

REPORT OF THE ETHNOGRAPHIC FIELD SCHOOL
IN BELIZE (JUNE 2013 SEASON)

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This report documents the findings of the ethnographic field school organized by the Center for Applied Anthropology (CfAA) at Northern Kentucky University (NKU) in Orange Walk District, Belize, during June 2013. The Sugar Industry Research and Development Institute (SIRDI) facilitated ethnographic research in the communities of San Antonio, San Lazaro, and Yo Creek. The aim of the ethnographic field school was to train students in basic ethnographic methods as well as collect data for SIRDI to use in their agricultural and economic development programs. This field season's research focused on the following broad topics: history and cultural relations; economy; kinship, marriage, and family; sociopolitical organization; and religion and expressive culture.

While the educational aim of the ethnographic field school is to train students in basic ethnographic methods, the applied purpose of the field school is to collect and analyze data that can then be used by SIRDI and other agencies in the development of programs for betterment of the sugar cane farming communities in northern Belize. As posted on the field school's web site:

Students will learn about the local culture by doing participant-observation and conducting ethnographic interviews in a community-based research project. Students will learn research ethics, unobtrusive observation, participant observation, field note writing and coding, ethnographic and life history interviewing, ethnolinguistic data collection, community mapping, rapid assessment procedures, qualitative data analysis, and other ethnographic methods in addition to basic ethnographic writing. After successful completion of this course, students will have:

- developed a basic understanding of Belizean culture,
- formulated an understanding of ethical and validity issues in ethnographic research,
- practiced skills in research design and ethnographic methods of data collection,
- applied basic ethnographic research methods in a non-western culture,
- engaged in a community-based research project, and
- analyzed ethnographic data resulting in an ethnographic monograph. (Center for Applied Anthropology at Northern Kentucky University 2014)

In addition, as posted on the field school's web site:

The ethnographic field school, as part of the CfAA, is collaborating with the Sugar Industry Research and Development Institute (SIRDI) in Orange Walk Town, Belize. Among other things, our partner is interested in our contribution in understanding the household economy and agricultural knowledge of sugar cane farmers in the Orange Walk District village communities. SIRDI will use our results and recommendations to develop and conduct workshops for farmers on agricultural techniques, economics, health, and other community development topics. (Center for Applied Anthropology at Northern Kentucky University 2014)

our general purpose and introduce students to community members. Two of the field school students were fluent Spanish speakers and would be assigned to interview informants who voiced a desire to be interviewed in Spanish. Students would then present the informed consent statement (Appendix A) and upon agreement, have the informant sign a copy (on file) and were offered an unsigned copy for their records.

Interviews were generally conducted on the informant's property (e.g., porch, house, etc.) with a pair of students, one serving as the primary interviewer and the other as observer. The standard method used for this research was the ethnographic interview (Spradley 1979), which is people centered (Levy and Hollan 1998) rather than interviewer centered. Interviews were from five minutes to an hour, depending upon the informant's time constraints and willingness to be interviewed by the students. Ideally the interview would flow naturally from topic to topic and would end when the interviewer or the informant perceived a natural stopping point or when the informant no longer seemed comfortable or interested (Levy and Hollan 1998).

During the first week of interviews while at Yo Creek, the students asked open-ended questions to elicit information about the following topics and subtopics (see Appendix B: Interview Schedule [Procedure]):

- orientation (identification and location, demography, settlements, and linguistic affiliation),
- history and cultural relations,
- economy (subsistence and commercial activities, industrial arts, trade, division of labor, and land tenure),
- kinship, marriage, and family (kin groups, kin terms, marriage, domestic unit, inheritance, and socialization),
- sociopolitical organization (social organization, political organization, social control, and conflict), and
- religion and expressive culture (beliefs, religious practitioners, ceremonies, arts, medicine, death, and afterlife).

After the first week of research, in San Antonio and San Lazaro, each student focused on two to three subtopics, listed above, during their interviews and as the focus of their final paper. Students took field notes both during and directly after each interview. The interviews were digitally recorded and later transcribed (still in progress).

The aim of this field season was to present a general cultural description of the farming communities in San Antonio, San Lazaro, and Yo Creek. These findings are not intended to be an extensive and in-depth cultural analysis, nor were they intended to focus on a specific theme. They are intended to serve as the basis for further field study and provide relevant cultural information from this and future studies to SIRDI and other agencies for their development of programs affecting sugar cane farming communities in northern Belize.

Orientation (Identification and Location, Demography, Linguistic Affiliation, History and Cultural Relations, and Settlements)

Research was conducted in Orange Walk District within the communities of San Antonio, San Lazaro, and Yo Creek. The predominant ethnicity of the village inhabitants is mestizo, which refers to a hereditary mix between colonial Spanish and the indigenous Maya. Many of the shop owners in Orange Walk were part of a small immigrant population from China and Thailand. Though Mennonites did not live in the village, they did come into town to sell their wares. None of the informants identified themselves as *Kriol* (creole) in the villages in which we conducted interviews.

Most informants lived in cement homes, which were built to withstand tropical storms and hurricanes, many of which were painted in bright colors. In the villages, it is common to see Maya style huts, with hardwood posts that support a thatched roof, which usually serve as a patio for guests. It is also common to see a secondary kitchen outdoors, often used to provide shelter from the heat. Many residences double as storefronts and sell dry goods and sundries.

Informants, with few exceptions, spoke Spanish as their primary language. The younger the informants were, the more proficient their spoken English. If they were in school (secondary or university), they were fluent in English. Some elderly people spoke a little Mayan.

The amount of time the informants lived in the villages varied; the older portion of

For the most part, the majority of the informants traded within the community. Those who claimed to not be involved with trade stated that it was primarily due to lack of opportunity or product. However, some informants who had both opportunity and

Children and adolescents usually spend their days at school. After school, they return home to help around the house. Children who were under 5 years of age normally did not have any chores in the home. Boys and girls helped with maintaining the household when they reached a certain age. Typical chores included maintaining the yard, cleaning up rooms in the house, cleaning dishes, and taking care of their younger siblings. It was more common for boys to help their families during sugar cane season. Boys had to be at least 10 to 12 years of age to help in the fields. As the boys got older, they were allowed to be more involved in the process of farming sugar cane.

The last main group of individuals in the community was the elderly. Informants stated that the retirement age was around 60 years of age. A common exception to this rule was farmers, who would usually continue working until they were not physically able to do the labor, which may be before 60 years of age. Upon retirement, these individuals were given social security payments by the state. The elderly in the community commonly stayed at home, in which they would use their free time to do activities and hobbies, such as gardening.

Kinship (Kin Groups, Descent, and Kinship Terminology)

league, and was successful in finding funding for trophies for the winners of the tournament. Both men and women can be elected to the council. In San Lazaro, there are currently two women on the council. They earned the title of “Machistas”. Many of the governmental employees are perceived to be wealthy. However, this wealth and political power does not confer social status. One informant reported, “For us, everyone is the same.”

Beyond the local government, the next level of government that the informants were interested in discussing was the national government. They reported that the national government consists of a prime minister, and a deputy prime minister, who is second in command. A house of representatives are elected area representatives. In total, 27 area representatives represent the people and vote for the prime minister. National elections are held every 5 years. Two political parties have power in Belizean politics. Although there are more parties, it is nearly impossible for a third party to achieve national power because voters are so deeply rooted within the political party they already support. The two major parties are the United Democratic Party (UDP), which is symbolized by the color red, and the People's United Party (B.Ra, it t-1.141r([(which is s

The villages named after saints, San Antonio and San Lazaro, celebrate their patron saint once a year, sometimes called Day of the Village. In San Antonio, an informant described the day as a track-and-field types, with relay races, swimming, and other outdoor activities. San Antonio Day is on June 13. The Catholics in San Antonio call the Day of the Village the *Feast of the Patron*, and includes a metaphorical walk with the Patron where villagers walk through the village streets, followed by a feast consisting of rice, beans, chicken, and tamales. San Lazaro Day, or the San Lazaro Feast, is celebrated on December 17. Another day in San Lazaro—Culture Day—is observed in the schools and gives students the opportunity to explore other cultures of the world through food, costume, stories, and presentations. An informant described a Hindu costume and dance that her daughter was practicing, and lamented that she did not know what to make for her dish. No one in Yo Creek mentioned a village day.

Different religions practice different ceremonies in the villages. Baptisms are performed at different stages of life according to the religious faith of the individual. Babies born into a Catholic family are baptized when they are infants, but those of non-Catholic faiths, such as Pentecostal, are baptized as an adolescent or adult whenever they see fit. A Pentecostal baptism is done in a natural body of water and up to ten individuals are baptized in one trip. Family and friends bring food and drinks and spend the day at the water with the baptized. The individual that is being baptized makes a testimony about why they want to be baptized, and after the complete submersion in the water, they talk about how they feel. Parents of non-Catholic faiths may devote their child to Christ when the child is an infant. Evangelical faithful have a Holy Communion ceremony. A Pentecostal informant spoke of Bible Day, observed on October 31, and is celebrated with a parade of a truck and trailer decorated as a giant bible with bible verses written on it. The informant was adamant about all inhabitants of the village being welcome to the parade, especially all Christian faiths present in the village.

Christmas is celebrated differently by different Christian faiths. In the Evangelical church, members gather at the church for Mass and Christmas-themed presentations. One Pentecostal informant from San Lazaro described a Pentecostal Christmas celebration as a type of lock-in, where church members stay the night in the church, make tamales, pray, and learn about the bible. Some informants explained that they raise chickens and turkeys to slaughter and eat on special occasions, such as Christmas.

Birthdays are celebrated with a family get-together at a family member's house. The traditional birthday consists of a dinner of Belizean food, a piñata, and a flan cake. Presents such as clothes, shoes, and money are given to the individual celebrating the birthday. An informant told us that some people celebrate birthdays and anniversaries with a power point presentation of pictures of the celebrated individuals through the years. Graduations from high school and college are celebrated in a similar way as birthdays, with a barbecue of traditional Belizean food and a gathering

that they often related the practices to Satanism. The rituals in question involve potions, for love or revenge, and dolls that they stick pins in, which resemble Voodoo dolls.

While people still have Maya myths, their death rituals are mainly Christian. When a death occurs, people have a wake, and then they take the body to Church for a service, and then to the grave. In the Catholic funerals, the occasion is known to the community and everyone in town comes together to help the bereaved, bringing medicine, money, food (sandwiches were extremely popular) to help them pass the night when they would sit with the dead. There are, however, some subtle variations. While most funerals are held in the village, some are planned and done in Orange Walk Town. Funeral guests are typically those people who knew the deceased in life, from family and friends to acquaintances. The funeral of one informant's sister was very large, and the informant said that there were people from the entire district there, as she exerted great influence in the community.

Regardless of religious affiliation, all people are buried in the same burial ground, which in all three cases was located at the edge of the village. Where one is buried seems to be a matter of choice. People have mentioned being buried at home or close to family as important and most often choose to be buried in those places. Sometimes remains are transported great distances for interment. There were a few graves around the Church in San Antonio that belonged to the original owners of the land. Churches have the holiest ground, but this is no longer allowed due to lack of space.

In the last 50-60 years, the aboveground burial style, in which the coffin is encased in a block of cement above the ground has become the norm. There are also burials underground, which used to be more popular, but are now considered poor burials. One informant reported that people used to be buried in the yards of their homes, which is a distinctly Maya tradition. He went on to mention that the Church had legally put a stop to that, but that it had been practiced within the last two decades.

The majority of informants identified themselves as Christian and believed that the

forming a basis for further study of sugar cane farmers in Northern Belize. In future field seasons, the focus of research will be on topics more directly assisting SIRDI in constructing development programs among farmers in Northern Belize, beginning with sugar cane farming as indigenous knowledge (as Sillitoe and Dixon 2005) and documenting household economic behavior (as Wilk 1991).



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INFORMED CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE

TITLE OF PROJECT: Ethnographic Field School

NAME OF PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Dr. Douglas Hume

CONTACT NAME AND PRESENT POSITION: Douglas Hume, Ph.D., Associate Professor of Anthropology, Northern Kentucky University

PLEASE READ THIS CAREFULLY. This document contains information about the project and the way of life of sugar cane farmers in Northern Belize. The purpose of this research is to understand the cultural practices and beliefs of these farmers and to help them improve their lives. The results of this research will be used to develop educational programs for sugar cane farmers in Northern Belize.

It is your right to refuse to participate in this study or to stop participating at any time. Your decision to participate in the study is voluntary. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to sign this consent form. Your signature acknowledges that you have read the information stated and willingly sign this consent form. Your signature also acknowledges that you have received, on the date signed, a copy of this document.

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Witness to signature (project staff) Date

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