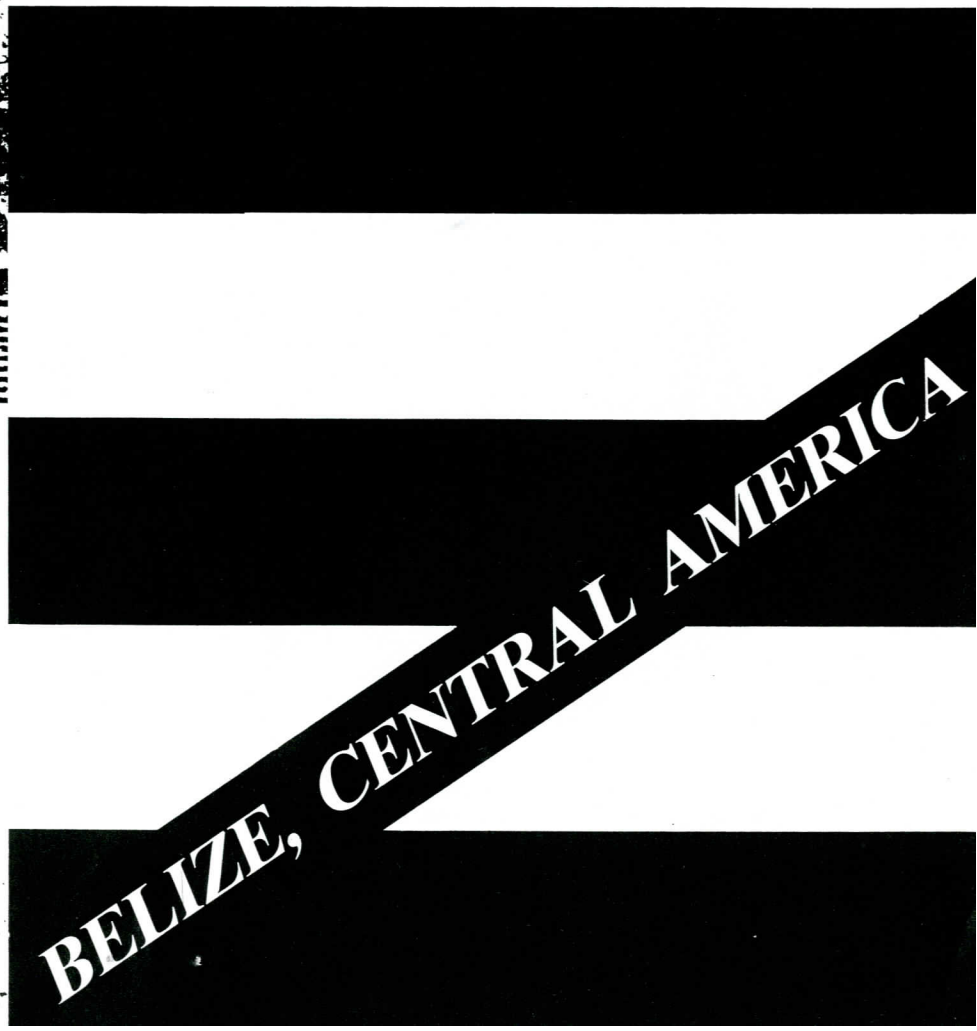


WOMAN SPEAK!

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A NEWSLETTER ABOUT CARIBBEAN WOMEN

No. 22, June 1987



WOMAN SPEAK!

Editor: Nan Peacocke

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WOMAN SPEAK!
Women and Development Unit
Extra-Mural Dept., UWI
Pinelands, St. Michael
BARBADOS

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COVER

Collage with part of cover illustration from AID Policy Paper, Women in Development, 1982 and British Military PR photograph by United Kingdom Land Forces, reprinted in NACLA: Report on the Americas (May/June 1984). Maya pyramid in background.



JADE HEAD of Kinich Ahou, the Maya Sun God, about A.D. 600. Weight 9³/₄ lbs., height 6 in. Discovered at Altun Ha, Belize District. Photograph by the Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto, Canada.

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"We forget that the antithesis of anger, polarization, ugliness and war are things that we create actively. They are not just the absence of tension nor the war against the war-mongers but the making of beauty, the making of understanding, the sharing of different views. We make life as well as death."

Martha Stuart



Rita's children: Marlon, Michelle, Desiree, Dalton, of Belize City.

EDITORIAL

From a satellite or on a map, Central America looks like a foot drawn back to kick something. Belize is in the instep, near the heel. But Belize is not part of Central America. Is it? After all, Belize is part of the Commonwealth, is part of CARICOM, is one of the territories joined to the University of the West Indies. Surely its colonial history has a different face than the faces of Mexico to the north, Guatemala to the west, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Panama?

Yet Belize is like her Anglophone Caribbean sisters only in some features. For one thing, here is land and more land and few people. None of us has a bigger yard, except Guyana. In Belize people live in more distinct ethnic groups speaking Maya, Kekchi, Spanish, English, Garifuna and German. There are even more threads in the tapestry than in the multicultural Caribbean islands. Modern Belizian society did not evolve from a plantation economy, as occurred in much of the British-controlled Caribbean. British settlers and enslaved Africans worked timber rather than sugar in the early centuries of colonisation. The fact is that Belize has become a home to many children of colonialism, even though historically the social discourse has been dominated by urban-based Creoles speaking in English.

This issue attempts to place Belize in the geographical context of Central America where it is seldom seen to be.

Of particular interest are the comments taken from an interview with three Belizian women working in the women's movement. Their observations go some way toward placing Belize in the light of a political reality we in the English-speaking Caribbean ignore to our peril. Belize is our link to understanding the nature of the conflicts in the republics of Central America, and their relationship to the preoccupations of the United States administration. A measure of the growing influence of the USA on Caribbean or Central American options can be taken from the decision to link the development of a tertiary-level institution in Belize, not to the University of the West Indies which has an Extra-Mural Centre in Belize City, nor even to the University of Mexico, but to an institution in the state of Illinois, USA.



Zoila Ellis / BRWA

Cultural Market Day, Belize City, 1986.

BOWAND

RITA'S STORY

Rita Garcia

I joined BOWAND in 1982, and when I was recruited to join I wasn't that interested because I was getting into a keep fit class at the 'Y'. What happened was that I had this problem with my husband of taking him to court. I went to a lawyer to get information about what steps I should take. The lawyer said, "Well, you won't have the amount of money that I will charge so I will send you to legal aid. Do you know where legal aid is?" I said, "No". He gave me the directions. "Go directly there and you will speak to Miss Zoila Ellis."

So I went in and met Zoila and I sat down and spoke to her about my problems, seeking maintenance for the children. I and my husband were separated and he didn't want to give money for them, so I decided to take further measures to take him to court. Well, Zoila worked on that and quick time the date for the court was set. The magistrate ordered him to give main-

tenance. After the order was sent to deduct the amount from his salary I didn't have any problems getting the money. I was still lucky because there are a whole lot of other men who are not in a situation like that where you could not really do very much about it, whatever the magistrate rules.

Well, Zoila told me about this organisation she was involved with and she asked me to join them at their meeting that Friday. So I said, "OK. If I remember". That time I was just getting into my exercising class, so I was more fond of my exercising class because I didn't know what BOWAND was all about. About three weeks after Zoila met me again on North Front Street. She said, "When are you coming? I look out for you the other evening and you lie to me and didn't come." I said, "OK then. When will you have another meeting?" She said, "Every second week in the month."

Again I missed that second meeting then because of my exercise! Anytime you see 4:30 I go to YWCA to get into my class. In November I decided to sit down and speak to Zoila. At the time they were out with their newsletter, *Pataki* (basket, a newsletter about the experiences of rural women). She said, "Would you help us get out these *Pataki*s?" They were preparing for Market Day. I said, "OK then. I would be glad." She said, "If people are interested to buy tell them whatever they want to donate, but don't give them for five cents. You can give them for ten cents." She asked me how many would I like to take along. I said, "Give me fifty for today." On my way to keep-fit I said, "Get you *Pataki*! Get you *Pataki*! So people start to ask me, "What a *pataki*?" I say, "Unno see it here. Read it, man." "How much for this?" To the men I said "shilling", but to the ladies I would say "ten cents".

I sold more at the 'Y'. That time 'Y' was packed with young women doing keep-fit and most of them were friendly. So I just went to them and said, "Market Day is coming up. This is for the occasion of Market Day and I want you all to come and witness it." From there I went to Red Cross meeting. When I went and see Zoila the next day, I said, "I sold all my *Pataki*s. Fifty of them." She said, "How much do you want again?"

I started to go to the meetings. These were planning meetings for Market Day and I was interested in what it was all about. I would go to the office and help with the decorations and getting out letters to business places to ask for help.

Market Day was a great event for me, for the first time I witnessed it. I was out there all day from morning until everything was over. When I saw the people that were out there! There was a group of children from Belmopan who did different kinds of dancing. Then they had the women's group from Dangriga, Lu Fuluri, and there were the other women who came in and brought their produce from Out District.



After that I decided to speak to other women about BOWAND. I told them that if they were interested they could come along with me. I recruited about four new members. Finally two of them started to grumble. They said, "It's boring. Only talk and talk. You come here from 6:30 and they over meeting late and I can't stand . . ." You know, things like that. Another one said, "Well, I like everything about it but I don't like a certain individual there. That certain individual do not like me and I don't like her, and so with that I'm not coming back!" I told her, "You are not coming to her, you're coming to join the group, so I don't think anything is wrong with that." But she decided not to come back. They wouldn't have talked about the problem between them in the group. This was something way back between them. It was personal.

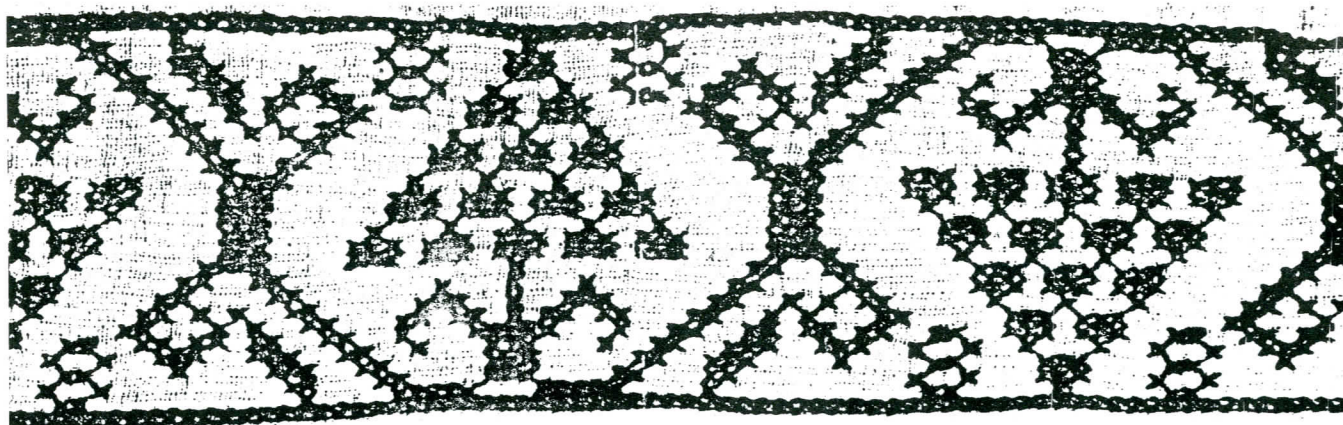
I think what women want to join is an organisation doing something like art or handicraft. Maybe they would want to have meetings, but at the same time they want to do something with their hands. I had spoken to two sisters and they said, "What do you all do there, just talk, talk, talk?" I told them about Market Day and I told them that being a member of an organisation, you get acquainted with other people. You learn something for yourself. But when you ask people if they are interested they say, "Gal, I want to join that ting, but I don't want to go into an organisation wey you no do something." I know they want to say, "Well I going to this meeting but we going to something—sew or something." I'm mostly speaking about those with husbands. They will tell the older child, "I'm going to BOWAND's meeting and I'll be there for two hours, but tell you Daddy whenever he comes in that if he wants to see me he can drop by." Because they are aware of themselves, mostly the ones that have a gentleman. Some of them will say, "I want to go home now because my husband will be in and if he don't meet me at home . . .". That is another matter by itself.

I'm speaking about myself in the sense that I'm not living with my husband. I'm single with my children and I have that more opportunity than them. Sometimes I go strongly to them and say, "Don't be a man's footstool." Especially seeing the condition that they are in. Some of them are still having babies at thirty-five.

Another problem for women is transportation. But you really have to make an effort. Girl, if I have something out there to do and I feel to just sit down here, well that's that. If you want something in life you have to find it.

I will continue my work talking to women about this organisation. And I think BOWAND should continue dealing with women's health problems because this is how women come to talk about personal problems they are having, and I think we should continue dealing with the radio programmes (a series on health presently on air based on a self-help approach to health issues). But maybe we should do another skit (BOWAND did a popular radio play on children's legal right to support from their fathers, called *Maintenance*). If I went to women and said, "Unno no interested to come do one skit 'bout health and so?", then I would want to hear their response.

Belize Central America



Sample of Mayan embroidery work from Toledo District in southern Belize. These strips of needlecraft are stitched to hems, sleeves and shirt fronts.

The Belize Organization of Women and Development is based in the former capital and the largest urban centre, Belize City.

BOWAND's membership comes from (predominantly Creole) women of both the working class and the middle class. The dynamics that emerge reflects a problem of organising which has its source in the social relations among women of our region. And it is to the credit of the organisation that the political nature of this relationship is being brought into the open by its members. The future direction of BOWAND depends on the resolution of this issue of class. The process has just begun. Whether the women come forward with that process has everything to do with what happens not just in BOWAND but in the women's movement, and the nature of its impact on Belizean society.

Diane BOWAND's objective was to become a national organisation, but that didn't work out for a number of reasons. Basically, they didn't have the financial or human resources to reach out to the wider community. In fact, that is a reason the Belize Rural Women's Association was formed, because some members who were living in the rural areas felt that the needs of rural women were not being met and they decided to form their own organisation. And BOWAND decided to focus on the critical problems facing the urban woman that were just not being addressed.

We had a situation developing in BOWAND where a couple of the members who are working class women who needed employment were doing domestic work for other members. Or like a middle class woman who was working at a job and wanted a helper would ask someone in our group who is part of the middle class network to find somebody to do day work. You know this person needs the work and it's like you have to do it, but it's a dilemma. How is it possible to make an exploitative situation work for women? It's like, "You

need the job, I want to get the housework done", but it's the kind of work that is pushed onto women who aren't in a position to do anything else.

Rita That has been a problem and is still a problem. Even though you and that individual meet in one room, talk, yet still that person has that certain instinct in her that she is still beyond you at the point that she is making more money than you and you is her maid! Then there were members who I found in BOWAND when I got there who stopped coming to the meetings after Market Day. At times I would sit down and wonder why they did not come back.

Diane Here we say we have this organisation that is looking at the problems affecting women, and we are in this group together. I am certainly in a better situation than you are in terms of being able to find a job and take care of myself and do some of the things I want to do. Do you think this organisation can exist with these two different kinds of women?

Rita If we could get the majority of women in my rank we would have to build a more stronger foundation.

Nan You could have the majority, but if you are seeing the middle class women as having the leadership and the skills, whose organisation is that and how do you ensure that it is working in your interests?

Rita We are quite capable. But me or Irene or other members should be trained to take positions of responsibility.

Irene You have first class, middle class and the lower class a people, fighting for survival. I am trying to check out a way forward because I want to change my situation. I do domestic work because I 'pon that basic level. I don't have no qualification that I could say I could go and be a secretary.

BOWAND

'MY HOUSE' OF SOCA

Diane Haylock

When women would come to us asking about this sewing and handicraft, we were faced with this dilemma. We are not that kind of organisation. There are a number of women's organisations who are happy to do that work. But at the same time we had to deal with the fact that this is where women were at. So we talked about it. At the time we were looking at some of the concerns that individual groups had. We also wanted to do something for International Youth Year in 1985 (the following year). We thought we would begin to address the concerns of young women because a few of us were teachers and were faced on a daily basis with the problems that young people face. We had young women who dropped out of school because they were pregnant and generally carried this lack of self-confidence and self-esteem, this total absence of a sense of who they are. The SOCA programme was designed to allow a member of BOWAND who was a seamstress, who had the skill, to share it with some young women since that was going to be a target group for us in 1985.

BOWAND is an affiliate member of Associated Country Women of the World, and they came to Belize in 1984 to meet with women's organisations here. They are into traditional skills and they encouraged the organisation to send the project proposal that would provide the money for training these young women, give them some skill that would help them.

The proposal met their criteria. But when the time came to administer this project a lot of us had some fundamental concerns. We thought, here is this money to do this. We can do what they want but we can also do work that we want to do. We decided we would teach the skills, the sewing, the arts and crafts but we want to add other dimensions that would address other problems that young people are facing—lack of self-confidence, the way women relate to each other, competition between women and the health aspect of it. Women don't know their body, don't know what's happening to them. Young women are getting pregnant. There's all this controversy about birth control. There's so many types of birth control and nobody is providing them with that information. These were issues that were important to the organisation.

Then we were thinking in terms of women developing a skill to go out there and work. So you teach them to sew. Is that going to make money for them? So we added a business part to it. And we added a language skills part. We also put in a textile design component. I think it was a very ambitious project. We tried to do all this in three months and there's no way you can do all that, though we were all very excited about it. Where were we going to work? A member of the organisation had an old broken wooden house. We were able to build into the proposal to ACWW some money to refurbish the place. At least we could make the house habitable.

Then, since we had added all these other components, we had to get people to do the work voluntarily. I decided to use my theatre skills. We used a lot of theatre games bringing out different aspects of the problems of working with each other, and how women perceive each other as women. We got the Health Education Bureau to assist, somebody from CARE who helped us. A VSO who was a graphic artist would come in to do textile design. We had to pay somebody to do the language skills and sewing.

In March of 1986 we launched "My House". We set it up with a resource centre, an office and a little workshop space and we also started the SOCA project. The name was a play on the word 'soca'. We wanted the young women to think in terms of this being fun. Women don't have to be fighting each other all the time. We can work together. Again emphasising collectivity and the spirit of co-operation for collective action.

Initially we were thinking of young women who were single mothers. The age group, we said would be between 15 and 24. That was another problem; the space is small and we wanted people to be comfortable so we decided to accept 15. We didn't have much money to advertise but we put it on the radio and in the newspapers.

It was a difficult decision to choose from the thirty applicants because all the women who came really needed it. They were saying that they wanted to learn a skill to get a job, or a better job. We decided we would give priority to young women who already had children and were single and if we had spare we would accept the others.



Interestingly enough only about four or five women who did have children did apply. That tells you something. So we accepted those and then we accepted the others based on whether they could fit into our timeframe which was fulltime in the sense that three days a week we had a full working day of classes from 8.00 to 4.00. We based that decision on the response of the applicants when they filled out the questionnaire about the time that suited them best. We started out with 15. Six of them were from Out District.

That was another problem. Only three of the women from Out District stayed. One never did come at all. She couldn't find any relative to stay with and there was no money for her. Another dropped out because there was a problem with her family and the third one told her ma about the health programme discussion on contraceptive methods. Her mother wouldn't send her back because she didn't think this child should know about sex.

When we found out why she didn't come back we spoke to the girls from that district, because they were Mestizo, whether this was how they perceived what was happening. They said no, that was just how some people are.

Then we had dropouts in Belize City. One girl had a situation where her mother was living with her stepfather who wouldn't maintain the children that were not for him. This girl's sister reached the age to start high school and her mother said to her that since she was the oldest one, she'd have to pay the sister's school fees. So when a job came her way she had to leave. It was sad because she didn't want to.

One woman had problems getting someone to babysit her child. We told her to bring the baby to the place. But she said she didn't feel comfortable. She tried it a couple of times and just stopped coming back. And we couldn't do follow up work. This was not a full time job for any of the resource people. So she just dropped out.

We had eight out of the 15 finishing the programme. Those eight who stayed with it may have been absent once or twice. That is significant. We did an evaluation with them. One of the biggest complaints was the time being too short. How could you do all this in three months? They recommended at least six. They said they liked the fact that it was like coming to school but it was not school. When we asked what they meant, one person said, "I know how to put it. If everybody handled us like Miss X we wouldn't come back long time".

In hindsight you realize that the planning process was so critical to the outcome. What we needed for the staff was a training of trainers session. Just because I have skills at using more participatory, and non formal education methods, I can't assume that the others are like this. We didn't think about that side of it. We knew of people, we got in touch with them, they seemed nice, we explained to them what we wanted, but we hadn't gone through a formal training programme with them.

They said "Unno don't treat we like teacher, you treat we like fren. You sit down and talk to us about the work, but also about personal concerns". That was critical to them. And they talked about the friendship that they developed among themselves and the feeling that they

were important. We have this poster in *My House* that says, "I know I'm somebody 'cause God don't make no junk", and they related to that.

They had some views on what was wrong or what was missing from the centre generally. They said that we were encouraging them to read but the books we have there they can't read. It's true. People give us material and it's there but it's not catering to them. They pointed out books that they liked, the documentary comic strip type, and the novels. But they liked *My House*. They felt it was a place for them. They thought the programme should be continued for young women, that they themselves had developed a lot of confidence.

Anyway, we realized that the programme is important but our biggest 'failure' was the follow-up work. We had touched the tip of the iceberg. We found out for instance that some of them couldn't read. They needed literacy work, but that programme in itself couldn't deal with it. Then they needed individual counselling. One girl had got pregnant at 13 and by 18 had two children. You know? It's so much.

There's so much work. What are you going to do when you don't have a staff, everybody is doing this in whatever free time they can grab from their already busy schedules. And then we have the whole problem of the crisis the organization is in. We talked about BOWAND in the programme. We tried in little ways to at least maintain contact. All of them had expressed an interest when we talked about BOWAND in the programme, and at the end of it we asked them whether they were interested in coming. They were and they've been coming to meetings. So we are developing a new membership of these young women.

So there are positive things from that but the follow up work. . . for instance with the girls who left for Corozal, I haven't seen them since then. You couldn't see what was happening to them. The only thing I know about them is that I had contacted a sewing factory that was opening in the Corozal area and spoke to the man about these women who were interested in jobs. They had identified that as a possible place for work. I know that they went but I don't know how that is working out. You also have to deal with the fact that these companies exploit women.

When we do the second SOCA project there are several things we'll do differently. First of all the training of trainers. We have to adjust the programme to more specific needs of the women and we have to look at the whole follow up aspect.

We are thinking in different terms. Instead of training an individual woman, the possibilities may be much greater as a group. One of you may get a job, but what about the other five? You can think of it in terms of doing a business together. You don't want to force anything on anybody but re-emphasise the whole point of co-operatism, collectivity.

My feeling is that this new phase of BOWAND's work we are trying to move into now will have to make more use of the education-theatre skills. We've talked a lot about building more of that into our work because of the fantastic stories that come out of it. It is perfect material for theatre.

Belize Central America

In this interview with **Cynthia Ellis** and **Margaret McGann** of the **Belize Rural Women's Association** and **Diane Haylock** of **BOWAND** several vexed issues of Belizean social and political life emerge. These three activists speak frankly about the geopolitical realities, the function of racism in Belizean society, the problems

experienced by refugees and the reaction of Belizeans to their presence. They look at the potential role of the Belize Rural Women's Association and the efforts of other organizations and individuals to establish in Belize a forum for the discussion of problems, rooted in our history, whose hour has come round.

INTERVIEW INTERVIEW INTERVIEW INTERVIEW INTERVIEW

Nan Let us start by placing Belize in the context of Central America, as an introduction to questions we will take from there.

Cynthia Belize is the only English-speaking country on the Central American mainland, and it is the only country that was colonised by the British. The neighbouring countries have a Spanish influence and to a large extent have had the experience of military dictatorships.

Belize is, in my view, quite significant because it's perceived as a haven for refugees, people fleeing from turmoil in the region. But I think that that is merely an illusion because while Belizeans have felt that we have nothing to do with what is going on in other Central American countries, the character of our country is fast changing.

We have a large percentage of the black population going to the United States and at the same time we have refugees coming in thousands to settle in Belize. We also have to bear in mind the so-called Guatemalan threat that hangs over our head. For many years this was the reason why we never get independence because we were told that if we get independence from Britain then Guatemala going invade we. This did not prove to be a rallying in a positive sense to say, "Well this is my country and we are going to be independent no matter what". What happened was, because we were a colony the British have forces here supposedly to defend us from the Guatemalans when they invade. But a lot of geopolitics came out of that because the British and Americans have this alliance, and they manoeuvre whenever they see it's convenient to them. So that we were caught in a situation in 1981. People had gone out into the streets before but it was much more forceful this time because the whole issue of independence was beginning to be discussed and people seem to have been terrified of the implications of independence. On the one hand they felt that if we became independent then Great Britain gwan lef we and den we a have to deal with the whole ting of defending ourselves against Guatemala,

and we are not equipped because all these years we must have had these soldiers who would defend we country fi we.

I think of '81 all the time because it brings a lot of things to focus sharply. In a crisis you see a lot of things clearly. When the people were demonstrating on the streets, the British soldiers were the ones who were brought out to control the public. So to me that should mash out any illusions about any British soldiers going to defend us.

It was a really traumatic period. Now we are in a situation where we have independence, political independence, but what I learned from that experience was the importance of Belize in the geopolitics of the region. For the first time, for whatever reason the United States of America voted in favour of Belize's independence at the UN and that was very significant because for many years they didn't vote — they were against it. That gave the warning signal that we could go into independence.

Diane But even though they voted for Belize, there was never any clear statement coming from the Americans about support for the territory. The Americans throughout just kept abstaining. So to say they supported Belize independence is not to say that the Americans categorically supported Belize's claim to have its independence with its territory intact. Whereas all these other countries were saying this for years.

Cynthia There was a time when all the borders were sealed and we couldn't leave the country at all. When I went to the Guatemalan border, at that time they had a big mural with Fidel Castro and Che Guevara, and on the background you had priests and nuns with their hands in chains, and then you had at the border "Belize belongs to Guatemala" type of thing. And then there were like missiles pointed at the heads of Che Guevara and Fidel Castro — in Spanish it said, "This is what we do to communists". Now all of this hot thing, dey go on in Belize and I made the connections because in

Seen against the background of the present intensifying crisis in Central America, the key question about Belize is whether it can be turned into a U.S. stronghold against the emerging

national liberation and socialist movements of the region, or will be drawn into and become a part of these movements.

(From Monthly Review, Feb. 1984 "Belize—On the Rim of the Cauldron" by Dave Broad)



the proposed Heads of Government Agreement for Belize, one of the things we would have to agree to was for oil pipelines to pass through Belize to Guatemala. We'd have to give them access to roads, and most significant of all was the use of two cays for setting up military bases.

Diane The demands Guatemala has made over the years have changed. They started off wanting the whole country, and then the southern part of the country; then it came down to the pipelines and the cays. This is where the agreement last sat. It created, then, the national crisis.

Cynthia Demonstrations, strikes. Everybody went on strike and we had a situation where nobody wanted to take the initiative. Nobody wanted to take leadership in bringing the different groups together. We are talking about the Church, trade unions, political parties.

Diane The opposition was at its weakest then.

Cynthia A collective of community groups came together at that time. There was a core of leadership bringing all these people together.

Nan These agreements were presumably being made officially between Guatemala and Britain. It was the issue of independence which was requiring that these things (the territorial dispute) be settled. The claim went from this large area of the country down, down, down to the two islands for the military base and this is the point at which you get this popular protest. How do you account for that?

Cynthia The government of the day was supporting the agreement and the people rejected it, the people being

led by the then opposition, which is now the government. They played on that because the rallying cry had always been "No Guatemala. Not one square inch!" And this was a betrayal of the people by that government. This is why they lost the elections after having been in power for 30 years. They were very insensitive — so much so that we got independence shortly after the curfew had been lifted. People had to be stifled. When they couldn't walk on the streets for such a long time, they couldn't be involved in any move for independence. It was just imposed. It was terrible. The issue (over the cays) is still unresolved.

Nan I get the impression that the rhetoric is different since independence. The US has changed its strategy.

Cynthia There are many ways of control, as we know, and they have decided to do the same thing by going through the development funding agencies. All the big money they are pumping in are means of control, strengthening their presence by sending down people as consultants and Peace Corps and through (the monitoring of) this so-called drug trafficking. And I'm not questioning that they are looking for drugs but there is this other component. I was in Dangriga at one point where they had people from Mexico — they used to hire people from Mexico — to come and spray the fields in helicopters. And these men were wearing war attire. They just landed in Dangriga — the helicopter land anywhere — and they walk through the streets in dis war attire. I said, "But dis way out". We were at this health meeting. I said to the person who was organising it, "Let us invite them to tell us what is the side effect of this paraquat they are spraying". The man came in and he didn't talk about paraquat. He said that Cuba is 90 miles away from Miami and that the people of Cuba and the people of Nicaragua are evil, and nothing in connection with paraquat. It was then that I became even more convinced that these things are just a cover-up for a lot of other things dem want do. And I get very nervous sometimes — especially if you cannot look beneath the surface of what these things are presenting.

After we got independence the exodus from Belize increased. The then opposition action (the people who are now the government) were very demoralised because they perceived themselves as having lost. OK, the Heads of Agreement thing subsided, but with all that fervour on the streets and what have you, like they got tricked with the independence thing. It just came on them totally unprepared. We were in a situation where the man from Great Britain, Nicholas Ridley, sat down in a meeting and tell us how he can't understand what all this fuss is about. And with a level of arrogance which offended people, he told us we had to accept the proposed Agreement as it was.

So after independence these people, to me, I saw them get demoralised. A lot of them started leaving, continued leaving the country saying, "Well, since we never mek it, we naw mek it again". And then at the same time we had a lot of people coming from Central America. So what you have is a people in utter confusion and the government of the day not having the strength of the people behind them. And refugees come in and take



Piers Cavendish/Reflex

Army checkpoint on road between Quezaltenango and San Marcos, election day, Guatemala, 1 July 1984.

over lands that we were not cultivating. They started getting into business and providing food at the markets that Belizeans were not doing.

At the same time the opposition group begins to get organised and they organise against the Heads of Agreements foolishness. But they organise along the sentiments of having been betrayed by this government—the government had lied to them. So we are in a situation where they won, yes. But they won on the strength of that mobilisation that happened during the Heads of Agreement time.

Nan You are telling me that the government changed because of this wider international issue.

Cynthia That was a rallying point. And they had upset the people enough for them to make a forceful rejection of this government that had been there for 30 years. I don't know why the people didn't lobby against this Guatemala thing all this while, but it was the arrogance, the insult, that whole experience that traumatised them.

Diane But it was also the fact that you had a very strong young vote. I think that what you said is true; there was this—people felt betrayed after the Heads of Agreement. They could never quite trust the PUP again. But given the conditions under which people were living and the fact that the PUP really hadn't done anything for the people for all those years, and the fact that you did have this young vote. . . The 18-year-old vote was introduced just a few years before that and there were all these displaced young people who the opposition was able to

mobilise. The way they did it—with the music that young people could relate to and that whole culture.

Nan I'm sure that all of that must be in there too. What we don't seem to understand in the English-speaking Caribbean is that Belize is in this situation. Or even if we do, we don't understand the whole of what is behind it. I had not understood the significance of that aspect of things in the election.

Cynthia The crisis still remains because what we have unresolved is our ethnic, cultural relationships which are, I would say, quite strained.

The way how we were colonised was according to geographic things. The Maya Indians were here first and they were raped and pushed off their land. Then we had the people of African descent—Creoles—coming in as slaves and they were the ones working along with (the British). Then we had the East Indians coming in as indentured labour and the Chinese—but those were a smaller minority. And you had the Garifuna, but the Garifuna came on condition that they stay in a certain geographic area because the British did not hear how they did go on way out in the islands, fight up and kill off people and how they couldn't be restrained. And you have Maya Indian reservations which still exist today where there are certain areas of land in the south legally documented and you had the Mestizos coming in from the north, fleeing from a war in the Yucatán.¹

1. The "Caste War" (1847–53) when the Indians of Yucatan province declared war on the Spanish and Mestizo landlords, driving many out of Mexico (*The Belize Issue*, Latin American Bureau, 1978)

So all the geographic ethnic thing is important because the people are kept divided deliberately for certain purposes. You cannot afford to have the Creole and the Garifuna together. Two set a black people would be a lot of confusion for them. We never did come together and resolve it. It would not have been in the interests of the colonial masters, nor would it have been in the interests of the people who took over from them.

I think that is one of the biggest points of our crisis—this whole disunity which we have not been able to overcome, which goes all the way back to colonisation and you go into independence with this thing still unresolved and then you get a new set of people and this thing still unresolved, and you have other people leaving the country with this thing still unresolved.

So that is where Belize is at this moment in Central America, in crisis, unless we address it in a serious way. We are talking about hundreds of years of unresolved things where we have to get the ethnic groups to come together and say, "Well, this is the situation and it no make sense. OK, we were divided because of history but those of us who have a level of consciousness about what's going on need to come together—at least some nationalistic minds because if we plan to live in the country we could see how we going deal wid it".

Nan So there's antagonism between groups?

Diane Everybody talks about this peaceful society and the way in which all these different groups of people co-exist in harmony. Right? But I think that it's an illusion because the fact is, the different groups still live

in these different areas and when members of one group dare to go into an area where another predominates you do find a lot of tension.

Cynthia It also shows up in government policy too. There was this anti-black, anti-creole sentiment because the opposition was at that time predominately made up of Creole elements.

That fast changed. One of the direct things that I see as a result of that experience is anti-refugee in some ways. The refugee for those black elements represents a threat for a certain reason. And I tend to agree. Although we sympathise with the struggle in Central America, we do know that in Salvador, for example, their Constitution is written that they don't want black people in a dem country. So you know that if they are coming with that kind of mentality . . . you do know that Guatemalans coming in learn from the time they are this age that Belize belongs to them. They say this in school every single day: "Belice es nuestro." So we know they get that kind of indoctrination.

Diane I went up to Guatemala City last year November for one first time. I went with some friends and when we said where we were from, so many people like the taxi driver, said to me, "Belice es nuestro". I wished I could talk Spanish . . . but they don't say it in any hateful way. They just say it automatically.

Another thing I think we should mention about the dynamics between the different racial groups is that here you have two black groups for instance—the Creole and Garifuna. We black. It no matter where we come

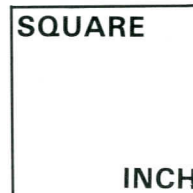
Belize es nuestro—Belize is ours—can be seen from time to time on bumper stickers or in flashing neon signs. But more important it is an idea that is implanted in Guatemalans at an early age and reinforced throughout their lives. Although Guatemala City houses an Office of Belizean Affairs, there is very little understanding for their Caribbean neighbor in Guatemala. Few Guatemalans know how many people live in Belize, where they are from or what they do. They just know that it is theirs.

Belizeans know that they do not want to become Guatemala's 23rd department. On that there is almost unanimous consensus. In the late 1970s when Guatemalan President Kjell Laugerud Garcia stated that since Belize is part of Guatemala, Belizeans should be given the same treatment as other Guatemalans, the Belizean magazine *Brukdown* commented: "Since such treatment includes discrimination, intimidation and deprivation of basic rights (not to mention murder) we are not exactly thrilled with the President's offer."

(From *NACLA: Report on the Americas*, May/June 1984 "Belize still struggling for Independence" by Milton Jamail)

NO

NOT



ONE

GUATEMALA

THE BELIZE RURAL WOMEN'S ASSOCIATION

The rural women of Belize have formed an association of women to promote the sustained development and education of women in rural areas.

The idea of a Belize Rural Women's Association emerged out of the experience of Cultural Market Day, an annual event initially conceived and initiated by the Belize Organization for Women and Development (BOWAND). Rural men and women would come into Belize City with produce, to display their handicrafts and share their lives through music and dance.

The BRWA was officially launched in November 1985. Regina Martinez, an organizer of rural groups for many years, is one of the committed and tireless women making the BRWA into an organization which responds to the problems of rural women in a range of areas related to rural work and life including: problems of marketing and transportation, the need for rural women to develop their leadership potential in Belizean society, the building of self sufficiency.

Among the activities sponsored by the Association have been an event held on World Food Day in October 1986 to promote the production of food and craft.

In September/October 1986 the BRWA held a Conference on Women's Health. The organization is concerned about women's health and the inaccessibility of health services in a country with a land area of 8,866 square miles and a population of 160,000 liv-

ing in its six districts. There are 93 rural communities that have a population of over 200. These total 55,317 persons, nearly half of whom live in small settlements and communities scattered around the country.

Some of the groups with which the BRWA works are:
Lu Fuluri of Dangriga (Cassava cultivation, bread making; Banana flour; Popular education)

Commerce Group of Dangriga (Banana flour, Spice processing)

Arts and Crafts Cooperative of Dangriga (Production of brooms)

Sandy Beach Women's Cooperative of Hopkins (Providing a tourist resort)

Hopkins Women's Group (Arts and craft, Cassava bread making)

Georgetown Women's Group (Chicken rearing, Cassava cultivation and bread making)

Georgetown Youth Group (Vegetable production)

Seine Beight Women's Group

Barranco Women's Group (Cultural Group — Warambians; interested in Cocoa cultivation)

Blackman Eddy Women's Group (Mixed farming; organizing for Health Centre)

Belize Northern Development Cooperative (Small farming and marketing)

Frank's Eddy Women's Group (farming; providing water tanks and schools)

Orange Walk Women's Group (Health Education)

Santa Clara Women's Group, Corozal (Fundraising for children's park)

from, the point is we black — but there's serious tension between those two groups, which is totally different from the tension between black people and Mestizo.

The Creole feels, and has projected this feeling of superiority towards Garifuna. I think that as a people the Creole people adapted to the whole colonial system much better. They were much better indoctrinated and they took on the colonial masters' attitude towards "these rebellious niggers". So that tension has remained.

Cynthia And it has been well documented that the colonial masters used to feed it to the African people who were here before the Garifuna because the Garifuna came retaining a lot of their cultural traditions. So if you want to control these are the kind of stories that you push.

Diane Creole people make all kinds of derogatory statements about Garifuna.

Cynthia And vice versa. It works both ways.

Diane Well . . . the Garifuna with a more defensive attitude. But with the Creole it's like "We are better than they are".

I can't say that a significant number of Garifuna people came from Guatemala. But you do find in Belize a number of black people living in Belize who came originally from there and on a number of occasions people have said to me that they came here because they felt that they had a place here. They belonged. There were more people like them whereas in Guatemala they were treated worse than the Indians. So you have that

thing here where Belizeans feel that this country "has always been ours". It always been a majority black country, and though we have the Mestizos coming in, the people who are really leaving are the black people. So the numbers of black people and the numbers of Mestizo people within the country are rapidly changing.

Historically Belizeans have never been taught about Central America and what is happening there. People are unsympathetic to the situation of other Central Americans because we've never really had an opportunity to find out what was going on there, except for the more enlightened people and we're faced with that situation where we're in Central America but we're not and we're in the Caribbean but we're not. And the previous government really didn't do much to foster the relationship between Belize and the rest of the English-speaking Caribbean.

Nan "How do we begin discussing all of this?" is the point you've been making. Now where are you seeing that happening? I get the impression you are not seeing it as a government initiative. So this is the point where women's organisations and others need to look at this. What is your thinking in that area?

Cynthia Well, women's organisation were the first to address it—let me not say the first.

Diane Wey you a say!

Cynthia Well the first to address it in a mass way. Whilst the government and other organisations did it in a scattered way. They would have a festival of the arts where

About three years ago I was in Nicaragua and I travelled to the Northern border and that was exactly the time when the first big Contra attacks started. And then I very much realised that peace and development in Central America are not possible without a radical change in the US policy in the region.

Evelyn Herfkens, Chairperson of the Committee of European Parliamentarians and Politicians in solidarity with Nicaragua. (Quoted in War on Want Conference Report: Central America options for peace and economic development. October 20, 1984.)

they would present plays and different things, bringing in ethnic groups but not necessarily dealing with ethnic, local presentations. The Cultural Market Day was this idea. All the different ethnic groups would come together and bring their food and their craft and their dances and their culture and whatever, and this was done by women's organisations, but the discussion did follow through then. It was just a big event which was planned and we did not emphasise the significance of it or build on the significance of that. I think that women's organisations are very significant in that. Although we might be involved in political movements or political organisations, women in Belize don't have a political agenda. We will go to the tea party and make the cake to raise the money but you know, or you assume, that when the party win you know you no dey in any position. That was the trend. So not feeling threatened in that way, it has not been difficult to organise women in ethnic groups. Even when they belong to political parties that are different, or religions that are different because they have not been, in Belize, in these top top positions. They still move across the lines and I think that is where our strength is, where our strength has been.

Diane Another initiative of women's organisations was that issue of women and peace where the refugee situation was one of the items on the agenda to discuss and the people's interest in that particular topic was so great. This was 1983.

Nan Who organised that?

Cynthia BOWAND.

Diane People wanted to know what the refugee situation was because the previous government was very secretive about these things. You kept hearing things like there's only 2000 refugees in the country.²

Nan When there were 20,000?

2. The UN estimates between 5,000 and 7,000 Salvadoran refugees in Belize. Although not officially recognised as refugees, there are estimates of up to 10,000 Guatemalans in the country (*Dave Broad Monthly Review*, Feb. 1984).

Diane I don't know about that figure itself, but there were many more than they were admitting to and there was no dialogue, no opportunity for dialogue between refugees and Belizeans. So at this conference people were saying that the refugee thing is an issue for peace because if we don't understand the refugee situation we can't really have a peaceful society. We have to deal with that. Everybody at that session was really turned onto that discussion.

Nan What are the problems Belizeans see are created by the presence of the new immigrants?

Cynthia Refugees come in with a more assertive position. They come from a situation where survival is much more . . . They have experienced war and what war brings. So when they come to Belize, Belize is like paradise to them. There's no war here. They come with that united and common concern. There's a certain solidarity amongst them, so they will begin clearing land and farm. They will go through struggles that we will not go into because we are so comfortable here. And you take a refugee who comes here today, by tomorrow they will have started clearing the land, burning it down, and by next week you'll see a house is up. A very recent example—yesterday a woman said to me, "You know, we gave this money to build this school and within a week they had started to build and before the month was over they had a school. Yes! And in another village where we have Belizeans, for nearly two years we did talk 'bout school and we can't get no school up to yet!" So that just shows the urgency of things to them.

I noticed that action, when we were doing registration for membership; all of those women who are refugees went immediately to register as members. They never hesitate. Even though we said you don't have to pay your membership fee now you could pay it later, they were the first to go up and register. They take things very seriously. They take life seriously . . . Whatever experience they've been through . . . it's precious to them, and the hassles we would bring up they don't bring up. For example they will do a lot of things to survive, make tamales and walk miles with it—in the rain. I see this woman walking in the rain, and rain or shine she will show up to sell her things, and the children will go to the farm. Our children are not doing that.

Diane I don't think we should get caught up in the word 'refugee' but with the large influx of people coming in from different countries you find that we have been producing vegetables locally, when prior to this large number of people, everything just came from Mexico. But with them a bit of it is being produced locally.

Cynthia They are providing the markets with food.

Margaret Part of this urge to join organisations is because of the conditions they live in, and they are very anxious to better their conditions. They have no lights, no water, no roads.

Diane Yes, and to get the land they are working on 'cause many of them are squatting. They want to make sure that their position is secure.

Margaret There's a settlement at the back of Belmopan here. It's ironic, there's a big sign that says "Occupying of this land is illegal" and what have you. And yet the people continue to settle and build their houses and es-

tablish their little plantations. The community is just growing.

Diane Is that the one they call "Salmopan?"

Margaret Yea. (Salvadorean inhabitants)

Diane Then there's also the other factor. This also happens with Belizeans and others going to the United States where they are cheap labour. So you have that other dimension to the situation. The refugees, or new immigrants (they've been trying to think of it more positively) are a source of cheap labour and can be exploited much more easily than a Belizean—dem won't deal with that, dem won't tolerate that. But these poor people come in and because they are talking about their very survival they are in a vulnerable position to being exploited.

Nan And what industries are exploiting them?

Diane The citrus industry, the drug industry.

Cynthia Growing of marijuana is mostly done by refugees.

Nan Really? But who is controlling it?

Cynthia Big men with local divisions.

Margaret A lot of them work as helpers. They would pay them less than Belizeans.

Diane A Belizean woman was telling me yesterday how she told off her boss. Those people are not going to do that. So they're perfect to be exploited right now. And then Belizeans become antagonistic towards them because they feel they're taking away their jobs.

Margaret Crime is being attributed to them too. When people live in certain economic conditions and they don't have certain basic necessities, a lot of them resort to crime and that may be part of why they get involved in crime too. Some of them—they live in terrible conditions.

Cynthia Most of those crimes that they say are being done by refugees are not being done by refugees. It's just like a truth, you know . . .

Diane But a lot of the crime is also related to the drug industry—and it really doesn't matter whether it's a Salvadoran or a Belizean or a Guatemalan. The moment you're involved in that industry your life is worthless.

Cynthia Exactly.

Diane I think that is important but what people look at is the fact that many of them are caught up in this industry for survival and they're just pointing fingers at them.

Cynthia Once when we were talking about the sugar cane industry and the future of the cane industry these farmers who are Mestizo, from Corozal, one of their biggest problems was refugees. So I was shocked because I didn't know there would have been tension between these two Mestizo groups. And it was such an anger. We were sitting down at a round table—they stood up and spoke against refugees—how they come here and there are these programmes funded by the UN and so on. They see these people get clothing, they get

food, they get housing and the Belizeans are here—they no get it. They said they don't understand how they speak English so well. But the refugees are getting programmes to learn how to read and write and speak English and they are very upset about it. Ours say that (when) they walk on the streets . . . there are these tensions. These are Mestizo Belizeans (but people) don't know that he's Belizean. They only know the difference when they open their mouth. When a black Belizean will say "Eh Pania, go back to Guatemala!" In the bus one day one Mestizo Belizean see one Mestizo Salvadoran sitting 'pon him seat. He say "Pania get up from ya!". Once a thing is not discussed and it's left like that, that there is no policy, it just get worse.

Diane A lot of Mestizo Belizeans are very concerned about it because *they* get called 'refugees'. So I think the presentation and discussion of these things—creating forums, people coming together on a basis to deal with it—I think the women's movement, women's organisations can play a very striking role. So we always invite people from the refugee community to our meetings and like, they are so thankful, you feel funny the way you say, well, "Wa we accept you" because they are so *resented* by the Belizean population, and we are in a very weird position when we do that too, by Belizeans who are looking (down) on us because they want to know, "Wha' we did do to have dem kin' a people".

Margaret Some people talk about the silent invasion. Some people worry about them as a security threat.

Cynthia Exactly, because the question is being asked, "What kind of refugees are coming in?" There are all kinds. No? And where there have been murders and crimes by refugees, they have been most violent. They have been of the sort that we don't know of. The chopping off of the head type—very violent.

Nan You have an impression of what the refugees' politics are. Or would it be a very mixed bag?

Cynthia It would be mixed, I think. Some CCC people came and we visited some refugee families, talking to them. And this man started to ask them about what was going on in Guatemala and Salvador. And they started to say well, you know, they came because the communists were taking over. And so the man asked them, "But what were your conditions of life?" and then they started to say well, oh yes, well they didn't have land and they were being pushed off the land. They really had to force it out of them

Nan But I would also imagine that they might know that that would be the best thing to say. You have to take that into account too.

What about the health issue?

Cynthia It's true that they bring disease. Plus, they put a lot of pressure to bear on the existing services. Schools are overcrowded. Then because of the conditions of life—they have to be overcrowded and children abused. A teacher was telling me that she would see these little girls with marks on their bodies, young girls—pickney. Beaten, raped.

When I was pregnant with this baby and was going to the clinic most of the people there were refugees.

Diane And that's another fear people have. You know the Blackman Eddie group? I had gone down there to do something with them for BOWAND and in talking to some of the women I was asking them about the refugees in their community and the women felt very positive about the way these people had taken the land that was theirs and were planting it. They thought that was really good because they felt that they had had this land all this while but they didn't have that orientation towards farming. But she said, "But the problem is they're too nasty, man, and we can't deal with that. I don't want to get too close to them. I don't want to catch any disease. But we really would like to have a good relationship with them so we can learn from them." This is what these creole women in this community were telling me.

Cynthia One other thing too. Even before the flood of refugees, these women have been exploited as prostitutes. Prostitution in Belize flourished through them. So that, especially in the north, you'd find that with the money economy, sugar cane harvesting, that's when you have a lot of women there involved in prostitution. And a sort of semi-prostitution goes on here too where men, especially before Belmopan was very developed, would go to the refugee settlements for the women there.

Nan Does the Belize Rural Women's Association have any specific plans in mind in regard to this forum for discussion?

Cynthia Whatever projects or seminars or workshops that we organise we involve women of all different ethnic groups as well as the refugees. For example, there's a project—the Belize Northern Road—which has a lot of refugee families and they are involved in the project. If you notice (at the Annual General Meeting) we had translation from Spanish to English quite a lot because most of the time you have women from the refugee settlements at our functions and this is an attempt to try to make people see what their basis of oppression is. Not only as women but as a people. And they need to try to work on them collectively despite the outside forces that are pulling us.

We are also planning. One of the things that came out of the AGM was to have forum that would focus just on this—this sort of discussion. The study session in May, for example, is going to attempt to deal with this in an analytical way where some of the people who are involved in the project that we are working with at present will air this discussion about Belize. Not only from inside but people from outside—Church organisations, people who have done studies on it like J. Pallicio, the head of the refugees centre. He did a study which government is going to use as the basis for making policy. There is Father Cararus of the Roman Catholic community. He works with refugees and he has close contact. He will be involved with the discussion as well. Those are two major events for this year which we are planning.

I think that's a key question too because I know of people who are in positions of developing strategies with people's organisations who are biased and anti-refugee and who will have nothing to do with involving refugees in their programmes. But I know also that one of

the thinkings in the government level is that not one more of them is to come into the country and that is the xenophobia. Not one more. But they can't stop that.

Nan To go back to the issue of militarisation: do you know anything about the American presence in any direct form in Belize?

Cynthia I don't know if they have any military advisors here now. But up to a year ago they did and they give funding to the Belize Defense Force.

Diane You don't know what control they have over the Belizean Defense Force because all those things are not made clear.

Cynthia One of the things . . . is that relay station of the Voice of America down south is another attempt to feed propaganda to the rest of Central America. There's an increase in (I don't know if its militarisation so much as) surveillance in the country. They have this new security section that's being developed. That's where they have a more systematic review of organisations working in the country and of people. They are going to be advised by the British (and I'm sure the Americans) in terms of that kind of surveillance.



Regina Martinez of the Belize Rural Women's Association.

ORIGINS OF THE DISPUTE WITH GUATEMALA

“Belize is the only English-speaking country on the Central American mainland and the one black country.” The historical basis upon which this statement rests is fast changing as the Creole and Garifuna populations (the culturally dominant African descendants) emigrate to the United States while from the stricken fields of the surrounding republics come thousands of Mestizo people looking for peace and the land in which to cultivate it.

The dispute between Belize and Guatemala has its roots in an old imperialist quarrel. Land first taken from the Indigenous Peoples by Spain's decree was then silently occupied by England. In fact it may be one of history's weird jokes that the issue will be settled in Belize's favour with the help of these new Spanish speaking Belizeans.

During the early days of Spanish colonialism the territories that we now call Belize and Guatemala were administered under the Vice-royalty of New Spain. In 1568, the Captaincy General of Guatemala, which was Guatemala and most of Belize as we know it today, was separated from the Audencia of Mexico (also under the Vice-royalty of New Spain). The fixing and unfixing of the boundaries between these territories continued for generations.

Meanwhile, some 'small boys' from England had their own Western Design. Using Jamaica, which had been captured by Cromwell's forces, as a springboard, British privateers established themselves a hiding place behind the string of cays in the Bay of Honduras along the barrier reef off the coast. Here they could retreat after their attacks on the gold- and silver-laden, Europe-bound, Spanish fleet.

When it was realized that the adjacent land held fortunes in the uses of logwood, the British turned their efforts to cutting logwood and exporting the dye. A settlement was established at the mouth of the Belize River "sometime between 1650 and 1690". Governor Modyford of Jamaica, realizing the value of the Bay Settlement, as it was called, urged the British government to recognise it officially, an event which would not take place for another 200 years.

In 1670, under the Treaty of Madrid, Spain gave over all the territories of the West Indies which were actually in Britain's hands. But the Bay Settlement was not considered subject to the conditions of the treaty. After all, it was not a properly constituted colony. It had no representative of the Crown and its 700 English

settlers governed themselves through their own elected town meetings.

Over the next seven decades, the Spanish, hoping to rid the area of the British, made numerous attacks on the settlement and destroyed the town of Belize several times. The woodcutters' repeated requests to the British government for help, for recognition of Belize and protection were rejected. Undeterred, they just rebuilt the town each time and kept holding on. In fact, they were extending their area of operation.

NO PLANTATIONS PLEASE

The Treaty of Paris (1763), the Treaty of Versailles (1783), and the 1786 Convention of London all concerned the business arrangements made by the "super empires", and in the specific case of Belize demarked and in 1786 extended the limits of logwood operations by the British settlers. The sovereignty of the territory was recognised to be Spanish by all the European powers and Spain intended to maintain this situation by imposing restrictions. For example, the location of woodcutting camps was subject to the Spanish commissioner; no establishments were to be set up on the offshore cays (these same cays would become a catalyst in the civil disturbances in the country 200 years later, and restrictions were imposed regarding cultivation, trade and construction work.

The 1786 Convention of London secured permission for the British woodcutters to chop and ship mahogany, and to farm, "so long as plantation or estate-type agriculture was not established". The British government agreed not to establish any colonial government in Belize except "to maintain law and order". Britain also gave over the Miskito Coast which became the coast of Honduras and Nicaragua. England had 'acquired' the Mosquito territory in 1739. The Miskito peoples had created a new ethnic group with Africans from Jamaica, as the Garifuna of St. Vincent had with the Africans who escaped from Barbados. At the signing of the 1786 treaty, the Miskito moved in large numbers to Belize, "their King having placed himself under the protection of England".

EMPIRE GAMES

During one of the wars between the empires of France, Spain and Britain, the British, who had taken on the other two, scored against the Spanish with a Yucatán-based invasion at the battle of St. George's Cay in 1798 from where they expelled the Spanish. This was the war which put Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and Trinidad into the British net. These territories were excepted when Britain made amends to the other two by returning territories captured during the war (in 1802) with the Treaty of Amiens. Perhaps Belize was not mentioned in the treaty because it was still seen to be a territory under Spanish sovereignty. However, the record is confusing . . . "a few years later the British government was to

express the view that Britain's title to Belize was fully established by conquest, referring to the Georges Cay victory". Britain's foothold in Belize became surer at the fall of the French empire and the 1840 Treaty of Madrid between Britain and France. This confirmed the status of all treaties entered into between Britain and Spain before 1797. Yet as late as 1819 the British Parliament referred to Belize as "a settlement which for certain purposes is under the protection, but not under the dominion, of the British Crown".

CENTRAL AMERICAN INDEPENDENCE

Whatever the rules of play laid down in these treaties, the British settlers "penetrated" the land southwards and westwards. By 1825 the Bay Settlement claimed an area from the Hondo River in the north to the Sarstún River in the south and Garbutt's Falls in the west. These are the present boundaries of Belize.

In 1823 when Central America became independent from Spain, the freed states entered into a federation. It was called the Federal Republic of Central America, and lasted for 16 years. The Federal Republic was never recognised by Britain because the Republic would not accept Britain's conditions about Belize. These were: the establishment of the extended boundaries, that the Republic should abandon all claims to sovereignty over the settlement, and that no duties should be levied on goods imported from Belize.

Guatemala has another version, arguing that when the Central American Republic got independence from Spain, they obtained rights over the territory previously under colonial jurisdiction. When the Federation fell into five separate republics in 1839 the territory of Guatemala was an overlay of the territory of the old Captaincy General of Guatemala, which included Belize, which had been granted to Britain to be used for defined purposes. Furthermore, Guatemala claims that at the point of independence, "the rights to usufruct granted to Britain by Spain lapsed by virtue of the fact of independence".

HIS MAJESTY'S MONEY MAN

By the middle of the 19th century, Belize was being seen as an entity separate and distinct from Guatemala by others than the settlers themselves. In 1840 the laws of England were proclaimed to be in force in Belize and an Executive Council appointed. In 1854 a Legislative Assembly appeared, though at that stage it was subordinate to the Superintendent of His Majesty's Financial Affairs who had been around since a fracas with Spain in 1784. But enough was enough, and in 1862 Belize was declared the Crown Colony of British Honduras directly administered by the Crown through a Lieutenant Governor.

Apart from the administration of justice and such constitutional arrangements, there were further developments in the area of trade relations which were in fact being recognised and complemented by adjustments at state level. Belize was "importing and forwarding goods" in demand in the surrounding republics and in Yucatán. In 1847 the United States sent its first consul to Belize on business regarding the growing trade between the two.

THE AMERICA OF THE UNITED STATES

— *The Monroe Doctrine*

The origins of the USA's attitude to its Central American neighbours can be found in this era. A proclamation by US President James Monroe in 1823 was conceived as a policy against the further expansion of Tsarist Russia or Britain into the Pacific Northwest or by any European power into Latin America. However, by mid-century, the proponents of "Manifest Destiny" had elevated the policy to a 'doctrine'.

The Monroe Doctrine was firmly established. It prevailed in 1865 when the French were forced to withdraw from Mexico, which they had invaded in 1861. It was applied to the building of the Panama Canal. The Clayton-Bulmer Treaty of 1850, which had provided for joint Anglo-American control of the Canal was replaced by the Hay-Ponceforte Treaty of 1901, recognising complete US control. In 1896 US President Grover Cleveland invoked it for the right of the United States to decide the border dispute between Venezuela and British Guiana. Cleveland's Secretary of State at the time, Olney, announced that the US was "practically sovereign".

During the 1930s the USA abandoned the Olney "paternal overlordship" rhetoric and "dollar diplomacy" which "intended to force all Latin America to depend entirely on the US for loans and investments" and espoused "cooperation and assent on the part of other American republics in place of domination".

In 1954 John Foster Dulles, another Secretary of State, speaking in Caracas, explained that a fundamental concern of US foreign policy was the possibility of Communist or pro-Communist governments on the American continents. Any contradiction you might have noticed between the doctrine's alleged support for Latin American determination and this position has been explained thus . . . "the US attitude would presumably be that such a government *must of its nature* be subject to foreign influence and that this was *directly contrary to the doctrine*". (our emphasis)

The US reserved the right to enforce the doctrine "when necessary for its security" and it has been invoked many times to justify actions against sovereign states of the Caribbean region.

THE TREATY THAT DIDN'T END ALL TREATIES

The dispute was not settled by the Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty of 1859 which merely became another source of contention. Different interpretations of an additional Convention in 1863 have been given to a certain Article VII which concerned the establishment of a link (never built) between the Atlantic coast and Guatemala which would benefit "the commerce of England and the material prosperity of the Republic".

"Guatemala has consistently argued that, in her view, the treaty was not a recognition of the reality of British sovereignty in Belize but an actual cession of territory in exchange for an undertaking to build a road from the Caribbean to Guatemala City. Thus, in Guatemala's view, failure to undertake construction of the road constitutes non-fulfilment of the treaty obligations, thereby rendering the treaty null and void. It is Guatemala's long publicised view that the treaty was intentionally drafted in vague and ambiguous terms in order to avoid violation of the Clayton-Bulwer Treaty's provisions on cession of territory and that the correct interpretation of its meaning was left to a gentleman's agreement between Her Majesty's representative and the Guatemalan Minister of Foreign Affairs. Britain's claim to sovereignty over the territory is deemed to have no legal foundation.

The British interpretation is that the treaty was quite clearly, as its title states, a boundary treaty involving no cession of territory or rights but one giving recognition to an existing fact of British occupation and involved the settlement of boundaries between two separate territories under the sovereignty of the respective signatories. Britain's view of Article VII has been that this sets out mutual responsibilities or obligations for ascertaining the cost and technical feasibility of the project. The 1863 Convention was therefore necessary in order to present the estimates and allocate the costs between the two parties. Britain feels that non-ratification of the 1863 Convention absolves her from any of the obligations under Article VII of the 1859 treaty and that the rest of the treaty still holds good."

Belizeans, of course, view the whole discussion as an arrogant one irrelevant to their interests. They showed their feelings on the matter very clearly in 1981. (See *Interview*, page 9)

(Information and quotations from *The Belize Issue*, Latin American Bureau, 1978.)

UPDATE

Guatemalan president Vinicio Cerezo surprised observers when during his October visit to Bonn he told an interviewer that Guatemala was ready to renounce its territorial claim, and suggesting that he would begin direct negotiations with Belize (*Independent* 16/10/86). Foreign Affairs Deputy Minister Francisco Villagrán later downplayed the president's remarks as 'overstated' and arising from 'a problem with translation', but at the same time gave notice of the lifting of economic sanctions and trade restrictions applied to Belize in 1981.

The announcement of the lifting of sanctions on 29 October was accompanied by a statement by the presidential Public Relations secretary Julio Santos that the move represented a strengthening of Guatemala's links with the Caribbean Basin (*Times* 24/10/86; *El Gráfico* 29/10/86). Foreign Minister Mario Quiñones, whose stance towards Belize has been consistently more hawkish than that of the president, later said that trade relations had not been resumed, 'nor would they be for the time being,' but that the lifting of the ban left the door open (*Emisoras Unidad* 31/10/86). In reality this statement is meaningless, since there has been no interruption of trade across the border in any case. By mid-November, the minister had modified his position, telling the meeting of the OAS at which Belize was present as an observer that his government wished to end the long running dispute and strengthen ties with Belize (*Independent* 18/11/86). At the Miami Conference on the Caribbean, President Cerezo held discussions with British representatives which are expected to lead to a speedy resumption of full diplomatic relations, and repeated his readiness to recognize Belizean independence (*El País* 22/11/86). But despite these developments, precisely how a settlement is to be reached is no clearer. President Cerezo's original statement that by strengthening links with Belize, Guatemala could open its long desired 'route to the Caribbean' is little different from the final negotiating position reached in the past of 'a broad path to the Atlantic', and while recognition of Belize and direct negotiation with its government would represent an enormous step forward, especially given Cerezo's complex relations with the right and the military in Guatemala, the fundamental question is whether he would be prepared to settle for a deal purely in terms of joint business ventures and access for trade. It would be politically even more difficult for PM Esquivel to encompass any cession of land title or territorial waters than it would be for President Cerezo to deal without them. In Belize the government has attempted to bind opposition members of the commission investigating possible solutions to an oath of secrecy, so far without success.

(From *Belize Briefing*, Dec. 1986 Central America Information Service. 1 Amwell Street, London EC1R, England.)

COCA COLA vs FOE

The billion dollar Coca-Cola Corporation has bought about one seventh of the country in a scheme to plant citrus groves. The following is from a statement by the London-based Friends of the Earth Limited of 377 City Road, London, EC1.

In January, Friends of the Earth International strongly condemned proposals by Coca-Cola Foods Ltd. to destroy 25,000 acres of tropical forest and wetlands for citrus plantations in Belize. Simultaneously, FOE contacted over 500 environmental groups around the world urging them to persuade Coca-Cola to stop the scheme before it is too late.

In a letter sent to Mr. Roberto C. Goizueta, Chairman of the Coca-Cola Company in Atlanta (USA), FOE accused the corporation of deliberately misleading concerned members of the public worried about the scheme's threat to wild species, falsely claiming to be working with the leading wildlife conservation group (the Belize Audubon Society) in Belize to "protect the environment and existing habitats" as Coca-Cola Foods pursue their plans, and refusing to carry out an environmental impact assessment to determine how to avoid destroying threatened, wildlife rich forests.

The organization reported that the Coca-Cola project area has been described as "teeming with wildlife" by the Belize Audubon Society. Although it has not yet been possible to carry out detailed species surveys, similar forests adjoining the Coca-Cola estate are known to contain a wide range of threatened species, including the endangered Central American tapir, the rare Jabiru stork, the black howler monkey, white tailed deer and the jaguar. The project area must be surveyed immediately to find out whether similar species are present, so they can be protected.

A minimum of 25,000 acres of species-rich tropical forests and wetlands will be destroyed if the project, as

it stands, goes ahead. Once access roads have been built, the total will inevitably be higher due to secondary development. The area consists of deciduous moist forest, high marsh forest, palm and moist pine forest, marsh and swamp.

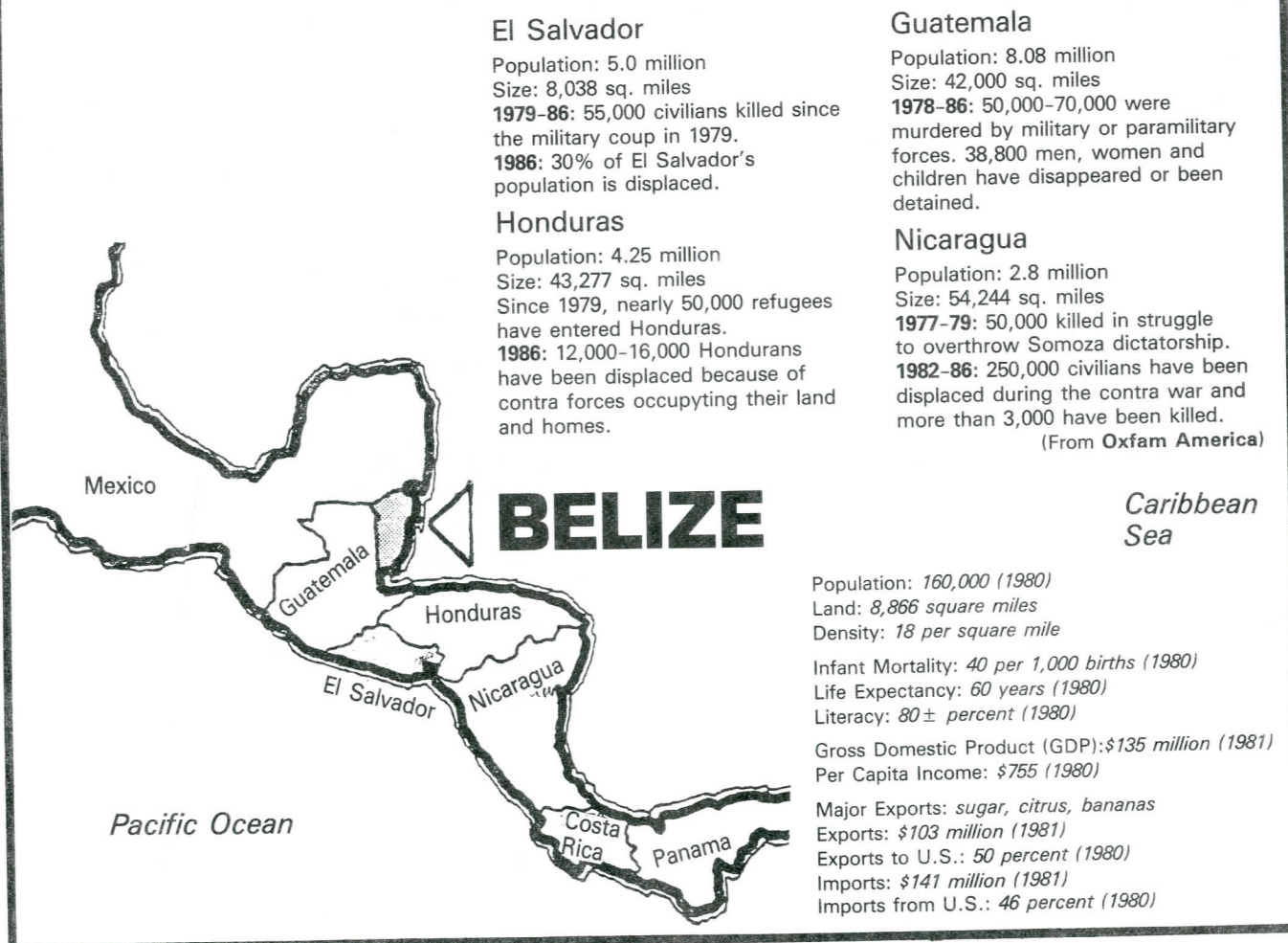
FOE also drew attention to possible threats to small citrus growers' operations previously supported by the Overseas Development Administration and the Commonwealth Development Corporation.

The statement took exception to claims made by Coca-Cola in replying to members of the public asking them to safeguard the site, insisting that Coca-Cola has *not* worked closely with the Belize Audubon Society to "determine how best to protect the environment and existing habitats as we pursue our plans". The Board and staff of BAS deny all such contact.

Coca-Cola, with a net operating revenue in 1984 of \$7.3 billion, refused to commission a thorough environmental impact assessment (which would cost c.\$200,000) to help design the project appropriately, and identify habitats to be protected, despite being repeatedly urged to do so.

(FOE Press Release, 19.1.87)

CENTRAL AMERICAN REFUGEES



BELIZE CENTRAL AMERICA

Carib
Creole
Pania
a green God watches us from a satellite
far above Altun Ha.
Watches
counting down
the ornate timepiece
of a sungod
counting down the centuries
till the moment when
we too
will face
extinction.

The letter falls to the floor with a thud.
Address
Belize Central America
falls with the same thud you hear
when a soldier from her majesty's troops
heaves his duffle bag
to the tarmac at Belize International.
The thud
you hear
through the neighbours' wall
when another Guatemalan peasant
falls from a bayonet
like ripe fruits falls
from an orchard lynching in Gethsemane
and another Congressional Committee
turns its strange movable eyes
in the direction required
by those strategic interests.

Address
Central America
the navel string
between south and north
the fuse
between Homeless and Lord Absentee
between the world's country club
and the waiters
between Superman and his midwife

The letter falls to the floor
of the meeting hall
it is a ship letter from 1797
it is an airletter signed by joint chiefs of staff
it is a message from the Voice of America
via the relay station at Cabo Rojo
*In the meantime the planters asked
their agents in London to suggest
that the Garinagu be removed from
Saint Vincent.* It is a memorandum
from the governor.
The nib cuts its blue path
across the pages of fine white foam
to Roatan Central America.

There is no city here now
only a stinking monument
Our Lady of Scornful Abandonment.
No country yet
just two old men sitting on the border
at a game of dominoes
shouting in two languages
"Belice es nuestro"

But the land, at least, is free of us
It is not in the hands
that pushed past the limestone curtain
at Placencia
it is free of the hands
that turned the mahogany forest
to cathedral cargos
it is free from the reins held by
buffalo soldiers in the Cayo
riding our ghosts of independence.

And we are innocent.
Ours is not the hand
that wheeled a horse
into Belmopan
in broad daylight.
Ours is not the hand
that slapped to its wooden rump
a bumper sticker for Coca-Cola
the new flag of Belize Central America.
And we are innocent
three sleeping centuries
at the gateway for invasion
watched by a green God.

A Kekchi woman lifts her hand in the meeting hall
lifts her hand from her needle
where she keeps
on cotton strips
the steps
the stitched architecture of skyward pyramids
lifts her hand to speak.

Nan Peacocke



Craftswoman from San Antonio Community in Southern Belize displaying Mayan embroidery.

HONDURAS — FROM BANANA REPUBLIC TO MILITARY ENCLAVE

Honduras proclaimed its independence from Spain in 1821. It joined the Federation of Central America, emerging an independent state in 1838. Historically, though the country had a mining industry, the chief commercial activity has been the cultivation of bananas and coconuts on the Atlantic coast.

The following dated incidents give a quick review of Honduras' transformation from what was disparagingly called a 'banana republic' to its new role in US business in Central America.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <p>1800s Anglo-American control over railroads, mining, and banana production.</p> <p>1893 Mining boom ends. Rosario Mining Co. pulls out. Economic stagnation sets the stage for arrival of US Banana companies. Their control is absolute. No native oligarchy will arise to make fortunes in coffee export as they do in other republics.</p> <p>1900s United Fruit Co. and Standard Fruit and Steamship Co. expand control over fertile alluvial plains of Atlantic Coast region. Bananas are 88% of exports. Economic centre of country on Caribbean coast. Population of coastal region becomes predominantly black, English-speaking labourers recruited from the Caribbean islands. Other banana workers are Garifuna ('Black Carib' originally from St. Vincent, expelled by the British in 1797 to islands off the coast of Honduras) from the Bay Islands and from Trujillo; they are granted 7,000 acres in 1901. (Decades later a military commander of the Honduran army will expropriate 2,000 hectares of this Garifuna land for distribution to large landowners.)</p> <p>1903 }
 1907 }
 1911 } US troops intervene.
 1919 }
 1924 }</p> <p>US begins training Honduran army and air force commanded by US officers.</p> <p>Post World War II Greater diversification of agricultural exports. Honduran landowners take small peasant lands for conversion to export production (cattle, sugar, coffee, cotton). Small manufacturing sectors established with loans and aid from multilateral lending agencies (e.g. World Bank).</p> <p>1950s Production of subsistence foods (beans, rice) by peasantry declines.</p> <p>1953 Banana labour force 35,000.</p> <p>1954 Banana workers strike for higher wages and better working conditions. Unionization of banana workers prompts banana companies to implement labour-saving changes.</p> | <p>1959 Banana labour force drops to 16,000 as a result of labour-saving implementations.</p> <p>1960s Peasants begin peaceful land occupations.</p> <p>1964 Standard Fruit taken over by multinational Castle and Cooke. Bananas and pineapples still marketed under <i>Dole</i> label.</p> <p>1970 United Fruit Co. merges to become United Brands.</p> <p>Banana companies return some land to Honduran government. Companies continue marketing bananas grown by small farmers or peasant cooperatives on the returned land, thereby avoiding the political problems of ownership, placing risk of crop failure on growers and maintaining control over profits.</p> <p>1974 Union of Banana Exporting Countries formed. Conflict develops with banana companies. Hurricane Fifi destroys 60% of agricultural production. Standard Fruit abandons many of its plantations. Idled workers organize Las Isletas Peasants Enterprise. Members plant, harvest collectively, share profits.</p> <p>1976 Las Isletas processes over 1 million boxes of bananas, selling them to Standard.</p> <p>1977 Las Isletas processes 4 million boxes, again selling to Standard.</p> <p>When Las Isletas decides to sell to the Union of Banana Exporting countries, 200 militant members of the collective are arrested and the Honduran army ransacks the headquarters.</p> <p>1979 US (Carter) administration begins modernizing Honduran army.</p> <p>1981 Attacks on Nicaragua being staged from Honduras.</p> <p>Military buildup includes airbase at La Ceiba, naval complex at Trujillo and regional training centre at Puerto Castillo. By 1984 33 joint US-Honduran military exercises carried out.</p> <p>"Honduras has moved centre stage as the primary US counterinsurgency base for the region."</p> <p>(Information from <i>The Caribbean: Survival, Struggle and Sovereignty</i>, Catherine A. Sunshine EPICA 1985, ISBN 0-918346-07-X USA)</p> |
|---|---|

During the military regime of Mejía Victores a military strategy for national development was conceived. "Security development" became a concept favoured by the powerful Guatemalan army. Its practices were carried out by a Section of Civilian Affairs and Community Development, known simply as S5. The philosophy and its instrument developed out of

Guatemala

THE BOYS NEXT DOOR

"National Security is a social condition . . . the synonym of integral peace. Modern national security embraces all activities connected to the nation, whether state or private . . . There can be no military power without national development, and vice versa." (*Colonel Hugo Alvarez, senior instructor, Centre for Military Studies, Guatemala*).

For over thirty years the military in Guatemala have waged a war against the people of the country. Some indication of the extent of this is reflected in the following fearful statistics: 100,000 killed between 1960 and 1984;¹ the Army acknowledges destroying 440 villages in counterinsurgency operations between 1982-83;² an official census in 1984 put the number of orphans in three departments alone at 51,000; religious sources confirmed "help given to 2,800 widows in one town in Baja Verapaz, the survival of eight families . . . out of a former population of 300."¹

Amnesty International estimated that 2,600 people were killed from March to October 1982. The then President, so-called "born again Christian" Ríos Montt, sent thousands of Guatemalan troops into the northwestern areas of the country for the purpose of applying 'scorched earth' tactics and murdering whole Indian communities. These highland rural areas are known to provide the strongest support for the guerrillas.

For several reasons, the majority of indigenous peasants in Guatemala have been unable to provide for their basic needs by farming their increasingly small plots. As the size of their *minifundia* has declined and the proportion of the absolutely landless rural population has increased, up to half a million peasants have had to undertake regular seasonal migrant labour on the coffee, cotton and sugar plantations.

(From "Bitter & Cruel" Report, 1984.)

a situation which by 1982 was near chaos. The military elite was unable to save the dying economy and a guerrilla movement was rapidly winning the long-suffering peasantry to its side. The army responded with something more than another *coup d'état*: it took the process of militarization to a fearful new level.



Inmates of Acamal 're-education centre', Alta Verapaz.

In May 1982, "we left our homes where we had always lived because the army began arriving and killing our people, and we refused to let that happen to us. I remember the first ones who were taken away. One was called Santos Castro, he was just a boy of eighteen, and then they grabbed my cousin. They were never found. They say the soldiers cremated them. After that came the massacres—more than a hundred people from our village, some disappeared, some shot and then the army destroyed the crops in our fields—so how could the people stay there if there was nothing to eat? They took away our animals and ate them. They burnt our houses. That's why we left and went to the mountains." (*Isabel giving testimony*)¹

"Countersubversive war is total, permanent and universal" (*from a manual used in Guatemala's Centre for Military Studies*) p. 13³

Joe Fish/Peoples Pictures

A brief look at Guatemala's recent history may provide a background to the events of that period.

UNITED FRUIT

Guatemala's last "democratic interlude" (1944-54) ended with a CIA-engineered *coup* in aid of the Guatemalan landowning élite and the United Fruit Company. These powerful interests had taken exception to the proposals for land reform put forth by the reformist government of President Jacobo Arbenz. The Army has held the reins ever since.

Between 1970-82 "elections" every four years placed the army-sponsored candidate in the presidency . . . "general elections became merely elections for generals". p. 1¹

Growing demands in the 1970s for social and economic reforms were brutally silenced by the army's death squads. In the process. . . "large numbers of trade unionists, priests, students, intellectuals, leaders of grass roots organizations, and two leaders of traditionally moderate social democrat parties, were killed". This wholesale murder of the civil opposition and the control of "elections" by the military set the conditions for a closer alliance between popular grass roots organizations and an armed opposition, both of which emerged during the decade.

By the beginning of 1982 the armed groups were in a strong enough position to make a serious bid for political power under the banner of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). In the highland departments especially, the growing impoverishment of the indigenous population and the government's brutal response to their attempts to overcome their problems by forming cooperatives and other grass-roots organisations had led large numbers of Indians to sympathise both actively and passively with the insurgents. p. 1¹

In the same year General Ríos Montt took the presidency after a *coup d'état*. At this time, the activities of the death squads in the cities declined, while in the northwestern areas Montt unleashed the army for the slaughter of the Indian peoples.

"Ríos Montt was deposed by another coup on 8 August 1983 and was replaced by his former minister of defence General Mejía Victores. Ríos Montt had alienated the business community by proposing a value-added tax; he had annoyed the upper echelons of the army by relying on an inner circle of junior officers and interfering with traditional patterns of army promotion; his aggressive style of 'born-again' Christianity had dismayed traditional Catholic sentiments both inside and outside Guatemala; and his reluctance to support US regional plans for reactivation of CONDECA (the Central American Defence Council) had distanced him from the Reagan administration." p. 1¹

Mejía Victores reestablished the Army's traditional structure and influence and brought back the death squads. He broadened the counterinsurgency policy with a *Plan Firmeza* (Stability Plan) described by the authors

of a British Parliamentary Human Rights Report as "one of a series of Vietnam-style pacification programmes". p. 2¹ *Firmeza 83* was to resettle the people displaced by the horrors of 1982, build a new infrastructure and spoke of moving ahead from "pre-development to development."



"Welcome to Ojo de Agua where we say no to communist subversion." Model Village at Ojo de Agua, Quiché.

"MISS MILITARY ZONE"

"The army is certainly devoting immense resources to this new system. The state and parastate development agencies (the national housing bank, agricultural credit and loan institutions, and the rest) now find their development activities subordinated directly to the Ministry of Defence through the *coordinadoras institucionales*. Non-governmental agencies too can only operate with military permission, and in most cases have to channel their resources as and where it suits the army's strategic interests.

While official propaganda speaks of the help and support the army is giving to the previously neglected Indians, most other observers talk of the slave-like existence in the model villages, the coercion of the inhabitants, the excessive monitoring of their movements and the breaking-down of the traditional Indian life-style. Indian villages that had enjoyed strong community and ethnic identity are strongly encouraged by the army to identify with the 'Guatemalan nation', as they regularly emphasise at ceremonies the importance of the Guatemalan national flag, national Independence Day, the national flower and the national anthem. The army also organises civilian patrol rallies on what were traditionally Indian feast days, while Indian women are encouraged to take part in beauty contests with titles such as 'Miss Civilian Patrol' or 'Miss Military Zone'. Indian community elders and elected leaders are no longer the local chiefs, but have been replaced by the army or army appointees. One journalist told us that the 'de-Indianisation' was an essential part of the counterinsurgency plan." p. 16¹

The United States has given Guatemala (unlike some of its neighbours) little military or economic aid in recent times. From 1977 to 1984 the US Congress "repeatedly voted to block military and non-essential aid to Guatemala because of its abysmal human rights record."¹ In fact the "dirty war" of 1982-83 was fought without US aid, a source of "nationalistic" pride for the military.

"We Guatemalans can feel satisfied at being the first country in the world that has managed to inflict a substantial defeat on subversion by means of our own eminently nationalistic strategy and tactics, without outside assistance." (Army Chief of Staff Lobos Zamora, October 1984).³

In the same address made to Cabinet officials and in which the Chief of Staff put the national priorities of the Army very concisely, he argued that there were two facets to the military threat which had developed since 1980. One, he is reported to have said, was "the new modality of subversive aggression" in the highland villages. The second came from outside Guatemala.

"In this stage of the guerrilla war, there is also the action of large international groups, which from Washington, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Paris, Geneva and other cities have unleashed a broad international campaign in support of subversion and against the Government and Army of Guatemala. p. 14.³

PSYCOPS

Lobos analyzed the combined effects of this at the time of an economic recession as interfering with the military and financial aid "which might help Guatemala defeat subversion". He paid tribute to the Army's new combination of military and psychological operations:

(The army) "will conduct operations of security, development, countersubversion, and ideological warfare. In other words, once security is achieved, the Army penetrates the population to encourage development. This is to rectify the weaknesses of our society . . . which subversion has exploited with great efficiency. Subversion had put in twelve years of good political work in the region; that is why it was necessary to combat it using the same methods, and that is why we entered the era of ideological, military and developmental operations." p. 14³

In 1981 a Guatemalan Navy captain outlined a detailed proposal intended to counter the political challenge being posed by the guerrillas called "Operation Ixil" it amounted to a developmental approach to surveillance.

"Virtually nothing was exempt: civil government, legal affairs, public security, public health, social welfare, public finance, education, labour, commercial and industrial activity, agriculture, price controls and rationing, property registers, supplies, public works, communications, transport, information and broadcasting (in conjunction with Army psychological operations, 'Psycops'), and displaced persons." The list was rounded off with "fine arts and religious affairs". He added, "The profession of faith will be guaranteed as long as it is not contrary to the interests of the state." p. 15³

"Operation Ixil" worked to the satisfaction of the High Command and they extended the idea to other departments. These civilian affairs units "provided the basic machinery for running the next phase of operations. This was the system of Inter-Institutional Coordinating Committees . . . and the network of "developmental poles" established by decree in June 1984. p. 15³

The coordination of social institutions had been tried by the army during the 1960s, and revived in 1976 "for planning post-earthquake operations". However, by "making the system nationwide, harnessing it to the counterinsurgency war and creating a new army section to run the public sector", the process was transformed. National security priorities became interchangeable with the very concept of "development".

I believe that Dr. Kissinger went to the heart of the matter when he said in his report—I will try to translate because I have it in Spanish—that "in the Central American and Caribbean region our credibility at world level is at stake. The success of hostile forces in our rearguard, a strategic rearguard, would be understood as a sign of impotence of the United States of America". So that's what really is at the heart of the matter, it is not national security but domination, and that's why the Monroe Doctrine has been revived.

(Guillermo Ungo, speaking in 1984. Opposition leader in El Salvador, United Alliance of the FDR/FMLN.)

. . . the price of raw materials has been going down for years now and it is very important for the development of Central America. One of the proposals once launched was commodity agreements to stabilise prices of raw materials. Central America depends for a major part of its export earnings on a few agricultural products like coffee, banana, sugar, cotton, and the prices of these products have plunged to very low levels compared with the prices of the manufactured goods that Central American countries purchase from industrialised countries. For these countries this implies a loss of purchasing power on the international market of about 30% in three or four years.

(Evelyn Herfkens, quoted in War on Want Conference Report, 1984.)

The ideological component in this new approach was a direct response to the "new political loyalty" forthcoming to the guerrilla movement in the highlands. Lobos Zamora estimated that one organization, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor, alone had gained "some 260,000 ideological sympathisers." p. 15³

The military's perception of the situation seems rooted in familiar cold war terms.

"We are at war in Guatemala. We have been in a permanent state of war since international communism began to attack us." (Alvarez, instructor at CEM)

The architect of 'Operation Ixil' noted in 1981 . . .

The EGP (Guerrilla Army of the Poor) has been successful from the outset by offering the Guatemalan Indian a hope of dignity which had never before been offered in more than 400 years of humiliation and misery."

He went on to describe the military actions from '77-'81 as "satisfactory" but ". . . as is natural in this kind of action, the resentment of the civilian population has spread alarmingly without any apparent peaceful solution" . . . because "as much as 50% of the population may collaborate with the enemy in espionage activities, principally by informing them of our movements." The "military language" used to describe the struggles of the peasants for social justice entrenches the army's oppressive response to those struggles into even more effective forms of totalitarian control.

1. *Bitter and Cruel: Report of a Mission to Guatemala* by the British Parliamentary Human Rights Group, October 1984, p. 3.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
3. *Report on the Americas*, "Under the Gun", by George Black.



Mike Goldwater/Network

Army on patrol, Quiché, Guatemala.

The Region

New Centre in Belize City



"Everywoman's Place", a guidance counselling and resource centre was officially opened in Belize City in December, 1986. The Presbyterian Church has made room for "Everywoman's Place" at St. Andrew's, Regent Street.

The Centre offers guidance counselling to the abused woman, and also serves as an information and referral centre on matters pertaining to violence against women.

The general purpose is to work towards the creation of a society in which woman abuse, as part of the larger problem of violence against women, will no longer exist, and to help individual women and their children rebuild their lives.

The members of Belize Women Against Violence Movement are committed to working towards peace and unity. We believe that women have the right to live without abuse. We are committed to empowering women to end violence in their lives.

We encourage men to support our work by providing positive role models to children and by working with other men to end violence against women. (*Belize Women Against Violence Movement, P.O. Box 1190, Belize City, Belize*)

Away with nude posters in Grenada

The Group of Concerned Women is waging war against nude posters.

Spokesperson for the Group, Margaret Neckles, said that her group will be staging a "forceful" campaign against "the sort of nude posters that we now see pasted up all over the place", especially on almanacs and in the advertisement of certain products.

Margaret Neckles said her group has already written letters to manufacturers, most of whom are based overseas, about the type of pictures they are sending to Grenada. She said they also intend to write the local distributors of these posters. "We are hoping that we would get support from business people in town to really assist us, because it's not elevating in any way or complimentary to women."

(From *Grenadian Voice*, March 10, 1987)

Delays worry Centre

The Rape Crisis Centre in Trinidad is very concerned about the length of time that cases of sexual abuse are taking in the courts. Since the Centre was set up in 1984, no verdicts have been handed down in cases with which the Centre is connected, and clients face seemingly endless postponements. Many women do not report to the police because they know that they may have to spend several years going to court.

Although delays are common in all types of cases, the Centre suggests that because of the nature of sexual crimes, delays are particularly traumatic for these victims. Feelings of helplessness, isolation and mistrust, commonly felt by survivors of sexual assaults, may be exacerbated, particularly as the accused is usually granted bail.

Representation has therefore been made by the Centre to the relevant authorities to find some method of speeding up these cases. One possibility is the reformulation of Section 33 of the new Sexual Offences Act (Nov. 1986), which allows for written depositions at the Preliminary Inquiry in certain, limited, circumstances. The Centre suggests that written depositions at this stage should be the norm, so that the victim does not have to go through the entire proceedings twice, as obtains at present.

Other possibilities for avoiding delays are also being looked into.

(*Rape Crisis Centre, Port-of-Spain*)

Trinidad & Tobago IWD

A statement from Women's Organizations Celebrating International Women's Day, March 8, 1987, made note of gains made by women in Trinidad and Tobago during the last ten years. Among these were the "increased recognition that women are people", the reinclusion of controversial Clause Four of the Sexual Offences Bill (see *Woman Speak!* Issue 19/20), the establishment of minimum wages for domestic employees, legislation protecting the property rights of women and simplification of the divorce laws, and an overall improvement in the tone of calypsoes featuring women.

The statement also drew attention to glaring and numerous inequalities in the workplace as well as the failure of society to address issues critical to women such as: health care, abuse of women in the media, and "the poverty in which thousands of non-wage working women struggle daily to raise families".

In February 1987, Women for Caribbean Liberation was officially launched in St. Vincent. The following is the declaration from that meeting.

DECLARATION OF THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF "WOMEN FOR CARIBBEAN LIBERATION"

Held in St. Vincent and the Grenadines over the period February 9-12, 1987

**An' so, if you see me
Looking at your hands
Listening when you speak
Marching in your ranks
You must know I do not sleep to dream
But dream to change the world.**

(Martin Carter: Poet of Guyana and the Caribbean)

This Inaugural Meeting of Women for Caribbean Liberation, held in St. Vincent and the Grenadines from February 9 to February 12, 1987, sends warm greetings of Caribbean Sisterhood to the Women of the entire archipelago; to the formal and informal organisations within which they function; and to other existing Caribbean Umbrella Women's organisations established to carry out different tasks, but to work towards our shared goals of the Liberation of Caribbean Women, the Liberation of Caribbean Peoples, the Liberation of the Caribbean Nation.

We are pledged to work towards the goals and to carry out the programme of activities which this Inaugural Meeting has set for the next year.

We are pledged, within this, to work to ensure the realisation of the First General Assembly of Women for Caribbean Liberation in International Women's Week, 1988, involving the broadest possible cross-section of Caribbean women and organisations that share our dream of a united, peaceful and free Caribbean, within which the aspirations of Caribbean minorities — in particular of our native peoples — are a living presence; and within which men and women of the Caribbean meet as equals to share the burdens and the fruit of a transforming Caribbean.

AND IN ADDITION:

Responding to the demands of this particular conjuncture of Caribbean life; informed by the reports from the women in the struggle in individual countries of our region; and inspired by the experience of earlier Caribbean freedom-fighters, men and women, including the example of the Hon. Marcus Garvey whose one-hundred birth anniversary we celebrate this year;

WE, Women from Puerto Rico, Haiti, Belize, Panama, Jamaica, Antigua, Dominica, St. Lucia, Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Suriname, Guyana and the Caribbean in North America;

Understanding that the struggle for the liberation of Caribbean Women and the struggle for the liberation of our region are two struggles which are separate but bound like links on one chain of oppression;

Express our opposition to the present threats to the sovereignty of Suriname by local and international forces which, in the name of freedom, seek to re-establish old links of dependence;

Pledge ourselves to support the just struggle of the people of the remaining colonies of our region against French, U.S., British and Dutch colonisation;

Affirm our unbreakable solidarity with the struggle of the Haitian people, and of Haitian women, to break free from a long and bitter history of thwarted hopes and to realise real freedom, justice and equality in Haiti;

Call the attention of Caribbean people and of Caribbean Women, to the continued abdication of principle by our Governments; and in this regard, as one important expression of our commitment to Caribbean morality, offer our support to the call by Sister Pat Rodney for an impartial enquiry into the brutal death of her husband, our brother, Walter Rodney, fighter for the Liberation of the Caribbean Peoples.

AND FINALLY,

This Inaugural Meeting of Women for Caribbean Liberation, committed to building firm links of solidarity with our Sisters in struggle outside the Caribbean, pledge our support to the women of Nicaragua defending their independence against U.S.-backed Contra forces;

And to the Women of South Africa struggling to end the anti-human system of Apartheid, and to give birth to a new South Africa.

**Dedicated to Pauline
A teacher and friend.**

I HEAR HER VOICE

**I hear her voice —
"Nelcia, are you sure?"
Quietly insistent
Beckoning me near
to share**

**I hear her voice
and the wood
of the casket
turns to gold
The loose earth
to threads of silver
And new strength
comes to me.**

Nelcia Robinson

(From **Pictures Remain**. A collection of 13 poems by Nelcia Robinson; Printed by Alternatives Ltd., St. Vincent and the Grenadines.)

Needlework and research — Guyanese 'self development' women's project gets going

The first exhibition and sale organised by Red Thread, a Woman's Development Project in Guyana, took place on April 4, 1987.

The centrepiece of the afternoon's event was a display of needlework produced by women and girls of the three communities where the project is now organised: Meten-Meer-Zorg, West Coast Demerara; Cotton Tree, West Coast Berbice and Wismar, Mackenzie — women and girls who in only two months of consistent production completed approximately 1000 pieces of work. Buxton and Victoria on the East Coast Demerara, where the project has involved women not yet organised, also produced some work. There was, as well, work from individual women not in the project who were invited to participate in the exhibition and sale. The girls of St. Ann's Orphanage also exhibited some of their work.

The Women's Development Project is addressing the question of the uneven quality of work produced by the women in the project, some of whom have only beginners' skills, while others are already capable of exquisite handiwork. Some pieces were well finished while in others, good or even excellent embroidery is spoiled by poor presentation.

Organizers appealed to visitors to the exhibition to help the producers to continue the task of raising their standards by using a "Comment Book" to speak frankly about the work exhibited.

THE WOMEN'S DEVELOPMENT PROJECT: ITS MEMBERS AND AIMS The WDP, which began steady production in October 1986, grew out of the activities of the WPA (Working People's Alliance) women in the communities and out of a growing recognition of the need to work with even broader masses of women towards the long-term goal of our collective self-development and self-organisation.

While most of the organisers of the project are therefore members of the WPA, a majority of the 100-plus women who produced work for this sale are not. The WDP is a non-profit group open to women on a non-sectarian basis.

Most of the participants are adult women, but a few are still girls at school. The adult women, in addition to being housewives, sometimes work outside the home, mainly in very small-scale selling, trading and farming. The majority have a low income or no direct income.

A main aim of the project is to increase the earnings and the earning capacity of participants. Given this, the present components of the project are income-generation through sewing; skills training; "education" about self and conditions of women in society; and research into the lives of Guyanese women.

The research being done at the moment is on women sugar workers specifically and on women and work generally. It is being done by case histories: women telling their own stories for documentation in written form and by slides.

Some of our friends have asked us why the project began with a "traditionally female" skill like sewing. The answer is that the project began with sewing precisely because it is a skill that many women already have, and one with which they can produce at the pace that suits the rhythm of their lives and needs. Thus, among the 100-plus women who began working for today's sale eight weeks ago, there are those who have produced only a few pieces while others produced more than 50 each.

As project participants improve their traditional skills, they will also be learning other, non-traditional skills. But even as they do, there will still be some who continue to produce out of the traditionally female skill of sewing, because with it they can create things that are useful and beautiful while they earn.

As the first issue of *Red Thread*, the Project's newsletter, says, "We have made a good start and as we continue our work we may grow into something else. In fact, we will become something different: just as a piece of cloth we work on becomes a useful towel and a piece of thread a pretty pattern. But whatever we grow into, the Needle and Thread will always remind us of where we began".

Added Attractions: Some of the work on display was produced by the project organisers. This included photographs, the first issue of the newsletter *Red Thread*, stationery and stitches. There was a display of handwork by women in other countries and a sample of literary production by women in other parts of the world. Guests were encouraged to look at three short films which were borrowed from the UNDP office: *Focus on Women*, *Winnie and Nelson Mandela* and *The Impossible Dream*.

(from pamphlet — WDP, April 4 1987, Georgetown, Guyana)

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, DOMINICA

In Grand Bay, March 8, the Southern Zonal Organization of Women organized a march and rally to mark International Women's Day. Thanks to the women affiliated with the Dominica National Council and a number of other women's groups, the event was a great success.

At the rally, Minnet Christian, herbalist, health advisor and the oldest member of the community, was honoured.

Numerous women's groups brought messages and there were statements from the Community Health Nurse, the former Parliamentary representative for the area, Judiana Henderson, and Pierre Charles the present Parliamentary representative.

Two visitors, Vanda Radzik of the Women's Development Project in Guyana and Kathy McAfee of Oxfam America, joined in. *WS!* thanks Kathy for these photographs.



Minnet Christian



Kathy McAfee/OA



Black Cross Nurse

The Black Cross Nurses was an organisation inspired by the work and ideals of Marcus Garvey, who dedicated his life to the dignity of black people in the American hemisphere. Garvey travelled throughout Central America and the United States to promote the ideas of loving self and kind.

Concerned about living conditions in Belize City, the Black Cross Nurses did a house-to-house survey on the facts of the true situation of health in Belize City. They were horrified by what their research revealed and decided to do something about it.

They were ordinary housewives others might have thought, but they decided to press on by getting themselves trained in nursing. At first they tried to get into a regular nurses' training programme, but they had families and were considered too old.

Furthermore, responsibilities to their families made it difficult for them to work fulltime or to be fulltime students outside the home. In addition, it would cost more if this group of women were to register in the regular programme, but they were determined to do something about suffering, undaunted by the traditional barriers that are often put before women.

POEM

Where is the God of Africa, can He not see . . .
The pain and injustice, being suffered by we?

Africa the great Motherland,
Raped of her riches, robbed of her Eden,
Existing now to carry, the white man's
Burden.

Oh Mother Africa, with all your glory . . .
Can they not respect you?
Must they just rob, hurt and neglect you?

All of our riches they seek . . .
Our diamonds, our bauxite, our gold.
Must we still turn the other cheek?
Must we riot, not keep quiet?
Or, must we turn back . . .
And get shot in the back?

To which God must we pray?
He of Pretoria?
Or He of Ethiopia?
The Caucasian, the Negroid?
They must be different Gods of colour.
The white God's got the black God's collar.
He can't fight back because he's feeble
He can't look down upon his people.

Cynthia Franklyn

The Black Cross Nurses were able to get the help of Dr. M. Simon, Government Medical Officer, and Mrs. M. Clare to train them. They began on July 21, 1921, meeting twice every week. Each trainee paid 20 cents a week to meet the cost of training. Whenever one of the trainees was absent she had to pay a fine of \$1.00. As soon as the Medical Officer felt that they were ready, he obtained permission for them to get practical experience in the hospital.

(From an article in *The Belize Woman*, newsletter of the Belize Rural Women's Association, Vol. 1, No. 3, June 1987.)

This story will be continued in the next issue of the BRWA's newsletter.

THE BELIZE WOMAN

Newsletter of the
Belize Rural Women's Association
P.O. Box 196
Belmopan
Belize
Central America

POEM

If you paid an assassin to come after me
You couldn't have done better.
You and your thunderous stifling ways
Over the years seem laughable
Compared to pain I endure
For having discovered something sweet and
unexplainable
Only to lose it as quickly.
Yes I feel pain, excruciating pain
And what pleasure it would give you
To mutter "Your sins are catching up with you kid".
What sins? What are sins?
Sins of a rich young Portuguese man dying at
forty-two
An adventurous Scotsman drowning helplessly
Chatoyer falling under the sickly sword of Leith
Ancestors all catching up with me.
Sins — damn you all, how dare you condemn me
Me with no childhood
Always knowing, always feeling, wanting
Never really having
And now I die daily
Die because I discovered there could be something
better
Only to have it withdrawn because I'm too damn
complicated.
Did you hear that bugger?
Too damn complicated.
I bleed and your revenge is sweet
Fate has got me like no speeding bullet could
No blunt cutlass no dull-edged dagger.
I am being strangled by feelings
Feelings like I've never had with you.

Carolle Grant

Books



Patrick U. Smikle

"John Gawn ah Fahrin An Im soon Come Back" sing Lana Finikin and Cerene Stephenson of the Sistren Theatre Collective, as they take centre stage to introduce one of the readings from the Sistren book *Lionheart Gal* (The Women's Press) at its recent Jamaica launch. Other Sistren members and a section of the large audience look on.

The Sistren Theatre Collective book, *Lionheart Gal* (The Women's Press), has been selected as one of the top twenty titles for a major book trade promotion in the United Kingdom in June.

The event, known as 'Feminist Book Fortnight', was first organised in June 1984 by Britain's major publish-

ers and distributors. It seeks to promote books about women which the judges see as being well-written and which have either sold well or are expected to sell well in the United Kingdom. During the promotional fortnight, 'Lionheart Gal' will be included in special window displays nationwide in all branches of Britain's



Patrick Smikle/'Sistren' Magazine

BUILDING A MEETING PLACE WITH 'NUFF LOVE AND WHOLE HEAP OF JOLLIFICATION: Love and jollification marked the opening of the Sistren Theatre Collective's new offices at 20 Kensington Crescent, Kingston 5, Jamaica. Picture shows some of the several hundred guests who joined popular theatre groups in costume, and the Panoridim Steel Band for a rousing jump-up around the crescent.

major bookstore chain — W.H. Smith. The *Sistren* book will also be included in a special catalogue produced by W.H. Smith for the 'Feminist Book Fortnight'.

Meanwhile, *Lionheart Gal* was the fourth best-selling book at the recently concluded annual International Book Fair of Radical Black and Third World Books organised by Race Today Publications and New Beacon Books in London. Other best-sellers were *Waiting in Twilight* by Joan Riley; *Watchers and Seekers* by West Indians Rhonda Cobham and Merle Collins, and *They Won't Take Me Alive* by Clarabel Alegria of Nicaragua.

(Sistren News Release, April 2, 1987)

BRINGING IT ALL BACK HOME

Margaret Prescod, co-founder of Black Women for Wages for Housework was in London last month to relaunch her book *Black Women: Bringing It All Back Home*.

The book describes the effect on women and children of emigrating from the Caribbean to the USA and Britain. Margaret explained the right of 'immigrants' to live in these countries: "We were working for places like Britain and the US long before we even came, and so it's not like we're beggars or charity cases, but we've helped to create the wealth in these countries."

An activist for women's rights, Prescod founded Black Women for Wages for Housework with Wilmette Brown. WFH aims to get every government to recognise the economic value of women's work. WFH also spawned the Black Coalition Fighting Back Serial Murders, which was formed in January 1986 to jolt the Los Angeles police into seriously investigating the murders of 17 women, most of whom were said to have prostitution records. According to Margaret, before the campaign was launched no one wanted anything to do with the issue of the serial murders. She said the feminist movement was reluctant to get involved because of the moral question, and the male dominated race relations organisations were not interested either. She believes the police's half-hearted approach to the investigation is characteristic of how society values people according to how productive they are to society. "If the victims were another population from a more moneyed community then there would be a much greater response nationally and internationally," commented Margaret.

WFH has started sanctuaries for political and economic refugees mostly from Central America, finding them places to stay and helping them integrate into society. Margaret believes that the sanctuary movement is stronger in the USA than in Britain possibly because it has been established for a longer time. Immigration problems also differ between the US and Britain, mainly



Maurice Frankson

Louise Bennett-Coverley "Miss Lou", accepts a special award from Pauline Crawford of Sistren.

because in the US total border control is impossible. Legitimate entry to the US tends to be more difficult for those of visible ethnicity. "If you're white and from Europe it is much easier to get a visa into the USA than if you're black and from Barbados, or if you're from Mexico. If you're fleeing a 'communist' country you'll get in easily, as opposed to those fleeing Reagan's war in Central America," said Margaret.

(Mary Gregory, *SpareRib* #177, April 1987)

Women's poetry

Recent research throughout the Caribbean region reveals that there are many more struggling literary females than the printed output would lead us to believe. And invariably, the product is poetry. It is not difficult to understand why. It is easier, after all, to write a poem if one has a few minutes between cooking, looking after children and coping with housework, than a novel or a play. But much of this poetry is 'silent' in that it remains private, unobtrusive, closeted. The practitioners of this art are not led to take themselves or their poems seriously and as a result the writing is sporadic, lacking development, and eventually goes nowhere.

It is important to note, though, that if women do not articulate and explore their own experience, their own development cannot help but be stultified. Allowing one's insights to pass into the common pool of literary endeavour is part of the process of exchange in which human beings are engaged. It is in the interest of redress-

Books

ing this perceived deficiency in the publication of women's poetry in the Caribbean that CAFRA (Caribbean Association for Feminist Research and Action) has initiated the project of compiling an anthology of contemporary poetry. The problem of writing and publishing is compounded by our history of slavery and indentureship, colonialism and its attendant disabling mechanisms. This applies of course to all writers, but more so to the women among them and especially to those women who have neither the means nor the circumstances to engage in creative activity for prolonged periods of time.

I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman. — Virginia Woolf

Woolf wrote this in the early years of the twentieth century. More women the world over have become recognised as poets since then. But only within the last decade or so have the Caribbean women poets begun to emerge. The anthology *Jamaica Woman*, compiled in the late seventies by Mervyn Morris, brought together many of these new Jamaican female poets under one cover — poets such as Lorna Goodison, Christine Craig, Pam Mordecai and Heather Royes. Lorna Goodison has since published two volumes of poetry: *Tamarind Season* (1983) and *I Am Becoming My Mother* (1986). Dionne Brand, living and working in Toronto, has published four volumes of poetry to date. But critical commentary, which is a crucial aspect of the development process, has been scarce. The poet needs this feedback for her audience and the need for more dialogue is evident. The publication of this anthology holds out distinct possibilities for the beginning of a real discourse on feminist poetics for the Caribbean.

Women have as rich and varied a history here as in every other part of the world. But the passing of experience from woman to woman has been largely through the means of the oral tradition — within the inner circle of the family, the tribe, the village. Much less has been written about the rites of passage to womanhood than the corresponding rites of manhood. Perhaps with the new bonds of sisterhood, and freedom from competition for securing males, which women are forging daily, ways can be found to share experience more widely.

At any rate, this anthology will offer Caribbean women the opportunity to present themselves, for the first time, in a common medium which intends to cross all of the boundaries of class, race, language and country. Such a fertile accumulation of poetic experience cannot but reproduce itself. The emergence of *new female poets*, engaged in sustained acts of writing, is one of the positive future projections of such an anthology.

Ramabai Espinet

BOOKS IN PRINT

Rural Development in the Caribbean, edited by P.I. Gomes, Heinemann Educational Books, Jamaica, 1985.



Carl Van Vechten/Beinecke Library, Yale U.

ZORA NEALE HURSTON (1903–1960)

American novelist. She was a key figure in the literary circles of the Harlem Renaissance. She wrote *Their Eyes Were Watching God* and *Jonah's Gourd Vine*.

The Caribbean Association for Feminist Research & Action (CAFRA), invites women living in the Caribbean and Caribbean women living abroad, to contribute to an Anthology of Poems. Publication of the Anthology is intended to challenge the male-centered bias which has dominated West Indian literature and to provide an opportunity for women writers to have their work published.

Poems may be on any topic and should be unpublished. Since the Anthology will be multi lingual, contributions in any Caribbean language will be welcomed.

The deadline for submitting material has been extended to August 31, 1987. Poems should be typed (double-spaced) if possible. They should be sent with a self-addressed envelope to:

Rawwida Baksh-Soodeen
CAFRA Co-ordinator
19, Maraj Street
Tunapuna
Trinidad & Tobago
West Indies.

Women of the Caribbean, edited by Pat Ellis, Zed Books Ltd. 1986
ISBN 0-86232-596-X ISBN 0-86232-597-8 Pbk
Edition for Jamaica published by Kingston Publishers Ltd., 1A Norwood Avenue, Kingston 5, Jamaica.
Jamaican ISBN 976-625-011-1

Lionheart Gal: Life stories of Jamaican Women

Sistren with Honor Ford-Smith, ed.

London: Women's Press, 1986.

North American edition: Sister Vision Black Women and Women of Colour Press, 1987.

Lionheart Gal. Sistren with Honor Ford-Smith. See Review by Ramabai Espinet.

Lionheart Gal is a brave and necessary piece of work which Caribbean women in particular should stand up and salute. It is the first Caribbean articulation of the daily struggle in the lives of individual women by those women themselves.

These life stories are crafted with a rhythm and a coherence which make them simple and readable. But such simplicity is deceptive: the practised eye and the skill at selection and editing are the tools which pull them into focus. And that such a "seeing eye" belongs to the editor, Honor Ford-Smith, is never in doubt. From the detailed and analytical introduction to the arrangement of the tales in the book, it is clear that a securely-grounded artist is at work. There is evidence of an eye for order, for effective rendering and a practical approach to stage direction which keeps the whole object of artistic endeavour in full view at all times.

Of the contributors themselves, the Sistren whose life stories these are, the most striking chord is that of a bare-faced honesty which can only have come out of a real confidence in themselves, allowing them to take such a risk. We are who we are, and whatever that is, we are worthwhile, these stories proclaim. Not a common or easy virtue, in my experience, among women anywhere. Has this confrontational act of BEING Come out of Sistren's work over the ten-year period that the group has been in existence? The facts suggest this, in itself a remarkable achievement.

Ford-Smith's introduction explains that the stories explore the two images of woman in the Caribbean woman's psyche: the warrior and the nanny. Because these images are opposed: common and contradictory, they are to be found in almost every single one of these life histories. *Rebel Pickney*, for all of its undaunted spirit, ends upon a reflective note deeply connected with woman as mother and nurturer. *Criss Miss* and *Rock Stone a River Bottom No Know Sun Hot* are bewildered, groping attempts by young girls without real information to find a footing in the world. Their errors, made in isolation, are compounded by repetition of familiar behaviour. And they emerge, scathed but alive and certain of the worth of their own painful experiences. And in *Grandma's Estate*, the woman reflects on her grandmother's life:



Patrick U. Smikle.

'Grandma, you miscalculated,' I thought, for she had underestimated the power of the powerless. she had failed to bargain for change . . . it was relatively easy to promise myself that I would try to challenge every social convention in which her world had tried to imprison me. (pp. 196-97)

All of these stories are individual authentic accounts of what life consists of for these Jamaican women. Not one can be left out of the reckoning.

The language used in the stories is Jamaican creole, but it is rendered in a system of spelling which, we are told, is a mixture of phonetic spelling, English spelling and that which has become accepted through usage. The non-Caribbean reader may have some difficulty at first, because the initial impact of the speech as a different language, not English, is strong. Reading the text aloud until one grows accustomed to the sound system is an easy solution. The reader is also helped considerably by the scrupulous attention to consistency in the spelling.

Lionheart Gal does more than the telling of the life histories of the women included here. It is literally a telling of the story from the inside — the home truths, the shameful facts, the fears, hopes, dreams, conflicts, and above all, the isolation in which these issues must be sorted out and resolved. The very existence of the book is a step out of that isolation and into a community where experiences can be shared. This collection is one of the concrete products of the Caribbean feminist movement. As a step forward for women everywhere, it is of no small significance.

Ramabai Espinet

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