America located near to possible trans-isthmian canal routes therefore was not new to Lincoln. As Thomas Schoonover argues, "the promoters of black colonies often regarded their projects as commercial ventures and the U.S. government emphasized the twin goal of establishing national security and of finding a suitable

¹⁶¹ Taylor Milne, "The Lyons-Seward Treaty of 1862," in *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 38, No. 3 (Apr. 1933), 511.

¹⁶² It appears British agents had learnt of Lincoln's plans for this eventuality, which he had finished drafting by either March or April 1862, after he pushed through legislation in Congress proposing to pay United States slave owners for voluntarily freeing slaves. "Op-ed: Emancipation Proclamation a Huge Risk," September 24, 2012, *Talk of the Nation podcast*, available at <https://www.npr.org/2012/09/24/161696144/op-ed-emancipation-proclamation-a-huge-risk?t=1572020252226>

¹⁶³ Chapman, "The Mission of Elisha O. Crosby to Guatemala, 1861-1864," 275-286.

¹⁶⁴ Phillip Magness, "Lincoln and Colonization," *Essential Civil War Curriculum*, online article, available at <https://www.essentialcivilwarcurriculum.com/lincoln-and-colonization.html>. Also, Michael Vorenberg, "Abraham Lincoln and the Politics of Black Colonization," *Journal of the Abraham Lincoln Association*, Vol. 14, No. 2 (Summer 1993), 22-45.

home for blacks.”¹⁶⁵ While black colonization presented an ideal opportunity for United States expansion into Central America, the need to “check European [particularly French] influence in that area,”¹⁶⁶ prompted the United States Minister to Guatemala, Elisha Crosby, to argue for accelerating the black colonization program in order to “block the Franco-Mexican move into Central America.”¹⁶⁷

British Honduras (i.e., Belize), like Chiriqui (in Panama) and Guatemala in Central America, had been considered by the Lincoln administration for black colonization from as early as 1861—even before he formally announced his colonization program to a cohort of free blacks at the White House—and by Lincoln himself, possibly from as early as the mid-1850s.¹⁶⁸ This was because Central America, and these locations particularly, presented not only cost but also strategic advantages over Africa.¹⁶⁹ In the case of Belize however, the ongoing Caste War in Mexico’s Yucatan was a concern, especially for Lincoln’s Secretary of State William Seward, more so after the renewal of Mexico’s territorial claim to Belize by the then government of Mexico. Nonetheless, hardly one month after Lincoln took office in 1861,

¹⁶⁵ Schoonover, “Misconstrued Mission...,” 609. For a debate of the commercial thesis see Tinsley Lee Spraggins, *Economic Aspects of Negro Colonization during the Civil War*, (American University, 1957) digitized 11 September 2008.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, 610; Chapman, “The Mission of Elisha O. Crosby...,”; Magness, “Lincoln and Colonization,”; Vorenberg, “Abraham Lincoln ...,”.

¹⁶⁷ Schoonover, 611.

¹⁶⁸ Following the *Dred Scott* incident, Lincoln spoke openly about black colonization needs. Speech at Springfield, 26 June 1857, available at URL <http://www.mrlincolnandfreedom.org/pre-civil-war/dred-scott/speech-at-springfield-june-26-1857/>. Lincoln also mentioned the issue in his first annual address in 1861. See “December 3, 1861: First Annual Message,” Transcript, available at URL <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/december-3-1861-first-annual-message>

¹⁶⁹ In 1816 the American Colonization Society, fearing a race problem in the United States resulting from the more than “1.5 million negroes that were in the [country],” put forward plans for returning them to Africa. By the 1830s, thousands of negroes had been sent to Liberia. Charles I. Foster, “The Colonization of Free Negroes, in Liberia, 1816-1835,” *The Journal of Negro History* 38, no. 1 (1953), 41-66. The black colonization program led to a legal issue in the United States with the *Amistad Case of 1839*, the basis for the 1997 Steven Spielberg film *Amistad*. For a recent study of the impact of this on citizenship in Liberia see Naomi Anderson Whittaker, “On Racialized Citizenship: The History of Black Colonization of Liberia,” *CERS Working Paper 2015*, <https://cers.leeds.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/sites/97/2016/04/On-Racialized-Citizenship-The-History-of-Black-colonialism-in-Liberia-Naomi-Whittaker.pdf>.

Elisha Crosby was instructed by Lincoln himself to investigate more fully the prospects of black colonization in Guatemala.¹⁷⁰ By this time, the idea of colonization of British Honduras was already being batted about. To be sure, in 1860 the Belize merchant James Grant had offered land in the southern part of Belize between the Sibun and Sarstoon rivers for sale to Aaron Columbus Burr of New York, adopted son of former United States President Aaron Burr, and Burr in turn, had attempted to offload this on the Lincoln administration for use for in its colonization-of-freed-blacks initiative.¹⁷¹

However, the Lincoln administration did not authorize the colonization program for Belize until 1863 (consistent with U.S. advantages in Panama, Lincoln's preference had been for Chiriqui), by which time Belize was already an official British colony. The timing of Lincoln's assent to the Belize program was not insignificant, as the United States really required that the status of Belize be settled before it could proceed with any plans for resettling freed blacks there. As President Lincoln indicated during his annual message in December 1862

I have declined to move any such colony to any state without first obtaining the consent of its government, with an agreement on its part to receive and protect such emigrants in all the rights of freemen; and I have at the same time offered to the several States situated within the Tropics, or having colonies there, to negotiate with them, subject to the advice and consent of the Senate, to favor the voluntary emigration of persons of that class to their respective territories, upon conditions which shall be equal, just, and humane.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Chapman, "The Mission of Elisha O. Crosby to Guatemala, 1861-1864," 277. Chapman shows that part of Crosby's assignment was securing agreement from Guatemala (and the other Central American republics) for relocating freed blacks from the United States to that country and that when he left Washington D.C. in April 1861 to take up his post, he carried instructions from Lincoln to "arrange for a colony of free blacks in Guatemala." However, the matter of possible colonization of freed blacks in Guatemala was being explored two years or more before Crosby was even selected for the mission.

¹⁷¹ Coryell, "The Lincoln Colony": Aaron Columbus Burr's Proposed Colonization of British Honduras," *Civil War History*, Volume 43, Number 1 (March 1997), 5-16.

¹⁷² President Abraham Lincoln, Second Annual Message, Transcript, footnote 152 above.

By then large numbers of blacks had been displaced by the Civil War,¹⁷³ and following the declaration of emancipation many were considering emigrating.¹⁷⁴ Actually, as Phillip Magness points out, it was “only three weeks after the Emancipation Proclamation [that] Lincoln approached Lord Lyons, the British minister to the USA, to discuss the prospects of colonization within the British West Indies.”¹⁷⁵ At this point, Belize was officially a British ‘West Indian’ colony, and therefore met the necessary pre-conditions described by Lincoln to receive freed blacks and emancipated slaves. More importantly though, with Belize’s status as a British colony secure, the Lincoln administration was now free to pursue its Civil War era objective of black colonization there, albeit through “a crown backed colonial land company.” This was the reason why the United States government did not protest when Great Britain converted Belize to an official British colony.

Conclusions

Great Britain’s agreement of the Wyke-Aycinena Treaty of 1859 with Guatemala was not a *fait accompli*. The convention failed to settle the boundaries between the British settlement at Belize and Guatemala, despite President Buchanan’s pronouncement of satisfaction that the differences with Great Britain over the Central American question were reconciled,¹⁷⁶ and produced a long running dispute between Great Britain and Guatemala.¹⁷⁷ The root cause of this dispute—the provisions of Article 7 of the treaty related to the construction of a cart-road—was introduced because Charles Wyke, Great Britain’s negotiator

¹⁷³ Magness, “The British Honduras Colony...,” 44.

¹⁷⁴ President Abraham Lincoln, Second Annual Message. After the Civil War almost 200 confederates and their families migrated to Punta Gorda in southern Belize (part of the area disputed by Guatemala). See Donald C. Simmons, Jr., *Confederate Settlements in British Honduras*, (McFarland & Company, 2001).

¹⁷⁵ Magness, “The British Honduras Colony...,” 43.

¹⁷⁶ Annual Message of the President of the United States, 36th Congress, 1st Session, Senate Document No. 2, 19th December 1859, in “*Compilation of Executive Documents*,” 1134.

¹⁷⁷ Belize inherited that dispute from Great Britain when it gained its independence in 1981.

for the convention, took up where Frederick Chatfield left off, and collaborated with the Guatemalan Foreign Minister in order to try and extend Great Britain's influence in the Central American isthmus. Pedro de Aycinena on the other hand, was trying to secure British financing for a project which he believed would help to restore Guatemala's regional predominance while at the same time undercut Honduras and Nicaragua positions in the region. When the Guatemalan government tried to influence a change in the proposed route from the port at Izabal to the port at Santo Tomás, the Foreign Office stepped in and pulled back official thinking and policy over the matter. This shift, and not the financial cost, was the real reason Great Britain refused to pay the £50,000 eventually agreed by Guatemala towards the cart-road project, even though it ultimately meant that the issue of the boundaries between Belize and Guatemala would be left unsettled. For Great Britain however, settling the boundaries of Belize was subordinated to the former's wider objective of maintaining British influence in the Central American isthmus.

Belize's conversion to an official British colony in 1862 was likewise not a *fait accompli*. Contrary to the generally accepted interpretation of the existing body of literature on this occurrence, this event was not the inevitable culmination of a colonial process of formal empire building, nor was it the product of British opportunism relative to the United States being distracted by the Civil War taking place in that country. Instead, this chapter has shown that the impetus for Great Britain converting Belize to an official British colony resulted out of fear that Napoléon III's Franco-Mexican empire would expand southward into Guatemala and from there deeper into Central America and thereby subvert British interests in the isthmus. Faced with the prospect of this happening Great Britain officially annexed Belize to forestall

French expansion into the region.¹⁷⁸ The decision to annex Belize was reactive, but with the mahogany and entrepôt trades on the decline, Belize's strategic value had diminished somewhat and as such Great Britain was no longer able to project informal influence from the settlement to safeguard its national interests. The whole event though, was characteristic of the vacillations which marked British policy towards Central America in the middle of the nineteenth century, what Richard Huzzey aptly described as the "impossibility of balancing contradictory impulses to preserve prosperity, peace and power in the Americas."¹⁷⁹

That Great Britain finally converted Belize into a colony at the back of the decline of both the Belize mahogany trade and Belize's entrepôt trade with Central America reinforces the hypothesis advanced by this study that Belize's salience to Great Britain, while it was tangible value, was not based on the value of the territory's natural resources (i.e. mahogany), nor on the value of the commerce with Central America per se. Rather Belize held strategic value for Great Britain relative to the latter's expansion in Central America. In other words, it was the extension of British influence in Central America which the combination of these factors afforded Great Britain, that shaped British foreign policy behaviour over the matter of Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize during the period under consideration in this study. This line of argument runs contrary to the notion held out by Rory Miller and other historians that British Honduras (i.e., Belize) was a "relatively insignificant colony."¹⁸⁰

Belize's significance to British expansion in Central America continued after 1863. Meanwhile, the impasse over Article 7 between Great Britain and Guatemala has persisted. On

¹⁷⁸ Huzzey argues that Great Britain was similarly motivated in Canada later in the decade. For a discussion of this see Richard Huzzey, "Manifest Dominion: The British Empire and the Crises of the Americas in the 1860s," chapter in *American Civil Wars: The United States, Latin America, Europe, and the Crisis of the 1860s*, (ed.) by Don H. Doyle, (University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 90.

¹⁷⁹ Huzzey, 99.

¹⁸⁰ Miller, *Great Britain and Latin America...*, 13

one hand, Guatemala insisted that the British government making good on its obligations relative to the cart-road was a *sine qua non* for any settlement of the territorial dispute. Conversely, the British government denied that Guatemala ever held rights to the territory between the Sibun and Sarstoon rivers in Belize.¹⁸¹ For Guatemala, the matter of the cart-road or transit route through that country is still very much a national development priority and matter of national pride and ‘national security’. In 1871, Guatemala took a liberal turn ending almost three decades of conservative rule in the country and for several decades the issue of the territorial dispute took a back seat, but, with the growth of the Guatemalan coffee industry, the matter of constructing a communications and port on the Atlantic remained a high priority and eventually a railroad running from Puerto Barrios to Guatemala City was inaugurated in 1908.¹⁸² Meanwhile, after 1863 Great Britain found itself continually implicated in the ongoing Caste War in the Yucatan, and this continued to present territorial and other security issues for Belize. This diminished significantly after Napoléon III was ‘forced’ to end French occupation of Mexico in 1867, and the British government maintained that Mexico had no claims to Belize’s territory.¹⁸³ After a break in diplomatic relations between Great Britain and Mexico, this was restored in 1884 and thereafter the territorial issue between these two parties was settled. The territorial dispute with Guatemala however, still endures.

¹⁸¹ Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History of British Honduras...*, 131.

¹⁸² Anderson, “The Development of Export Transportation in Liberal Guatemala, 1871-1920,” 1.

¹⁸³ Scarlett to Ramirez, 1 December 1865, F.O. 15/144B.

Conclusions

This study established that Great Britain did not settle the territorial dispute over Belize in the middle of the nineteenth century because it regularly subordinated doing so to the wider objective of maintaining British paramountcy in Central America. After the region's independence in 1821, the entrepôt trade and merchant credit services provided by British merchant houses established in Belize alongside Belize's control of the coastal shipping for Guatemala on the Atlantic seaboard enabled Great Britain to commercially penetrate the Central American isthmus. Belize itself however, offered nothing in the way of markets, and though the settlement still had a few valuable stands of mahogany, the mahogany trade (like the logwood trade before that) was, in absolute terms, only a miniscule part of overall British overseas trade. Moreover, the British government continued to deny requests from the settlers at Belize to change the status of the settlement to that of a colony. Nevertheless, Belize was not "insignificant" to Great Britain in Central America during the nineteenth century, but Belize's value was strategic rather than economic.¹ In other words, while the woodcutters were interested in mahogany, Great Britain's policy in Belize was tied to sustaining British influence and to forestalling European (particularly French) and United States expansion in the Central American isthmus.

As chapter 1 of this study showed, Great Britain's policy vis-à-vis Belize in the nineteenth century did not take shape until the 1820s, when, following Central American independence, Belize's strategic value to Great Britain shifted, then increased significantly. This shift was unplanned, and during the early years of Central America's independence, the

¹ Rory Miller argues that British Honduras was a "relatively insignificant colony," thereby promulgating Aldous Huxley's claim in 1934 that Belize "has no strategic value." Miller, *Great Britain and Latin America...*, 13.

British settlement at Belize was not positioned to support British expansion in the Central American isthmus. However, from around 1824, and certainly after the region seceded from Mexico, Belize gradually emerged as an entrepôt for British trade with Central America; a centre for British merchant credit services to Guatemalan businesses; and the main shipping port on the Atlantic. The combination of these attributes helped establish Belize's utility to Great Britain's imperial project in Central America and enabled Great Britain to "exercise a preponderant influence among foreign powers"² there for decades. It also allowed the British merchant houses in Belize to control Central America's trade in indigo and cochineal. These remarkable feats were accomplished, as Robert Naylor pointed out, without the benefit of a treaty of commerce with Central America, and often despite a lack of support from the British government. The British government however, frequently intervened when the 'national interest' of Great Britain was at stake.

Belize's emergence as the bridgehead of Great Britain's empire in Central America in the nineteenth century followed on the heels of France and the United States separately attempting to establish their own influence in the region after Spain's colonial empire collapsed. This study showed that the former outcome was not a direct response to the rise of free trade principles in Great Britain, but that it nonetheless coincided with developments in London involving, on one hand, changes in "British politico-economic thought" which engendered a preference for 'informal empire', particularly in Latin America, among other regions;³ and on the other hand, shifts in "the trading and financial activities of London merchant bankers"⁴ and houses which engendered "the adoption of free trade policies from the

² Naylor, "The British Role in Central America...", 361.

³ Paquette, "The intellectual context of British...", 77.

⁴ Llorca-Jaña, "Shaping Globalization: London's Merchant Bankers...", 469.

1820s onwards.”⁵ In the search for foreign markets for British manufacturing and merchant credit services that these changes produced, Belize took on new significance to Great Britain. This study also shows that in this process, Belize was not itself the focus of this new thrust overseas, but the settlement nonetheless benefited as British merchant houses became established there to take advantage of the gaps left by the collapse of Spain’s colonial trading networks and systems. Several previous decades of successful contraband trade with Spanish America showed that Belize provided an ‘ideal’ location from which to commercially penetrate the isthmus. It also helped that French and United States trade with Central America were not well developed, and this would remain the case for some time. In this way, British policy in Belize during the nineteenth century arguably displayed the same timbre of opportunism from earlier periods.⁶

During the time that Belize was still developing as a trade entrepôt, centre of merchant credit services, and coastal shipping port, the imperial rivalry over influence in Central America between Great Britain, France, and the United States forced Great Britain to follow the latter’s lead in recognizing the independence of the new states in Latin America. Thus, Great Britain recognized Gran Colombia and Mexico, two states which adjoined either side of the Central American isthmus but did not officially recognize the UPCA. Although reactive, recognition by Great Britain, in the case of Mexico, was intended to “[establish] a powerful barrier to the influence of the United States.”⁷ Great Britain also used the opportunity presented by the occasion of a treaty of commerce with Mexico to secure Belize’s northern boundaries.⁸ This

⁵ Howe, “Free Trade and the City...,” 392.

⁶ John Darwin contends that British policy exhibited similar tendencies in Peru, Brazil, and China. Darwin, “Imperialism and the Victorians...,” 617 – 618.

⁷ Temperley, “The Later American Policy of George Canning,” 781-782.

⁸ Pappas, James G., “A Discussion of the British-Mexican Treaty of Amity, Commerce and Navigation of December 26th, 1826,” *Master’s Theses. Paper 2183*, (1966), http://ecommons.luc.edu/luc_theses/2183

thesis argues that this was intended to provide a sense of stability to the British merchant houses establishing in Belize, as doing so furthered Great Britain's interests in the Central American region. That aim was almost derailed by Article 15 of the treaty agreed between the two countries, as this provision threatened to usurp British possessory rights in Belize at the time, but quick action by Foreign Secretary Lord Canning prevented this from happening. Otherwise, the treaty of commerce negotiated with Mexico provided no direct trade advantages or other benefits to the Belize merchant houses about their trade with Central America.

Great Britain's hand in Latin America was also forced when France and United States early sent consular agents to ports there to explore commercial opportunities and negotiate treaties of commerce. Again, the Foreign Office responded to this by likewise dispatching commercial agents to Latin American port cities to assess the opportunities for Great Britain in those places, as well as to gauge the political situation of the countries. Among the persons dispatched, Great Britain sent George A. Thompson to Guatemala after he had completed a mission to Mexico. This study found that Thompson's commission to Guatemala provided one of the first instances of the 'man-on-the-ground' propelling British expansion in post-independence Central America. For instance, Thompson's revelation that a communication route through Guatemala was important to that state's political elites prompted Great Britain to contemplate leveraging British possession of Belize to attain geopolitical ambitions in the region. Notably, Thompson 'mapped' Belize's spatial position vis-à-vis the UPCA, and he also assisted Guatemala with marking out its political boundaries. This latter collaboration exposed a certain degree of intellectual influence by Great Britain on Guatemala, in this case for cartography.⁹

⁹ Dym, "More calculated to mislead than inform..." 341.

Meanwhile, in response to the territorial claim to Belize asserted by the government of the UPCA in a treaty agreed with Gran Colombia (a ‘backdoor way’), Superintendent Codd at Belize, in 1826, responded by claiming that the Sarstoon River was the effective boundary line to the south, thereby effectively sanctioning the territorial expansion of the woodcutters.¹⁰ Codd’s actions laid bare the incongruence that existed between decisions on the frontier of Great Britain’s empire and Whitehall. Still, during this early period of British imperial expansion in Central America, when British predominance in the isthmus was not yet fully realized, and when Guatemalan claims to the British settlement at Belize were nascent but the new Republic was still politically unstable, Codd’s actions secured Belize’s role to Great Britain’s imperial project and at the same time laid the foundation for Great Britain’s later position in the isthmus. This interpretation challenges the conventional reading of this event in the historiography of the dispute as reflecting British hankering for seizing colonies.

This study found that once Belize’s position in Great Britain’s ‘world system’ was attained, preserving British commercial predominance in Central America assumed priority for Great Britain. For instance, in 1834 in response to the related incidents of the Guatemalan government ratcheting up its claims to Belize and the Guatemala President issuing land grants to territory in Belize occupied by the British, the Foreign Office sanctioned the declaration of Superintendent Cockburn and the Belize Public Meeting that same year that the Sarstoon River was the southernmost boundary of the settlement. This study showed that the objective of the Foreign Office in this instance was to consolidate Great Britain’s territorial foothold in Belize and not to ‘seize colony’ per se. Great Britain’s failure to follow up this ‘extension of territory’ in Belize between the Sibun and Sarstoon rivers with converting the settlement to an official

¹⁰ Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History...*, 18.

colony, despite requests from the settlers and woodcutters alarmed by Guatemala's sabre rattling to do so, seems to support this conclusion. It also confirms John Darwin's contention that the influence of an 'official mind' wasn't always at play.

In 1839, and thereafter, Belize's utility to British expansion in Central America became more patent. That year, Superintendent McDonald of Belize hoisted the British flag in Roatan in the Bay Islands. This effectively restored British claims to the archipelago and in the process laid the basis for the claim by Great Britain that the Bay Islands were dependencies of Belize. Three years later, McDonald seized the port of San Juan in Nicaragua, ejected the Nicaraguan forces that were stationed there, and revived Great Britain's 'right of protection' over the Mosquito Indians. McDonald accomplished these feats by leveraging Belize's historical linkages to both Roatan and the Mosquito Shore. The Foreign Office subsequently sanctioned these actions when it was felt it was in the 'national interest' to do so. The same was true in 1847, when in response to growing United States interest in a canal project through Nicaragua, the Foreign Office restored a British protectorate over the Mosquito Shore.

As this study showed, clear examples of the Belize issue being subordinated to British expansionary interest in Central America occurred in 1847 and 1850, and again in 1859, but also in earlier decades as well. In the first case, Great Britain's proconsul in Guatemala Frederick Chatfield tacitly leveraged British possession of Belize to subvert a joint attempt by Honduras, Nicaragua, and Salvador to establish a new federation in Central America that would have served as a counterpoise to British expansion. On this occasion Chatfield collaborated with Pedro de Aycinena to have Guatemala oppose the calls for federation and 'ignore' the Belize issue in exchange for British recognition of Guatemalan independence. In the second instance, Sir Henry Bulwer (on the instructions of Lord Palmerston) leveraged Great Britain's possession of Belize to strengthen its position in Central America by declaring the Bay Islands

“dependencies of Belize” just prior to Great Britain and the United States ratifying the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty. Although this caused the United States to label Belize an impediment to United States interests in the region, the tactic allowed Great Britain to forestall United States expansion in the area. Finally, and related to the previous point, the primary objective of Great Britain’s negotiation of the Anglo-Guatemalan treaty was to satisfy the United States demands for removing the Belize impediment to its interests in Central America and not settlement of the boundaries with Guatemala per se. The latter was the upshot of the former, but Great Britain leveraged the occasion of the treaty to extend British influence in the isthmus by manoeuvring free of its entanglement with the United States.

Belize’s experience with the British ‘world system’ in the nineteenth century accords strongly with Gallagher and Robinson’s hypothesis of informal empire – Great Britain did not turn Belize into an official colony until doing so became inevitable for preventing French expansion into Central America. In other words, Belize’s annexation in 1862 was not a case of Great Britain ‘seizing territory’ as part of a plan for formal empire building. As this study demonstrated, Great Britain’s handling of the Belize issue during the period of consideration for this study had “little firmness of imperial purpose.”¹¹ This study also showed that British officials were customarily reactive to the oft changing geo-political situation in Central America. This reality has hitherto been largely neglected in the existing scholarship on the territorial dispute. Thus, the important roles played by British officials in Belize alongside the British proconsuls Chatfield and Wyke in Guatemala in propelling Great Britain’s expansion in the isthmus have hitherto either been missed or misunderstood. The actions of the British officials were not aimed primarily at securing Belize’s borders, but in sustaining British

¹¹ Darwin, “Imperialism and the Victorians...,” 620.

influence in the Central American isthmus. In the absence of a free trade treaty with Central America, Belize was indeed ‘a settlement for a certain purpose.’

By placing Great Britain’s handling of Guatemala’s territorial claim to Belize in the nineteenth century within the context of Great Britain’s imperial project in Central America, this study found that European (mainly Belgian and French) and United States expansion in Central America during the period under consideration in this study, directly affected Great Britain’s policy in Belize in a couple of ways. Firstly, French and United States pretensions in the Central American isthmus forced Great Britain to recognize Mexico and in doing so Great Britain secured Belize’s northern boundaries. Great Britain, however, never recognized the Federation of Central America, and it took another eight years after the Federation collapsed in 1839 before Great Britain recognized Guatemala, and then largely to counter the growing United States influence. Undermining the push by Honduras, Nicaragua, and Salvador to revive a Central American federation was also an objective of Frederick Chatfield, and to achieve this, he collaborated with the Guatemalan government to denounce the calls for a new federation and forego mention of the Belize boundary issue in exchange for negotiating a treaty of commerce with Great Britain.

Secondly, European and United States interest in interoceanic communication (canal, road, and railroad) projects in the isthmus, not only provided significant threats to British paramountcy in Central America during the nineteenth century, because of the potential for such projects to extend French and United States influence, but they also forced Great Britain to defend its rights in Belize. As this study revealed in chapter 5, the real reason Great Britain refused to pay “the paltry sum of £50,000” to settle the matter of the boundaries of Belize was twofold: to avoid a cart-road from Santo Tomás (instead of Izabal) to Guatemala City

subverting Belize's trade entrepôt and coastal shipping roles, and to prevent French expansion southward from Mexico into Central America.

This study demonstrated that European and United States interests in canal projects in Central America, fuelled by Central American promotions of such enterprises after the region's separation from Spain in 1821, significantly shaped Great Britain's policy in Belize. The contract awarded in 1826 by the Central American Federation to a New York company for undertaking construction of a canal route in Nicaragua did not present any challenges to Belize mainly because a lack of funding caused this enterprise to collapse, but the matter placed Great Britain on guard over its position in the region. Conversely, the infrastructure works requirements embedded by Dr Mariano Gálvez in his colonization schemes in the 1830s, led to Belgian expansion in the region. Somewhat ironically, Galvez's colonization schemes used British owned companies, namely the East Coast Company and Colonel Juan Galindo's enterprise, to try and usurp Great Britain in Belize. The use of collaborating elites from Great Britain and parts of the British empire by Latin American countries to subvert British informal empire is a much under studied area, and further studies of this are likely to yield new insights into how resistance to Great Britain's imperial project were mounted. In any event, in the two cases above, Superintendent Cockburn as well as the Foreign Office successfully forestalled any damage to Belize by commencing negotiations of a treaty of commerce with the government of the Federation of Central America. In addition, in the case of Galindo, Superintendent Cockburn rejected, and the Foreign Office sanctioned this action, Galindo's territorial claims to portions of Belize. Yet, as this study showed formal annexation of Belize was not a priority for Great Britain, largely because of the settlement's effectiveness in its trade entrepôt and shipping roles, though Superintendent Cockburn nonetheless found it necessary to assert British control over the Bay Islands.

The awakening of French and United States interest in canal schemes in Central America in the 1840s shifted the calculus for Great Britain there, and directly affected Great Britain's attitude towards Belize. For instance, United States' attention to expansion into Central America led to calls by members of the Polk administration for the complete removal of British presence from the region, including from Belize. The objective of the United States here was to destabilize Belize's efficacy as the base of Great Britain's 'sphere of influence' in the region that covered the Bay Islands and the Mosquito Shore. The United States and France also supported filibuster enterprises in the 1840s and 1850s, the former mainly in Central America and the latter in Mexico, and these destabilized the political conditions which had facilitated British expansion in the isthmus. This study found that the threat of United States expansion in Central America was the impetus for the forward actions of Superintendent McDonald in declaring in 1840 that Belize be governed henceforth 'according to the laws of England' and in his reviving Great Britain's presence in the Mosquito Shore in 1842. It also found that heightened United States interests in a trans-isthmian canal in Nicaragua starting in the second half of the 1840s caused the Foreign Office to draw on the Belize settlement's historical ties with the Mosquito Shore in restoring an official British protectorate in the latter.

The yoking of the Bay Islands to Belize as the latter's dependencies in 1850 succeeded in temporarily forestalling United States influence in the isthmus. At the same time, this subordinated settlement of the Belize issue to Great Britain's wider expansion in the region. Declaring the Bay Islands dependencies of Belize initially enabled Great Britain to maintain its position in the region but doing so almost proved a misstep as this led the United States to label British possession of Belize one of the impediments to United States commercial expansion in Central America and to demand that Great Britain retract to the limits established by the Convention of London of 1786. As this thesis showed, the British government agreed to settle this matter with the United States by negotiating a boundary treaty directly with

Guatemala after the Dallas-Clarendon Treaty negotiations fell to the ground. In so doing however, Great Britain subordinated settlement of the boundaries of Belize to its interest of maintaining British influence in the wider region. Thus, although a boundary treaty with Guatemala was concluded Great Britain had no real appetite for meeting the obligations for the construction of a cart-road that had been set out under the agreed convention. By the time a subsequent treaty was concluded to address some of the constraints Belize was already ‘painted red on the map.’

This study found that Great Britain’s turn to ‘free trade’ starting in the 1820s, and its campaign for abolition of the slave trade in the nineteenth century separately influenced Great Britain’s handling of Guatemala’s territorial claim to Belize. Regarding the former, the way in which this affected Great Britain’s handling of the territorial claim to Belize wasn’t very conspicuous and had to do more with, as Gallagher and Robinson contend, the preference for “extending British influence through free trade.”¹² In other words, Belize benefitted from the ideological shift towards free trade by becoming a centre of commerce, finance and shipping, and this increased the value of the settlement to Great Britain which, in turn fostered Great Britain’s expansion in the region. This factor undoubtedly emboldened different Superintendents of the settlement to propel British expansion by implementing their own forward policies, but at the same time, Belize’s efficacy as a ‘bridgehead’ to the isthmus deepened apathy in Great Britain towards formal annexation of the settlement. Belize therefore remained as a lever for, and itself a part of, Great Britain’s informal empire in Central America. Put differently, there was a calculated interest in keeping the entrepôt trade, merchant credit and shipping roles of Belize viable as this sustained Great Britain’s expansion in the region.

¹² Gallagher and Robinson, “The Imperialism of Free Trade,” 12.

Great Britain's free trade turn though directly affected Belize's mahogany trade. The tariff reductions for mahogany Great Britain introduced in 1826 reduced the margin of preference between Belize mahogany and mahogany imported into Great Britain from all other sources, including from official British colonies.¹³ When the tariffs were reduced again in 1832 this led to a situation whereby mahogany cut outside of Belize was shipped as Belize mahogany. The upshot of this development was that the Belize wood cutters pushed into Central American territory, and a few Belize mahogany merchants such as Marshall Bennett even secured significant concessions in Honduras, Guatemala, and the Mosquito Shore, thereby technically extending Great Britain's territorial reach from Belize. As Robert Naylor rightly contended, "mahogany was a factor in British expansion in Central America in the second quarter of the nineteenth century,"¹⁴ but as this study shows, mahogany was not the reason Great Britain retained possession of Belize. Moreover, in contrast to Naylor's contention that the activities of the mahogany merchants reluctantly involved the British government, this study found that the Foreign Office, arguably, knowingly turned a blind eye to such activities as doing so supported Great Britain's imperial objectives in the region. For instance, Belize woodcutters operating in Honduras extended Great Britain's presence in the region, as did the granting of concessions to British nationals or enterprises by the Guatemalan government of Mariano Gálvez, a tactic that backfired as the concession to Galindo for territory in Belize occupied by the British only steered British officials against allowing this.

Regarding Great Britain's anti-slavery campaign during the nineteenth century, this study showed that the impact of this on Great Britain's handling of the territorial dispute was mixed. The mahogany trade in Belize was affected by the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of

¹³ Bulmer-Thomas and Bulmer-Thomas, *The Economic History of Belize...*, 74.

¹⁴ Naylor, "The Mahogany trade as a factor..."

1807 so that by the 1820s, slaves were no longer being imported into the settlement. The abolition of slavery in 1824 by the newly independent republic of Central America created a strong incentive for the slaves that worked in the logging camps in Belize to escape across the border to Guatemala. This threatened to destabilise Belize's economy and therefore Superintendent Codd issued a stern rebuke of Guatemala's practice of enticing slaves from Belize to escape to Petén. Guatemala's response to this was to link the slavery issue to the boundary issue, and to propose a renewal of the 1783 and 1786 Anglo-Spanish treaties in exchange for extending the limits of Belize.¹⁵ The Guatemalan government of Gálvez also tried to get the slaves from Belize to settle alongside freed blacks in areas proposed for port and road infrastructure schemes in the 1830s, but these were unsuccessful, and this undermined the viability of such projects.

This study argued that the more significant effect of Great Britain's antislavery campaign on the Belize issue had to do with the prospect of relocating emancipated slaves from the United States to Belize. The project for 'resettling liberated Africans' in Belize which first started in the mid-1830s after Great Britain passed the Slave Emancipation Act,¹⁶ resettled mostly freed blacks from Cuba. However, plans by the Lincoln administration in the 1860s for black colonization of freed slaves from the United States in Belize and Central America gave the Foreign Office tacit assurance that converting Belize to an official colony was a way of countering the threat of French expansion into Guatemala and the Central American isthmus. Converting Belize to an official colony however was not the result of a "conscious plan" or

¹⁵ Humphreys, *The Diplomatic History...*, 30 - 31.

¹⁶ Tim Soriano, "Promoting the Industry of Liberated Africans in British Honduras, 1824-41," chapter in Richard Anderson and Henry B. Lovejoy, (eds.), *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807-1896*, (Boydell & Brewer, 2020), 365.

imperial design.¹⁷ Historians on Belize often point to the strengthening of the colonial administration of the settlement as evidence of formal empire, but such moves are better understood in terms of British officials ensuring that the settlement was able to support British expansion and interests in Central America. In any event, the black colonization program fell to the ground, but the new comity that had been attained between Great Britain and the United States after Great Britain switched its ‘support’ to the Union no doubt boosted President Abraham Lincoln’s resolve to declare emancipation in 1863. Ironically, following the end of the civil war in the United States, hundreds of Confederate soldiers and their families resettled in Belize in areas previously considered for resettling the freed slaves.¹⁸

This study adds to the literature on the territorial dispute over Belize by shedding new light on Great Britain’s handling of the Guatemalan territorial claim, particularly in relation to different aspects of the 1859 Anglo-Guatemalan treaty, and by clarifying the motivations behind Guatemala’s claim to Belize. Regarding the former, firstly, this study reveals that while the express objective of the Anglo-Guatemalan convention of 1859 was ostensibly to settle the boundaries between Belize and Guatemala, the real aim of this was to resolve a crucial point of disagreement between Great Britain and the United States relative to the latter’s plans for expanding its own influence in Central America. In other words, settling the boundaries of Belize was *not* the priority for Great Britain, settling the disagreement with the United States over Central America was. But it shows that Belize was vital to Great Britain’s imperial project in Central America in the nineteenth century, in much the same way the settlement was key to

¹⁷ This is consistent with Darwin’s argument that Great Britain’s imperial system “emerged by default and not from design.” See John Darwin, *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System, 1830-1970*, (Cambridge University Press, 2009).

¹⁸ Simmons Jr., *Confederate Settlements in British Honduras*, 10-11.

Great Britain penetrating Spain's monopoly of commerce in Spanish America in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

Secondly, this study provides an alternative explanation for the inclusion of Article 7 in the 1859 convention. Contrary to the widely promulgated account in the historiography that Article 7 was included in the treaty on the cognizance of the British negotiator as compensation to the Guatemalans, this study found that in fact, months before Wyke was appointed as the negotiator for the Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty, the Foreign Office had contemplated funding construction of a cart-road through Guatemala as a possible carrot for concluding the treaty. This is significant, as it suggests that Wyke was aware of the Foreign Office's strategy for getting Guatemala to conclude the treaty. The point here is that the Foreign Office wanted to release Great Britain from the 'conditions' demanded by the United States to settle their disagreement with Great Britain over Central America. Furthermore, the study further found that Wyke agreed to inclusion of Article 7 in the treaty not as compensation but because he was trying to collaborate with his close friend Pedro de Aycinena to secure British financing for the cart-road project. British investments in the cart-road would have helped the Consulado to attain their decades' old objective of obtaining a communications route through Guatemala. At the same time, new British investments for the cart-road project would have satisfied Wyke's own ambitions for extending British influence in Guatemala.

Thirdly, this study showed that the project for a cart-road through Guatemala (the main object of Article 7) was not something new but in fact formed part of a long-term goal of the Guatemalan Consulado and political elites, especially the Casa de Aycinena, reaching back to the closing decades of the Spanish colonial system. The cart-road project took on new significance to Guatemala after Central American independence, particularly after Nicaragua and Honduras emerged as preferred sites for locating trans-isthmian communications projects.

This is because locating any trans-isthmian routes through either of the two states threatened to undermine Guatemala's dominance in the region. As Brockmann contended, a communication through Guatemala formed part of the imagination of Guatemalan "exponents of enlightenment reform in the eighteenth century" and sought to redress Guatemala's marginalization in the "networks of trade and political power."¹⁹

Finally, this study showed that contrary to the conventional explanation in the historiography of the territorial dispute, Great Britain's failure to meet the obligations under the Article 7 provision was not because the estimated monetary costs of the cart-road project were too high or unaffordable, but because British officials wanted to prevent construction of a road and port that would further undermine any residual value Belize held as a 'bridgehead' for British influence in Central America.

Regarding the reasons for the crystallization of Guatemala's claim to Belize in the 1830s, this study showed that a, perhaps *the*, key motivation for this had to do with the Guatemalan political elites' fear of losing the influence on, and being usurped by, Honduras as the dominant state in the Central American isthmus. This interpretation challenges the existing historiography of the territorial dispute which holds that Guatemala's claim to Belize was based on the former's assertion that Belize constituted part of the colonial territory of the Kingdom of Guatemala inherited from Spain in 1821. As this study pointed out however, the 'inheritance claim' is not credible because, as Dym argued, Central America did not emerge from colonialism with its political border (internal and external) clearly defined. In other words, Guatemala could not realistically have claimed 'inheritance' of Belize from Spain at the point of independence as Guatemala did not know exactly what areas such territory in fact included.

¹⁹ Brockmann, *The Science of Useful Nature...*, 2, 9.

Guatemalan officials needed the British agent George A. Thompson to help with mapping its political borders in 1826 and Guatemala did not produce a first map of the country until 1832, and this was based on Thompson's maps. The fact that the government of Guatemala never predicated its territorial claim to Belize on the ethnic or nationalist value of the territory, that is, that Belize formed part of the historical domain of the *Indio* population or indigenous Maya of Guatemala, seems to support this interpretation.

This study also makes an important contribution to the literature on British imperial history. Belize has traditionally been considered part of Great Britain's formal empire. However, this study has demonstrated that during the nineteenth century, although Belize was a political possession of Great Britain, in many other aspects its relationship to the British empire was akin to informal empire. Belize's experience as part of the 'British world system' during the period under consideration in this study supports John Darwin's argument that "British expansion had no master plan" and that invariably such expansion was propelled by the forward policies of British diplomats on the frontiers of the empire.²⁰ Additionally, the Belize case shows that Great Britain's 'informal empire' extended into the early Victorian period, and that Belize was part of an exclusive group of British overseas possessions which "powered British expansion elsewhere."²¹ Members of the old oligarchy in Belize were important to the establishment of new merchant houses in the settlement after 1821 and several of them became partners in the new enterprises that became established in the settlement during the 1820s and 1830s. The territorial activities of the British woodcutters in the settlement also provided a useful forefront for British expansion, not only in Belize but also in Central America. For Great Britain, the Belize imperial experience in the pre-Victorian and early

²⁰ Darwin, *The Empire Project...*, 3.

²¹ Knight, "Great Britain and Latin America," 122.

Victorian periods exhibited many of the contours of British expansion that occurred in the mid and late Victorian periods.

This study also supports the growing body of literature on the issues-approach to territorial disputes. Firstly, the findings of the study support Paul Diehl's hypothesis that territory is a highly salient issue in international politics.²² The settlement at Belize was important to Great Britain for its imperial project in Central America; to Guatemala for re-asserting its dominance in the region; and to the United States for its expansion in the isthmus. Thus, after Central American independence, the matter of British possession of the territory became a salient issue the relations between these states. The Belize case also supports Hensel and Mitchell's thesis that territorial claims driven by tangible concerns are easier to resolve peacefully.²³ As mentioned already in this study, Guatemala's territorial claim to Belize based on historical possession is tenuous as Guatemala did not know exactly the territory it inherited from Spain. Moreover, the fact that the claim was not based on intangible issues (ethnic or nationalist factors) lent to Guatemala's readiness in the 1850s and 1860s to settle the matter with Great Britain. Thirdly, the findings of this study validate Paul Hensel's hypothesis that how countries manage disputes over territory is directly related to the way in which they value the disputed territory.²⁴ In other words, the salience of the disputed territory as a foreign policy issue to Great Britain mattered. Belize's value to British expansion in Central America during the nineteenth century directly influenced how Great Britain handled the matter, but the territory itself was not the foreign policy priority for Great Britain at the time, expansion was.

²² Diehl, Paul F. "What Are They Fighting For? The Importance of Issues in International Conflict Research." *Journal of Peace Research* 29 (1992): 333-344.

²³ Paul Hensel and Sarah McLaughlin Mitchell, "Issue indivisibility and territorial claims," *GeoJournal*, 64, (2005), 275-285. Also, Daniel J. Dzurek, "What makes territory important: tangible and intangible dimensions," *GeoJournal*, Vol 64, No. 4, (2005), 263-274.

²⁴ Paul R. Hensel, "Contentious Issues and World Politics: The Management of Territorial Claims in the Americas, 1816-1992," *International Studies Quarterly* 45, (Mar. 2001), 81-109.

Consequently, Great Britain subordinated settlement of the Belize issue to its wider objective of maintaining British influence in the region.

Finally, the findings of this study support Wiegand's thesis that territory can have both economic and strategic value, and that territory can be valuable within issues (i.e., it can have specific values).²⁵ The study showed that in addition to having natural resources (mahogany, and before that logwood) that British merchants exploited for economic gain, the settlement's location as part of the Central American mainland and its geographical location on the Atlantic coast ascribed a certain strategic value to the territory as well, particularly for Great Britain, but also for Guatemala. Thus, the conclusion of this study that the economic contribution of the mahogany trade to Great Britain's overall economic performance was insignificant and therefore not the driver of British policy towards Belize, bears out Wiegand's argument that territory can be valuable within issues. This is momentous, as while the findings of the study confirm the prevailing assumption of the existing historiography on Belize that the settlement held tangible value for Great Britain, it also revealed that that value was historically based on strategic, and not, economic factors. This distinction has significant implications for current and future interpretations and historical analysis of the territorial dispute over Belize, as well as for our understanding of Belize's place historically in Great Britain's empire project. In short, the notion that Belize was always part of Great Britain's formal empire is completely turned on its head.

More than 160 years after the Wyke-Aycinena (or Anglo-Guatemalan) Treaty of 1859, the boundaries of Belize with Guatemala remain a highly contentious issue. Since Guatemala revived the territorial claim in the 1930s, all attempts for resolving the matter have failed

²⁵ Krista E. Wiegand, *Enduring Territorial Disputes*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

despite the adoption of confidence building measures, perhaps because, as Wiegand contends, ‘a nationalist discourse now frames any settlement attempts’.²⁶ Yet, Belize and Guatemala continue to maintain settlement strategies which guarantee that negotiations of the matter will remain firmly entrenched within the “framework of nineteenth century colonial concepts of sovereignty.”²⁷ This approach has consistently failed to place new negotiating value on the table. Still, both Belize (which inherited the territorial dispute with Guatemala from Great Britain when Belize gained its independence in 1981) and Guatemala continue to dig in their heels in the proverbial sand at the border. Expanding Belize’s understanding of Great Britain’s motivations behind its handling of Guatemala’s territorial claim in the middle of the nineteenth century, especially the reasons for Great Britain’s failure (read refusal) to pay “the paltry sum of £50,000” for the construction of the cart-road ‘from a port on the coast ... to the capital’, hopefully can engender a shift in the way in which the Belizean government and its negotiators approach settlement of the matter.

The current *Corredor Interoceánico de Guatemala* initiative of the Guatemalan government suggest that for the political elites of that country, the matter of an interoceanic corridor to facilitate trade and development remains an important political priority if not still a precondition for Guatemala settling the boundaries of Belize. If that is the case, then perhaps it is timely for Belize’s officials to consider how a modern interoceanic corridor, though not a cart-road, could serve as a key to unlocking settlement of the enduring territorial dispute with Guatemala. Whether the International Court of Justice (ICJ) will take this into consideration is uncertain, but if anything can be gleaned from the joint legal opinion of “four eminent

²⁶ For a discussion of this see Krista E. Wiegand, “Nationalist Discourse and Domestic Incentives to Prevent Settlement of the Territorial Dispute Between Guatemala and Belize,” *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics*, Volume 11, Issue 3 (2005), 349-383.

²⁷ McCorquodale, "Pushing Back the Limitations of Territorial Boundaries," *European Journal of International Law* 12, no. 5 (1 December 2001): 867.

international lawyers” then, it is safe to presume that the matter of Article 7 will certainly be at the centre of the Court’s decision.²⁸ What is also certain is that, despite the recent emotionally charged rhetoric in certain corners of both Belize and Guatemala over the matter of the territorial dispute, the decisions of the separate referenda—Guatemala in 2018 and Belize in 2019 (in Belize)—for referring settlement of the dispute to the ICJ indicate that Belizeans and Guatemalans alike, are, ostensibly, ready to have the matter conclusively settled. It will be interesting to see what the ICJ makes of the whole cart-road factor.

²⁸ Joint Opinion of Sir Elihu Lauterpacht, CBE, QC, Judge Stephen Schwebel, Professor Shabtai Rosenne, and Professor Francisco Orrego Vicuña in *Legal Opinion on Guatemala’s Territorial Claim to Belize*, (Belize: Government Printer, 2002), 5.

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