introduction

In this article I examine the relation between the construction of collective identities and the emergence of class alliances that shape economic development trajectories. Anthropologists investigating the construction of collective identities have most frequently focused on ethnic or national collectivities, exploring the means by which constructions of peoplehood gain sufficient power over people's imaginations to create a sense of shared identity and interest capable of moving them to action (Fox 1985, 1990b; Gellner 1985; Handler 1988; Herzfeld 1982; Kapferer 1988; Verdery 1991; Williams 1989, 1991). Despite the rich insights interpretive approaches have brought to discourses that organize collectivity in national or ethnic terms, their focus away from issues of class has left an incomplete picture of the dynamics of class issues in the shaping of national identities and economies. This article attempts to broaden this line of analysis by focusing on the construction of collective class identities and examining their intersection with racial-ethnic and national collectivities.

By applying class analysis to the construction of nations a few scholars have recently provided a more complete picture of how material interests are implicated in nationalist discourses. Fox (1990a), Smith (1990), and Williams (1989) attend to the interests and agency of particular classes in struggles to construct particular kinds of nations. While these approaches problematize collective national or ethnic identities, they have not interrogated the social construction of class identities and interests in parallel fashion. Conversely, "post-Marxist" theorists (Laclau and Mouffe 1985), who do problematize class as they investigate the discursive construction of all social identities, have tended to "lose their reference to material practice and historical conditions" (Hall 1986b:56-57). In this article I seek a middle course attentive to intertwining "modes of production and modes of signification" (Barrett et al. 1979:10), which retains a concern for material relations while aiming to avoid simplifying and reifying class.

class formation and the construction of collective identities

Orthodox Marxists have tended to define classes abstractly in a "pure" form, based solely on their positioning in the material process of production; this abstract definition is often assumed
to carry over into material relations “on the ground” (Wolpe 1986:119–121). “Pure” class-in-itself is expected to transform itself automatically into a class-for-itself; failure in this process is attributed to capitalists’ use of purely “ideological” notions such as race and ethnicity to create “false consciousness” among workers, dividing them and interrupting their march toward class unity. “Pure” class must then be rescued from the fragmentation imposed by “ideology” in order to ensure the class-in-itself to class-for-itself transition.

Against these assumptions, Marxist-feminists and neo-Marxists assert that “pure” classes do not exist “on the ground”; rather, concrete, historical classes are “fragmented and fractured” (Wolpe 1986:121). Challenging traditional Marxist dichotomies—which oppose the material to the ideal and assign priority to the former—they argue that the economy is not autonomously formed; rather, the economy, politics, and social meanings interact with the result that they mutually shape and “internally structure” one another (Diskin and Sandier 1993; Sacks 1989; Wolpe 1986). For example, as people who belong to particular social categories (such as racial-ethnic, gender, or national categories) are assigned to different kinds of work, both the meanings attached to those categories and those attached to the work position are (re-)shaped through their association. As a result of differences in the way production is organized and the allocation of different “types” of individuals to different types of work, people in different segments come to experience different relations of production—with their employers, their coworkers, and the unions that represent them (Glenn 1985; Gordon et al. 1982; Nash and Fernandez-Kelly 1983). They may also formulate distinct class understandings or consciousness based on those different experiences (Sacks 1989; Weston 1990; Willis 1977). Thus, through segmentation, other social identities become intertwined with and internalized into class experiences—both the material conditions involved in production and the meanings attached to those conditions. While most research has focused on the working classes, analogous processes fracture the capitalist classes.

The heterogeneity of class experience reveals class unity as problematic, an emergent solidarity achieved and sustained only through struggle (Hall 1986a:14). Recognition of the contingent and contested nature of class unity refocuses analysis of “class struggle” on the ongoing struggle to form collective class agents (Przeworski 1977). The struggles by which members of a fractured “class-in-itself” construct themselves into collective agents and negotiate alliances with other fragments have important implications, because such alliances play a central role in establishing particular development policies and shaping overall national development trajectories (de Janvry 1981; Roxborough 1979).

Efforts to forge either inter- or intraclass alliances out of differentiated fragments depend on the definition of common identities and interests (Gramsci 1971). In order to understand the ideological contests involved in these efforts, Hall has argued for a “more discursive understanding of ideology,” an approach that explores the way ideology works through discourses that organize experience and constitute subjectivities and relationships (Hall 1988:73). While recognizing that material practice is apprehended through discourse, this approach does not reduce all practices to discourse (San Juan 1989:73); it remains attentive to the ways material practice is implicated in the discursive ordering of social identities, relations, and interests.

In general, political and economic elites play a leading role in establishing public identities and their associated interests through their control of the means of symbolic production; indeed, the meanings they purvey may saturate public discussion of an issue. Nonetheless, their efforts to construct and mobilize collective agents behind particular projects encounter difficulties. On the one hand, the capitalist classes are themselves fractured along many lines. Thus, cleavage and competition among capitalists impedes both intraclass solidarity and the elaboration of consistent and coherent systems of social meanings by elites (Roseberry 1989:47). On the other hand, economic subordinates do not simply absorb and act on the meanings disseminated by elites. While the discourses elaborated by political and economic elites provide categories for
subordinates to think with, either within or against the meanings elite discourses establish, the material practices of subordinates may support alternative interpretations: insofar as elite discourses do not adequately make sense of the material practices of subordinates they are subject to rejection or modification.

These circumstances suggest that the dominance of a particular discourse is not simply given by the structural position of the class group that disseminates it (Hall 1986c:42). Rather, discourses attain dominance through “ideological struggle”—contests to fix meanings, constitute collective agents, and direct their actions (Hall 1983:45, 1986b:42). Competing discourses articulate sets of shared identities and interests that may resonate in different ways with the material conditions of the people they aim to move; they consequently vie for allegiance (Hall 1988). Recognition that opposing discourses may “make sense” of people’s experiences in different ways leads us away from judging the truth or falsity of discourses to focus instead on their efficacy—on how and why particular discourses bind together collective agents in support of particular political and economic projects (Hall et al. 1977). As Hall asserts, there must be something that “makes good sense” about any argument that moves people to action (1988:46). The effectiveness of particular discourses can be measured by the degree to which they “impose certain ‘ways of looking,’ particular angles of vision, on events and relationships,” and, ultimately, “construct us into different forms of practice” (Hall 1983:49; Hall and Donald 1985:ix–x).

In this article I examine such “ideological struggle” in the Belizean citrus industry among politicians, the owners of citrus-processing companies, the proprietors of large citrus estates, smallholder citrus farmers, and wage laborers. Official discourses elaborated by the state to construct and channel social collectivity in Belize provide the context for two public contests that unfolded in the citrus industry, each involving competing attempts to forge social alliances behind particular political and economic projects. Each case provides an example of the ways in which workers and farmers in the Belizean citrus industry measure official and elite discourses against their own material practices as they negotiate collective class identities and interests. While I explore the discursive construction of collective identities, I also examine the material grounds for particular constructions of collective identity and the material consequences of these constructions as they play a role in shaping economic development strategies.

official discourses: development, nationalism, and democracy in Belize

Official Belizean government pronouncements appropriate three internationally available discourses—nationalism, development, and democracy—and weave them together to define a particular configuration of identities and interests: the Belizean nation and its goals. While these discourses are not explicitly about class, all have important class implications. International development discourse (Escobar 1995) defines development in terms of growth in the national economy and links this goal to particular strategies, evaluative measures, and enforcement mechanisms. The strategy prescribes infusions of capital for investment. An increase in per capita gross domestic product (GDP) serves as the measure of success while coercion applied by specialized international bodies ensures compliance. Belizean development policies reflect both this hegemonic definition of development and the coercive constraints imposed by international lending institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, and the development organizations established by the U.S. and British governments, which have provided funding primarily for investment in export production (Barry 1992:155–156; Deere et al. 1990). Accordingly, the government has implemented an export-led development strategy based on the expansion of agroindustrial exports such as sugar, citrus, and bananas. This export-oriented strategy aims to increase per capita GDP, decrease the nation’s trade deficit by boosting exports, and earn foreign currency to pay the creditors who finance the strategy. Belizean export producers have turned this policy emphasis to their benefit

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to obtain credit and concessions for expansion. They have enhanced their ability to win favorable policy decisions from the government by providing funding for electoral campaigns. They compete among themselves for government patronage, however, and they are fragmented by ethnic, kin, political, and other distinctions.

In order to implement an export-led development strategy successfully, the government of Belize has worked to establish the "attractive climate for investment" sought by international and Belizean investors. Thus the government touts Belize's stable democracy, offers tax and tariff concessions to investors, and attempts to hold down wages. Since export-led development produces for external rather than domestic markets, labor represents only a cost to investors (deJavny 1981). Thus, to encourage investment, the Belizean government exerts downward pressure on wages by refusing to enforce or strengthen existing labor laws and by supporting the use of immigrant labor from Central America. These measures weaken unions, provide bases for the division of workers along national lines, and increase competition for jobs (Medina 1990a, 1992a). The government's export-led development program has been successful in the sense that success is defined by international elites: in 1990—as per capita GDP rose to BZ$2,500—a representative of USAID declared Belize "close to the take-off point" for self-sustaining economic growth. Despite this economic growth, unemployment is estimated at 20 percent, wages lag behind the rising cost of living, and concern over the use of immigrant labor exacerbates racial-ethnic tensions in Belize (SPEAR 1990:18).

Government discourses on the nation and democracy work to legitimize these development policies and their results. As Williams (1991) has noted for Guyana, official discourses assign places in the nation on the basis of "contributions" to the nation. While the Guyanese identify contributions primarily in ethnic terms, the Belizean government recognizes two different types of contribution—ethnic contributions to "national culture" and class contributions to "national development." Since independence in 1981, the government has consistently promoted multiethnic images of the Belizean nation, hailing the "contributions of the many ethnic and cultural groups" that comprise Belize as "the backbone of [the] nation and its progress throughout history" (UDP 1984:13). Tensions among Belize's constituent groups are portrayed as holdovers from British colonial policies of "divide and rule."

The racial-ethnic categories most celebrated as contributors to the history and culture of Belize include the two largest categories, Creole and Spanish, together with Garifuna and Yucatec, Mopan, and Kekchi Maya. The construction of each category—both historically and in the present— Involves competing projects of peoplehood. These projects define in divergent ways the category's boundaries, its relation to other categories, and its content. Leadership among those who claim each racial-ethnic identity, and the corresponding power to define and position the group, are contested in many of the categories. At present, the Creole category is closely associated with the ideas of African ancestry and Black identity. The Garifuna (formerly labeled Black Carib) embrace a "mixed" identity, tracing their culture and history to the physical and cultural amalgamation of free Africans into indigenous Carib society in the eastern Caribbean and the subsequent mass deportation of the Black Caribs to Honduras. Over recent decades some Creoles and Garifuna have been working to build an Afro-Belizean solidarity that would bind Creole and Garifuna together. Although Mopan, Kekchi, and Yucatec often invoke specific, distinct identities rather than a generic Mayan identity, some Mopan and Kekchi leaders have also been working to establish an overarching Mayan or indigenous identity to strengthen their political and economic claims. The term Spanish was adopted by refugees, who fled from Mexico into Belize during the Caste Wars of the mid-1800s, to distinguish themselves from both the British and the Maya in Belize (Ludd 1989). The official census label for this category is mestizo, a Spanish word that refers to mixed indigenous American and European ancestry; the Spanish label, however, has been adopted by some families in the process of shifting away from Yucatecan Maya identities (Birdwell-Pheasant 1985; Brockmann 1977,
Recent immigrants from neighboring Central American countries have also been officially incorporated into the Spanish category. Several other officially enumerated racial-ethnic categories—East Indians, Chinese, Syrians, Mennonites, and Whites—have fewer members and are less celebrated as contributors to national culture.\(^9\)

Beyond the contributions of recognized racial-ethnic groups to “national culture,” the Belizean state has defined a second avenue for national belonging based on class contributions to “national development.” In keeping with economic development policies that direct resources to investors in export production and hold down wages, official rhetoric extols capitalist entrepreneurs as the most significant contributors to national economic development and equates the concerns of investors with the interests of the nation as a whole. For example, the minister of labor explained in a 1990 radio interview that, in spite of 20 percent unemployment, the government must allow investors to import labor in order to “make a success out of [their] investment,” because, “without the foreign input of labor, many of our industries would naturally die. Therefore, Belize would lose a lot” (Minister of Labor 1990; emphasis added). In establishing investment as an exemplary contribution to the nation, the government has extended “economic citizenship” to entrepreneurs, granting Belizean passports to foreigners who invest at least BZ$50,000 in Belize. Conversely, wage labor is not defined as a contribution to national economic development; instead, jobs are counted among the benefits provided by economic development.

Official discourses on democracy reinforce multicultural models of the Belizean nation and legitimize the development policies implemented by the Belizean government. Belizean discourse on democracy mitigates the dangers posed by ethnic differences by emphasizing a love of peace and a high regard for democracy as key values that characterize all true Belizeans and unify them across racial-ethnic lines.\(^{10}\) Indeed, both major political parties define their priorities in nationalist terms, court constituents from all racial-ethnic categories, and run candidates affiliated with each of the major racial-ethnic groups (Bolland 1991:104–105). But Belizean pronouncements about democracy also carry class connotations. The government defines representative democracy as the rule of the majority and asserts its fairness on that basis; government policies are therefore portrayed as representing the will of the majority, collectively conflated as “the small man” (Medina 1990b). Incorporating “the small man” into Belize’s political and economic development is seen as the key to sustaining both peace and democracy. A former prime minister argued:

> We want to protect the little man, to help him, to bring him in [to the development process]. That’s the only way we are going to have stability in our country. We need to learn from the lessons around us. Why is there civil war in El Salvador? Why is there guerrilla fighting in Guatemala? Why are guerrilla insurgents beginning in Honduras? Because the little man, the majority—and the little man is the majority of the people—were neglected. . . . [W]e are fighting for democracy. [Price 1989]

Consequently, each of the two major political parties competes to define itself as the true champion of the “small man.”\(^{11}\) In practice, there is little substantive difference between the respective policies of the two parties. When in power, both parties pursue similar export-led development policies that disproportionately benefit wealthy export producers; when in the minority, each party criticizes the other’s implementation of those policies without attacking their central tenets. Despite these inconsistencies, the parties’ nationalist and populist rhetoric (and the patronage they can distribute to party faithful) has helped to attract followers across class and racial-ethnic lines (Bolland 1991:104–105; Moberg 1992).

If the placement of the “small man” at the center of democracy articulates awkwardly with the celebration of investors’ contributions to national development, the ambiguity of the “small man” category permits resolution of this contradiction. Democracy discourse does not specify which class positions qualify one as a member of the “small man” majority. While most Belizeans place themselves in the vague “small man” category, in practice only small-scale
investors in agroexport production are regularly able to win government recognition of their invocations of “small man” status and use it to enforce a central role in policy making (Medina 1990b). As investors—albeit small-scale—they count as contributors to national development, and their demands are not perceived as inimical to the government’s overall development strategy. Although this restriction of the “small man” category is never made explicit, workers—whose demands threaten a development project that relies on keeping wages down—are less successful in winning government recognition for their claims to “small man”-“majority” status.

Further, the largest sector of the working class in Belize is defined by the government as altogether outside the imagined Belizean nation and its democratic practices. Government officials have repeatedly defined agricultural laborers, who are predominantly Spanish and represent the largest employment sector in Belize, as “aliens.” Although the government has encouraged the use of immigrant labor in agriculture, the blanket classification of Spanish agricultural workers as “aliens” has occurred without documentation to account for the percentage of agricultural workers who are unnaturalized immigrants. Lacking data, government officials simply assume that most agricultural workers are immigrants, asserting this in official documents and speeches to constituents. For example, a recent five-year development plan predicted that most of the jobs created through expansion in the citrus industry would be taken by immigrants and recommended that more Belizeans should become citrus farmers “so as to avoid the untenable situation of a massive expansion of production without any significant employment of Belizeans” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Economic Development 1985:41). In a 1990 radio interview, the minister of labor asserted that most agricultural workers were “foreign” and rationalized their employment by making explicit the government’s commitment to help investors get the most for their money:

[The investor, the person who is spending his dollars, his hard-earned dollars, makes an assessment of the output of the Belizean worker and the output of the refugee or the foreign worker. The person who is spending wants to get the best for his dollar spent. And in many occasions it is reported to me, officially and unofficially, that the foreign labor produces more than the Belizean worker. (Minister of Labor 1990)]

Defining Belize’s predominantly Spanish agricultural workers as “aliens” ideologically marginalizes them from images of the nation and the right to share in its development and democracy. These efforts to disempower and disenfranchise agricultural workers are particularly significant in light of the fact that the expansion of agroindustries has provided the motor for Belizean economic growth. While citizenship is granted to investors as a token of appreciation for their contribution to national development, allegedly “alien” agricultural workers are neither invited into the nation nor seen as contributing to it. This parallels situations in Europe (Balibar 1991; Gilroy 1987) and the United States, where racialized and ethnicized underclasses are categorized as “aliens” in a manner that permits the “immigrant” category to serve as a substitute for racial-ethnic categories. As a result, “the racial-cultural identity of the ‘true nationals’ is inferred and reinforced through contrast with the ‘false nationals’” (Balibar 1991:20). The Belizean case is distinct from the European cases, however, and reveals contradictions more similar to those involved in recent anti-immigrant initiatives in the United States because official discourses in Belize explicitly declare Spanish-Belizeans to be a part of the nation. At the same time, the designation of predominantly Spanish agricultural workers as “aliens” plays into long-standing racial-ethnic tensions between Creole- and Spanish-Belizeans and meshes with Afro-Belizean discourses that challenge the Belizean-ness of all Spanish.

Although these Afro-Belizean discourses have a long history (Stone 1994), their force in the present is partly a result of Guatemala’s territorial claim to Belize. After reviving a colonial era dispute over the territory now comprising Belize, the Guatemalan government has on several occasions mobilized troops on the border and threatened to invade. Guatemala’s menace has contributed to Afro-Belizeans’ suspicion about the loyalties of their Spanish or Maya compatri-
ots, who might benefit from a Guatemalan invasion and the subsequent imposition of a regime of “Latin domination.” The most widely read newspaper in Belize has characterized the Guatemalan government as racist, periodically covering the marginalization and discrimination that confront Blacks in Guatemala.

Over the last decade, Afro-Belizean concerns have grown in response to the migration of large numbers of Guatemalans, Salvadoreans, and Hondurans to Belize in search of peace, work, and land (Palacio 1988). Most of these immigrants were categorized as Spanish in Belize. This immigration exacerbated already high levels of unemployment in Belize and fueled Belizean out-migration to the United States, primarily by urban Creoles (Vernon 1990). Together these population movements produced a sense among Creoles and Garifuna that the “ethnic balance” between Afro-Caribbean and Central American Spanish and Maya populations in Belize had shifted. The 1991 census was perceived as confirmation of these concerns: whereas the 1980 census had counted 40 percent of the population as Creole and 33 percent as Mestizo (Spanish), the 1991 census classified 44 percent of the population as Mestizo, while the number of persons classified as either Creole or Garifuna totaled only 36 percent (CSO 1992). While persons classified into the Spanish category do not regard themselves as a unified, homogeneous group, Creoles and Garifuna often imagine a homogeneous Spanish solidarity (Medina 1994). Thus Afro-Belizeans see themselves becoming a minority in Belize, and many have begun to fear the imposition of “Latin domination” in Belize without a military invasion. To shore up their position, Creole and Garifuna Belizeans often label all unknown persons who “look Spanish” as “aliens.” In routine encounters Afro-Belizeans challenge the right of Spanish persons to hold a job, sit on a bus, speak Spanish, or simply be present in Belize. Such challenges assert that only Blacks can automatically be taken as true Belizeans (see Medina 1992b, 1994). While this unofficial discourse contradicts official discourses about the multiethnic Belizean nation, it meshes with official classifications of Spanish agricultural workers as “aliens.”

It appears, then, that the intertwined discourses on nation, development, and democracy in Belize provide contradictory frameworks for interpretation and action. Contributions to Belize that warrant membership in the Belizean nation are counted both in inclusive ethnic and exclusive class terms. The “small man” category at the center of the Belizean democracy discourse is claimed by a majority of Belizeans, but only those recognized as contributors to national economic development are successful at invoking “small man” status and using it to shape political decisions in their favor on a regular basis. While the government imagines a multiethnic nation with a place of honor for each constituent ethnic group, it classifies Spanish agricultural workers as “aliens,” regardless of their place of birth or their current legal status. Approving the use of immigrant labor in agriculture and portraying all Spanish agricultural workers as “aliens” facilitates the expansion of agroindustries by inhibiting union activity or wider support for agricultural workers’ demands, but it also exacerbates tensions between Afro- and Spanish-Belizeans. The effectiveness of these discourses in shaping identities, alliances, and, ultimately, development trajectories must be sought, however, in actual historical processes. Thus the remainder of this article is devoted to examining two particular struggles in the Belizean citrus industry.

class and collectivity in the citrus industry

The citrus industry of southern Belize produces frozen orange and grapefruit juice concentrate for export. There are two processing companies located in the Stann Creek Valley: the Citrus Company of Belize and Belize Food Products. The Citrus Company of Belize is jointly owned by a Trinidadian group, which controls 50 percent of its shares, and a group of Belizean entrepreneurs, which is dominated by two large citrus growers. Belize Food Products was a Nestlé subsidiary until its recent purchase by Belizeans; I explore below the struggles involved
in the company's sale. While the companies own sizable orchards, more than 500 private citrus growers produce more than half of the fruit processed annually. All citrus producers belong to the Citrus Growers Association. Workers employed by the two processing companies, in the groves and factories and on the waterfront, all belonged to the United General Workers Union (UGWU) until 1987, when workers in the factories and groves seceded to form a separate union. I also explore below the events that prompted their secession.  

small and large growers  
Citrus producers classify themselves as small or large growers, using 50 acres as a boundary between the categories; the majority of citrus farmers, however, own fewer than 10 acres, while the few large growers own 100 to 2,000 acres. In a random sample of citrus growers, farmers with fewer than 10 acres of citrus accounted for 57 percent of the sample's members but less than 7 percent of its total citrus acreage; conversely, farmers with more than 50 acres accounted for less than 7 percent of the sample's membership but nearly 70 percent of its total citrus acreage.

Although the acreages and incomes of those who designate themselves small growers vary widely, each step in citrus cultivation provides small growers with reasons to lump themselves together and differentiate themselves and their interests from large growers. Small growers compete with large growers over land for expansion. Most available land is held by the government in forest reserves that can be leased and later purchased at rates below market prices. Although both large and small growers may apply for government-owned land, large growers use their political sway in the capital (often the result of making significant contributions to election campaigns) to obtain choice parcels of fertile land close to roads, while small growers frequently settle for land on hillsides a half-mile or more from a road.

After obtaining land large growers clear the forest with bulldozers, while small growers use axes and machetes. Stumps left behind by men wielding axes prevent the use of machinery to clean the groves, while orchards cleared with bulldozers can be cleaned mechanically. Small growers often plant a short-term cash crop to recover some of the costs of clearing land before they plant citrus. The high costs of clearing land, planting, and maintaining the trees for five years until they reach maturity force most small growers to plant parcels of less than one acre at a time. While tree stumps or remote location force many small growers to cut the grass in their groves by machete, small growers whose farms can accommodate a tractor with a mechanical mower must often wait their turn for the Citrus Growers Association's services. Small growers complain that the association does not have enough equipment to meet their needs and assert that the association's failure to invest in more equipment is the result of the control of its board of directors by large growers who own their own equipment.

Small growers also complain that they are held to higher standards than large growers in determining whether or not their fruit is ripe. In order to produce a naturally sweet juice concentrate that sells for a high price on the U.S. market, the processing companies establish maturity requirements and test each load of fruit. The longer growers wait to begin reaping, the more fruit they lose to birds or to premature fruit drop, but the processors argue that growers profit more from selling a smaller amount of mature fruit at a high price than they would from selling a larger quantity of green fruit at a lower price. Farmers accept this argument in principle; small growers, however, believe that the maturity requirements are not applied equally to all growers because large growers use their high volume of production to pressure the companies into accepting green fruit.

Thus, throughout the annual citrus cycle, small and large growers confront distinct production problems, apply different techniques, and compete with one another over a variety of issues. Although small citrus growers recognize that they share certain interests (such as the desire to maximize fruit prices) with most large growers, the competition between small and large growers that characterizes every stage of citrus production shapes the small growers' conception of development policies and identity politics.
themselves as a class distinct from and vulnerable to large growers. Small growers in the sample classified themselves into a number of racial-ethnic categories, and ten percent were immigrants to Belize. Since small growers confront similar problems regardless of their racial-ethnic or national affiliations, however, they seldom invoke these identities in citrus industry disputes, even though these dimensions of their identities become salient and are invoked in other contexts. Those recognized as large growers appear to be more homogeneous. Most, if not all, may be categorized as White, even though they are associated with different national or ethnic backgrounds; all are wealthy. They compete among themselves, however, and in specific contexts they ally or differentiate themselves along lines of kinship, ethnicity, political party affiliations, their status as native Belizeans or immigrants, and whether or not they hold shares in a processing company. In particular, the ownership of processing company shares by some citrus elites has created conflicts between them and those large growers who do not own shares. Such conflicts have sometimes heightened the significance of other social affiliations among citrus elites as they attempt to forge strategic alliances.

**competition and coalition in the sale of Belize Food Products**  
The small growers’ construction of themselves as a class distinct from and vulnerable to large growers played an important role in negotiations over the purchase of the Nestlé-owned processing company, Belize Food Products. Divisions among citrus elites were equally important. In 1987 large grower Oliver Hassan began negotiating with Nestlé to purchase Belize Food Products. He planned to retain controlling interest for himself and offer the remaining shares for sale to other citrus growers. The processing companies can increase profits by increasing the amount of fruit they process; selling shares to growers would give them incentive to deliver their fruit to their “own” company in order to increase its profitability. When Hassan approached the prime minister to request tax concessions for the new company, the prime minister offered a small concession but promised further consideration if Hassan could expand the involvement of other citrus growers. It was an election year, and the prime minister must have seen the opportunity to widen his party’s popularity among citrus growers by broadening the number of growers who would benefit from government largesse.

Hassan responded with a new proposal, which he unveiled at a citrus growers meeting in August, 1989. Under the new plan the government would help “the growers” to secure a loan for the purchase of Belize Foods; all the company’s shares would be made available to growers in exchange for their fruit deliveries. Hassan attempted to rally support for the project among small growers by portraying all growers, large and small, as a unified class with common interests: his proposal treated all growers as equals, he emphasized, providing each grower an equal opportunity to invest in shares by delivering fruit. The prime minister attended the meeting to promise a government guarantee for the loan that would allow “the growers” to acquire the company, following Hassan in defining “the growers” as a single class and attempting to rally them all behind Hassan’s plan and the United Democratic Party.

During the meeting, one of the large-grower owners of the rival Citrus Company of Belize emphasized the probability that Hassan would gain controlling interest in the company by repeatedly asking whether limits would be placed on the number of shares an individual could own. Hassan replied that growers’ purchase of shares would be limited only by the amount of fruit they could deliver to the factory. While most small growers favored the idea of a grower-owned factory, they feared that Oliver Hassan’s 2,000 acres would allow him to gain controlling shares in the new company. Small growers were unconvinced that their interests coincided exactly with Hassan’s and feared that fruit prices would drop if each company fell under the control of one or two large growers. Thus they voted to prohibit any individual from acquiring more than 40 percent of the company’s shares or anyone with more than a 10 percent share interest in the rival company from purchasing shares in Belize Foods.
Since the prime minister's pledge to growers was made less than two weeks before national elections, the opposition People's United Party (PUP) and its sympathizers regarded his promise as an "election gimmick." When the PUP won the election, it looked askance at Oliver Hassan's role in setting up the meeting. According to Hassan, the large-grower chairman of the rival Citrus Company of Belize lobbied PUP ministers to withdraw government support for Hassan's plans, pointing to his own generous support for the PUP's recent election campaign as compared with Hassan's assistance to the UDP.17 Rebuffed by both the new government and the small growers, Hassan stepped back from his leading role in the acquisition of Belize Foods and turned the negotiations over to a special citrus-growers' committee.

Anxious to learn whether the PUP government would equal the offer made by its rival before the election, the growers' association invited the new prime minister to speak at a meeting. Whereas the UDP prime minister had addressed the growers as a single category, the new prime minister's speech drew emphatic distinctions between small and large growers. "We needn't hide ourselves from it," he asserted, "this industry is so structured that the few big growers own more acreage than the many small growers. [T]hat's the reality." Linking democracy with development, he emphasized his party's desire to "make sure that the little man is helped." He continued, however, by saying "we expect the big growers to find the money themselves." Although the prime minister had made no promises, small growers were buoyed by his support for them as small growers. Large growers had been apprised of the costs of political disloyalty and reminded that government support for their plans would be contingent on their winning the backing of small growers.

The citrus growers' special committee had made no progress in negotiating a growers' purchase of Belize Food Products when, some months later, the industry was shaken by rumors of an attempt by the Citrus Company of Belize (CCB) to buy Belize Foods. According to rumor, the chairman of CCB claimed to have government support for his bid to purchase Belize Foods. Noting that the largest shareholders at CCB were well-known PUP supporters, growers speculated that ownership of Belize Foods would be the reward for their financial support in the recent election. CCB's attempt to establish a monopoly brought to the fore interests shared by small growers and those large growers who did not own shares in the Citrus Company; small and large growers thus united to oppose the Citrus Company's plans, dispatching a delegation to warn the prime minister that "the growers" would never accept a monopoly.

Working a different angle, the opposition UDP newspaper decried the impending sale of Belize Foods to "the same foreign interest group that already owns and operates Belize's only other citrus processing plant." It warned that this would "place the entire industry in the hands of foreigners" (Pulse 1990:1). While some growers took this as an allusion to CCB's 50 percent Trinidadian ownership, others applied it to CCB's chair, a Jamaican immigrant. In response, the chair challenged as "hypocritical" the fact that persons "who have become Belizeans and who have contributed greatly to Belizean economic growth are still gratuitously labelled 'foreigners' " (CCB 1990:2). Nonetheless, many growers considered him less than fully Belizean.

Alarmed by the monopoly threat, Hassan renewed negotiations with Nestlé, working in conjunction with another large grower and the managing director of Belize Foods, who was himself a large grower with strong connections to the UDP. They soon concluded an agreement for the purchase of Belize Foods. It was not clear, however, which large-grower faction, the PUP-affiliated owners of CCB or Hassan's UDP-affiliated group, would win the government backing necessary to conclude the sale. When a special citrus-growers' meeting was called, anxious growers filled the meeting hall and crowded the doorways. The general manager of the Citrus Company of Belize confirmed that his company hoped to purchase its rival. Portraying all growers—including the largest shareholders at CCB—as members of a single class seeking the best prices for their fruit, he promised to make shares available to all growers who had not purchased CCB shares. Therefore, he explained, rather than creating a monopoly, a CCB buyout
would establish a “growers’ factory.” The increased efficiency resulting from operating one factory at full capacity would lead to higher prices for growers’ fruit, he promised, adding, “There would be no price fixing, because we would be grower owned.”

Small growers jeered at his promises, shouting “Choi!” (a Belizean Creole expression of disbelief or disgust). Oliver Hassan countered his argument, using the moral authority accorded to the “small man” majority (reconfigured as “the people”) to pressure the government to withdraw its rumored support for the Citrus Company’s PUP-affiliated owners:

I understand that the big boys from [CCB] are going around—now I’m sure that this is not so. I am sore that this is not so. I hope it is not so! They are going around telling everybody that they have the blessing of the Prime Minister and the cabinet [to purchase Belize Foods]. I don’t believe that. But if it is so, it is something very very serious. And if it is so, we have to send a very clear signal to Belmopan [the capital].

“Yes,” the audience agreed, applauding. “That’s correct!”

“Belmopan has to realize that the people are power,” he asserted.

“Correct!” they responded again. “We put them there!”

“And,” Hassan added, “if the wishes of the people will not be adhered to, then we don’t have a good government.”

“That’s right! Yes!” “the people” shouted, applauding.

A “clear signal” had indeed been sent to Belmopan.

Despite the unity between large and small growers at the meeting, Hassan abandoned his earlier argument that growers were all one big class. His new proposal addressed small growers’ concerns and treated them as small growers: the plan set aside 20 percent of the shares for small growers, and it prohibited any individual from owning more than 30 percent of the shares. Small growers were unanimously pleased with the outcome of the meeting: a monopoly had been averted and Oliver Hassan would not wield controlling shares in the new company. They supported the acquisition of Belize Foods by the coalition they dubbed “Oliver and the growers,” a phrase indicating their perception that a cross-class alliance had been formed. While some small growers began to consider buying shares, many doubted that they would have a say in running the company within the new coalition.

Six months later another special meeting was convened to present to citrus growers the final agreement for the purchase of Belize Food Products. The meeting was not as well-attended as the previous one. Once the proposed monopoly had been defeated and Hassan had made it clear that he would accept less than controlling interest in the company, many growers had lost interest. In his presentation, Hassan adopted a nationalist rhetoric, announcing that the sale would “eventually bring the ownership of Belize Foods into the hands of Belizeans, 100% Belizeans!” He urged growers to invest in shares for their own good and the good of their nation: here was an opportunity for smallholder export producers both to contribute to and to benefit from national economic development. The declaration of “100% Belizean” status for the new company was intended to contrast favorably with CCB’s “foreign” ownership, since Trinidadians and an immigrant to Belize held the majority of its shares. Hassan’s own faction, however, included both a naturalized immigrant from Jamaica and a British financier who was chair of a local bank. The latter had been granted Belizean citizenship in return for his investment in Belize and had subsequently been named Belizean ambassador to the European Community. Growers were particularly skeptical about his Belizean-ness.

Nonetheless, small growers who attended the meeting applauded Hassan’s announcement of the new company’s “100% Belizean” status. Regardless of their skepticism about the Belizean-ness of all members of Hassan’s faction, most hoped that the (predominantly) local ownership of the company would keep more of its profits circulating in Belize to create jobs. At the same time many small growers were still disinclined to purchase shares in the company. Small-grower support and Hassan’s nationalist argument appear to have struck the desired chord with the government, however: BFP’s buyers demanded larger tax concessions than those granted to the Citrus Company of Belize because of their “100% Belizean” status. The government obliged.
In this case growers with relatively small citrus acreages drew upon the everyday practical activities involved in producing citrus, which place them in competition with large growers, to define themselves as small growers who share certain interests in opposition to large growers. Elite attempts to define all citrus growers as members of one big class with common interests—attempts pursued at different points by Hassan, the UDP prime minister, and the administration at CCB—were rejected by small growers. Small growers recognized, however, that they did share some interests with some large growers, and they allied themselves with a large-grower faction when they saw those common interests threatened by monopoly. Among large growers, competition between those who owned shares in a processing company and those who did not, compounded by different political party affiliations, divided them into factions that contended for small-grower and state support. While both factions at some point sought to portray themselves and small growers as a unified class of “growers,” the faction that ultimately succeeded was able to construct the sought-after alliance with small growers by dropping this claim and addressing the concerns of those who classified themselves as small growers. The need for such a strategy resulted in part from the PUP prime minister’s insistence that there were large and small growers and his pledge to support only “the small man” whose interests democracy was pledged to serve. Small growers embraced the “small man” role and so forced the competing economic and political elites to seek alliances with them to further their plans. Eventually both small and large growers used the identity of small growers as “the small men” at the center of Belizean democracy to shape government responses to the unfolding negotiations between Nestlé and the large-grower factions. While small growers achieved their goals, preventing a monopoly or controlling ownership in Belize Foods by a single person, the new company was nonetheless dominated by large-grower shareholders. The limited demands made by small growers did not threaten the overall development strategy, while the fulfillment of small growers’ demands won political points for the party in power and reinforced the legitimacy of Belizean democracy as the rule of the “small man” majority.

Hassan’s use of nationalist rhetoric, while not completely convincing to small growers, was effective in securing support from both small growers and the government, who appeared to agree that increasing the proportion of Belizean ownership of industries in Belize would provide broader benefits to the nation. Small growers accepted the argument that investment was a contribution to the Belizean nation but were unconvinced by assertions that investment provided a sufficient claim to Belizean identity.

segmentation in the labor force While the practices involved in citrus production contributed to class cohesion among small growers in opposition to large growers, the diverse ways in which wage labor is organized in the industry has created a fault line between the waterfront and the groves and factories in the Stann Creek Valley. This fault line has been magnified by racial-ethnic segmentation across the work areas. As a result, workers on the waterfront and in the Stann Creek Valley experience different class relations, confront different problems on the job, and relate to their employers and union representatives in different ways.

The union itself exercises primary control over the waterfront: it recruits waterfront workers, determines work rotations, assigns members to specific jobs, and controls promotions into more highly paid jobs. A union foreman supervises waterfront work, and waterfront gangs include a paid union representative to negotiate and resolve conflicts or unexpected situations quickly. This control is a result of union pressure applied to a critical point in the production process: on the waterfront citrus concentrate must move quickly because of the high cost of keeping a ship in port and the perishable nature of the frozen concentrate. Waterfront workers have thus won greater concessions than workers in the valley. All members of the waterfront sample are Garifuna men, who describe themselves as “brethren,” and most communication during work shifts takes place in the Garifuna language. Although one out of every four men in the waterfront
sample are Garifuna born in Guatemala or Honduras, they are also called “brothers” rather than “aliens.” In 1986 all of the union’s officers were Garifuna men from the waterfront.

In the groves and factories of the Stann Creek Valley the union exercises less control. Valley workers are supervised by captains clearly aligned with the companies. Work assignments and promotions in the valley are in the hands of employers. Valley work crews do not include union representatives; thus they are less able than waterfront gangs to press demands on the job. If valley workers believe a task warrants a higher piece rate or a lower work quota, or if they become involved in disputes with supervisors, they must send a message to the union office and wait for a union official to negotiate on their behalf. In the valley, more than half of the workers classify themselves or are perceived by others as Spanish, though many workers identify themselves as Mopan Maya, Creole, or Garifuna. One-third of the valley workforce were immigrants from Central America who identified themselves primarily in national terms as Guatemalan, Salvadoran, or Honduran. These identities are translated into a “Spanish” classification by Belizeans. Of the workers who were born in Belize, more than half had migrated to the Stann Creek District from predominantly Spanish and Maya regions of Belize.

The valley workforce is itself segmented across work activities each of which is dominated by a particular ethnic group, although no group exclusively monopolizes any area of work in the valley. Creoles work primarily in the factories and transport, prestigious positions involving the management and maintenance of heavy machinery. Spanish and Maya predominate in the groves, picking fruit, applying chemicals, or chopping with machetes. Nationality appears to provide a less significant criterion for the placement of workers than does ethnic classification: persons classified as Spanish are assigned to similar jobs whether they are Belizean or immigrants. The correspondence between ethnic classification, type of work, and rate of pay contributes to tensions within the valley labor force. For example, the primarily Spanish and Maya groves workers complain that their work is more demanding but less valued by the companies than factory jobs for which higher hourly wages are paid for less-strenuous work.

The disintegration of the union  The differences in work processes between the waterfront and the valley and the ethnic segmentation that sharpens those differences were reflected in a confrontation that erupted at the United General Workers Union (UGWU) convention in 1986. A few days before the convention several men distributed an open letter to laborers announcing their intention to impeach the officers of the UGWU, who were all Garifuna waterfront workers. None of the letter’s signatories were union members or workers in the industry. Their leader was a Garifuna teacher and a locally important member of the United Democratic Party, the party controlling the government at the time.

At the convention, workers divided themselves into Spanish and Garifuna sections, with the Spanish outnumbering the Garifuna. Spanish-speakers heckled the union officers as they presented their reports and, when nominations for union offices were opened, the meeting turned into a shouting match. Spanish workers insisted on nominating the nonmember challengers to the union’s leadership, but Garifuna officers argued that this would violate the union’s constitution. Spanish workers vowed to change the union’s constitution to allow the election of the opposition leaders. In response, alarmed Garifuna longshoremen urged those waterfront workers who had supported the opposition to unite with their Garifuna “brothers” from the waterfront and the union leadership to prevent the Spanish from taking over the union. Unable to restore order, union leaders adjourned the meeting and postponed elections.

Through the conversations, posted signs, heated arguments, and public meetings that followed the aborted convention, two competing interpretations of the conflict emerged. Valley workers emphasized the insufficient attention union officers had paid to their concerns, which many explained in ethnic terms. Conversely, waterfront leaders defined valley workers as “alien” pawns of party politics, thereby delegitimizing their demands. The response of the
Garifuna dockworkers was shaped in large part by the union’s control over waterfront work. Garifuna union leaders had built an ethnic enclave on the waterfront by recruiting kin and ethnic “brothers.” Waterfront workers loyal to the union’s leaders argued that if Spanish workers gained control of the union they might not give Garifuna longshoremen work.

Furthermore, in the Stann Creek District unemployment stood at 24 percent, with 46 percent of the employed population working less than full time (CSO 1984). Competition for work had been exacerbated by migration into the district, and the fact that many of the immigrants were categorized as Spanish lent ethnic and national dimensions to the competition for work. In this context, national-level discourses that portrayed Spanish workers as invading “aliens” made sense to dockworkers fearful of losing their jobs. Hence, Garifuna longshoremen invoked government and Afro-Belizean discourses to define the primarily Spanish valley workers as “aliens,” challenging their right to make demands or to aspire to union leadership in Belize.

The involvement of the local United Democratic Party (UDP) functionary in the valley workers movement also colored waterfront workers’ opinions. The UGWU had historically been linked to the Peoples United Party (Medina 1990a; Shoman 1987), and several of its officers were active in local politics as representatives of the PUP; thus many dockworkers viewed the movement as an attempt by the UDP to gain control of a PUP union. Involvement by the UDP delegitimized the opposition movement in the eyes of many waterfront workers, who saw it as a UDP strategy to expand its power rather than as an attempt by valley workers to obtain more effective union representation. Waterfront workers accused the United Democratic Party of manipulating “aliens” in order to take over the union.19

Ironically, the United Democratic Party’s involvement in sparking the opposition movement may have been more apparent to waterfront workers from Dangriga, who were familiar with local politics and affiliations, than it was to the majority of valley workers, who were from outside the district. Many valley workers were unaware of the Garifuna teacher’s role in the opposition movement. Others characterized his involvement as “a political thing,” explaining that valley workers cooperated with the opposition, because “the valley was ready for change, but we didn’t know how to go about it ourselves.”

The UDP-affiliated leaders of the opposition movement publicized a list of grievances on behalf of workers; in it they accused union leaders of discrimination and corruption and demanded new leadership, payment of the severance monies workers had hoped to receive after the Citrus Company of Belize changed ownership in 1983, and a break with socialist trade union federations.20 The promise to obtain severance payments for CCB workers won support for the opposition from a number of Garifuna longshoremen in the early stages of the conflict (see Medina 1992b). Yet it was the opposition’s call for new union leadership and charges of discrimination by the present leadership that resonated with the concerns of valley workers; the other issues failed to attract their support. After the union elections were suspended, however, opposition leaders discontinued their meetings with valley workers and moved their struggle against the UGWU leaders into the courts.

When this occurred, emerging leaders within the valley workforce began to hold public meetings in the work camps. The new leaders warned that the Garifuna leadership would refuse to relinquish control of the union, even if valley workers succeeded in voting them out of office. They advocated withdrawal from the UGWU and the formation of a separate union to represent valley workers. These calls for a separate union were founded upon the particular problems valley workers encountered on the basis of their distinct relation to the union and the companies. Many of their complaints focused on the United General Workers Union’s failure to send union officers out to represent them in conflicts with employers or to negotiate increased pay rates for especially difficult work. For example, one valley worker explained that after a dispute with his employer,
I went in to the union office to ask them to speak to him. They said they'd be out the next day, but they never went out there at all. Sometimes they would just tell you, "We don't have time." Now, I think a union officer should always have time, especially if you're getting paid to be a union officer. And at the last meeting [the aborted convention] we found out that we had spent $20,000 for a pickup. We paid for that pickup, and we expected they would at least use it to come out here and see what was going on!

Other valley workers echoed his complaint: "When you would call on the union officer to solve a problem, it took them about a week, two weeks, and by then it's too late."

Valley leaders also drew upon the intersection of racial-ethnic and class concerns among Spanish workers of all nationalities to generate support for secession: Spanish workers represented the majority in the valley, and many believed they had been neglected by the UGWU leadership as a result of racial-ethnic biases. Some Spanish groves workers complained that "when the UGWU leaders did come to the valley, they only talked to the blacks." Unity among Spanish workers was neither preexisting nor given; they continued to enact national distinctions in many contexts even as they constructed a shared identity in this context (see Medina 1992b, 1994). The assignment of Spanish workers to similar positions regardless of nation of origin, however, provided a basis for their alliance in this instance. Their perception that UGWU officials had conflated Spanish and "alien" categories and discriminated against all of them as "aliens" provided further impetus for their alliance. The organizers' use of the Spanish language also served to circumscribe and unite a Spanish collectivity. The valley organizers who gained the most support addressed workers in both Spanish and Creole: their use of Spanish established an unprecedented level of accessibility for monolingual, Spanish-speaking valley workers (a category that includes some Spanish-Belizeans as well as immigrants), while their use of Creole prevented most non-Spanish-speakers from feeling alienated or threatened.

Although racial-ethnic segmentation within the valley workforce ensured that ethnicity and class experience were not bound together for Creole, Garifuna, and Mayan workers in precisely the same way as they were for Spanish workers, the opposition's promises of timely union representation to resolve disputes with the companies addressed a problem common to both groves and factory workers. Promising a solution to a shared problem in Creole and Spanish, the new opposition leaders solidified a cross-ethnic alliance that incorporated the great majority of workers in the valley. The alliance included both Belizeans and immigrants, all of whom were convinced that this new leadership would be more responsive to the problems they shared as valley workers and more accessible and attentive to both Creole- and Spanish-speakers. Eventually this coalition of valley workers of all nationalities and ethnic groups seceded from the UGWU to form a new branch of the Belize Workers' Union, which represented sugar workers in northern Belize.

The events leading to the division of the UGWU into two separate unions again illustrates the complex interplay between official discourses that attempt to impose particular angles of vision and workers' alternative interpretations of the material conditions of production. Waterfront workers were initially divided, with some supporting the opposition. Fear that Spanish leadership of the union would cost waterfront workers their jobs, however, spurred greater unity among Garifuna waterfront workers. In order to maintain control of the union, waterfront workers drew upon government and Afro-Belizean discourses to define the predominantly Spanish agricultural workers as "aliens" and reject valley workers' demands for greater presentation in the union's leadership. Among Garifuna waterfront workers trying to protect their jobs in a district characterized by high levels of unemployment and high levels of Spanish migration, discourses that defined Spanish agricultural workers as "aliens" served to delegitimize valley workers' demands. Involvement by the UDP also diverted attention from what many waterfront workers later recognized as legitimate complaints on the part of valley workers.

On the other hand, the struggles conducted by valley workers challenged both official development policies and the arguments elaborated to justify them by resisting the definitions imposed upon them by official and Afro-Belizean discourses. Spanish Belizeans rejected
attempts to strip them of citizenship and convert them into “aliens,” and their perception that the companies and the union leadership had lumped them together with immigrant Spanish strengthened their solidarity with those immigrants. Immigrant Spanish themselves asserted rights and demands in spite of their lack of Belizean citizenship. And valley workers from other ethnic groups supported the claims of the Spanish majority—regardless of their nation of origin—and joined in a coalition with them to demand that the problems of representation they shared as valley workers be addressed. This type of intraclass alliance, crossing ethnic and national boundaries, challenges government development policies and the discourses used to implement and legitimize them. Furthermore, while it demonstrates that interethnic cooperation and peace are possible, it also suggests that they may pose a threat to dominant development policies in Belize.

discussion

The picture that emerges from the citrus industry points to a dominant class alliance in Belize that loosely binds together large and small export commodity producers to implement development policies favored by Belizean and foreign investors in export production and by the government’s foreign creditors as well. Large producers provide most of the economic production, reap most of the benefits of state efforts to promote the growth of agroexports, and are lauded as contributors to national development. Small producers contribute a small share to the overall goal of economic growth; but, more important, their involvement underwrites Belizean democracy, which requires state development policies to benefit the “small man” majority. Consequently small growers are able to utilize their “small man” status to make demands on the state and citrus elites. Often those small-grower demands can be at least partially met without significantly threatening the overall development strategy. On the other hand, the demands of labor, characterized as only a cost in an export-oriented economy, are perceived as threatening to this alliance’s development project. The use of immigrant labor and the classification of all agricultural workers as “aliens” maintains downward pressure on wages by limiting broader social support for their demands. The characterization of predominantly Spanish agricultural workers as “aliens,” however, also plays into Afro-Belizean discourses that threaten the multiethnic character of the officially imagined nation. Thus Belizean political elites attempt to balance contradictory strategies in their pursuit of export-led economic expansion. Their policies hold down wages but exacerbate racial-ethnic tensions. Their discourses premise Belizean peace and stability on bringing the “small man” majority into Belizean national development; but they exclude much of the working class from both the “small man” category and the nation.

Although these official discourses have influenced public perceptions, they have not been fully successful in imposing their definitions of persons and events or maneuvering subordinates into desired forms of practice. Both smallholder citrus farmers and Garifuna waterfront workers adopted official discourses to define and protect their interests. By contrast, those who stood to lose the most within the terms of official discourses—agricultural workers classified as “aliens” and thus outside the Belizean nation, Belizean democracy, and Belizean development—appear to have been the least persuaded by them. Consequently the bridges built among themselves by Central American immigrant workers, Spanish- and Maya-Belizean workers, and Afro-Belizean workers pose a challenge to the current direction and priorities of Belizean economic development, undermining the state’s attempts to divide and marginalize workers in order to limit labor costs. It is also clear that the collective identities that emerged from the contests described above were grounded as much in material practices as they were ordered and constituted discursively. When official discourses provided effective explanations of their practical activities, people adopted and deployed them strategically. When official discourses
did not provide an adequate basis for making sense of their practical activities, people elaborated alternatives.

As these examples have demonstrated, the negotiation of collective class identities and interests in Belize is linked to the construction of racial-ethnic and national identities and interests. This suggests that analysis of the construction of collective identities should move beyond narrowly ethnicized versions of collectivity. By focusing on class, I have attempted to ground public contests over collective identities and interests in material and historical conditions and to explore the ways in which these contests shape “national development.” The intertwined discourses on nation, development, and democracy in Belize all have important class aspects and implications. A place in the nation can be conferred not only through membership in an ethnic category defined as a group that contributes to national culture, but also on the basis of class contributions to national development. Specifically, the class contributions worthy of membership in the nation are restricted to investment in export production. Belizean discourse on democracy, which unites Belizean “small men” across racial-ethnic boundaries and requires the government to serve their needs, is effectively invoked only by small-scale export producers. At the same time, a whole ethnicized class segment—Spanish agricultural workers—is excluded from participation in the nation and its development.

The Belizean case also demonstrates the need to abandon reductionist, economistic notions of class, in order to explore more fully the construction of class identities and their intersection with other forms of collectivity. The approach to class adopted here entails attending to the ways in which the economy, politics, and social meanings continually (re-)shape one another. This perspective reveals the importance of public struggles in constituting collective class agents, whose strategic alliance or opposition shapes future economic and social relations.

notes

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1. Race and ethnicity are both social constructs. I use the hyphenated term race-ethnicity to indicate the interpenetration of Belizean constructions of “biological” and “cultural” differences (Medina, in press).

2. Because gender did not emerge as a category of public discussion or identity in the cases analyzed below, this article will not focus on gender. Gender segmentation is not evident among citrus growers. While there is gender segmentation among citrus workers, it was not an issue in the union dispute discussed below.

3. I am not arguing that class is constituted solely at the point of production, but a fuller discussion that explores the construction of class outside the realm of “production” is beyond the scope of this article (see Medina 1992a).

4. This approach to class formation partially parallels Omi and Winant’s (1986) “racial formation” and Ferguson’s (1990) “genderization” (Ferguson 1990). These processes are complexly interwoven: racialized and gendered meanings and identities have become internalized into class relations, both materially and ideationally, in such a way that individuals are constituted and constitute themselves as classed, gendered, and raced-ethnicized persons simultaneously. A full analysis of the complex intertwining of racialization and genderization with class formation in Belize, however, is beyond the scope of the present work. I have addressed this interplay more completely elsewhere (Medina 1992a); I focus here on struggles over class meanings.

5. Merchant-importers, members of the other most significant section of the Belizean economic elite, also benefit from policies that encourage production for export and importation for consumption.

6. All monetary sums are given in Belize dollars. One Belizean dollar is equal to U.S.$ .50.

7. During the research period, the dissemination of official government discourses was facilitated by the government’s control of the nation’s only radio stations. Each of the two political parties also publishes its
own weekly newspaper. Pressure within each of the political parties to generate a consensus and then force members to tow the party line (or risk losing access to resources) reduces the number of public discourses available in the media. Nevertheless the most widely read weekly, the Amandala, is published by an Afro-Belizean nationalist. Little local TV programming is available; Belizeans receive U.S. interpretations of world events through pirated signals from the major U.S. networks and Voice of America broadcasts from a transmitter in southern Belize.

8. Discussion of the historical emergence of these categories and their ongoing construction is beyond the scope of this article. I have examined these processes more fully elsewhere (Medina 1992a, 1994). See also Judd 1989, 1992; Rutheiser 1990; and Stone 1994 on Creoles. See Gonzalez 1988 and Wright 1986 on the Garifuna. See Cal 1991 and Henderson 1990 on the Spanish. And see Brockmann 1977, 1985; Birdwell-Pheasant 1985; Gregory 1976, 1984; Wilk 1986; and Wilk and Chapin 1990 on Mayan groups.

9. In Belize economic position and ethnic categorization do not overlap neatly for most groups. The majority of each of the largest ethnic categories are wage laborers or smallholder farmers or both, while Belizean capitalists include members of several racial-ethnic categories. The White category may represent the closest correlation between race-ethnicity and economic position. The term White is a construct that has conflated light skin color, European descent, and economic power and privilege. Judd argues that "there are no 'poor whites' in Belize" and asserts, "In Belize, the true elite, those who have held onto land or capital or both, and are and have been, white over generations" (1992:292). Recently, however, "the economic success of mestizo and non-European immigrants has obliged local whites to open their ranks—at least to Lebanese and Palestinians, if not Indians and Chinese" (1992:117).

10. Beyond uniting Belizeans of all ethnic allegiances, Belizean deploy their democratic tradition to differentiate themselves from their less democratic Central American neighbors and claim a place of international honor for Belize (Medina n.d.).

11. Most politicians from all racial-ethnic groups belong to the petite bourgeoisie as owners of businesses, farms, or professional practices.

12. The government does not collect such data, so policy is based on popular assumptions and perceptions. A recent study of communities known as "refugee" or immigrant communities revealed these assumptions to be inaccurate, since a large percentage of the residents were actually Belizeans who had migrated there from other parts of the country (Stone 1990). Furthermore, although immigrants can apply for refugee or permanent resident status and eventually become naturalized citizens, they will not necessarily be accepted as true Belizeans.

13. Many of these immigrants left Guatemala, El Salvador, or Honduras to escape political violence and repression (Armstrong and Shenk 1982; Carmack 1988) or their economic consequences, including wages lower than those paid in Belize.

14. Afro-Belizean definitions of Belizeans as Black and Spanish as "aliens" allow Black immigrants, like Garifuna from Guatemala or Honduras, to escape the "alien" label. In fact over the past few years some Afro-Belizeans have called for more immigration of Blacks from Central America or the Caribbean. It is important to note, however, that some versions of Afro-Belizean discourse continue to affirm a multietnic image of Belize.

15. This article is based on research I carried out from January through September 1986, from September 1989 through September 1990, and during brief visits of two to four weeks in 1987, 1988, 1991, 1992, and 1994. Research in 1986 focused primarily on elites in the industry: owners and administrators of the processing companies, owners of large citrus estates, government officials involved in managing the industry and resolving disputes, and leaders of the Citrus Growers Association and the United General Workers Union. During 1989-90 the research focused more closely on smallholder citrus growers and rank-and-file workers from the two unions in the industry. Random samples were drawn from each organization, including 30 of 398 citrus growers, 48 workers from the groves and factories (where union membership ranges from 600 at the peak of the citrus harvest to 300 between harvests), and 8 of less than 100 workers on the waterfront.

16. This is a pseudonym.

17. Oliver Hassan did not openly declare himself either a UDP or a PUP supporter and had ties to both parties. He had been a PUP supporter and has kin ties to the PUP leader. He had been able to work closely with the UDP administration from 1985 to 1989, however, and in 1989 his close ties to a local UDP candidate and the fact that advertising for his other business appeared only in the UDP newspaper contributed to the perception that he was supporting the UDP in 1989.

18. Two were teachers; another was a bus conductor. They had applied for membership in the UGWU but the union's officers had rejected their applications, directing the teachers to the teachers' union.

19. Some waterfront workers—at least some of the time—accepted the claims of valley workers who said they were residents of Cayo District in western Belize. Yet they were still concerned that the wages of workers from Cayo would be taken to western Belize and would circulate there to develop that district's economy, rather than circulating in the Stann Creek District. Since the Stann Creek is seen as a Garifuna stronghold and Cayo is predominantly Spanish and Maya, this competition between districts also expressed ethnic competition.

20. The UGWU had been affiliated with socialist trade union federations during the late 1970s and early 1980s, a matter of some concern to government officials. The concern about socialist affiliations and severance payments are both detailed elsewhere (Medina 1992a).
21. The Creole language was understood and spoken by Creoles, most Garifuna workers, and most of the Maya. One of the opposition leaders, a monolingual Creole speaker, won much less support from Spanish-speakers because they feared that he would “only be for the Creoles.”

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