

ABSTRACT

THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF LAND IN BELIZE "Machete Must Fly"

by
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This thesis analyzes social and economic relations in Crown Colonial Belize through an examination of the use and distribution of land. Access to land is mediated by a range of factors. Two of these - the state and ethnicity - are analyzed in the context of the evolving political economy of Belize.

This involves a close look at the distribution of land: by size and use and between private and national ownership, an examination of the state in the process of land distribution as well as an inquiry into the role of ethnicity in the process of land distribution.

The analysis draws on several theoretical strands, particularly the neo-Marxist framework presented by de Janvry (1981). This framework strengthens under-development theory by positing that the internal dynamics of peripheral economies are important in the process of reproduction and accumulation. It thereby facilitates the analysis of internal dynamics while maintaining the importance of external relationships of domination and dependency.

The findings centre on the role of the state and ethnicity in a context of enduring disarticulation. First, the state played an important role as a mediator in the processes of land distribution and ethnic identification. In the former, this role derived from its position as possessor of approximately one-half of the territory of Belize and the institutionalization of policies and mechanisms to determine access to these lands. The latter role was played out in the colonial policy of establishing "objective" definitions of and differential policies for the various ethnic groups. Secondly, state policy helped to determine the nature of agricultural development through its policies and through the operations of the National Estate. Whereas there was little change in the distribution of private lands, on national lands there was an increase in the proportion of mid-size plots and a reduction in the proportion of small and large plots. Thirdly, the role of ethnicity has varied over time. Whereas in the early colonial period ethnic differentiation was an aspect of colonial policy, in the post-colonial period it also became a determining factor in the political economic process.